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Rethinking Social Inclusion Concerning the Hidden Poverty of Young Women in Japan

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Abstract

This paper aims to clarify the reality of the work and livelihood of young married women. We conducted an investigation focusing on the invisible poverty of married women and the association between their dependence and feelings of happiness. We mainly attempted to analyze levels of “fear of violence” that young married women felt on a daily basis, in order to address the issue of their quality of social inclusion. For this study, a website survey was performed in April 2014 among 1,000 men and 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 34 years old, who did not graduate from university. The findings are the followings:

Firstly, the partners of nearly 20% of the married women enrolled in this study were non-regular employees. This result suggests that the Japanese government and researchers need to review their tacit assumption that married women are dependent on their male breadwinner. Secondly, 80% or more of the married women were found to be poor, even though they had been considered stable because they were socially included in families. Among the women belonging to, the most of them were categorized into an invisible poverty group. Thirdly, no significant difference was found in the happiness levels between the poverty and non-poverty groups; however, the poverty group’s happiness levels were significantly associated with their levels of fear of violence.

The results suggest the needs to reconsider the Japanese government’s

employment policy that socially excludes married women and to address the hidden issues of social inclusion.

Key words: social inclusion, hidden poverty, young women, capability, male breadwinner

Introduction

The economic globalization from the 1980s onward accelerated the non-regular employment of women in Japan. Since then, poverty and inequality have been getting worse. The ratio of women working as non-regular employees reached 50% in 2003, and has been increasing (55.9% in 2016)¹. In addition, non-regular female workers receive approximately half of the average hourly wage paid to regular male workers (54.0% in 2016)². This could be a cause for the increase of women living in poverty. Despite these serious situations surrounding women, the government has paid little attention to the issues of non-regular employment and poverty, because it is strongly believed in Japan that women are included in family and can be assured a good living after marriage. As the result, married women are deemed to be dependent on their male breadwinner, and thus are rarely given the benefits of policies.

The non-regular employment model was originally designed for married women; thus, there remain gaps in the labor conditions between regular and non-regular employees. Today, not only middle-aged married women, but also young men and women, work for low wages as non-regular employees. This is considered to be a cause of the growing number of youth suffering from poverty and inequality. However, according to the custom, young married women are deemed dependent on their male breadwinners and are thus removed from the

¹ Although the number of men under the same conditions has been increasing, the ratio remains still about 20% (22.1% in 2016).

² Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2017).

beneficiary list of government policies.

Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the reality of work and livelihood of young married women. We conducted an investigation into the invisible poverty of married women and the association between their dependence and happiness. We mainly attempted to analyze the levels of “fear of violence” that married women felt on a daily basis in order to rethink the quality of social inclusion. In Japan, sufficient studies have not been conducted in this area.

1. Background

As references of this investigative study, we examined three types of previous research on: 1. freeters (part-time workers) and non-regular workers, 2. poverty and social exclusion, and 3. happiness levels, as well as, the capabilities approach.

(1) Research on freeters and non-regular workers

It is said that labor regulations in Japan first began to be relaxed when Nikkeiren suggested flexible work styles in “Shinjidai no Nihonteki Keiei (Japanese-style of Management in a New Era)” issued in 1995. However, the labor regulations at that time for female workers had already been relaxed and accelerated with the growth of female workforce participation since the 1970s. In the 1990s, youth called “freeters” in addition to married women started to work as non-regular employees. Since 2000, not only young, but also middle-aged men, have been employed as non-regular workers. However, the majority of non-regular workers of all ages are still women. Despite this fact, Cabinet Office and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare exclude married women from their definition of the term “freeters”³ in the relevant documents. This is considered to

³ There is no unified definition of freeters, even in Japanese. The most widely-used definition is “the youth aged 15 to 34 years old (not including students and housewives), who are working in arbeits (temporary jobs) or part-time jobs (including temporary contracts) or who are not working with a wish to work” issued by the Cabinet Office (2003).

be gender biased. Surprisingly, this government definition was used for analyses or discussions of some gender-specific studies on freeters (Kosugi 2003; Honda 2002; Taromaru 2007 and 2009)⁴.

To formulate policies or perform research on freeters, married women are typically excluded. This means that women are no longer regarded as freeters after marriage, because they can obtain a stable living regardless of their husband's ability to support them. In fact, policy makers and many researchers have no intention of investigating married women's livelihoods, or refining awareness to clarify the differences among them.

(2) Research on poverty and social exclusion

Several organizations and researchers (such as Cabinet Office 2009; Kawahara 2005; National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2012) have recently performed investigative studies on various excluded groups, consisting of men and women, to address the issues of social exclusion. However, the subjects of these studies were mainly people who were being, or had already been, excluded from family. Even though the term "social exclusion" is typically used in an expanded sense including those who are blocked from various opportunities because of poverty, Japanese researchers normally discuss freeters on the assumption that people included in "standard" family (such as married women and children living with their fathers) are not exposed to this disadvantage.

In other words, people who are included in, and are dependent on family, are deemed to possess absolute resources that decrease their survival risk in Japan; therefore, "inclusion quality" is not considered very important. However, inclusion in family does not always improve or maintain quality of life. What is even worse

⁴ Osaka City (2007) conducted a survey among young people including married women. In this survey, the youth between the freeter ages of 15 and 34 years old were randomly selected from the lists of Osaka Basic Resident Register and Foreign Resident Registration Ledger to send a questionnaire and have interviews with 20 respondents. The 9th and final chapters of the survey report refer to married women including non-regular employees. The category title is "Housewives Working as Part-time Workers."

is that this may change into a dominance or suppression relationship, cause strain, and lead to domestic violence, abuse, or other problems. Despite these facts, only a few researchers (Takahashi 2013) discussed hidden issues about inclusion and its quality.

(3) Research on happiness levels

Economic researchers (such as Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2010; Frey 2010; Graham 2012) have recently released new studies to suggest a happiness level index for quality of life. In the capabilities approach (Sen 1992; Nussbaum 2000), the basis of the “Human Development Index” dramatically changed development concepts in a wide range of areas, especially the economic field. The capabilities approach is an important factor which influences quality of inclusion; however, sufficient studies have not been conducted in Japan. To evaluate quality of inclusion, it is particularly important to examine whether married women either physically or mentally feel fear of violence on a daily basis (Nussbaum 2000). However, Cabinet Office and municipal governments have conducted surveys on women’s past experience with violence, but have never investigated their daily fear of violence.

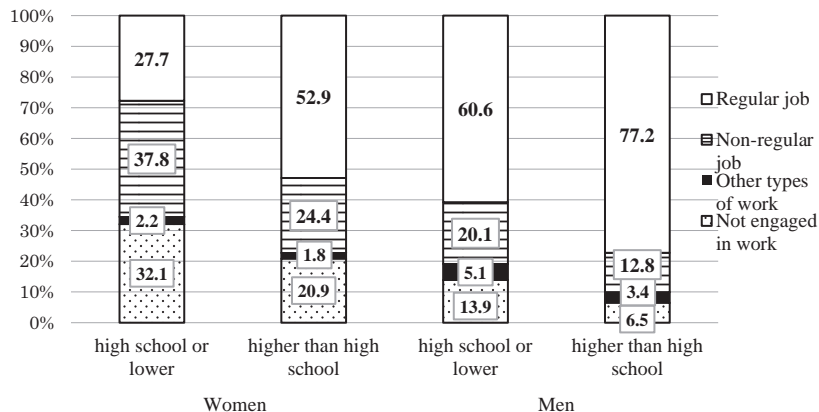
2. Method

For this study, a website survey was performed in April 2014 among 1,000 men and 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 34 years old, who did not graduate from university. We included people with a high school or lower education, because they were more likely to work as non-regular employees and have higher risks of poverty than those with a college degree [Figure]⁵. For analysis, the data of 475 married women (including those who are in a de facto state of marriage) was used.

⁵ In this research, the word “non-regular employees” is defined as not regular workers, including self-employed and unemployed.

[Figure]

Employment Status by Sex and Education (15–34 years old)



Source: The Employment Status Survey (by sex, age and education) (2012)
 Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

The survey results were analyzed from the following three points of view: firstly, we examined the employment status of their partners to clarify the ratio of women whose partner was not a regular employee.

Secondly, we attempted to clarify the poverty ratio and livelihoods of the married women. In Japan, poverty lines are typically determined based on household incomes. However, we regarded 1.03 million yen as the poverty line for this study, because it was considered the minimum income for living alone according to the welfare of a single-person household in the fiscal year 2014 (Nakahara, Ida, Yamada and Kumayasu 2016). The married women enrolled in this study were divided into two groups: those who earned an income less than 1.03 million yen (poverty group) and those who earned an income more than 1.04 million yen (non-poverty group). Using the data from the two groups, we calculated the ratio of poverty and also compared the differences in awareness and livelihoods between the two groups, in order to clarify the reality of married women deemed to be dependent on family.

Thirdly, we investigated the happiness levels of the married women to compare the two groups with respect to dependence on partner, health, awareness of gender roles, housework time, income and employment types and to clarify the association between happiness levels and fear of violence⁶. The issue of fear of violence has rarely been discussed by researchers in Japan.

3. Results

We conducted an analysis of young married women (475 people) and obtained the following results:

Firstly, 17.7% (84 people) of the women were married to men working as non-regular employees.

Secondly, 84.8% of the women (403 people) were classified into a poverty group (and 15.2%, 72 women, were categorized into a non-poverty group). We compared the poverty and non-poverty groups to investigate the differences in their awareness and livelihoods. As a result, significant differences were found in economic dependence, care dependence, living condition, health, awareness of gender roles, housework time, income and women's employment type. The women in the poverty group believed that they suffer hardship of life and poor health. Furthermore, they tended to be more supportive of gender roles and consume longer time on housework, compared to those of the non-poverty group [Table 1].

⁶ Our survey doesn't have the question to specify where one feels the fear of violence.

[Table 1]

Mean Scores Between Poverty Group and Non-poverty Group: Awareness and Livelihood.

		Poverty group N=403		Non-poverty group N=72		t	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Happiness level	Happiness level	6.63	2.18	6.92	1.97	-1.14	
Dependence on partner	Money	1.45	0.83	2.07	1.19	-4.23	***
	Care	3.23	0.89	2.96	1.04	2.30	*
	Being paid attention	2.16	1.01	2.03	0.95	1.06	
Living condition	Living condition	3.71	0.88	3.40	0.93	2.73	**
Health	Health condition	2.44	1.01	2.04	1.05	3.05	**
Gender role	Awareness of gender role	2.57	0.77	2.29	0.85	2.80	**
Housework	Women's housework time	9.48	6.81	4.38	3.55	8.93	***
Income	Women's income	16.08	33.60	240.29	113.68	-16.61	***
		%		%		²	
Fear of violence	Presence	21.3		25.0		0.48	
	Not presence	78.7		75.0			
Women's employment type	Regular employee	0.2		54.2		230.28 ***	
	Non-regular employee	99.8		45.8			
Partner's employment type	Regular employee	82.6		80.6		0.18	
	Non-regular employee	17.4		19.4			

$p < 0.5 = *$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.001 = ***$

Happiness Level Scale is 10 point scale. 0 point=very unhappy to 10 point=very happy.

Dependent Scale is 4 point scale. 1=very dependent on 4= not dependent on.

Living condition scale is 5 point scale. 1= afford 5=very hardship

Health condition is 5 point scale 1=good 5 =not good

Gender role is 4 point scale. If woman married, she should think more about her family than herself 1=Not agree at all 5=completely agree.

Housework time is hour per a day

Income is annual income (10 thousand yen)

Fear of violence: 0=presence 1=not presence

Employment type; 0=regular employee 1=non-regular employee

Thirdly, no significant difference was found in happiness levels between the poverty group (6.63) and non-poverty group (6.92) ($t = -1.14$, $df = 473$, n.s.).

Therefore, to perform a multiple linear regression analysis to discover the association between happiness levels and variables above mentioned, we divided the women into two groups: the poverty group and the non-poverty group. As a result, both of the groups had the happiness levels associated with the following two variables: hardship of life and emotional dependence. As for the poverty group, in addition to these two variables, another three variables were significant: fear of violence, health, and awareness of gender roles. As a result, both of the groups had the happiness levels associated with the following two variables; hardship of life and emotional dependence. As for the poverty groups, another three variables such as fear of violence, health and awareness of gender roles were significant. Our findings demonstrated that the poverty group was more likely to be affected by fear of violence than the non-poverty group, with respect to happiness levels, although of the level of fear of violence no significant difference was found between two groups (21.3% of poverty group, 25.0% of non-poverty group). We also provided sufficient variable data about fear of violence, which had not adopted in previous research [Table 2].

[Table 2]

Multiple Regression Analysis between Two Groups: Happiness Level

		Poverty group			Non-poverty group		
		338			67		
			t			t	
	(constant)		2.52	*		4.68	***
Dependent on partner	Money	0.03	0.65		0.12	1.05	
	Care	-0.02	-0.37		-0.01	-0.05	
	Being paid attention	-0.26	-5.26	***	-0.29	-2.54	*
Violence	Fear of violence	0.20	4.09	***	0.09	0.78	
Living condition	Living condition	-0.22	-4.50	***	-0.36	-3.14	**
Health	Health condition	-0.21	-4.43	***	-0.21	-1.84	
Gender role	Awareness of gender role	0.16	3.51	**	0.17	1.57	
Housework	Women's housework time	0.07	1.31		0.12	1.07	
Income	Women's income	0.00	0.02		0.03	0.26	
Employment type	Women's employment type	-0.02	-0.48		-0.01	-0.06	
	Partner's employment type	-0.01	-0.14		0.00	0.04	
	Adjusted R-squared		0.30			0.33	
	F-score		14.04	***		3.96	***

$p < 0.5 = *$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.001 = ***$

4. Discussion

The poverty group showed an association between their happiness levels and their fear of violence. To discover the reason for this association, defining fear of violence as a dependent variable, we examined four independent variables⁷:

⁷ We chose the independent variables concerning the relationship of the couple because when the victims are women, almost 30% of the murderers and the offenders of injury are their partners (National Police Agency 2017).

housework time of women, income of women, employment type of women and employment type of partners using binary logistic analysis. The result was that housework time of women and employment types of partners were associated with the presence of the fear of violence; the women who consume more housework time, or those who have a non-regular employed partner [Table 3]. Some studies indicate that men incapable of playing the role of breadwinner, tend to commit violence to demonstrate the male authority in the household (Bueno and Henderson 2017).

[Table 3]

Binary Logistic Analysis of Poverty Group: Fear of Violence

		B	Wald	Exp(B)		
Housework	Women's housework time	-0.05	5.29	0.95	*	
Income	Women's income	-0.01	2.16	0.99		
Employment type	Women's employment type	-19.85	0.00	0.00		
	Partner's employment type	-1.16	13.75	0.31	***	
		Nagelkerke R ²			0.08	***
					18.06	

$p < 0.5 = *$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.001 = ***$

As for the housework time, the second significant variable, our data shows the longer housework time women consume, the more sensitive they are about the mood of their partner ($r = -0.192$, $p < 0.000$). Hochschild suggests that a weaker status tends to be a shield against the displaced feelings of others (Hochschild 1983). According to her suggestion, our finding is likely to show those who are more sensitive about the mood of others tend to be in a weaker status and, therefore, vulnerable to violence.

Our findings in this study may be significantly important because of the insufficient amount of research in Japan on the fear of abuse and violence related

to “physical well-being” in the capabilities list suggested by Nussbaum. To investigate inclusion quality, it is essential to use variables to express levels of women’s fear of violence in addition to their past experience with violence.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, nearly 20% of the married women enrolled in this study were married to men working as non-regular employees. This result suggests that the Japanese government and researchers need to review their tacit assumption that married women are dependent on their male breadwinners. Secondly, 80% or more of the married women were found to be poor, even though they had been considered stable because they were socially included in family. If women in the poverty group wished to divorce with their male breadwinners to live alone, they would immediately fall into poverty. The majority of the married women were categorized into this hidden poverty group. Thirdly, no significant differences were found in happiness levels between the poverty and non-poverty groups; however, the poverty group’s happiness levels were significantly associated with their levels of fear of violence.

Our analysis results suggest the following things: while the poverty of married women has not been paid enough attention, as it is hidden in family, our analysis has identified the presence of the poverty among married women.

Exclusion of married women from policy discussion on the precarious employment of youth actually makes this poverty of women invisible. Whether they have partners or not, women should be included equally in employment policy considerations.

We also found that situations surrounding married women differ between them. To enlarge discussions on movement from social exclusion to inclusion; it is important to employ the capabilities approach in order to address the issues about social inclusion quality, including violence.

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