

Social Welfare Policy and Social Work in Responding to the Needs of an Aging Society with a Falling Birth Rate: A Message to the World from the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

1. About the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

The Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare (JSSSW) was founded in 1954 by 196 members. Now the JSSSW has become one of the largest organizations for academics, students and practitioners, as well as service users in social welfare studies in Japan, with over 5,000 members. The aim of this society is to promote the study of social welfare. The JSSSW continues to:

- hold academic conventions twice a year,
- provide forums for presenting research results and exchanging ideas,
- publish an academic journal, *the Japanese Journal of Social Welfare*, which it has done since 1960,
- send a newsletter (Gakkai News) to members.

The continuing crisis in state welfare and its impact on social services and social work reform during the last 15 years has stimulated members to create various research themes and to develop interdisciplinary approaches for further work. Recent autumn conventions over the last five years have proposed new subjects of research in light of social changes:

[2012] The restoration of Japanese society and the role of the study of social welfare: fields and boundaries of social welfare around the relations of people, communities, and institutions

[2011] Essence of social work: a fundamental question for practice

[2010] The prospects and issues for sustainable social welfare: from the viewpoint of the economy, ecology, and welfare

[2009] Questioning ‘the public’ in social welfare

[2008] Social exclusion and the study of social welfare

2. Studies of social welfare policy

1) Social welfare policy in Japan

The broader sense of the term “social welfare policy” in Japan is similar to that of “social policy” in the UK. This terminology has traditionally been used to describe personal social services in the Japanese context. This term can be classified into two domains: personal social services and social assistance run by the state. They have been the most important research areas for the study of social welfare policy.

2) Influence of British social policy studies

Japanese studies of social welfare policy have greatly benefited from British social policy studies since the 1970s. Many of the works of R. M. TITMUSS and T. H. MARSHALL, for example, have been translated into Japanese. For members of the JSSSW, Titmuss' ideas in social policy, including the concepts of social divisions of welfare, positive discrimination, universalism and selectivism, the social market against the economic market, and the gift relationship, have been regarded as analytical tools and/or normative principles of welfare. In the same way, Marshall's classical theory of the historical development of social citizenship has been read by generation after generation.

3) Marxist tradition

In contrast, Japanese social welfare policy studies have traditionally been dominated by a Marxist or materialist approach before accepting the theoretical ideas of the Fabian perspective in the 1970s described above. A famous Marxist thinker, KOUHASHI Shouichi, who was one of the founders of the JSSSW, strongly termed social welfare policy as the inevitable product of the economic and social relations of capitalism ever since the 1950s. His theory, however, gradually came to be criticized as a theory of economic determinism.

4) The social welfare management theory

The emergence of a pragmatic or managerial approach to the study of social welfare policy has increasingly become prominent in trying to overcome the Marxist deterministic or metaphysical perspective since the 1970s. This approach was termed "social welfare management theory" (Shakai Fukusi Keiei Ron) and it insisted that studying social welfare policy no longer needed structural explanation and radical change but expected gradual reform by effective and incremental social planning. A promoter of this theory, MIURA Fumio, who was one of the introducers of Titmussian inspiration, had successfully removed normative and ideological debates from the study of social welfare policy. His intention in this removal was to deliberately eschew the endless Byzantine debates on social welfare policy studies and rather provide practical theory that made it more fruitful and rationally accountable for policy makers and practitioners.

5) The Japanese model of the welfare society

In the 1980s the government of the Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyuu Minshu Tou) had tried to keep welfare schemes small, emphasizing and strongly recommending the meeting of needs by the family as part of the informal sector. This conservative policy agenda was called the Japanese model of the welfare society (Nihon Gata Fukushi Shakai Ron) but it eventually reached its limits and ended in failure, as traditional family values and norms of supporting or caring for its dependents had increasingly changed due to the considerable diversification of family forms. Some critics argued that the male bread-winner model of the family had lost its former position.

6) The structural welfare scheme reform

In the 1990s and after, demographic changes and the state's fiscal crisis gave rise to the growth of reformed personal social service policies with the introduction of user-oriented service provisions. The establishment of the Long-Term Care Insurance Law in 1997 was the most prominent example of this. This enabled users and their families to choose care services they needed or required through the care management system in exchange for contributions. Care management approaches have overwhelmingly spread throughout service provision in the fields of the elderly, the handicapped, and children. These policy modifications are entitled the structural welfare scheme reform (Shakai Fukushi Kiso Kouzou Kaikaku), and were attained through the efforts and commitment of many researchers.

7) Recent issues

Furthermore, social change over the past ten years in this country has seen the growth of new political issues as tasks of the study of social welfare policy: the growing wealth gap between the rich and the poor, inequality of income and health, and social exclusion. The most visible theme in the political area is the problem of social inclusion, by which it is necessary to bring the excluded into (just) the labor market. Many activation or workfare policies for the excluded (the unemployed, the working poor, and temporary workers) have been introduced since the Democratic Party (Minshu Tou) took power. There has been a great flowering of a new focus of social welfare policy in the past few years: how to introduce and deal with job support for able-bodied recipients of social assistance. Following this, some researchers have debated the possibility of introducing a Basic Income Scheme and a way to reconstruct the minimum income policy.

3. Studies of social work theory and practice

1) Early studies of social work theory

The study of social work in Japan historically has been influenced greatly by the western nations, especially the United States of America. Classical social work theories developed in the U.S. were introduced and applied to social work research and practice. In particular, at the developmental phase of social work in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s, notable casework books were translated intensively, including those of M. E. RICHMOND, G. HAMILTON, C. TORRE, and H. H. PERLMAN. While these early efforts guided Japanese social work studies and practice in a rational way, there existed a certain level of criticism by Marxists and other social scientists for a lack of consideration of the unique socio-economic and historical context of Japanese society.

2) Original theoretical developments

Meanwhile, significant theoretical developments were also made by Japanese scholars. OKAMURA Shigeo was a notable figure who developed an original social work theory, by specifying unique functions of social work within a broader social welfare framework. He insists

that social work is applied to solve difficulties in making use of social relations and institutions, and is characterized by 1) social, 2) universal, 3) self-directed, and 4) realistic principles. Later, he further developed a theory of community work that consists of 1) community care, 2) welfare community organization, 3) community development, and 4) preventive social work. NAKAMURA Yuichi, another pioneering social work scholar, proposed the importance of socially-oriented professional caseworkers by interlocking the social-relational perspective with that of social problems. In his book, *Casework in Public Assistance* published in 1956, the basic principle and method necessary for casework were clarified with the aim of attaining economic as well as human independence of the service recipient.

3) Modern social work theories and their application to fields of practice

The introduction of system theory and an ecological perspective into social work caused significant effects on social work in the West as well as Japan. These perspectives gave a broader understanding of social work within a global environmental context, and triggered the development of generalist social work which integrated practice methods including casework, group work, and community organization. More recently, empowerment and strengths perspectives brought forward in the 1990s as well as the post-modern paradigm have led to the flowering of user-centered approaches. KOMATSU Gensuke was one of those who vigorously reviewed and introduced modern social work theories. Many others also investigated theoretical and practical issues of these emerging perspectives when applying them to specific populations and fields of practice, such as the elderly, the mentally ill, children, and the handicapped in various settings of social work.

4) Expanding community care and community-based social work

Community care has been a major trend since the 1970s in many western nations, as in Japan. The aging population has been growing rapidly, and the need for community care has become an urgent national concern. In 1987, a law for certified social workers and care workers was enacted in order to respond to the growing needs of people in need of social care. Accordingly, case/care management gained popular interest among social workers as well as other health professionals. In 1997, case/care management was formally instituted in the public long-term care insurance act for the elderly. Currently, the certified care manager plays a crucial role in supporting the daily lives of the elderly in the community.

Population aging as well as other major social shifts such as urbanization, prolonged recession, and the weakening of family and local ties have caused tremendous changes in the Japanese family and society. Social isolation as well as family abuse and neglect have become visible phenomena, which require community-based social work with an emphasis on networking and advocacy. There is no doubt that not only social work professionals and institutions, but also related individuals and organizations, in both formal and informal sectors, should join and work collaboratively in each community. Currently, there exists a great demand for social work to further develop, coordinate, and lead such an inclusive community care system.

5) The accumulation of social work research and the need for evidence-based practice

Due to innovations in computer technology and the advancement of statistical measures, empirical social work studies have been increasingly piling up since the 1990s. Needs analysis of various populations, including the poor, the elderly, children and youth, the handicapped, caregivers, and those with special needs have been conducted both at the national and local levels. Social work skills are also investigated in various settings including residential and community facilities. Professional associations such as the Japanese Association of Certified Social Workers are eager to monitor and evaluate the practices of their members and develop life-long educational programs. Meanwhile, academic and professional efforts to establish quality social work have been noteworthy, and evidence-based practices should be promoted to secure people's quality of life and professional accountability.

4. Current issues of social welfare studies

Recently, the necessity of treating new issues of social welfare has been growing more urgent. Most of these issues tend to appear out of the existing institutional frameworks of social welfare services, or extend to several institutions. Therefore, the JSSSW is required to see them from a wide perspective and contribute to the development of flexible systems management or create new services and approaches. The examples given below are some of the typical issues.

1) Ill-treatment of children and the elderly

In order to protect children from ill-treatment, the Child Abuse Prevention Law was enacted in 2000. The number of victims dealt with by the Child Consultation Center has expanded four-fold in the last decade. The law defines the patterns of child abuse as: 1) physical abuse, 2) sexual abuse, 3) neglect, and 4) psychological abuse. Since the law was enacted, the cooperation of ordinary citizens in the early detection of ill-treatment has become mandatory, along with that of specialists close to the abused children such as doctors, teachers, and staff members in child welfare facilities.

The Elderly Abuse Prevention Law went into effect in 2006. This law also defines abuses of the elderly as: 1) physical abuse, 2) abandonment and neglect of nursing care and looking after elders, 3) psychological abuse, 4) sexual abuse, and 5) the expropriation of elders' estates. On a legal basis, social workers are requested to: 1) prevent the ill-treatment of elders and to support them continuously until their lives have been stabilized; 2) respect and pay serious attention to their will; 3) make approaches to society to keep ill-treatment from occurring; 4) detect and cope with ill-treatment swiftly; 5) support not only elders but their protectors; and 6) respond in an integrated manner in cooperation with other concerned institutions.

2) Domestic violence

In light of the increase in the number of domestic violence (DV) cases, the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims was entered into effect in 2001. In the law, Women's Consultation Offices (established in each prefecture) are stipulated as Spousal

Violence Counseling and Support Centers and are required to offer consultation, assistance, and provision of temporary care.

For the improvement of services for victims, those institutes provide: 1) consultations on holidays and at night; 2) the forging of networks with other concerned institutions; 3) training for the staff members; 4) the assignment of a staff member in charge of psychotherapy; 5) employing night guards; 6) taking victims into temporary protective custody at the Livelihood Support Facilities for Mothers and Children and the Private Shelters for Domestic Violence Victims; 7) placement of a childcare official for the accompanied children to temporary care centers; 8) legal advice and support by lawyers; and 9) furnishing personal references when the victims need to exchange written contracts for finding jobs or houses to rent.

3) Solitary death

Lack of mingling with neighbors is becoming more and more serious in Japan, and one typical consequence of this trend is the incidence of solitary deaths. The number of cases of people dying alone is increasing, especially in urban districts. This situation has prompted the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to implement government undertakings to promote solitary death prevention. Also, several local governments, such as prefectures and ordinance-designated cities, are working on activities to promote and raise awareness of these, model enterprises, and so forth.

4) New patterns of poverty emerging because of an unequal society

We have a definite worldwide tide of economic recession, which brought about serious stratification caused by the income gap. Even labor policies, which include the deregulation of employment, could widen the gap. While the rates of job availability have been slightly decreasing in the past few decades, the unemployment rates have been increasing.

As a result of this social stratification specific patterns of poverty, which could be characterized differently from conventional homeless or low-income earners, have appeared, such as N.E.E.T (people with no employment, education or training), young and middle-age people who live in internet cafes (can be used as one-night accommodations) called “net-cafe refugees,” permanent part-timers called “freeters,” and withdrawn young people. Because of their distinguishing features, they are also termed “impoverished in social relationships.” Now services and approaches from the broad perspectives of employment, residence, mental health, and building human relations are needed.

5) Members’ responses to the Great East Japan Earthquake

The Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 caused tremendous human and structural damage. According to the Headquarters for Emergency Disaster Control, as of May 29, 2012, the number of deaths was 15,859, and the number of those evacuated came to more than 340,000. In particular, people with special needs including the elderly, the disabled, children, and those in need of medical and social care, have faced great difficulties in obtaining information, evacuating, receiving necessary care, and rebuilding their daily lives at shelters and temporary housing. The

research shows that they are more likely to be injured by relocation or changes in their environment.

In order to respond to such needs, various social welfare organizations and institutions have played significant roles. For example, local social welfare councils, in collaboration with local governments, have played a crucial role in assessing the needs of local people and coordinating voluntary help offered by volunteers gathered from all over Japan and around the world. Furthermore, professional social work and social care organizations have sent rescue teams and developed various projects to assist with efforts in the devastated areas.

The JSSSW and other related academic organizations, which have formed the Japanese Association of Social Welfare Academic Societies, have created a joint committee in order to respond to this disaster. The committee collects and shares information and makes sure that members work in collaboration and support professional social work and research effectively and efficiently in the devastated areas. The committee has also continued to monitor supportive activities conducted by member organizations together with other social care professional organizations and universities. It also sponsors symposiums on a regular basis in order to discuss, share, and evaluate academic and professional needs and necessary actions to be taken at each stage of recovery from disasters.

Although many frontier developments have emerged in the field of social welfare and social work, there still remain unsolved issues and future tasks. The social welfare division of the Science Council of Japan discusses future tasks and periodically publishes its recommendation report. It is certain that a more effective social welfare system should be developed, which can respond to the diverse and changing needs of people at times of crisis. For instance, a Disaster Welfare Assistant Team (DWAT) should be founded and properly trained, and disaster management should be taught in the social work educational curriculum. Also, community social work, together with local participation, should effectively be practiced in order to rebuild communities. It should be noted that these efforts not only are required at the time of current crisis, but also are necessary to make our super-aged society functional and revitalized.

In order to sort out these issues, theoretical contributions are required of the JSSSW, which give practical suggestions to social welfare. We can see some trends of studies: firstly, studies on outcome evaluation and effectiveness analysis of practitioners, approached from clients' point of view; secondly, studies on social policy and its management, and service providing system or institutions; and thirdly, methodological studies about social work and its approaches.

These studies are still in progress, so now let us consider two significant practical possibilities of recent focus: 1) generalists' social work in various fields, which appears with new skills such as: social work in schools, rehabilitation and assistance for employment; 2) community care for elders who need nursing care, clients who are leaving hospitals or welfare institutions, disabled people who are involved in social reintegration.

5. Social welfare/work education

1) Origin and development

Formal social welfare/work education has been developed as a field of higher education since

the 1920s. The Japanese educational system was reformed after World War II, and a modern higher educational system was formed. The Japan Association of Schools of Social Work was founded as a voluntary organization in 1955 by 17 schools. In response to the aging society, the Laws for Social Workers and Care Workers went into effect in 1987, and the Association grew larger and larger. As of March 2010, it included 148 four-year universities, 13 two-year colleges, and 8 vocational schools. Another organization, the Japanese Association of Certified Social Workers, included 271 membership schools. As the outcome of all these educational courses, there were 134,000 certified social workers as of 2010.

2) Becoming a certified social worker

A certified social worker is a person who provides consultation, advice, guidance, and other forms of support for those who have difficulties in their daily lives due to any types of disability and environmental barriers. In order to be a certified social worker, applicants must study the subjects related to social welfare designated by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in colleges and other institutions. They also have to pass the National Examination for Certified Social Workers. The examination includes 19 subjects as follows:

- The structure and function of the human body and disease
- Psychological theory and psychological support
- Social systems and social theory
- Society and welfare
- Basics of social research
- Assistance and the professional foundations of consultations
- Theory and methods of counseling assistance
- Theory and methods of community welfare
- Plans for welfare, welfare administration, and finance
- Organization and management of welfare services
- Social security
- Systematic support and long-term care insurance for the elderly
- Systems and support for persons with disabilities and support for people with disabilities
- System and child welfare and family support for children and families
- System and welfare assistance for low-income earners
- Healthcare services
- Services employment support
- Adult guardianship and advocacy
- Offenders rehabilitation

The curriculum of social welfare/work education has been influenced by this national examination, and the subjects of the examination became standard subjects within the curriculum of those educational institutions. Applicants are also required to complete 24 days/180 hours of an internship in a designated social work field.

3) Continuing education

The Japanese Certification Board for Certified Social Workers (Nintei-Shakaifukushishi Ninsho Nintei Kikou) was formed in order to respond to the complex issues and needs of society and to establish a career path for social workers. The Board certifies both educational programs for continuing education for social workers and social workers who have completed this continuing education.

6. Conclusion

The aging of the population, widening income inequality, and weakening human ties in families and communities have caused tremendous social changes in Japanese society. In addition, the Great East Japan Earthquake has raised questions about how we should rebuild our social system and create helping relationships in the community to secure our lives in such an unstable and unpredictable future.

It is estimated that the population of elderly people will continue to grow, and natural disasters may happen more frequently than before due to world-wide climate change. In such an era of increasing risks, it is certain that social work needs will continue to grow and become more complex. Further collaboration is required between policy makers, researchers, service providers, professional organizations, and social workers with the participation of service users in order to rebuild our communities and nation.

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