Monitoring health equity for foreign nationals in Japan: where is the big data?

Russell Miller

Department of Community and Global Health, The University of Tokyo

Keywords: Health equity, foreign background, statistics, ethno-centrism

Research on health disparities among ethnic and racial minority populations strongly supports the conclusion that these populations are more vulnerable to poor outcomes than majority populations during emergencies. The likelihood of poor downstream health and well-being outcomes for vulnerable minorities like migrants are conceptualized by the social determinants of health (Bhala et al., 2020; Hayward et al., 2021). While governments implemented various measures to combat the recent novel coronavirus pandemic, historically migrant communities have been marginalized in health policy (Andrulis et al., 2007; Orcutt et al., 2020). A 2018 review of pandemic influenza preparedness plans from 21 national governments in Asia found that only 3 (14%) mentioned migrants at all, yet 18 (85%) described border restrictions (Wickramage et al., 2018). Japan was not included in that review but the 2018 National Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases in Japan shows a similar trend in reference to migrants. The plan refers to "citizens" 135 times, "residents" 35 times and "foreigners" only twice (once about providing timely information and once about border restrictions) (Office for Pandemic Influenza and New Infection Diseases Preparedness and Response; Cabinet Secretariat, 2017). Despite being a high-income country and a leader in universal health coverage, it is unclear to what extent, and exactly how, data on health outcomes for migrants are being monitored on a large scale.

In other countries with diverse populations, the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened the basis for secondary data-based research on health equity. For example, large comparative studies from the US (Khanijahani et al., 2020), UK (Mathur et al., 2021) and Canada (Passos-Castilho et al., 2022) found various levels of increased risk of healthcare resource use when health data was disaggregated by either patient ethnicity or 'foreign-born' status. Such kind of comparative data is very rarely presented in Japan and the closest proxy variable to ethnicity or foreign-born status, in Japanese statistics, is 'nationality'. Clearly, nationality is a much rougher measure of 'foreignness' that excludes naturalized

citizens, post-first generation immigrants and the children of some international marriages. Even still, there are few large-scale surveys of the general population in Japan that collect nationality, especially for health-related data.

The limited ability to analyze large-scale data with fit-for-purpose variables of foreign background are a structural impediment to understanding the well-being of this growing population in Japan vis-à-vis the majority Japanese population. In this presentation I will present the limited examples of comparative health outcomes (including COVID-19) published by local governments, the national government and academics. By examining the problems with the paucity of existing research on minority healthy equity in Japan, and the purported reasons for limiting collection, I hope to underline the importance of inclusive statistical design as part of structurally including non-Japanese in society. Rethinking the types of data that can best inform evidence-based policy-making will be key to designing real world solutions for the needs of a diversifying population.

References

Bhala, N., Curry, G., Martineau, A.R., Agyemang, C., Bhopal, R., 2020. Sharpening the global focus on ethnicity and race in the time of COVID-19. Lancet. 10238, 1673-1676. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31102-8.

Hayward, S.E., et al., 2021. Clinical outcomes and risk factors for COVID-19 among migrant populations in high-income countries: a systematic review. J. Migra. Health. 3, 100041. doi:10.1016/j.jmh.2021.100041.

Andrulis, D.P., Siddiqui, N.J., Gantner, J.L., 2007. Preparing racially and ethnically diverse communities for public health emergencies. Health Aff. 26, 1269–1279. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.26.5.1269.

Orcutt, M., et al, 2020. Global call to action for inclusion of migrants and refugees in the COVID-19 response. Lancet 395, 1482–1483. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30971-5.

Wickramage, K., Division, M.H., Law, G.H., Program, H.P., House, C., 2018. Where Are the Migrants in Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plans? Health Hum. Rights 20, 251–258.

Office for Pandemic Influenza and New Infection Diseases Preparedness and Response; Cabinet

Secretariat, 2017. [National Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases]. Available at: cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/ful/keikaku.html, Accessed on 12 December 2020. [In Japanese]

Khanijahani A, Iezadi S, Gholipour K, Azami-Aghdash S, Naghibi D. A systematic review of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in COVID-19. Int J Equity Health. 2021; 20, 248. doi: 10.1186/s12939-021-01582-4.

Passos-Castilho AM, et al. Outcomes of hospitalized COVID-19 in Canada: impact of ethnicity, migration status, and country of birth ethnicity, migration and COVID-19 in-hospital outcomes in Canada. J Travel Med. 2022 13, taac041. doi: 10.1093/jtm/taac041.

Mathur R, et al. Ethnic differences in SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19-related hospitalisation, intensive care unit admission, and death in 17 million adults in England: an observational cohort study using the OpenSAFELY platform. Lancet. 2021 397, 1711-1724. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00634-6.

A Glimpse into Multicultural Blue-Collar Worksites in Japan:

Findings from fieldwork exploring feelings, relationships,

and expectations of Japanese workers toward technical intern trainees

Kathy Okumura

Kobe College

Keywords: technical intern trainees, public sentiment towards migrants, foreign labor

Abstract

1. <u>Background</u>

Japan is moving into a new era of immigration. The Revised Immigration Act of 2019 launched the new Specified Skill Worker (*tokutei gino*) visa status, in effect an extension of the technical intern trainee (*gino jishusei*) status. As a response to intensifying labor shortages driven by Japan's declining population, the Act represents a *de facto* opening of the country to unskilled workers. The foreign workers on these visas come from Asian nations such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia and China, and are employed in mainly blue-collar work in fourteen industries, including construction, manufacturing, food processing and agriculture. The rapid increase in the number of Specified Skill Worker visa holders is striking, rising from 5,000 in April 2020 to 50,000 in December 2021 (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2021).

The length of stay of such foreign workers is also at a turning point. Permanent residency has only been an option for a small section of these foreign workers up until now, but in November 2021 the government announced that it was considering extending the Specified Skill Worker program to allow visa-holders working in all 14 applicable occupational groups to eventually apply for permanent residency ('Japan mulls more areas of skilled foreign workers', 2021). Should this proposal be implemented, foreign workers employed as technical intern trainees and specified skill workers are likely to become a more permanent presence in Japanese blue-collar businesses and local communities. For this reason, their social integration into Japanese society is an urgent issue. However, as the government continues to deny the existence of any immigration policy, public debate on social integration of foreign workers has been limited, making it difficult for scholars to explore the field in any depth. Quantitative methods have long been used to obtain valuable information on general trends in opinion toward foreign residents, including recent extensive quantitative studies on the way foreign residents are viewed by the Japanese public (Kage, Rosenbluth & Tanaka, 2021; Korekawa, 2019; Nagayoshi, 2021; Park, Berry, & Joshanloo, 2022). However, there are very few in-depth qualitative

studies on the rationale and reasoning behind the answers given in large-scale surveys. For this reason, little is known about how migrants are being received in the workplaces and communities where they work and live.

2. Overview of research project

Against this backdrop, this research aims to investigate the feelings and expectations that Japanese workers hold toward their technical intern trainee co-workers, as well as the relationships that are forming between the two groups. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 Japanese workers who work alongside technical intern trainees from Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar and China at four seafood processing companies in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture. Questionnaire surveys were also completed by the Japanese participants on their expectations regarding the acculturation of trainees and other foreign residents in Japan. Interviews were also conducted with around twenty technical intern trainees, to verify findings from the Japanese worker interview data. The research questions in this project are as follows:

1.   What kind of feelings do Japanese workers have toward their technical intern trainee co-workers?

2.   What kind of relationships do Japanese workers have with their technical intern trainee colleagues at work and outside of work?

3.   How do Japanese workers expect foreign residents to adapt to life in Japan?

The overarching aim of this study is to understand whether the Japanese workers surveyed have welcoming or non-welcoming attitudes toward their technical trainee co-workers. Findings to date are presented here, divided into the three areas of 'Feelings', 'Relationships' and 'Expectations'. This exploratory case study of a relatively unexplored demographic has uncovered family-type relations between Japanese and trainee workers in the workplace, a lack of relationship development outside of the workplace, and a common perception of migrant integration as a one-way process tending toward assimilation.

References

Immigration Services Agency of Japan. (2021) '*Tokutei Gino Seido no Unyo Jokyo*' [Operation
        Status of Specified Skill Worker System]. Accessed March 3, 2022.
        https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001359454.pdf

'Japan mulls more areas of skilled foreign workers for no stay limit' (2021, November 19), *Kyodo
        News*. Accessed November 20, 2021.

Kage, R., Rosenbluth, F. M., & Tanaka, S. (2021). Varieties of Public Attitudes toward Immigration:

Evidence from Survey Experiments in Japan. *Political Research Quarterly*, *1*(15).

Korekawa, Y. (2019) *Imin Ukeire to Shakaiteki Togo no Reality* [The Reality of Accepting Migrants.
and their Social Integration]. Keiso Shobo.

Nagayoshi, K. (2021) *Immigrant Integration in Japan: Current Status and Challenges*. Akashi Shoten.

Park, J., Berry, J.W. and Joshanloo, M. (2022) 'Japanese people's attitudes toward acculturation and.
intercultural relations', *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, vol.6, pp.1-15.

Human Security and Foreign Workers Acceptance in Japan
-External Policy and Internal Praxis

Shah Sardar Ahmed

Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University

Since the 1990s, Japan has included 'human security' as one of its pillars of foreign policy and as one of the objectives of its foreign aid. Strengthening Japan's role in the international community as a promoter of peacebuilding and international development, the Japanese government has actively emphasized on the provision of human security abroad. At the same time, the domestic policies regarding the issue of foreign workers, such as that of technical trainees and the 2018 policy change of specified skilled workers, appear to be at odds with the external promotion of human security.

This paper aims to analyze the issue of foreign workers' acceptance in Japan using the human security framework, that of freedom from fear and want and protection of people from threats, and in relation to Japan's policy and active promotion. It aims to explain the dichotomy that exists between the external policy promotion and the lack of application of the same principles when it comes to the acceptance and treatment of foreign workers coming to Japan. The paper begins by a conceptual understanding of the human security framework and the Japanese model of human security, before moving on to explain the acceptance and approach towards foreign workers in the country and its human security issues, and then argues for the expansion and application of the human security framework for migrant workers inside Japan.

The core principle of human security essentially blurs the distinction "between internal and external security", therefore several scholars have argued for the integration of the human security

approach "from those dealing with human rights and humanitarian concerns to those with security and those with development" (Muguruza, 2017), and have stated that human security offers a better approach to address the problems and issues in migration than the state-security model (Vietti and Scribner, 2013). Moreover, the essential logic behind the concept demands "including the excluded' and in "identifying the rights at stake in a particular situation" (Commission on Human Security, 2003).

When it comes to Japan, despite the active promotion of the concept abroad, a criticism has been that it "has become a tool of differentiation: it represents 'what Japan is doing or ought to be doing externally' but the government has neglected how the concept can be applied domestically" (Tana, 2015). In fact, Nik Hynek uses the term of *ie* (home) domopolitics in critiquing Japan's human security approach as the analytical separation between the 'international' and the 'domestic' aspects of Japanese human security, which he says rests upon the relationship between citizenship, state and territory (Hynek, 2012).

Japan has been accepting foreign workers in practice since the 1980s in a number of industries, through various side-door approaches and, since the 2018 policy change, many of the workers are being directly accepted through the main door, owing to the labor shortage. The current issues of foreign workers, especially those considered lower skilled, include labor rights violations and human rights issues of technical interns, different treatment in terms of restrictions on changing employers or bringing families among several others, are indicative of the larger problem of how foreign workers are envisaged and accepted in Japan.

When it comes to human security as a framework, not just the international or citizenship side must be analyzed, but it is also important that the domestic application of the concept is also studied, expanded, and applied. In this regard, the Japanese human security emphasis on 'freedom from want'

is not just applicable but much needed on the domestic governance of migrant workers. The paper, therefore, argues that the human security framework should not just be limited to an 'external' foreign and international aid policy or for the projection of Japan's image as a promoter of international development and peace, but it is also useful to incorporate human security into the 'internal' domestic and labor policy regarding acceptance and treatment of foreign workers, in order to truly realize the aims of the framework as a 'people' centric approach.

References:

Commission on Human Security. 2003. "Human Security Now." New York.

Hynek, Nik. 2012. "The Domopolitics of Japanese Human Security." *Security Dialogue* 43 (2): 119–37.

Muguruza, Cristina Churruca. 2017. "Human Security as a Policy Framework: Critics and Challenges." *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, 15–35.

Tana, Maria Thaemar Camanag. 2015. "Japan's Human Security Policy: New Pressures, New Responses." *East Asian Policy* 7 (4): 88–98.

Vietti, Francesca, and Todd Scribner. 2013. "Human Insecurity: Understanding International Migration from a Human Security Perspective." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 1 (1): 17–31.