

Submission on Japan to the CEDAW Committee by the Japan National Group of Mentally Disabled People (JNGMDP) and CPAO (Child Poverty Action Osaka)

Pre-sessional working group of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Pre-Sessional Working Group – List of Issues), July 2015

1. Background

The Japan National Group of Mentally Disabled People (JNGMDP) is the nationwide network of individual mentally disabled people and groups of them, established in 1974. Our membership is composed of only persons with psychosocial disabilities and our mission is to advocate for our own human rights by our own voices. We also are a member organization of the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUSP). At the national level, we are a member of the cross disability organization Japan Disability Forum (JDF).

Child Poverty Action Osaka (CPAO) established in 2013, is a group to support children in poverty and difficulty with their family. Currently, CPAO focuses on single-female-parent households where the situations are especially serious.

This submission is intended to explain the current status and the need for research of single-mothers, because they face complex problems consisting of mental health problems, challenges about being a single-mothers, and discrimination against women.

2. The Current Status and the Issues

2-1. The economic situation of women with mental health problems is particularly severe, though there is no concrete data about about psychological and mental health of women in Japan. As Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA) mentioned, the current situation, analysis of causes and determination factors are not clarified by the Japanese government. For these women, poverty in women and poverty in people with disability may effect in multiple ways. These situations violate Part 1 and Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

2-2. Many single mothers have to be responsible for their family finances and child-caring under low family income. The most important problems are low-paying job, environments which do not facilitate nor support working parents and inadequacy of

grant-type aids like the Child Rearing Allowance. On pregnancy and divorce, there are many problems which have been pointed out by the JFBA and Allies Law Office / Space Allies. These situations violate Part 1 and Article 13 of CEDAW.

2-3. Mental health problems have been documented to cause poverty, and poverty also can be a cause of mental health problems. A study by CPAO revealed psychosocial and developmental problems among women in poverty at a high rate. These women experienced child abuse in their original family, bullying in schools, power and sexual harassment at work and domestic violence problems within their marriage. Their opportunities for empowerment and self assurance have therefore been greatly compromised.. The difficulty and poverty become more serious year by year. These situations violate Part 1 and Part 4 of CEDAW.

2-4. The reduction of poverty is an important key to solution, though it is not able to solve everything. In Japan, the Public Assistance and the Child Rearing Allowance may be an effective measure, but these financial aids are under-budgeted and the rights to access these aids are often violated. The financial conditions for them will get worse, especially in single-mother households, because the reduction is planned on 1 July 2015 for housing assistance and in addition in winter to livelihood assistance in the Public Assistance. Women's low income in Japan is not addressed specifically especially as part of the low-income group. This is the reason why the Public Assistance for an adequate standard of living is still required by the women, especially women with disabilities, as they face additional challenges related to being single-parents and/or lack of access to employment or flexible employment as well as other barriers that make their fulfillment of an adequate standard of living difficult. Despite the insufficiency of current standard on the Public Assistance, the reduction will come into force. These situations violate Article 11 and Article 14. From the perspective of children's rights, they also violate Article 5 and Article 16 of CEDAW.

2-5. The limited economic and social resources of women in poverty bring the limited choice of medical care. It predisposes these women to select inappropriate medications if they hoped to exercise their right to take mental health treatment. The inappropriate selection promotes more severe symptom. If these women are committed to forced hospitalization in psychiatric hospitals after the course of events, they may be suffering from patient abuse. As JNGMDP already reported to the Human Rights Committee 111th session in 2014, Japan has no effective public monitoring agency of the closed wards in psychiatric hospitals. Many female patients in psychiatric hospitals have talked about gender discrimination in psychiatric treatment institution during their stay. In

the report on 2014, JNGMDP reported about 6 instances of sexual abuse of women in 1968-2005 in wards of psychiatric hospitals although these reported cases are only the tip of the iceberg. In the report, a personal note about sexual abuse under involuntary hospitalization on 2007 by Yoko Hashimoto is also included. The situations violate Article 12 of CEDAW. In another way, it may be described as a violation of Article 14 in the urban area.

3. Proposed questions for the list of issues

JNDMDP and CPAO kindly request the Committee to take into account this information in drafting its list of issues on Japan and to consider these specific questions:

- What steps has the government taken to assess the impact of the reduction of housing assistance and livelihood assistance in Public Assistance planned for 1 July 2015, and in particular the harm and damage that will cause to the most vulnerable groups including single mothers with disabilities? What steps have been taken to consult with those groups which will be most affected?
- What steps is the government taking to ensure adequate allowances and benefits to support single- mothers in raising their children, in particular by allocating sufficient budget for the sustainability and effectiveness of benefits- in particular the Child Rearing Allowance?
- Please provide information on the number of persons and families living below the poverty line in Japan, including disaggregated by gender, age, marital and family status (single-mothers), disability, geographical location, etc
- What measures exist such as provision of support services, including psychosocial support services, to assist families, in particular single mothers with disabilities, and mothers or women in the family who are the lead caregivers in their care for children with disabilities? In particular, what measures are taken to ensure that services and assistance are rendered to permit single mothers to continue their careers with an appropriate work/life balance?
- What kind of community based services exist to support single mothers, including women with mental health conditions and other kinds of disabilities, to raise their children?

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Japan National Group of Mentally Disabled People (JNGMDP) about this report

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