

## The Japanese Welfare System: Problems of Today

### Introduction

For this cycle, I decided to research about the Welfare System in Japan. The reason why I chose this topic is that I watched some TV programs or read some newspaper columns that picked up this subject. I've got to know that there are latent contradictions in this welfare system, for example, in some cases this system prevents recipients from living their lives on their feet. The welfare system also has some problems. So I decided to research about these things. I will go on this report with showing my way of thinking: the review plan for this cycle, starting questions and two rounds of research which are about the outline of Japanese Welfare System and the problems around the recipients of welfare within the Japanese system.

### Review Plan from the Third Research Cycle

In the previous cycle, I could develop my abilities in reading, making notes and planning what to research for the next class. However, I think I used some difficult words and I felt a little difficulty when I explained my topic to other students in the class. So my goal for this cycle is developing my explaining ability in English in both speaking and writing. I also want to make the presentation of my research and my ideas in each class understandable for all other students.

### Starting Questions for the Forth Research Cycle

On researching about the Japanese Welfare System, I brought up several starting questions: How many and what kind of people get welfare in Japan? What are the contents of the welfare? In short, what is the welfare? Is the welfare system "fair" for "all" Japanese people? What are the problems of the welfare system? I went on researching with these questions.

### The Out Lines of the Japanese Welfare System

The Japanese Welfare System was established in 1946 and started to work from 1950. Its purposes are to secure for all people maintain standards of wholesome and cultured living (Article 25 Constitution) and to support a person who receives the welfare called ‘recipient’ to live by his/her own capacities. There are seven main types of welfare in this system: life allowance, medical, educational, housing, childbirth, finding job and formal occasions supports (Hyakkajiten My Pedia). Today, the number of the recipient population records the biggest number since this system began. In June 2011, there are over two million recipients, and 1.5 recipient households. After the March 11<sup>th</sup> disasters, a total of about 1,000 households have become new welfare recipients. It seems that one of the most important factors in this sudden increasing of the recipient population is the March 11<sup>th</sup> disasters. Roughly half of the recipient households are from Fukushima Prefecture. This is because they had to escape from their hometown and their own houses. In this case, we can see that the March 11<sup>th</sup> disasters caused serious financial damages to many people. The amount of money spent on the welfare also hit the top. Since the global financial crisis in 2008, it has increased rapidly, and today it marks 3.4 trillion yen. This number holds 10 percent of all Japan’s tax revenues (The Japan Times, 10<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2011).

### About Recipients: the Population and Their Lives

Next, I researched about matters related to recipients. As mentioned above, ‘a recipient’ is a person who is guaranteed the welfare service. There are over 2 million recipients in Japan. This is 1 percent of the population in Japan. About 33 percent of recipients are elderly people, 45 percent are households with sick or handicapped members, 14 percent are fatherless families and 8 percent are in other categories like people who were temporarily out of work (The Japan Times, 2011). Next, I researched about the tendency of today’s

additional recipients. The number of unemployed in Japan is just under the 5 million mark, and most of the new additions to the welfare role are men who were employed as 'haken'. A haken worker is somebody who is registered in a temporary personnel service agency. He/she is asked by the agency to work for other corporations or companies, and he/she works in that corporation. So haken worker's employment is unstable (Wikipedia). After the economic shock in 2008, the problems of dismissals of them became serious. A lot of 'haken' men were fired, so they lost their means to live and then, they applied to the acquirement the welfare. Through this social phenomenon, The Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare issued a directive to local governments to ease up on the requirements for receiving welfare (The Japan Times 2011). Then, the borderline of receiving social welfare service has gone down.

#### Problems around Recipients: the Isolation and Illegal Acts

Some men who are recipients lost their will to work. According to the Japan Times (Japan Times 2011), a man in his early 50s receives ¥126,700 a month and at the end of which, he has ¥40,000 left over. Though it's much less than what he received as salary when he was working, he says he is "comfortable". That is why he has no desire to work. Another man in his 20s doesn't go to employment office because he is afraid of being asked to move away from his family to work. As long as he can survive on welfare, he will stay with it (Japan Times 2011). In other cases in Osaka which has the largest number of the population of recipients, two 32-year-old and 36-year-old recipients go to karaoke together almost every day without going to the Hello-Work to find their job. Such as these "Lost the will to work" has led to self-isolation. These men prefer to be excluded from a society. Around these men, serious social problems also happen. An underground economy has built up. The Yakuza organize illegal gambling dens with free food and drink to attract welfare recipients. In these facilities, recipients spend all day long and use their money provided by the Japan government to play gamble games. Another problem is that since welfare recipients can

receive free medical care, they can get expensive or unnecessary drugs easily. So some of recipients get drugs and sell them on the black market, and then, they get money illegally. These cases may be just the tip of the iceberg.

### Conclusion

The Welfare System is one of the important and effective policies in Japan. However as I researched this topic, I've gradually got to know that there are some serious problems around the recipients and the system itself. The welfare system may be not fair for all Japanese people because in some cases, recipients spend better lives than a person who works hard to live. To solve these problems, the borderline of receiving this system should be lowered. We should also find some alternative system to be fair for all people. Through this fourth cycle, I could have researched the Japanese Welfare System itself and problems around the recipients mainly people in their prime. And I also started to want to know about other kinds of recipients, for example, elderly people, fatherless families and households from Fukushima Prefecture. To research this issue further, these are some important questions to consider:

- 1) How to reduce the Japan's financial burden with the welfare system?
- 2) Working poor people who don't receive the welfare money
- 3) The welfare systems in other countries.

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