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Academic experience
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Research interests
- Housing Policy for one-parent family and DV survivors
- Studies of relationship between change of family form and housing needs
gender and housing issues in Japan

Major articles and papers
- Housing situation of Single mother households in Japan –Periodical change of tenure of single mother households and
  the difference of housing situation between single mother households who is left as a widow and who is divorced-
Proceedings of the 1st APHR Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 1st ASIA-PACIFIC
HOUSING RESEARCH CONFERENCE in KUALALUMPUR, pp.135–pp.146, 2003
Summary

Since the 1970s, the number of divorced women with children has risen sharply, comprising 1,517,000 households in 2006. The main problem created by the increase in these households is their low economic status. Single mother households in particular are among the poorest of all households, with an average income one-third that of general households. Under the profit-oriented housing provision system, it is difficult for such low-income households to secure affordable housing.

The owner occupation rate of single mothers (20.6%) in 2003 was about one-third that of the overall rate. Compared to general households, the rate of single mother households living above the minimum housing standard is lower, and their housing expense is much higher. In particular, the quality of their private rental housing is the lowest of all households. The main factor is the tendency of divorced women, particularly those with children, to move out of their marital homes immediately before or after divorce. Single mothers also tend to fall into poverty and subsequently face unstable housing situations. Currently, there are three types of housing assistance for single mother households: farther less family daily living support facilities, the loan system (housing fund, moving fund), and public housing. However, for serious housing conditions, these types of housing assistance are insufficient. Thus, improvements in housing situations and modification of current housing policy are urgently required. To clarify possible solutions, this paper examines both quantitative and qualitative aspects of single mothers’ housing needs and identifies aspects of housing assistance that are inadequate for single mothers’ process of securing housing.

Introduction

Ohayou Gozaimasu. Good morning, everyone. My name is Liza Kuzunishi and I am a GCOE Research Fellow at Osaka City University’s Urban Research Plaza.

Today I would like to talk about the problem of mismatch between the process of securing permanent housing and housing policy for single mother households in Japan. Japanese family form has been changing over the last 30 years. Before the typical family was made up of a mother, father and 2 kids, but these standard nuclear families have been broken up, increasing the divorce rate, and the increasing number of single mother households is related to this situation. Although the typical family composition has changed, urban planning and housing policy still focuses on the standard nuclear family. We need to think about what living environment matches the new types of households.

Single mother households in Japan

First, let me explain some basic information related to single mother households in Japan. According to the latest data, the number of single mothers is 1,517,000. In the past 35 years, the number of single mothers has more than doubled. You can see that the proportion of divorced households has risen sharply. This is the divorce rate and this is widow rate (Table 1). The causes
of this increase are changes in lifestyle and the social awareness of women. The main problem resulting from this increase of divorced women with children is economic.

Single mother households belong to the poorest group of all households. Over 50% of single mother households live at or below the poverty line. This figure shows the average income of single mother households and of general households. You can see the single mother households’ average income is about one third of the average rate of general households.

In 2006 the average earned income was 1,620,000 yen. Although over 84.5% of single mothers have a job, half of them are part-time workers. You can see that part-time workers’ earned incomes are lower than those of full-time workers. You can see that single mothers’ earned incomes are half of full-time workers’ incomes.

Many women in Japan tend to stop working because of marriage and child care. Single mothers also did not have work or part-time work at time they were married. It’s hard for those women to find a full-time job after the divorce. Moreover the balance of work with child care is hard for single mothers because the Japanese child care system is not flexible. For these reasons single mothers are more likely to work at part-time jobs.

**Vulnerability of single mother’s housing**

Single mothers’ low income status relegates them to lower quality housing.

In Japan the owner occupation rate of general households is over 60%. On the other hand, in 2003, single mothers’ owner occupation rate was 20%, so the rate is one third of the general rate. Instead, single mother households tend to live in rental housing or with relatives. Of course housing tenure is not by itself an important issue. But in fact compared to general households, their housing quality is very low. And the housing expense to income ratio is much higher.

Moreover, single mothers tend to face more serious housing problems immediately before and after divorce, when about 70% moved out of their marital homes. Although housing assistance is insufficient at the time, women who move into private rental housing or relatives’ houses move several times during a short time period until their housing condition becomes stable.

So, improving their housing condition is an urgent matter. Regarding this situation, previous studies have indicated that timing is an essential factor for assisting in the securing of stable housing, and assistance should be divided into several stages to adapt to their process of gaining independence. However, it can be considered that the mismatch of single mothers’ housing needs and housing assistance is not only an issue of timing, but is also related to location and living environment.

To improve their housing conditions, the government must not only provide affordable housing but also holistically consider the needs of single mothers’ livelihoods.

**Aims and methodology**

This study aims to clarify the relationship between single mothers’ choice of new residential area and their neighborhood before the divorce, and the connection between childcare, work place, and residential area. The mismatch problem between securing permanent housing and housing policy from the aspect of their geographical needs has not yet been studied and there are no statistical data.
on it. So I would like to report about it using my own survey. Let me explain research methodology: This study is a case study of Osaka City in Japan. 400 questionnaires were distributed among 2000 members of an organization in Osaka City for mothers and children from June to July, 2005. The response rate was 71.0%.

Public housing assistance for single mother households

Next I would like to explain about housing policy for single mothers and their needs: We have three kinds of governmental housing assistance for single mother households who struggle with inadequate housing conditions. The first are facilities for fatherless families intended for emergency, transitional or temporary housing. Any single mother household that is in poverty can use these facilities but you can see that single mothers’ need for these facilities is very low. Most facilities are old and small, and there is social discrimination towards facility residents. Due to these problems, single mothers tend to avoid using this type of housing assistance.

I will show you some pictures of facilities for single mother households. There are 280 facilities in Japan. And the private space of 50% of these is less than 30 square meters. So, they are very small and very old and dark. This is a typical facility for single mother households.

On the other hand, new facilities have recently been constructed or renovated. This facility was in Miyagi Prefecture in 2009. In front of the entrance, the common space, a pre-school, and a gym. This is a private living space.

And high quality facilities like these are unusual, many single mothers try at present to use this kind of household. And the next one is the loan system. This loan is available for purchasing and renovating housing, and to prepare for moving. But the need for this loan is very low. You can see that over 40% of the respondents were unaware of it. This one focuses on single mothers who own or who intend to purchase housing, but the single mother home ownership rate is very low. So the targets of this are restricted. And it is difficult for single mothers to get this loan because of strict criteria. To gain access to this loan a guarantor is required and the applicant must have an income above a given level. And also single mother households avoid applying for this loan because they are unable to repay it.

The last one is public housing. Compared to facilities and loan systems, single mothers’ need for public housing is very high. However public housing doesn’t meet their needs for three reasons: First, the supply is inadequate. Next, there are many vacancies in inconvenient locations but few in convenient locations, even though single mothers have specific needs in their neighborhoods, and there is little public housing meeting this limiting requirement. This point will be discussed in more details in the following section. And last, the public housing can’t address immediate or sudden housing needs. As a previous study indicated, most single mother households need to secure stable housing before or right after divorce. However public housing requires time between the application and entrance, at least five months or more. For these reasons single mother households tend to live in lower quality private rental housing or with relatives.
Single mother’s specific geographical needs

Next I would like to go on the main subject. In the survey, almost 80% of respondents moved out of their marital homes. Some previous studies hypothesize that single mothers move into metropolitan areas to seek job opportunity and affordable housing. But this is not the case. This figure shows the relationship between their moving situation and former residential areas. 23.4% stayed in their marital homes, and 45.1% moved within Osaka City. In fact, almost 70% of single mothers have remained in the metropolitan area. What factors do affect single mothers’ choice of residential area?

As shown in this table, while most respondents who remained in the same housing did not give a reason for staying, about 40% cited their children’s school or childcare. Regarding the subjects who moved within Osaka City, half of the subjects cited “because of children’s school or childcare,” and 36.6% of the respondents remained in the same city because of relatives. For respondents who moved to Osaka City, about 80% moved to seek relatives’ support.

In contrast, few single mothers moved into Osaka City to search for job opportunities and affordable rental housing. These results indicate that single mothers’ preferences for neighborhoods are divided into 2 types:

The first group remained or moved within the same city because of their children’s school district or childcare. Single mothers tend to avoid making their children transfer to another school due to concern over whether their children can adapt to new surroundings. Moreover, because the number of preschools is chronically insufficient, it is difficult to find new preschools for them. Therefore, single mothers try to minimize the distance between their former and new residential areas.

The second group moved from another city or prefecture to seek relatives’ support.

It is thought that the reason why single mother households rely on relatives is the need for childcare support and housekeeping. Single mothers have to manage jobs, childcare, and housekeeping on their own. Generally, preschools in Japan do not accept children who have a fever or are injured. In these unforeseen situations, single mothers must take a leave of absence from work if they do not have private support. In many cases, these situations cause them to lose their jobs. Informal support is an essential factor for single mother households who have young children.

On the other hand, regarding the reason for choosing a new residential area, only 12.5% answered “because there was available public housing” (Table 2). Single mother households faced serious housing problems due to barriers, such as economic issues, childcare problems, and lack of access to real estate agents. Therefore, it is thought that there is usually a lack of affordable housing in the desired areas. As mentioned previously, public housing is often unable to meet single mothers’ specific geographical needs, and thus many single mothers often move into rental housing which is of low quality and too expensive.

Table 2: Former residential area and reason for choosing present residential area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former residential area</th>
<th>Reason for choosing present residential area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not moved</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osaka City</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osaka Pref.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Pref.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Problem of Mismatch between the Process of Securing Permanent Housing and Housing Policy for Single Mother Households in Japan
Workplace, residential area and childcare

I will go on to the last subject, which is the relationship between residential area and workplace. The responsibility for childcare is one of the barriers to stable job status for single mothers, particularly those with younger children. As shown in this figure, the unemployment rate of single mother households with children from 0 to 3 years old is the highest. Additionally, this table shows that the rate of full-time employment of single mother households gradually increases as the age of the children increases. These are fulltime workers. The number is increasing.

This figure shows the childcare problems of single mothers who have children under 6 years of age. As previously mentioned, regarding absence from work or leaving the office early to manage an unpredictable situation, about 80% responded that they have problems “when children are sick or injured.” Preschools usually open at 7:00 am and close at 6:00 pm, so single mothers have to match their work time to childcare time; in the present study, 60% complained that they were unable to work overtime. These requirements restrict single mothers’ choice of workplace.

This figure shows commuting times and youngest child’s age. Commuting times within 15 minutes are highest in every age category. Single mothers tend to find workplaces near their homes regardless of their children's age.

This table shows commuting means and the youngest child’s age. Over half of the respondents commute by bicycle. The rate of bicycle commuting for single mothers whose children’s age is under 3 years is the highest, but the rate of commuting by train is the highest for mothers whose children are over 16 years old. Single mother households who have older children do not need to manage childcare. Additionally, part-time workers do not generally receive commuting expenses; thus, these workers try to find a workplace near their home. The consequence is that single mothers are more likely to minimize the distance between the workplace and home in order to manage an emergency situation, to match their work times to school times, and to save on commuting costs.

Conclusion

Mothers who prioritize preserving their children’s environment and obtaining available preschools tend to not move, or try to minimize the distance between the former and the new residential area, while mothers who seek relatives’ support for daily life tend to move to a new residential area. The Japanese childcare system does not adequately support single mothers who work and care for their children on their own. So, these factors are essential in allowing single mother households’ livelihoods to become independent. Government assistance should thus be more flexible in providing support to single mothers regarding the location and also the timing that they have chosen for creating a stable and independent life. One possible way to offer this kind of support would be to make housing subsidies available for private rental housing. And collective housing is one option to balance work and childcare for one-parent families.

Thank you very much. Thank you for your kind attention.
Session 5

Problem of Mismatch between the Process of Securing Permanent Housing and Housing Policy for Single Mother Households in Japan