

POVERTY AND DISABILITY AS GLOBAL ISSUES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE INTERNATIONAL TRENDS AND THE ACTUAL SITUATION IN JAPAN

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POVERTY AND DISABILITY AS GLOBAL ISSUES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE — INTERNATIONAL TRENDS AND THE ACTUAL SITUATION IN JAPAN —

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the international trends and the actual situation in Japan concerning poverty and disability, a global issue that must be solved worldwide to contribute to improving people's well-being. In this paper, "poverty" includes not only those with low income but also social exclusion: the exclusion from participation and connection. In addition, this paper uses the social model of "disability," rather than the medical model. In this paper, "disability" also means social vulnerability, the social disadvantage brought about socially. In essence, for the purposes of this paper, a "persons with disabilities" includes not only individuals with a functional disorder but also people who are vulnerable, such as a child, an elderly person, and a single-mother and her child. The Department for International Development (2000) has pointed out the vicious cycle of poverty and disability. Furthermore, closely related to poverty and disability, it has been shown in medical and public health

domains that there are social class differences in health (Mackenbach et al. 2003, Marmot 2005). Therefore, by integrating the discussion of poverty and disability, as they are mutually related, I examine a comprehensive resolution of the key issues in this discussion and the directionality for future research.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Background in Japan

It is important that this paper examines poverty and disability comprehensively in the context of welfare in Japan, because such problems are complex and overlap. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's report, "The Future of Social Welfare for People Needing Social Protection Study Panel" (2000), pointed out the overlap and combining of issues such as "mental and physical disability, uneasiness (mental/physical disability/uneasiness)," "social exclusion and friction," and "social isolation and loneliness."

These correspond to poverty, including social exclusion, and disability, including social vulnerability, in this paper. In addition, the Toyo Univer-

sity Welfare Social Development Research Center (hereinafter referred to as “the Center”), with which the author is affiliated, focuses on one of the problems raised in the report – social isolation – and studies methods of support and systems for independence and watching. The Center’s approach interconnects various aspects, such as children, elderly persons, persons with a disability, theory, and history. The Center’s awareness of the issue lies in the various difficulties in life becoming problematic as social relations weaken, stemming from changes in the social-economic structure. More specifically, these problems include poverty/income differences, isolation/solitary death, abuse, consumer damage, homelessness, and the working poor. The object of this paper is to organize and discuss these combined life difficulties in an international context focusing on the dimension of poverty and disability. Further, for such complicated problems, the construction of a multifaceted support system is needed. This paper aims to gain insights for constructing this support.

2.2. Global Background

Attempting to interpret poverty and disability as global issues in an international context is an important and valid perspective for international social work. This is supported by the global definition of “social work.” First, the global definition respects the opinions and conditions of developing countries. The issues of poverty and disability discussed in this report are more serious and urgent in developing countries. Therefore, working to improve these issues as an important global community matter also relates to respecting developing

countries.

Second, the global definition emphasizes innovative changes of social policy and social development at a macro level. Regarding these problems as global issues, as in this paper, a collaborative approach among countries is a macro-level approach, and may lead to innovative social changes.

Third, the global definition emphasizes collective responsibility. International collaboration to resolve these issues can be viewed as the practice of collective responsibility by the world as a whole.

Fourth, the global definition emphasizes social cohesion and inclusion. International collaboration to resolve these issues, which is this paper’s aim, facilitates and contributes to social cohesion and stability both nationally and internationally.

2.3. Motivation of this Paper

The author recognized the importance of organizing the issues of poverty and disability and the corresponding social security services and systems in Japan from an international context. In 2016, the author presented the vicious cycle of poverty and disability, and employment of persons with disabilities as a solution, at an international conference. There, the author was able to exchange opinions on these issues with researchers and practitioners from 12 countries, both developed and developing. The author thereby found that, regarding poverty and disability, researchers from all countries cared, faced similar problems, and were seeking effective approaches. However, the author was unable to find sufficient materials from an international context or that took into consideration differences in definitions between coun-

tries. Therefore, the author considered it would be beneficial to all countries to share information on the actual situation and approaches in Japan in this paper.

2.4. Significance of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the international trends and actual situation of Japan regarding the global issues of poverty and disability. The solutions to poverty, disability, and their combined problems that are discussed in this paper are global issues that international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), and World Health Organization (WHO) are leading efforts to solve. Therefore, a global perspective and cross-cultural studies may contribute to this cause. This paper may, thus, become the basis material for future international discussion and collaborative research.

2.5. Research Questions and Methods

Based on the above background, and by reviewing public materials and prior literature, this paper's objective is to clarify the following:

- (1) International trends on the issues of poverty and disability;
- (2) The actual situation of poverty and disability in Japan; and
- (3) The directionality of the approach to improve the vicious cycle of poverty and disability.

3. DEFINITION OF POVERTY AND DISABILITY

3.1. Poverty

3.1.1. Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty

Many studies to date have considered the definition of the poverty (Spicker 2007). However, an absolute definition has yet to be established (Kondo and Abe 2015). This is because the definition of poverty involves a judgment of value (Lister 2004). In addition, poverty is roughly classified into two concepts: “absolute poverty” and “relative poverty.” “Absolute poverty” refers mainly to the poverty seen in developing countries, where groups' or individuals' living standards are lower than the minimum living standards in the absolute sense.

Conversely, “relative poverty” is mainly poverty based on economic disparity in developed countries, where groups' or individuals' living standards are lower than those of other groups or individuals. Townsend (1979) defined relative poverty as a state that lacked the “life resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in social activities, or have necessary living conditions and amenities that is customary or at least widely encouraged in the societies to which they belong.” In addition, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines relative poverty as “household income (income – taxes/social security contributions + social security such as pensions) below half the median household income after adjusting for household size.”

3.1.2. Social Exclusion

A concept in conjunction with poverty is social exclusion. Conceived in France in the 1970s, the concept of social exclusion attracted attention in the EU after the 1980s and is currently studied globally. However, interpretations of social exclusion vary, which has been criticized. Social exclusion in Europe involves “different features in different countries at different times in forms of poverty, such as the homeless people on the streets, or aspects of marginalization of long-term unemployment, and households falling into severe debt” (Commission of the European Communities 1993). In addition, social exclusion is defined in the U.K. as “what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health, and family breakdown” (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). In Japan, Iwata (2008) explained social exclusion as “a new policy word to realize ‘social inclusion’ and prevent current social issues brought about by structure to bar specific people from main social relations.” In addition, Kondo and Abe (2015) defined social exclusion as “the process of gradually removing people from social systems and relations.”

3.2. Disability

3.2.1. The Social Model of disability

The legal definition of disability varies between countries, but there is a social model of disability in the WHO’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) that provides an international definition. The international definition of disability is shifting from the conventional

medical model to this social model (also called a human rights model), which is reflected in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mentioned later. The ICF deals with all aspects related to health, including well-being, of all people, including persons with disabilities. The ICF classifies human life functions and disabilities into 1,500 items of “mind/body function, physical structure,” “activity and participation,” and influential “environmental factors.” A significant characteristic of the ICF definition is that it not only classifies mental/body function disorders and consequential life function disorders but also focuses on activity and social participation, particularly influential environmental factors. Such view on disability in the ICF has had a large influence on the health care, medical care, and welfare services for persons with disabilities.

3.2.2. Social Vulnerability

Vulnerability means “capable of being wounded/fragile” (Social Worker Training Lecture Editing Committee 2010). In relation to the ICF and the social model of disability, Seino (2014) suggested clarifying disability to include social barriers such as social vulnerability, which Seino (2014) defined as “social disadvantage due to social systems or society.” In addition, social vulnerability is neither a biological or physical functional vulnerability requiring medical care or functional rehabilitation, nor a psychological vulnerability that occurs thereafter. Vulnerability attracted global attention after the enactment of Canada’s “The Vulnerable Persons Living with Mental Disability Act” in 1996. In Japan, Furukawa (2008) discussed vulnerability from a social welfare-specific perspective.

The concept of social vulnerability is also valid in this paper when discussing poverty, disability, and related issues, because poverty as social exclusion includes various disadvantages, and that is precisely the form of disability in the social model mentioned above.

4. INTERNATIONAL TRENDS ON POVERTY AND DISABILITY

4.1. Poverty

Eradicating poverty is a highly prioritized problem in the global community. In 2015, the United Nations proposed 17 “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) for the global community to be achieved by 2030. The global issues identified include poverty, starvation, medical care and welfare, education, gender, employment, inequality, and peace. The international trend of poverty reported by the United Nations is as follows. An improvement is being seen in the world poverty ratio; however, many people remain either in a state of poverty state or at risk of poverty. In addition, the United Nations sees poverty from a social exclusion perspective, according to which poverty is not merely lacking the income and resources necessary for sustainable life but also includes facing hunger and malnutrition, having no access to education or other basic services, facing social discrimination and exclusion, as well as exclusion from decision making.

Table 1 shows the poverty ratio of the world in 2012. Since 1990, the extreme poverty ratio has decreased by more than half. The world poverty

ratio and the number of people living in poverty were 37.1% and 1,958 million in 1990, and 12.7% and 896 million in 2012 (based on the purchasing power parity of 2011, the international poverty line is calculated as USD 1.90 a day). In countries such as China or India, millions of people have escaped poverty due to the rapid growth of the domestic economy. However, compared to men, women have a higher probability of falling into poverty state due to unequal access to employment, education, and resources. In addition, 80% of people living in extreme poverty occupy areas such as South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, where the extent of poverty has not much improved. To fully eradicate poverty, the United Nations has highlighted the need to focus on people who live in vulnerable situations, improve access to basic resources and services, and support communities that suffer conflicts and climate change-related disasters.

4.2 Income Gap and Inequality

The income gap is deeply related to poverty. According to the United Nations, there are differences in and inequality of income domestically and internationally; it is a global problem that needs a global solution. The wealthiest 10% of the world’s population receive nearly 40% of the entire global income; in comparison, the poorest 10% earn only 2~7% of the entire global income. After taking into account population size, difference in income developing countries increases to 11%. Regarding this expansion, the United Nations has emphasized the need to empower the lowest income groups, regardless of sex, race, and ethnicity. Large differences remain in access to health, education ser-

VICES, and other resources. While cross-national economic differences are reducing, inequality continues to spread within each country. When economic growth occurs only in some parts of society, it is insufficient to achieve poverty reduction. It is necessary to pay attention to the needs of those who are underprivileged and isolated from society, and to introduce a universal policy to reduce inequality.

4.3. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In recent years, the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” adopted by the United Nations on December 13, 2006 had a significant influence on the global community regarding persons with disabilities. Adopted during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly and coming into force on May 3, 2008, this was the first international treaty on persons with disabilities. The treaty secures the rights and basic freedom of people with disabilities, as well as promoting respect for the dignity of disabled persons, by demanding that countries secure rights in numerous aspects, such as political/civil rights and the right to education, health, labor, employment, social security, and access to leisure activities. Japan signed the treaty on September 28, 2007, and is now among the 160 countries to have signed as of November 2015. A process of international monitoring for the treaty’s implementation is stipulated therein. According to this requirement, countries that ratify the Convention must report to the United Nations on their state of implementation, and the United Nations gathers an advisory general opinion for

each country that includes referential parallel reports from NGOs. As of August 2015, the United Nations has given such opinions to 26 countries. In Japan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared its first draft in September 2015. The first government report was compiled by the Persons with Disabilities Policy Board set up by the Cabinet Office in December 2015.

4.4. Disability

This paper organizes the issues surrounding persons with disabilities based on the United Nations opinions given to 26 countries as of August 2015. Regarding the definition of disability, the United Nations has advised countries to revise the legal definition from the medical model to the social model (human rights model). In addition, other advice has included recognizing persons with disabilities based on their characteristics, situation, and needs, rather than their ailments or functional disorders. Regarding discrimination prohibition, the United Nations has observed that reasonable accommodation in many countries was undeveloped or lax. Furthermore, the United Nations has highlighted the necessity for many countries to deal with “intersectional discrimination,” which refers to discrimination stemming from a combination of disability and other factors, including sex differences, age, ethnicity, location, social isolation, and insular factors. Regarding the expansion of independent life and community life, the United Nations has raised a shift to deinstitutionalization and community independent living as an issue to be tackled for many countries. In particular, the United Nations identified the large

number of people with intellectual disorders entering facilities and the large number of people with mental disorders in social hospitalization.

4.5. Employment of Persons with Disability

Regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, the United Nations has highlighted that many countries have not provided adequate reasonable accommodation to secure the employment participation of disabled persons. Many countries have implemented employment quotas as a means of affirmative action. However, employment rates, improvement of employment conditions, and the shift from sheltered employment to general employment has yet to succeed. In addition, it has been observed that, in most countries, compared to people with no disabilities, the disabled have a much lower employment rate, a higher unemployment rate, and among people with disabilities, there are large differences depending on sex, type of disability, and location. The United Nations urges the relevant countries to improve in the following areas: (1) prohibiting discrimination of persons with disabilities, (2) removing the minimum wage exemption, (3) affirmative action such as employment quotas, 4) discontinuing sheltered employment for more inclusive employment, and (5) organization of information and data to investigate the effectiveness of policies such as employment quota systems.

5. POVERTY AND DISABILITY IN JAPAN

5.1. Summary of Japan'

Japan is an island country in the Pacific Ocean in East Asia. Its total land area is about 378,000 square kilometers. As of September 2016, Japan's total population is 126.92 million. The unemployment rate is 3.0% (July 2016), the nominal GDP is the third highest globally at USD 5,959.7 billion (2012), it is ranked fifth globally in the official development assistance (ODA) results of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) with 104.9, and its United Nations normal budget allotment rate is second globally at 10.833% (2013). Social security programs in Japan are designed to guarantee a minimum standard of living and to protect citizens from certain types of social and economic risk. The social security system comprises four major components: public assistance, social insurance, social welfare services, and public health maintenance.

5.2. Poverty

In the context of Japan, poverty is relative, rather than absolute. The relative poverty percentage in Japan has been reported as 10.1% in the "National Survey of Family Income and Expenditure" of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2009) and 16.1% in the "National Livelihood Survey" of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2012). In both surveys, the characteristics of relative poverty households were elderly, single-person or single-parent households in rural districts

or villages (Cabinet Office; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare). In addition, the relative poverty ratio of children has grown to 15.7% in 2009 since the mid-1990s. The relative poverty ratio of working-age households with children is 14.6%, of which the poverty rate of working-age households with one adult is 50.8%. In addition, according to the OECD, the relative poverty ratio of children in Japan is the tenth highest among the 34 OECD member nations. Moreover, the relative poverty ratio of working-age households with children and one adult is the highest among the OECD members.

In addition, the number of welfare recipients – who receive living, medical, and housing benefits – has increased in recent years, reaching more than 2,160,000 as of July 2014. Thus, the number of recipients and benefits have increased 1.7-fold and 1.6-fold respectively over the ten years from 2002 to 2011.

5.3. Homelessness and Social Exclusion

According to a survey by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2016), the number of people who slept outdoor that year, such as in a park or on a riverbank, was 6,235 people. Regarding households living in difficulty, the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2009) reported that in a survey conducted in 2007, the rates of households experiencing delinquency in electric and gas payments in the year before were 4.7% and 4.5% respectively. In addition, approximately 40% of single-person and single-parent households experienced not being able to afford

food. The ratio for the same experience in single-person working-age households was 17.0% for men and 20.4% for women. Abe (2011) highlighted the increase in irregular employment and high unemployment rates among young working-age people in recent years reflecting on the above. Furthermore, food poverty was experienced by 24.7% of single elderly men. Health insurance cards were taken away from 307,000 households nationwide (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2011). One in 50 households had people who were unable to receive medical services even though they were unhealthy.

5.4. Disability

Regarding the actual situation of Japanese disabled persons, I will provide an outline based on the first Japanese Government report (2016) and the Annual Report on Government Measures for Persons with Disabilities (Cabinet Office 2015) based on the persons with disabilities right treaty. Japan's definition of persons with disabilities is based on the social model. Disabilities “include physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental disorders (which includes developmental disabilities), and other mental and physical functional disabilities (hereinafter all referred to as “disabilities”), and refer to a state of considerable, continuous limits in everyday or social life caused by a disability or social barrier” (the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities and the Disability Discrimination Elimination Act). The number of people with disabilities in Japan today comprises 3,937,000 with a physical disability, 741,000 with an intellectual disability, and 3,201,000 with a mental disorder.

Approximately 6% of Japan's population has some kind of disability. In addition, the number of people entering facilities is 16.1% for people with intellectual disabilities, which is particularly high, 1.9% for people with physical disabilities, and 10.1% for those with mental disorders. Although it is difficult for the ratio of persons with disabilities to the rest of the nation to be simply compared internationally, it is estimated that Japan's ratio is low compared to other OECD member nations, except Korea (Katsumata 2008). Regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, the Act on Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities obliges business owners to comply with a legal employment rate of persons with disabilities within their workforce (2.0% for private enterprises and 2.3% for public institutions). As of June 2015, the average actual employment rate in private enterprises nationwide is 1.88%, while the number of employed persons with disabilities is approximately 453,133 (320,752 with physical disabilities, 97,744 with intellectual disabilities, and 34,637 with mental disorders). The actual employment rate and the number of employed people with disabilities have increased for 12 consecutive years; it is, therefore, considered that the employment of persons with disabilities in Japan is steadily advancing.

6. DISCUSSION

In this paper, an integral review was conducted by interpreting poverty and disability broadly to include social exclusion and social vulnerability respectively. There is a global aim to establish the

right for safety and equality of all people, including persons with disabilities. However, inequality due to poverty disability is an issue in both Japan and globally. In addition, poverty and disability are closely related in both contexts. Gender inequality and inequality of access to living areas, employment, education, and resources are related to poverty as social vulnerability.

Although social exclusion is a poverty issue, many people still suffer from absolute poverty in some areas and countries. Therefore, the global community needs to strive to eradicate absolute poverty quickly simultaneously with working to eradicate social exclusion. To that end, solving the cross-national economy and income gaps is necessary, requiring the application of knowledge from fields such as international development studies, economics, political science, and social work.

Regarding disability, the shift from the medical model to the social model in the legal definition of disability is being demanded globally. This leads to inclusion within the persons with disabilities category of individuals with social vulnerability, rather than just persons with a functional disability. This provides a basis to visualize and clarify issues such as those faced in Japan, including persons with various difficulties in life and those with a combination of problems needing social support. Conversely, clarifying the problem and the development of support method systems do not necessarily synchronize. Therefore, such clarification and systems development is urgent, and the social significance of studies directed at contribution to practices conducted at the aforementioned Center is huge.

In addition, regarding poverty and disability, I was able to confirm that they were closely related to issues in employment. Poverty is related to exclusion from the labor market and social disadvantage, while disability is related to social exclusion, a low employment rate, and low income. In addition, both were related to social exclusion as a result of employment or unemployment, and exclusion from employment opportunity as a result of social vulnerability. Therefore, the creation of stable, high-quality employment is demanded globally and domestically. In a situation where the market and economy are globalized across borders, international cooperation is important in achieving solutions to these problems.

Broadly interpreting poverty and disability offers a perspective that includes combined issues of the world and Japan. In essence, those who are exposed to social risks, such as children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, can all be considered as people with social vulnerability. In addition, various social problems, such as unemployment, social isolation, and low income, can be included as forms of social exclusion. The concepts of social exclusion and social vulnerability will be important as theoretical evidence. Moreover, the accumulation of practices and integrating studies into practices is important in solving actual situations presented by these issues.

7. CONCLUSION

For the equality, health, and safety of all people, including persons with disabilities, the global com-

munity needs to wrestle with these issues quickly and with international cooperation. By studying the issues of poverty and disability from an international context and by conducting collaborative studies, contributions to innovative social changes on a macro level and realization of the exertion of collective responsibility may be possible. Simultaneously, to solve the actual problems, nation-based cross-field and inclusive studies and practices on social work are needed.

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Table1. Poverty ratio in each area based on the international poverty line (2012) (World Bank 2014)

Area	Poverty line (PPP, dollars / day)	Poverty ratio (%)	Number of people living in poverty (million)	Total population (million)
East Asia, Oceania	1.9	7.21	147.2	2,041.56
Europe, Central Asia	1.9	2.11	10.14	480.78
Latin America. the Caribbean	1.9	5.58	33.68	603.58
Middle East, North Africa	No result indicated			
South Asia	1.9	18.75	309.23	1,649.25
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.9	42.65	388.76	911.51
All developing countries	1.9	14.88	896.7	6,026.23
Whole world	1.9	12.73	896.7	7,043.07