

– Foreword –
The Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

Vice President, Japan Society of Social Welfare,
Hidekazu Hongo (Fukuoka Prefectural University)

I feel that there are many expectations I hold for the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare. As a forward, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of addressing the following challenges from a research perspective.

1. Mutual Help and Social Welfare in Times of Disaster

Japan has experienced major disasters such as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. In Kyushu, where I reside, there have also been significant natural disasters including the Fukuokaken-Seiho-oki Earthquake in 2005, the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake, and the Northern Kyushu heavy rainfall in 2017, all of which caused severe damage. Additionally, in recent years, there has been growing concern and a need for preparedness regarding the potential for a major earthquake along the Nankai Trough.

One of the core values of social welfare is the idea of mutual help among people in society. Based on this, preparedness and responses in the field of disaster welfare are also essential. Therefore, I believe it is important to raise awareness of the significance and necessity of mutual help in daily life (self-help, mutual assistance, public assistance, and their collaboration, particularly voluntary social welfare) and to promote social initiatives from a research perspective to enable people to "help one another" in emergencies.

2. Balancing Human Resource Development and Specialization

I believe there are ongoing challenges in balancing the quantitative recruitment of social welfare personnel with the need to maintain their professional expertise. In Japan, with its declining birthrate and aging population, it is important to secure a sufficient number of social welfare personnel, as this will directly contribute to ensure the security and well-being of social welfare service users. However, some areas of social welfare operate under systems that do not require academic qualifications or professional credentials (such as licenses). As a result, personnel are recruited on this basis, making it necessary to enhance their expertise through practical experience and training after employment. This means that many individuals are

working in the welfare field without having learned the ethical and moral principles necessary to safeguard the specific needs and human rights of welfare service users, or the legal frameworks and methodologies required to provide support for daily living. It is also a task to further promote initiatives through empirical research and related studies to address this tension between securing numbers and maintaining high levels of professionalism, while ensuring that the ethical and human rights central to welfare practice are not compromised.

3. The Notion of Being “Highly Educated” and Improving Treatment for Social Welfare Degree Holders

In Japanese, the term "highly educated" is often used to refer to individuals who have graduated from top-ranked universities. However, from the perspective of academic degrees, including social welfare studies, I believe that individuals who have completed master's or doctoral programs should be considered highly educated.

In recent years, not only Japanese students but also international students from East Asia and other regions have been obtaining degrees in Japan and securing employment either in Japan or their home countries. In this context, I sometimes feel that degrees earned in Japan are more respected in other countries than in Japan itself. Given this situation, I believe it is important for our society to promote greater interest in social welfare studies among Japanese students, foster their research motivation at the graduate level, and strengthen the social support systems available to those enrolling in graduate schools.

In the field of social welfare studies, a significant proportion of Japanese graduate students have practical experience. Furthermore, when considering faculty qualifications required at universities, particularly in social worker training programs, practical experience, seen as in terms of practitioner-teachers, is often emphasized depending on the subject matter (e.g., seminars, internships). Additionally, social welfare studies encompass many research areas that are closely linked to practice. At the same time, it is important to advocate for the development of a society in which individuals with doctoral degrees can fully utilize their expertise, supported by appropriate recognition, distinct from bachelor's degrees, as well as institutional frameworks, system and career opportunities that ensure professional advancement.

4. Additional Points

As additional points, I would like to briefly highlight the following three issues. First, it could vary depending on the field or theme of social welfare research, but an important issue is (1) how to evaluate the social contribution of research papers, how

to return their findings to society (i.e., fostering awareness or offering proposals, based on evidence), and how to make use of them. Especially at the micro level, I believe it is important to promote and accumulate research on constructing welfare support models that are practically useful in specific situations. Second, (2) for researchers who are often required to produce a large number of papers, while it may indeed be important to increase the quantity, promoting understanding of the importance of research quality and summarizing the results of long-term research in a single paper is also a key task. In particular, regarding this quantity-quality balance, I feel that it is a challenge to consider how it should be evaluated not only by academic societies but also researchers' institutions and society at large.

Finally, as a practical issue in conducting research, I believe there are challenges in the research environment for faculty members at universities and other institutions. In recent years, I feel that many educational and research institutions have not been able to allocate sufficient research funds due to financial constraints. In particular, the decline in research activity among researchers who have been unable to secure competitive research funding (such as Grants-in-Aid Scientific Research: KAKENHI) is a matter of concern. Furthermore, with the declining number of university applicants caused by the falling birthrate, there are concerns about a reduction in the number of universities offering bachelor's programs in social welfare. Researchers at these educational institutions are often burdened with student recruitment activities and various internal tasks (such as community engagement activities organized by universities) aimed at securing applicants, which can limit the time and resources available for research.

There are, of course, various challenges surrounding social welfare studies, including the challenges already mentioned above. Nevertheless I believe that the efforts of the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare to maintain and improve social welfare in Japan, both in practice and research, remain crucial and will continue to be highly valued in the future.



Announcement of the 73rd Autumn Conference of the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

Chair of Organizing Committee: Hiroto Kuga (Doshisha University)



One of the pleasures for members attending a national conference is having a meal at the student cafeteria (*gakushoku*) of the host university. Since becoming a member, I have enjoyed dining at the *gakushoku* of universities across the country. The 73rd Autumn Conference of the Japanese Society of the Study of Social Welfare will be held on **Saturday, October 4, and Sunday, October 5** at Doshisha University in Kyoto. The *gakushoku* within the conference venue will be open on both days. We hope you will make this one of the highlights of your conference experience and plan to enjoy it during your stay.

Additionally, Kyoto, where Doshisha University is located, is expected to be very crowded in October, not only due to the peak tourist season but also because the Osaka Expo runs until Monday, October 13, a national holiday. We strongly encourage participants traveling from outside Kyoto to secure accommodation as early as possible.

The theme of this conference is "The Intellectual Foundations of Contemporary Social Welfare Studies: Questioning the Roots of Theory and Practice." Across the world, reports of war continue, while in Japan, issues such as poverty, isolation, exclusion, and division are becoming increasingly severe. It is now more important than ever for us, as members of this society, to bring together our collective knowledge and insights. As social welfare research and practice continue to expand into diverse fields and domains, this conference aims to provide an opportunity to revisit the intellectual foundations of social welfare studies as an academic discipline, reexamine the roots of its theory and practice, and envision the role of social welfare studies and our society in the present era. Under this theme, keynote speeches and symposia will be organized as part of the conference program.

In addition, the conference feature a variety of programs, including a research exchange meeting for early-career researchers, a workshop for international students and comparative research, a society-organized session on action research

methods in social welfare studies, and sessions on specific issues, as well as free research presentations and poster sessions. We are also preparing cloakroom facilities, book sales, accessibility support, and childcare services to assist all conference participants during the conference.

This year, 2025, marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of Doshisha English School, the predecessor of Doshisha University, by Jo Neesima. It is also the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare within the Faculty of Social Sciences, following the reorganization of the Faculty of Letters in 2005. We are deeply honored and delighted to host the national conference of our society in such a significant year. To make this conference both meaningful and memorable for all participants, our staff, comprising faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduate students, will dedicate themselves to its preparation.

We sincerely look forward to your participation.

73rd Autumn Conference "Registration Guidelines"
<https://www.jssw.jp/conf/73/entry.html>

Report on the 73rd Spring Conference of the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare

National Conference Organizing Committee, Spring Conference Coordinator
Michihiko Tokoro (Osaka Metropolitan University)

Conference Theme : Social Welfare Amid of Labor Shortages

Date : Sunday, May 25, 2025, 1:00 PM – 5:40 PM

Venue : Rikkyo University, Ikebukuro Campus, Building 7

The 73rd Spring Conference was held on May 25, 2025, at Rikkyo University, Ikebukuro Campus.

At the beginning of the conference, President Junko Waki delivered the opening address. In her remarks, she provided an update on the corporatization of the Science Council of Japan, which arose from the government's refusal to appoint certain members. She explained that the Japanese Society of the Study of Social Welfare had conducted a signature campaign by its members to request revisions to the bill, and that although the bill was ultimately passed, the accompanied resolution included provisions respecting the independence and autonomy of the Science Council. She also emphasized that, amid similar threats to university autonomy, freedom of speech, and diversity in the United States, it is crucial to reaffirm the foundational principles of social welfare studies.

Following this, lectures were delivered by the two recipients of the 2024 Academic Award. Masahira Ozawa (Sapporo Gakuin University), who received the award for his work titled "Children's 'Experience of Poverty' – Agency and Inequality of Life Chances in Structure," spoke about his journey from high school teacher to researcher and his focus on research emphasizing qualitative methods and agency. He explained the importance of understanding children's own perceptions and experiences of poverty, understanding agency within structural contexts, and key points for addressing poverty issues. He also discussed the significance of conducting complex research on agency.

Mr. Katsunobu Kihara (Doshisha University) discussed the background to his award-winning work, *George Müller and the Origins of Christian Social Welfare: The Idea of "Tenjo" and its Influence on Japan*, tracking it back to his student days. He spoke about Müller's life, including his engagement with Christianity and the

establishment of orphanages, and his ideological characteristics. He also described Müller's visit to Japan during his missionary travels and the influence that a booklet summarizing his lectures had on Gunpei Yamamuro and Jūji Ishii.

The symposium on "Social Welfare in the Face of Manpower Shortages" featured three panelists: Mr. Osamu Nakashima (Bunkyo Gakuin University), Ms. Kazuko Obayashi (Tokyo Seishinkai/University College Dublin Center for Japanese Studies), and Mr. Shinichi Murota (Tokyo Metropolitan University). Mr. Michihiko Tokoro (Osaka Metropolitan University) served as coordinator and commentator.

Mr. Nakashima addressed the shortage of human resources in local communities, focusing particularly on the vacancies among Commissioned Welfare Volunteers (Minsei-iin) and Commissioned Child Welfare Volunteers (jidou-iin). He highlighted regional disparities in filling these positions, noted that financial remuneration is not a viable solution since the volunteers are strongly motivated by a sense of community contribution, and stressed the need to review the recommendation process in light of the declining organization rates of neighborhood associations. He further emphasized the importance of creating arrangements that would allow people to serve as the volunteers while continuing to work as the population ages. In addition, he pointed out the current situation where paid employment agencies are profiting while welfare facilities struggle to secure personnel, emphasizing the critical role of Welfare Manpower Centers.

Ms. Obayashi reported on the current status of the introduction and utilization of technologies such as AI and robots. Using videos, he presented examples of the use of monitoring and communication robots in nursing care settings, discussed the importance of evidence-based practices, and addressed the roles and challenges of humans in utilizing these technologies. He also emphasized the need to reconsider the meaning of care provided by humans.

Mr. Murota examined the issue of manpower shortages from the perspectives of specialization and de-professionalization. He pointed out that signs of de-professionalization similar to those observed in the UK are also emerging in Japan. He noted that the shortage of manpower has highlighted the need to secure and nurture comprehensive welfare personnel, that professionals are increasingly required to respond beyond their own areas of expertise, and that social work is undergoing a transformation toward more efficiency-driven and consumerist practices.

Many questions were raised for the three speakers. Commentators pointed out the importance of examining the nature of connections in changing local communities where resources once taken for granted are disappearing, the speed of technological advancement and the cost of its introduction, the impacts and challenges in the

"consultation" field, and the needs of facing the situation related to manpower shortages in areas such as labor and community development without falling into a bias toward maintaining the status quo.

Finally, Vice President Koichi Kaneko delivered the closing remarks. He mentioned the need for new approaches to address current challenges in social welfare, collaboration with the fields of science and engineering, and the importance of reviewing the history of social welfare studies. Overall, the spring conference proved to be a highly fulfilling program, ranging from the symposium to the lectures by the Academic Award winners. We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants, to everyone who contributed to the success of the conference, and in particular to the staff of Rikkyo University for their dedicated support in preparing and setting up the venue.

This term, the roundtable on the above theme, conducted with five members, will be serialized in five installments. This issue presents the second installment, continuing from the self-introductions into the main discussion.

The members who joined in the roundtable discussion, along with the public relations staff present on the day, are listed below. We sincerely thank the members who kindly agreed to participate despite their busy schedules.

Panelists: Ms. Tokiko Ishikawa (Kanto Gakuin University), Mr. Atsushi Kuchimura (Okayama Prefectural University), Mr. Mikio Hishinuma (Japan College of Social Work), Ms. Kiyoko Miwa (Meiji Gakuin University), Mr. Yuichi Watanabe Yuichi (Musashino University)

Moderators/Public Relations Committee: Ms. Rie Iwanaga (Japan Women's University), Mr. Taishi Arimura (Japan College of Social Work), Ms. Saeah Lim (Rikkyo University), Ms. Tomoko Osawa (Jissen Women's University), and Mr. Hironobu Katayama (Health Sciences University of Hokkaido)

Session 2: From Self-Introductions to Discussion

Watanabe: My name is Yuichi Watanabe from Musashino University. This is my 14th year at Musashino University. My own specialization is social welfare for the elderly and social work, and I wrote my doctoral thesis on the empowerment of local residents. Currently, through a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI), I am conducting implementation research on whether Community Organizing practices can be realized in super-aging communities. However, I am facing the challenges inherent in implementation research.

In relation to today's theme, I have been involved in the activities and surveys of the Japanese Association for Social Work Education (So-Kyo-Ren), and I would like to introduce some of their work. One of the initiatives included in So-Kyo-Ren's FY2023 plan is the development of Educational Policy. Currently, training

institutions are structuring their curricula in line with the syllabi and curriculum issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, ensuring that students can complete the designated subjects required to qualify for the Certified Social Worker (Shakai Fukushi-shi) examination. This accounts for approximately one-third to one-half of the overall university curriculum. At Musashino University, it is roughly half and when general education subjects are included, it accounts for about one-third. Within this framework, we are working to establish Educational Policy that clearly outlines what students should look like upon graduation, i.e. what knowledge and skills they should have acquired and what constitutes a professional social worker. In the American context, this corresponds to competencies, while in the UK, it is referred to as the Professional Capability Framework (PCF). A project team has been launched to develop a Japanese version of the Educational Policy and the competencies it encompasses.

Through these activities, I have been reflecting on the curriculum revisions that were mentioned earlier as having a significant impact. However, personally, I have not felt that the curriculum changes were so substantial. The shift to conducting internships at two locations may have had some influence, but at Musashino University, the timing and methods of internships have not changed significantly. Previously, third-year students completed 180 hours at one site between August and the end of October, and now, they complete 240 hours across two locations. Although the number of lecture hours has decreased, I feel that opportunities for learning within the university have increased. In fact, it has become easier to provide education aligned with the diploma policy. The total internship hours remain 240, and I even feel that they could be expanded further, so the overall impact has not been so significant. By contrast, at other universities, the changes appear to have been much more drastic. This makes me wonder whether such major adjustments were truly necessary. While it is certainly challenging to spare more time and attend two placements, I think it is possible that the impact on future qualification programs may be intertwined with broader demographic trends, such as population decline and the decrease in the number of 18-year-olds. For example, the new curriculum has increased the common components between Certified Mental Health Social Workers and Certified Social Workers. It is unclear whether decisions to discontinue one program or the other are directly attributable to the curriculum revision. More likely, they are also connected to declining population and fewer applicants in total, and therefore fewer students are choosing to study social welfare at the undergraduate level. This may result in adjustments in faculty numbers and in some cases, the discontinuation of qualification programs. These issues are related to the workplace environment and conditions that Professor Ishikawa mentioned earlier. I think it is essential to expand the

discussion on how to increase the number of people who want to pursue this career path, not only among university students but also at the national level, which is indeed a very significant, although it is a complex and far-reaching discussion.

Iwanaga: Thank you. I see. Your remarks are very interesting, and I look forward to the discussion ahead. Before we begin, I would like to invite the members of the Public Relations Committee to share a few words.

Arimura: I think my area overlaps somewhat with Professor Miwa's. My work has mainly focused on child and family welfare, statistics, and survey methods. I will refrain from going into detail about my specific research topic. Currently, I am primarily engaged in policy research related to children. Thank you.

Nin: I am Saeah Lim from Rikkyo University. My research focuses on the development of care personnel in the field of social welfare for the elderly. I take the view that as professional associations gain greater influence, the social status and recognition of that profession also increase. Therefore, from the perspective of someone engaged in research on human resource development, I regard the decision of the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare to organize this roundtable as a valuable opportunity to further enhance the status and recognition of social workers. I am sure there will be a variety of opinions among the faculty members, and look forward to learning from everyone today.

Osawa: I am Osawa from Jissen Women's University. I am currently engaged in childcare worker/nursery teacher training rather than social worker training, so I have become somewhat detached from the new social worker curriculum. However, I do have one or two social worker practical training sessions at my part-time posts. This year, I have been working with fourth-year students who have just completed their internships under the new curriculum, and I find it quite interesting that they now visit two different places. I am learning together with the students through their experiences. I am very much looking forward to today's session.

Katayama: I am Katayama from Health Sciences University of Hokkaido. I also have experience working at a children's home, and since then, I have been struggling with how best to present social work to interns and what kinds of experiences would be beneficial for them. Now, as someone involved in trainings, I work with facility staff, proposing ideas such as, "Perhaps this kind of experience would be beneficial," and considering them collaboratively. With the new curriculum requiring internships at two locations, I find myself grappling with questions such as: What specific knowledge should be taught to students going to specialized facilities? How far should such knowledge go? Or should we rather focus on a generalist perspective? I am looking forward to hearing everyone's insights today and learning from you all.

Iwanaga: Thank you. After hearing everyone's self-introductions, I thought it might

be useful to divide our discussion into a few categories. I am still in the process of organizing my thoughts, so if, based on the introductions, there are any topics you think we could discuss, or any comments you would like to make on what others have shared , please feel free to share them.

Arimura: After listening to everyone's comments, I thought it might be good to discuss any changes made to the curriculum, especially regarding practical training. Additionally, I think it would be important to dedicate some time in the latter half of the programme to the role of our academic conferences. It might turn into a free-flowing discussion, however I feel that the opinions from each of you could add significant value.

Iwanaga: Thank you, that is very helpful. As Mr. Watanabe mentioned earlier, the new curriculum has had a positive impact at his university. However, at my university, we are facing significant challenges, including the fact that we had to abandon (or give up establishing) the program for Certified Mental Health and Welfare Workers. I think this is likely related to the position of social welfare departments within each university. As Professor Watanabe mentioned earlier, social welfare studies has become less popular and some universities are even closing down such programs, which was recently reported as rather shocking news. I would like to start by hearing about the discussions regarding the new curriculum at your respective universities and your experiences in that regard.

Announcement from the Research Support Committee

Research Support Committee Members:
Minho Kang (Kansai University) / Yukiko Noguchi (Musashino University)



The Research Support Committee primarily aims to support early-career researchers by organizing events such as the Early-Career Researchers' Exchange Meeting at conferences, and the Salon and the Relay Essays as part of the CS-NET program. We would like to introduce these initiatives here. We hope you will take the time to read about them, consider participating, and share your thoughts for future improvements.

The Early Career Researchers' Research Exchange Meeting is an initiative designed to provide research support and foster exchange among early-career researchers. The first session will be held on the first day of the Japanese Society for the Study of Social Welfare Autumn Conference. The program will consist of poster presentations and discussions on "research and practice proposals" by early-career researchers. Unlike previous startup symposia, this event aims to provide a space for both research and networking. Eligible participants include those currently enrolled in master's or doctoral programs, as well as those who have completed graduate studies within the past five years and are engaged in research activities.

Early-career researchers, why not summarize your research or practice ideas floating in your mind in a poster? There is no need for the same level of completion as an oral presentation. Gather around your poster, exchange opinions with participants from a wide range of career backgrounds, receive advice, and further refine your ideas to develop them into research. Please take advantage of this opportunity both to advance your research and to network with fellow researchers.

The Research Support Committee CS-NET Salon provides an informal space for early-career researchers to connect and exchange ideas. It has been approximately three years since the first salon was held in 2022. The sixth salon, "Considering Ways for Social Welfare Researchers to Create Social Impact," will be held in a hybrid format (in-person venue: Kansai University Umeda Campus) on September 14, 2025. The event is scheduled to take place from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM, followed by a reception.

What do you think are the missions of researchers? Many may envision uncovering the truth behind social issues that need to be addressed and presenting the "new

insights" gained through research in the form of academic papers. That is certainly one example. This time, we will focus on the concept of "social impact." Simply put, it refers to the idea of contributing to society by influencing it and making it better. As researchers in social welfare studies, some of you may be interested in engaging in social action or establishing a nonprofit organization (NPO) as a base for social contribution. However, even when you recognize the necessity of such actions, you may feel frustrated because you are not sure how to go about it.

In this session, we will invite researchers who are actually engaged in social impact initiatives to share not only theoretical insights but also the practical challenges they face and the strategies they employ to address them. This will be followed by a discussion where participants can collectively explore ways in which social welfare researchers can create social impact. Once the event flyer is ready, we will provide further details. so Please consider joining us.

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