



## The social costs of child abuse in Japan



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 10 June 2014

Received in revised form 31 July 2014

Accepted 4 August 2014

Available online 12 August 2014

#### Keywords:

Social costs

Child abuse

Japan

Direct costs

Indirect costs

### ABSTRACT

The present study calculates the social costs of child abuse in Japan. The items calculated included the direct costs of dealing with abuse and the indirect costs related to long-term damage from abuse during the fiscal year 2012 (April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2013). Based on previous studies on the social costs of child abuse and peripheral matters conducted in other countries, the present study created items for the estimable direct costs and indirect costs of child abuse, and calculated the cost of each item. Among indirect costs, future losses owing to child abuse were calculated using extra costs with a discount rate of 3%. The social cost of child abuse in Japan in the fiscal year 2012 was at least ¥1.6 trillion (\$16 billion). The direct costs totaled ¥99 billion (\$1 billion), and the indirect costs totaled ¥1.5 trillion (\$15 billion). This sum of ¥1.6 trillion for only the year 2012 is almost equal to the total amount of damages of ¥1.9 trillion caused by the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami in Fukushima Prefecture. Moreover, abuse is a serious problem that occurs every year and has recurring costs, unlike a natural calamity. However, Japan has no system for calculating the long-term effects of abuse. Therefore, owing to the scarcity of data, the calculations in the present study may underestimate the true costs.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The state of child abuse in Japan

In Japan, the primary agency that deals with child abuse is the child consultation center. As of fiscal year (FY) 2012, there were 207 child consultation centers throughout Japan. The child consultation centers had 9827 employees, 2670 of whom were juvenile welfare officers who deal with children (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013a). In FY 2012 (April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2013), the child consultation centers handled 384,261 cases related to child guidance, 66,807 of which were related to child abuse (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013b). Thus, each juvenile welfare officer handled 143 cases in FY 2012, 25 of which were related to child abuse. These numbers of child abuse cases were the highest since the enactment of the Child Abuse Prevention Law in November 2000 (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013c). In addition, approximately 46,468 children used the Child social welfare services, whose official duty is to provide care for children who require protection owing to abuse and other domestic problems (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013d). These figures demonstrate that child abuse is a major growing problem in Japan.

### 1.2. Summary of the estimated costs of abuse

Because child abuse is considered to have a major effect on society, many countries have been researching the effects of child abuse from an economic perspective, particularly in terms of its so-called “social costs.” In the United States, this social cost has been calculated at \$55 billion (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersema, 1996). Various studies have calculated the total direct costs (losses owing to the abuse itself) and indirect costs (long-term effects of abuse) of child abuse as \$94,076,882,529 (Fromm, 2001), \$103,754,017,492 (Wang & Holton, 2007), and \$80,260,411,087 (Gelles & Perlman, 2012). Yet another study estimated this cost to be \$123,811,794,000, using a discount rate of 3% to reflect the present value (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012). Similar studies on the social costs of child abuse have also been conducted in Canada (Bowlus, McKenna, Day, & Wright, 2003), Australia (Taylor et al., 2008), and Germany (Meier-Gräwe & Wagenknecht, 2011). The rationale behind our study was to lend impact to policies concerning child abuse by quantifying the extent of damage caused by child abuse to the Japanese society, by expressing the costs of child abuse in monetary figures to allow for cross-disciplinary comparisons, or by serving as basic resource for policy decisions.

### 1.3. Study objective

Very few cohort studies, such as those in other countries that investigate the long-term effects of abuse, have been undertaken in Japan; thus, there is an extreme scarcity of basic data on the subject. Neither

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the federal government nor local administrations have databases related to the effects of abuse. Thus, social cost research in Japan lags far behind similar research in other countries; hence, no studies have calculated the social costs of child abuse in Japan. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to calculate the social costs of child abuse in Japan based on the results of the few existing studies related to child abuse.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Selection of items

We used not only social welfare data but also all kinds of data related to child abuse to estimate the prevalence of latent abuse and the effects of abuse on income; these estimates are presented as the social costs of child abuse. Basic statistical data on child abuse before FY 2010 were unreliable because of the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami (March 11, 2011), when most of the data were destroyed. Therefore, approximately 90% of the data used in the present study are from FY 2012, and this study calculates the social costs of child abuse in that year. In calculating these costs, we referred to multidisciplinary studies of social cost calculations from Japan and other countries. After determining which items in Japan were estimable, we calculated the direct and indirect costs of those items.

### 2.2. Direct costs

The items calculated as direct costs were those for which we were able to obtain data: (1) Child social welfare services, (2) administrative costs, (3) private group costs and (4) research expenses. Of these direct costs, the amount related to the child welfare services system was the highest. We were then able to conclude fairly confidently that the next highest costs were medical expenses (Fromm, 2001; Gelles & Perlman, 2012; Wang & Holton, 2007). However, Japan suffers from the fatal flaw of having no database for medical expenses related to the effects of child abuse itself. Neither incidence studies on serious accidents involving children nor child death reviews have been performed or even legislated. Therefore, we were unable to estimate medical expenses as direct costs in the present study.

#### 2.2.1. Child social welfare services system

The child social welfare services system has several types of facilities for receiving children who need them. Children living on welfare services in domestic environments included 4295 children living with foster parents (usually in a private home of a married couple with 1–4 foster children) and 671 children living in family homes (small child-care businesses operated in individual residences with one or more caregivers [usually not a married couple] and 5–6 children). Children living on welfare services in facilities include 29,399 children in foster homes, 3000 children in infant homes, 6028 children in unwed mother support centers, 1286 children in short-term therapeutic facilities for emotionally disturbed children, 1525 children in children's self-reliance support facilities, and 390 children in children's self-reliance aftercare facilities (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013d). No official data exist for the annual costs per child for each of these types of facilities in Japan. Therefore, from among the local governments administering the child welfare services listed above, we used data from 16 local governments that evaluate child welfare service policies. Calculations of per-child costs were based on policy evaluations from FY 2012. The results were as follows: ¥1.38 million (\$13,800) per child with foster parents, ¥3.11 million (\$31,100) per child in family homes, ¥3.61 million (\$36,100) per child in foster homes, ¥8.84 million (\$88,400) per child in infant homes, ¥3.18 million (\$31,800) per child in unwed mother support centers, ¥5.26 million (\$52,600) per child in short-term therapeutic facilities for emotionally disturbed children, ¥5.72 million (\$57,200) per child in children's self-reliance support

facilities, and ¥3.27 million (\$32,700) per child in children's self-reliance aftercare facilities. Next, the percentage of costs related to child abuse and shouldered by the child social welfare services was calculated by using the percentage of children in each type of facility who had suffered abuse. The results were as follows: 31.5% for foster parents, 53.4% for foster homes, 32.3% for infant homes, 41.4% for unwed mother support centers, 71.6% for short-term therapeutic facilities for emotionally disturbed children, and 65.9% for children in children's self-reliance support facilities. No data are available for the costs of child abuse in family homes and children's self-reliance aftercare facilities; therefore, zero percentage was used for these estimations and could have underestimated the actual costs.

#### 2.2.2. Estimation of administrative costs

In the administrative costs, we included child consultation center costs, local government costs, and other administrative expenses.

The data sources for the child consultation center (prefectures and ordinance-designated cities) costs were the 20 municipalities that evaluate relevant policies. Based on the operating expenses (including business expenses and personnel expenses) of these child consultation centers and the number of abuse cases they handled, we calculated that the annual cost per case was ¥90,000 (\$900). This figure was then multiplied by the number of abuse cases nationwide.

In terms of local government, the municipalities that exercise jurisdiction over these child consultation centers also provide support to victims of child abuse. There are 27 such municipalities in Japan. The calculation method used here was identical to that for the cost per case shouldered by child consultation centers. Based on consultation data from the 27 municipalities with policy evaluations available to the public, we calculated the cost per case as ¥11,000 (\$110). This figure was multiplied by the number of child abuse cases over the same fiscal year.

The costs described above are welfare division costs. Administrative costs in other fields amounted to ¥10.12 billion (\$101.2 million), which comprised the following: ¥120 million (\$1.2 million) for police, ¥190 million (\$1.9 million) for legal affairs, and ¥9.81 billion (\$98.1 million) for education (Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2012a).

#### 2.2.3. Private groups and research expenses

For private group expenses, we ascertained the FY 2012 costs paid by the 26 private child abuse prevention groups throughout Japan and calculated the total amount of these costs.

In Japan, every year expenses for research related to child abuse are appropriated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (National Institute of Informatics) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (National Institute of Public Health). The term 'research' covers academic research, research done by public officers, or any work done to check the status of abused children. From these databases, we extracted and totaled the amount allotted to all research related to child abuse. A search for FY 2012 yielded 95 hits. The research expenses per case were ¥1.48 million (\$14,800) per year.

### 2.3. Indirect costs

We needed to use child abuse incidence rates as the basis for our calculation as previous studies have done (Libby et al., 2012), but there are no official data in Japan on the incidence of abuse. Therefore, using the same estimation method as Ae, Nakamura, Tsuboi, Kojo, and Yoshida (2012), the present study estimated percentages of child abuse experience by gender and age group (ages 20–64). These estimated values were multiplied by the respective numbers of children of those genders and age group in the overall population to calculate the numbers of people who had experienced abuse. According to these calculations,

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