

**Development of A Welfare-Education Program
enhancing "Competency" of Children in Poverty**

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1. The Objectives of the Research

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Outline

Recently child poverty has started to draw more public attention in Japan. Although one can easily predict that child poverty leads the reproduction of poverty, we have not observed any progress in a research that prevents child poverty on a practical level, especially in the development of effective social programs.

Therefore, our research aims to explore causes of poverty on a macro level while we will also focus on social work practices that tackle the issue on a micro level.

First, this research will look at social factors of child poverty such as the parents' social status, children's academic achievement, health, social behavior, etc., and articulate the key factors that are effective to unlink the poverty chain. Second, this research aims to develop welfare/educational programs that would facilitate children in poverty to develop skills and self-awareness, so they would be competent enough to unlink the poverty chain.

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In 2006, the OECD's economic report made a shocking impact in Japan. It unveiled the fact that Japan was the second worst among OECD countries in its comparative poverty ranking after the U.S. The report also indicated that 1) the child poverty rate had been rising and reached 14% in 2000, 2) the figure is, in fact, quite

high among OECD countries, and 3) the poverty rates among households with single mothers are extremely high, indeed.

The report was so influential to Japanese researchers that they became more sensitive to the issue of child poverty. Many studies were already conducted on inequality by researchers, but the issue of actual poverty, or issue of child poverty, was not drawing enough attention, because their focus was mainly on inequality,

We all agree that the issue of child poverty should be taken more seriously not only because children cannot be responsible for the issue but also because the poverty is transferred to the next generation through their poor health, lack of motivation, etc. No researches, however, have proved empirically the assumption that children would inherit the lack of motivation and hope for futures from their parent(s).

Given the background described above, **our first objective** is to explore the relationships between variables like parents' social status, learning environment, educational achievement, health status, social behavior, and children's ways of thinking. We plan to conduct a quantitative research to study the correlation between them and figure out effective approaches to unlink the poverty chains.

Recent research findings suggested that issues surrounding children such as poor academic achievements, high dropout rates, and misbehavior are strongly associated with their households' poverty level. This indicates that collaboration between welfare programs and educational programs is very important. Therefore, development of such programs is urgently needed in everyday practice.

To develop a program, we would like to focus on the idea of "competency." This term means the ability, including skills and behavior, in which one can develop in order to overcome difficulties in his/her life, by using social and psychological resources available. The term competency is often used to capture those abilities. The "key competencies" introduced by OECD refers exactly the same types of ability, which is required when one maneuvers the threats in his/her life.

While social safety net such as health, housing, jobs, and public assistance are fundamental to a person to confront poverty, welfare/educational programs, which embrace dignity and autonomy in one's life, are equally important.

Enhancing the point raised above, **our second objective** is to develop welfare/educational programs that would facilitate children in poverty to improve their ability and to acquire skills and self-awareness, so they would be competent enough to unlink the poverty chain. The significance of the research is that we map out and introduce new direction for social policy in the area of child poverty, by bridging the macro-micro spectrum in our research. The originality of our research is that we are not

only focusing on the cause of child poverty, but we are also committing the development of a social program for children to tackle causes of the issue.

In addition to that, this research is also significant because it is carried through international perspectives. We plan to conduct field interviews in the countries where welfare/educational programs have already been implemented; namely Head Start of the United States, Sure Start of the England, and WE Start of South Korea.

In the United States, Head Start was launched in 1965. It is a pre-primary educational program for underserved children. Sure Start, started in 1998, was implemented to the disadvantaged area in order to prevent social exclusion, improve academic performance, and reduce the inequality in health. WE Start was originally launched in a local municipality, and it aims to provide customizable programs among health, welfare and educational services for children in poverty. In addition to those countries, our research will also feature welfare/educational programs in other countries/areas such as Hong Kong and Finland. Through field interviews in those countries/areas, we will seek for “a program model for Japanese version of Head Start”.

The research will be assisted by our international research partners: S. Kammerman from Columbia University (U.S.), J. Bradshaw from York University and Tavistock Institute (England), Y.M. Kim from Chung-Ang University (South Korea), Y. Ngai from City University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong), M. Ishikawa from Embassy of Japan in Helsinki (Finland).

Our domestic researches will be conducted mainly in Osaka, since Osaka is the area where the level of child poverty is seriously concerned, and it is the area where both macro and micro approaches are awfully needed.

2. Research Method and Schedule

We aim to achieve the research based on strong empirical evidence by conducting domestic surveys and by elaborately investigating the latest international trends. To achieve the research goal, we organize two research groups and conduct three kinds of surveys.

Two Groups are :

1. The Macro Research Group which carries out a quantitative survey and seeks to find factors affecting child poverty in Japan, to establish strategy for breaking off a vicious circle of poverty
2. The Micro Research Group which attempts to build a practical welfare-education program to enhance “competency” of children in poverty for

unlinking the poverty chain

Three Kinds of Surveys are shown in Chart 1

Three-Years Research Schedule is as follows :

In the first year (2011), we review previous studies to develop survey questionnaires and carry out pre-survey. And in the second year (2012), we conduct three different surveys in Japan. Domestic surveys will be carried out in Osaka City and its surrounding areas. This is because Osaka City has the high rate of children receiving school expense subsidies or those from social assistance recipients' families. Therefore exploring the mechanism of "child poverty" and taking action based on those findings have been considered as burning issues.

We also do field interviews in several countries/regions (United State, United Kingdom, Finland, Korea and Hong-Kong) for identifying the actual situations/causes of child poverty, public policies and actions by NPO/NGOs tackling child poverty during three years of research.

In the last year (2013), we hold an international forum inviting overseas researchers and also compile policy recommendations, and finally publish the outcome of our research by integrating findings of two research groups along with releasing our welfare-education program.

