

Socio-economic Impacts of Covid-19 on Children in Single Mother Households in Japan

Marking the Children's Day, May 2021

Single Mother Research Project
October 10, 2021

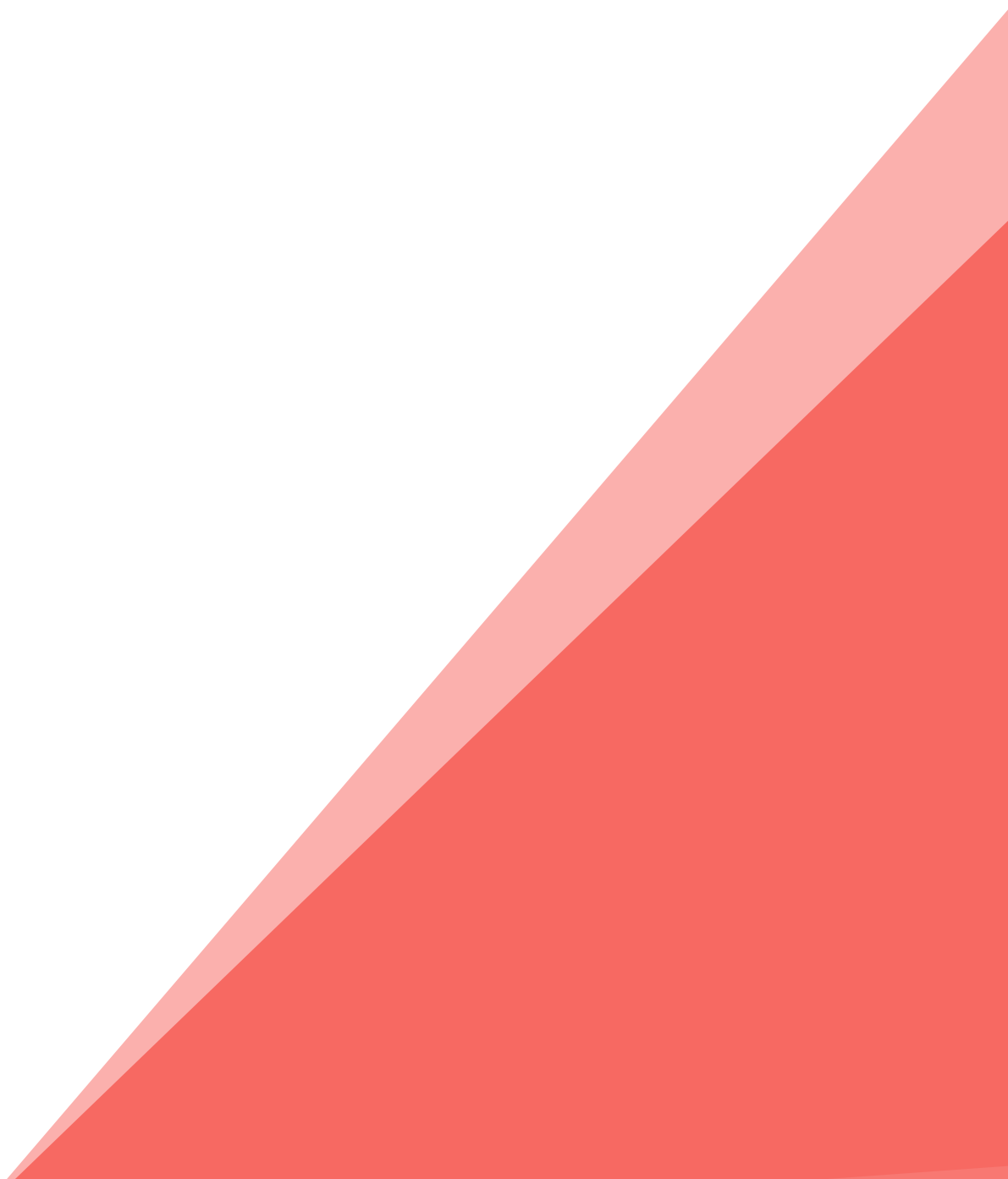


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INTRODUCTION

About the Report

May 2021 marks the second Children's Day amidst the COVID-19 pandemic where single mother households in Japan continue to face numerous layers of challenges. This is one of the multiple research series put together by the project entitled "Socio-economic Impacts of Covid-19 on Children in Single Mother Households in Japan ~ Marking the Children's Day, May 2021 ~" (Japanese edition published on April 25, 2021.) This English version summarizes the findings from the "Single Mother Research Project," with a focus on children living in these households.

The Japanese version (full report):

<https://note.com/api/v2/attachments/download/26fa1254fd099908c0866219c23c5f07>

About the Single Mother Research Project

This project was launched by a group of single parent support groups, led by the NPO Single Mothers Forum, gender policy experts and researchers with in-depth knowledge of the challenges that single mother households face. The project collects and analyzes data to shed light on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in order to advocate for a more positive and sustainable policy change that will benefit single mothers and their children during and after the pandemic.

About the Research

Large-scale research in July 2020, conducted online, reached out to around 1800 single mother households, consisting of members and supporters of the NPO Single Mothers Forum. The first of its kind in scale and detail, the results revealed the real voices of the single mothers' struggle. A flash report was released on August 28, 2020.

As a follow-up to the report, the same team conducted monthly surveys from August 2020 to present. The respondents of the follow-up (panel) surveys included single mothers who cooperated in the first large-scale research. The respondent pool was selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) mother-child households (without grand-parents);
- 2) non-recipient of public pension support (e.g. survivor's pension, disability pension, old-age pension);
- 3) non-recipient of social welfare, or "Public Assistance" (*seikatsu hogo*¹); and
- 4) recipient of "Child-rearing Allowance" (*jido fuyo teate*²).

The respondents were grouped according to "Tokyo" and "Non-Tokyo" residents (252 and 287 respectively) to mirror the varying infection status and/or availability of support programmes and policies at the local municipality level. The respondents were approached via email every month with the link of the web survey form that they respond online.

¹ Public Assistance (*seikatsu hogo*生活保護) : A livelihood protection system prescribed by the Public Assistance Law, designed to guarantee the minimum standard of living and promote their self-reliance. https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/topics/social_welfare/dl/outline_of_the_public_assistance_system_20101004.pdf

² Child-rearing Allowance (*jido fuyo teate* 児童扶養手当) : Cash benefit to promote the welfare of children of single-parent households. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-hw3/dl/7-36.pdf>

SUMMARY

Analyses from the surveys reveal the socio-economic struggle that single mother households in Japan face amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Their lives have never been easy, and inarguably worsened during the prolonging pandemic.

Many of the respondents of the surveys have faced an earning loss as they work as informal or part-time workers paid hourly or daily. They work in industries such as food and services that have been hard hit under the state of emergency and other subsequent COVID-19 measures, and hence forced to work less hours.

Furthermore, the public childcare and educational services have been disrupted: a serious blow to the single mothers and their children. Prior to the pandemic, public care services such as school lunches, school playgrounds, children's centers, nursery schools as well as community services had supported single mothers to work or seek jobs. With the down-scale or cancellation of such services, the care burden is back on the single mothers, and in turn affecting the health and learning development of their children.

This report sheds light on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on single mother households with children.

1 Challenges

Under this section, the following issues are raised:

- Day to day expenses, e.g., inability to afford food, school supplies, and children's weight loss.
- Education, as children are increasingly falling behind classes, facing stress, and undergoing changes in their daily routines.
- Lack of childcare services for infants, which makes it more difficult for single mothers to work or seek jobs; and
- Declining income/savings

2 COVID-19 Related Benefits

Section two looks at the special cash benefits paid by the government: how these benefits served as an emergency fund for the single mothers to make ends meet.

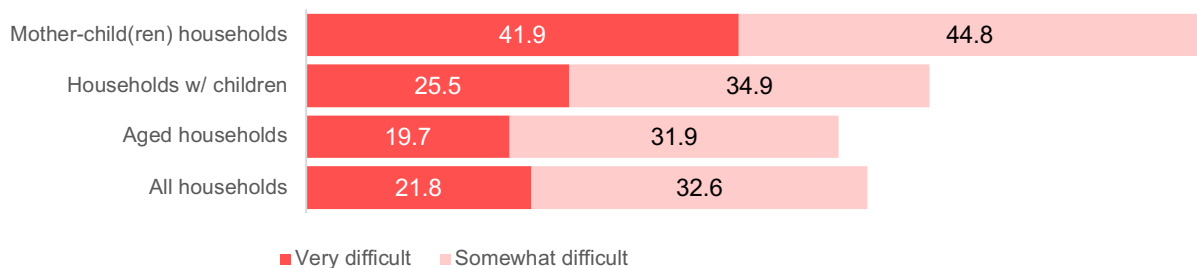
BACKGROUND

Single mother households in Japan have been under socio-economic hardships even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are some basic background data:

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. *Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions (2019)*

- Poverty rate of households with child(ren) (2018, new criterion):
Single adult households 48.3%
Two or more adults households 11.2%
- Earned income (2018):
Mother-child(ren) households 2,311,000 JPY
Households other than aged households 5,613,000 JPY
- No savings (2019):
Mother-child(ren) households 31.8%
All households 13.4%
- Living consciousness (2019) “Difficult”: see Graph below
Mother-child(ren) households 86.7%
All households 54.4%

Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2019, Self-Awareness of Living Standards



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. *Nationwide Survey on Single Mother Households (2016)*

- Work participation rate: 80.6%
- Employment status: Full-time 44.2% Part-time 43.8%
- Annual income (2015)
2,430,000 JPY (inclusive of social benefits)
2,000,000 JPY (annual salary)
- Amount of Savings: 39.7% have savings below 500,000 JPY
- Children’s school enrollment:
Pre-school 14.5%
Elementary school 30.2%
Junior high school 20.1%
High school 23.0%

SURVEY RESULTS

Analyses from the surveys reveal the socio-economic struggle that single mother households face amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The report focuses on the negative impacts on children and shares the real voices of the single mothers.

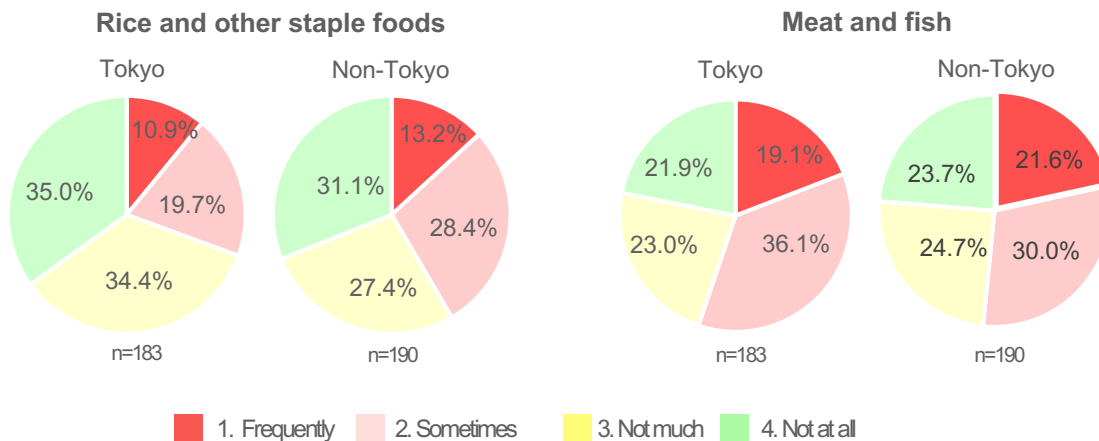
1. CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS

1.1 Food Expenses

The most recent survey results from March 2021, approximately a year after the start of the pandemic, showed that single mother households continue to face socio-economic hardships. As below, 30.6% of the respondents from Tokyo and 41.6% from non-Tokyo residents were “frequently” or “sometimes” unable to afford rice or other staple foods in February 2021. Responses rose to approximately 50% for meat, fish and vegetables for both Tokyo and non-Tokyo residents which reveals how these single mothers are living under very tight budget.

Food Expenses

Survey Question “In February 2021, were there occasions when you were unable to buy necessary food for your family?”



(Data: March 2021 Survey)

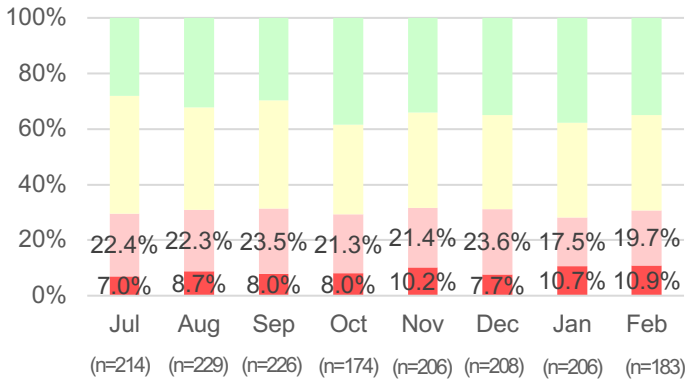
When looking at the monthly transition from July 2020 to February 2021, approximately 30% of the respondents from Tokyo and 40% from non-Tokyo areas have been unable to afford “rice and other staple food” on a monthly basis. The respondents rose to over 45% from both areas for “meat or fish”.

Food Expenses: Monthly Transition

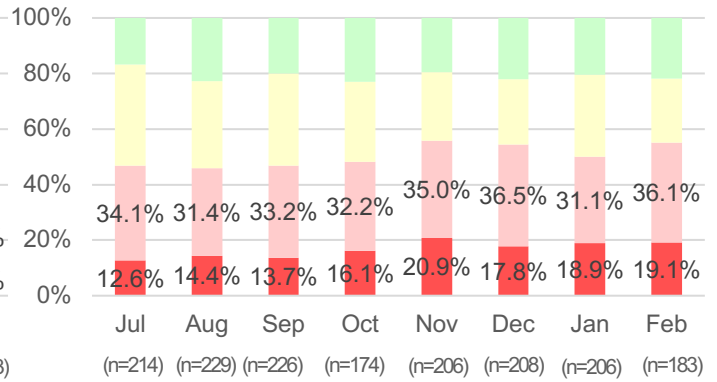
Survey Question “Were there occasions where you were unable to buy necessary food for your family?”

Tokyo

Rice & Other Staple Food

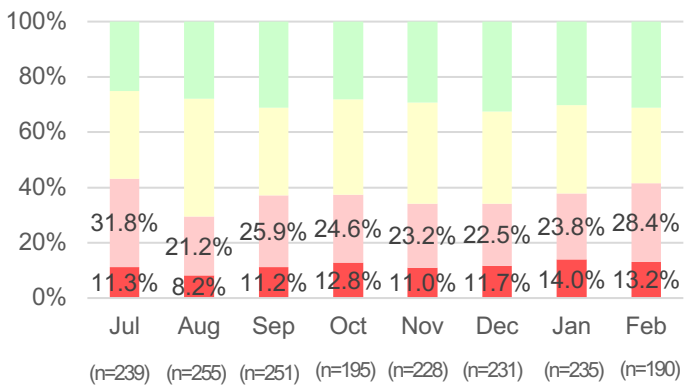


Meat/Fish

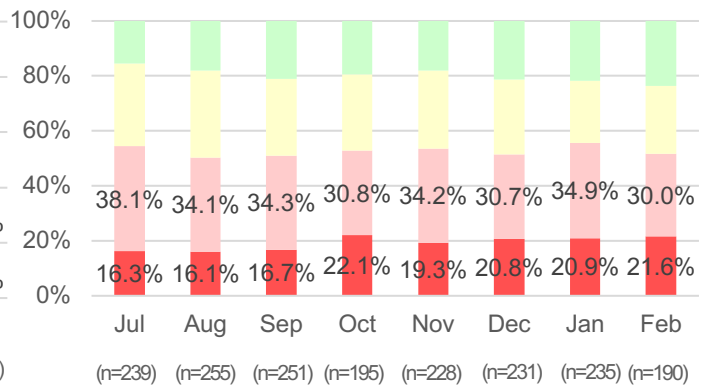


Non-Tokyo

Rice & Other Staple Food



Meat/Fish



1. Frequently 2. Sometimes 3. Not much 4. Not at all

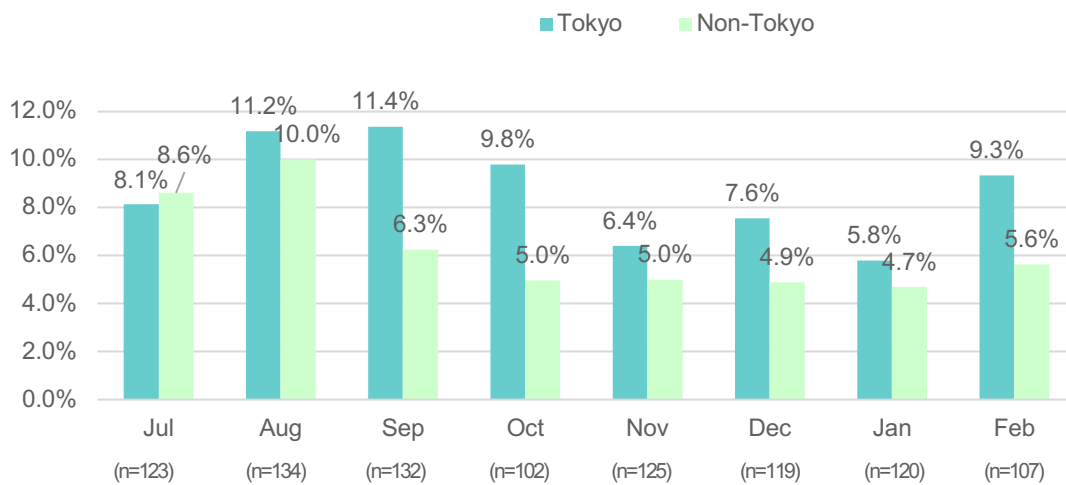
(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

1.2. Children’s Weight Loss

As single mothers struggle to cover food expenses, the surveys revealed a worrying fact that their elementary school children were losing weight. Responses from Tokyo were very high in the August and September 2020 surveys, scoring 11.2% and 11.4% respectively. It went down to 5.8% in January 2021 but shot up again to 9.3% in February 2021. For non-Tokyo residents, the number peaked out in August 2020 at ten percent but rose again in February 2021. As a result, an average of approximately ten percent of households in both areas have responded consistently on weight loss since the survey began.

Ratio of Single Mothers Who Reported on Their Child(ren)’s Weight Loss: Monthly Transition (Tokyo & Non-Tokyo)

Survey Question "Any concerns regarding your elementary school child(ren)?"
Answers from the single mothers: "Weight loss"



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Voices of Single Mothers on Food Expenses

(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

- Unable to cut back on rent and minimum food expenses. Very difficult to make ends meet. (Tokyo/August 2020 Survey)
- Payments for rent, utilities and loan are first priority. I either delay paying for food, hospitals and school necessities or cut back on them. (Non-Tokyo/September 2020 Survey)
- My child entered junior high school and is growing fast. Food consumption and expenses are on the rise. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- Food expenses increase when schools are closed. (Non-Tokyo/November 2020 Survey)
- Food expenses became burden during winter vacation because of no school lunches. (Tokyo /November 2020 Survey)
- Income declined but food and school expenses remain the same. (Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- Facing a serious shortage of food and living expenses. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- Teenagers eat a lot. Increase of food expenses has been really tough. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- My children were home many days during the exam periods, eating three meals a day. Food expenses became a big burden. (Tokyo/March 2021 Survey)

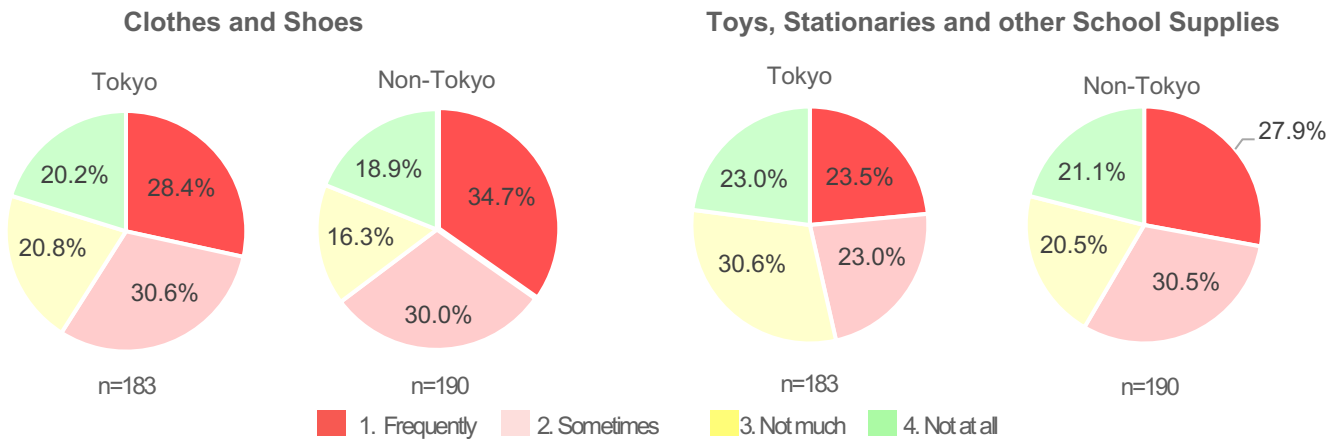
1.3 School Expenses

The surveys looked at other expenses such as school supplies, costs that single mothers are forced to cut back under economic hardships as they prioritize day-to-day food purchases. Those who answered “frequently” or “sometimes” could not purchase their “children’s clothes and shoes” in the March 2021 survey were 59% in Tokyo and 64.7% in non-Tokyo areas.

The accumulated survey results from August 2020 to March 2021 further show the single mothers’ continued struggle as those who were “frequently” and “sometimes” unable to afford school supplies, etc., accounted for 50% for both Tokyo and non-Tokyo residents.

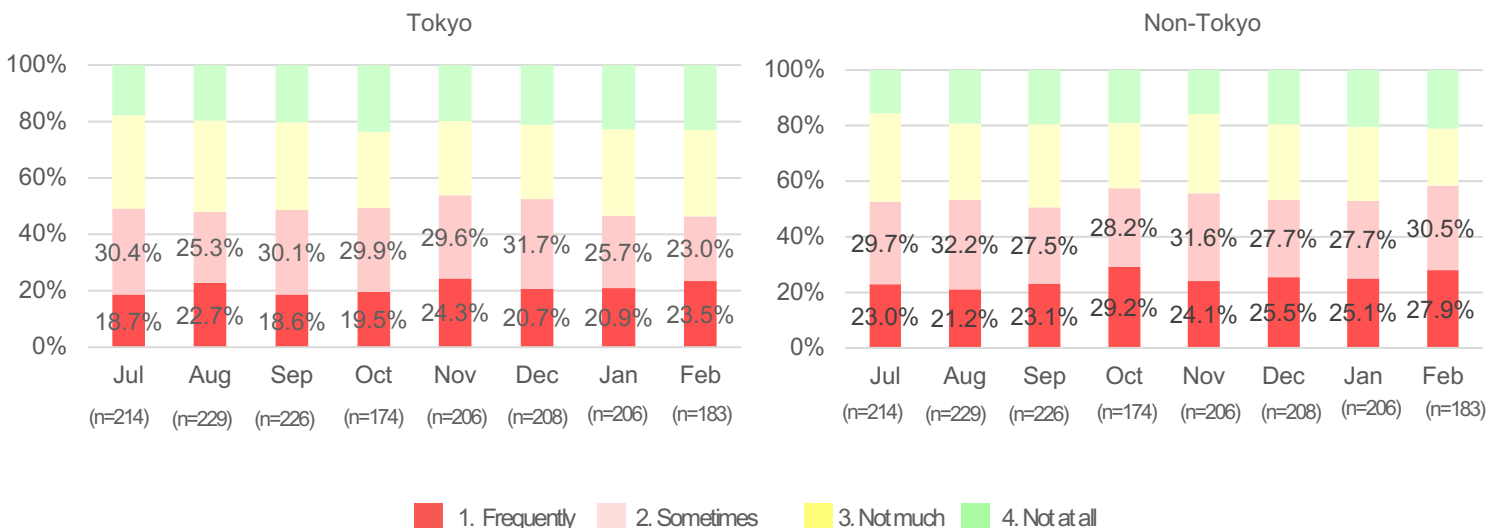
School Expenses (Tokyo & Non-Tokyo)

Survey Question: “Were there occasions where you were unable to buy children’s goods last month (February 2021)?”



(Data: March 2021 Survey)

Toys, Stationeries and other School Supplies (Tokyo & Non-Tokyo): Monthly Transition



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

School supplies have been a burden for single mothers even prior to the pandemic due to the following reasons:

- The costs of supplementary learning materials, e.g. calligraphy tools, dictionaries, are not necessarily covered under the Financial Assistance for School Expenses (*syuugaku enjo*³). The scope of assistance depends on the municipality.
- The supplies need to be purchased in February and March before the new school year begins in April. Since eligibility for the Financial Assistance for School Expenses is approved after the new school starts, parents need to prepare the money ahead of time.
- School designated gym clothes, shoes and other supplies used in classes tend to be a burden.
- After-school club activities are not free.

Voices of Single Mothers on School Supplies

(From August 2020~March 2021 Surveys)

- Schools and afterschool lessons resumed, and I paid the lesson fees and school supplies from my savings. The supplies included dictionaries and calligraphy tools that are not covered under the financial assistance for school expenses (*syuugaku enjo*). I also had to pay for them all at once. (Non-Tokyo/August 2020 Survey)
- School and after school club activities resumed in June, but I still haven't been able to buy the necessary equipments which costs around 60,000 JPY (Non-Tokyo/August 2020 Survey)
- My child's winter track suit for the after-school club activity was handed out without prior notice so I had to ask them to wait for payment until I received the child-rearing allowance (*jido fuyo teate*) . (Non-Tokyo/September 2020 Survey)
- My child grew out of the gym clothes, but I still can't afford to buy new ones: shirt costs 3,000 JPY, shorts 3,500 JPY, and winter track suit 8,000 JPY. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- Compass and calligraphy tools for the first calligraphy writing in the New Year's (*kaki-zome*), etc.. were handed out without prior notice and payment deadline was within a week. I wanted my children to have the same supplies as others so paid them out of my savings and cut back on other expenses. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- My elder child enters junior high school next spring and is required to buy a windbreaker and a music instrument. The lesson supply fees for my younger child's after school English classes need to be paid every six months and are expensive. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- I am frustrated because I am unable to buy winter school clothes or educational materials right away when needed. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- There were many school expenses, e.g. calligraphy tools, gym clothes, music instruments, etc.. all paid at once before my younger child started the new school year. (Non-Tokyo/March 2021 Survey)

1.4 Children's Education

The prolonging pandemic is posing a negative and scalable impact on children's educational attainment. In the March 2021 survey, single mothers with elementary school children who responded that their children couldn't keep up with schoolwork were 44.9% in Tokyo and 30.6% in

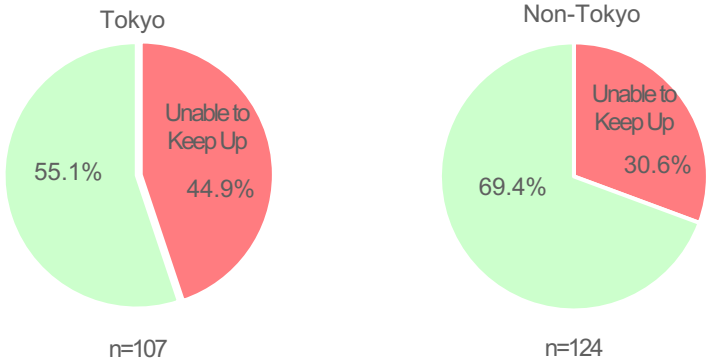
³ Financial Assistance for School Expenses (*syugaku enjo* 就学援助): A financial assistance program granted to parents & guardians of students enrolled in public schools from first year elementary school through third year junior high school who have trouble keeping their children in school due to financial hardships. It assists with school supply expenses, school lunch fees, etc. The scope of assistance depends on the municipality.

non-Tokyo areas. When unable to keep up, children tend to stay away from school: 29% of respondents in Tokyo and 21% from non-Tokyo areas said their children didn't want to or didn't go to school at one point. The survey also revealed that more than half of the children were unable to attend after school lessons that require additional fees: 60.7% in Tokyo and 59.7% in non-Tokyo areas respectively.

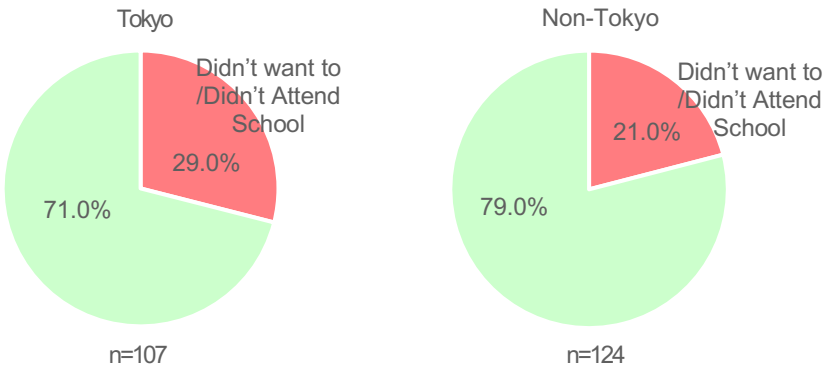
Children's Education

Survey Question "What concerns did you have regarding your elementary school children last month (February 2021)?"

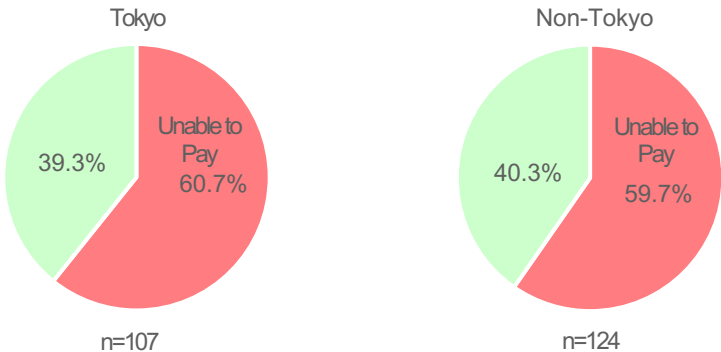
Child(ren) Unable to Keep Up with Schoolwork



Child(ren) Didn't Want to Attend School / Didn't Attend School



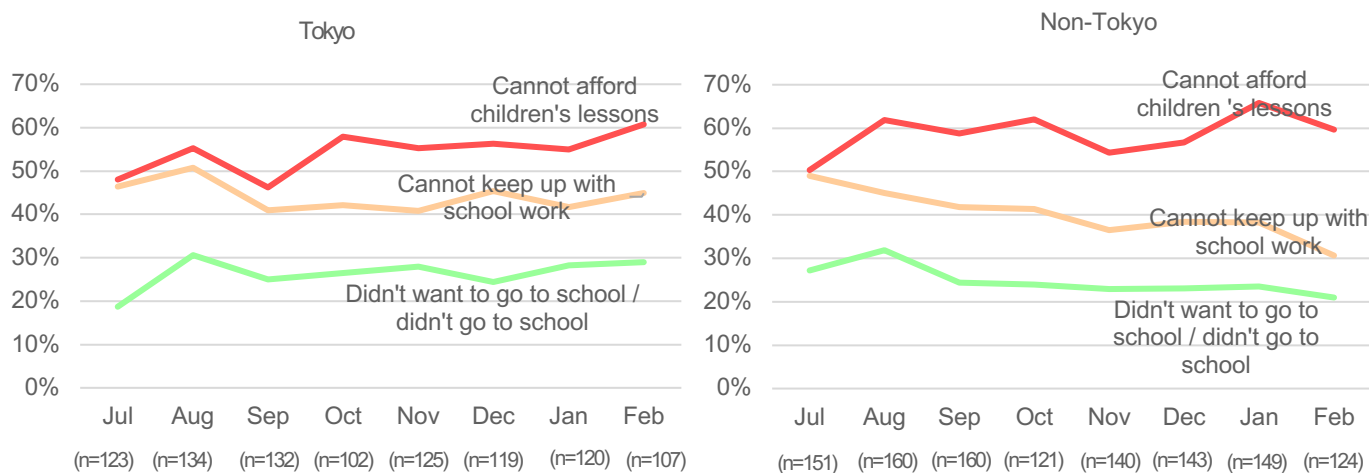
Unable to Pay for After School Lessons



(Data: March 2021 Survey)

The accumulated survey results show how children have been affected continuously during the prolonged pandemic. Sixty percent of the single mothers in both Tokyo and Non-Tokyo areas have been unable to pay for their children's after school lesson fees. Forty percent from both areas reported that their children have been unable to keep up with schoolwork. Children who either didn't want to or didn't go to school at one point accounted for 30% of respondents from Tokyo and approximately 20% from Non-Tokyo areas.

Children's Education: Monthly Transition



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Voices of Single Mothers on Children's Education

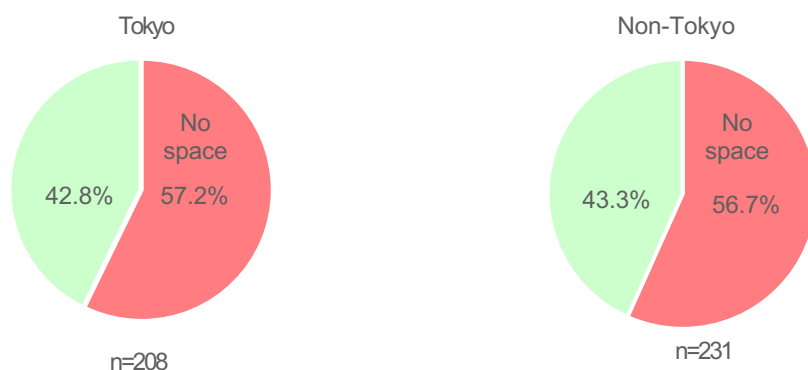
(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

- My child began to avoid playing with friends, who enjoy after school lessons unlike my child. S/he kept such feelings to her/himself so not to worry me. (Tokyo/March 2021 Survey)
- My child decided not to take after school lessons knowing the economic situation of our household (Non-Tokyo/March Survey)
- My child wasn't able to keep up with the fast-paced school lessons after classes resumed and had trouble with the exams. Due to the recent changes in school curriculum, students need additional help from a *juku* or a tutor, or else they will fall behind in class immediately (Tokyo/September 2020 Survey)
- I am worried that my child cannot keep up with the speed to recover from the missed classes from the state of emergency. (Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- In fear of another state of emergency, the school is giving out loads of homework, for example, asked students to finish the Chinese character workbooks one semester earlier. This is adding burden to my child who stays at after-school care center until late and has very limited time to do homework. (Non-Tokyo/January 2021 Survey)
- My child is in fifth grade and struggling with his English class. Others are learning English after school. I am worried that he will continue to fall behind. (Tokyo/March 2021 Survey)
- The number of stressed students is on the rise and the classes are unsettling, resulting in days where my child is unable to go to school. (Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- Now in the third semester, my sixth grade child is skipping more classes. After finding out that I have not been able to purchase the suits for graduation yet, s/he is now planning to skip the ceremony. (Non-Tokyo/February 2021 Survey)

Housing is also a challenge for these children as they often lack enough study space at home to focus. 57.2% of respondents from Tokyo and 56.7% from non-Tokyo areas noted in the January 2021 survey that they do not have sufficient space at home for their children to concentrate on schoolwork.

Lack of Space at Home

Survey Question “Is there sufficient space at home for your children to concentrate on schoolwork?”



(Data: January 2021 Survey)

Voices of Single Mothers on Lack of Space at Home to Study

(Data: January 2021 Survey)

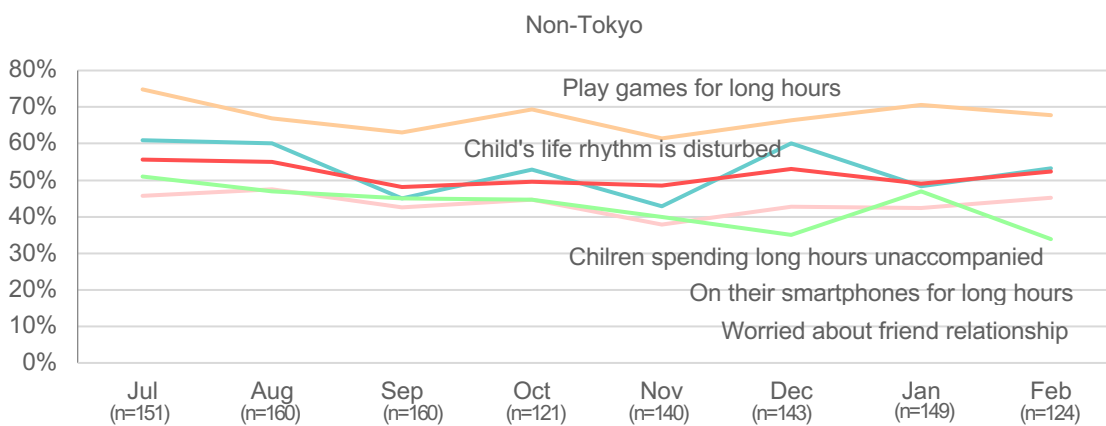
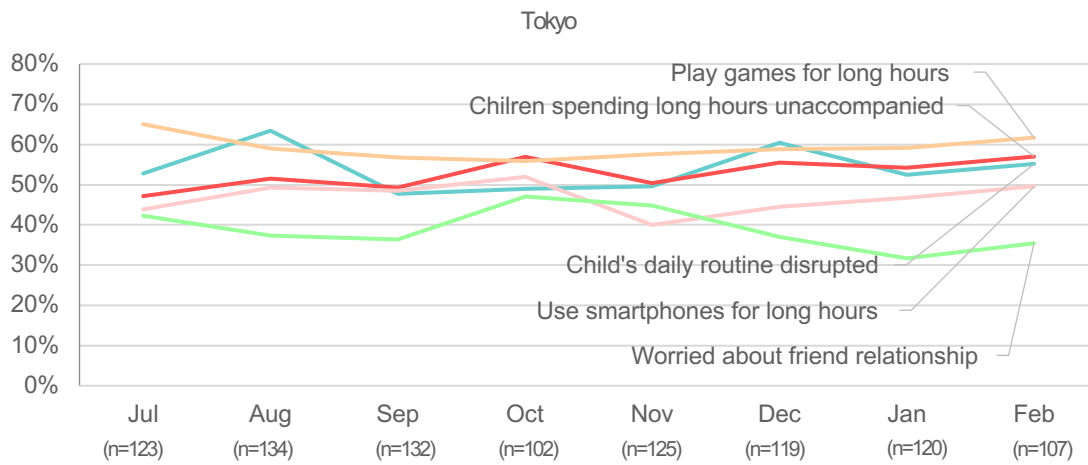
- Our house is very small. My child is requesting a separate room to study (Tokyo)
- We have air conditioning only in the living room. I have four children (one preparing for entrance exams) and they are all in the living room and unable to focus on their studies (Non-Tokyo)
- We don't have space to wash hands nor hang a coat, and my two children share a table to study. I cannot pay a higher rent, but this housing condition is tough for my junior and senior high school children. (Tokyo)
- I have children in elementary school, junior and senior high school and our house is very small. There are no separate rooms, and we are running out of space to put away clothes, school supplies, etc.. I can feel they are getting irritated, especially the teenagers. (Non-Tokyo)
- As my children grow, our house is becoming too small. We don't have enough space to stretch out our legs at night. My children are teenagers but there is no space for privacy or even to put a study desk (Non-Tokyo)
- We eat, spend time, and sleep in the living room. We don't have a storage either. (Tokyo)
- I would like to provide a children's room when my child becomes older. We only have one room, so I cannot do anything after my child goes to sleep (Non-Tokyo)

1.5 Children's Daily Lives

The respondents are concerned about their children's daily routine being disrupted as school schedules change and children's centers close. The monthly accumulated survey results show that around 60% of respondents from Tokyo and 70% from non-Tokyo areas noted that children in elementary schools are now “playing video games for longer hours.” More than 50% of the respondents from Tokyo and around 50% from non-Tokyo areas also noted that their children's daily routine is disrupted. Due to lack of publicly available childcare measures, their children are left spending longer hours unaccompanied.

Impacts on Children's Daily Lives: Monthly Transition (1)

Survey Question "What are the main concerns regarding your elementary school children?"



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Voices of Single Mothers on Impacts on Children's Daily Lives (1)

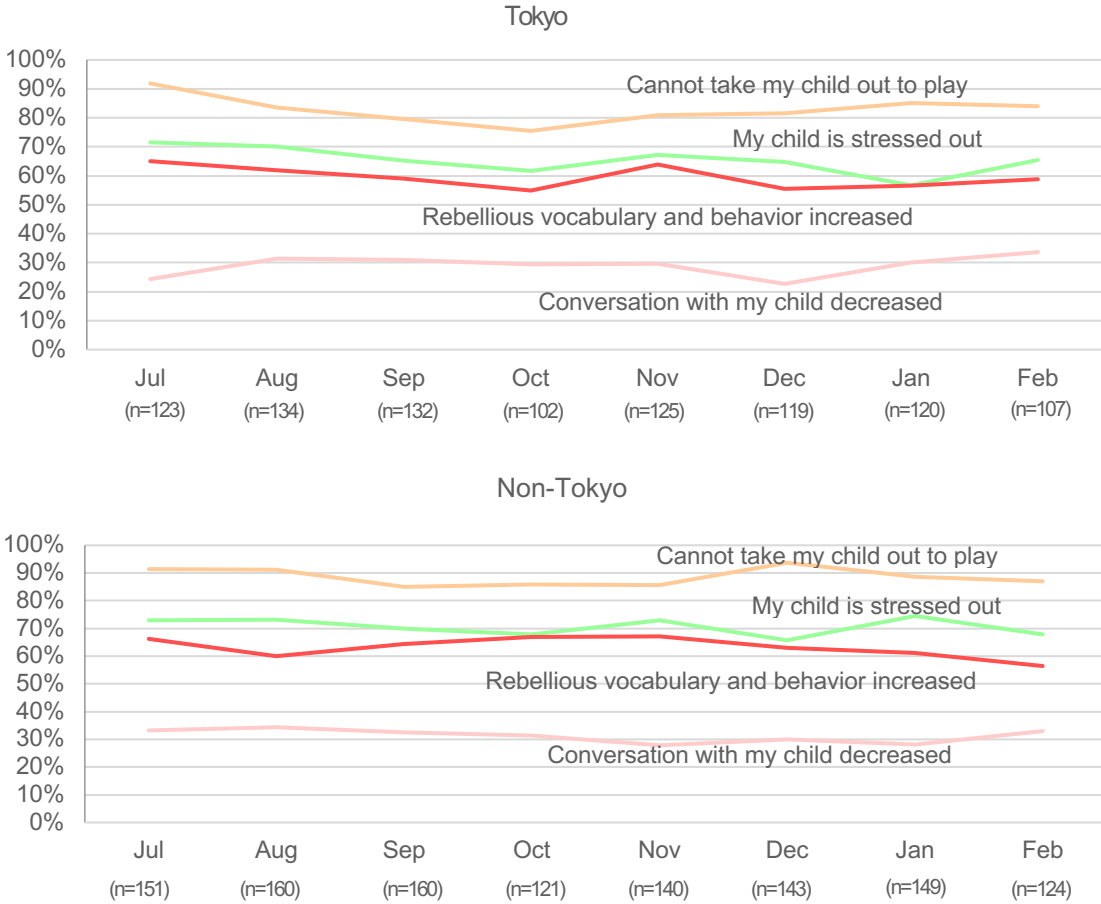
(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

- My child spends time alone indoors. I am worried about video games and smartphone addiction. (Tokyo/November 2020 Survey)
- I didn't want my child to spend time at the crowded children's center, so I cut back on the hours there. My child now stays home alone more frequently (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- Due to the frequently changed daily routines under the state of emergency, etc., my child is now skipping school often. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- Due to lack of exercise, my child is full of energy and cannot sleep. The doctor prescribed sleeping pills, but they are not working. S/he has asthma and under the state of emergency, we are being extra careful and staying at home. (Non-Tokyo/January 2021 Survey)
- My child is spending less hours outdoors with friends and more hours on video games and smartphones. S/he is also falling behind schoolwork. (Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- I found my child speaking to a stranger through a video game. I am very concerned that something like this could happen again. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)

In addition to the above, around 80% of the respondents from Tokyo and 85% from non-Tokyo areas have been unable to take their children out to leisure. Around 70% from both Tokyo and non-Tokyo respondents noted that their children are stressed out continuously, and around 60% of respondents from both areas said rebellious vocabulary and behavior increased.

Impacts on Children’s Daily Lives: Monthly Transition (2)

Survey Question “What are the main concerns regarding your elementary school children?”



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Voices of Single Mothers on Impacts on Children’s Daily Lives (2)
(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

- I can see that my child is losing weight and stressed, but I too am stressed and unable to do anything. (Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- My child is having ups and downs and sometimes yells or cries out loud. (Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- My child seems under stress because of the state of emergency and restriction of sports. (Tokyo/February 2021 Survey)
- My child used to like playing outdoors, but after the stay-at-home period, s/he will not go outdoors anymore. S/he is becoming stressed and throws tantrums at times probably because there are more homework to do. Also, it seems that the students are unable to play freely in the school yard as part of COVID-19 measures. (Non-Tokyo/November 2020 Survey)
- Bad words and behavior, constantly emotionally unstable. (Non-Tokyo/March 2021 Survey)

Voices of Single Mothers on Impacts on Children: Other Concerns

(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Weaker eyesight

- My child's eyesight is getting poorer and poorer. (Non-Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- Probably due to long video game hours, my child's eyesight that used to be good is getting poorer. (Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- Weaker eyesight, and no longer playing outdoors with friends. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 & February 2021 Survey)

Lack of exercise, weaker physical strength

- Weaker physical strength due to lack of exercise. (Tokyo/September 2020 Survey)
- Physical education classes were cancelled many times. (Non-Tokyo/September 2020 Survey)
- No opportunity to exercise. (Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)
- My child broke his/her bone. Muscle strength is declining, and stress is building up as well. (Non-Tokyo/ December 2020 Survey)
- Being afraid of COVID-19, only going out in the neighborhood. More time spent on video games and watching TV, resulting in lack of exercise. (Tokyo/January 2021 Survey)
- We are under the prefecture's state of emergency. My children are getting stressed due to lack of exercise. Increased quarrel between siblings. (Non-Tokyo/February 2021 Survey)

COVID-19 related weight gain

- Lack of exercise and eating lots of snacks, my child gained weight. (Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)

1.6 Child Care Services for Infants

Single mothers with infants face additional challenges on childcare, which is essential for single mothers to be able to work or seek jobs. The survey results revealed that nursery schools were the main option for many single mothers: only half of the respondents were able to seek support from their relatives. They were unable to reach out to friends and local networks in fear of infection.

Challenges of Single Mother Households with Infants: Monthly Transition

Survey Question "Was there any public/private support aside from nursery school (day care, kindergarten, certified children's center)? (multiple answers)"

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
1. Support staff of kids' and parents' plazas (kosodate hiroba)	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Support staff of temporary childcare services	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	0
3. Support staff of childcare center for sick children	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1
4. Support staff of family support center	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	3	1	0
5. Support staff of single-parent daily life support program	2	4	7	4	5	4	4	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	0
6. Support staff of short-stay program	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Support staff of twilight stay program	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
8. Baby sitter	3	2	4	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
9. Child's father (your ex-husband)	3	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	7	7	6	3	5	6	5	4
10. Child's grandparents (i.e. your parents)	25	25	23	17	14	21	18	13	36	37	36	27	34	32	33	27
11. Child's relatives excl grandparents (i.e. your siblings)	6	9	6	5	5	7	7	4	11	12	8	5	10	12	9	11
12. Your friends or school moms	8	6	6	3	4	3	3	3	5	9	11	9	10	9	10	8
13. Your neighbors	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	3	3	3	2	1	0	2
14. Others	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	3	1	2	2	2
n=people with infants (children under elementary school)	54	56	55	38	48	47	45	40	72	79	78	55	70	70	71	56

(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

Voices of Single Mothers on Child Care

(From August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

- Due to the state of emergency, there were days when I couldn't leave my child at the after-school day care service (Non-Tokyo/February 2021 Survey)
- I wanted to use the municipality's "Family Support" service to look for a more stable job but couldn't receive support. They told me that they felt sorry for the child - implying that I should not leave my child with others to look after. (Non-Tokyo/January 2021 Survey)
- My parents and grandparents are old, so I don't want to put them to risk by looking after my child but I have no other support service that I can access. (Non-Tokyo/December 2020 Survey)
- I wanted to go back to my parents' home, but my mother and sister are care staffs: due to COVID-19, their office limits interaction with other non-staff family members. (Tokyo/January 2021 Survey)
- I used the "Family Support" service after many months for just one day but was able to go out on my own. My child also enjoyed the service which made me happy. (Tokyo/October 2020 Survey)

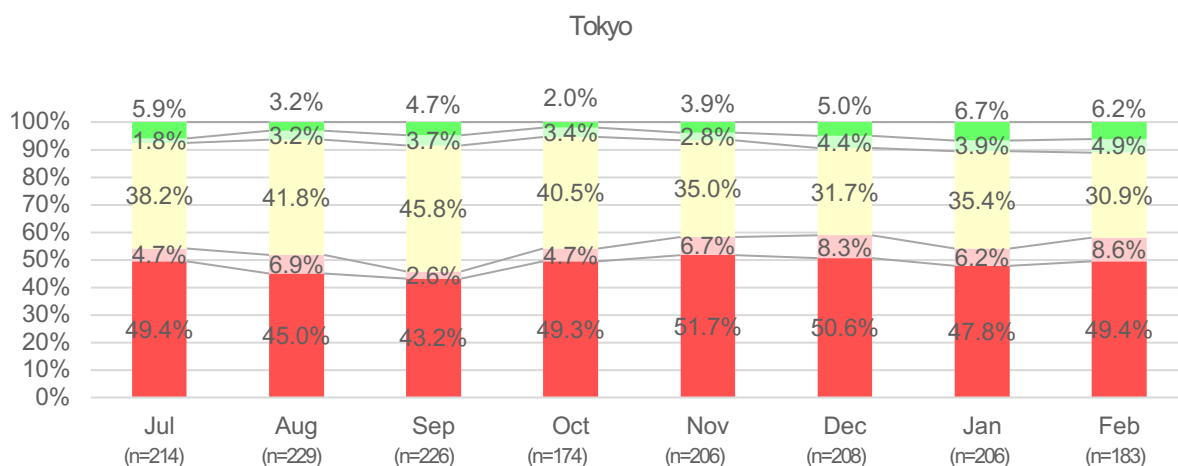
1.7 Income and Savings

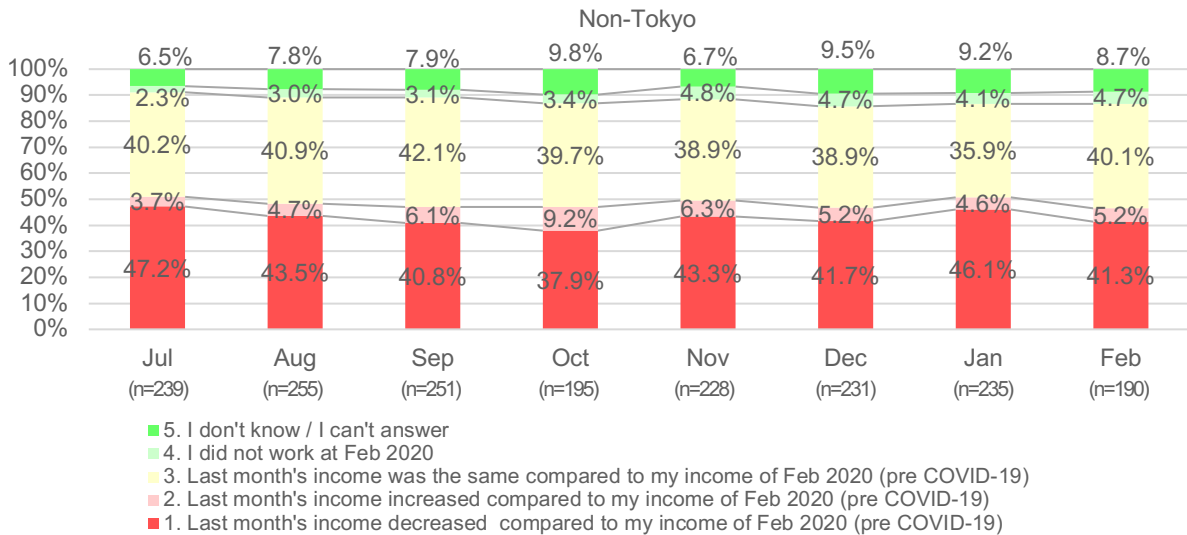
1.7.1 Income

Survey results showed a stark decline in income level of single mothers compared to pre-COVID-19 times. In all monthly surveys conducted from August 2020 to March 2021, around 50% of the respondents from Tokyo and 40% from non-Tokyo areas constantly responded that their income declined.

Income Decline: Monthly Transition

Survey Question "Was there change in your earned income compared to pre-COVID-19?"

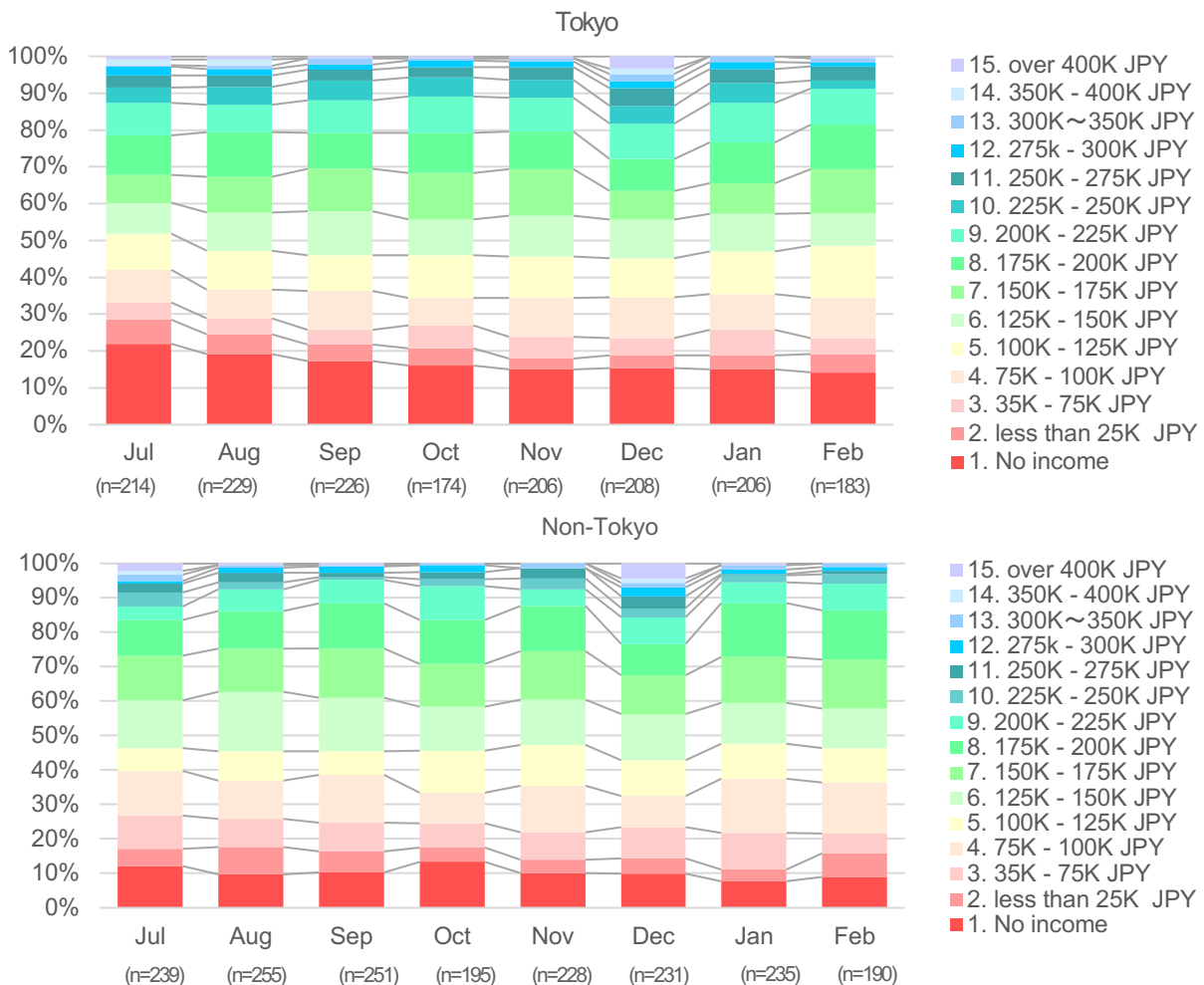




(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

The survey results also revealed the low-income level of single mother households. Approximately 50% from Tokyo and 40 to 50% from non-Tokyo respondents are constantly earning less than 125,000 JPY during July 2020 to February 2021.

Low Income Level: Monthly Transition

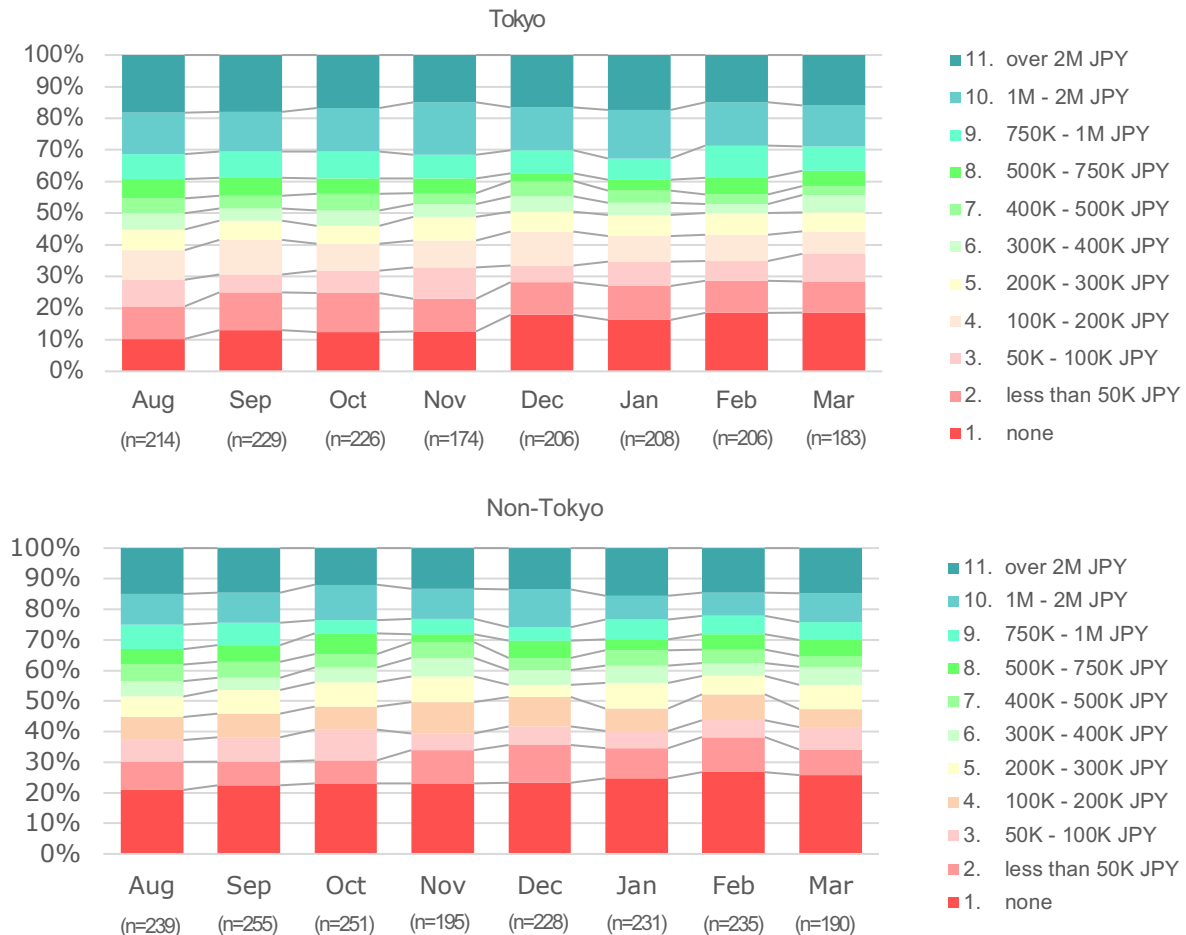


(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

1.7.2 Savings

As seen in other issues, many single mothers are tapping into their savings to make ends meet. However, 30% of the respondents' savings are less than 100,000 JPY, and with the prolonged pandemic and drop in income, their savings are running out. Every month, households with no savings are on the rise, reaching above 30% in Tokyo and around 40% in non-Tokyo areas.

Low or No Savings: Monthly Transition



(Data: Results from August 2020 to March 2021 Surveys)

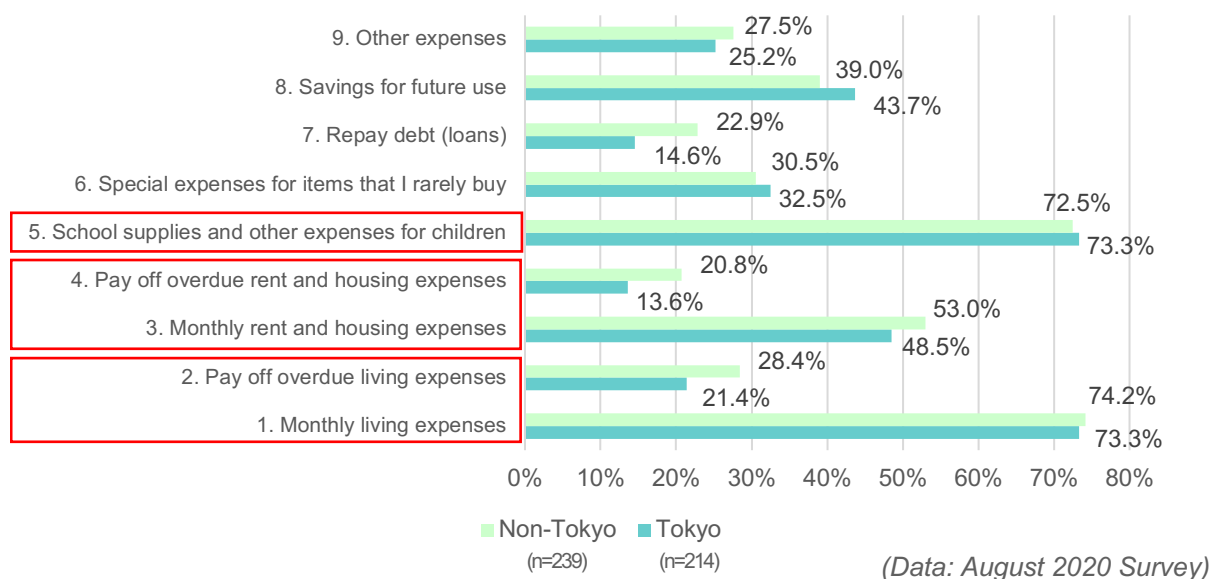
2. COVID-19 Related Benefits

2.1 Special Cash Payment

The surveys also asked single mother households on how they made use of the special cash payment for COVID-19 (100,000 JPY per household) distributed around June to August 2020. As below, many single mothers either paid off monthly or overdue living expenses, school supplies and other expenses for children.

Usage of Special Cash Payment (100,000 JPY per Household) for COVID-19

Survey Question "How did you spend or plan to spend the Special Cash Payment?"(multiple answers)

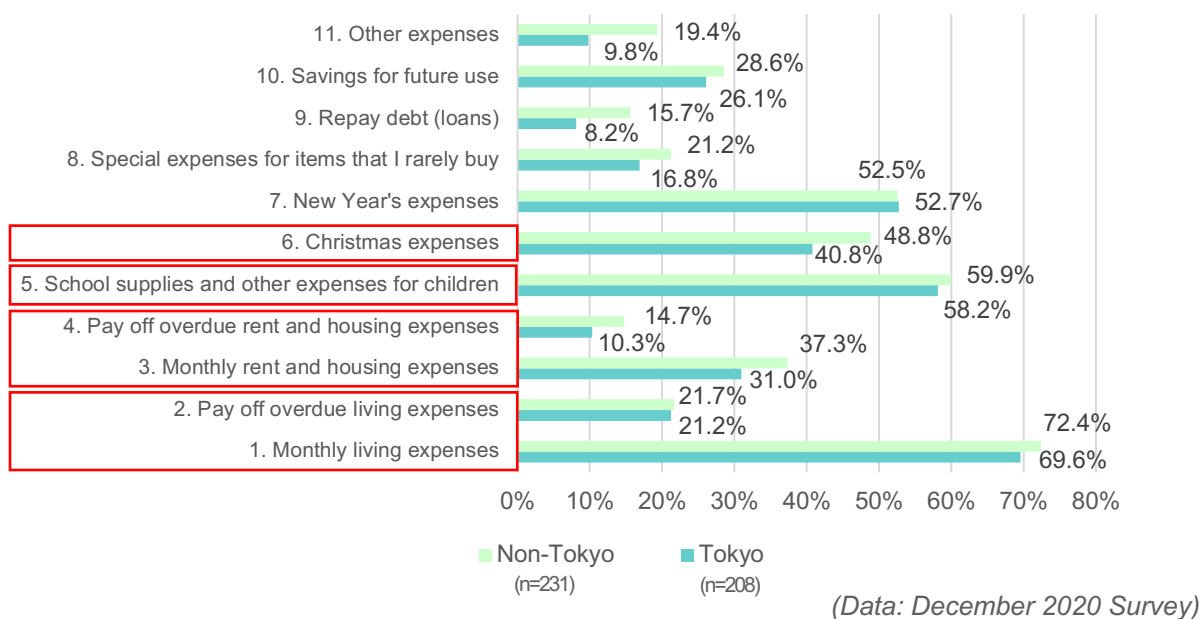


2.2 Temporary Special Cash Payment for Single-Parent Households

The Temporary Special Cash Payment for Single-Parent Households were paid out in December 2020. Main usages were similar to the previous Special Cash Payment. In addition, many single mothers spent the funds to prepare for the New Year's.

Usage of Temporary Special Cash Payment for Single-Parent Households

Survey Question "How did you spend or plan to spend the Temporary Special Cash Payment for Single-parent Household?" (multiple answers)



CONCLUSION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, absolute poverty is expanding, and single mothers who work part-time and/or in the food and service industries continue to face drastic income decline. As a result of the pandemic, poverty among single mother households, which always existed, has become more acute. This serious situation jeopardizes not only the lives of mothers and children, but also their future.

It is an extremely grave situation and has posed serious impacts on the lives, growth, and education of their children. The survey results revealed that the ratio of elementary school children that lost weight marked over ten percent during the survey period. The respondents were unable to afford basic school clothes and supplies. Many children were unable to keep up with schoolwork, play with friends or were left unaccompanied, leading to physical and/or mental instability for many. The two emergency cash benefits were helpful to respond to temporary or seasonal (year-end) needs but not sustainable.

These staggering data show how the current systems and policies have not been able to respond fully to the real needs of these households.

A comprehensive support system is urgently needed, aimed at easing the vulnerabilities of the single mother households. These systems should be well-coordinated and provided over the course of the year. For example, the amount of the child-rearing allowance (*jido fuyo teate*) is calculated based on the income from the previous year with an assumption that the income level remains the same the following year. They do not respond to the seasonal needs, either, e.g. higher utilities for summer and winter, school breaks where food and utility expenses rise, or in February or March when parents have to purchase many school supplies to prepare for the new school year that starts in April. The costs of supplementary learning materials are not necessarily covered under the Financial Assistance for School Expenses (*syuugaku enjo*). Items covered by the assistance depends on the municipality and therefore, parents need to pay for items that are not covered. The Single Mother Research Project will continue to shed light on the different layers of challenges that single mother households face in the research series that will follow, and advocate for a more comprehensive and adequate policy change.

ANNEX

This report is one of the research series that examines the various dimensions of challenges of single mother households in Japan.

Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Children in Single Mother Households in Japan

Marking the Children's Day, May 2021 (Japanese edition published on April 25th, 2021)

NPO Single Mothers Forum, & Single Mother Research Project

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