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Child Poverty in Japan
日本の子どもの貧困

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概要

様々な分野で発展を遂げた日本は今や先進国の中でも重要な役割を担うようになり、また、世界的に見ても日本は平和で豊かな国として知られるようになりました。しかし、先進国であるにもかかわらず日本は現在、深刻な貧困問題を抱えています。この問題によって、多くの子ども達が苦しんでいることを知り、同じ世代である私たちがこの問題と向き合うことが解決への一歩になると感じ、日本の子どもの貧困問題について調査を始めました、そしてこの問題がどれだけ知られているのか、また私たちに出来ることは何なのかを知るために、次の三つの設問を立てました。

1. どれだけの高校生が日本における子どもの貧困問題を知っているのか？
2. 貧困に苦しむ子ども達が求める支援は何なのか？
3. 子どもの貧困問題解決に向けて高校生として私たちに出来ることは何なのか？

私たちは、関西創価高校3年の全生徒を対象に子どもの貧困についてのアンケート、子どもの貧困問題解決に向けて取り組むNPO キッズドアへの電話インタビュー、創価大学教授へのメールでのインタビュー、そしてフィールドワークを通して、この問題があまり知られていない現状とその認知度の向上に教育が有効であること、そして私たちに出来ることはこの問題を学び広め、貧困に苦しむ子ども達への経済的・教育的支援を拡充することであると知りしました。そして、これらの調査結果をもとに、私たちは子どもの貧困についての情報をまとめた携帯用アプリとウェブサイトの設立、また、子どもの貧困についての情報を発信するための媒体として使うLINEアカウントの設立を提案します。SNSの活用によって多くの人々、特に若い世代が子どもの貧困に関心を持つことが期待されます。今回の調査は、私立高校1校を対象としたものであるため、大人へ情報を発信するには信憑性にかける点があり、また、相対的貧困は日本という国としての指数であるため、各地域での経済的背景を考慮しきれていないことが課題といえます。ウェブサイトを作る上でも、セキュリティや維持コスト、学校への許可企業のサポートの必要性、ウェブサイトの管理を委託できるボランティアの必要性といった課題として考えられます。多くの課題が残るこの問題を高校生として、また一世界市民としてこれからも調査、探求し続けることを強く決意し、そして、この提言が少しでも多くの人がこの問題を知り、活動するためのきっかけとなることを願います。

Child Poverty in Japan

These days, Japan has succeeded in developing in various fields in society, so it is called a developed country. It is also considered a peaceful land that provides social services for its citizens. However, about one in six children in Japan are actually poor even though it is such a developed country. Since the authors have become aware of child poverty in Japan, we have felt that it is our mission to study about the causes of why such innocent children suffer from poverty in Japan. Indeed, despite the development of Japan, this domestic issue might be not as noticeable as poverty in other countries. Still, we find it important to address. We have divided poverty into two parts. One is called *absolute poverty* and the other is called *relative poverty*. The World Bank (2015) has defined *absolute poverty* as living on less than \$1.90 a day. On the other hand, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2013) has defined *relative poverty* in the case of Japan, as a condition of life below an annual income of ¥1.22 million a year. In this proposal, we consider all poverty in Japan as relative poverty. In the end, if we could make people aware of this issue, we thought that we would be able to contribute to finding solutions to this problem in Japan, which we hope could also be applied to other countries with the similar struggles. This is the reason why we have researched and made proposals to tackle child poverty in Japan.

Literature Review

Main Causes of Child Poverty in Japan

Working poor. The working poor are people who do not earn enough wages even though they are working (Cambridge dictionary, 2016). Because of the prolonged recession, many companies employ people as part-time workers instead of regular hired workers in order to keep costs down. Moreover, even governmental jobs have shifted to non-regular employment.

Single-parent families. The reason why these families become single-parent is mostly due to divorce (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2011). By becoming a single parent, their income is decreased. Single mothers find it especially difficult to become regular employees. According to research from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2011), more than half of single mothers are non-regular employees. Moreover, because they have to do housework and take care of their children, their schedule limits their working hours. Therefore, they cannot earn enough wages to live on. Over 50% of the families from single mothers are poor now (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010).

Redistribution of income. Redistribution of income is an aid for poor people (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2009). The Japanese government tries to obtain higher taxes from rich people, and then help poor people by distributing aid money. However, unfortunately, this causes a reversal in the poverty ratio. People suffer due to high taxation, and that effect is actually bigger than the aid money received. As more money is distributed as aid to poor people, they have more taxes to pay. Therefore, this pattern leads to poverty (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2009).

The Relationship between Internal Poverty and External Poverty

Depression is related to poverty. Internal poverty is related to mental health issues, while external poverty is related to actual economic issues. The reason why children who are suffering from poverty become depressed is because such children do not have access to daily necessities such as eating enough food, and living amenities like taking a bath every day, buying new clothes, and enjoying amusements. Thus, their desire cannot be satisfied. This leads poor children to be concerned about their future, which is not guaranteed, because their life is always unstable. This causes children to experience more stress. (PNAS, 2009) That's one of the reasons how children end up depressed.

Non-attendance at school. Poor children are also suffering from a “gap in education.” (Ochanomizu Women’s University, 2008) The education gap is related to both external poverty and internal poverty. A child from a wealthy family tends to be a high academic achiever. On the other hand, a child from poor family tends to be a low academic achiever because parents from poor families cannot afford to send their children to additional private supplemental schools for further education since they lag behind other students. Thus, children are not in a position to excel in their studies. This academic gap stresses the child from the poor family. Therefore, children from poor families will find it difficult to gain meaning and value from their educational and studying experience. As a result, some refuse to go to school.

Activities to Help to Decrease Child Poverty in Japan

Chance for Children. Chance for Children is a public interest incorporated association (Chance for Children, 2016). This association provides opportunities for society to help decrease child poverty in Japan by not only funding, but also developing creative ways to tackle this problem. For example, volunteers sell old books, and the organization collects money from those sales. This money is used for tuition for supplemental private cram school education for children who want to study to take entrance examinations to enter better schools. Moreover, it collects T-card points, which are derived from people who make purchases at many stores in Japan. These points are used to support children who lost their homes by the Tohoku earthquake in order to study. It introduces a voucher system. The government cooperates with companies to produce vouchers that can be used for tuition in cram schools. In this way, poor children can be supported educationally and financially

Special Cafeterias. Some communities provide special cafeterias, which tackle child poverty in Japan (Special cafeteria network, 2016). Everyone can eat meals from about 300 yen to 500 yen in this cafeteria. Most of them are open once or twice a week. The food is

collected from food bank activities and donated by people who have an interest in these cafeterias. To make it easier, a network of cafeterias inform society through their websites about what is needed, such as rice, meat, fish, money, and volunteer staff. In these cafeterias, children who cannot eat meals with their parents can eat meals with staff and other people. This can create a family-like atmosphere where they do not feel so lonely.

Save the Children Japan. Save the Children Japan is a public interest incorporated association. Save the Children is an international organization to support children. Save the Children Japan also collects money to help decrease child poverty, and it cooperates with Yahoo services. For example, if people use yahoo shopping to buy something, four percent of the income is sent to the Save the Children Japan fund. Moreover, the stamps on postcards, which are sent by mistake, are exchanged for money. That amount of money is donated to these causes (Save the Children, 2016).

Methodology

Our methodology has three parts. Firstly, we conducted two interviews. One was with *Kids-Door*, an NPO, in order to deepen our understanding of child poverty in Japan. Another was with Mr. Sugimoto, who is a professor on the faculty of Liberal Arts at Soka University of Japan. Secondly, we created a newspaper to increase high school students' knowledge about child poverty in Japan. Thirdly, we administered a questionnaire in a private Japanese high school in order to find out how many high school students knew about child poverty in Japan.

Interviews

Kids-Door. Although the literature review provided a background to the issue of child poverty in Japan, it was considered necessary to obtain more information on the issue. *Kids-door* is an action group in the NPO community combating child poverty in Japan. This

organization fully understands what children need, and how to support a stable family life, which children depend on. Therefore, a phone interview with one of the representatives was conducted. Our goal was to find a way to tackle child poverty in Japan as high school students.

Economics. Furthermore, Mr. Ichiro Sugimoto, a professor of economics at Soka University Japan, has conducted research on poverty and development. We had a chance to learn from him on child poverty when we went to Soka University to carry out fieldwork. We realized that he deeply understands this issue and the role of high school students in society. Therefore, an e-mail interview with him was conducted.

Education. We created a newspaper on child poverty in Japan to inform high school students about this issue. Then, we gave them to third-grade high school students, providing them time to read the newspapers during home room.

Questionnaires

After reading our newspaper, we administered a survey. The questionnaire was designed to investigate how much high school students knew about child poverty in Japan before reading the paper, using the same third-grade high school students. We also asked students how much they had become interested in this issue after reading the newspaper.

Lastly, the new information gained from the interviews informed the kinds of questions that were asked of the students on the previously mentioned questionnaire. The interviews also informed the content of the newspaper. It was hoped that the questionnaire and interviews would lead to a genuine plan of action to combat child poverty among the high school students.

Results

Interview with Kids Door

First, we interviewed the executive director of Kids-Door. This NPO helps children suffering from poverty. In this interview, we asked two questions to the executive director of Kids Door. The first question was how we could contribute to the resolution of child poverty as high school students. In response, he told us that we could learn about child poverty and could tell our friends about the current situation in Japan. He explained that to learn about it becomes a trigger for action. Then, he suggested that we should spread that information by telling others. In other words, we should make it an opportunity to encourage people to pay attention to the issue of child poverty. In this way, we could help contribute to resolving child poverty in Japan. The second question concerned feasible activities that high school students could carry out and would be most useful to help children suffering from poverty. The director responded that the most important activity would be educational support for children suffering from poverty. The reason was that elementary school children suffering from poverty tend to grow up without developing a good study habit. For example, for many children, when there is something that they do not know, they can immediately ask their parents. As a result, they can develop a study habit through the instant interactions with their parents. Conversely, for children suffering from poverty, that interaction is much weaker because there are a lot of single parent households. Some people call families like this members of the working poor; their parents must work long hours. Therefore, their parents do not have enough time to answer questions from their children. Thus, it is difficult for such children to develop a well-established study habit. No only do such children lack the opportunity to ask their parents freely, they also do not have enough money to go to a preparatory school or buy reference books. For these reasons, they tend to not be able to develop their intelligence. He continued to explain that it becomes difficult for them to gain

full-time employment later on in life. In fact, this cycle continues to produce welfare recipients. In the end, our action is very important. Through providing educational support, we can cut this negative cycle. To be sure, we need a lot of money to do this activity, but we can cut back the number of welfare recipients by engaging in educational support activities. It is an investment for the future.

Interview with Soka University Professor

We sent an email to Professor Ichiro Sugimoto, who is on the faculty of International Liberal Arts at Soka University, in Japan. We wanted to solicit some advice from him for our research. He said that child poverty does not mean that children are poor. Actually, it is a problem of the parents, because child poverty is a cyclical chain from parents to children. Unfortunately, child poverty in Japan is increasing. One of the reasons is the income divide. He suggested to us that one solution was “education,” because it contributes to providing equal opportunity to learning and to acquiring practical abilities for the workplace. This will result in a sufficient income in the future for those children who are struggling now. In addition, it is necessary for adults to support children through creating educational support services, and software. They can also help to strengthen the scholarship system among other initiatives. He said, although it may be difficult to contribute directly to solving child poverty as a high school student, it is still necessary for us to find our own original approach to help alleviate this problem. Both interviews offered similar suggestions in regards to the necessity for educational support and awareness.

Results of the survey

We administered a survey to ascertain how many students knew about child poverty in Japan to third grade students in a private high school in Japan. There were 175 respondents in all. First, we gave the respondents newspapers, which covered the topic of child poverty.

Next, after they had read the newspaper, we administered a survey that contained four questions.

1. How much did you know about child poverty in Japan?
2. How much did you become interested in child poverty in Japan after reading the newspaper article on the topic?
3. How much do you think that we can resolve child poverty in Japan?
4. How motivated are you now to take action to solve child poverty in Japan?

A four-point Likert scale was employed to elicit the responses. On the scale, one indicated the highest end, while four indicated the lowest end.

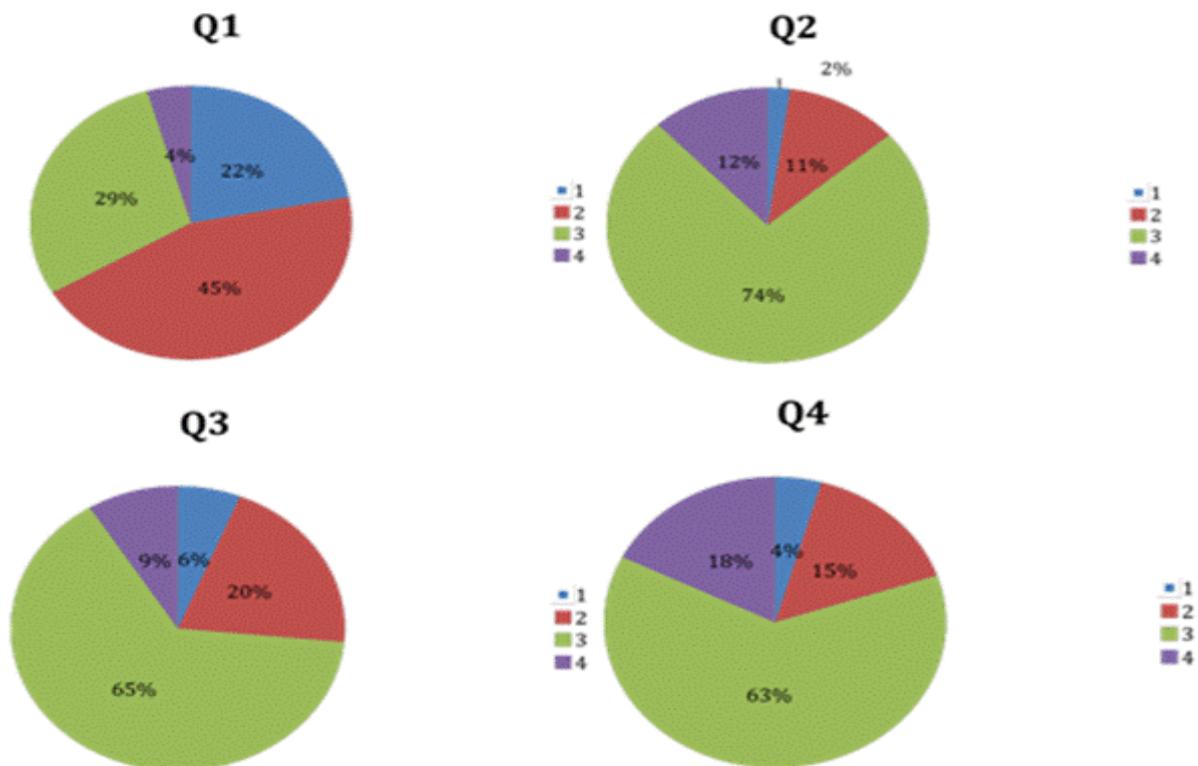
The results for the first question (How much did you know about child poverty in Japan?) indicated that 22% of the respondents didn't know anything about child poverty in Japan. Next, 45% chose that they hardly knew anything, while 29% knew something about the topic. Only 4% chose that they knew a lot about it. This can be seen in Chart 1.

The results for the second question (How much did you become interested in child poverty in Japan after reading the newspaper article on the topic?) indicated that 2% of the respondents didn't become at all interested. Next, 11% didn't become so interested. However, this was followed by 75% who become interested. Lastly, 12% chose that they became really interested. This can be seen in Chart 2.

The results for the third question (How much do you think that we can resolve child poverty in Japan?) indicated that 6% of the respondents chose that they the problem could not at all be resolved. Next, 20% felt that the problem could not really be resolved. However, 65% felt the problem could probably be resolved. While 9% felt the problem could absolutely be resolved. This can be seen in Chart 3.

The results for the fourth question (How motivated are you now to take action to solve child poverty in Japan?) indicated that 4% of the respondents were not at all motivated. Next,

15% were not so interested. This was followed by 63% who a little interested. Lastly, 18% were very motivated to solve child poverty in Japan. This can be seen in Chart 4.



Discussion

Questionnaire

The results of the first question in the survey show that 67% of the students answered that they didn't know about this issue at all or not really. Most Japanese people think that Japan is an advanced country, so they can't imagine that poverty in Japan exists. Moreover, we think this problem is difficult to see from outside.

The results of the second question show that 87% of the students answered that they became interested in this issue after reading our newspaper. We think that newspapers are a good way to learn and understand the issue quickly, and informing others is the easiest way to make people interested in something.

The results of the third question show 74% of the students felt positive that they can solve this issue. We think that though some children are suffering from poverty, Japan is a wealthy country in the world and we have enough food to raise children without any financial difficulty. Therefore, many students believe either optimistically or naively that we can solve this issue.

The results of the fourth question show that 81% of the students answered that they are motivated to take action by the newspaper. We think that many felt that this issue was close to their daily life. Moreover, Japan cannot advance without solving this issue. Therefore, many high school students became passionate to solve this issue after knowing current situation.

Email Interview

Professor Ichiro Sugimoto, who is in the faculty of International Liberal Arts at Soka University of Japan, answered our question concerning what is the most feasible action to take towards eliminating child poverty in Japan by high school students through our email exchange. He said, “Actually, it is difficult for high school students to solve this issue directly, because the cause of child poverty is a special Japanese problem caused by globalization from income differences and is getting worse within the Japanese industrial sector. The solutions tend to be economical, such as support for education and governmental programs.” Therefore, we think that adults should take action by improving scholarship programs and by providing more educational opportunities to enable children to go to college. If they can attend college, they can find employment with a suitable income in order to live on their own. Moreover, we think if children learn about child poverty in Japan during their school days, they have more opportunity to solve child poverty directly in Japan when they become adults.

Phone Interview

The executive director of Kids-Door concerned with child poverty, said to us in a phone interview that “high school students cannot directly tackle child poverty, but they can contribute to child poverty by doing simple things.” We think that high school students who are so busy with study and club activities, cannot tackle child poverty since it would take too much time to establish or contribute to an NPO in order to ameliorate child poverty in Japan. Moreover, he said to us “students would have to hold and organize events. Rather, high school students need to focus on their studies. However, high school students can do simple things such as gaining knowledge on this issue, sharing that knowledge with others and suggesting ideas how to tackle child poverty.” High school students can spread information very quickly, so we think that the expansion of information will increase the opportunity to support poor children, and high school students can appeal to adults to support poor children. As a result, more adults will become aware of child poverty in Japan and make an attempt to address this issue. Next, the director said to us, “poor children need educational support, because their learning environment is so unstable. For example, they cannot purchase reference books or go to cram schools due to lack of financial resources. In addition, their circumstances are likely to contribute to an educational gap and they will be at a disadvantage to gain employment in the future. Consequently, poor children tend to rely on social welfare from the government.” Therefore, we think that if poor children can stabilize their learning environment through educational support, it may be unnecessary to receive welfare.

Proposal

Based on our research, we would like to propose two ideas. We think that we need two approaches to solve this issue--one for high school students and one for adults. High

school students should especially raise their awareness, and adults should improve educational financial support.

Raising high school students' awareness. Some of third year high school students who are eighteen years old have voting rights; this means that they have the opportunity to participate in politics. Therefore, they can take political action to solve child poverty. Learning about the issue affects not only the present, but also the future. High school students should prepare by becoming knowledgeable about child poverty so that they can solve this issue when they become adults. Therefore, they need to learn about it while they are high school students.

Importance of improving educational and financial support. We realized the importance of education as solution for child poverty in Japan. Actually, child poverty is a problem of the parents, because child poverty is a cyclical chain from parents to children. To cut the chain, we think that education has an important role, because it contributes to providing equal opportunity to learning and to acquiring practical abilities, so education will enable poor children to get a chance to go to university or to earn a sufficient income in the future. We think it is necessary for adults to support children through creating educational support services. In this regard, we would like adults to take some action for supporting poor children. For example, adults can contribute to improving education by providing aide to the scholarship system among other initiatives. We feel it may be difficult for high school students to contribute directly to solving child poverty. However, we can influence the adults around us to take action, so we are not powerless.

SNS Activities

These activities can raise high school students' awareness and appeal to adults to improve educational and financial support at the same time.

Website. We would like to suggest creating a website that introduces the data on child poverty. We could design the website by posting URLs of the articles, activities, and data that we find relevant. This website could be a good tool to access Internet resources about these problems easily. Furthermore, such a website could be a portal to promote participation and support for organizations tackling these problems. For example, a map could be posted on the website that shows the facilities where volunteers are dedicated to helping poor children. Such a map would be able to increase the number of the people who try to participate in such activities. This would likely help decrease the child poverty population in Japan. On the website, we could also conduct a survey to collect data to investigate in more detail the current situation of child poverty in Japan. Moreover, we could make and post graphs and tables for each of the survey questions on the website, which would raise awareness towards the resolution of child poverty. Lastly, such a website would be an appropriate medium to reach youth and high school students who use Social Network Services. It would be effective to raise awareness toward these issues among this population. Through learning about this issue on the website, adults would be motivated to support poor children.

SNS applications. We would like to suggest providing information about child poverty in Japan on LINE, which is a SNS application that many Japanese people use, as well as create other educational applications. We could send information on LINE to subscribers. Then, we could answer the questions submitted by subscribers. Through posting articles, news, and information about volunteers, we could give opportunities to subscribers to learn about this issue seriously. In addition, we could raise the general awareness of subscribers as well. Moreover, we could create additional educational applications together with organizations that are tackling child poverty in Japan. By cooperating with such organizations, we could carry out dynamic activities and provide the most important information on

alleviating child poverty in Japan by experts in the field. Such educational applications about child poverty could help others learn about this issue through short movies, quizzes, and by providing a platform where people could learn how to be a volunteer.

University Partnership Program. We would like to suggest that experts in the field of child poverty be invited to the University Partnership Program (UP). UP is a program that our high school holds every Thursday. Every student can participate by listening to specialized lectures given by professors in various fields. In this regard, we would like to invite professors whose specialize in child poverty. The purpose of such lectures would be aimed at allowing students who participate in UP to become more aware of child poverty in Japan. The pedagogical approach applied in the UP program provides an active learning environment where students would be able to gain knowledge and more importantly, think deeply about child poverty in Japan.

Limitations

There are limitations in this research. First, our data was collected among one private high school. Since this school places a particularly strong emphasis on global issues, it may not be representative of other high school students. Thus, a more representative sample of students from both private and public schools should be undertaken. Secondly, our survey was conducted among high school students. Therefore, the survey does not represent the adult population, or other age groups outside of high school students. A more diverse random sampling of the general public is necessary to get a better picture of the real situation in Japan concerning child poverty. Thirdly, there may be regional differences between urban versus rural areas. This distinction was not examined in our research. This survey was conducted in an urban area. This survey also did not investigate the economic background, gender, or any other possible confounding variables that may have also influenced the survey findings. All

in all, a more representative sampling across a wider range of people and areas is necessary. Although we have suggested creating SNS applications and websites to raise people's awareness, there are some limitations to this proposal. First, we need to get permission from our school. Teachers will be concerned about the security and costs, so it would take a long time until we are allowed to use SNS as a tool for spreading our ideas. In addition, the issue of maintenance of such media is problematic, as students would come and go. Thirdly, we need to find some organizations, which we can work with. There are a lot of organizations working on child poverty. However, there are only a few organizations willing to cooperate with high school students. This means there would be difficulty in finding an organization, which could understand our proposals.

Conclusion

In this research, activities to tackle child poverty in Japan by making opportunities to learn and serve low cost dinners were investigated. Based on the literature review, we deepened our knowledge about child poverty, focusing on solutions that high school students could manage. Then, an awareness questionnaire was conducted to learn how many students had an interest toward child poverty. Interviews were conducted to hear the opinions from experts in the field on what high school students could do. The results indicated that students could become more aware. Although it is difficult for high school students to solve child poverty in Japan directly, they could influence others. In the end, the proposal was divided into two approaches--one for adults and one for high school students, because each of them have different roles in solving child poverty. For high school students, raising and spreading their awareness is a priority to solve child poverty. For adults, providing financial and other resources would be helpful toward realizing a poverty-free Japan for children.

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