

# **Kodomo Shokudo “Children’s Cafeteria” in Japan – Problems of Kodomo Shokudo in the city and the importance of city-wide connections – A case study of Kashiwa city**

(日本の子ども食堂－自治体における子ども食堂の課題とまち中のつながりの重要性－柏市のケーススタディ)

Author: Malte Detjens (47-186798)

Supervisor: Professor Masahide Horita

Graduate School of Frontier Science, Department of International Studies, March 2020

Keywords:

Kodomo Shokudo, Welfare Organizations, Municipal Government Institutions, Social Workers, Information Exchange

## **Introduction**

Since 2012 [1] Kodomo Shokudo provide a cafeteria for children to eat for free or for a minimum amount of money, create a spot for members in a community to frequently gather, and a place to facilitate multi-generation communication. Starting as a grassroots movement, Kodomo Shokudo quickly attracted the attention of the media as an anti-child-poverty activity. This attention created a Kodomo Shokudo boom, and currently, according to some sources, there are around 3700 Kodomo Shokudo in Japan [2]. On the other hand, focusing on the anti-poverty aspect, children and families in need of the services of Kodomo Shokudo are in some cases kept away in fear of stigmatization [3].

Past research focused on the operational and structural sides, such as opening hours, types of activities, types of organizations [4], and possible ways of how to solve stigmatization through opening a Kodomo Shokudo up to a variety of customers from the community [5]. Last year, a report on 274 Japan-wide Kodomo Shokudo was published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. They found the 10 biggest problems Kodomo Shokudo face [6]. In our research, using Kodomo Shokudo in Kashiwa city, I want to take a closer look at the problems of Kodomo Shokudo, and find the underlying causes that are responsible. Furthermore, I want to find possible ways to ease or solve these underlying issues.

## **Methodology**

The connections of Kodomo Shokudo to organizations/institutions in the city, how they

exchange information and might function to help each other solving problems is a complex system, requiring methodologies for analyzing complex situations. For this, we use three different methodologies: Ethnographic work, Soft Systems Methodology, and the Pressure and Release (PAR) model.

In my ethnographic work, I volunteered at 4 different Kodomo Shokudo in the city, while frequently visiting 2 more. Interacting with children, parents, and other volunteers, I additionally informally interviewed Kodomo Shokudo managers on a regular basis.

Using Soft Systems Methodology [7], I use formal interviews with managers of Kodomo Shokudo, and organizations/institution involved in Kodomo Shokudo in the city. Using a specific set of questions (CATWOE), I create Rich Pictures to visualize the connections of these organizations/institutions to Kodomo Shokudo, and among each other. I include actions each actor takes, and what kind of information flows between them.

In the next step, I utilize a slightly modified version of the Pressure and Release (PAR) model [8] from risk analysis in natural disaster situations. I see Kodomo Shokudo problems as a three-layered system, in which problems are apparent because of underlying dynamic pressures, which in cause are occurring because of even deeper lying root causes.

## **Soft Systems Methodology**

At first, I interviewed managers of three Kodomo Shokudo. Two of these, through my ethnographic work, were analyzed as Kodomo Shokudo running with highly satisfied managers, and one

where the manager expressed some dissatisfaction and problematic situations. I created Rich Pictures to see what kind of connections to organizations/institutions are important for Kodomo Shokudo to increase manager satisfaction and mitigate problems. After that, I interviewed four organizations/institutions in the city to create their Rich Pictures and see how they are connected to Kodomo Shokudo and among themselves. These actors are the municipal government (Child Division, Child Welfare Section), the Social Welfare Council, the City Board of Education, and Community Coordinators.

### **Pressure and Release (PAR) model**

I utilized the PAR model to effectively organize the problems of Kodomo Shokudo into the three-layers. For this, I compared the different Rich Pictures, and used observations from my ethnographic approach. I defined Hazards and Disaster, and looked at the problems Kodomo Shokudo face as unsafe conditions. These are: 1. Insufficient Attraction of Children in need; 2. Trouble with succession and engagement of younger volunteers; 3. Venue Inconvenience and Venue Cost; and 4. Uncertainty of activities to introduce.

Following, the closest look I took was at the dynamic pressures. I found 6 dynamic pressures, mostly revolving around insufficient communication between different actors. Limited connections of Kodomo Shokudo to schools, as well as to different organizations/institutions within the city. Furthermore, I found limited information exchange between individual Kodomo Shokudo. Moreover, communication between organizations/institutions themselves are also often limited, even if these operate under the same municipal government.

Finally, I took a rather brief look at some root causes I found during my research period. I found that the timeframe Kodomo Shokudo managers use to approach specific organizations/institutions is important. Do they seek cooperation before starting their operation or after the Kodomo Shokudo is already operating? Another point is physical distance between different actors. How

far are organizations/institutions apart from each other and do they have the means to bridge that physical distance?

However, I must make concessions regarding the analyzation of the root causes. More root causes are likely to exist that I did not find during my research. Moreover, different actors might perceive root causes differently. This would require more research with the different organizations/institutions directly.

### **Conclusion**

I found it is immensely important for Kodomo Shokudo to be connected to specific organizations/intuitions, as well as to other Kodomo Shokudo to mutually solve existing problems. The different organizations/institutions can help to effectively connect Kodomo Shokudo to social workers in their area, who in return increase the outreach of Kodomo Shokudo into their communities because of their direct access to children in need.

### **References**

- [1] The Sankei News (2018), retrieved from <https://www.sankei.com/life/news/180403/lif1804030040-n2.html>
- [2] Nihon Keizai Shimbun (2019), retrieved from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO46629900X20C19A6CR0000/>
- [3] Wada, Yu (2016), 子ども食堂づくり運動の現状と課題 (特集 格差・貧困・階級) (JP)
- [4] Yasufuku, Hideki, Morimoto, Fuyuna, & Maeda, Hiroki (2017), A study on classification of “Kodomoshokudou” from the viewpoint of administrator and space
- [5] Matsuoka, Yoshinobu (2017), 名寄市における子どもの学習支援・子ども食堂・子供の居場所づくりの実践：地域における各機関・団体の連携とステイグマの払拭を願って(JP)
- [6] Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2018), 子ども食堂と地域が連携して進める食育活動事例集～地域との連携で食育の環が広がっています～ (JP)
- [7] Checkland, Peter, & Scholes, Jim (1990), *Soft Systems Methodology in action*
- [8] Wisner, Ben et al (2004), *At risk natural hazards, people’s vulnerability and disasters second edition*