

# Despite Revival of Public Allowance, Single Mothers are in Poverty (2010)

## *Women's News from Japan*

### Despite Revival of Public Allowance, Single Mothers are in Poverty

On October 23rd 2009, the Hatoyama Administration decided to revive the additional childcare allowance for single-mother households on welfare. Previously, in March 2009, the Aso Government had abolished it.

The single-mother allowance, about 20,000 yen a month for the first child and several thousand yen for each additional child, is designed to add extra benefits to standard welfare for single-mother households with children aged 15 or younger.

In 2007, the previous Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry had reduced, in phases, this allowance, reasoning that the average annual income of single-mother families on welfare was higher than that of families not on welfare. The allowance was discontinued in March 2009, and an alternate method of assistance was introduced, whereby the Aso Government provided extra employment assistance for these mothers.

"Single Mothers Forum," a group of single mothers, criticized the ministry saying "It's like putting the cart before the horse. The core issue is that the average income of single mothers is far lower than single mothers on the welfare benefits." In Japan, eighty-five percent of single-mothers are employed.

In this statement, the Single Mothers Forum said they basically welcomed the Hatoyama Administration's decision to revive the single-mother allowance for mothers on welfare. However, they pointed out that the revival would not be a complete solution.

In aiming to increase the income of

single-mothers, they asked the new administration to rethink the "gradual reduction policy", a measure designed to reduce childcare allowance by half after a five-year period of benefits.

Because the average wage of single mothers is lower than the welfare benefits, they also requested efficient job assistance, residential security, a rise in the minimum wage, promotion of equal treatment and educational assistance.

In a survey released by the national government on October 20th, 2009, the nation's "relative poverty" rate in 2006 was 15.7 percent, and the children's poverty rate was 14.2 percent. This survey was released at Welfare Minister Nagatsuma's direction. It was calculated using OECD measurements for the first time. The relative poverty rate is defined as the percentage below the median national disposable income.

The median national disposable income in Japan in 2006 was 2.28 million yen and the poverty line was less than 1.14 million yen. Among the 30 OECD nations, Japan ranks forth worst in relative poverty, after Mexico, Turkey and the United States.

In a follow-up survey, it became clear that the relative poverty rate of single-parent households in 2006 was 54.3 percent. The figure shows the rate in 2006 is slightly better than that of 58.7 in 2003. However, the majority of single-parent families remain in poverty. And most of them are single-mother households.

A survey cited in the "Tokyo Shimbun" on December 12th 2009, noted that a large number of single-mother households receiving welfare benefits not only suffer effects of poverty but also emotional and physical health challenges.

According to a November 2009 survey conducted by the Welfare Ministry, 31 percent of single mothers on welfare

suffer from emotional disorders, such as depression, and 12 percent of their children under 17 struggle with similar challenges. These figures were calculated temporarily (through random selection), and 136 single-mother households out of 490 families on welfare were screened for these statistics.

This survey also revealed a clear contrast between single-mother households on welfare and those not on welfare. The former in this group were 8 times (8 percent) more likely to experience emotional challenges compared with those not receiving welfare benefits (1 percent). As for health, 65 percent of unemployed mothers on welfare answered that they are not confident of their health, compared to 37 percent of unemployed mothers not on welfare. In terms of employment, only 42 percent of single-mothers on welfare are employed, while 81 percent of ordinary single-mothers are employed.

In terms of average savings, ordinary single-mother households have 3.25 million yen, whereas single-mothers on welfare have only 27 thousand (0.027 million) yen. The results of this survey will be reflected in the new national minimum wage scheduled to be set this spring.

*Translated by Akemi MARUMO*

## Citizens Appeal to Publishers to Restore 'Comfort Women' Topic in School Textbooks

The Citizen's Liaison Committee for Restoration of 'Comfort Women' topic in Junior High School Textbooks, a Japanese citizen group is asking academic publishers to place 'Comfort Women' case descriptions into junior high school textbooks.

Current high school curricula offer world history as a compulsory subject and Japanese history as an optional subject. Therefore, children study Japanese history as a separate subject at the junior high school level.

When the Japanese government acknowledged 'Comfort Women' case in 1994, all junior high school textbook publishers incorporated 'Comfort Women' cases in their 1997 editions. However, more recently, the 'Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform' and the former government Liberal Democrat Party's for 'Outlook of Japan and History Education Association of Junior Lawmakers' started an offensive on textbooks discussing 'Comfort Women' topics. As a result, 4 out of 7 textbook publishers deleted 'Comfort Women' case descriptions from their 2002 edition, while in their 2006 editions all publications addressing 'Comfort Women' matters were deleted. Two publishers scantily noted this issue: one included related text in the publication's body and another company provided related text in an annotation. Supporting this back-story are political pressures on textbook publishers and harassments of authors. Additionally, the introduction of a broadband system for adopting textbooks bestowed upon local