

15th European Research Conference on Homelessness 2021
Seminar 13: Impact of Take-Up of Benefits and Services on Homelessness



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Why Homelessness Has Decreased in Japan: Comparison of Public Assistance in Japan and the U.S.

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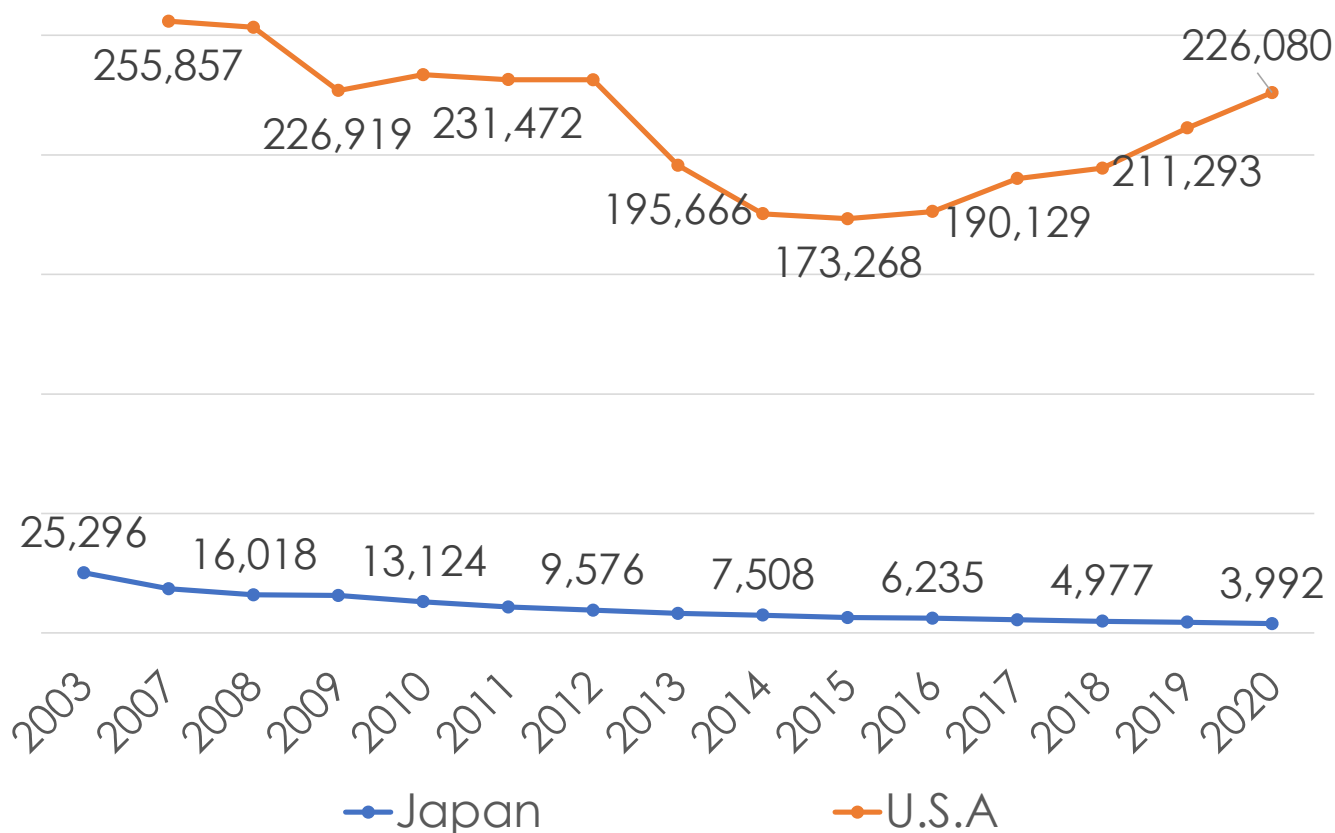
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Background and Purpose of This Study 1



- The number of homeless people on the streets in Japan has been consistently decreasing from 2003. As of January 2020, there were 3,992 homeless people.
- On the other hand, in the U.S., there are around 226,000 unsheltered homeless. This number has been consistently increasing since 2015. (Figure 1)

Figure1 : Comparison of the number of street-level homeless people: Japan and the United States



Source: HUD(2021)/kousei rōdō sho(2013-2020) 2

Background and Purpose of This Study 2



- There are various factors behind the increase and decrease in both countries in the number of homeless people. This study will **focus on** one of these factors, **the public assistance system**.
- It is said that the main public assistance system in Japan, **“Seikatsu-Hogo”**, is **behind the decline in the number of homeless people** in Japan (Yamada 2009), but **which characteristics** of the public assistance (seikatsu-hogo) have contributed to the decline in the number of homeless people has not been examined in detail.

Background and Purpose of This Study 3



- The purpose of this study is to discuss what features of Japan's public assistance have contributed to the decline in homelessness on the street, comparing it to the public assistance system in the United States.
- Clarifying how Japan, as a successful case, has been able to reduce homelessness could provide certain suggestions for the U.S. and other countries homelessness measures.

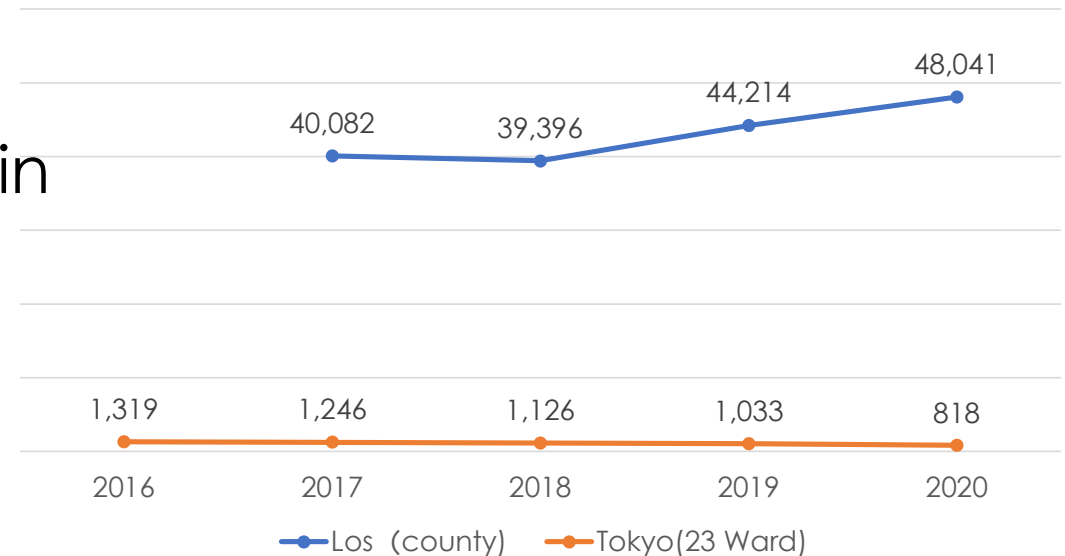
Overview of Homelessness in Los Angeles and Tokyo 1



- In this presentation, the comparison will be made between **Los Angeles**, which is called the "capital of homelessness in the US" (Marr 2015), and **Tokyo (23 wards)**, which has the largest number of homeless people in Japan.

Figure 2 : The number of Unsheltered Homelessness (2016-2020) : Comparing Los Angeles County & The 23 wards of Tokyo

- Figure 2 shows the **trends in the number of unsheltered people** in LA (County) and the Tokyo.



Overview of Homelessness in Los Angeles and Tokyo 2



- Figure 3 shows the **demographics of unsheltered homelessness in L.A and Tokyo** in 2020 (data after age in Tokyo is from 2016).

Figure 3 : Demographics of Unsheltered Homelessness (2020), Comparing Los Angeles **County & The 23 wards of Tokyo**

Gender		
Male	72.3	96.5
Female	26.0	3.5
Gender Non-Binary	1.4	N/A
Transgender	0.3	N/A
Age (From the following Tokyo's data n=367 (2016))		
Under 18	3.6	N/A
18-24	5.2	N/A
25 and over	91.3	N/A
Under 40	N/A	1.4
40-49	N/A	10.4
50-59	N/A	28.7
60-69	N/A	41.3
70 and over	N/A	18.0

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS		
Chronically Homeless who are individuals	47.5	87.3
HEALTH & DISABILITY		
Substance Use Disorder	31.0	N/A
HIV/AIDS	1.9	N/A
Serious Mental Illness	25.3	N/A

Figure 4 Age of Unsheltered Homelessness (2020) Los Angeles **City (n=28,852)**

Under 18	2.9
18-24	5.6
25-54	63.6
55-61	16.8
62 and over	10.9

An Overview of the U.S. Public Assistance System: Why Focus on SSI? 1



- In the U.S., there are **various cash benefits** programs available to the poor and homeless people. (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (**TANF**), Supplemental Security Income(**SSI/SSDI**), and General Relief(**GR**))
- It is reported that about **37% of people experiencing homelessness have serious physical or mental health problems** (HUD 2010)
- Among LA's homeless, including those on the streets, the number of people over the age of 65 is expected to **increase 2.5 times** between 2017 and 2030 (Culhane et al. 2019)
- Among the cash benefits mentioned above, those eligible for SSI are the **elderly aged 65 and above, and those with disabilities**
- In that sense, it can be said that **SSI is one of the most important programs to help unsheltered homeless people get off the streets** in the U.S.

An Overview of the U.S. Public Assistance System: Why Focus on SSI? 2



- In addition, SSI is administered under the responsibility of the federal government. It has been pointed out that this system is similar to that of Japan's public assistance (seikatsu-hogo). (Noda 2007)
- Therefore, this study compares SSI and Japanese public assistance, through examination how Japanese public assistance characteristics are effective in reducing homelessness in Japan.

Comparison of SSI (LA) and Public Assistance (Japan) 1



• Eligibility requirements

	SSI	Public Assistance(JAPAN) (Seikatsu-hogo)
Attribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be either a U.S. citizen or national, or a qualified alien. • Reside in one of the 50 States, the District of Columbia or the Northern Mariana Islands. • Not be absent from the U.S. for a full calendar month or 30 or more consecutive days. • Age 65 or older / Blind; or Disabled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In poverty - below a particular income level • (provided based on a requirement that a person who is living in poverty shall utilize his/her assets, abilities and every other thing available to him/her for maintaining a minimum standard of living.)
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited income. • Has limited resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited income. • Has limited resources.
Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the disability is based on alcoholism or drug addiction alone. • Any month in which you're in prison or jail, have an outstanding warrant for a violation of a parole or probation order, or are a fleeing felon. • after you are outside the country for more than 30 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nondiscrimination and equality

Comparison of SSI (LA) and Public Assistance (Japan) 2



• Benefit level and relationship with other systems

	SSI	Public Assistance(JAPAN) (Seikatsu-hogo)
Benefit level (L.A and Tokyo) (Compared to relative poverty rate level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$ 954 Disabled person 18 or over • 107% ➤Relative poverty level in the U.S. in 2020 = less than \$12,760 per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$ 727 (single individual) • 75.7% ➤Japan's relative poverty level in Japan in 2018 = less than \$11,513 per year
Provision for Other Needs (Housing, medical and ...) (By other systems or include?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSI recipients automatically qualify for Medicaid. (Medicaid eligibility varies by state) • More than 60% of SSI recipients receive SNAP (food stamps) and about a quarter receive housing assistance. 	<p>If necessary, provided below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing assistance (upper limit: \$ 487 in Tokyo/single household) • Medical assistance • Other assistances
	<p>Therefore) In some cases, people are receiving SSI while living on the streets.</p>	<p>Housing is automatically provided. (If street-level homeless get public assistance)</p>

Comparison of SSI (LA) and Public Assistance (Japan) 3



• Time for certification

	SSI	Public Assistance(JAPAN) (Seikatsu-hogo)
Time For certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average 166 days (average for 2016-2021) (Complicated application process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Within 14 days in principle (Simple application process)

Discussion : Three characteristics of welfare in the context of declining street-level homelessness



- Based on the above comparison, from the perspective of contributing to the reduction of street-level homelessness, the characteristics of Japanese public assistance can be summarized in three key words:

①

Generality

②

**Comprehensive
ness**

③

Expeditiousness

① Generality



- The Japanese public assistance is designed so that **anyone in need can receive it**.
- As we saw in Figure 3, the homeless are a diverse group of people, and if the system is designed according to categories, as is the case with public assistance in the U.S., some people will be left behind because **they need to match these requirements** in order to be able to use their systems.
- Therefore, from the perspective of contributing to the reduction of street-level homelessness, it would be **preferable to design the system without limiting the categories** (general assistance principle) as in Japan.

② Comprehensiveness



- Unlike the U.S., where various welfare systems are built separately, Japanese welfare is a combination of cash benefits from livelihood assistance and other assistances if necessary.
- Therefore, if a street-level homeless person receives public assistance, **housing assistance is automatically provided**, that is extremely significant, considering in the context of reducing homelessness.

③ Expeditionousness



- For Japan's welfare, time from application to adjudication is **extremely short** compared to SSI in the US.
- **Application process is very simple**. You basically only need to fill out (1) an application form, (2) a declaration of income, and (3) a declaration of assets, and if you are homeless, (2) and (3) are almost unnecessary documents.
- These reduces the possibility of prolonged homelessness, deterioration of physical and mental health, and involvement in crime, as long as the application is made.

Which Characteristics are Most Important?



- The three features of Japan's welfare system that I have described above were **built into the system from the time it was established in 1950.**
- In spite of this, street-level homelessness rose dramatically in Japan during the 1990s. This is because ① **the "Generality" of the system has not been properly applied in operation**, effectively excluding the working-age population from welfare.
- From the perspective of contributing to the reduction of homelessness at the street level, **it is important to note that ① "generality" has changed significantly** at the operational level due to the Lehman Shock in 2008
- From this perspective, of the three characteristics mentioned above, ① **"generality" seems to be the characteristic that has contributed the most to the reduction** of street-level homelessness.

Remaining Issues



Stigma

- There is a **strong stigma** against receiving public assistance due to the **strong sense of self-reliance** (goto 2010) and when people apply for public assistance, **their third-degree relatives are contacted** to inquire about their support.
- As a result, the take-up rate of welfare in Japan is reported to be around **15-20%**.

Appropriate Housing ?

- Some of the shelters used by people experiencing homelessness are **inadequate** in terms of the living environment and the support provided.
- These shelters are called "**poverty businesses**", and some people even leave the shelters.

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