Social Work Services for Transnational Families in Japan: Transnational Social Work in the Multicultural and Integrated Community

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Abstract
This paper examines social work services' needs for transnational families within their local areas, based on the results of a research conducted on communities with connections to Afghanistan and Sri Lankan who live in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. The research focused on speakers of three languages which are not covered by the multilingual services of the local governments despite their presence. The impact on their economic situations and daily lives due to Covid-19 arose from constraints and barriers in their surrounding environments from five primary factors, and the complex intertwining thereof: language, daily life customs/norms, residency status, employment, housing environment and community; and separation from family/relatives. We conclude that it is crucial to post transnational families within community social work along with to develop multicultural and integrated communities in order to provide transnational social work services across borders in the future.

Keywords: Transnational families, Transnational Social Work, Multicultural and integrated community development

Introduction: Background and Research Objectives

Chiba is a neighboring prefecture of Tokyo consisting of highly industrialized urban areas and agricultural/coastal areas with population of 6.2 million. Chiba Prefecture has the sixth-largest number of foreign residents in the country, following Tokyo, Aichi, Osaka, Kanagawa and Saitama, with 167,000 persons in 2020 (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Over the past 20 years, foreign residents in Chiba Prefecture have more than doubled—presently accounting for 2.66% of the prefecture's total population, which surpasses the percentage of foreigners in Japan overall (2.29% total) (Chiba Prefecture, 2021).

Chiba's uniqueness lies in its large number of yards for dismantling second-hand cars and trading those car parts (80% of which are operated by foreigners), which the prefecture attracts due to its low land prices, and the convenience of an international airport and seaport (Fukuda, 2020, 194).

Among the operators of these yards, the largest two nationalities are Afghan (20%), followed by Sri Lanka (12%). Chiba Prefecture is home to 43% of all Afghans and 18% of all Sri Lankans nationwide—the highest figure in the country for both nationalities (Fukuda, 2020, 194). The last decade in particular has seen increases of around 3.7-fold for Afghans, and 3.8-fold for Sri Lankans (see Figure 1).
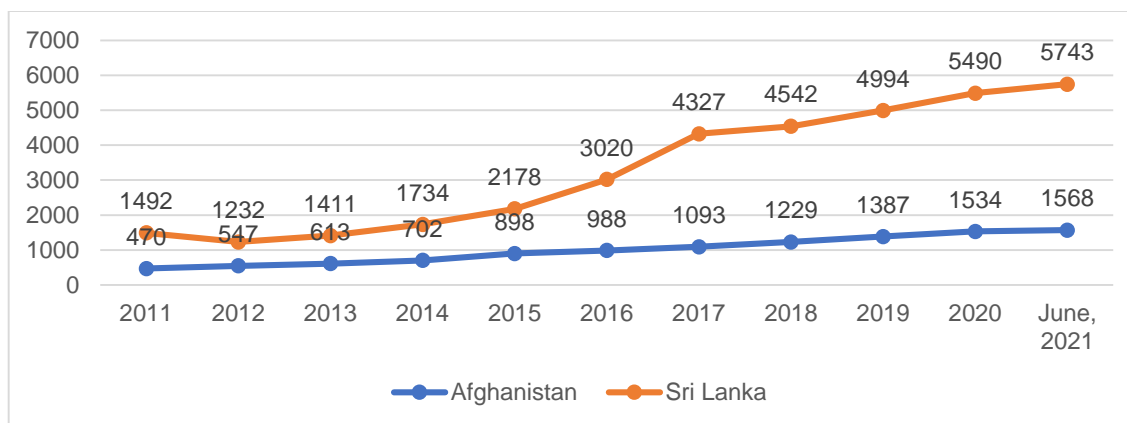
Figure 1: Afghans and Sri Lankans in Chiba Prefecture
Source: Compiled by Hanako Okawara based on 2021 Ministry of Justice figures.

In the Afghan and Sri Lankan communities, individuals (often men) with the residence status of Business Manager or Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services, tend to bring over family members to Japan once they had settled down. However, many people work within their communities, and therefore rarely have a chance to interact with Japanese people.

Language assistance in Chiba Prefecture is provided in 13 languages, including Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Nepalese. The languages spoken in Afghanistan (Dari) and Sri Lanka (Sinhala and Tamil), however, are not included. Our research aimed to understand the lives and existing challenges to the well-being of Afghans and Sri Lankans without linguistic support from local governments, and they could not access Japanese language courses or religious facilities, which were closed due to Covid-19. We aim to connect them with support from local governments and non-profit/non-governmental organizations, and with social resources as well as informal networks within their communities in order to create inclusive societies within the post Covid-19 era. This paper will assess social work services' needs of transnational families with connections to Afghanistan and Sri Lanka based on the results of our research, and propose future challenges in providing transnational social work services with development of multicultural and integrated community.

Methodology

Our research comprised a joint collaboration between the NPO Multicultural Free School Chiba and study project of the Chiba Studies on Migration and Refugees, and was carried out with cooperation between a research team and fieldworkers via the method of outreach research. The fieldworkers also received assistance from municipal office employees, volunteers, Japanese language instructors, company owners, and the head of an international exchange organization. The research team set up a Research Ethics Review Committee, and held training sessions for the fieldworkers with a guidebook on ethics-related standards such as protecting private information, while monitoring the progress of the study. Fieldworkers familiarized themselves with issues facing these communities by learning from community leaders and Japanese supporters, and asked individuals trusted by these communities to distribute and collect the questionnaires. They then provided the research team with information regarding the communities.

We decided on this methodology since these communities are not accustomed to questionnaires, and are resistant to divulge personal information due to a low level of trust toward governments following experiences including persecution in their home countries. Some people said they would only fill out such questionnaires "at courts or police offices," and since they felt extreme caution toward releasing personal details, we opted to have the questionnaires distributed by fieldworkers who are trusted by the communities.

The questionnaires were translated into Dari, Sinhala and Tamil, and then back-translated and distributed to Afghan and Sri Lankan households with children living in Chiba Prefecture. In addition to fieldworkers, the questionnaires were also distributed with cooperation from members of local education boards within the prefecture, NPO Multicultural Free School Chiba students, and research members.

In-depth interviews were also conducted between June 2021 and March 2022, and the issues and needs that were brought to light were addressed by the research team in collaboration with local governments and non-profit/non-governmental organizations. By the end of March 2022, 116

questionnaires were collected and targeted for analysis after the data was translated and assured anonymization.

Review of the literature
1. Social Work in Japan

As described above, our research is being carried out primarily by researchers and supporters with a background in various academic disciplines, including sociology, migration studies, Japanese language education and social work, cooperating with field workers who had already built trusted relationships with these communities. Until now, social work in Japan, both as a discipline and as a practice, has not paid sufficient attention to issues such as migrant communities in Japan or support for refugees. Instead, the research, support and human rights activism in this regard have largely taken place in the fields of international sociology, migration studies, and Japanese language education.

This is rooted in the fact that the framework of social work in Japan have developed in conjunction with a concept of the nation-state wherein people, nationality, and state were all considered to be united as one singular unit—thereby resulting in insufficient attention toward the transnational movements of people. On the other hand, questions such as "What is social work?" and "Who are social workers?" have already been discussed considerably: for example, numerous debates exist around questions such as whether social work is a specialist career; how to think about the definitions of global and local; and whether social workers are those with national certification as social or mental health welfare professionals, but not with certification such as social welfare officers or child welfare specialists (e.g., Tsuru, 2019). The fact that issues affecting foreigners have not been actively engaged within social work in Japan may be attributed to discrepancies between Japanese terminology of *shakai fukushi* and social work, which is based on western-rooted professional social work theories and practices (eg. Gohori, 2017; Matsuo, 2020, Sasaki, 2010).

A Japanese social welfare educational textbook titled "Social Work Theory and Practice I" (Kuga et. al, 2022) defines social work based on the theory of Okamura Shigeo, who built the foundations for social work in Japan: "Understanding the client's relationships with respect to various social policies, and conducting assessments regarding the relationship between people and their environment from the client's perspective" (p.6); and as the unfolding of the process from the stage of formulating a plan through the problem's resolution, and "working with various targets such as individuals, groups, organizations, communities, etc., while targeting change in those relationships" (p.14).

On the other hand, discrepancies arise in the core concepts of social work between the 2014 revision of the Global Definition of Social Work Profession, and the Certified Social Workers as defined by Japan's domestic Certified Social Worker and Certified Care Worker Act; while the global definition appears to prioritize the principle of professional values, Japanese domestic law focuses on the stipulation of work duties. Consequently, social work "is trivialized or restricted in terms of scope due to the policies and domestic laws denoted by the government, which results in social workers themselves incorrectly interpreting these trivialized and restricted practices as comprising social work" (Tsuru, 2019, 30).

Efforts to re-examine this domestic approach toward social work, and proposals to improve social welfare education, have been proliferating based on these varying definitions of social work (Matsuo, 2020; Tsuru, 2019). There is a limited scope in terms of who qualifies for national certification as social workers; and the academic discipline of social welfare studies, where social work is positioned, is likewise often categorized and fixed by specific targets (i.e., elderly/disabled/child welfare, etc.).

Regardless of whether or not one has national certification, the places where people known as social workers—or, as they are generally called, "social welfare providers"—actually do this work are subject to different jurisdictions and budgets, depending on the specific category of each target population. Therefore, it becomes easy to prioritize the assessment of a client in terms of whether or not they are a member of the population targeted for assistance, or are part of a different jurisdiction, based on existing legal policies and the standards for specific discipline-based categorizations. Banks (2012; 2016, 200) describes the model wherein social workers are deemed to be those who carry out a predefined type of work under an organization whose role they are required to fulfill as a "technical/ bureaucratic model." It has long been preferred within the social welfare field in Japan.

2.The category of "foreigner" and the international movement of people

According to the increase of foreign population in Japan, some social workers have tried to respond toward their needs, and these efforts have recently been named as multicultural social work or intercultural social work (eg. Ishikawa, 2012) within the large frame of international social welfare/social

work. Also, it sometimes equates social work for "foreigners" or residents with foreign nationality in Japan, where they would be seen as a collective target for support (Ishikawa, 2012; Minamino, 2020).

The fact alone that discussion regarding "foreigners" have recently attracted attention represents extremely significant progress, since this population has not been proactively mentioned within social welfare studies in Japan. On the other hand, due to the use of the "technical/ bureaucratic model" described above, it is quite possible that if a support model is newly considered for the collective target of "foreigners," they would remain separate from the category of "Japanese people," and the discussion would stop at the question of how to use existing social resources in Japan for the purpose of providing support for "foreigners" (Tanaka, 2020).

It is also plausible that intersectionality with other disciplines could become difficult, and that the perspective of empowerment would be lost as a social relationships become solidified wherein Japanese people are the providers—and foreigners the recipients—of assistance. And clearly, "foreigners" are not homogeneous group that encompass the elderly and children; disabled persons and single-parent families. They also come from various places and live in various communities with different levels of integration and social participation. It is not hard to imagine how the "foreigner" who was born in Japan is in a completely different position from the one who arrived last week; just as the "foreigner" who came from a war zone is different from the one who came to Japan by choice as an exchange student. By referring to "foreigners" exclusively in terms of a fixed collective group on the receiving end of assistance, therefore, it is possible that the agency, strength and diversity of these people as individuals will become overlooked.

In addition, those whose nationality is Japanese but who were born and raised out of Japan will not be legally regarded as foreigners, and therefore could be ineligible for assistance. According to the Ministry of Justice (no date), around 8,000 people naturalize yearly, and while 1,000 people acquire Japanese nationality annually in accordance with Articles 3 and 17 of the Nationality Act, this does not mean that all problems resolved.

Kondo (2020), based on her own experience as a social worker, points out that persons with overseas connections who are categorized as "foreigners" have been continually excluded from social welfare in Japan, despite facing the same problems as "Japanese" people with respect to day-to-day life within their communities. In other words, prior to considering the matter of assistance, a closer look must first be taken toward the specific issues being faced by those being grouped together within the category of "foreigner"; as well as how this categorization has created a structure of barriers and exclusions within Japanese society.

On the other hand, there are people who try to build their lives in countries across the globe, including Japan, who were born and raised elsewhere, or have different nationalities. This gives rise to a shared set of problems, regarding immigration control-related laws, for example, and other issues related to differences in language and norms. Therefore, it is necessary for social workers to understand how the legal systems regarding residency status and social positioning impact communities and assistance-related service provisions, in working with "immigrants" or "refugees" (or "foreigners") in addition to age, gender, (dis)ability status, employment status, income, and family situation.

The National Association for Social Work (NASW) in the United States has pointed out that immigration control laws prevent family visits and re-integration, while the possession of differing immigration statuses and citizenships among family members can result in deportations—rather than safety, security and justice—when help is sought for domestic violence, abuse, employer exploitation, etc. (NASW, 2015). Such issues are also starting to be discussed within Japan's community social work disciplines (Hashimoto et. al, 2021), and also to emerge within our research results.

Results and Discussions
1. Needs of transnational families as revealed by the research results
Our analysis utilizes the term "transnational families" throughout this paper as we consider social work-related challenges. Although some social work studies and practice in Japan utilize terms such as "foreigners," "immigrants," "migrants," or "people with connections to foreign countries," we have opted to use the phrase "transnational families" to focus on families while emphasizing movements that transcend borders.

As with authors including Suzuki (2021), who conducted previous studies into the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic upon migrants in Japan, our research similarly showed significant economic impacts in this regard. Multiple families (households) reported being "no longer able to pay for rent/utilities," "unable to purchase food/essential daily items," and "unable to go to hospital due to lack of funds." We additionally received responses indicating "we gave up on higher education for our children" and "sending children to school is impossible due to financial constraints." Such comments

indicate impacts exacerbated by these families' already vulnerable position. The results revealed the existence of challenges arising from the following factors: language; daily life customs and norms; residency status; employment, housing environment and community; and separation from family/relatives—all of which complexly intertwined to create their present-day realities. Below, we look closely at each of these factors.

1. Language

We asked respondents to indicate the Japanese language level of the primary child caretaker in their household in the four separate categories of speaking, reading, writing and listening, with a scale of 1 (can do well) to 5 (cannot do much at all). (See figure 2, where N = the number of responses minus those who did not answer that question). The results revealed a high number of "can do well" and "cannot do much at all" responses, with wide discrepancies existing between families.
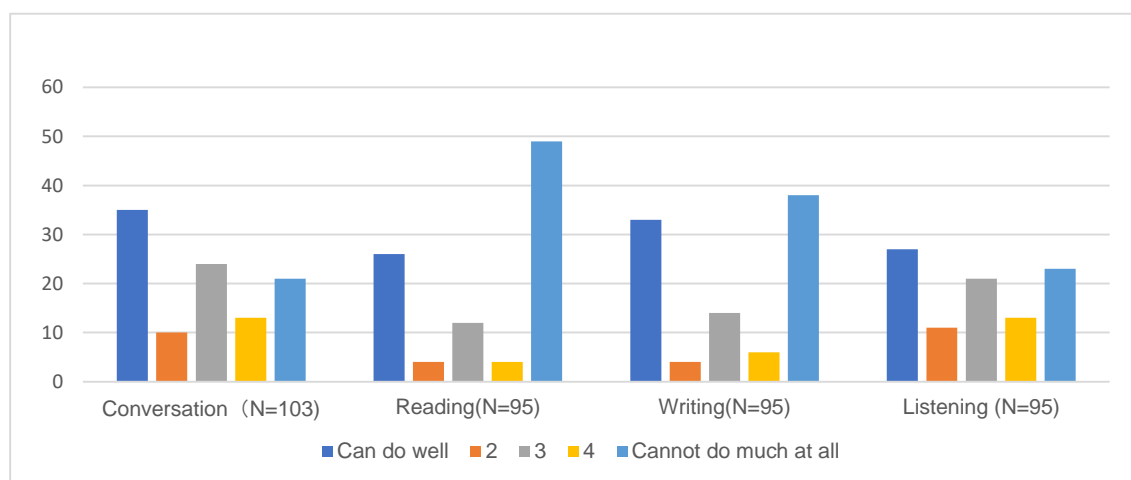

Figure 2: Language level of those responsible for raising children

In particular, the number of main caretakers who responded "cannot do much at all" with regard to reading and writing are higher compared to those in the other two skills. It would be easily assumed that they may face difficulties in children's education and everyday living, since they are not able to comprehend the written information from nurseries, schools, and local government offices.

In addition, in response to question（N=117）regarding whether any live-in family members had been unable to visit the hospital despite wanting to (with multiple answers permitted), 50 people said "yes," among which the most common reason was "I didn't think I would be able to communicate at the hospital" (11 respondents).

Regarding the question on their child(ren) attending school or preschool, 13 respondents said they "didn't appear to be enjoying school" and/or "were often absent," for which 11 people gave the reason (with multiple answers possible) "they do not understand Japanese" and "they cannot keep up in class." In the comment space, many respondents also indicated that they faced problems since they "do not understand Japanese"—revealing that language-related difficulties are impacting their children's education, as well as their ability to maintain their families' health and everyday living environment.

It is difficult for parents to support the study of child(ren) when the schools were closed due to Covid-19. The decreasing opportunities to learn and speak Japanese may hinder their learning achievement. Continuing to attend junior high or high school with insufficient Japanese does not lead to learning, and often results in children not attending school. Although intensive language studies after arriving in Japan often helps children continue learning, additional staff costs to support children of transnational families run between four to eight million yen per year per student, according to the interview conducted in our research.

Previous studies have shown that early childhood education is an investment in the future, and leads to increased social benefits such as higher education, rising incomes, and low crime rates. Meanwhile, not attending school correlates with future poverty, which if left unchecked can lead to reduced incomes and taxes as a whole—in turn increasing social security burdens and causing significant social losses (Nippon Foundation, 2015).

Recently, it has also been pointed out that children with foreign nationality who have developmental disabilities have been placed into special needs classrooms at a rate higher than the general population of children—thereby calling into question the criteria upon which such judgments

are made (see for example Kim, 2020; Tanaka Iki, 2021). Such "developmental disabilities" diagnoses might be rooted in lack of access to basic and continuous education while migration, as well as insufficient understanding due to the inability to understand Japanese language; and the administering of intelligence tests geared toward children born and raised in Japan, whose first language is Japanese. It is crucial to conduct assessments of the environments of transnational families and their children from the perspective not only of language ability, but also the impact of migration, as well as language, culture and gender norms—and that plans be made to help support the transformation of their relations with others around them.

2. Daily *life customs and norms*

In response to the question of belief in a particular religion, the most common answer was "Islam" (64% of total responses). Similarly, we learned from the interviews that needs existed for halal meals to be provided for school lunch. Because much of the food provided at school is unable to be eaten for religious reasons, some families ask the schools only to provide milk, and children bring lunch from home. Some elementary and junior high schools have responded to address such religious needs (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2017), for example, by removing pork from the menu or providing other religious-based food accommodations, although no governmental guidelines exist in this regard (Asahi Shinbun Digital, 2019).

Only a small number of questionnaire responses indicated that their children refused to go to school or were bullied, or that they felt concern that their children were experiencing discrimination or negative influences from Japanese people. With respect to child-rearing and education of girl children, however, uneasiness was expressed regarding the teasing they experienced from other children for wearing hijab; as well as school sex education ("sexual content," as indicated on the questionnaire), and casual conversation with friends of a sexual nature, wherein it was stated that the child did not like being physically touched.

Regardless of gender, concern was additionally expressed with "being unable to keep up with the children's studies," as well as the lack of religious education and schooling in their native language, or studies about their home country. Numerous responses also indicated worry about insufficient English language education.

Questionnaire responses also reflected a desire for higher education such as university or graduate school (56% for boys and 60% for girls), although in reality, Afghan boys were also expected to help with their fathers' businesses after high school, resulting in only a small number going on to university. Meanwhile, in the case of girls, elder daughters in some cases deferred their high school enrollment to care for younger siblings. Regardless of gender, those who will find a job in a Japanese company after completing high schools are extremely limited so far.

In addition, due to family and community norms, children who have attained a certain level of Japanese language ability are put into the position of acting as "young-carers," where they accompany family members to hospital appointments, and meetings with school and government officials, in order to interpret. In other words, some children are foregoing their own high school and university education to help with their father's work or care for their families.

As trade in second-hand cars has decreased due to Covid-19, however, some families are beginning to consider employment with Japanese companies. Some 54% of respondents indicated they wanted their children to "be active in Japan in the future," where paving the way toward graduating from Japanese schools and working at Japanese companies is important for the social integration of those in the 1.5th and 2nd generation.

In addition, with respect to gender norms, it became apparent through the interviews that women preferred dealing with female doctors for medical appointments. As was also clear in previous studies (Masako Tanaka, 2021), while some preferred female doctors only in case of gynecological examinations, others indicated they did not have a problem with male doctors—thereby revealing different preferences even where the nationality and religion of respondents were the same.

Because there is no female gynecologist in areas where transnational families are concentrated, however, they must travel far away to the hospitals—and must bring a Japanese speaker with them. Presently, the "Chiba Medical Navi" service provided by the Chiba prefectural government to search for medical institutions and pharmacies within the prefecture allows for searches of hospitals with outpatient services by female doctors, but the only language used is Japanese (Chiba prefecture, no date). Beginning around 2002, a system of "women's outpatient care" was established where hospitals were not divided by department, but instead focused on providing outpatient care where patients could feel comfortable with doctors of the same gender. This was followed by a dramatic increase in female outpatient doctors throughout the country who provided care from a woman's perspective, and catered to individuals who felt embarrassment at having male doctors examine them in cases of abnormalities

in the breast or anal region, and had therefore previously avoided medical care (Doi et. al, 2004). Among the first local governments in the country to implement this type of women's outpatient care was Chiba governor Domoto Akiko, who began creating a prefectural system of health care support based on gender-specific care more than ten years ago (Doi et. al, 2004). It is desirable, then, that transnational families utilize this previously established infrastructure, and make "women outpatient care" an option in cases where needs have been expressed.

Finally, while in the Coronavirus situation, the restrictions on going out and inability to meet others has had a significant impact upon mental health, as well as relationships with families and friends. The Covid-19 restrictions placed on the periodically-held Islamic religious gatherings have negatively affected mental health, and people's lives in general. Whether for religious purposes or not, meeting new friends is important not only for interactions—but also, crucially, for exchanging information. Losing one's job and life stability leads to the inability to envision the future; and restricting interactions with others also results in being completely cut off from sources of information.

Among the responses received in the free comment space of the questionnaire described, "I am afraid of being alone when I am old." As social workers have created spaces for social interactions, such as community salons and children's play areas in their community social work, it is necessary to create spaces where transnational family members can easily go to interact with other members of the community in taking into account the norms of age, gender and religion.

3. **Residency** *status*

There are numerous types of residency status in Japan, with various patterns such as those that do and do not permit work, those that restrict total working hours, and those ranging from several months, several years and permanent residency. With the exception of the small number of respondents with Japanese nationality, we saw challenging, difficult-to-resolve cases within our research related to residency status. This included asylum seekers who only have been given temporary residency status were unable to proactively plan their children's education or create a plan for the future.

The problem of residency status has been recently attracting attention for reasons relating to the immigration control law, as well as the human rights violations, violence, deaths and suicides taking place inside immigration detention facilities. In addition, there are multiple cases of exclusion from governmental services, discrimination in schools, and aggressive responses from public consultation facilities for reasons associated with one's residency status or nationality. This seems to be rooted in an ongoing pervasive misunderstanding that "'foreigners' are different from Japanese citizens" and they can be treated differently.

According to Kondo (2019, 60), it is a standard interpretation in other countries and human rights treaties that "foreigners" are included within the "citizens" to whom the Constitution and the Basic Act on Education confer the rights to exist and receive education. In fact, the immigration law which regulates residency status and controls over "foreigners" should be positioned under the Constitution (Kondo, 2019, 60). In order to implement these human rights protections as the Constitution stipulates, it is necessary to change the present situation that residency status would have a great impact on individuals' human rights.

4. **Employment***, housing environment, and community*

In response to the question regarding the number of years lived in Japan, the largest response was 1-5 years (31.6%), followed by 5-10 years (25.6%), and 10+ years (20.5%). Asked "How long do you wish to continue living in Japan?" 46% answered "permanently," 20.5% said they "wished to become citizens," and 25.6% indicated "I'd like to stay here long-term if I can renew my residency status."

On the other hand, asked to "describe the employed family members or relatives living with you," where they could write freely about the type of work and employment style, numerous responses indicated lengthy work hours for the self-employed (70-90 hours weekly), and restrictions in the number of working hours due to visa regulations (28 hours weekly) for those who were working under irregular employment.

In addition, we learned that there were number of children unable to attend school or preschool for reasons including "inconvenient transportation," "transportation unavailable," "preschool is far," etc. With regard to the number of family members living together, the highest number was six (20.5%), with more than half of respondents saying their household included "more than four" family members.

According to the questionnaire, more than 60% of those from Afghanistan were renting their houses, while slightly less than 40% owned their own home. The interviews additionally revealed the need for many Afghan people to purchase their own single-family homes, as their apartments were too small to accommodate their household members. A study by Matsumiya et. al (2017) into homebuying

by foreign nationals showed that in addition to representing real estate and assets, homes also helped eliminate social insecurities and secure children's inheritances. Also, it held additional meanings such as flexibly of accommodating extended-family members, relatives and friends visiting from their home countries.

According to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (2020), 8.8% of owners restricted foreigner's renting homes, while 71% said they "felt negatively toward renting homes to foreigners" in the same way that they felt negative toward renting to elderly or disabled individuals. While restrictions on homebuying by foreigners have also relaxed somewhat on one hand, home loans are often subject to conditions such as permanent residency (Matsumiya et. al, 2017; Tsuzuki et. al, 2009).

The inability to rent or purchase a house due to belonging to a specific group is discrimination, requiring social workers to conduct rights-related advocacy. For this reason, the national government launched a housing safety policy in 2017 designating low-income households, disaster victims, elderly and disabled persons, those raising children, foreigners, etc. as requiring special consideration to help stable housing be secured (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2020). By working together cooperatively, real estate organizations, housing support groups, local governments can connect the issues of housing and social welfare; but such connections within Chiba prefecture have not been actively pursued so far (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2022).

The image of "transnational families" as seen through our research differs from the standard of households raising children as envisioned by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, whose models include parents and one child, with a husband employed full-time at a company and a wife working a part-time job. In reality, many of these households are families with relatives living together, whose main wage earner is employed either independently, or on an irregular basis. In addition, while there are families desiring to obtain permanent residency or Japanese nationality, or at least to live in Japan as long as possible, it is necessary to assure them to rent or buy a house in their present community of residence that can accommodate all of their family members. Moreover, they have risk of being excluded from the right to access education and medical care due to the lack of public transportation and respect on gender and religious norms. For these reasons, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive assessment regarding the social needs of transnational families, as well as to reconsider the role of community social work.

5. Separation from family/relatives

In response to our research, 82 individuals indicated that they had been impacted by the Coronavirus situation, including the effects of being unable to see family members or relatives. In terms of the reasons given therefor (multiple responses permitted), 29 people said they "wanted to return to their country but could not"; 29 people indicated that they had "family members/relatives who had planned to come to Japan, but could not," and 6 people cited "temporarily returning to our home country but being unable to re-enter Japan." In particular, the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021 resulted in unexpected negative prospects that it would no longer be possible to visit and return for the possible future. The comment section also indicated a strong impact in this regard, such as "I want to see my grandmother," and "I was unable to attend my family member's funeral."

Not all transnational families living in Japan have a choice between Japanese permanent residency or returning to their home country, however; they may move to different countries or they may have to stay in Japan despite their wish to return. A study conducted by Mie Asakura (2017,107) into Japanese-Brazilians, Chinese, and Filipinos (who comprise 80% of the foreign population in the researched prefecture) regarding their lives after the Lehman Brothers collapse revealed that 44.3% had returned to their home countries more than twice after coming to Japan, with nearly 30% of Filipinos saying they had returned home more than six times. She points out, therefore, that "it is necessary to consider the type of support necessary for those whose lives are characterized by continually traveling back and forth."

While our research did not cover the number of times respondents had returned to their home countries after coming to Japan, it did reveal that a significant number of people planned to base their lives in Japan, while having hope of occasionally traveling back to their home countries for family reunions, or maintaining relations by inviting relatives to visit Japan. However, even though they want to travel back to their home countries or invite family members to Japan, it would be very difficult due to the covid-19 related restrictions, political situations in home countries, and implementation of the government's extremely politicized immigration policy. For this reason, transnational families must be viewed not as "temporary visitors" or "permanent migrants," but as community residents with extended family members and relatives living overseas—and their needs must be responded to accordingly.

The results of the research, there would be support needs in social work arose from differences in language, daily costumes/norms, and difficulties in residency status, and employment /housing situation. In addition to those needs, it hasn't been overlooked that mental health and trauma-related therapeutic needs might arise from forced separation from family members and relatives, isolation from home countries, and lack of controlees over ones' life.

Conclusions and Suggestions: Developing Transnational Social Work along with the Multicultural and Integrated Community

While the word "community" is ambiguous, social work in Japan usually defines community as *chiiki shakai* (local community) (Kuga et. al, 2022, 192). In addition, there is "welfare community" whose functions include services, support, policy-making, and planning problem resolution together with the association-style connections which were born from a sense of empathy with the people facing problems. Such association-style connections do not refer to regionally based organizations, such as those with local governments or neighborhood associations, but rather to volunteer or self-help groups whose members have shared interests or purposes (Kuga et. al, 2022, 194).

As described earlier, social work directed toward "foreigners" who live in Japan is presently being discussed in terms of the theory and practice methodology within the field of "multicultural social work." Supports are found mainly in the form of association-style connections in multicultural social work in response to the situation wherein those with "foreign nationality" cannot avoid confronting systemic challenges relating to residency status, education, employment and structural discrimination in the local community.

Some social workers in the communities with significant populations of foreign residents have already developed regional-based connections along with function of association-style supports. However, in those communities where a significant level of interest has not been shown even among social workers—i.e., where public legal policies have not been enacted, making public fundraising difficult—non-profit/non-governmental groups and volunteers have provided support based upon their own compassion and enthusiasm. Supporters have worked on individual cases through a repetitive process of trial and error, thereby accumulating know-how to help resolve problems through information-sharing within their networks (or giving up on finding resolutions).

The results of our research indicated that communities that many transnational families have recently developed in Chiba would be one of the areas where support policies for local foreign populations have not rarely made yet, and information has not been shared systematically, either. Therefore, things may go well if the staff working at school or at a local government happens to be kind, but these can become difficult as soon as these employees are transferred or replaced.

As we have seen in this paper, the problems faced by transnational families cannot always be solved by the migrant communities in multicultural social work settings using resources of association-style supports. Rather, numerous issues require connecting with the wider communities around them. Existing fields of social work (relating to the elderly, children, disabled persons, etc.) have clearly-outlined social resources within their local communities, which are characterized by pre-determined routes and support patterns, as well as collaborative systems of solidarity that have clearly delineated roles.

In order to provide social work for transnational families wherein such systems are unclear, it is important first for social workers to clarify the know-how that has been collected among association-based networks in multicultural social work. Then, social workers have to connect association-based networks with social resources in the local communities, collaborating with community social workers to systematize them. Furthermore, it might become necessary to develop association-based connections across borders, for example, with social workers in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka in future. Development of transnational social work might be crucial along with the development of multicultural and integrated local communities in Japan.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare launched innovative plans in 2017 to help realize inclusive and integrated communities (*chiiki kyousei shakai*). This concept goes beyond the vertical divisions of individual policies and fields, as well as the relationships of "supporter" and "the supported," in order to encourage all local residents and diverse community actors to participate in society (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, no date).

Kinoshita (2020, 200-218) writes of social work in terms of "social action" as one method of "changing society," describing "a method of creating social resources and improving the social environment for the purpose of protecting the rights of those with a socially vulnerable position." In addition, he defines "changing society" in terms of politics, laws, situations, social norms/customs, and

peoples' awareness and consciousness. In order to exert change upon the immigration control law and social welfare legal system, which create systematic barriers simply due to peoples' status as "foreigners"; and to position transnational families within their communities in a way that their differing language and cultural background do not serve as factors of exclusion, it is first necessary to work toward changing the consciousness of each local government employee who is responsible for policy creation, as well as each social worker who provides services based on the policy. In addition, the awareness of local individual residents in the community must also be raised in this regard.

For example, social workers with the Social Welfare Council in Tokyo's Toyoshima Ward, and multicultural social workers with the Kitakyushu International Association in Fukuoka Prefecture, have both led groundbreaking programs in their respective communities from which we may learn a great deal (Japan Federation of Social Workers' international committee, 2022). When local social workers and other actors in different disciplines and sectors across borders can create networks in order to work together with transnational families and build mutual support systems, it will be possible to realize local communities in Japan wherein each transnational family members of diverse backgrounds can live together while ensuring the active participation of all members in the community. It would be expected in future to develop transnational social work across borders along with the development of multicultural and integrated communities in local areas, in order to meet the needs of transnational families living in Japan.

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