Focus

Asia-Pacific

Newsletter of the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS OSAKA)

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Editorial

Ensuring Inclusivity

In situations of crisis, exclusion of some members of society from services and facilities that are meant to protect them and serve their needs occurs. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, youth are eased out of education, employment and other opportunities due to closure of schools and work places, and lockdowns. Similarly, some members of society suffer from inadequately disseminated information as well as prevention measures that fail to consider their linguistic, cultural and social conditions. Unless proper support is provided, the plight of these members of society might worsen.

In non-crisis situations, exclusion occurs because of government and public perception regarding certain physical conditions as disadvantage. Despite lack of scientific basis, color vision condition remains to be seen as a disadvantage that leads to revival of color vision testing in school. Such testing can potentially and unfairly ruin the educational prospects of students with color vision condition.

Ensuring inclusivity for everyone regardless of physical, socio-cultural-linguistic and other conditions and statuses is still difficult to achieve. As a result, safety, economic security and access to needed services of some people suffer. Even though unintended in some cases, this is still discrimination.

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Marginalized Youth*

Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented crisis globally, disrupting the lives of millions of individuals as well as their families, economies and communities. Spanning geographies, the crisis, which was initially considered to be only a health setback, rapidly progressed into an unprecedented social and economic disaster. News editorials, viral retweets, government announcements and Whatsapp forwards soon began to reveal that at the center of this burgeoning situation were those living on the margins, including migrant laborers, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, the homeless, the elderly, and low-income women. In the Philippines, for instance, the number of young individuals reporting mental health setbacks began to surge.[1] The massive loss of livelihoods and incomes, the uncertainty associated with the availability of a vaccine in the market, and the strict lockdown measures enforced as part of the "Enhanced Community Quarantine," increased the number of calls received on the national mental health hotline five times. The archipelagic nation already has among the highest rates of depression in the Southeast Asia region. In Nepal, between 1.6 and 2.0 million jobs had been projected to likely be disrupted amid the pandemic-induced lockdown,[2] either with complete job loss or reduced working hours and wages. In rural parts of India, with only 4 percent of households having access to the internet,[3] dropout rates among school-going children have been on the rise ever since.

Even before the onset of the crisis, the social and economic integration of young people was an ongoing challenge. According to the *Youth and COVID-19 - Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being, Survey Report 2020* published by the International Labour Organization,[4] for instance, of the young people who were either studying or combining study and work before the onset of the crisis, three-quarters experienced school closures, yet not all were able to transition into online and distance learning. Indeed, COVID-19 left one in eight young people without any access to courses, teaching or training; a situation particularly acute among youth in lower-income countries and one that serves to underline the sharp digital divides that exist between regions. The pandemic is also inflicting a heavy toll on young workers, destroying their employment and undermining their career prospects. One in six young people who were employed before the outbreak, stopped working altogether, most notably younger workers aged 18-24, and those in clerical support, services, sales, crafts and related trades.

Meanwhile, in its *COVID 19: A threat to progress against child marriage* report, UNICEF foresaw that over the next decade up to ten million more girls would be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic. The risk of child marriage increases through various pathways, including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services.[5] The health pandemic, further compounded by the extreme disruption of learning, working and marriage, has been particularly hard on young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries.

Research Project

Steered by this extreme destruction and uncertainty on the one hand, and compelling stories of struggle and survival of the youth on the other, this study reports the findings from the Youth-led Action Research (YAR) on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized youth. It was conducted by the Asia South

Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and its member-organizations in nine countries including India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mongolia, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu between May and August 2020. This research was undertaken at the time when the COVID-19 pandemic had rapidly progressed into an economic crisis. The main objective of this participatory action-research study was to capture the immediate effects of the pandemic on the lives of marginalized youth with respect to their employment, education, mental and physical health, and to document their recommendations. By doing so, ASPBAE aims to engage the youth with the local community, through member-organizations, in its advocacy efforts. This can further influence policy and practice-change discourses.

Given the ground-up, field action-research model, a large proportion of the voices documented as part of the study belonged to those youth situated at the fringes, previously unheard and undocumented given the broader socio-economic and digital divides. Previous study has shown us that a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can have protracted and severe consequences for younger populations, who are already starting to be termed the "lockdown generation."[6]

This youth-led study focused on four areas of impacts on young people: namely, education, livelihood, health and well-being. It also brings to focus the various sources of information used by the youth in the nine

different countries to stay informed about the unfolding pandemic and its short-term and long-term implications. At a time when fieldwork had to be either halted or postponed due to the stringent lockdown measures, it was the community-based participatory action research framework of the study that enabled the grassroot youth researchers to unearth an insider's view of the crisis. The study thus provides crucial information on how the pandemic affected the lives of young people in marginalized communities and neighborhoods from ground zero. The research also documented the volunteer work that young people initiated to help their communities in the time of the pandemic.

Research Findings

1. No Schools, No Screens

The shutdown of schools and colleges has affected millions of poor students, and evidence suggests that for countries with low learning outcomes, a large number of school dropouts, and insufficient infrastructure, the impact will be far more negative. In Bangladesh, for instance, students participating in the YAR study stated that the closure of educational institutions coupled with inadequate access to information had led to a rise in stress and trauma. In South Sulawesi in Indonesia, too, students said that the closure of schools had an impact on their social activities. In addition, the youth also gestured towards a crucial problem that had been underestimated while making the switch: the digital divide.

While the digital divide has existed from before, the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden transition of schools to online education has only further exacerbated the problem. Living in remote areas has meant that despite the will to study further, students have not been able to access their classrooms owing to problems of internet connectivity and electricity. This problem of digital divide is fairly universal across the nine countries covered by this study. For the orphaned youth interviewed in Mongolia, for instance, the transition into televised schools has meant a complete halt to their academic pursuits, since the orphanage did not have a television set. According to the 2017-2018 National Sample Survey report on education, only 24 percent of Indian households have an internet connection, and more than 36 percent of schools operate without electricity. Thus, for Pooja Pakhane, a student from Boripada in India, the lack of internet network at home, has meant that she has had to either climb a mountain in her village or scurry around to find corners with limited connectivity.

2. Loss of Labor and Livelihood

Another key impact of the loss of livelihood has been felt by the youth from the larger international migrant-sending countries, including the Philippines, Vanuatu, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka. The sudden closure of their work units and factories in host countries on the one hand, and the sealing of the international border on the other, left these youth workers stranded, unemployed and

vulnerable on international soil. Sri Lankan laborers stranded in Gulf nations sent desperate appeals to the government to ensure their safe return. In India, too, repatriation flights had been launched to bring back Indian citizens employed abroad. At the same time, the loss of livelihoods coupled with increased economic stress has reportedly led to a rise in criminal activities across the various countries. The youth respondents from Vanuatu pointed to the rise of thefts, drug peddling and fights in their country during this period.

3. Soaring Mental and Physical Stress

The restricted physical mobility and the pressing need to stay indoors without any social interactions and experiences, has further intensified other anxieties. Fifteen-year-old Earl Joshua Santos, a Class 9 student in the Philippines, said, "The pandemic has affected me greatly. In terms of physical [condition], I feel weakening of my muscles because our movement has been limited. Mentally, it is stressful." Santos further added, "Though I find it very hard to just stay at home, I try not to get out of the house because I am also worried that I would be infected with the COVID virus outside. The news on the number of positive cases and deaths are very scary."

4. Increase in gender and sexuality-based violence at home

In addition to fear of the virus and uncertain future, some youth also spoke about how the "home" touted as the "safe space" in almost all

conversations centered on the pandemic, was in fact, a place of great distress and trauma. In Nepal, a young female respondent named Rama said that the extent of domestic violence in her house had increased during the lockdown period. Rama said, "I have seen the family dispute for more than two months because of poverty, and my father always drinks alcohol and quarrels with my mother… When my parents quarrel, they often beat me. It was very difficult for me to stay in such a situation." Rama, therefore, decided to get married. The COVID-19 pandemic has thus led to the advent of another sinister pandemic: an alarming increase in all forms of gender-based violence during these unprecedented times, along with an increase in the number of early and child marriages. In addition, Nepal has also witnessed a perceptible spike in the number of suicide cases among the youth. Similar responses of anxiety and despair were cited by youth from sexual minority groups, where family members were at loggerheads on sexual orientation issue. This made it difficult for the members of the sexual minority groups to stay indoors with their families for so long.

5. Battling Fake News

One of the grave challenges of accessing "unofficial" information through social media and other internet websites, was the overwhelming presence of fake news reports, both on the health aspects of the virus and on other social matters. The youth from Sri Lanka are a case in point.

According to some of the respondents, some posts on social media were directly accusing certain ethnic groups of deliberate spread of the virus. These unverified claims and rumor-mongering led to communal disharmony and exchange. The youth from the marginalized groups also were at the receiving end of cyberbullying and harassment online. The fake news stories exchanged on chat messaging applications, in particular, also contributed to the increased stigma surrounding the COVID-19 virus.

Thus, even as the COVID-19 virus initially began as a health concern, it has over time transformed into a serious social, cultural, economic and political issue, affecting the lives of millions of youth, day in and day out. Its implications, although still unraveling, are predicted to be far and wide.

During this research study, the YAR youth groups attempted to understand the different dimensions of the youth in adversity, engage them more effectively to influence policy and practice, and challenge existing discourse. They offered recommendations which can help pave the way forward. Apart from recommending free higher education while ensuring safety of students and educators, youth groups also recommended the government to build policies to bridge the digital divide. In collaboration with civil society and other relevant partners, the government should focus more on creating local job opportunities and provide incentives, loans or funds to

youths who are willing to venture into small scale business. With the increase in indoor violence based on gender and sexuality, youth groups urged government bodies to lay down strict laws and policies and implement them at the earliest. On issues related to fake news and rumors being spread through it, youth groups recommended the government to keep an eye on such platforms and take strict action against them. In a bid to ensure that their research findings also serve as a means to give back to the vulnerable communities, the youth members have been pursuing their action plans.

The Way Forward

Based on the key recommendations offered by YAR youth groups in each of the member-organizations, the following broader themes and ideas have emerged to pave the way forward:

1. Make higher education free and accessible to everyone and safely restart schools, colleges, community learning centers at the earliest, with priority attention to ensuring the health and safety of students and educators, while ensuring that quality second chance education and programs are instituted for those unable to go back to school for a variety of challenges and constraints;

2. Governments should implement and promote policies that bridge the digital divide and move countries closer to achieving their Sustainable Development Goals;

3. In collaboration with civil society and other relevant partners, the government should aim to create more local job opportunities by engaging more youth in skills for work and life programs, including such areas as information and communication technologies, sexual and reproductive health rights, and volunteerism;

4. Government should provide incentives, loans or funds to youths who are willing to venture into small scale business;

5. Government should pay special attention to addressing gender issues and particularly combating gender-based violence and early marriage that has been intensifying during the pandemic and the lockdown;

6. Government should design and build inclusive education infrastructure including community learning centers at the municipal and local levels;

7. Government in collaboration with relevant stakeholders should create safe social spaces for youth to socialize and work together in order to overcome loneliness and anxiety associated with the pandemic;

8. Government should keep a check on media channels and portals disseminating information related to the pandemic and related policies and plans. Strict action should be initiated against those media spreading fake news and rumors.

* This is an edited excerpt of the report entitled "Youth-led Action Research on The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Marginalised Youth – Consolidated Research Study Report 2020" available at www.aspbae.org/userfiles/2021/YAR_Impact_COVID-19_MarginalisedYouth_1.pdf.

The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional network of more than two hundred civil society organizations and individuals operating in around thirty countries of the Asia-Pacific. ASPBAE works towards promoting the right to quality education and transformative and liberating lifelong adult education and learning for all.

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Endnotes

1 See Malindog-Uy, A., "COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health of Filipino," *The ASEAN Post*, 19 July 2020, available at: https://theaseanpost.com/article/covid-19-impact-mental-health-filipinos.

2 COVID-19 labour market impact in Nepal, ILO, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-kathmandu/

Reaching out to Pacific People

Julia Ioane, Teuila Percival, Winnie Laban, Ian Lambie

Pandemics affect everyone in society; however, their impact differs across individuals and groups and is heavily influenced by the social, economic, and political determinants of health. Populations already experiencing health disparities will be the most vulnerable during a pandemic. Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) share a collective worldview where they are either born in and/or have ancestral links to Polynesia[1], Micronesia, or Melanesia in the South Pacific alongside spiritual and religious affiliation. They are also seen to be highly vulnerable and a high needs population with social and economic disparities *prior* to the arrival of COVID-19. We believe that the success of a pandemic outcome should be measured by how well its most disadvantaged groups fare and thereby we focus on the need to include cultural processes and interventions when working with Pacific, indigenous and ethnic minority communities. As practitioners and researchers we know that inequity and disparity remain among these vulnerable yet resilient population groups. We focus on how to address the vulnerabilities that endure.

Impact of COVID-19

As COVID-19 came to Aotearoa NZ, Pacific leaders in the community, agencies and government such as Ministry of Pacific Peoples came together, creating a number of culturally specific initiatives to support Pacific people. Yet, in our experience, these initiatives sometimes struggled to reach the heart of communities, as the "all-of-government" response had difficulty reaching the "all-of-community" Pacific frontline. For example, much of the public-health communication was available online, a format that inadvertently eliminated many Pacific communities. Research shows Pacific people are affected by digital exclusion, with the lowest level of internet access at home, when compared with other non-Pacific ethnicities. Our direct experience with Pacific communities confirms this digital divide. We also found that many of our Pacific clients and communities consequently minimized concerns for their own health, believing that medical help was only for those with COVID-19, or they avoided vital treatment of their health conditions, due to ungrounded fear of COVID-19 infection risk at medical facilities. In addition, Pacific communities were immediately at risk because restrictions of physical contact were in direct conflict with cultural practices and protocols that identify and maintain the survival of many Pacific communities. Social and economic disparities were also present particularly when physical distancing is required yet Pacific families live in large and overcrowded homes. Secondly, abandoning mass gathering was not easy when church remains a major influence and support for Pacific families. Thirdly, the notion of staying home was another requirement though home for many Pacific communities can refer to a number of different households. Central to Pacific people is their responsibility to family members in other physical households with regular care and interaction with them. As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, a one-size-fits-all approach, that tends to be from a digitally connected, western worldview is neither appropriate nor equitable for Pacific communities The following priorities are suggested as a framework to support Pacific communities during a pandemic and beyond. We believe that it can also be shared with indigenous and other collective communities throughout the globe.

Priority One: Utilize Pacific knowledge, practice and protocols

Pacific cultures have their own worldviews and knowledge that have led to their resilience across generations and ensured their survival in previous epidemics. Working within an

overarching framework that incorporates Pacific indigenous knowledge and perspectives will promote and enable community survival. Despite the heterogeneity of Pacific communities, fundamental principles are similar, including our collective worldview, relational identity, and values such as *respect, love, humility and reciprocity*, that have particular meanings and protocols in Pacific versus non-Pacific cultures. For example, one of the principles is to ensure people are safe and supported during crises. Most support, however, is offered online via the internet or telephone, which, as noted, inadvertently excludes Pacific communities. Issues for Pacific dissemination of information are therefore two-fold: firstly, the lack of access to digital information and, secondly, loss of the traditional and valued method of engagement that is face-to-face. However, we believe that this traditional method can still be carried out by essential services who have an opportunity to engage face-to-face - yet safely - with communities during a pandemic. This is what our vulnerable communities need. With appropriate protective equipment to minimize risk, services can actively seek to support the welfare of Pacific families and draw on the principles of *respect* and *reciprocity*: respect by understanding who to engage with in the family, and reciprocity by bringing something to assist in building rapport. Appropriate cultural training is essential to ensure that the interaction is perceived as genuine; there can be an

understandable mistrust of "the system" that has often judged or failed us, and experiences of entrenched racism within healthcare. Pacific families are more likely to engage with services if there is a connection that is based on more than a narrow western definition of relationship; the messenger delivering the health message is key. Pacific providers who have established relationships and accountability to Pacific communities are critical, and partnering with church or faith groups with messaging may help to ensure Pacific families are informed and continue to feel connected.

Priority Two: Prioritize the provision of food, shelter, warmth, care, and planning for natural disasters

The prioritization of basic needs throughout a pandemic and post-recovery is critical in reducing the mobility among vulnerable communities that increases the spread of COVID-19. Socioeconomically disadvantaged Pacific families need food, financial help, and employment or education assistance. The ubiquity of online resources in the learning needs of children and to keep families informed about COVID-19 and external support mean digital exclusion must be addressed. We know Pacific parents who have lost jobs or their hours have been reduced, resulting in their children leaving secondary school or tertiary education for full-time employment to help meet the family's basic needs. It is crucial that a planned and targeted approach to provision of practical help remains and,

more importantly, considerable efforts made to provide employment, housing, and financial support to empower families toward future independent and sustainable outcomes. This must be within a culturally appropriate framework of engagement with a vision for sustainable future outcomes and community self-determination across the entire community. Pacific communities can and should be partners in this sustained response.

Priority Three: Educate to prevent and eliminate virus spread immediately, using all forms of communication

Messages to Pacific communities during COVID-19 and post-recovery should draw on indigenous knowledge and languages. At present, most COVID-19 messages are online, via the Ministry of Health website and social media platforms, or via radio/TV (with a TV broadcast in Pacific languages during lockdown only twice-weekly versus daily English-language briefings). As noted, Pacific communities have the lowest level of internet access at home in Aotearoa NZ. The Ministry of Health worked with church communities to disseminate information of COVID-19. Church leaders united online to *talanoa*[2] and seek ways to support one another in the community. A social media campaign was also launched "We got your back Aotearoa" led by key Pacific members and leaders encouraging and educating our Pacific communities.

Many resources were distributed by an "all of government"

approach to provide targeted support and services to Pacific communities. Health messages were translated appropriately into Pacific languages with videos and daily radio broadcasts on Pacific radio stations drawing on the expertise of Pacific language experts and clinicians. In addition to this, we also suggest the use of spirituality and/or religious beliefs to contextualize the messages, e.g., "Stay safe with Jesus in our bubbles." This style of message portrays staying safe in one's own household bubble, at the same time acknowledging the "bubbles" that the whole community live within, and drawing on a religious context to reinforce the message. Disseminating messages via print should also be considered, to reach all our communities given the digital disparity that exists.

Priority Four: Vaccination and testing for COVID-19

It may seem that vaccination and testing for COVID-19 should be the first priority, but without being grounded in a Pacific worldview (Priority 1), basic needs being addressed (Priority 2), and appropriate information understood about the communal need for vaccination and testing (Priority 3), it is harder to achieve. The history of disease and pandemic among Pacific communities and Western countries is marred with mistrust and betrayal, death and destruction for decades - from the influenza epidemic (1918-1919), that infected Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Nauru, to the lethal measles outbreak in Samoa in 2019, that was attributed to someone travelling

from Aotearoa NZ. Resistance to COVID-19 vaccination and tests, based on historical fears and biases, can only be mediated through appropriate Pacific protocols of engagement and ease of accessibility to services.

Successful solutions for the Pacific communities for vaccinations and testing included a Pacific-led and run COVID-19 CBAC (Community Based Assessment Centre) establishment. This CBAC was also unique in responding to Pacific needs by providing food parcels from its own dedicated food hubs. Stories from the frontline include tremendous community-led efforts with local Pacific social service providers working with the community to increase vaccination and testing rates. Widespread vaccination and testing is strongly recommended with mobile testing clinics able to visit families in their homes to provide vaccinations, testing and information.

Priority Five: Partner with the community to provide robust interventions and gather data to deal with unintended outcomes of family violence, poor mental health and harm, and substance abuse

Given the collective worldview of Pacific communities, it is to be expected that the impact of COVID-19 will undoubtedly affect our overall health, that includes physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing, alongside family foundation and cultural stability. While Pacific communities are known for resilience and connectedness, the risk of family violence and

harm, poor mental health and substance abuse are heightened by the economic and social impacts of COVID-19. The best and safest way to respond to these risks is with the development of robust prevention and education plans. A large portion of at-risk Pacific families will have had their support services revert to online services during lockdowns, making independent monitoring and face-to-face support no longer available. This is particularly alarming where there are family violence and mental health issues. We believe that face-to-face contact, with safety measures, is even more important as COVID-19 consequences build. For example, police, as an essential service, can engage in a community partnership with Pacific service providers and churches, to conduct home visits within a culturally appropriate framework, and provide prevention and early intervention. Furthermore, risk may appear for families who have never needed social and welfare support. This needs to be managed with Pacific-led sensitivity and respect, as well as safety.

Following the development of interventions with the community, it is equally important to formally and independently evaluate such programs to inform social policy and enhance current practice. The evaluation of Pacific programs and their outcomes are crucial for the sustainability and wellbeing of Pacific communities. However, we also believe that data gathering techniques must also be prioritized in an evaluation. The

way in which data are gathered and the ethnic identification of Pacific communities have remained problematic, and prevent clearly tracking health status and the development of subsequent interventions. A robust data-gathering strategy, for example, that uses appropriate cultural protocols (respect, relationship) and articulates the authentic nuances of diverse communities (island-born/NZ-born; Samoan/ Tongan etc.; church-focused/less so, etc.) is needed for thoughtfully targeted approaches. Furthermore, enhanced technology (and access to it) that includes quality, well-translated education for Pacific people is likely to improve quality of care and increase opportunities for empowerment and self-determination.

Priority Six: Implement solutions that are culturally appropriate and long-lasting to ensure Pacific communities are empowered to thrive and flourish in Aotearoa NZ

While there is an "all-of-government approach" to managing COVID-19, Pacific people need an "all-of-community approach" to work alongside families for short-term solutions (e.g., food and accommodation security) and equally important long-term solutions (e.g., employment, physical and psychological health security and spiritual wellbeing). Planning with community leaders, with our most vulnerable Pacific communities in mind, is needed. This includes working within the mindset of families with limited or no access to

digital resources and capability, low or no employment income, diverse Pacific family make-up (e.g., elders and young in one household and/or new migrants), disconnection from cultural and spiritual support or limited community support. Working with these significant risk factors and inequities will allow for more realistic plans of support. This will require representatives within government sectors to work with community and faith-based organizations to visit and contact families directly to determine needs and expected outcomes for current and future wellbeing.

Conclusion

A response to COVID-19 for Pacific and vulnerable communities requires the provision of health-promotion messages that incorporate health inequities and social justice principles by undertaking a holistic approach that is not confined to a western definition of health needs and includes (though not limited to) faith-based and spiritual context. An "all-of-community" approach responds to the recommendation that a best practice plan for COVID-19 and beyond requires transparency in the decision-making process. Community involvement is more likely to provide this transparency and build and sustain Pacific confidence and trust in government. Consonant with the Pacific collective worldview, if support for families can transition to self-sufficiency, this will result in more sustainable outcomes for communities. The successful management and elimination of

a pandemic should be assessed by how well Pacific and vulnerable communities survive during such crises and beyond.

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Color Vision Diversity – Towards Wider Recognition of Color Vision Minority

Hiroaki Oie

The current medical term "achromatopsia" or the former term "color-blindness" is understood by many people as "inferior color vision" or an "inability to distinguish colors." To explain the condition, I use the term, "minority color vision" or the person with the condition, "color vision minority." It is a condition or people with a condition that may make it difficult to distinguish between particular colors, but enables discovery of things that many people may be missing.

Research in color vision or sensation has made tremendous progress in the 21st century revealing that color vision of human species was an aspect of its diversity. Discoveries were made in color visions of species other than humans as well. Color vision diversity is also found in New World monkeys living in Central and South America. Professor Shoji Kawamura of Tokyo University confirmed that monkeys with minority color vision were not inconvenienced by their conditions in fruit foraging. On the contrary, they were adept at finding camouflaged insects and small animals for food, and these special skills in locating food further increased in the dark. This suggested that it was advantageous to have minority color vision in the group.

School Tests and Education

Later, through development of civilization, human beings were able to create colors, classify them, put names on them and use them as a means of communication. People subsequently realized that there were some who found it difficult to distinguish some colors which many other people did with ease. Since around the end of the 19th century when the colors red and green were adopted for railway signals, the condition was considered problematic, as "it was dangerous when someone cannot distinguish the signal colors," and color-blind tests were introduced. In those days, a color-blind person meant "a person with color vision that should be excluded from railway operations." Strict tests were conducted and people with the condition were excluded from railways and shipping.

At the beginning of the Meiji era, Japan introduced the color-blind test along with the railway and testing was started following the western practice. During this period, under the slogan of creating a "rich country, strong army" and with the rise of the eugenics ideology people were placed in a hierarchical order and groups of people were created and

excluded, such as people with Hansen's disease. Color vision minorities, who until then were unnoticed, were labeled "people with inferior color vision," and were deemed unqualified for any job that involved colors. Everyone in the country was required to be tested for color-blindness before choosing their occupation, and the system of testing all children in the former primary school started in 1921. The test not only led to the exclusion of color vision minorities, but also to the reproduction and spread of misperceptions regarding color vision.

The testing system continued after World War II, and the misconceptions were taught in detail in school. In the 1950s, a Japanese junior secondary school textbook on health and physical education used a genetic diagram to explain "how a color-blind boy is born from non-color-blind parents." The female genetic carrier would be explained as being "healthy in appearance," and the textbook admonishes readers to do a background check before marriage on the intended bride. Because people with these conditions may "reduce the efficiency of the occupation and harm social development" when they take up an inappropriate employment, the textbook gives

a list of "unsuitable occupations."

Since the Meiji era, these teachings were taught among teachers, doctors as well as at home, and even today quite a number of people still believe that people with anomalous color vision are those "who perceive red and green as identical colors," "who are ineligible for a driver's license," or "who have a rare abnormality." Since then, people with achromatopsia increasingly faced policies such as exclusion from employment in the public service, ineligibility for various qualifications, refusal of employment in companies and of enrolment in schools. By the end of the 20th century, Japan became an extremely intolerant country for color vision minorities that was unparalleled in the world.

In Europe and North America, minority color vision is considered "an extremely limited difference" and there are no prejudices or perceptions of being "inferior." A famous British expert on color vision explained to a mother who

brought her child out of concern for color vision that the test showed that child had hereditary color vision. The mother said, "So, it is something I inherited from my father. That is why the child has difficulty with some colors. I understand," and she left reassured with no negative perceptions about the difference in color vision. It is very different from Japan.

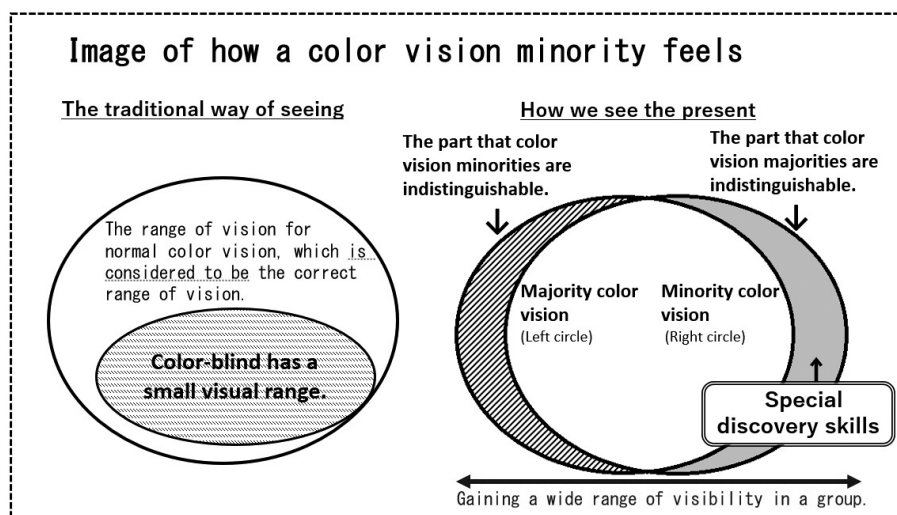**Abolition and Reintroduction of Uniform Testing**

In 2001, the government declared that the majority of those who have been diagnosed with anomalous color vision was not disadvantaged in their work by their condition, and that there were many cases of enterprises unnecessarily restricting their employment. The color vision test was dropped from the required testing items in the health examination before employment, finally putting a curb on the spread of the misperceptions. The uniform testing in schools was abolished in 2003.

However, calls for testing in schools reemerged around

2014. The Ophthalmologists Association argues that tests in schools are "a good opportunity to inform the children about occupations that are currently restricting hiring of color-blind people," and that early guidance should be provided for children with the "abnormality." The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology changed course in that direction, and issued a confusing notice saying that although color vision tests were abolished, the Ministry recommended getting tested. The notice was understood as an order, and since 2016, recommendations for tests spread rapidly nationwide. Children and their parents were tested without any understanding about color vision diversity.

The method used for testing is the well-known Ishihara Test plates. It was a globally acclaimed testing method that could identify anomalous color vision with high accuracy at the time when it was believed that "even people suspected with color-blindness should be excluded." But the method also identifies people with color vision that is not very different from the majority population. The reasons for abolishing the tests are being forgotten, and many people are given career guidance based on the test results alone. As expected, I received reports of many tearful parents and children having been diagnosed as "abnormal" and given guidance.

Fair hiring standards are founded on providing wide access to employment to applicants. Occupational

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Image of how a color vision minority feels

The traditional way of seeing

The range of vision for normal color vision, which is considered to be the correct range of vision.

Color-blind has a small visual range.

How we see the present

The part that color vision minorities are indistinguishable.

The part that color vision majorities are indistinguishable.

Majority color vision
(Left circle)

Minority color vision
(Right circle)

Special discovery skills

Gaining a wide range of visibility in a group.

aptitude assessments should be conducted on the abilities necessary for the work. Aptitude tests for pilots using computer analysis for assessment have been developed overseas. It is said that the results may be completely different from those using test plates.

Also, career guidance is something that should be provided systematically in the course of education in a manner appropriate for the various developmental stages, and it is problematic when it is given focusing on one particular physical characteristic. In particular, primary school children for whom it is too early to choose an occupation should not be diagnosed as being "abnormal" and be given career guidance based on the diagnosis. It will mean denying the possibility of review or improvement of the current employment restrictions and making them accept these restrictions unconditionally. This goes against the ideals of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities enacted in 2016, when the tests were being reintroduced, and would lead to a violation of the freedom to choose an occupation protected by the Constitution.
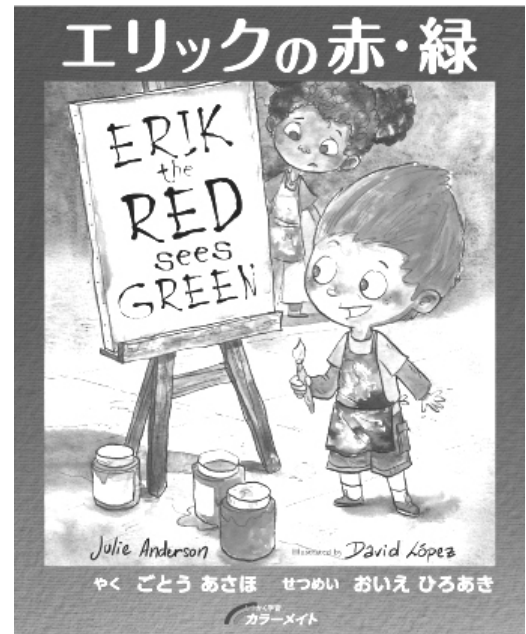
Shikikaku Gakushu (Color Vision Learning) Color Mates

Because of the above situation, there are many angry voices calling for an end to the tests themselves and the test plates. But it is inconceivable that the misperception and social division regarding color vision minorities in this country will disappear just by abolishing the tests. Indeed, it took little more than ten years after they were abolished that the color-blind tests were swiftly reintroduced. There is a deep-rooted perception that these tests are necessary. "Normal color vision" is still required by law for train driving license in Japan and diagnosis is still being done using only the test plates.

The deeply rooted misconception will not vanish when left alone. Teachers and former teachers have come together to create teaching materials for children and parents to learn about differences in color vision and tests before they receive notices for tests from the school and decide whether to take them or not. This group is the Color Mates. Believing that it is the children and their parents that are in most need of accurate knowledge, we published two kinds of comic books at our own expense (はじめて色覚にであう本/*Hajimete Shikikaku ni Deau Hon [First Encounter with Color Vision]* and 検査のまえによむ色覚の本/*Kensa no Mae ni Yomu Shikikaku no Hon [Booklet on Color Vision to be Read before Testing]*).

In July 2021, we translated a children's book published in the United States, *ERIK the RED sees GREEN – A Story about Color Blindness*[1] and published it asエリックの赤・緑/*Erikku no Aka / Midori*.[2] The book is about the protagonist with minority color vision finding solutions to his life together with his classmates. It also has

explanatory comments for parents. We hope you will pick it up and read it.

Hiroaki Oie has color vision condition. He is a former secondary school teacher and the representative of Shikikaku Gakushu Color Mate.

For further information, please visit: Shikikaku Gakushu Color Mate, https://color-mate.net/ (in Japanese language only).

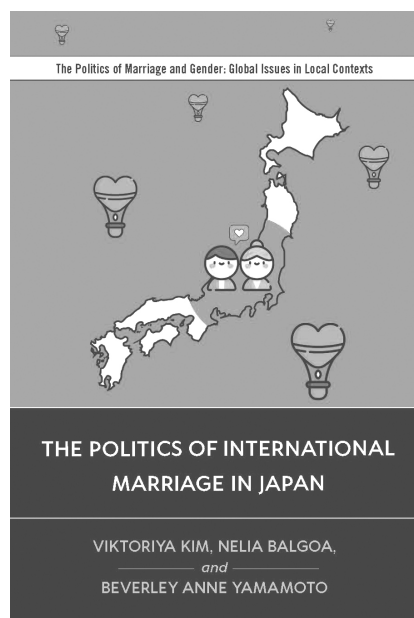### Endnotes
1 Authored by Julie Anderson and David Lopez, Albert Whitman & Company, 2013.
2 Watch video about the book at https://color-mate.net/book.

International Marriage in Japan: Russian-Speaking Women Married to Japanese Men

Viktoriya Kim

In this article I introduce my co-authored book, *The Politics of International Marriage in Japan*, which focuses on unraveling the web of historical, governmental, and cultural influences on international couples. The book discusses life trajectories of marriage migrants in Japan from different regions (former Soviet Union, Asia/ Philippines and the West), and here I focus on Russian-speaking women from former Soviet Union (FSU) countries who married Japanese men.

The Politics of Marriage and Gender: Global Issues in Local Contexts

THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL
MARRIAGE IN JAPAN

VIKTORIYA KIM, NELIA BALGOA,
and
BEVERLEY ANNE YAMAMOTO

International marriages in Japan grew rapidly in the past two decades (Figure 1). One of the large groups of marriage migrants are women from FSU —mainly, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. There are no exact estimates of Russian-speaking females married to Japanese men. However, there were 16,310 nationals (9,318 or 57 percent females) from the abovementioned countries, among these 1,450 were "spouse of Japanese national" and 5,459 "permanent resident" status holders (E-Stat: Portal Site of Official Statistics of Japan 2020b). Since many foreign spouses acquire permanent residence after at least three years of marriage and residence in Japan, and women constitute about sixty percent among these, I estimate that there were approximately 3,500-4,000

(50-60 percent) FSU female marriage migrants in 2019.

Paths to Marriages with Japanese Men

From the 1990s, unions between FSU women and Japanese men grew, driven by the collapse of the USSR, which resulted in the freedom of movement to and from post-Soviet countries. One of several paths where FSU women and Japanese men met was a consequence of the entertainment industry in Japan that attracted large numbers of Slavic FSU women. Alongside this was the spread of marriage introduction agencies and their development into internet dating sites. According to estimates,
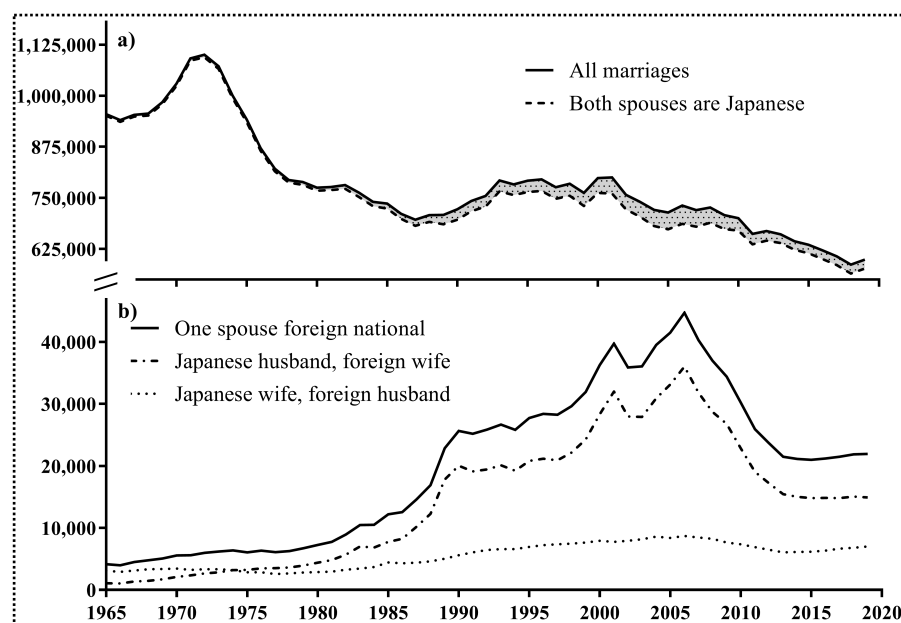
Figure 1. Trends in International Marriages in Japan, created by Kim based on E-Stat: Portal Site of Official Statistics of Japan (2020a)

there were at least three hundred marriage agencies in Russia that operated or had online presence (Ryazantsev and Sivoplyasova 2019). An alternative path originated from the increased presence of Japanese businesses and tourists in FSU countries and increasing interest in Japanese language and culture among Russian-speaking people.

Ryazantsev and Sivoplyasova (2019) point that "Russian wives" became a special sociocultural phenomenon, usually describing Slavic women from post-Soviet countries. "Russian wives" are characterized by their orientation toward husband and children; readiness to give up career for family; ability to manage household, which are attractive traits for foreign grooms. On the other hand, Russian women are attracted to foreign men for their image as being able to support the family financially, leading a healthy lifestyle and not being addicted to alcohol (Ryazantsev and Sivoplyasova 2020).

Spousal Choices

One of the findings is that the place where the relationship was initiated—Japan or overseas—significantly shaped couples' decisions on where to live and how to organize their households. As such, the major reasons for couples that met overseas to settle in Japan were economic and familial responsibilities. Many spouses considered that the husband's earning power and the quality of life would be better in Japan. Most of the FSU wives were either homemakers or worked part-time, while their husbands were the main breadwinners.

Even though there were cases where Japanese men could speak foreign languages and had experience working overseas, in the majority of cases, Japan was chosen as the country of settlement due to the husband's career and the perceived lack of opportunities in women's countries. In contrast, couples that met in Japan were often a result of FSU women's involvement in the Japanese entertainment industry, with many women and their husbands reporting no prior intentions to marry foreign nationals. Women in such marriages were more or less familiar with life in Japan and were willing to settle here.

Love

The book also addresses the question of love and its various representations. The focus here was not on the existence of genuine love, but the romanticized view of love and concerns of authenticity, often imposed by the immigration regime and popular media. Even though there were individual wives in constrained family situations, most still claimed to have romantic feelings toward their spouses. As such, FSU wives voiced the security that Japanese men represented and the trust in their family support, contrasting with men back in their home countries. Others claimed that the abundance of beautiful women in the FSU made it hard to compete for the smaller number of men that would provide them with the family life they imagined. Being chosen from among other women by the future (Japanese) husband was a perfect scenario for them to fall in love. As for

Japanese husbands and their reasons for choosing an FSU wife, one participant pointed out that he was attracted to the idea that his wife was not too traditional, but also not too emancipated, she was "fifty/fifty." Also, some men pointed that they were attracted to Russian culture and literature, while others were attracted to Slavic women's appearance.

Family Affairs

Another point of interest is negotiations over household organization, bilingual/bicultural education of mixed-heritage children and international divorce. The book introduces examples and situations in which international couples negotiate family customs, child rearing, and each other's role in the family. The biggest finding is that though it tended to be a husband's career needs that informed family roles, the family lifestyle tended to be organized based on wives' preferences. As for parents' educational strategies, FSU wives chose the Japanese school system. While it allowed both children and their mothers to gain fluency in the Japanese language, Russian language skills needed constant support by communicating in it inside the home, regular visits to FSU and other strategies. Needless to say, the difficulty of supporting fluency in both languages in many cases led to monolingualism or passive bilingualism. And finally, the book introduces cases of FSU women's international divorce and complications they faced when their marriage collapsed. Hitherto there has been little information on what happens

during and after divorce; therefore, I aimed to fill this gap in the research. Despite (perhaps fortuitously) having a relatively small number of participants whose life courses I could follow, I hope the information on their experiences will contribute to the knowledge of international marriage in Japan.

Future Research

During the time of writing this book, there have been changes in the combination patterns of international spouses: there are fewer female entertainers, but more young people who come to study and work in Japan; there is a visible increase in the non-Asian population, specifically Western men, who come to Japan as English language teachers; there are exponentially more tourists traveling to Japan; there are more ways for women and men to meet across borders through dating apps. All these changes

will modify international marriages in the near future. However, this new diversity within such marriages cannot be addressed without considering the individual, structural, and global politics of international marriage migration.

Viktoriya Kim is a Specially Appointed Associate Professor at the School of Human Sciences, Osaka University. She specializes in international marriage migration, multicultural policies, and integration issues of foreign residents in Japan. Her current projects involve comparative research on Russian-speaking female marriage migrants in South Korea and Japan, foreign residents and multicultural community building in Japan during COVID-19, and integration of third-generation Koreans in Central Asia.

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September 2020, available at www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-54009306.
4 Report available at International Labour Organization, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf.
5 *COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*, UNICEF, March 2021, copy of full report can be downloaded here - https://data.unicef.org/resources/

covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/.
6 Vinícius Pinheiro, The lockdown generation: Disarming the time bomb, ILO, 12 August 2021, www.ilo.org/caribbean/newsroom/WCMS_816641/lang--en/index.htm.

Reaching out to Pacific People

Endnotes

1 While Māori (indigenous to Ao-tearoa NZ) are part of Polynesia,

they are seen independently from the Pacific people when referred to within Aotearoa NZ.
2 This means "to discuss."

HURIGHTS OSAKA Calendar

HURIGHTS OSAKA welcomes contribution of articles on human rights relating to the Asia-Pacific for inclusion in the next issues of this newsletter. Please contact HURIGHTS OSAKA on this matter.

HURIGHTS OSAKA, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following aims: 1) to engender popular understanding in Osaka of the international human rights standards; 2) to support international exchange between Osaka and countries in Asia-Pacific through collection and dissemination of information and materials on human rights; and 3) to promote human rights in Asia-Pacific in cooperation with national and regional institutions and civil society organizations as well as the United Nations. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.
FOCUS Asia-Pacific is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

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