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Japanese Public Perceptions of Homelessness

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Research Background 1

- Social policy research has highlighted the influence of public opinion on policy making. ^{*1}
- Since the 1980s, the number of homeless people has increased rapidly in Western countries, attracting the attention of numerous scholars. One related research area is public perceptions of homelessness.
- As suggest by previous studies, such research is important because it influences the design of policies for homelessness and the actual mobilization of resources, as well as explores the reasons why people who experience homelessness are excluded.

- There have been many studies on attitudes toward homelessness in the United States and Europe;
- Studies that show changes in attitudes within the same country ^{*2}
- Studies that compare attitudes in different countries ^{*3,4}

- In Japan, street homelessness increased sharply in the 1990s.
- There have been several surveys on attitudes toward homelessness in Japan. ^{*5,6}
- However, they were all small and were conducted more than 2 decades ago; thus, they are inadequate for understanding perceptions toward homelessness today.

Research Background 2

- One of the matters that symbolizes how public perceptions of homelessness affect the mobilization of resources required to help them is the so-called “NIMBY” phenomenon. ^{*7,8}
- The NIMBY phenomenon negatively impacts not only the people who are homeless, but also the society as a whole in terms of increased costs. The NIMBY phenomenon is characterized by the populations’ unacceptable attitude toward homelessness.
- For example, Tokyo has established five “self-reliance support center for homeless people” but due to strong opposition from the local community, each centers is demolished and replaced by a new one every five years.
- Thus, the general public in Japan has a severe attitude toward homelessness. However, no study has been conducted in recent years to clarify such a situation.
- There is a need to clarify the Japanese public’s perceptions toward homelessness and examine measures to promote an accepting attitude toward homelessness.

Purpose

1. Clarifying public's perceptions toward homelessness in Japan by comparing them with the results of similar surveys conducted in other countries.
2. To determine the reasons behind the accepting attitude toward homelessness, we focus on the NIMBY phenomenon and identify the people who are more (or less) likely to embody a nonaccepting attitude.

- The survey was conducted via the Internet during March 11-14, 2022. The survey was distributed throughout Japan among men and women aged 20 to 70.
- We selected participants from registered monitors of the research company that divided the population according to age (5-year age groups) and gender in accordance with the population composition in Japan. The request was terminated when the target number of respondents was reached. We invited 5,351 participants, and the responses were received from 4,500 individuals.
- Ethical consideration: Before conducting the survey, the authors applied for and received approval from the Ethics Committee of the College of Community and Human Services, Rikkyo University.

Analysis procedure 1

Corresponds to research purpose ①

Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents were asked how many homeless people they thought there were in Japan. Respondents were classified as GOOD if their estimate of the number of homelessness was within $\pm 20\%$ of the number reported by the Japanese government, PARTIAL if it was within $\pm 40\%$, and POOR if it was more than $\pm 40\%$.
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The respondents were asked whether they had past practice experience regarding “in person help,” “help through organization,” and “volunteer work.”
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When asked whether they thought public spending on homeless assistance should be increased from the current limit, respondents who chose “decreased,” “increased,” or “left as it is” were categorized under “Too Much”, “Too Little”, or “Enough”, respectively.• Respondents were asked who was responsible for providing homeless assistance, emergency shelter, and long-term housing: the government, NGOs, religious organizations, the homeless themselves (not required to provide it), and don't know.• When asked whether they would be willing to “pay more taxes,” “volunteer,” or “have a homeless shelter near your home” to reduce homelessness, respondents were expected to choose between “yes,” “no,” or “don't know.”

Result 1: Characteristics of Japanese Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes Toward Homelessness from an International Comparison (Table 1)



Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As in the eight European countries, the majority of respondents were classified as poor, especially in Japan, where most respondents (96.2%) did not have sufficient knowledge about the number of homeless people.
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japanese respondents were more reluctant to solve the problem of homelessness than respondents from the eight European countries; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 38.7% of the respondents said that the government spends “too little” on homelessness programs, compared to an average of 75.6% in the eight European countries. The percentage of respondents who said that the government is responsible for providing emergency shelter and long-term housing is about 50% in Japan, compared to an average of about 80% in the eight European countries. ➤ The percentage of those willing to have a homeless shelter near their home was also significantly lower in Japan (18.8%), compared to that in the eight European countries (50.1%).
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of respondents who had provided direct support or support through an organization was more than half in the eight European countries but was notably low in Japan (less than 10% in each case). The rate of engaging in volunteer activities was 7.0% in Japan, which was slightly lower than the average of 11.6% in the eight European countries.

• Japanese respondents were less aware of the number of homeless people, had less experience helping them, and were more reluctant or indifferent toward solving the problem of homelessness than their European counterparts.

Analysis Procedure 2:

Corresponds to Research Purpose ②



- Focusing on the NIMBY phenomenon as an indicator of receptive attitudes toward homelessness, a binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted, with 1 assigned to those who said “yes” to “having a homeless shelter near their home.”
- Controlling for respondents’ gender, age, education, income, and occupation, the following four explanatory variables were used in the analysis ("See " Table 2 for descriptive statistics).
 1. Experience of residency difficulties
 2. Knowledge of homelessness issues
 3. Attitudes toward people who experience homelessness
 4. Experience in helping people who experience homelessness

① Experience of Residency Difficulties

- Those who responded “yes” to any of the following four items were categorized as having “Experience of Residency Difficulties.”
 1. Difficulties experienced with rent arrears due to financial reasons
 2. Experience with housing-related financial assistance programs
 3. Experience living in unstable housing
 4. Family members or acquaintances who have experienced unstable housing

② Knowledge of the homelessness issues



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1. Number of homeless people in the country
 2. Percentage of homeless who are men
 3. Percentage of homeless people aged 65 and over
 4. Percentage of homeless people who have ever been married
 5. Percentage of homeless people with at least a high school education
 6. Percentage of employed homeless people
 7. Percentage of homeless with mental illness
 8. Increase or decrease in the number of homeless persons over the past three years
- Question 1: If the answer was within $\pm 20\%$ of the government's announcement, it was termed as GOOD; if it was between $\pm 20\%$ and 40% , it was termed as PARTIAL; if it was more than $\pm 40\%$, it was termed as POOR.
 - Questions 2 to 7: GOOD if the result was within $\pm 5\%$ of the government's announcement or previous survey, PARTIAL if the result was between $\pm 5\%$ and 15% , and POOR if the result was more than $\pm 15\%$.
 - Question 8: Since the number of homeless people in the country according to the government has decreased from 3,992 to 3,448 in the past three years, respondents who answered "decreased" were categorized as GOOD, those who answered "unchanged" were categorized as PARTIAL, and those who answered "increased" were categorized as POOR.
 - The total score (out of 16 points) for the eight questions was calculated, with 2 points for good, 1 point for partial, and 0 points for poor. The following three categories were used: 6 points or more for "well understood," 3 to 5 points for "generally understood," and 2 points or less for "not understood."

③ Attitudes toward the homelessness

- The five-question method was used to frame 10 questions, including “Homeless people live the way they do because they want to” and “The lack of housing assistance for the poor exacerbates the problem of homelessness in this country.”
- An exploratory factor analysis (maximum likelihood, promax rotation) of the responses yielded the following three-factor structure (Appendix Table 1)
 1. No need to help the lazy (5 items, $\alpha = 0.807$)
 2. Policy inadequacies create the problem of homelessness (3 items, $\alpha=0.785$)
 3. Afraid of homeless people (2 items, $\alpha=0.735$)
- The scores were simply added for each factor, and classified into three categories: “strong,” “standard,” and “weak.”

④ Experience in helping the homelessness RIKKYO UNIVERSITY

- Respondents were asked if they had experienced any of the following five things in the past

Those who had experienced at least one of the following were classified as having had directly helped or interacted with homeless people	Those who had experience with at least one of the following were classified as having “experience with helping people who are homeless” through a support organization
1. Hear from homeless people about their experiences	4. Donate money, food, or clothing to private support organizations or charities for the homelessness
2. Personal interaction with people who are homeless	5. Volunteering at private support organizations and charitable organizations for the homelessness
3. Giving money, food, and clothing to the people who experience homelessness	

Result 2: Factors associated with receptive attitudes toward homelessness (Table 3)

- In addition to control variables such as gender and age, the variables presented in slide 8 were used as explanatory variables; all these variables were related at a statistically significant level, except for knowledge of homelessness.

Experience of residency difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those who had this experience were more likely to have a receptive attitude toward people who experienced homeless than those who did not.
Knowledge of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No significant association was identified between knowledge and receptive attitudes toward homelessness.
Attitude toward homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those with a weaker sense of “No need to help the lazy” and “Afraid of homeless people,” and those with a stronger sense of “Policy inadequacies create the problem of homelessness” were more likely to have a receptive attitude toward homelessness than those who believed the contrary.
Experience in helping the homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those who had provided support, either directly helped or interacted or through organizations, were more likely to have a receptive attitude toward the homelessness than those who had not provided support.

- The results of this analysis suggest that a realistic understanding of housing difficulties, a reduced sense of “No need to help the lazy,” and direct or indirect experience with homeless assistance are important in increasing receptive attitudes toward homelessness.

Discussion 1

- Japanese respondents were less knowledgeable about the number of homeless people and had less experience helping them than their European counterparts.
- 48% of respondents said that the government has a responsibility to provide emergency shelter. Regarding “having a homeless shelter near your home”, 18.8% were in favor. These results were higher than we initially expected, but the attitude toward solving the problem of homelessness among the Japanese was passive or indifferent compared to their European counterparts.
- These results may be influenced by three factors:
 1. The relative “smallness” of the size of the homeless population compared to other European countries.
 2. Differences in the image of the condition that comes to mind when the general public hears the word “homeless” (most Japanese people think of “street people” when they hear the word “homeless”; 94% [Appendix Table 2]).
 3. Differences in the “behavior” of people experiencing homelessness.
- Japanese people are less likely than their counterparts in other countries to have “helped strangers,” “donated,” or “volunteered” not just for homelessness.⁹
- Religious differences and different perceptions of the welfare system and the role of the government may account for these behaviors. Those reasons may have influenced the results of this survey.

Discussion 2

- Those who had “Experience of residency difficulties” were more likely to have a receptive attitude than those who did not.
- It is believed that one feels more empathy for oneself or someone close who is homeless or in a similar situation compared to other conditions.
- It was found that those with a strong sense of “No need to help the lazy” and “Afraid of homeless people ” were less likely to have a receptive attitude toward homelessness. In particular , “No need to help the lazy” was strongly associated with a less receptive attitude toward homelessness.
- Van Oorschot and Roosma (2017) identified individuals who deserve public assistance according to the “CARIN criteria.” One criterion for being described as unworthy of assistance is “control” (persons deemed to be in need due to personal responsibility are considered unworthy of assistance)*¹⁰.
- This perception contributes toward the difficulty of adopting an accepting attitude, since “there is No need to help the lazy” is synonymous with the sense that people are homeless because of personal responsibility.

Discussion 3

- Educational programs should be developed and implemented to cultivate an accepting attitude toward homelessness among the general public.
- In light of the results of this study, it is suggested that education that imparts knowledge is not enough and programs that engage with people who experience homelessness and provide experiential education are needed.
- Some of these efforts have already been undertaken in previous studies, which have reported positive changes in the receptive attitudes toward homelessness.^{*11,12}
- It is necessary to develop and implement educational programs that are relevant to the Japanese context.

Limitations of this study and future tasks

- In this study, the presence or absence of knowledge about homelessness was not found to be significantly associated with NIMBY attitudes.
- However, it is possible that some people have knowledge and NIMBY attitudes, and others have no knowledge but still have NIMBY attitudes. These may have offset each other as a result. Thus, a longitudinal study is needed to clarify the relationship between knowledge and attitudes.
- Compared to Europeans, the Japanese were indifferent toward homelessness, and the lack of experience in helping them was a distinguishing characteristic. Continued comparative research is needed to understand why these differences emerge.
- It is also necessary to conduct future research on how attitudes toward homelessness have changed after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Table 1: International Comparison of Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes toward Homelessness

	JAPAN	8 European countries (Petit et al. 2019)									
		All	FR	IR	IT	NL	PL	PT	SE	SP	
Knowledge											
Magnitude of homelessness											
Good	2.4	12.9	8.3	21.1	6.2	20.4	8.0	10.9	12.2	15.7	
Partial	0.0	9.0	11.0	13.4	5.4	17.0	4.1	7.1	3.0	10.1	
Poor	96.2	78.1	80.7	65.5	88.4	62.6	87.9	82.0	84.8	74.2	
Practices											
In person help											
Yes	8.1	60.2	59.0	61.4	66.4	49.7	56.9	62.8	59.0	67.4	
Help through organization											
Yes	8.9	56.7	45.7	69.8	48.3	59.1	51.9	73.7	52.1	51.3	
Volunteer work											
Yes	7.0	11.6	6.6	16.2	12.8	5.1	8.8	22.5	9.8	10.7	
Attitudes											
Government spending on Homeless programs											
Too much	9.9	2.4	2.6	0.7	1.8	1.3	3.5	3.0	5.8	0.5	
Enough	22.6	13.7	22.9	11.0	6.2	19.3	13.0	8.0	23.9	5.5	
Too little	38.7	75.6	69.7	78.7	79.6	71.0	68.9	85.0	64.1	87.9	
DK/R	28.8	8.3	4.8	9.7	12.5	8.4	14.5	4.0	6.1	6.1	
Who should be mainly responsible for providing...											
Emergency shelters											
Government	48.0	77.7	77.8	83.3	84.8	60.0	67.3	85.6	85.6	77.6	
NGOs	13.7	13.9	19.7	11.6	3.7	28.7	18.5	9.9	3.3	15.4	
Ereligious groups	3.0	3.4	1.0	1.1	6.0	5.6	4.9	1.1	3.0	4.2	
Homeless themselves	6.8	2.7	1.5	2.4	1.7	2.5	7.3	1.0	5.3	0.1	
DK/R	28.5	2.4	0.0	1.6	3.8	3.3	2.1	2.5	2.9	2.7	
Long-term housing											
Government	49.5	81.2	74.0	85.2	87.0	84.5	63.1	85.3	87.4	82.6	
NGOs	9.8	8.5	15.1	3.9	4.0	7.6	15.0	9.8	2.5	10.5	
Ereligious groups	2.4	2.4	1.1	1.2	3.4	0.2	3.4	1.8	6.2	2.2	
Homeless themselves	8.9	5.1	9.8	6.5	2.6	3.6	15.7	0.8	0.9	0.5	
DK/R	29.3	2.8	0.0	3.1	3.0	4.1	2.7	2.3	3.0	4.2	
To reduce homelessness, would you be willing to...											
Pay more taxes											
Yes	8.0	31.0	32.7	45.4	20.5	18.0	22.1	35.5	41.4	32.3	
No	53.9	62.7	67.1	41.6	63.0	78.5	74.3	58.2	55.9	63.1	
DK/R	38.1	6.3	0.2	13.0	16.4	3.5	3.6	6.2	2.7	4.6	
Volunteer											
Yes	12.9	45.1	40.7	46.6	44.3	25.2	32.6	75.4	39.7	57.0	
No	45.7	50.3	58.8	48.3	37.2	71.1	63.4	23.1	58.8	41.1	
DK/R	41.4	4.6	0.6	5.1	18.5	3.7	4.0	1.4	1.6	1.8	
Have a homeless shelter near your home											
Yes	18.8	50.1	46.8	53.6	44.2	52.8	31.5	52.2	71.9	47.5	
No	38	42.1	52.2	33.6	33.2	43.0	57.6	44.9	26.3	46.7	
DK/R	43.2	7.8	1.1	12.8	22.7	4.2	10.8	2.8	1.8	5.8	

FR: France; IR: Ireland; IT: Italy; NL: Netherlands; PL: Poland; PT: Portugal; SE: Sweden; SP: Spain.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of variables

Gender	Male	49.6	Experience of residency difficulties	No	88.8		
	Female	49.4		Yes	11.2		
	Other/Don't want to answer	0.9	Knowledge of homelessness issues	Well understood (6 points or more)	18.0		
Ages	20s-30s	35.1		Generally understood (3-5 points)	52.7		
	40s-50s	42.3		Do not understand (less than 2 points)	29.4		
	60s	22.6	Attitudes toward the homelessness	No need to help the lazy	Strong (16+ points)	23.7	
Education	High school graduate or less	29.2			Standard (13-15 points)	50.3	
	Vocational school/junior college	23.4			Weak (12 or less)	25.9	
	University graduate or above	47.4		Policy inadequacies create the problem of homelessness	Strong (12+ points)	18.0	
Annual income	No income	16.2			Standard (9-11 points)	59.2	
	Less than 3 million	40.1			Weak (8 or less)	22.7	
	3 million to less than 6 million	27.9		Afraid of homeless people	Strong (8+ points)	32.0	
	More than 6 million	15.8			Standard (6-7 points)	50.7	
Occupation	Self-employed	11.8		Experience in helping the homelessness	Directly helped or interacted with homeless people	Yes	12.2
	Regular employee	41.1				No	87.8
	Irregular employee	22.7	Experience with helping people who are homeless" through a support organization		Yes	10.9	
	Unemployed/other	24.4			No	89.1	

Note: Unit: %, n=4,500, but missing values are excluded

Table 3: Factors associated with receptive attitudes toward homelessness

		OR	95%CI	p
Experience of residency difficulties (ref=No)	Yes	1.59	1.26 - 2.01	.000
Knowledge of the homelessness issues (ref=Do not understand)	Well underst	1.12	0.87 - 1.43	.384
	Generally un	1.17	0.97 - 1.40	.110
Attitudes toward the homelessness (ref=Standard)				
No need to help the lazy	Weak	3.17	2.60 - 3.85	.000
	Strong	0.80	0.63 - 1.02	.076
Policy inadequacies create the problem of homelessness	Weak	0.60	0.48 - 0.75	.000
	Strong	2.18	1.78 - 2.66	.000
Afraid of homeless people	Weak	1.59	1.27 - 1.98	.000
	Strong	1.03	0.84 - 1.26	.765
Experience in helping the homelessness (ref=No)				
Directly helped or interacted with homeless people	Yes	1.76	1.31 - 2.37	.000
Experience with helping people who are homeless” through a support organization	Yes	1.87	1.38 - 2.53	.000

Note: OR: odds ratio, CI: Confidence interval, *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, control variables (Gender, Ages, Education, Annual income, Occupation) are omitted.

Appendix Table 1: Results of Exploratory Factor—Analysis of Attitudes Toward Homelessness

	Factor loading			Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3					
Factor 1: No need to help the lazy ($\alpha=0.807$)								
Adult homeless people are homeless because of their own laziness	.769	-.074	.032	4.4	13.3	55.8	19.5	6.9
Many homeless people are always drinking	.692	.093	-.032	3.6	15.2	51.2	23.5	6.5
The cost being spent on helping the homeless is too high	.672	-.069	.116	4.3	10.1	62.2	17.1	6.3
Homeless people live that way because they want to	.644	.000	-.163	2.9	11.7	44.5	29.6	11.2
Cannot expect the homeless to lead a normal life at all	.594	.049	.099	3.8	12.5	54.0	23.5	6.2
Factor 2 : Policy inadequacies create the problem of homelessness ($\alpha=0.785$)								
Lack of housing assistance for the poor is exacerbating the country's homelessness problem.	-.085	.805	.013	7.3	27.6	48.5	12.2	4.3
Low minimum wage is a contributing factor to the issue of homelessness	-.036	.752	.036	9.8	26.0	45.6	14.1	4.5
Cuts in government welfare spending are increasing the number of homeless people	.133	.678	-.051	5.9	18.4	57.8	13.4	4.4
Factor 3 : Afraid of homeless people ($\alpha=0.735$)								
Not comfortable talking to homeless people	-.091	-.047	.941	16.2	29.8	40.8	9.7	3.5
Brace yourself when passing by a homeless person	.159	.095	.561	8.5	27.4	46.8	13.0	4.3
(interfactor correlation)								
	Factor1							
	Factor2	.118						
	Factor3	.573	.293					

Appendix Table 2

When you hear the word "homeless," what condition do you think of ? (MA)		
	Responses	%
People living on the street	4224	93.9
People living in cars	942	20.9
People living in a friend's or acquaintance's home	236	5.2
People living in 24-hour stores (fast food restaurants, internet cafes, etc.)	1068	23.7
People living in dormitories or company housing in the construction/security/manufacturing industry, etc.	67	1.5
Temporary lodgings for laborers	172	3.8
People living in welfare facilities such as women's shelters	131	2.9
People living in evacuation shelters	192	4.3
Others	36	0.8
	4500	100.0