

Abstract

Using comparative studies of Singapore and Japan, this study clarifies the support situation for mothers and children affected by domestic violence. It particularly focuses on support for children who have been positioned as incidental to mothers who have been affected by domestic violence and whose human rights have not been respected. Through examining the survey result, the study seeks suggestions for how to support Japanese domestic violence victims.

Singapore has the lowest ratio of domestic violence victims in Asia (as of 2009) and has adopted a framework for victim support based on the concept of family violence that began to attract attention in the 2000s. In 2018, Singapore entered the new stage of assisting abuse victims by enforcing the Vulnerable Adults Act to complement the already established care network to address overall abuse. The Women's Charter and the Vulnerable Adults Act are both wheels of the new protection policy, and the Women's Charter is positioned as a protection law against Family Violence.

In Japan, institutional and operational issues exist regarding support for mothers and children affected by domestic violence, despite the Domestic Violence Act (DV Act) having been revised three times. The first amendment of the DV Act in 2004 stipulates a “prohibition order for access to children” for children (but only those who are under age and living together) brought to the victim’s mother when they evacuate them from her abusive husband. In the same year, the Child Abuse Prevention Act was revised to prescribe child abuse that includes domestic violence conducted in front of children. According to a survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2018), cases where mothers and children who are domestic violence victims did not lead to temporary protection because they “cannot enter public temporary protection facilities with accompanying children.” Therefore, the separation of mother and child in temporary protection facilities is a barrier to temporary protection.

In the Tokyo survey, independence support that focuses on mental recovery needs to be provided over the medium to long term period, but there is no such viewpoint in the current DV Act. Also, although independence support is provided by the local government since the independence support system has not been established, it is confirmed that the target, period, and the number of times for independence support are limited and insufficient. Mothers and children who are affected by domestic violence receive support from the local government, though mainly for temporary protection, and the support of various NGOs complements this.

According to the Fukuoka and Kitakyushu survey, it was observed that related organization aggressively tackled with support of mothers and children including domestic violence. The survey also clarified that the treatment of children and family counselors at the child and family consultation section of the local government is

unstable. Additionally, they are working as a part-time and cannot make their opinion into the decision-making process that determines domestic violence measures, although they are important in supporting domestic violence victims. The issue is how to improve the structure where the know-how of and skills in assisting domestic violence victims is difficult to accumulate.

In Singapore, a revolutionary amendment to the Women's Charter was enforced in 1996 in line with today's family violence policy. This revision expanded the significance of family violence and clarified penalties for violations of protection orders. The definition of family members was expanded to include children, siblings, parents, parents-in-law, and other relatives.

The "order issued by the family court" in the Women's Charter stipulates four types of orders: the personal protection, expedited, domestic exclusion, and counseling orders. If a mother was affected by family violence, her child is also considered to be affected by family violence, and they are provided protection and support within the same framework. Additionally, the Singapore Police Department, the core agency of family violence, has been granted the authority to arrest without extensive arrest warrants. The above-mentioned legal system and the powerful authority of the police can be said to function effectively to protect family violence victims from the perpetrators and ensure safety.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the police have built a system that includes women's shelters to make support for family violence victims more effective. Moreover, they launched the Break the Silence campaign, which also characterizes Singapore's support.

Furthermore, the four major crisis shelters that are operated with the full backing of the Singapore government are indispensable for supporting family violence victims. Since there is no temporary public shelter in Singapore, MSF provides financial support to those crisis shelters to operate and ensure the safety of victims. The public sector (MSF) and the private sector (crisis shelters) are working on family violence so that they can make the best use of their respective positions and provide support, including self-support, that respects mothers and children among family violence victims.

The study showed that, under Singapore's family violence policy, children of domestic violence victims are not separated from their mothers and could receive support without falling into anxiety. It was observed that the concept of family violence contained many suggestions in support of Japanese mothers and children who are victims of domestic violence. Based on the results revealed by these surveys, it is necessary for the government to present standards of support that are unified to some extent, and to conduct analyses and surveys from the perspective of child abuse and family violence, including domestic violence. Moreover, cooperation between domestic violence and child abuse measures needs to be enhanced.