

## **SOCIAL POLICY AND LONE PARENTHOOD IN JAPAN: A WORKFARE TRADITION?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines Japanese social policy on lone parent family in comparative context. Postwar policy developed based on the mix of residual and non-intervention aspects - low benefit provision, public loan, and no enforcement of child maintenance - and lone mothers were expected to work rather than stay at home as mother. A micro-simulation analysis is tried to compare the levels of support packages of tax, cash benefit, cost of child care and other related services, for lone parent family in 22 countries. The result confirmed that Japanese financial supports for lone mother family are moderate, compared to other nations, and relatively generous supports are available for those with low income. However, as the number of lone mother is increasing, a major policy reform is currently underway, stressing work and self-reliance in return for cutting public supports. The message is similar to workfare policies in other countries, but it is rather fair to understand that Japanese case is a mere reflection of traditional residual aspects of welfare states.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Lone parent family has become a main issue in social policy analysis in the most welfare states. There are two reasons for this. First of all, lone parent families are the one of the large groups of recipients of social security. These governments are trying to contain and cut the public expenditures, and exploring policy options to support lone parent families without additional social costs. Secondly, lone parent families can be seen as a typical example of family change since the late twentieth century. Some postwar welfare states have been based on the so called male-breadwinner model of family in which man works and woman stay at home to take the responsibilities of domestic works including care for the children and the elderly. Obviously, lone parent family is not fit in this

assumption. As a result, many lone parents - and most of them are lone mothers - are struggling to juggle work and domestic tasks.

There have been serious concerns about increasing poverty among lone parents and their children. It is pointed out that higher proportion of lone parent families does not necessarily lead to higher rate of child poverty. It is also suggested that reducing the number of lone parent could have very limited effect to reduce child poverty as whole. Sweden and Norway, for example, have almost same proportions of children living in lone parent families as UK, the child poverty rates of these Nordic nations are one fifth of British rate. Similarly, Canada's child poverty rate is three times higher than Finland, despite that both nations have the same proportion of children living in lone parent families (UNICEF 2000). Although lone parent family is in higher risk of poverty, above all, it is a matter of social policy whether this particular type of family has to face poverty.

Japanese social policies have been challenged by family changes as well as fertility decline. Combined with long recession, the rapid increase of lone parent families is pressing the whole policies towards drastic changes. Policies on lone parent families have involved wide range of programmes. In mixed economy, it is necessary to look at social security, work and labour market policy, and informal arrangement (family and maintenance system). This paper will examine the policies on lone parent families and evaluate them in comparative context.

### **2. LONE PARENT FAMILIES IN JAPAN AND POLICY RESPONSES**

#### **2-1 Lone parent family in Japan**

It is always problematic to count how many lone parents exist in Japan. The number of lone parents is different,

depending on surveys, partly due to the fact that many lone parents live with their elderly parents and they are often treated as three generation households. The most important data source on lone parent family is the National Survey on Lone Mother Households (NSLMH), which is conducted every five years. According to this survey, the number of lone parent families is estimated at 1,118,300 and 85 per cent of lone parent families are female headed (lone mothers at 954,900 and lone fathers at 163,400) in 1998\*1).

Looking at the types of lone parent family, marital status of lone mothers has changed over the last 40 years. The NSLMH survey shows that the partners' death was the main cause in the 1950s (77.9 per cent in 1956). In 1998 widowed lone mothers made up 18.7 per cent, while divorced lone mothers increased to 68.4 per cent. The average age of lone mothers is 40.9 years old, and that of the youngest child is 10.9, according to the NSLMH in 1998. At the point of divorce, average age of mothers is 34.9, and the youngest child is 5.4 years old. In particular, 34.6 per cent of the youngest child is under 3 years old, when their parents divorced. There is a downward trend in the ages of both mothers and children.

Next, look at the trend of divorce, which is now main cause of lone parenthood in Japan. The divorce rate has changed several times in the postwar periods. It fell during 1950s and reached as low as 0.73 in 1963. Then it increased and reached to 2.27 in 2002. In particular, the divorce rate has increased sharply since 1997. Although more detailed analysis is needed to explain the backgrounds of these demographic changes, it can be said that divorce is no longer unusual part of Japanese family life. The rapid increases of divorce become the most important factors for Japanese family policy, along with the fertility decline.

Turning to economic status, high proportion of lone parents are taking a job. The NSLMH survey shows that 86.8 per cent of divorced lone parents are working - 52.1 per cent are employed on full-time basis and 37.5 per cent are part-time. The employment rate has unchanged, compared to the same survey in 1993. The average annual income of lone mothers household is Y 2,290,000 in 1998, which is just one third of the income of average household. It is also important to note that the most lone mothers are not receiving maintenance from former partners. According to the NSLMH, only 35.1 per cent of them have made arrangement over child maintenance with their former partners. Furthermore, only 20.8 per cent are actually receiving it from them. It is no doubt that lone par-

ent family has a high risk of poverty if their income and family supports are limited.

It is often seen that Japanese family has consisted of strong ties and stable relations. The argument for the Japanese style of welfare society was based on traditional strong family function, contrasting with the western style of welfare state. Equally, several western researchers looked at the Confucian tradition as additional explanation for this (Jones 1993, Esping-Andersen, 1997). However, the demographic data shows stable family relation is no longer the case in Japan. The rapid increases in divorce since the late 1990s has suggested that there is no uniqueness about Japanese families and it is likely to follow similar patterns of family changes in the western nations. It is also not exceptional that lone parent families in Japan are vulnerable to poverty, because of female positions in the society and labour market, lack of financial support from former partner and inadequate benefit.

## **2-2 Traditional policy framework**

Now, it is summarised how the government has responded to the issues of lone parenthood since the last century. Japanese social policies on lone parent families can be traced back to the prewar periods such as those for war widows, but this paper begins with the postwar development of social services. In 1953, the Public Loan Programmes for lone mothers was introduced to support war widows, who were the largest group of lone parent families at that time. Then, in the process of expanding social security system as whole in the 1960s, new programmes came into force. When a non-contributory pension system for the widows was introduced in 1959, the Child Rearing Allowances for the divorced lone mother was introduced in 1961 for equity. Also as an attempt to reorganise various personal social services, the Lone Mother Welfare Law was implemented in 1964. This law has provided legal grounds for the most social programmes for lone parent families, including financial support, providing shelter for mother and children, setting higher priorities in allocating public sectors housing, and employing consultants for mental supports at local welfare office.

The current policy framework was created in the 1950s and 1960s, and there were no major changes until this century. At a glance, it seems that the postwar policies on lone parent families have not been consistent and lacked a clear direction as whole. However, these policies were carefully designed not to discourage self-help or self-efforts of lone parents. A typical example is the

public financial loan systems, which include loan for job skill training, starting business, education for children 2). It is important to note that these programmes are provided as a loan, not one-off cash benefit, therefore lone mothers would be required to pay it back, although most loans are granted without interest. Obviously, these loan programmes are based on the principle of self-help that lone parents should work and earn by their own anyway, and public support should not be undermining the sentiment of individual efforts. Secondly, public child care - day nurseries - has been available for most lone mothers. As the income-related charges have been applied, the childcare cost would be very small for those in low income. But there are still some problems in childcare arrangement. The places are currently short in some urban areas because dual breadwinner model of households with both takes full-time jobs are increasing. Lone parent with low income are given priority to take a place in public day nursery, but even this could not be secured in some local authorities. Also, public day nurseries are not flexible in terms of time arrangement. Typical nursery opens from morning to evening, i.e. 8:00 am to 6:00 pm., and therefore not always suit Japanese long working and commuting hours. Alternatives are for-profit sectors' nurseries, but they are not considered as the first choice because of the quality of care. In fact, several fatal accidents have been reported nationwide. Childcare has become one of the most important policy issue, and policy makers are still looking for the way to balance between expanding child care facilities including for-profit sectors and keeping the quality of care services by tight regulation. Along with these work incentive measures, there are several programmes to provide financial support as well. The most important benefit is still Child Rearing Allowances for lone mothers, which has provided vital financial support. This benefit is unique because of its relatively generous amount and less strict income-test threshold. While Child Benefit is eligible for those under 6 years old, Child Rearing Allowances is provided to children aged under 18 years old. It is very important to note that this benefit is only available to lone mothers, not lone fathers. In addition, several other social services are provided to lone mothers such as public sectors housing and shelters.

Furthermore, it is worth to note about Japanese divorce and child maintenance system. As mentioned above, not many lone mothers are receiving child maintenance from the former partners. Relatively easy divorce

system exists behind several problems in regard to child maintenance arrangements. If both parties agree to divorce, the formal procedure can be completed by just signing an official document and submitting to a registration office. While over 90 per cent of divorce cases in Japan follow this procedure, suing the other party in a district court for divorce in the case of no mutual consent is still not common. Here, maintenance arrangements are not always made at divorce, especially in the case of divorce by mutual consent. The issue of maintenance is a part of the negotiation to reach mutual agreement. There are concerns that one party may exchange the right and the amount of child maintenance with other conditions such as custody of children, or even just for obtaining consent of divorce. Secondly, there is no specific system to enforce a maintenance payment or to secure the continuation of payment. The maintenance payment can be enforced by a civil law suit, but bringing a former partner to court for maintenance is not always the best option - usually legal costs is higher than maintenance payments can be expected.

In general, there was no serious debate over the policies on lone parent in the last century, probably because the numbers of lone parent families were still small. Also, many lone parents were the widowed, not the divorced, so it was not necessary to change the assumption of male breadwinner model of family itself. Even having seen the family changes and increasing divorced lone parents since the 1990s, there were no significant changes until recently. However, it cannot be denied that Japanese policies on the lone parent have stressed work, providing a very limited cash benefit. This is a common aspect of the residual model of welfare state systems, in which people receive minimal public support only when they cannot cope otherwise.

### **2-3 Recent development of policies on lone parent families**

Rapid increases in the number of lone parent families have led to major reforms of whole policy arrangements. The Lone and Widowed Families Law Reforms was carried out in November 2002. This was the first major change in the Japanese policies on the lone parent families.

The new policies are promoted on the basis of the five major principles: supporting children, encouraging work participation, securing child maintenance, reforming the Child Rearing Allowances, and defining the local government role. It has been reassured that priority is given

to lone mothers when allocating a place in public day nursery. This is potentially significant because the shortage of public child care facilities in urban areas has become a social issue in recent years as dual earning family has increased rapidly. The most controversial aspects of reform can be found the changes in Child Rearing Allowances. The income test for the eligibilities for full-payment became strict for 'targeting'. Also, the time limit of 5 years is introduced and the amount of benefit will be reduced after that periods. This cutting back is due to the rapid increase in the recipients of the benefit in recent years (Fig.4). In 1995, about 600,000 lone mothers were receiving the benefits, and now it is provided to 750,000 lone mothers in 2001. It is seen that the number of lone mothers have increased so as the poor lone mothers. Lone mother families are the one of the largest recipient groups of the public assistance programmes along with the elderly and the disabled. And, 11.73 per cent of lone mother households are receiving the public assistance (*the Seikatsu Hogo* programme) in 2001, 2.3 % increased from the previous year (HWSA 2002).

Social welfare or social services for lone parents have developed since the 1940s, on the basis of male breadwinner assumptions and residual programmes. There was no serious debate over social expenditure, or gender issues. It is not possible to deny that stigma attached divorce and birth outside marriage has still existed, although the lone mothers have not seen as a typical representative of benefit dependency. In brief, lone parent family was a relatively minor issue for policy makers as the number of the families was small until recently. Now, whole policy packages for lone mothers are under review, as a result of rapid increases in the number of divorce and lone parent families. This new policy package is sending a strong and simple message to lone mothers - more work than ever.

### **3. LONE PARENT FAMILIES AND POLICIES IN COMPARATIVE CONTEXT**

This section will try to present a more comprehensive picture of policies on lone parent in comparative context. It is not easy to compare the policies on lone parent families amongst the welfare states, mainly because the issue requires the broad ranges of social policies, including cash benefit, child care, and family law. This section begins with the comparison of demographic aspects and several systems.

#### **3-1 Categorical comparisons**

##### **Demographic Backgrounds**

It is notable that the proportion of lone parents in Japan is still far smaller than other nations. While the lone parents share more than 20 per cent of all families with children in US and UK, it is less than 10 per cent in Japan. Looking at the types of lone mother, single lone mother makes up small proportion, comparing to UK and US where over 40 per cent of lone mother are unmarried mother (Table 1). The employment rate of lone mothers can be divided into three groups. UK, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Ireland are around 50 per cent. In US, Sweden, Norway and France, and Germany, about two third of the lone mothers are employed. It should be noted that the employment rate of Japanese lone mothers is over 80 per cent, along with Portugal and Luxemburg (Table 2).

##### **Child Care**

Table 2 shows the diversities of child care arrangement in each nation too. The dominant forms of childcare are nurseries, mainly provided by public sector. In some nations, for example in UK, the shortage of child care facilities has been a political issue. On the other hand, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Portugal guarantee a place for children aged under three. Not all nations give priorities to lone parents. Costs for child care vary, depending on the nations and income level. Japanese system includes income-related charges and is one of the least expensive for those with low income (Bradshaw and Finch 2002, p95). In Japan, public child care system has provided some advantages for the lone parent family who need to work. The aspect of income-related charge and giving higher priorities for lone parent families are combined to prepare at least minimum conditions for them to work rather than living on benefit, contrasting to UK.

It needs cautious approaches to compare child care systems. Treating quality and cost at the same time is always a barrier to comparative studies as measuring child care cost is easier than that of qualities. In terms of qualities, Japanese public day nurseries, which are operating tight regulations, can be considered better than unqualified child minders in other nations. Also, the access to the service should be taken into account. As mentioned above, inflexible time arrangement of public day nurseries are not suitable for the lone parents who are working in the night, longer hours or engaging casual works. For those

**Table 1. Demographic Background of Lone Parent Families**

	Lone Parents as a percentage of all families with children	Marital status of Lone mothers				Divorce Rate (per 1000 pop)	Guaranteed Child Support
		Single	Separated	Divorced	Widowed		
Australia	(2000)21	*	*	*	*	(2000) 2.6	no
Austria	(1999)15	26	8	34	32	(2000) 2.4	yes
Belgium	(1997)12	16	29	39	14	(2000) 2.6	no
Canada	(1998)17	*	*	*	*	(1996) 2.4	no
Denmark	(2001)22	*	*	*	*	(2000) 2.5	yes
Finland	(1999)19	34	13	48	5	(1999) 2.7	yes
France	(1999)12	*	*	*	*	(1999) 2.0	no
Germany	(1999)21	27	13	39	22	(1999) 2.3	yes
Greece	(1999) 3	*	*	*	*	(1999) 0.9	no
Ireland	(1999)14	63	29	2	6	--	no
Israel	(1999) 8	10	12	58	16	(1998) 1.7	yes
Italy	(1995)10	7	*	31	63	(1998) 0.6	no
JAPAN	(1999) 8	7	4	68	19	(2000) 2.1	no
Luxembourg	(2000)11	22	23	34	22	(2000) 2.3	yes
Netherlands	(2001)13	33	11	51	6	(1998) 2.1	no
New Zealand	(2001)29	46	29	20	5	(2000) 2.6	no
Norway	(1998)19	*	*	*	*	(1998) 2.1	yes
Portugal	(1996)13	13	19	31	30	(1999) 1.8	no
Spain	(1995) 9	12	4	57	27	(1998) 0.9	no
Sweden	(1990)18	*	*	*	*	(1999) 2.4	yes
UK	(2001)22	46	20	29	4	(1998) 2.7	no
USA	(2000)29	43	18	35	4	(1998) 4.2	no

Source: Bradshaw and Finch (2002) A Comparison of Child Benefit Packages in 22 countries, DWP, Research Report 174, Table 2.2, Table2.3, Table B.1, Table3.9

parents, only private sectors nursery is available but the qualities of the services are far worse and paying higher charges, comparing to public sectors.

### Cash Benefit

Vast majorities of nations have provided child benefit and categorical benefit for lone parents. While many nations provide child benefit on universal basis, Japanese child benefit is income-tested one. In cash terms, Japanese child benefit is not particularly generous, comparing to the other nations. For example, British child benefit is 67.17 pounds (approximately 13000 yen) per month and this is 3 per cent of average monthly earnings. Japanese child benefit is 5000 yen (1 per cent of average monthly earnings). But in the case of lone mother family, Japanese Child Rearing Allowance provide above average financial supports (Table 2). Current monthly rate (full-payment) is 42370 yen for a child and 47370 yen for two children. It is worth reminding that Child Rearing Allowance is only available to lone mothers, not for lone fathers. This is due to the historical development of the benefit which was introduced to equities of widow's pension. It can be said that this

aspect is a good example of the male breadwinner model of welfare in Japan.

In addition, a cautious interpretation to this type of ranking by categorical items is needed. Some nations employed tax benefit rather than cash benefits or both. In recent years, tax credit systems become main measure to provide economic support for those with children, replacing income tested family benefit. For example, UK replaced income-related Family Credit with Working Family Tax Credit. Therefore, it is necessary to compare these arrangements together. This type of comparison will be addressed later.

### Family Law

Family law plays a vital part of policies on lone parent. First of all, the state can control family formation, marriage and divorce, through legal system. Secondly, family law can define family responsibilities - obligation of supports between family members- and enforce it. Regulations of divorce and treatment of child maintenance are relevant topics for family policy analysis. Finally, family law is sending moral messages to society, which suggests

**Table 2. Child Care Arrangements and Benefits for Lone Parents**

	Typical Child Care arrangement	Guarantee for age 2y 11m	Priority for Lone mothers	Income related subsidies	Tax allowance for child care cost	Cost of child care per month (UKP ppp) (*1)	Cash Benefit for lone parents (UKP ppp) (*2)	Employment Status of lone mothers (%)
Australia	Day care	no	yes	yes	no	-89	96	(00) 46
Austria	Creche	no	yes	yes	no	-36	249	(99) 80
Belgium	Nursery	yes	no	yes	yes	-101	58	(97) 59
Canada	Centre based care	no	yes	yes	yes	-324	86	(96) 51
Denmark	Nursery	yes	no	yes	no	-30	175	(95) 73
Finland	Nursery	yes	no	yes	no	0	152	(98) 65
France	Child Minder	no	no	yes	yes	-140	14	(01) 66
Germany	Nursery	no	yes	yes	yes	0	61	(00) 67
Greece	Private Nursery	no	yes	no	yes	0	6	(96) 75
Ireland	Child Minder	no	no	yes	no	-375	266	(99) 53
Israel	Nursery	no	yes	yes	no	-237	27	*
Italy	Nursery	no	yes	yes	no	0	46	(98) 65
JAPAN	Nursery	no	yes	yes	no	-19	177	(98) 86
Luxembourg	Child Minder	no	no	yes	yes	-62	45	(00) 82
Netherlands	Subsidized care	no	yes	yes	yes	0	47	(97) 42
New Zealand	Creche	no	no	yes	yes	-242	0	(01) 68
Norway	Nursery	no	yes	yes	yes	-43	188	(99) 45
Portugal	Nursery	yes	no	yes	yes	-54	24	(96) 88
Spain	Private Nursery	no	yes	no	no	-201	0	(91) 68
Sweden	Nursery	yes	yes	yes	no	-56	1	(96) 68
UK	Child Minder	no	no	no	yes	-385	67	(01) 50
USA	Private Nursery	no	no	yes	yes	-127	0	(00) 68

Source: Bradshaw and Finch (2002) A Comparison of Child Benefit Packages in 22 countries, DWP, Research Report 174, Table 5.3, Table 5.4, Table 3.11, Table 2.5

\*1 Lone parent with one child aged under three, living on half average female earnings

\*2 Lone parent with one child, living on half average earnings

that what preferable and expected citizen=s behaviours are alike. It might be possible to argue that family law become less important in relation to lone parent as co-habiting couple has increased. Cohabitation is difficult to regulate as it is basically private arrangement. However, parental obligations to child are usually not affected by the difference between legal marriage and cohabitation. And the attention of policy has shifted from regulating family formation to secure these parental obligations. Some nations have an official system to collect maintenance payments from absent parent (non-resident parent). For example, UK set up Child Support Agency to enforce payment of child maintenance on absent parents in 1993. Furthermore, in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, and Sweden, the state guarantee payment when the non-resident parent does not or cannot pay (Table 1).

Japanese family law system has mixed aspects. If both parties agree, divorce is granted instantly without any family court procedures. No waiting time and no fur-

ther regulations are applied. It should be noted, however, that there is no public system to secure maintenance. As far as family law is concerned, Japanese system can be called as *laissez-faire regime*, in which government avoid any intervention into family matters. It is very symbolic that many lone mothers have not received child maintenance from former partners.

### 3-2 Model family analysis

It is always necessary to compare whole policy packages together to understand more comprehensive pictures. One of the well-known comparative analyses of this type is provided by the researchers group based on York University, where EU Observatory of Family Policies research project is located. These studies used a method of micro-data simulation for the comparison of financial support systems for family with children in various countries (Bradshaw et al 1993, Ditch et al 1996, 1998). They updated analysis afterwards with expanding the nations to be examined. The most recent study was conducted in

2001, which involved 22 nations (Bradshaw and Finch 2002). Based on the data of the 2001 study, which I participated, this paper will look at the level of Japanese packages for lone parents in comparative context.

### **The outline of the research**

This study created hypothetical families based on the combinations of earning levels, the work participation of spouses and the number and age of children. The families include single, childless couples, and lone parent families. Then it is examined how each nation's tax, benefit, social service systems treat these families. These combination of benefits and service systems are called 'support package', which are shown in form of the available income for each type of family after adding financial support such as child benefit and exempted the cost of having children such as childcare service all together. The value of packages is measured by calculating how much extra financial support available for each child by providing extra onto the disposable income of childless couples.

This is a conventional method for comparison, and 'model families' provide a picture of tax and benefit systems seen from different types of families. And it is relatively easy to skip the complex social systems of different nations. However, there are several limitations in this research method. Firstly, as is always mentioned, the research is based on the assumption that the system should work rather than how it actually does work. This nature of simulation would be problematic in the case of a nation where all cash benefit systems are income-tested and a social stigma may affect the take-up rate. It will remain as a question how means-test benefits can be treated with universal benefits. Similarly, this method can measure only cost of services, not quality. It is debatable that high quality of childcare services provided by a skilled care workers are treated in the same way as services provided by a part-timer with no qualification. Another technical limitation is the setting of model family. Some models are unrealistic for one nation, while a particular type of family can be omitted if it is not common to other nations. In addition, there is an issue of what kind of cost should be taken into account to measure values of financial support for children. For example, education costs outside school are not taken into account in the research. The financial burdens for Japanese parents are said to be significant, not because of school fees but for a private tuition for entrance examinations. These limitations are inevitable

in making comparisons involved a large number of countries because there will be no 'common' model of family among nations. It is necessary to sacrifice some details of family / social aspects of each nation in order to generalise setting of simulations. And this method is still one of the easiest ways to present each nations system in comparative context.

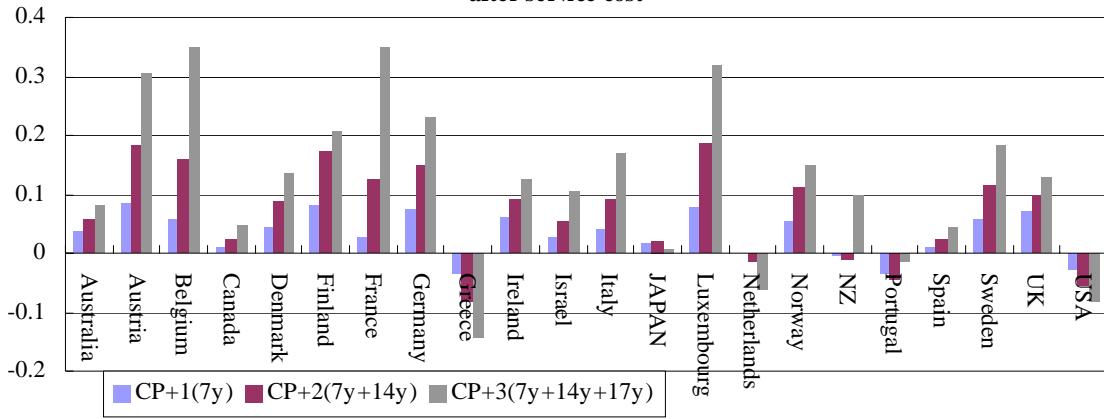
Model families are set by the combination of the family types (single, couple, two parent and lone parent) and income cases (average, half-average, and so on). The numbers and ages of children are also considered in setting up models. Then earnings, tax, benefit, and services costs are calculated for each model family. The total level of the package is presented as a form of disposable income after exempted several costs from original earnings and added several benefits. For comparisons, the level of tax and benefit package for lone parents is measured by the differences between the package of lone parent family and that of single households in each nation. In other words, this is examining an aspect of horizontal redistribution. The data is collected by the national informant in 2001, who is responsible for his/ her nation. In other words, 22 researchers are involved in this comparative study of 22 countries.

### **Results**

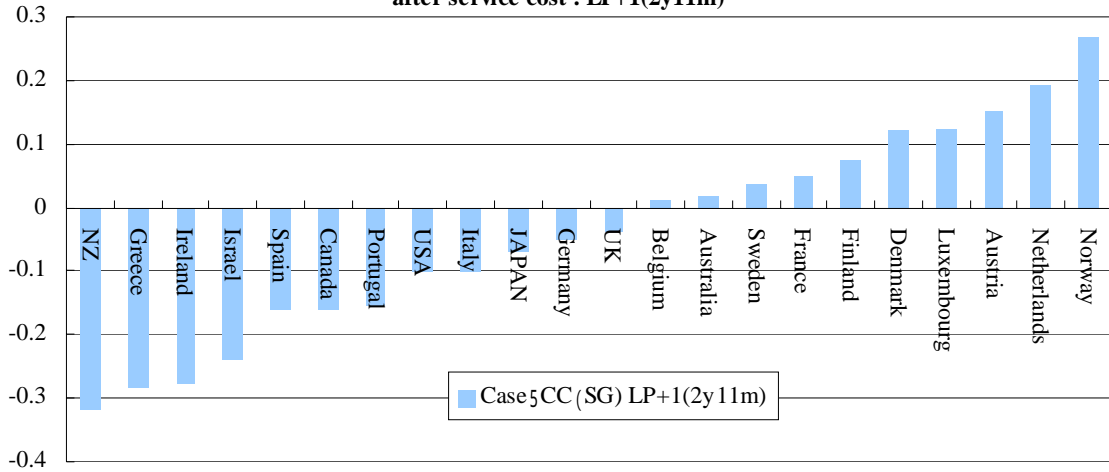
The analysis should begin with the most common cases. Fig.1 shows the comparisons of child support packages for a couple with children in case of one earner with average male earnings. France, Belgium, Germany and Austria, and the Nordic nations show higher level of supports. There are some differences in a way of supporting children, not just that of the levels. For example, in France, the level of support is sharply expanding for family with three children, compares to other nations. It is not possible to say that Japan's package is generous than the other nations. In addition, it is important to note that some extra cost for children is not included here. In Japanese case, taking a private tuition prevails, and this is a typical example of financial burdens of family with children.

Now, look at the case of lone parent families. Fig.2 shows the case of lone parent with a preschool child, living on average female earnings. The comparison of the package for lone parent families presents a slightly different picture, comparing with the case of a couple with children. For example, the Netherlands is giving extra support in the case of lone parent, while Belgium and France drop the support levels.

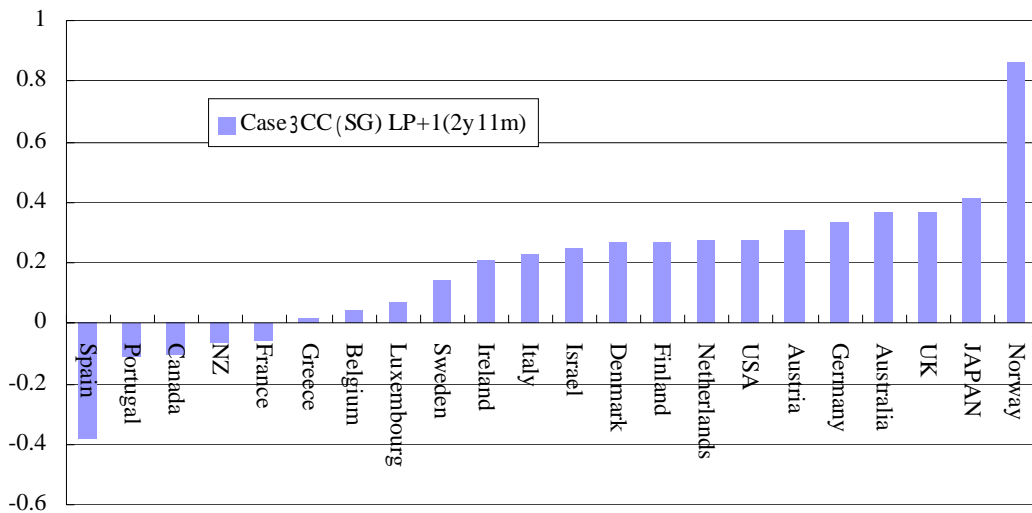
**Fig. 1 Packages for those with average earnings (male) after service cost**



**Fig.2 Packages in those with average earnings(female) after service cost : LP+1(2y11m)**



**Fig.3 Packages for those with low income after service cost : LP+1(2y11m)**





Next, the case of lone parent with low income is presented in Fig.3. It is interesting to note that Japan record is impressive, following Norway and UK. Some cautions are necessary to interpret this chart. Basically, the result has reflected the level of differences between the single households and the lone parent with low income. If a nation is providing support to both types of family regardless the existence of a child, the gap - the level of support - might not be as important as it is shown in the chart. As far as Japanese case is concerned, the result is brought by the less expensive child care cost and relatively generous Child Rearing Allowances, which combined added extra financial resources for lone parent family. Some nations provide support for a particular family type and some provide support for those with low income. Japan provides it only when both conditions are fulfilled.

Now, the relation between the value of packages and work incentives for lone mothers will be examined. It is often considered that the long-term welfare benefit dependency is related to poverty trap. More specifically, the benefit dependency for the lone mothers is seen as results of the gap between the level of benefit and level of disposable income which can be reduced further by expensive child care costs. Some nations have tried to increase financial incentive for lone mother by exempted child care cost from tax system, so that more income can be left for them.

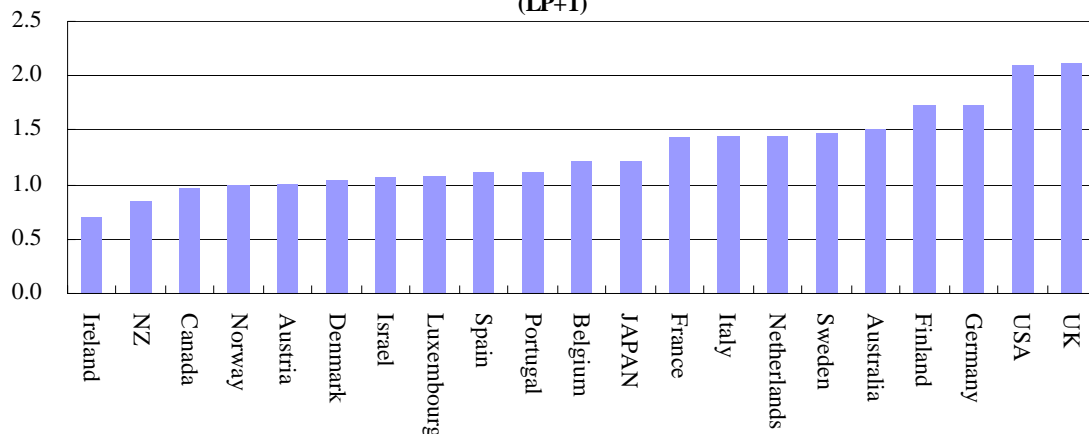
Fig.4 presents the difference between the lone mother with preschool child (LP+1 2y11m) receiving public assistance, and those earning 50 per cent of national average female earnings. It is indicated that UK and US present more incentives for lone mothers. The UK government has implemented several new measures

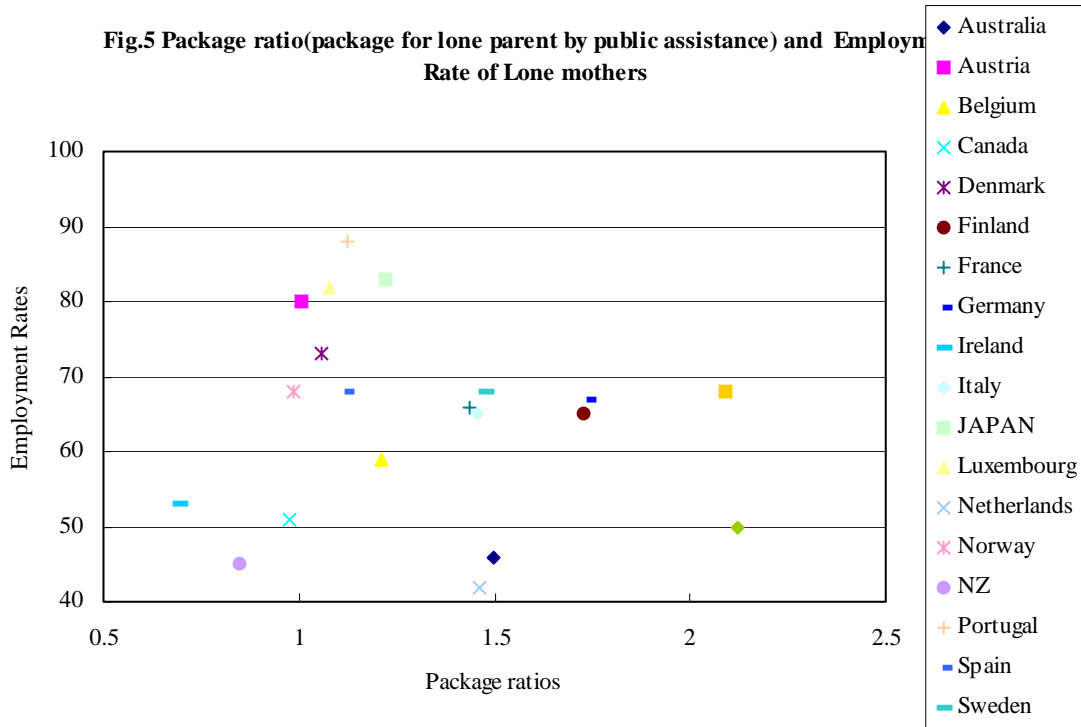
to promote work participation. The introduction of Working Family Tax Credit (WFTC) and Child Care Tax Credit (CCTC) aims to provide financial support without reducing work incentives. Also, the New Deal for lone parent programme offers job training to those living on benefit. As lone mother families are main target in the current reform, the British packages provide higher level of incentives in packages.

However, this ranking is not paralleled to that of the work participation rate. Fig.5 shows the correlation between the benefit packages (the gap between packages for those with low income and those on public assistance) and employment rate for lone mothers. It is clear that the higher level of incentives in financial packages is not necessarily leading to the higher level of employment rates. Portugal and Japan, the two nations with higher employment rate of lone mothers, are not providing higher incentive in the packages, while British employment is amongst the lowest.

It should be taken into account that other factors might influence on lone mothers' choices. The access to the public assistance must be taken into account. Not all eligible lone mothers actually claim the benefit because of a stigma which attached the means-test, and they might choose to work instead. In addition, the roles of informal networks such as the relatives and neighbourhoods might need to be taken into account, in particular regard to providing childcare. It might take several years to find out the outcome of new policies such as New Deal programmes in Britain. The relation between work incentive by tax benefit packages and work participations will remain to be seen.

**Fig.4 Ratio of packages : Lone parent with low income and on public assistance (LP+1)**





#### 4. JAPANESE LONE PAERNT AND WELFARE REGIMES

Lone parent families have provided interesting cases in the debate over the welfare regimes since Esping-Andersen's influential work. His original analysis focusing the de-commodification level in the industrialised nations left room to debate on gender and family issues. Clearly, a higher de-commodification score is not necessarily showing a better condition for lone mothers if the system is enforcing fixed gender roles, sending a message to them to stay home against their will. In his recent work, Esping-Andersen himself has referred poverty amongst lone parent families, stating as 'family instability is the second subversive soldier in the Trojan horse of the welfare state' (Esping-Andersen 1999, p161).

One of the first influential critique of Esping-Andersen's welfare regime was presented by Lewis who proposed three alternative typologies of welfare states by the degree of dominance of the male breadwinner. *The Strong Male Breadwinner model* is based on an assumption that gender should be equal but the role is different. In this model, like Britain, women's work participation is relatively low and a provision of public child care system is underdeveloped, as Lewis argues, women's positions are supposed to be at home caring for children. *The Modified Male Breadwinner model* acknowledges the dual role

of women as wife/ mother as well as worker, and has a relatively high provision of public child care system. Generous family benefits are also provided, as in the case of France. In *the Dual Breadwinner model*, women are regarded as workers, and her unpaid work as mother at home is compensated at the rate of the labour market (Lewis 1992). Ten years on since her arguments for three male-breadwinner typologies, it is a matter of debate whether her classification for a particular nation is still appropriate at the 21st century, although Japan is still be seen as a case of strong male-breadwinner model.

And, lone parent present a key to find out different welfare regime typology. Lone mother is in a position to fulfil dual duties - work and care - automatically, and it is important to examine how they are treated in a male-breadwinner model. It is suggested that the differences in policies towards lone mothers is related to policy logic and the assumptions and premises of welfare regimes (Lewis 1997), but there could be different policy responses even in the same type of welfare regimes.

##### 4-1 Woman, lone mother and the welfare state

First of all, the difference about expected roles of women and lone mother in the society needs to be examined. It is useful to start lone parent issues with male-breadwinner model. In a traditional nuclear family, women positions

are mothers, not breadwinners. The question is what happens after breaking up this traditional model, and what policy response to these changes is. Are lone mothers seen as mother, therefore, they should stay at home to care their children in return for enough economic support through social security system? Or are they expected to work as a main breadwinner? An analysis of lone parent families has a possibility to discover further diversities within male breadwinner models.

It has been summarised that more and more nations have began to treat lone mothers as workers, rather than mothers. Until the mid last centuries, lone mothers were treated as mothers in the most male-breadwinner regimes such as UK (Lewis 1997). The theory of maternal deprivation was influential in the postwar Britain, which provided a strong justification of fixed women's role as mothers. Having combined with relatively less stigmatised benefits, British lone mothers chose to stay home. The policy changed in the late 1980s when the government tried to contain the public expenditures on them and new ideological basis of Thatcherism, which stressed self-reliance and attacking welfare dependency, put into practice. However, the contradiction and clash of two values within the Conservative government, one for supporting traditional family and gender roles, and the other is stressing self-reliance in market economy, makes whole policy directions rather ambiguous. The policy makers turned to family obligations (i.e. maintenance by absent fathers) rather than stressing women's labour market participation. In contrast, US and Germany provided a work incentive for a lone mother through stigmatised low level of public assistance or better earnings. In the nations of dual breadwinner model, changing marital status is not important as women are always treated as workers (Lewis 1997).

Japanese case is slightly different. Lone mothers have been expected to work as sole breadwinner, rather than stay at home as mother. Despite the strong male breadwinner ideologies and social insurance system based on such assumptions, simply opposite rule has been applied on lone mothers. Public childcare (although these cares were provided on the basis of child welfare, not for working mothers) and extended informal supports were available, unlike Britain. It is also important to remember that the Japanese public assistance is stigmatised and less accessible, which could push lone mothers to the labour market. In additions, working and showing self-reliance was one of the limited ways to reducing social stigmas

attached on divorce and 'a problematic family'. As the number of divorce and lone parent families are increasing, social stigmas of these kinds are fading in recent years, but the assumption of lone mothers as worker has been unchanged.

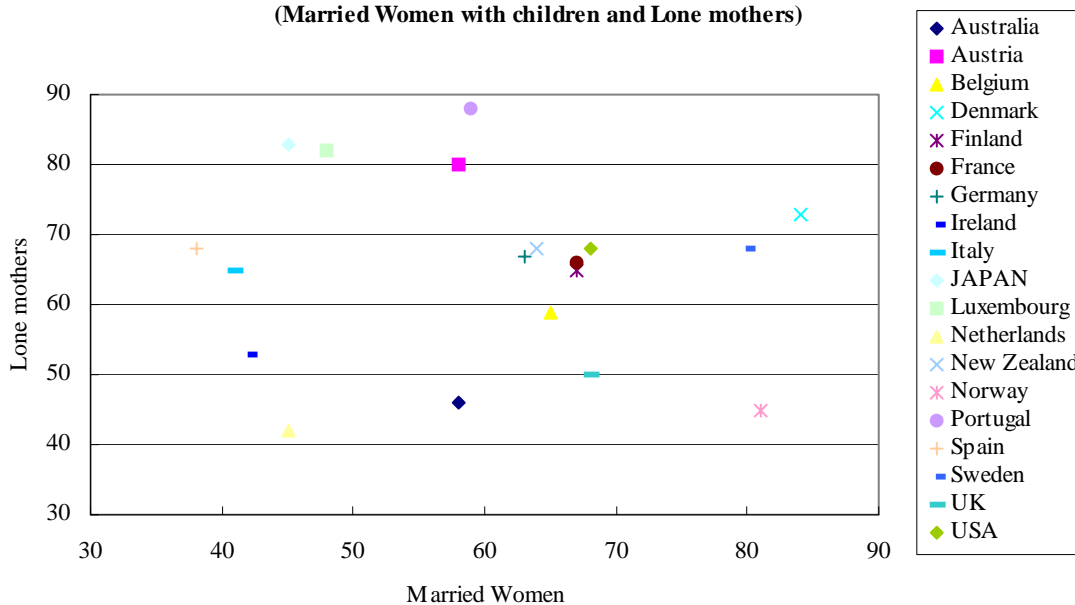
These points above can be appeared in the pattern of women work participation and the contrast between married couple and lone mother families (Fig.6). There have been general trends of increasing women's work participation in the developed nation. And the concept of male breadwinner model cannot be traced in the current employment rate, as Lewis argued in the early 1990s. But employment rate of married women with dependant children is still key indicator of male breadwinner regimes. It appears that Japan can be seen as a male breadwinner model of welfare state. And then, in lone mothers' employment rate, three groups of nation can be observed. In a group of low employment rates, five Anglo-Saxons (English speaking) nations (Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland and UK), and two of Benelux nations (the Netherlands and Belgium) are placed. Japan is in the opposite side of ranking table, along with Portugal, Austria, and Luxemburg. US are in the middle with the Nordic nations, France and Germany. Spain and Italy also belong to this group. It is worth remembering that Japan and Luxembourg are amongst the lowest work participation rate for a couple with dependent children, with Ireland and the Netherlands.

It is possible to argue that here are two types of breadwinner models. One is treating women as mother regardless marital status, and supporting through social security and family supports. The other type emphasises self-reliance of family, in which role as mother is second to that of a breadwinner. Ireland can be seen as the former type, and Japan falls into the latter type. Luxemburg, Portugal, and Austria can be seen as the same as Japan. It seems that the degree of residual aspects of welfare states still has a key to compare welfare states and to explore welfare regimes.

#### **4-2 Work and welfare**

Secondly, the policies on lone parent families are demonstrating the relations of work and welfare in each nation. Lone parent families need to look for supports from three main sources: informal (maintenance and family support), public (social security and welfare services) and self-reliance (work). As family role is weakening in many nations and it belongs to a private sphere and difficult to inter-

**Fig.6 Employment rates  
(Married Women with children and Lone mothers)**



Source: Bradshaw and Finch (2002) A Comparison of Child Benefit Packages in 22 countries, DWP, Research Report 174, Table 2.5 and Bradshaw et al (1996) The employment of lone parents, Table 1.3 for Denmark, Italy, Spain, Sweden

vene, policy makers tend to balance between welfare and work. In recent years, the principles of ‘workfare’ (or ‘welfare to work’) are prevailing in many nations. It aims to solve the poverty through work, rather than providing social security benefit. The New Deal programme in the UK is a typical example.

Cautious understanding is needed when we look at lone mothers work patterns to evaluate the outcome of workfare programmes. There would be distinctions between a social policy factor such as workfare programmes and a social factor such as a natural increase in women work participation. Also, it would take some time to recognise the effects of policy programmes, and current employment rates might not be seen as an indicator of outcomes of the programmes. Furthermore, short term changes in employment rates by (the condition of national economy are inevitable. But still employment rate shows some outcomes in regard to work centred programmes. So, is it possible to use ‘workfare’ to Japanese policy in the same context of UK? Employment rate might suggest so. But there are two reservations. First, it should be remembered that Japanese lone parent families have practically never been in the position to stay home, living on social security benefits. Lone mother’s main obligation is to work as main breadwinner. Higher level of work participation can be explained not only by less expensive public child care but also by limited social benefits as

well as informal family network. It could be still possible for them to stay with mothers’ own parents. The high proportion of work participation rates, supported by these arrangements, cannot be seen as a direct outcome of workfare. The difference from a new type of workfare nation such as UK is that Japan has never been committing welfare through social security system. In other words, Japan does not need for any slogan such as ‘welfare to work’ nor ‘ending welfare as we know’. It is mere traditional practice in the residual model of welfare state.

Also, it is important to look into the principle of workfare. Recent policies of workfare often redefine the concept of poverty, shifting from the simple lack of resources to ‘social exclusion’ - lack of participation to mainstream society. It is believed that the concept of social inclusion - participation to mainstream society through work - is vital to understand current British policy, which should mean more than work enforcement. The change in discourse can provide a rationale to promote ‘workfare’. While Japanese policy has stressed self-help and self-reliance, it has rarely considered the issue of lone mother and employment in the context of social exclusion.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Many different views over the Japanese welfare system have been provided in previous comparative studies.

However, it cannot be denied that Japan is the typical male-breadwinner model - informal welfare is playing vital part - and there is strong residual aspect of welfare - self-help comes first. Lone parent family as an unfit model for the system has struggled to cope with fulfilling two conflicting responsibilities.

The combinations of the low level of divorce, wider informal family support networks and stable economic performances have created a unique aspect of Japanese welfare systems.

There have been several supports available for them. The public child care system has worked to support lone mothers to join labour markets, although this policy is aimed to support children in need, not lone parent families. The Child Rearing Allowance for lone mothers has provided vital economic support for them, although this benefit was introduced to balance between the widowed and the separated - this is a simple reflection of male breadwinner model. And in total, public welfare has never fulfilled all lone parents' needs.

The core principle of the policies is work, rather than benefit. One of the outcomes of this policy is a higher work participation rate among lone mothers. This was partially brought by public child care system and good national economy, not by simple work enforcement or Japanese culture. It might be possible to argue that the policies on lone parent families have not been too dreadful, comparing to other area of family policy in Japan. This study compared supports package for lone parent of various nations, and at least, it can be said that Japanese packages for lone parent family is in average level, if not advanced. But it is very important to understand that these policies on lone parent families are mere outcomes of unintentional policy packages, aiming at different goals, or default setting of residual policies.

The rapid family changes and the crisis of national economy are likely to throw the policy packages for lone parents into turmoil. There will be no strong extended family network as before. Cutting back and targeting of benefit have become inevitable, while a decade long recession is affecting earnings levels and available work in labour market.

Japan appears to be following the workfare policies. Current policy reviews are implemented by using similar logics of workfare, but it is important to draw a line between residual type of work centred programmes and new types of workfare programmes. It is sometimes difficult to find out who is a frontrunner and who is a laggard in 10000m

competitions on 400m track. This is also the case in comparative study of social policy.

## Notes

### 1) Definition of lone parent

The number of households in which a child (age under 20 years and unmarried) is rearing up by either a mother or a father only.

### 2) Public Loan programmes for lone mothers

There are 13 categories of loan, which is provided for promoting independence such as for starting own business, for children's education, job training and obtaining skills. Most loans are provided without interests, paying back periods are 5 to 20 years, depending on the type of loan. In 2000, total 21.7 billion yen are provided as loan, and 77.3 per cent of them are for children's education. Loan for obtaining skills make up only 1.6 per cent (337 million yen), but this type of loan is the most rapidly increasing - 240 per cent up since 1995.

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