

*KFAW Report*

## **Reports on KFAW Research Activities at the 21<sup>st</sup> Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women**

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) holds the Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women every fall. The 21st Conference was organized under the theme “Child Rearing Environments in the World : Children, Parents and Society” on November 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010. On the second day, KFAW researchers and KFAW visiting researchers reported on the results of their research and exchanged opinions with participants. The abstracts of the presentations are as follows.

### **1. Approaches to Women's Empowerment: Cases in South Asia by Masako Ota\***

The term, empowerment is, in general, interpreted as “being given power” or “increasing one's capacity.” In the fields of development and gender, it also encompasses the process in which individual persons increase their capacity to become able to make their own decisions, while simultaneously acquiring physical, psychological, social, economic and political power by transforming human/gender relationships in society. The empowerment of women is recognized as an important element in achieving gender equality. Towards this end, various projects have been conducted around the world since the middle of the 1990s.

The processes in which women are empowered vary from society to society and evaluating levels of empowerment is not easy. When comparing situations of women among countries, quantitative indicators, such as maternal mortality rates, life expectancy and literacy rates, are used. The United Nations has developed the Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM), which is a composite index of the proportion of women as legislators, senior officials and managers, and income gaps between women and men. However, it is difficult to measure qualitative changes, such as the level of awareness on gender and changes in gender relations.

Given these quantitative and qualitative indicators, this research report presents an empowerment framework which can assess the processes of women's empowerment on the basis of previous studies. Using the empowerment framework, it examines approaches to women's empowerment which have been adopted by projects conducted for women in South Asia.

The cases in this paper include the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, whose principle objective is

---

\* KFAW Senior Researcher

economic empowerment of women, and the Gram Nidhi project in India which combines environmental and economic activities. Furthermore, in order to analyze the role played by education in women's empowerment, two cases are presented: the State of Kerala as the one with high female literacy rate and Pakistan as the one with low female literacy rate.

This report places its main focus on a project in Mahila Samatha in India, which aims to empower women through education. This project does not have pre-determined components, such as micro-credit, income-generation and literacy education. It facilitates women to recognize their problems, find solutions, and take action by providing education and training. Since the project began in 1993, many women's groups have been formed in villages and have conducted activities to oppose child marriage and eliminate child labor. Some of these groups have established a federation of women's groups at the mandal level and they have continued their activities independently from the Mahila Samatha project.

Forming women's groups is a common strategy for all the projects mentioned, although the processes and outcomes of empowerment differ. By gaining economic power, women's positions in households and society may or may not improve, although women may be empowered socially through a recognition of their disadvantaged positions and demanding equality, even without a change in economic status.

It is inappropriate to present only one model for empowerment, since effective approaches to women's empowerment need to reflect the economic and socio-cultural environments of respective societies. It is, however, expected that extracting important factors for empowerment from successful cases will be useful in incorporating perspectives of empowerment and gender in future projects for women in developing countries, as well as for other projects.

## **2. Women's Employment Behavior and Social Networks in Kitakyushu and Fukuoka by Katsuhiko ISHIKAWA\***

In Japan, full time work for women during their childrearing period is still very difficult. In particular, the proportion of women in the workforce whose youngest children are 0 to 3 years old has leveled off, and there are many voices calling for the establishment of a social framework that allows women to work more easily. However, even in the current situation, approximately 40% of women with their youngest children being infants are working (White Paper on National Lifestyle, 2006). What factors enable these women to balance jobs and childrearing? In this research, we address this issue from the viewpoint of women's social networks.

---

\* KFAW Research Staff

In step with the image of community liberalization, which is other aspect of urbanization, a lot of attention has been given to support networks. Support networks here literally suggest an image of a mesh of human relationships. Vertically segmented social systems, such as families, workplaces and communities, are weakening, and support mobilization from networks beyond these groups has become even more important. The purpose of this research is to clarify the characteristics of networks comprising mainly mothers, and in what ways those networks support working mothers.

As our research method, we distributed questionnaires to 500 mothers with pre-school children who use daycare centers in Kitakyushu City, and 150 mothers with pre-school children in Fukuoka City who cooperate with researchers at Kyushu University regarding research on child psychology. An important point in conducting this survey was to weed out the effects of the mothers' personal attributes from the research, as characteristics of the networks may largely be influenced by the various attributes of the mothers. The main analytical goal of this research was to extract the influential network characteristics that remained even after the effects of these attributes were removed.

We asked the following questions in the survey.

Regarding the social networks involving the mothers

- (1) How many people are there to support you?
- (2) Who are they?
- (3) To what extent do supporters know each other?

Regarding the working style of the mothers, we asked:

- (1) What is your work history?
- (2) What kind of working style do you hope for in the near future?

The following are the major findings that we obtained from preliminary data analysis.

- When we retrieved the characteristics of networks involving mothers who have continued working without interruption until the present time, we found no significant factors inside the households, such as the influence of supportive relationships with husbands or household structures.
- Mothers who have continued working have less dense networks.
- For networks that might influence those who want to work full time, those women with fewer relatives showed a stronger desire to work full time in the near future.

The most characteristic point in this research suggests that full time work is not impossible even without support from within the household or from relatives, and that establishing extensive supportive relationships with people other than relatives fosters hope for working. We have obtained results suggesting that extending communication networks beyond the immediate household and relatives is one of the keys to balancing childrearing and a career.

### **3. Social Inclusion of Migrant Women and their Children from Thailand and the Philippines by Yuriko SAITO\* and Pataya RUENKAEW\*\***

#### 1. Background

The number of foreign nationals living in Japan (i.e. foreign national residents, hereinafter called immigrants) is increasing yearly. Although Japanese policies for the social integration and inclusion of immigrants from foreign countries or people who have their roots overseas are not proactive, the realization of multicultural coexistence is expected at the levels of local governments and communities.

Fukuoka Prefecture ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in the number of foreign nationals in Japan. Other prefectures with high numbers of immigrants, from the first-ranked Tokyo to the 11<sup>th</sup>-ranked Gifu, are located in the Pacific belt zone where industrial and commercial areas are concentrated from the Kanto to Kansai regions. Also, many local cities in these regions have communities of Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians. On the other hand, about half of foreign nationals living in Fukuoka Prefecture are so-called “old-comers,” which means Chinese people and South and North Koreans living in Japan. The number of “newcomers,” which means foreign nationals of Japanese descent who immigrated in the second half of the 1980s or later, is extremely small. Multicultural coexistence in Fukuoka Prefecture has different characteristics from other prefectures on the mainland of Japan. It is expected that the ordinance-designated cities of Kitakyushu and Fukuoka and other municipalities in Fukuoka Prefecture will create an original model of multicultural coexistence.

In addition, we will introduce a case study of a local government in Germany, since it represents the social integration and inclusion measures for the coexistence of foreign nationals in a city where heavy industry once flourished. This study will contribute to the social integration and inclusion policies of Fukuoka Prefecture, especially for Kitakyushu City.

Multicultural coexistence tends to be regarded as one idea inclusive of the residents of foreign nationals and people who have their roots overseas. The difference between “old-comers” and “newcomers,” gender gaps, the differences of original countries or regions, cultural or customs differences are easily underestimated. Also, the number of people crossing national boundaries began to increase in the late 1980s when the age of globalization advanced, and it is still increasing, the characteristics of which are called “the feminization of migration.” In this study, we interviewed women from Thailand and the Philippines living in Fukuoka Prefecture and having childrearing experience (the reproduction of a generation), since we position them as having the characteristics

---

\* KFAW Visiting Researcher (2010) /Associate Professor, Faculty of International Studies, Meiji Gakuin University

\*\* KFAW Co-researcher / Researcher

of “the feminization of migration.”

## 2. Purposes of the study

- (1) To understand the current status and needs of concerned individuals (women from the Philippines and Thailand, and their children) who live in Fukuoka Prefecture
- (2) To understand specific measures or projects conducted by the policies of local governments or other offices regarding foreign nationals (i.e. multicultural coexistence policy, policies related to international affairs, support projects for foreign residents by private organizations, etc.)
- (3) To collect good practices and to propose ideas in order to fill the gap between the aforementioned points (1) and (2)

## 3. Current status and issues of concerned individuals (mid-term results)

### (1) Childrearing

#### - Infants and pre-school children

Mothers having concerns about childcare and a sense of isolation

→ Providing childcare support and reinforcing the nursery school system

#### - School children (elementary school and junior high school)

Bullying, learning Japanese language, lack of learning materials (especially for children born overseas), newsletters or papers with language support for foreigners (mothers) and providing volunteer staff, learning disability, identity problems, entering high school (lack of academic skills while hoping to study)

#### - Adolescence

Sex (sexuality) education (shoplifting, pregnancy at a young age), children who cannot promote to higher education, employment

#### - Cooperation from supporters (husbands, friends, Japanese organizations)

### (2) Career development for mothers

#### - Income and employment (support for mothers' independent life)

#### - Health of mothers

#### - Learning Japanese language as a career development support (putting kana readings to school textbooks)

#### - Measures to improve nursery schools for supporting mothers' careers

#### - Utilization of career support (nursing care skill, kimono-wearing skill, nail art skill, massage skill, business management, etc.)

#### - Future plans including returning to one's home country (“Don't want to die alone in Japan.”)

### (3) Others

#### - Violence and prejudice against women (violence, neglect and prejudice by husband)

#### - Creation of groups of concerned individuals and Japanese supporters, support from

administrative offices such as help groups and supporters, and providing aid from municipal governments

4. Experience of multicultural coexistence in Germany

(1) Multicultural coexistence in the city of Essen

(2) Value of self-help group activities of Thais living in Germany

**4. Female Criminals and Suspects Portrayed by the Japanese Media by Yumi SHIKATA\***

This research examines how women have been described in recent crime reports in Japan, and raises questions from the perspective of attitudes towards gender.

In Japan, crime coverage of both female victims and suspects tends to emphasize information unrelated to the actual crimes, including appearance, sexuality and the sexual background of the victim/suspect. For example, it is common for victims to be asked if they may have been at some fault, and their appearance may be mentioned. Suspects may be questioned about motherhood and their sexual relationships. This indicates that crime news is colored by gender bias, in addition to the existing problems associated with crime reports, such as the violation of privacy and the resulting report damage.

The author has pointed out that there are many problems with how women are described even in the present day when the mass media tends to pay more attention to human rights. For instance, we often see cases of news reporting that make us wonder if the female victims might have been at fault, even if this is more suggested than actually stated. There is also the damage caused by the dissemination of information on the Internet by the mass media.

Against this background, this study selected crime reports involving women (female victims or suspects) mainly from newspaper coverage of the past five years. We analyzed the details of the coverage (1) to clarify the characteristics of reporting in recent years and (2) to examine the factors revealed. Furthermore, we examined how social trends such as the growing popularity of the Internet and the introduction of the lay judge system have affected this subject, and how they impact women's issues in crime coverage.

In the case of female victims, while we can say that reports on personal information have decreased compared to 20 years ago, as has the harm caused by privacy leakage, there are more than a few expressions suggesting that victims of sexual crimes may have been at fault, which means that gender bias still exists in the news reports. With

---

\* KFAW Visiting Researcher (2010) /Associate Professor, Miyazaki Municipal University

respect to female suspects, the situation has not changed at all when compared to that of 20 years ago. In other words personal information is more heavily reported with female suspects, and there are many negative references to gender norms, including matters unrelated to the crime. There are also more cases where the full background of the incidents are covered in depth.

On the other hand, crime reports in newspapers since the introduction of the lay judge system have included simplified explanations of the crime or extremely detailed information regarding only the main points of the trial. This is ostensibly done to make it easy for the public to understand. We examined the relationship between this point and gender bias.

In the modern era, the mass media forms an integral part of our perceived reality and our awareness of norms. Coverage colored by gender bias not only hurts those who are covered but also enforces gender norms among society as a whole. In this context, we believe that studying the current situation of how women are described in crime reports from the perspective of gender is useful for identifying the damage caused to the subjects of the reports, and for obtaining ideas for improvement. It is hoped that the results and the implications of the present study will lead to a clearer conception of how to report without gender bias.