

Thank you for joining us today. My name is Noriko Seyama. I am a deputy representative of Hamu-Net, the National Women's Network on Non-regular Government Employees. Our group was launched last year and is mainly run by women who currently work or used to work as Non-regular Government Employees.

Sitting next to me is Yuriko Watanabe. she is a representative of our group. She had been a librarian in Tokyo for over 40 years.

I worked at a prefectural gender equality center in the Kanto region for 11 years until March 2020 as a program coordinator and as a non-regular local government employee. Now I am an associate professor at Saitama-Univ and teach gender studies, but with fixed-term employment.

There are more than 300 "Gender equality centers" established by local governments all over Japan. The mission of those centers is to promote gender equality in each local area. The center provides consultation, training, research, and collect information for that purpose.

As most of you may know, gender discrimination is one of the major issues in Japan. Gender equality centers, in fact, could play an important role. However, most people who work there are non-regular government employees and are not treated equally. That, in itself, is the core of the problem. And workers at those centers feel a serious dilemma. Their employment is unstable, with just a year's contract. They have no decision-making authority just like many other low-paying female workers in this country. More than half of female workers in this country are non-regular workers.

In Japan, non-regular employment is an unstable position that can easily be "terminated", non-renewal of a fix-term contract, unlike the situation in the United States where fixed-term employment is repeatedly renewed.

Similar situations happen in many other places in the public sector, like employment security offices, child consultation centers, spousal violence counseling, support centers, and so on. A counselor who works at an employment security office told me that she always feels anxious because she only has a year contract. So, she might come to an employment security office next year to look for a job.

The number of non-regular public employees continues to rise in Japan since around 2000. As a result, the government amended the Local Public Service Act in 2017 to clarify the legal status of non-regular civil servants of the local government, and the law came into force in April 2020.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, there are about 2.7 million regular employees and 1.2 million non-regular employees in the local governments. One in four local government employees is a non-regular employee. And nearly 80% of non-regular employees in local governments are women.

We, the National Women's Network on Non-regular Government Employees conducted a survey between May 2nd and June 4th this year and tried to reveal the problem we faced.

Now I would like to introduce the outline of the survey.

Sorry, we only have the leaflet in Japanese. If it's possible please refer to this leaflet.

We used Google Forms for our survey. This survey targeted those who are currently working as non-regular government employees and those who have worked recently.

The survey received 715 responses, of which 705 were valid. And actually, we conducted the same internet survey last year. And 80% of the answers this year are new respondents.

The top three concerns the respondents expressed are Job insecurity, low wages, and wide disparities.

More than 90% of respondents are women. The age group was mostly in the 50s and the 40s.

90% of the answers are from people currently working. There are non-regular local government employees nationwide. The workers in all 47 prefectures responded to this survey.

To see the respondent attributes, we noticed that there are non-regular workers in almost every area of public services.

They are general office workers in local government offices, Librarian, School counselors, School Social workers, School Librarian, Child Care-workers, After-school Child Care-workers, social education instructors, Gender Equality Center staff, Women's counselors or consultants, Employment Security Office staff, and School Teacher, Curator, Medical Staff, Counselor & others.

Their jobs often need special knowledge and skills. And they are the key workers in the workplace.

90% were employed by the local governments. The remaining 10% are the national government and private companies. Recently, due to the privatization of the public sector, many places such as public libraries are run by private companies.

And 90% of workers have an employment contract period of less than one year. The new system, which began in 2020, named these workers, "Fiscal Year Staff," and only guarantees single-year employment.

And more than half of the employees work 30 hours or more per week.

There is a possibility of renewal of employment, but there is no guarantee. Because it is positioned as single-year employment. Also, every 3 or 5 years there is public recruitment. So, if they do not apply, they will lose their job. Of course, there is no guarantee that they get re-hired even if they apply for the position.

This year is the first "3 years" after the law came into force. So, more than 400,000 non-regular local government employees nationwide are expected to face termination. If they want to continue to work then they have to apply to the recruitment.

Because this leaves workers very vulnerable. They will lose their jobs if the contract is not renewed. In addition, it induces harassment, because they feel that it's difficult to speak out even if they are faced with a problem at work.

We also asked about annual employment income.

50% of workers earn 2 million yen annually. And 26% earn 2 to 2.5 million yen annually, which means almost 80% earn 2.5 million yen annually.

Even if they work full-time, 60% have an annual income of less than 2.5 million yen. What is even more serious is that about 40% of the workers who answered that they are the breadwinners, earned 2 million yen annually.

The latest median annual income of Japanese people is about 4.4 million yen. So, 2 million yen is less than half of the median income. Well, 2 million yen is about \$ 15,000 in US dollars.

And main breadwinner or not, more than 40% of respondents said that without their income it would be very difficult for them to live.

Looking at the years of service, 30% are 10 years or more. However, 50% of employees have been working at their current workplace for 1 to 3 years, which tends to be shorter.

And we found that almost 30% are in poor physical health and 40% are in poor mental health.

And more than 90% of workers are feeling anxious about their future.

Here are some voices of the workers:

- Non-regular contract is unstable but the workers are required to have higher skills and qualifications than regular employees. And those unstable workers like me are consulting with job seekers. My heart is about to break. (Female, 50s, Kanto region, Employment Security Office)

- My salary is too low. I will improve my skills and provide good service. Please raise my salary. I need a stable job. (Female, 40s, Chubu region, Curator)

- I worked for 10 years but was fired. I was afraid of being fired and I couldn't feel safe expressing my opinion at work because I only have a year contract. We are workers and humans. Stop discriminating against us! Please give us regular employment. (Male, 40s, Kanto region, School Teacher)

- Unstable employment, on a contract that must be renewed every year, cannot provide sustainable public services. (Female, 60s, Kanto region, Librarian)

- I was infected with Covid-19 last year and realized the instability of working on an hourly wage. On low wages and with no savings, I can't feel at peace. It is difficult to continue to be a public service worker. I AM suffering. (Female, 50s, Kansai region, Counselor)

Lastly, I would like to explain our plan for the future.

First, we will make recommendations to the government based on the issues manifested in the survey. In addition, we would like to find and connect with workers who are isolated in their workplaces nationwide to promote information sharing and experience exchange.

Trade unions are centered on regular workers and often do not involve non-regular workers. Therefore, we would like to make the voices of non-regular workers in public affairs louder while building solidarity with unions.

Also, we will file a report based on the survey with the Committee of Experts on the Application of Convention 122 Employment Policy at the International Labor Organization (ILO) in September this year in collaboration with other groups. Last year, we submitted a report on the serious labor issues concerning non-regular government employees.

I would like to conclude my talk with this word.
Decent work for all!

Thank you so much for your kind attention.