

Margaret Stacey

Academic who helped shape the distinctively British genre of empirical sociology

Anne Murcott
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Professor Margaret (Meg) Stacey, who has died aged 81, was a sociologist who brought to her work a powerful blend of fidelity to the best traditions of the discipline, commitment to the rights of women, advocacy on behalf of children and a tireless readiness to render public service.

Stacey's career coincided with the burgeoning of sociology, and she rapidly became a leading figure in the discipline, one of a generation which, for 30 critical years, shaped a distinctively British genre of empirical sociology. Her contributions ranged widely. Her first book, *Tradition And Change* (1960), presents a compelling analysis of social change in Banbury, Oxfordshire, in the late 1940s. It was pioneering, not only as the first such British study to have a follow-up (in 1975) but also in that both studies were based on team research.

An examination of gendered social divisions also became a sustained concern. The concepts of a male-dominated discipline have a "crippling effect", she declared in her presidential address in 1982 to the British Sociological Association "on any attempt to understand the world of women and men and not just the world of men". Her proposals for reconfigured thinking in medical sociology also remain influential; hers was a strong voice calling for its redesignation as a sociology of health and illness, to which she added "healing" and "suffering" to its more familiar vocabulary of "doctors", "patients" and "diseases".

Born in London, Stacey was educated at the City of London School for Girls and the London School of Economics whence she graduated in 1943 with a first-class honours degree in sociology. First, a Royal Ordnance Factory labour officer, she was a tutor for Oxford University by the end of the war, remaining there until 1951.

She had married Frank Stacey, a political scientist, in May 1945. After they moved to south Wales, she spent the next decade combining motherhood with work on her first book, before academic posts at University College, Swansea, including a secondment as director of its Medical Sociology Research Centre. In 1974, the couple moved to the Midlands: he to a chair at the University of Nottingham, which he held until his premature death in 1977; she to become professor of sociology at the University of Warwick until her retirement in 1989.

During this time she also served as chair of the department and of the graduate school of Women's Studies, and established the Nursing Policy Studies Centre. As expected of an academic, she published steadily (14 books), secured research grants (nearly 30), and served on public and professional bodies (not just for sociology, but also on the General Medical Council, about which she published a study in 1992). She early developed an international reputation (including visiting positions abroad) and won the Fawcett Prize for a co-authored book *Women, Power And Politics* (1981), and received an honorary doctorate at Keele University.

Both her sociology and her private life echoed C Wright Mills's sociological juxtaposition of "personal troubles" and "public issues". Her extensive work on the adverse consequences of hospitalisation for small children derived its impetus from thoughtful appraisal of her own young family's experiences when needing specialist medical attention. It resulted in multi-

disciplinary research before such collaboration became fashionable. She also played a major role in founding the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital in the 1960s.

Readily described as indomitable, Stacey inspired tremendous loyalty in her graduate students at Warwick. Despite her seniority as principal investigator, she took it for granted she would do a share of the door-to-door interviews on a windswept estate, on the grounds that she had to have a first-hand sense of the data.

Always hard working, she continued publishing through the decade after her retirement. She also made time to devote her energies not just to proposing that the sociology of health and illness also examined the sufferings caused by war, but to active involvement in the peace workers' movement, Women in Black.

In 1999, a conference was held at Warwick University in tribute to her long career, to which, in typical fashion, Stacey herself made an animated contribution. Stacey the person was well summed up in her funeral, which opened with a Buddhist meditation - a faith to which she turned in her later years - but closed gleefully in a characteristic tinge of mischief with Yellow Submarine.

Meg Stacey is survived by Jennifer Lorch, her partner for many years, five children, 16 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

• Margaret (Meg) Stacey, sociologist, born March 27 1922; died February 10 2004