



**Children and Care Work: Political Perspectives about Young Carers in Japan**

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## List of Acronyms

CFA	Children and Families Agency
MHLW	Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
MIC	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
YCs	Young Carers

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## **Abstract**

Studies on YCs have been conducted in the global north and global south whereas in relation to the former studies from the UK have gained dominance. However, studies about YCs from the perspectives of East Asia have yet to develop. Research available about YCs in Japan written in English tends to be limited; hence, the research aims to contribute to the studies on YCs to make the topic known among non-Japanese speakers. The topic of YCs have been recently gaining momentum in Japan with the introduction of support laws in 2024. The main research question is through what dynamics and in what form (i.e. representation and conceptual form) is the issue of children as carers emerging as a policy topic in Japan? The paper answers the question through the use of textual analysis of looking at the sessions in the Diet (Parliament of Japan) and other governmental bodies along with the use of interviews. The findings show that changes in Japanese society, such as the rise of nuclear households, the high dependency ratio and discrepancies of support between the national and local governments act as a need for the government to respond to such changes. A welfare regime that combines both governmental and community support seems to be the solution to support YCs.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Topics on unpaid care work have often focused on feminist perspectives of the role of women's care work of raising children as the next human capital, which is often unpaid yet contributes to the capitalist economy. However, children and care work offer a unique perspective in the fact that they have different positions than adults who can voice their opinion or organize social movements. While Japan is a “developed country” in the sense of economic advancement and political stability, it shows the existence of YCs even in global north countries where the response to YCs as a policy matter has been slow in Japan.

## **Keywords:**

Young Carers, Japan, welfare regime, care work, dependency ratio

# 1) Wearing the Adult Shoes in Care Work

## 1.1 Demographic Change and Care Work

*“We’re now in an age where anyone can become a carer. When that happens, is it okay to just say it was bad luck and take responsibility for it?” (Carers Japan representative, 2024)*

This is a quote from a representative of a lobbyist organization that I interviewed for the research. The quote is important for two reasons; one is the use of the word “anyone” and second is the response to care work. In the context of an aging population, care work is no longer limited to adults only, but children are also becoming part of the caregivers. While the common social understanding in Japan has been that it is the responsibility of families to take care of each other, this notion gets complicated when children become the caregivers as will be discussed in the paper. When the government is slow in its response then individuals are left alone to deal with care work. The Japanese government has only recently started to take actions to support YCs and alleviate the responsibility of care work taken up by children.

Caring responsibilities tend to be associated with adults and not with children in the global north. The assumption about children in the global north is that they are supposed to be in full-time education and preparing to be productive adults in the future (Evans, 2014, p.64). Despite the involvement of children in care work, such unpaid care work by children has not been addressed by UNICEF until recently in the 2016 roundtable to discuss care work and children as a global policy issue (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2017). Hence, care work by children is a topic of importance and relevance to both global north and south countries.

YCs exist even in the global north as found through a study by Becker (2007) that YCs tend to be similar regardless of the welfare regime that they live in where most children are involved in low intensity care work while YCs are on the heavier side of the spectrum. While the factors that make YCs more likely to arise in one country than another are different. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, HIV infections affect the demographics of the population where reduction in the life expectancy along with an increase in the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS leads to the need of caregivers who are often women and children to do the care work; especially with the minimal role of the state in offering welfare or nursing care to its citizens (Robson *et al.*, 2006, p.94-96). While YCs in the global north arise depending on the context of the country where chapter 4 will discuss countries of the UK and Sweden. YCs in both the global north and south tend to do care work due to the combination of low financial resources, lack of support provision by the government and the demand of care provision in the family that leaves them with no choice but to be involved in care work (Becker, 2007, p. 34).

In a similar way, changes in demographics in Japan contributes to the rise of YCs in recent times. Japan has the highest old-age dependency ratio among the OECD countries that is expected to continue rising to 79% by 2050 (Jones, 2024, p.71). This means that for every 100 people of the



working age population (20-64) must support 79 people above the age of 65. Coupled with a low total fertility rate of 1.26 in 2022; meaning that on average women give birth to one child (Ibid., p.75). Such a demographic dynamic increases the care burden on the society where the number of people who require care is increasing at a higher capacity than the people who can support them. In fact, Japan is expected to face a shortage of 570,000 care workers by 2040 (Kibi, 2024). This shows the expedited growth of the elderly to the point of not having enough care workers to support them. Despite Japan's low acceptance of immigration, acceptance of international care workers is seen through the bilateral agreements with Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines to respond to the growing demand of care workers along with creating care worker residence permits (Vogt, 2023).

With such changes in the demographics and increased need for care workers that play a factor in children doing care work, the topic of YCs has been rising in the political sphere in Japan as an issue that needs to be addressed by the government. The national government has set 3 targets of early deduction of YCs and connecting them to the relevant bodies along with increasing awareness about YCs in local governments (Public Relations Office, 2024). The second goal involves measures to support YCs through offering consultation with support groups and collaboration with educational and medical institutions. Lastly, the national government initiated a three-year program starting from 2022 known as the Intensive period for raising awareness of YCs to increase social awareness about YCs through the use of posters, leaflets and online events with the goal of making 50% of middle and high school students be aware about YCs.

Unlike other members of the population such as women or adults who can voice their words and seek action to represent themselves, children are less likely to do so, and their voices tend to be represented by adults. In fact, YCs tend to be referred to as a 'seldom heard' population of young people whose voices are not represented in the decision-making that affects them (Kelleher, Seymour and Halpenny, 2014, p. 25). YCs often tend to be unaware that they are assuming care work that is not the "normal" thing to do, where the idea in Western culture tends to be that children are not encouraged to take on substantive care responsibilities as they are expected to be the care receivers from adults (Becker, 2007, p.25). Unawareness of being YCs is likely to happen if one grew up doing care work and had no basis of comparison to other households or they might use other terms to refer to the care work taken up by them (Smyth, Blaxland and Cass, 2010). Not only this, but children might find it harder to discuss the hardships they are facing in the care work especially to adults. This has been the case with an example of YCs in England where some YCs expressed their concern in sharing their experiences to strangers due to being perceived as no longer wanting to provide care for their families or guilty of sharing such private matters (Aldridge *et al.*, 2016, p.55). Also, they might find it hard to find another peer of their age who can relate to them due to the fact that the rate of YCs is not very high in Japan along with the fact that the term YCs is not common among the public.

## **1.2 Relevance and Justification of the Topic**

Japan has one of the highest rates of elderly population where 30% of its population is aged 65 and over coupled with its high dependency ratio (UNPD, 2024). The topic brings a new aspect to consider in an aging society where the focus often tends to be on the economic side of shrinking labor force

population.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the social aspect of care provision has often been neglected, especially care work undertaken by children under the age of 18.

Not only is care work related to the rise of the elderly population along with the increase in nuclear families, but some children have to suddenly assume the role of YCs. A recent survey conducted by the Traffic Accident Orphans Educational Association (2024) in Japan showed that around 15.8% of the surveyed students became YCs after one of their parents, who was most likely to be their father, was involved in a traffic accident. This shows the urgency in promoting support for YCs where anyone has the potential of becoming a YCs regardless of their financial circumstances.

Also, the governance administration in Japan is important to mention to understand the discrepancies in supporting YC. There are three levels of the national, prefectural and municipalities (the aforementioned two are referred to as local governments). To put this into numbers, there are 47 prefectures and 1741 municipalities. One of the first prefectures to support YCs is Saitama Prefecture which has done so before the national government through the introduction of an ordinance stating the need to support YC. It set a precedent for other prefectures that started to follow this as well. Equally important is the role of actors outside the national government where efforts by NGOs, local and international research play a key role in accelerating the efforts taken by the national government to create policies that address YCs (Leu, A. *et al.*, 2022, p.631). Hence, a bottom-up approach tends to be the common driver to set discussions about YCs.

The rise of the topic in the political sphere of Japan, especially the introduction of an Act to support YCs is seen as a positive move by former YCs. Some stated being hopeful for the removal of financial disparities to support YCs among local governments, increase in the awareness of adults about YCs considering the difficulty for YCs to voice their need for support (NHK, 2024). Such a political step by the government shows the concern regarding care work and the need to create policies as a result (Becker, 2007, p.24). At the same time, the initial stages in how YCs are being discussed is significant for it will set the future steps in how YCs are perceived by the society and the political side of Japan. While the research's focus is on Japan, the aim is to shed light on the topic of YCs considering the existence of YCs in the Global North or South where children assume care work regardless of the welfare system of the country (Ibid., p.32).

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Zhao, Z. (2023). Effects of Population Aging on Japan's Economic Growth. In: Li, X., Yuan, C., Kent, J. (eds) Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Economic Management and Green Development. Applied Economics and Policy Studies. Springer, Singapore.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7826-5\\_42](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7826-5_42). Or, Miyahara, T., Adelaja, A. Aging and Economic Growth in Japan: Differential Effects of Multiple Generations. *Population Ageing* 15, 239–258 (2022).  
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### 1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The objectives of the research are twofold, first is to identify the context for the recent rise of awareness of YCs by the stakeholders on the national and prefectural levels where efforts to support YCs varied on the two scales. The topic of YCs was not discussed heavily until a decade later in 2021 from when it was brought to the Diet for the first time in the post Great East Japan earthquake in 2011 regarding the urgency to support YCs and caregivers in the disaster-stricken areas.

Second is to understand the various perspectives about YCs in the context of Japan. Such perspectives allow us to understand the motivation behind their actions to support YCs. The views they hold have power in affecting public views considering that only around 30% of the 2400 people surveyed in 2021 stated their knowledge about the term of YCs and the care work done by YCs in which TV was the media through which respondents came to know about the topic (The Japan Research Institute Limited, 2022, p.309). Hence, understanding the context and the way YCs are being discussed among different stakeholders is important as it will set the route for how YCs are seen both in the public and the political agendas in the future.

The research question is as follows: *Through what dynamics and in what form (i.e. representation and conceptual form) is the issue of children as carers emerging as a policy topic in Japan?*

The following are the sub-questions:

1. What is the context giving rise to address the topic (demographic change, welfare regime)?
2. What is the role and relation of the policy scales between international, national and prefectural levels?
3. How are YCs being represented by the various actors (national, prefectural and non-profit)?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The following chapter offers a theoretical framework of welfare regimes and childhood theories in relation to YCs. The third chapter describes the methodology of the use of textual analysis and qualitative interviews. The fourth chapter offers contextual background about YCs internationally with the examples of the UK and Sweden and then brings back the discussion into YCs in Japan. Followed by the findings chapter of the political views on YCs and the context for why such discussions are happening now. Lastly, the conclusion section summarizes the findings of the paper.

## **2) Children Through the Eyes of the Welfare Regime**

The chapter discusses the analytical framework that acts as the basis to understand the rise of the topic of YCs as a political topic. The chapter is divided into two sections of welfare regimes and childhood and care work. The theory of welfare regimes is useful to understand the multiple dimensions that affect care work undertaken in the household that are often not fixed and continue to change. The section begins with the typologies of welfare regimes to understand the broader context for the rise or lack of the rise of the topic of YCs followed by situating care work within the welfare regime. The second part is the conceptual framework of childhood, which adds another layer to understand changes in welfare provision as an intervention. This is seen as necessary when care work is taken up by children due to challenging expectations of adults regarding children being dependent on adults and vulnerable members of society that need protection.

### **A) Welfare Regime in the Context of Care**

The study of welfare regimes allows us to understand the role of the state in affecting interactions among the family and market (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.21). Based on the interactions upon such actors, three welfare regimes are established: the liberal, conservative or social democratic regimes. Liberal regimes are characterized as minimal support from the state, and the provision of services is left to the market instead (Ibid., p.26-27). Hence, benefits tend to be provided through contractual agreements for the working-class and their employers or purchased through insurance companies (Esping-Andersen, 1997, p.183). Accessing benefits in conservative regimes is heavily based on contractual basis based on one's occupational status (Ibid., p.182). States are least involved in conservative regimes where benefits are only offered as a last resort, where the emphasis is that the family should be the primary source to provide benefits; women and other family members can access benefits in an indirect format through the male breadwinner (Ibid). Lastly, social democratic regimes are drastically different from the two aforementioned regimes in which benefits are seen as a universal right for its citizens regardless of their employment; the state is seen as the responsible body to provide services to children and the elderly (Ibid.). It is significant to note that most states exhibit a hybrid mixture of the welfare regime types, but some states exhibit features of a certain welfare regime type more than the others (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.73).

To understand the differing attitudes towards YCs as will be discussed in chapter 4, the UK and Sweden are chosen due to their differing family and state welfare provision. The UK is characterized as a liberal welfare regime and Sweden as a social democratic regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.74). Such a discussion offers a comparative context in understanding the reaction of states to YCs. One of the earliest categories of Japan's welfare regime is a mixture of liberal and conservative regimes (Esping-Andersen's, 1997, p.187). Welfare in Japan is characterized as a mixture of the market, state and family can be seen where family plays a central role in such a support system (Shizume, Kato

and Matsuda, 2020, p.121; Table 1). The market plays a role through the occupation of the employees. For instance, employees who work in larger firms have more benefits, such as higher social insurance, retirement payments or household allowances compared to non-regular workers who would be entitled to the National Health Insurance as their right (Ibid., p.120).

The discussion of care in the context of welfare regimes is essential amid the changes in demographics and financial resources and social norms of women being more involved outside the household in employment; leading to the decrease of care supply at a time when demand is increasing (Daly and Lewis, 2000, p.288). Amid such changes, social care is a proposed term that looks at three dimensions of care work identified below (Ibid., p.285):

- Care as labour; looks at the conditions of how care work is carried out (whether it is unpaid/paid, informal/formal services exist where such characteristics can change depending on the state)
- Care located within norms and obligations; looks at the social roles within the family and the role of the state in weakening or strengthening such norms
- Care has financial and emotional costs

Such dimensions need to be understood through the macro levels of the state, market and family and the micro levels among the individuals themselves of the caregivers and care receivers and how such levels interact with each other (Ibid., p.285). Changes at the macro level encompass alteration in the distribution of care among sectors of the state, market and family while micro level changes include changes in the relation between caregiver and receivers, and distribution of caring activities (Ibid., p.287).

The dimensions of social care framework can be applied on YCs where care work as labour takes up the time that YCs could have spent on education, employment or social relations that can have costs and YCs might not view themselves as carers but as fulfilling familial obligations (Cass, 2007, p.250). From the perspective of YCs and their parents stated their resistance to be associated with the term YCs (Aldridge, 2018, p.161). For instance, some YCs stated that they feel uncomfortable or do not identify with the term (Wayman, Raws, and Leadbitter, 2016, p.52). They stated that caring is part of their everyday lives, and some proposed the use of other terms; such as “looking after” or “guardian” (Ibid. p.50). At the same time, some YCs felt proud of the term and wanted to be identified as such, showing the subjective use of the term and the difficulty in applying the term to every YCs. Considering that the topic of YCs has only recently been discussed as a political issue in Japan, I will analyze the three dimensions looking at adults due to the large phenomenon of care work in an aging population that affects the provision of welfare. The dimensions of YCs will be looked at through the findings of the research at the end of the paper.

The provision of welfare in Japan has been changing due to the changing social and economic trends. The characteristics of nuclear families with the male as the breadwinner and women as housewives and the provision of welfare benefits by the corporates started to change during the 1980's due to the uncertainty in the economy (Miyamoto, 2021, p.116). Also, the government started to initiate measures to tackle the low fertility rate and increase childbirth. For instance, the most recent

measures include the increase of child allowances for the third and subsequent children along with offering full-paid care leave for married couples and 10% of wages will be paid to parents working shorter hours to take care of children under the age of 2 (Kawano, 2024). Along with the generous paternal leave offered by the government in Japan of 31 weeks fully paid leave which is the longest among the 41 high-income countries part of the OECD (Gromada and Richardson, 2021, p.11).

In terms of the normative framework of care work, women tend to be the main caregivers for children and elderly. A survey showed that women with children under the age of 6 spend on average 4 hours on childcare and 3 hours on household work as opposed to only 1 hour of childcare and 30 minutes on household work by men (MIC, 2022, p.2). Even on an international level, Japanese women rank fourth among the OECD countries in terms of time spent on unpaid work while men rank third in paid work (Jones, 2024, p.92). Not only do women face the effect of care work during childcare, but even in care for the elderly where women who provide care work for more than 5 hours per week were more likely to quit their regular employment (Kikuzawa and Uemura, 2021). Women who tend to be above the age of 60 tend to still account for more than half of the caregivers for people above the age of 65; 68.9% of women provided care compared to only 31.1% of men among caregivers living in the same household as the person being taken care of (Cabinet Office, 2024, p.33). This shows the informal and unpaid care work done by women in an aging population. Women tend to accept their roles of being a caregiver due to social norms where most grew up seeing their mothers assuming caring roles along with being concerned about their reputation by their neighbors where the use of care services might be perceived as abandoning one's responsibilities of caring for parents (Sugiyama, Omote and Okamoto, 2023, p.5). Also, some women stated their hesitancy to discuss the matter with their husbands due to feelings of being responsible to take care of one's parents or not to make their husbands perceive such a discussion as criticizing one's in laws (Ibid., p. 7).

Even for adults, there are costs when it comes to care work. Niimi (2021) showed that being the main caregiver for one's parents or in-laws increased the probability of one to leave their jobs along with the fact that formal care increases the likelihood of the caregiver to remain in their workplace (Ibid., p.12-13). Also, unmarried people are more likely to leave their jobs due to not having the family support offered if they were married (Ibid., p.7). This can be similar to the case of YCs amid the low fertility rate and rise of nuclear households where their burden would increase without the presence of other family members to share the burden of care. This shows the significance of having formal support for care recipients, which can also explain that families who cannot afford to access paid formal care would turn to their children as a form of support while the adult member can continue to work to contribute financially to the household. Leaving one's workplace due to care work has an impact on the financial resources where around 68% of the workers stated that their financial burden concern increased (MHLW, 2022a, p.153). Children from low-income households or cohabiting with grandparents are more likely to be engaged in care work (Nakanishi et al., 2023). Children of three-generation households could imply the low financial and physical aspect of the parents that makes them rely on the informal support of grandparents and children (Ibid., p.8). Along with children whose parents have irregular working hours or work on Sundays or at night (Miyamoto, 2021, p.129). This shows the socio-economic inequality in affecting children's take up of care work.

Women tend to bear most of the costs of caregiving where a gender penalty exists; women often have to either choose between having a career or children, where most of the women in managerial positions do not have children (Iida, 2023, p.11). This tends to be the case due to the workplace characteristics of overtime work and positional relocations that make it difficult for women to balance childcare with work. The welfare system of Japan tends to still have the assumption of women being in the caregiver role (Kawano, 2024, p.5). This is evident through the trend of the “M-Curve” that is commonly referred to the low labor force participation of women during the ages of 25-39 due to childcare (Yoshida, 2022, p.4). A survey by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2024) surveyed the status of employment of women during the period of 3 years from when they found out they are pregnant. More than 40% of mothers quit their employment mainly due to the difficulty of combining childcare and work due to work hours and not having the physical strength to do both (Ibid., p.152, 154, 157). While the curve is starting to change, it is mainly attributed to the employment of women in mostly non-regular work where women stated that they opted for non-regular work after childbirth to balance household and care work (MHLW, as cited in, International Monetary Fund, 2024, p.9). This is especially the case with the rise of waiting lists to enroll children in childcare facilities that makes mothers more likely to quit their jobs (Ibid., p.12).

## **B) Childhood and Care Work**

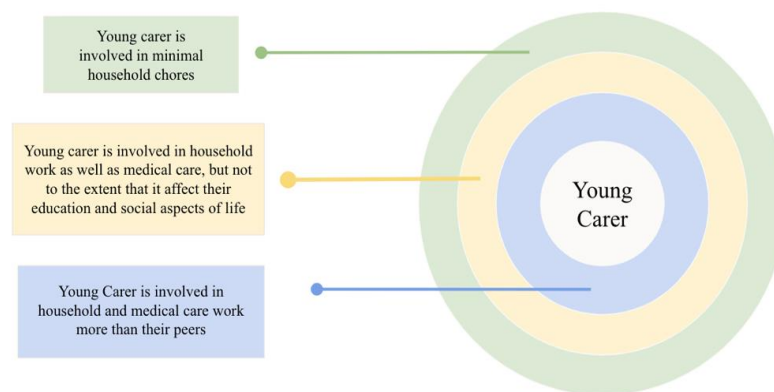
One of the early theories regarding children emerged during the 1950's in what is known as the development theories where as the name suggests, childhood is a period for development where Piaget (1972, as cited in, Ansell, 2017, p.19) created stages depending on the age of the child and the skills they acquire. The common idea in developed countries tends to be that children should be involved in activities that lead to their psychological development (Miller, 2005, p.24). Hence, housework is not seen as something that contributes to the development of children rather education is seen as the space that children should occupy (Ibid., p.25). Also, children were viewed as innocent and in turn need to be protected until adulthood (Smith, 2015, p.23). This period marked the neoliberal reforms in some of the Western countries as the UK where the success of the future depended on the individuals, making children be seen as future assets for the productivity and success of the society (Ibid., p.24). Hence, adults are in charge of determining what environment and activities are appropriate to preserve the innocence of children and increasing their likelihood to become a productive citizen.

Socialization theory emerged as an opposition to the development theories due to its view of childhood in terms of developmental stages along with viewing children as objects of the process of development (Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2014, p.120). Instead, sociology of childhood is of the view that a universal definition for childhood or how they are supposed to behave does not exist, instead such ideas tend to be relative to the social norms and beliefs regarding childhood (King, 2007, p.196).

The term used for children who assume care work is YCs where a definition for caring can be seen in the figure below. There are three concentric circles that correspond to the amount of care

work taken up by the YCs. Looking at the term itself, one can see the problematic or difficulty in having a universal definition where the two words are subjective and would create different images depending on the individual. The term “young” makes one question which ages are seen as young and adding to it “carer” of who the young person is taking care of. Also, caring has different dimensions from the activities that the YCs is involved in to the amount of time YCs are engaged in such activities (Joseph *et al.*, 2019, p.82).

**Figure 1: The Concentric Model of Defining YCs**



Own interpretation of the Concentric Circle Model of YCs as described in (Joseph *et al.*, 2019, p.83)

Care work by children challenges ideas of childhood and is seen as a risk to the society and the children themselves due to the economization of education and gaining human capital (Wihstutz, 2017, p.186). Hence, intervention is needed to protect children and minimize such risks. For instance, two scales of the Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities Checklist (MACA-YCs18) and the Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring Scales (PANOC-YCs20) have been developed by Joseph *et al.* (2009) through studying YCs in the UK to create measures that can be used in research about YCs and understanding the effect of an intervention in changing such measures. The (MACA-YCs18) includes a list of 18 items where the activities are categorized into 6 subscale items of “domestic tasks, household management, personal care, emotional care, sibling care and financial/practical care (Ibid., p.513).” Along with the reference to the two measures in the support manuals for YCs in Japan (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 2023b). The PANOC-YCs20 uses two sub-scales to measure the positive and negative outcomes of caring where results showed that girls tend to have a negative outcome for household management, and the outcomes for emotional care were divided between those who found it as negative vs. positive outcomes (Joseph *et al.*, 2009, p.517). On the other hand, boys found that financial, sibling and domestic care provided positive outcomes while personal care had a negative outcome (Ibid.). While such scales are useful to understand YCs, it is significant to note the impact of how YCs are defined in the policy responses taken by the government where defining YCs by only looking at the tasks taken by YCs vs. the impacts



of caring can create different policy responses. The former leads to policy objectives with the aim of reducing the burden of care while the latter leads to policies with a focus on the impacts of caring (Joseph *et al.*, 2019, p.83). While the use of the term is beneficial for the literature and the spread of the topic by organizations which is appreciated by some YCs (Ibid., p.82). However, there is a drawback for the use of the term as a one-fit-all to describe the experiences of YCs under care work (Ibid.).

Not only this, but association with the term challenges societal norms of childhood where YCs continue to be a hidden group of the population. This is mainly due to the stigma associated with care work; especially with the common social context that children should be care recipients and not the ones to provide care, or lack of recognition about what YCs do unless through interactions with other YCs or support services (Smyth, Blaxland and Cass, 2010). If children do not associate with the term, then it might increase the likelihood or unwillingness to access services targeted to YCs. Also, some parents of YCs feared the consequences of being associated with the term to lead to separation from the families, where parents who required more support tended to hold such thoughts (Carers Trust and NatCen, 2019, p.13). This is important as YCs from such households would benefit the most from support systems yet are not seeking help due to the state's form of intervention. Lastly, some YCs might be isolated and are more likely to remain hidden. Abe (2022, p.157) identifies three factors that contribute to the isolation of YCs in Japan which are social, family and psychological factors of the child. Social factor examples include the role of statements made by adults that encourage YCs to continue to do care work without actually listening to the voices of YCs. Family factors of guardians telling YCs to keep the family matters private makes it harder for YCs to ask for support or lack of recognition of the care work done by YCs. Psychological factors refer to the thoughts that YCs have that leads to isolation, such as feeling guilty for having negative feelings towards the person they take care of or not knowing how long one has to do care work can lead to feeling isolated

To understand the emergence of YCs, the two terms of adultification and parentification relate to new discussions on childhood and are relevant to the topic of YCs where not every child who assumes care work will become YCs, but rather certain circumstances of socio-economic background play a role in this. Adultification of children is a term coined by Burton (2007) based on research in the USA that refers to the assumption of tasks to step in to respond to the needs of the family with little guidance on how to perform such tasks. Such responsibilities tend to be questioned by the social institutions of especially schools as they fall outside the social expectations of childhood being free of assuming such care work (Ibid. p.331). Children tend to assume such a responsibility as a result of the family's circumstances of family needs, capital, culture along with the attributes of children (Ibid., p.333). Children assume caring responsibilities to respond to the needs of the family from alcohol abuse, illness, taking care of siblings or translating for parents. Family capital refers to parental and social capital that plays an impact on children. For instance, the resources of parents of not having the mental, physical, financial or time capacity to be engaged in child-rearing activities would make children step up into such caring roles to compensate for their parents (Ibid., p.334). As for social capital, parents who do not have access to social support tend to have more adultified children. Family culture of the various norms and values held by the household can create certain expectations on the child to assume care work that would make children think such responsibilities is the norm. Lastly,

child attributes of gender and age can play a role in the likelihood of a child to become adultified (Ibid., p. 336). For instance, girls tend to be more likely to be YCs than boys which was the case in the UK and Japan; showing the less likelihood for the role of culture in such a trend (The Me-We project, 2019b, p.10; MUFG, 2021, p.112).

Another relevant term is parentification which tends to be the extreme version of adultification where children assume parental responsibilities full-time (Burton, 2007, p.340). One of the factors that increase the likelihood of children being parentified is having alcoholic parents, which in turn affects their educational achievement (Chase, Wells and Deming, 1998). There are two types of parentification of instrumental and emotional where the former refers to tasks like helping siblings, cooking or dressing care receivers while the latter refers to acting as an emotional support of supporting parents during a fight or mediator in the household (Byng-Hall, 2008, p.149). Parentified children are unique in the sense of attaching their duty of care work to their identity due to the familial expectations to be a caregiver along with often not receiving validation for the care work they do (Ibid., p.150, 152). Yet, one must be careful to not assume that parentification leads to negative consequences where Hendricks *et al.* (2021, p.528) showed the positive consequences of learning life skills of being independent, and empathetic. This is further seen in other studies that showed the positive outcomes of caregiving from being perseverant in their care work and being morally resilient by being patient and empathetic (Gough and Gulliford, 2020; Geraldine, 2020).

### 3) Methodology

To understand the rise of the topic of YCs as a political issue, I used a qualitative method of primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources is where most of the data comes from, I looked at governmental sources of sessions in the legislative body, the policy committee of the CFA and prefectural sites of Saitama and Tottori Prefectures. For primary sources, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Carers Japan and a representative body of the Saitama Prefecture government. The aim was to look at the various bodies of the government and the lobbyist organization to understand the political perspectives regarding YCs.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

For the primary sources, Saitama Prefecture was chosen as a prefectural representation due to being the first prefecture to create an Ordinance for YCs that was before the national government along with the need to understand the prefectural level in terms of their perspectives and support systems for YCs. The second is an actor of a lobbyist organization called Carers Japan, that aims for a society in which carers and the people being cared for can live in a supportive society. I used a different set of questions depending on the interviewees to understand their perspectives on YCs considering that they are different actors in the sense of one being governmental while the other is non-governmental. For instance, questions for Saitama Prefecture focused on the actions taken by the Prefecture to support YCs while questions for Carers Japan focused on the political aspects of lobbying work about YCs. However, certain questions remained the same, such as the views on the recent amendments on the Act on Promotion of Support for the Development of Children and Young People along with their views behind the emergence of YCs in Japan.

To understand the rise of the topic of YCs as a political manner. The choice for these bodies serves to answer the research question to understand the political context behind the rise of the topic of YCs and how they are viewed; considering the discrepancies in the efforts taken to support YCs among national and prefectural levels.

Data was collected from the following secondary sources:

- The National Diet of Japan composed of two houses: the House of the Representatives (lower house) and the House Councillors (upper house)
- Basic Policy Committee (one of the committees of the CFA, a new agency created by the current Prime Minister Kishida in 2023 to create a centralized governmental agency that promotes child policies to allow them to grow in a healthy environment (CFA, 2022)
- Websites of Saitama and Tottori Prefectures

In terms of the data collection for the Diet, the term “Young Carer” in Japanese is used in the search engine for both houses. The data from the lower house looked at the minutes of the meetings

while the data from the Upper House looked at the textual analysis of the questions and answers raised by the House of Councillors to the Cabinet. Such data offers insights into the political perspective held by members of the Diet in terms of how YCs are viewed by such decision-makers who have the power to propose and amend laws. Also, such sessions are broadcasted to the public which can play a role in affecting the views held by the public regarding YCs. Lastly, members of the parties in both houses are elected by the citizens; making members accountable to address social issues to ensure their popularity among the public and ensure them to be re-elected into the office in the future election terms.

As for the Basic Policy Committee, the same Japanese textual search of YCs was applied to the meetings held by the Committee. This committee was chosen out of the 8 committees that are part of the CFA due to its relevance to the research along with their main responsibilities that involve research on the Convention on the Right of the Child, and efforts to involve the voice of children in policies along with drafting and evaluating guidelines and policies. Also, the committee members include people with different roles, professions and age from university students and professors from different majors (economics, social welfare, career design and health). Being part of a new agency would allow us to understand the new political perspectives that would set future understandings of YCs.

As for the prefectural levels, Saitama and Tottori Prefectures are chosen. Saitama Prefecture is chosen due to being the first Prefecture to include YCs in their Carer Support Ordinance as well as being the fifth largest populated prefecture in 2024 with a population of 7,331,000 (Statistics Dashboard, 2024). Tottori Prefecture is chosen due to having the lowest population in Japan standing at 537,000. At the same time, it has a higher percentage distribution of the total population of children under 15 that stands at 12.2% compared to the national average of 11.7% (MIC, 2024). This can increase the likelihood for the presence of YCs in Tottori Prefecture. Also, rural prefectures tend to have fewer financial resources due to the lower tax revenue from the small number of the population. This can be seen with Tottori Prefecture having the lowest tax revenue for the prefectures along with the municipalities among the 47 prefectures (MIC, 2020). In terms of the research method for the prefectures, analysis of the ordinances for YCs and the meetings to promote the ordinances were selected from the official website of the prefectures.

## 3.2 Data Analysis

The primary data of the interviews was transcribed using an AI transcription system of TurboScribe and translated from Japanese to English. I analyzed the interviews using both languages while ensuring to accurately analyze the interviews from the Japanese context to not get lost in the translation. I then categorized the quotes based on the three sub-research questions. For the quotes used by Saitama Prefecture, I ensured that they align with the prefecture's views and were not only the views held by the representative by looking at resources published on the prefecture's website.

As for the secondary sources, data where the term "young carer" was mentioned in the Diet resulted in looking at 7 sessions out of 36 sessions in the House of Representatives since 2011, which was the first time YCs were mentioned. The sessions are divided into plenary sittings where I looked at 64 sittings. As for the House of Councillors, out of the 12 question and answer sessions since the

first mention of YCs in 2020, 4 sessions discussed YCs resulting in looking at 23 questions about YCs. I translated the sessions of the Diet and then categorized the quotes in a similar manner to the interviews. I also tried to capture and understand the bigger pictures that members of the Diet referred to YCs and decided to use quotes that capture such pictures in my findings chapter. As for the Basic Policy Committee, out of the total of 11 sessions conducted 4 discussed YCs which I also translated to English and analyzed the quotes. Lastly, I referred to the meeting of the bodies established by the prefectures to promote the ordinances to grasp an understanding behind the context and how the ordinances should be interpreted.

## 4) Contextualizing YCs

The chapter begins by offering context about YCs in the UK and Sweden that have different welfare regimes and the various state responses to YCs. This offers a comparative understanding for how states look at YCs in comparison to Japan. The second section situates the discussion to Japan by looking at the policies to support adult caregivers, which show that there are other factors that explain the emergence of YCs as the assumption would be that with the lack of state welfare provision of care work for adults, children are more likely to become caregivers. Followed by how YCs are defined, and who they are in terms of the activities and impact of care work that show the urgency of discussing this topic in a global north country as Japan. Lastly, the emerging support system for YCs is discussed which shows the changes in the welfare provision to support children involved in care work.

### 4.1 YCs Across Other Countries

To understand the differing policy responses towards care work taken up by children in a Global North context, the two countries of the UK and Sweden are chosen which are different in their welfare regime type. The study by Leu *et al.* (2022) offers a comparative analysis based on the service, legislation and research efforts taken by countries regarding YCs. Based on their study, the UK is the only country with an advanced level (strong research base about YCs and existence of services across the nation) while Sweden is at an intermediate level (medium research base for YCs and services exist in a local context and not nationwide).

The UK is one of the earliest countries to discuss the topic of YCs since the late 1980's (Becker and Aldridge, 1995, p.15). YCs is defined as “a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person” as long as the provision of care is not done under a contractual agreement or voluntary work (Children and Families Act, section 96, 17ZA (3), 17 ZB (3)). Hence, the UK does not limit the definition of care work to only family members which is important considering that some YCs take care of non-family members, such as their friends (The Me-We project, 2019b, p.11). According to the 2021 Census, the number of children involved in unpaid care work from the age of 5 to 17 was 120,000 in England; accounting for 1.4% of the stated age population (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

In terms of household characteristics of YCs, they tend to come from single-parent households or whose parents are not working (Letelier *et al.*, p.3). Care work for parents; mainly for mothers tend to be common regardless of the age of the YCs while taking care of siblings tend to be more common among YCs of younger ages of 5 to 11 compared to 16-17 while caring for grandparents tends to not be common among YCs in England (Aldridge *et al.*, 2016, p.24). The most common care work activity is household work, such as cleaning, cooking or dealing with paperwork

while providing emotional support by listening to the person cared for was second highest (Ibid., p.26).

There are two legislations that refer to YCs, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act. The legislation recognizes the existence of YCs as a group that needs support along with making local authorities responsible to take action to support YCs through the Needs Assessment. The assessment evaluates whether the care work undertaken by the YCs is appropriate considering their age and sex, the effect of care work on their education and well-being and whether they are considered as a child in need (The Young Carers Needs Assessment, 4.2). Children in need are defined as those whose health and development would be threatened if they cannot access services offered by the local authorities (Children Act, section 17 (10)). The assessment can be carried out in two ways through the local authorities if they suspect someone is a YCs or through a request from the YCs or their parents (Children and Families Act, section 96, 17ZA (1)). The idea behind the assessment is the use of a whole family-based approach where assessments should be made by considering the person being cared for as well as the person doing the care work to understand the dynamics of the care work done in the household to create an effective support plan (Local Government Association *et al.*, 2015, p. 13). The Care and Support Statutory Guidance (2024) lists some of the caring acts that are considered as inappropriate, such as medical administration, help in personal care, emotional support or use of strenuous exercise.

Provision of support for YCs is essential where a study (Vizard, Obolenskaya and Burchardt, 2019) showed that households with YCs tend to be affected more by austerity measures and financial crises where child poverty rates increased at a higher rate compared to other households during the time of study. While having a legislation to address YCs can be seen as a step forward to support YCs, implementation of such policies tend to be criticized from the lack of a standardized method to assess the needs of YCs in terms of the amount care work along with the support they need; making YCs be assessed differently depending on the local authorities along with the lack of awareness among YCs regarding their right to be assessed (Ibid., p.17). Support for YCs tends to be provided by non-state actors of charities and volunteer organizations which is essential during austerity measures of the government (Ibid., p.19).

In Sweden, authorities tend to be under the assumption of the lack of YCs due to the idea that the state provides adequate welfare to its citizens and children would not have to assume caring roles (Gould, 1995, p.59). Due to the lack of national census data, the number of YCs can only be drawn from research studies that give an estimate that around 7% of children aged 14-16 are considered as YCs (The Me-We project, 2019a, p.4). The concept of children doing care work tends to be unthinkable which contributes to the fact that the term YCs is not adopted yet instead 'children as next of kin' is what is used. Such a term provides insights into the Swedish perception of YCs where the idea is that the state has a responsibility to protect children through the provision of welfare, leading to the topic of YCs to be hidden in Swedish society (Ibid., p.12).

Not only this, but there tends to be a stigma surrounding YCs taking care of parents with mental health or alcohol abuse compared to physical disabilities; parents and children tend to not seek help in fear of being separated (Gould, 1995, p.67). This is significant to note considering that commonly YCs tend to take care of mothers with mental health illness in Sweden (The Me-We project,

2019a, p.10). While support exists, it has been criticized for its individual approach in terms of providing welfare to the care receiver rather than the caregiver along with the emphasis of responsibility of providing help lies on the social worker due to the open regulatory framework that lacks a clear definition for the limits of care work and when support should be provided (Ibid., p.14). Also, support tends to be provided based on the idea of parenting rather than to care work where the closest example of support for YCs is the Healthcare Act that gives children the right to support and information if they live permanently with adults of mental health, substance abuse or physical illness (Leu *et al.*, 2022, p.625). Such a view is unique to Sweden and significant to discuss where political discussions have not looked at children as being responsible for care work in the household whereas adult carers above the age of 18 have a right to support as defined in the Social Services Act (Nordenfors and Melander, 2017, p.15).

In conclusion, the emergence of YCs into the eyes of the policymakers among the different welfare regimes allows us to see the various responses by the states to YCs from the difference in how they are defined to the way they are supported. The following section looks at YCs in the context of the Japanese welfare regime.

## **4.2 YCs in the Context of Japan**

The section is divided into four subsections starting with a discussion on the policies provided for adults to offer some background into the state provision of welfare to support working adults, which is different from the case of YCs who are not in employment. Then the following section looks at the definition of YCs succeeded by a description of the care work and its impact. Lastly, current support systems for YCs will be explored which demonstrates the changes of welfare provision as a response to YCs.

### **4.2.1 Policies Regarding Care Work of Adults**

Care leaves are paid to some extent in Japan except for the bereavement leave. Table (1) summarizes the types of and duration of care leaves along with its eligibility, which in turn means there is an excluded group as well. For instance, the availability of care leaves is limited to people who have employment and the Caregiver Leave tends to be short term; meaning that children or other family members have to take up the care work when the working family members have to return to their employment to have financial income. Another policy that is not directly related to care work but can have an impact on the care work of children is regarding their parents, in cases of care accidents or workplace injury. Such a situation can be covered by insurance, but someone has to step in and do the care work, especially in the cases where hospitalization is not needed, as was discussed in the beginning of the paper regarding traffic accidents and YCs.

Shifts in the demographics led to the introduction of various policies to support caregivers and care receivers. For instance, the Long-Term Insurance Policy has been introduced due to the changing forms of informal care work done by the families. This has been the case due to the aging population, rise of smaller families and the movement of young people away from their households



(Fu, Iizuka and Noguchi, 2023, p.2). Along with the changing roles of women who are now more engaged in the labor force as they were seen as the primary caregivers in the family (Ibid.). The insurance is mandatory for all Japanese citizens aged 40-64 (secondary insureds) and those above 65 (primary insureds) (Ibid., p.10). The payment for the insurance would depend on one's income where the co-payment rate is set from 10% to 30% (MHLW, 2022, as cited in, Ibid, p.24). Primary insured people can receive support if it is deemed as required while secondary insureds can only receive support if they suffer from the 16-aged related illnesses (JICA, 2022, p.1-9). However, one can receive support only if they pass the eligibility-test and an interview conducted by the municipality of one's residence (Fu, Iizuka and Noguchi, 2023, p.10). Thus, welfare provision is characterized by a means-test and reserved to those only deemed to really need support.

Despite the existence of policies and insurance about care, around 470 thousand workers stated that they left their jobs in 2020 to take care of an aged or sick family member (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2022, p.28). There is a low take-up of the Caregiver Leave where only 1.6% of the workers took it up; employees tend to be unaware of the existence of such leaves or are hesitant to take the leave due to the workplace environment (The Japan News, 2023). Also, some full-time employees stated the difficulty of balancing care work and employment due to overtime work, not being able to use care services or do not know how to do so (MHLW, 2022a, p.137, 140). More than half of the full-time employees surveyed stated that their workplace does not offer caregiver leave; this shows the lack of awareness by employees of being protected by the law. Also, balancing work and care work is not enough to prevent workers from leaving their jobs where mental and physical burden tend to build up and some employees tend to not discuss the matter with their employers which often makes the effect of caregiving become intense (Ikeda, 2019, p.22).

**Table 1: Types of Care Leave in Japan**

TYPE OF CARE	ELIGIBILITY	EXCLUDES	DURATION OF LEAVE
<b>Childcare Leave</b> (MHLW, 2023a, p.1-2)	Can be taken by employees who have a child under 1 year old	1) Employees who work on a day-to-day basis 2) Self-employed 3) Less than one year of employment 4) Term of the contract where expiration of the contract during the leave would make employees ineligible	Paid Leave Until the child reaches 1 (Exception for the extension of the leave up to 18 months if admission to a nursery was unsuccessful, and additional 6 months if admission to a nursery still fails) A period of 1 year can be taken before the child is 14 months old if both parents take the leave at the same time
<b>Maternity Leave</b> (Nakazato, Takezawa and Nishimura, 2023, p.343-344)	Employees covered by the Employees Health Insurance regardless of their citizenship or residency statuses	1) Employees not covered under the Employee Health Insurance 2) Employees with only national health insurance; such as part-time or self-employed women	Paid Leave 14 weeks: 6 weeks before birth and 8 weeks after birth (obligatory to take 6 weeks of leave)
<b>Paternal Leave</b> (Nakazato, Takezawa and Nishimura, 2023, p.345-346).	Employees regardless of their contract type or insurance are eligible	1) Employees who work on a day-to-day basis 2) Self-employed 3) Term of the contract where expiration of the contract during the leave would make employees ineligible 4) Less than one year of employment (MHLW, 2023a, p.2)	Paid Leave 14 weeks: 6 weeks before birth and 8 weeks after birth (obligatory to take 6 weeks of leave)
<b>Caregiver Leave</b> (MHLW, 2023a, p.2)	Employees regardless of their contract type or insurance are eligible	1) Employees who work on a day-to-day basis 2) Less than one year of employment 3) Term of the contract where expiration of the contract during the leave would make employees ineligible 4) Worker only works twice a week	Paid Leave 93 days per family member (siblings, parents, children, grandchildren and in-law parents) who need care for more than 2 weeks (can be split up 3 periods)
<b>Bereavement Leave</b> (current laws do not state the right of employees for such a leave; instead the leave depends on the organizations) (労務SEARCH, 2024)		Depends on the workplace regulations	Receiving payment during the leave would depend on the workplace regulations On average, the length of the leave is as follows (the length of leave would depend on the workplace regulations as well as the relation of the employee to the deceased) 1) 1 week to 10 days in the case of the death of parents or a spouse 2) 3 to 5 days in the case of the death of grandparents or siblings or third degree relatives (grandchildren, aunts or uncles, etc.)

## 4.2.2 Definition of YCs

The topic of YCs has been discussed as a way to describe the literature of the UK during 2000-2010, but it was only during 2011-2013, where researchers have started to use the term in the Japanese version of using katakana which is the format used to describe foreign-adopted words (Kawamoto, 2020, p.47).

In terms of defining YCs, variation is seen among governmental bodies where prefectures, the lobbyist organization of Carers Japan and the MHLW (2022b) define them as “children who regularly perform household chores and family care that are generally assumed to be the responsibility of adults.” This demonstrates the difference in situating care work as an obligation of adults as opposed to the definition in the Act on Promotion of Support for the Development of Children and Young People as “children and young people who are deemed to be providing excessive care for family members or other aspects of daily life” (CFA, 2024a). The responsibility of adults to do care work has been removed which shows the changes in the idea of care work provision as a responsibility of the family members along with the age division of children and adults.

While the term YCs is not stated explicitly in the law as in stating that YCs are children who assume excessive care work, which will be discussed in chapter 5, but the term YCs is only referred to in the explanation of the Act on Promotion of Support for the Development of Children and Young People published by the CFA (CFA, 2024a, p.1). This is different from the approach taken by the legislation in the UK which explicitly states the term YCs and its definition. The amendment is momentous due to the recognition of care work done by children as care work that requires the support of the national and local governments in a legal manner, creating obligations to support YCs. However, it is based on a duty of effort and no legal consequences arise if local governments choose not to provide support.

## 4.2.3 Who are YCs of Japan?

This section describes the situation of YCs in Japan by looking at the three national surveys conducted by the Japanese government with multiple organizations of MUFG (Mitsubishi UFG Financial Group), The Japan Research Institute Limited, and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited among all 47 prefectures of Japan. The survey conducted by MUFG in 2021 surveyed students from 8th grade students, 11th grade high school students while the survey by the Japan Research Institute surveyed 6th grade students in 2022. It is significant to note that local governments also carry their own surveys about YCs, but they only offer a picture of YCs on a small scale and only in the prefectures that carry out such surveys. Lastly, the most recent survey conducted in 2023 by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited offers insights about YCs from all elementary to high school who received support from support organizations.

## A) Amount of Care Work and Types of Caring Activities

The MUFG survey (2021, p.92) covered 5558 8th grade students surveyed, 319 students stated that they do care work in the family in comparison to 307 students out of 7407 11th grade students. Figure 2 summarizes the amount of care work done based on frequency as well as the hours spent on care work. More than half of the students stated that they care for their siblings almost every day which is extremely common in a two-generation household as opposed to a three-generation household (Ibid., p.116). The types of care work that the survey looked at are household activities (cleaning, cooking and doing the laundry), physical nursing care (bathing and going to the toilet), accompanying members when they go out for shopping or walking, accompanying members for the hospital, emotional support (listening to complaints, engaging in a conversation), watching over, interpretation of Japanese, financial management, medicine management, and picking up and dropping off siblings. Household activities, accompanying members when they go out for shopping or walking and watching over tend to be the most common work done by students regardless of their grade (Ibid., p.93-95). Girls tend to be more involved in household activities than boys while boys tend to be more involved in financial management (Ibid., p.112).

The Japan Research Institute Limited (2022, p.65) surveyed 9759 6th grade students, 631 students that they care for are family members. Similar to the 8th grade and 11th grade students, taking care of their younger siblings tends to be common. However, the types of care work activities that are most common varied depending on the person being looked after where household activities were common when taking care of parents while emotional support was common for grandparents and picking up and dropping off for siblings (Ibid, p.108). One of the comments by a 6th grade student was the frustration of taking care of a younger sibling of not being able to stop their crying (MUFG, 2021, p.78). Another comment is by 8th grade students who stated that they took care of their siblings as a form of helping out their parents and thought that such caring activities is the norm, and did not know that such actions are actually what a YCs does, and would have considered seeking support if they knew this at the time along with comments as always putting the needs of their siblings first (The Japan Research Institute Limited, 2022, p.146).

In addition to taking care of siblings, taking care of parents was the second most common family member that YCs took care of. Physical disability and mental health illness were the most common characteristics of such parents (MUFG, 2021, p.93; The Japan Research Institute Limited, 2022, p.66). Furthermore, the most recent survey by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (2024) looked at YCs who received support and the situation of both parents. One can see that most of the YCs who sought support come from single mother households who often suffer from mental health illness (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 2024, p. 35, 38). This is important to note as being in a single-parent household would put more pressure and responsibility on YCs to assume care work than share such a responsibility with other adults in the same household. Not only this, but also mental health adds a sensitive layer to the care work where social perceptions as well as the perception of the caregiver and YCs comes into play. For instance, a study by Kanehara *et al.* (2015) showed the common factors for not accessing medical services, such as the lack of knowledge about the availability of medical services which was more common among females and younger population under 50 years. This shows that YCs and their mothers might be more likely to not receive information about medical

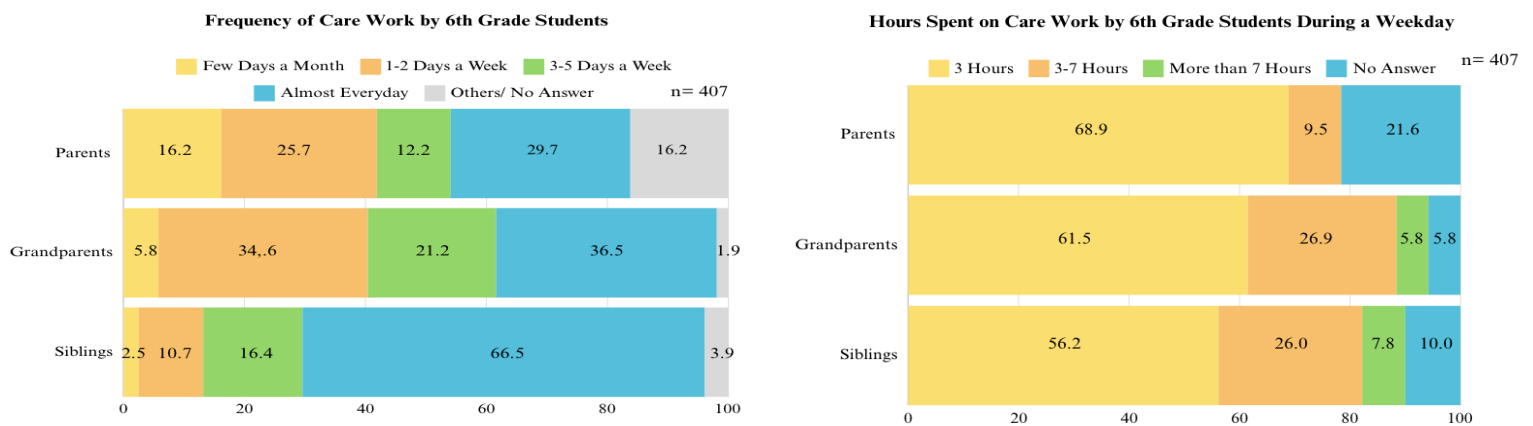
services for mental health illness. Another factor is the individual's choice of wanting to solve it on their own along with the existence of structural barriers of financial problems and lack of time to access care. Parents would find it difficult to seek help; especially if they would have to cut their working hours or leave children at home to receive medical services. Hence, this might lead to YCs handling the care work by themselves rather than seek outside help. Lastly, social stigma along with one's stigma about having mental health illness reduced the likelihood of undergraduate students seeking support; showing that such a stigma still exists even among the younger generation (Yamawaki and Green, 2020). Also, some people saw mental illness as something that can be cured and that it is caused by one's upbringing (Kasahara-Kiritani, 2018, p.58). Such an understanding can further promote social stigma in the Japanese society.

**Figure 2: Frequency of Care work and the Amount of Time Spent on Care Work**  
**Fig 2 (A): 8th and 11th Grade Students**



Source: Own graph created through the data published by MUFG (2021, p.127,128)

**Fig 2 (B): 6th Grade Students**



Source: Own graph created through the data published by the Japanese Research Institute Limited (2022, p.109-110)

## B) Impact of Care Work

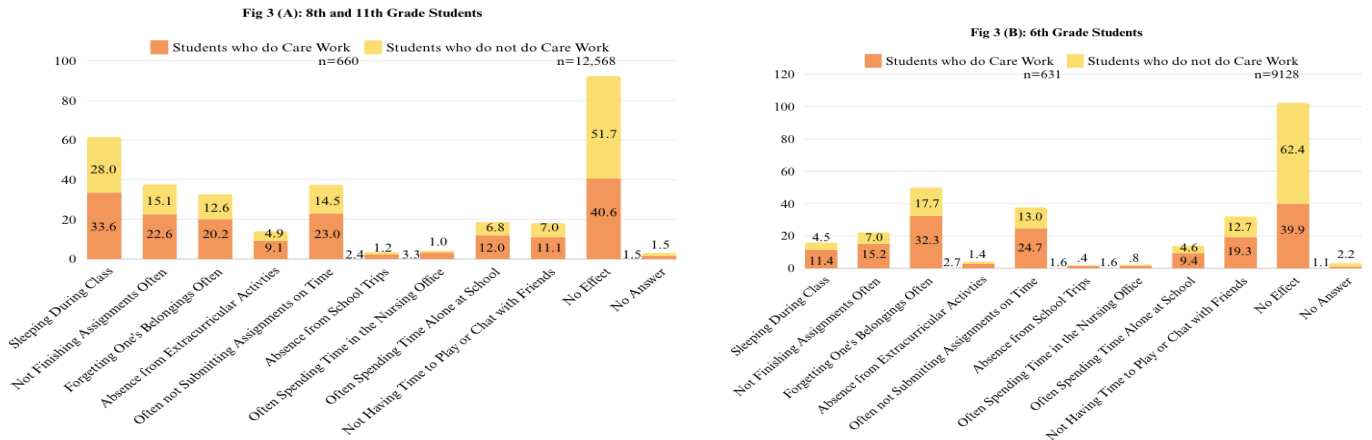
Figure 3 compares the effect of care work on the school life of students where sleeping during class, not doing assignments and not being able to keep up with the assignments deadlines tends to be common. Not only this, but students state that the common activities they cannot do include not having time to do their assignments or have time for themselves, not getting enough sleep and not being able to play with their friends as seen in Figure 4. One can see the effect of care work on the mental, physical, and social life of students. Not having time to study, sleep or play with friends seemed to be the major activities that YCs felt deprived of due to care work.

Despite the effect of care work on YCs, more than half of the students who assume care work stated that they did not seek consultation services regarding their care work. One of the main reasons for not seeking support is due to not being worried about care work to the extent of needing to discuss it with someone and not wanting to share the private matters of the family. Hence, it offers a different understanding than the cases of YCs in Sweden or the UK where being separated from one's family tends to be a concern.

Also, in the free response section, some of the students stated that they found it difficult to consult where one student stated their worry in seeking support from their teachers in case they would contact the parents while another student stated that they were worried of the consequences of seeking support; such as creating nuisance to the consultants, people finding out about the situation and being made fun of (MUFG, 2021, p.147, 148). Indeed, Ishii *et al.* (2017) showed that Japanese university students compared to European students tend to be more concerned about the impact of seeking support on their relationships, such as wanting to save face, and refusing to burden others with their concern along with feeling shame and guilt when seeking support.

Yet, seeking consultation services is important as seen in the survey by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (2024) through the high rate for seeking consultation services where middle and high school students considered such support to be the most beneficial whereas elementary students considered having help in the household to be the most beneficial (p.43-44). Regardless of one's grade, most of the students stated a reduction in their stress and mental health load after seeking support services (Ibid., p.45). For instance, some of the statements were changes in one's views of being responsible to assume all the care work into thinking that it is okay to not do all the care work along with taking actions to seek help when feelings of being troubled arise (Ibid., p.46-47). Such statements show the significance of consultation services especially among older students compared to support in the household for younger children.

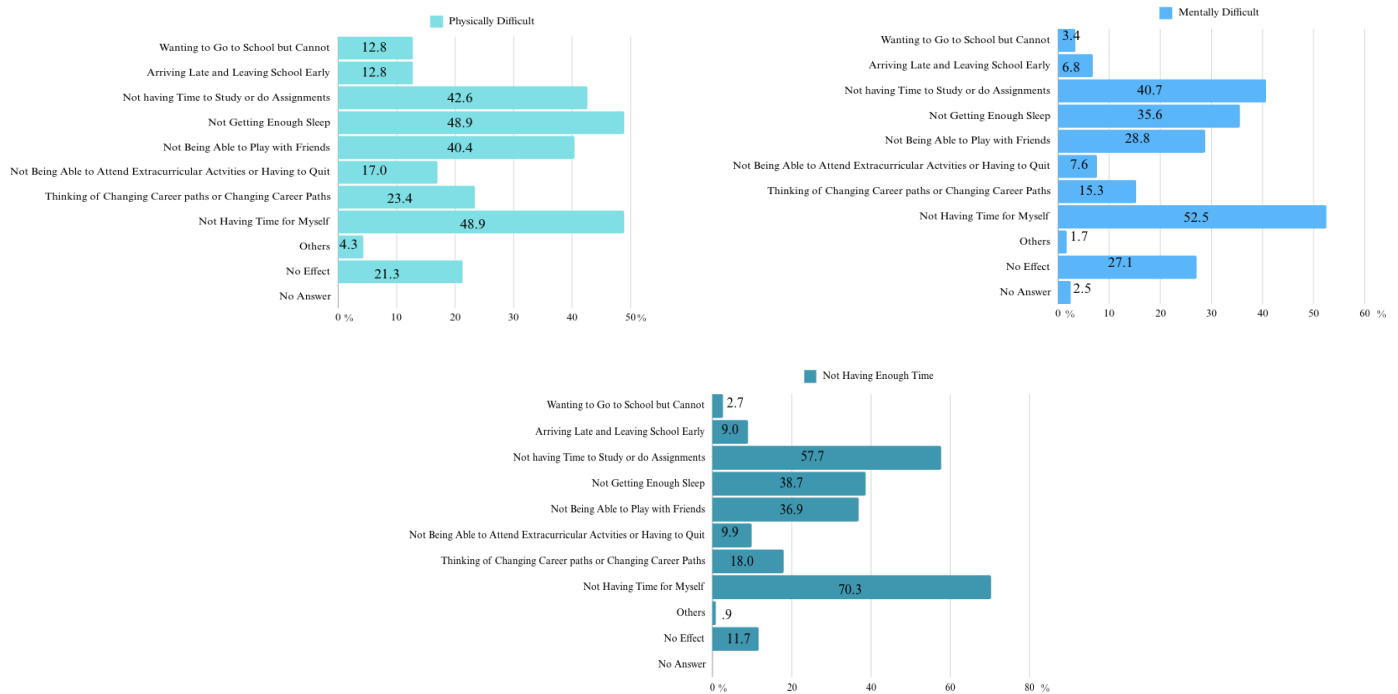
**Figure 3: School Life Difference Between Students who do Care Work Compared to those who do Not (Multiple Answers Allowed)**



Source Fig 3 (A): Own Graph Created through the Data published by MUFG (2021, p.108)

Source Fig 3 (B): Own graph created through the data published by the Japanese Research Institute Limited (2022, p.86)

**Figure 4: Things that One Cannot do Due to Care Work and the Difficulty Faced by Care Work**



Source: Own Graph Created Through the Data Provided by MUFG (2021, p. 133)



#### 4.2.4 Support System for YCs in Japan

In terms of welfare provision, the MHLW is responsible for the design of programs along with offering financial support, prefectural governments are responsible on the provision of services on a wider scale while municipalities are in charge of implementing the six types of welfare of “public assistance, child welfare, welfare for the elderly, welfare for single parents, welfare for the physically disabled, and welfare for the mentally disabled” (Arami, 2021). This stems from the centralized and decentralized welfare characteristics where municipalities with the understanding that they are the closest to citizens create welfare plans but are required to do so by the prefectures (Kitayama, 2024, p.144). The administration and implementation of policies is based on two systems of those required by the law or through ordinances established by the local governments which plays a more important role in terms of implementation (Ibid.). This is significant considering that only 19 municipalities have ordinances that refer to supporting YCs as of the end of 2023 (Welfare Newspaper Editorial Department, 2024).

The age limit for support is not only limited to children under the age of 18, but rather the approach taken is provision of support even to the age of 30 and sometimes to the age of 40 with the idea that care work does not end at the age of 18 and to offer support during the transitional period of one’s life from education to employment (CFA, 2024b, p.2). Support available varies among the local governments where some have created consultation desks specific for YCs while some use existing desks; information about the consultation desks available across Japan can be found on the CFA. Also, the use of SNS has been rising to support YCs where they can use chat systems to talk with someone, who can be former YCs or nursing or welfare employees depending on the local government.

As a result of the discrepancies in the support by local governments, the national government created subsidized programs where  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the costs would be covered (CFA, 2024c, p.8). Programs include peer support, online salons with YCs and former YCs to create a space where YCs can relate to other people of the same experience and foreign language interpreter support which shows the expansion of support even for children of non-Japanese nationals.

Also, households with YCs could receive assistance which includes cleaning, meal prepping, picking up children, listening to the worries of parents along with reporting back to the municipalities regarding the situation of the household. However, while the program is a first step towards the recognition of the need to support care work done by the families, there are some drawbacks. For instance, the program is free, but it depends on the municipality where some might put a limit of only 20 hours are free along with the fact that one can only use it for up to 2 hours during the weekday (Komechannel, 2024). Also, support can only be accessed once the municipalities and relevant departments establish that support is necessary upon a request for the application that can only be initiated by guardians of YCs under the age of 18 (CFA, 2024d, p.11).

As for initiatives that support YCs indirectly through raising awareness among people who encounter YCs is the development of guidelines and manuals on how to identify and support YCs developed by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited. There are two assessment tools to support YCs, a checklist to use when asking a child that one suspects to be YCs and a checklist for adults to consider when assessing if children are YCs. Checklists to ask YCs include items such as not being able to put one's needs and interests ahead due to caring for family members or feeling that one does not have enough time for play or study (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 2023b, p.16-18). While items that adults should keep in mind are whether the child is involved in activities as discussed in the previous section, or if they are late or are absent from schools (Ibid., p.20-22). Also, explanations on which services to contact depending on the situation of YCs are explained which is important to connect YCs to support as adults might identify YCs but do not know how to connect them to support. Lastly, a manual is established for local governments on how to support YCs where an emphasis is placed on the need to collaborate with various bodies due to the perplexities of the issues by the families of YCs which can allow local governments to still address YCs even without having a specific consultation desk for YCs (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 2021, p.13, 14). Also, guidance is offered on how to collaborate with the various bodies and utilizing local resources of support systems from schools and local residents to share if they think someone is a YCs as they would be more aware of the situation of YCs than the local governments (Ibid., p.37).

## 5) Findings

The chapter presents the findings of the research question using the analytical framework of welfare regimes and childhood. It starts the analysis from a broader context in terms of the factors contributing to the rise of the topic, followed by understanding the policy scales that differ between the national and prefectural levels. Lastly, how YCs are represented by different actors is discussed to show the varying understanding of childhood and care work that differ among the national, prefectural and the non-governmental levels.

### 5.1 What is the context giving rise to address the topic (demographic change, welfare regime)?

Debates in the Lower House have focused on child-rearing policies to reverse the aging population and encourage childbirth. However, there have been changes in such an idea as a response to the topic of YCs where the society should provide support. This is coupled with the high dependency ratio where the number of people who can provide support for elderly people has been decreasing.

*“Up until now, I think that Japan's policies have basically been based on child-rearing policies, but if we take the issue of young carers, for example, this has been reversed in a sense. Children are now the ones who have to look after the family. This means that child-rearing support alone is not enough, and we are in a situation where something that puts the child at the center is needed.”* (Nomura, Former Representative of Nishi Tokyo City Children's Rights Protection Committee, 2022).

*“In terms of changes in the current era, it is said that nuclear families are becoming more prevalent, and that local ties and bonds are becoming weaker. Even in these circumstances, we need to consider how we can support children as a society as a whole, and how we can create a society where children can live with peace of mind and hope for the future. I feel that these points will be important when it comes to supporting child-rearing in the Reiwa era [name of imperial period after the succession of the new emperor that started in 2019].”* (Former Prime Minister Kishida, 2022).

Moreover, changing social trends in terms of the rise of nuclear families coupled with longer life expectancies create a dilemma for the society where the number of people who need care is increasing, but the number of caregivers in the household is not enough to support them compared to the past where a three-generation household was more common. The number of three-generation households has decreased drastically from 44.8% in 1986 to 7.1% in 2022 (MHLW, 2023b, p.4; Fig.2). A three-generational household increases support for caregiving than in a nuclear household where the main familial support comes from mainly the two parents. For instance, a study by Takaku (2019) showed that women who live in a three-generation household are more likely to have regular employment when their children attend school for the first time due to the familial support in

childcare. Also, changes in the work style of the family in terms of the role of YCs contributing economically to the household have been discussed, where statements regarding changing the employment insurance that sets a limit on working hours to be eligible for benefits in case of unemployment are discussed to widen the support for YCs. This shows the role of changing economic conditions that make the model of the male breadwinner no longer feasible to support the household.

*“Even though the number of people who need care in a family is relatively increasing, the family itself is shrinking rapidly. The rate of single-person households is also increasing dramatically, and as a reaction to this, three-generation families and two-generation families are really decreasing, and the number of people who become caregivers in the family is also decreasing. I think that this is creating a situation where children and young people have no choice but to become YCs.”* (Carers Japan Representative, 2024)

*“Experts have pointed out that the number of YCs is increasing, and it is assumed that this is due to the change in household structure, where the burden of care is likely to fall directly on the children when someone in the family needs care due to the increase in nuclear families and single-parent households. For this reason, it is expected that the number of children and young people who care for their families will continue to increase in the future.”* (Makiyama, member of the Constitutional Democratic Party, 2020)

*“Society is gradually starting to realize this. Things that have somehow managed to make sense within the family up until now are no longer making sense within the family, and there is little capacity for caregiving within the family.”* (Carers Japan Representative, 2024)

Reference to the surveys regarding YCs can be seen in the Diet as a way to show the urgency to support YCs. Surveys bring the context of YCs into the surface through having factual details of the situation of YCs which makes policy makers more likely to act on the situation. This is in line with the significance of having home-based research on YCs that acts as a foundation for policymaking (Leu and Becker, 2017, p.759). The establishment of the CFA is seen as a responsibility for the government to correct vertical divisions among governmental bodies that hindered access to support and respond to the various surrounding children; changes need to occur due to the complexity of the issues faced by children where it is no longer possible to just assign MHLW or Ministry of Education to respond. Hence, the topic of YCs is emphasized to ensure such divisions do not happen and the CFA would act as a central body to connect YCs to support.

Also, the characteristics of YCs of not voicing their opinion, hesitancy to discuss private matters of the family and not being aware that they are YCs due to doing care work since a young age creates an urgency for the government to act on this situation to not hinder the employment and educational opportunities of YCs. Hence, members of the Diet place an emphasis on early detection along with raising awareness about YCs among the public; especially among adults to connect YCs to support. Such an idea connects to neoliberal ideas of human capital where support is seen as essential to create future citizens that can contribute to the future economy. Also, the approach taken is outreach by the governmental bodies as YCs are unlikely to go to consultation desks by themselves, which is why Saitama Prefecture uses schools as the place for early detection; actions need to be taken by the adults and look for YCs.

## 5.2 What is the role and relation of the policy scales between national and prefectural levels?

Reference to the international context of YCs in the House of the Representatives and the CFA can be seen. Examples from the UK's response to YCs along with the importance of supporting YCs in the perspective of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). For instance, statements on the mandatory efforts of the local governments to identify YCs in the UK along with the example for the use of assessment sheets in elementary schools to identify and support YCs without letting their friends know. As for the UNCRC, statements regarding the importance of promoting policies that are in the best interests of the child are commonly stated. Best interests of the child refer to the consideration of the interests that are best-fitted for each individual child relative to their situation when making decisions concerning children and the impact of such decisions on children (Ruggiero, 2022, p.24-25).

Differences can be seen in the understanding of the role of the family in the context of welfare regimes by members of the Diet. One example is the debate in 2022 between Niwa, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which is the dominant party and Shiokawa, member of the Japanese Communist Party, which is one of the opposition parties to LDP. YCs were considered in the making of the new Child Basic Act where the use of a sentence that states that the family acts as the foundation or basis for child upbringing as part of article 3.5 of the Basic Philosophy section has been challenged. Shiokawa stated the similarity of the statement to the preamble stated in the UNCRC that the child should grow up in a family environment. However, his statement was criticized by Niwa for its use as a way to rationalize cutting down budgets for child-rearing support and making parents and children like YCs feel responsible to take care of the household; making them feel isolated. Along with stating that the UNCRC views that support should be provided by the states. Hence, one can see the inclusion of the statement with the addition that support would be provided to ensure that children can grow up with their families. Such ideas of the importance of the family are one of the reasons that the member of Carers Japan stated for the slow response of the government in addressing the topic of YCs where unlike Scandinavian countries that view provision of welfare as a responsibility of the state instead Japan views care work as the responsibility of families that decided to have children.

The use of a broad definition for YCs is important to ensure that support can reach the greatest number of people and not be limited by the definition of YCs. One of the discussed questions is the meaning of the term “excessively” used to define the care work by YCs where some stated their concern that the term narrows the support for YCs both in terms of the possibility that some YCs might not seek support due to categorizing themselves as not doing excessive care while local governments might also use the definition to narrow the support in terms of only providing support to YCs who are seen as doing excessive work. The following quote by the Minister of State Kato, who are appointed members by the Prime Minister defines the term “excessively” where one can see the broad scope of the term where best interests of the child through listening to the views of YCs are to be considered. At the same time, one can see the idea of the state acting as a protector to protect the childhood of YCs to ensure care work does not affect education or play time of YCs.

*“We have received a question regarding the legislation of support for young carers.*

*The term "excessively" in the definition of a young carer does not have a uniform scope, but rather should be judged individually from the perspective of the child's best interests, taking into account the situation and perception of each individual child or young person, and whether they are in a severe situation that is depriving them of time for studying, play, etc. and creating a burden for them” (Kato, Minister of State, 2024).*

Discrepancies to support YCs among local governments are also discussed in the Diet. Some of the causes for this is due to the “lack of recognition by municipalities, which are the basic local governments, that it is an issue that they themselves should grasp the actual situation about, and a lack of support systems within local governments.” (Yoshimizu, Director of the Child and Family Agency Support Bureau, 2024). Also, “the lack of a legal position for local governments to support YCs, and the lack of clarity within the local government as to who will be the implementing body for the support and what kind of support they will provide.” (Kato, Minister of State, 2024). One can see the attitude of the Diet members in blaming the local governments for the lack of awareness and support for YCs. The recent amendment of the Act on Promotion of Support for the Development of Children and Young People is believed to solve such discrepancies by clearly stating that local governments have a duty of effort to support YCs. This amendment is important considering that out of the 1741 municipalities, only 367 have conducted surveys on YCs in 2023; hence the number can be expected to increase with the recent amendment (CFA, 2024a, p.2). As stated by the member of Carers Japan, the amendment is a major step by stating that local governments have a responsibility to support YCs considering that only advanced local governments supported YCs, but questions of implementation remain. Even on a prefectural level local governments are seen as the responsible bodies in providing support for YCs as stated by the employee from Saitama Prefecture due to having information on their citizens along with handling family and child consultations whereas prefectures do not have such microdata of citizens, and their role is to create more awareness and training about YCs.

Nevertheless, such statements do not take into account that discrepancies still exist where local governments bear the effort of financing the daily activities of their citizens that includes welfare provision where 65% of the welfare expenditure was borne by local governments and 35% by central government in 2023 (MIC, 2023, p.4). In fact, insufficient human and financial resources is one of the highest reasons and lack of awareness have been stated by local governments for the lack of identification of YCs in their areas (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 2023a, p. 90).

New systems are discussed in the Diet to support YCs, such as the creation of YCs coordinators and child and family centers. YCs coordinators would be responsible to connect YCs to welfare services and private support groups as online salon or peer support programs while child and family centers are responsible for creating support plans tailored to the household. In addition, collaboration among educational institutions is discussed to connect YCs to the relevant bodies in the local governments. Along with raising awareness about YCs among nursing, welfare and teaching bodies to connect them to support and increase the likelihood of receiving support as some YCs might not be aware about the existing support system. Even support for children of foreign residents is discussed in the Diet and the Basic Policy Committee through having interpreters at hospital and administration is discussed. Hence, one can see changes where the society as a whole supports children

rather than the idea that these issues of YCs are to be faced inside the private sphere of the household where consideration must be taken regarding the “burden on young carers when making decisions on the provision of welfare services for people with disabilities, and to proceed with efforts that do not assume that children are the “caregivers.”” (Former Prime Minister Suga, 2021). The politics behind the emergence of the need for support by various coalitions can be attributed to two factors. The first factor relates to the provision of welfare “to watch over the upbringing and development of children.” (Niwa, member of the LDP, 2024). This shows the role of the adults in protecting children from care work. The second factor relates to adultified and parentified children where multiple socio-economic factors are connected, leading to the need to combine efforts by multiple actors to work towards one goal of supporting YCs.

Saitama Prefecture took the approach of creating the Carer Ordinance first and then decided to conduct the first survey in Japan about YCs. The idea was to create awareness first among the public and then support follows. Saitama Prefecture takes the approach of looking at children with the view that they might be YCs due to the difficulty in identifying YCs along with placing an emphasis on the relative aspect of care work where not all children might want to receive support and support should be provided by listening to YCs and acting on their best interests; reference to the UNCRC is seen the starter book to support YCs (Saitama Prefecture, 2023, p.7). This is important considering that the difficulty of a care work activity would depend on the YCs, and such acts might have been difficult at first but they got used to it, making it difficult to draw a line on when support should be given (Employee at Saitama Prefecture, 2024). The following quote shows the approach taken by Saitama Prefecture where an emphasis is placed during training sessions about YCs to not assume that children need to be saved which tends to be common among older people who come into training, but rather support should be provided when the capacity of the child is exceeded relevant to each child.

*“It’s not that we have to support everyone just because they’re a young carer, but we should only support them when their capacity is exceeded, and we say that we shouldn’t force support on them in training, but I think that’s a bit difficult to convey. After all, there are a lot of people, especially older people, who come with the idea that children must be saved, so I think we need to be careful about that and say it in training.”* (Employee at Saitama Prefecture, 2024).

As for Tottori Prefecture, the ordinance to support YCs was established in 2022 as response to urbanization, rise of nuclear families and the changes in society to create a welfare approach in which the society and related organizations support members who are vulnerable to isolation. However, discussions in the Council to promote the Ordinance have stated their concern regarding the low take-up to adopt the ordinance by local governments and how this would lead to discrepancies (Tottori Prefecture Council, 2023, p.20). One of the reasons stated for the low take-up is due to one of the articles that is specific to Tottori Prefecture and was not found in Saitama's Ordinance is the sharing of personal information of caregivers, which was found to be important to connect them to support (Tottori Prefecture Council, 2024, p.13).

The ordinances in both prefectures show the context of welfare in Japan where the idea is that prefectures, local governments, businesses, related organizations and even citizens in the prefecture

act as a support system for caregivers. This is seen in the division of the articles that state the responsibilities of each body. For instance, prefectures are responsible to cooperate with the actors, along with the provision of support to ensure support for caregivers is provided. Educational institutions have a responsibility to understand the status of the living environment and support status of YCs and connect them to the necessary support while respecting the wishes of YCs. Lastly, residents shall deepen their understanding of caregivers and support them. Hence, a community-based approach to welfare is seen where relationships among the community would lead to a long-term support through empathy rather than the neoliberal basis of a one-way street through the provision of financial resources; such an approach is seen as a future-oriented and resilient model to withstand changes in policies due to the establishment of social bonds among the community (Gagné, 2021, p. 112, 113). Such an approach could be beneficial considering the statement in the Basic Policy Committee by a member who works with YCs support organizations of the importance of having social connections that can help realize the situation of YCs; especially YCs who graduate high schools due to no longer being part of such a support system of the educational institution.

Despite such progress, one of the representatives from Carers Japan stated the need for the creation of one comprehensive law to support caregivers rather than amending existing laws as this means that there is no end to the amendments that are needed. This is similar to the Carer Support Ordinance in Saitama Prefecture that defined carers in a broad way rather than having a specific ordinance for each type of carer in order to provide for all carers that need such support. However, such actions are seen as difficult by members of the Diet as from the perspective of policymaking, amending an existing law is easier than having to create new laws. What Carers Japan aims is to achieve an act similar to the Carer Recognition Act in Australia where the law explicitly recognizes the significance of the care work for the society and the people being taken care of along with the provision of rights for caregivers (Care Recognition Act 2021, 2022, p.3,6).

### **5.3 How are YCs being represented by the various actors (national, prefectural and non-profit)?**

Terms; such as isolation and loneliness were used when describing YCs. This is a relevant context in Japan considering the fact that 348 people committed suicide in 2023 due to care work fatigue (MHLW, 2024, p.11). Among them there can be YCs, but such information is not yet collected by the government as stated by Carers Japan representative. Support for YCs tends to be viewed from the perspective that caring leads to loneliness and isolation due to not being able to be with their friends. Also, the low rate of understanding about YCs by the younger generation can play an impact in the isolation of YCs where the decrease in community bonds and three-generational households makes younger people less aware of care work and YCs feel that their peers do not understand the care work that they do.

Provision of support is difficult considering that some people might be lonely but do not want to receive support due to the stigma of admitting defeat if they seek help. Some want support but are unaware of the existence of support systems or are unaware of their situation due to doing care work



for a long time. Hence, Saitama Prefecture uses pamphlets about YCs tailored for the grade of students to make YCs aware of their situation. Also, feelings of loneliness and isolation can change and often are not fixed where the employee at Saitama Prefecture state the need to keep in contact with YCs where changes in the environment of the YCs, such as changing schools or joining extracurricular activities or changes in the family environment can all play an impact on YCs. Statements about loneliness and isolation can be understood as “not about preventing people from feeling lonely, but about ways to prevent the condition from becoming serious, in other words, to prevent people from feeling lonely for long, and to create a situation where people can loosely access connections when they feel a bit lonely or disconnected. I think this is probably the essence of measures against loneliness and isolation.” (IbashiChat’s board of directors, a non-profit that provides free chat systems for people who feel lonely, 2023). Thus, the government wants to alleviate the negative consequences of loneliness and isolation and be equipped with support systems for YCs when they face such situations.

*“We [Carers Japan are currently doing an experimental course teaching about YCs in Saitama Prefecture] teach them [elementary to high school students] what care is. If we don't do that, they don't really feel it's real. That's why young carers are more likely to be isolated. Even if you talk to people around you, there are few people who say, "I know what you mean." They just say things like, "You're trying so hard, that's great." And that's the end of it. You end up feeling isolated.” (Carers Japan Representative, 2024)*

*“As for the son [YCs taking care of his mother], he said that even when asked if he was having any troubles, he didn't, and it's hard to bring to the surface mental and physical worries. I felt that this issue was extremely difficult, in terms of how to problematize this reality and how to alleviate the burden it places on people.” (Ishikawa, member of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, 2022).*

One can see a difference in the titles of support ordinances for YCs in the two prefectures of Saitama and Tottori. The title used in Saitama is ‘*Saitama Prefecture Carer Support Ordinance*’ compared to ‘*Tottori Prefecture Ordinance for Promoting a Warm, Supportive, and Loving Society to Prevent Loneliness and Isolation*’. Such ideas offer insights in the purpose of proposing support for YCs where Tottori Prefecture does so in the aim of preventing isolation of YCs whose employment and studies are affected due to care work. Tottori states that the Ordinance is created to create a society where people support each other “in which no one is left behind.” For instance, the council responsible to promote the ordinance states the importance of the use of SNS to support YCs and prevent loneliness by having a space where they can share their feelings with someone without showing their faces. At the same time, the following quote shows the importance of not assuming that all care work is bad and needs to be stopped. Similar statements were made in the Saitama Prefecture Young Carer Support Promotion Council (2022, p.17,18).

*“Everyone feels that it's a shame for children to be carers, so they need to be supported, and that's what's spreading now. I think it's spreading because of that feeling, but I don't think that everything that children do as carers is bad. There are good things about it, and I think that even children are carers because they feel that their family is important, so I think that feeling is very important, so I think it's important to be careful not to make people think that they have to stop because the child is doing care work.” (Employee at Saitama Prefecture, 2024)*

Lastly, looking at visuals regarding YCs is another form to look at the various representations of YCs according to the different stakeholders. Understanding this is important considering that the topic of YCs is only recently starting to rise in the public, making such illustrations powerful in setting images about YCs in the public eyes. They are significant to raise social awareness and understanding through having a visual that the people can then use to draw images in their minds (Carers Japan Representative, 2024). Raising social awareness is deemed to be significant to raise awareness among adults about YCs in the hopes of connecting them to support early. The illustrations are similar in conveying the two types of parentification of instrumental and emotional activities that YCs are involved in; highlighting the family circumstances of family needs and capital that make children more likely to be adultified. At the same time, some activities are difficult to illustrate where images that depict taking care of mentally ill parents are difficult as they depict mental burden rather than physical care that are easier to illustrate (Carers Japan Representative, 2024) .

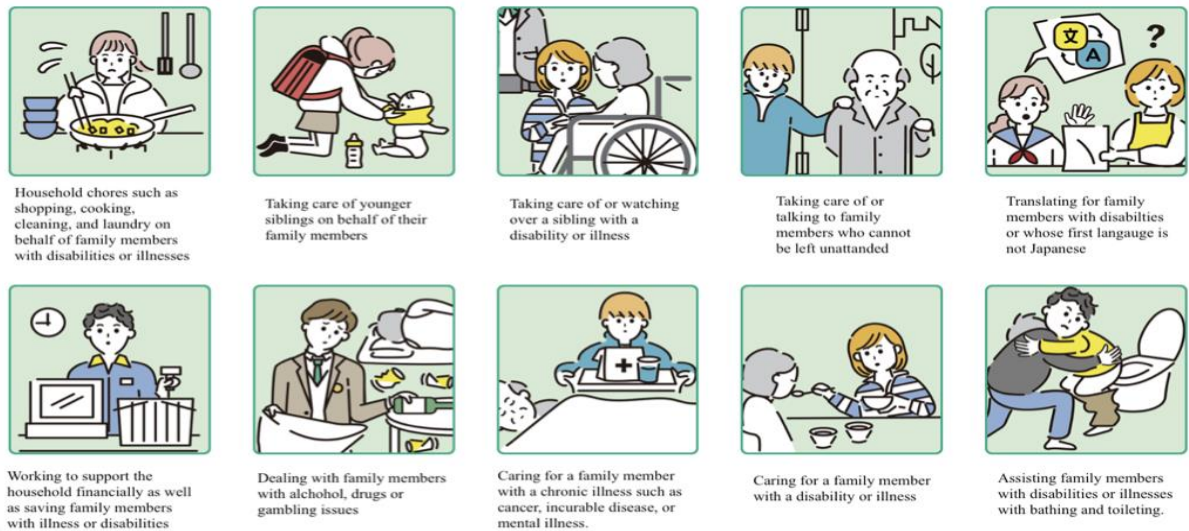
The figures show a difference in the illustrations of the activities, the facial gestures of the YCs, differences in the gender depending on the activity taken up to even the use of animals to explain the activities taken up by YCs as seen in the four figures. The first figure comes from the CFA, which is a newly governmental body established in 2022 to oversee child-related policies (The Japan Times, 2023). The second figure comes from Carers Japan and the illustration is often used by multiple actors.<sup>2</sup> The third figure comes from Yokohama Prefecture. The fourth figure shows a different illustration using animals instead of human beings. It comes from the Nippon Foundation, which is a non-profit organization that also supports the Carers Japan organization in their efforts to support YCs.

Some of the notable differences are the change of gender depending on the activity taken; Fig. 1 and 3 show females doing the cooking activity and males contributing financially. On the other hand, caring for siblings is done by females in the first three figures, implying gendered nature of care work. The characters in almost all the figures look sad or perplexed except for the working girl in Figure 6 while Figure 7 shows lack of mouths in the characters. Such an illustration portrays care work as a burden and to only bring negative emotions on the child. This ignores the fact that some children enjoy and feel proud of the care work (Wayman, Raws, and Leadbitter, 2016, p. 53). Consideration is taken when depicting such images where as stated by the representative of Carers Japan, they decided to remove an image of abusive alcoholic parents to prevent such misunderstanding in the case of YCs while the image of abusive alcoholic care receivers is used to describe activities of adult caregivers. This shows the more cautious approach taken when it comes to children; by not depicting extreme images of care activities. Lastly, one can see the symbol of education through the backpacks or the school uniform of the characters in all four figures, showing the dual identity of YCs as caregivers and children involved in education, depicting the difference of YCs to other children. Thus, the expectation of children being in education is threatened by care work and intervention is needed to prevent this.

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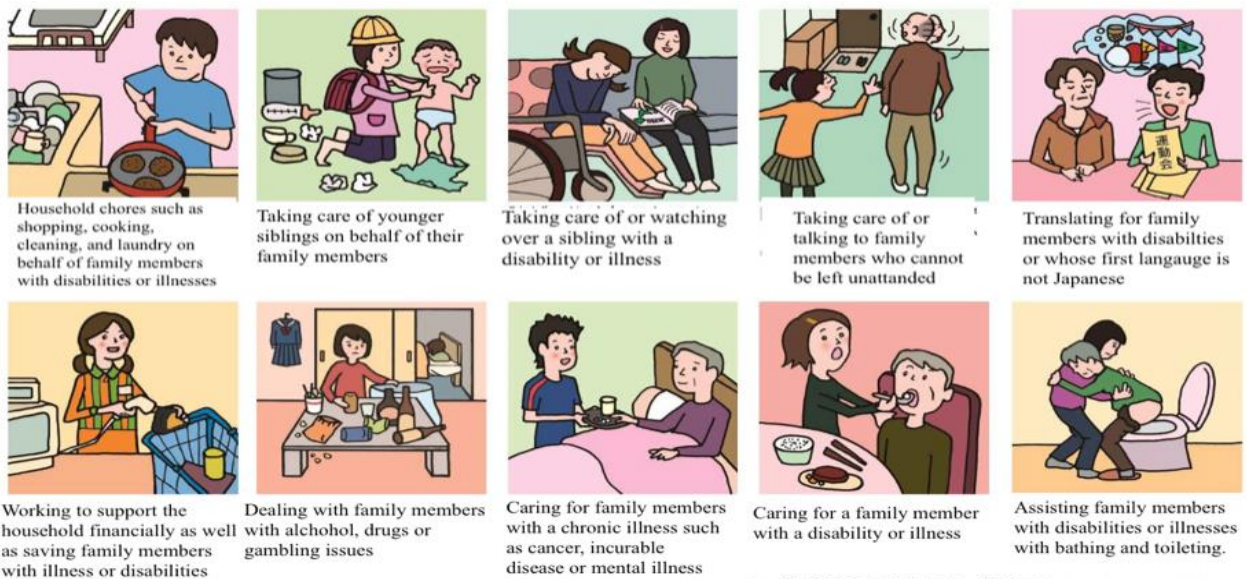
<sup>2</sup> The same illustration was used by some local governments; such as [Niigata Prefecture](#), [Ibaraki Prefecture](#), [Nagasaki Prefecture](#).

**Figure 5: Activities of YCs Through the view of the CFA**



Own Translation of the Activities of YCs ([Children and Families Agency](#))

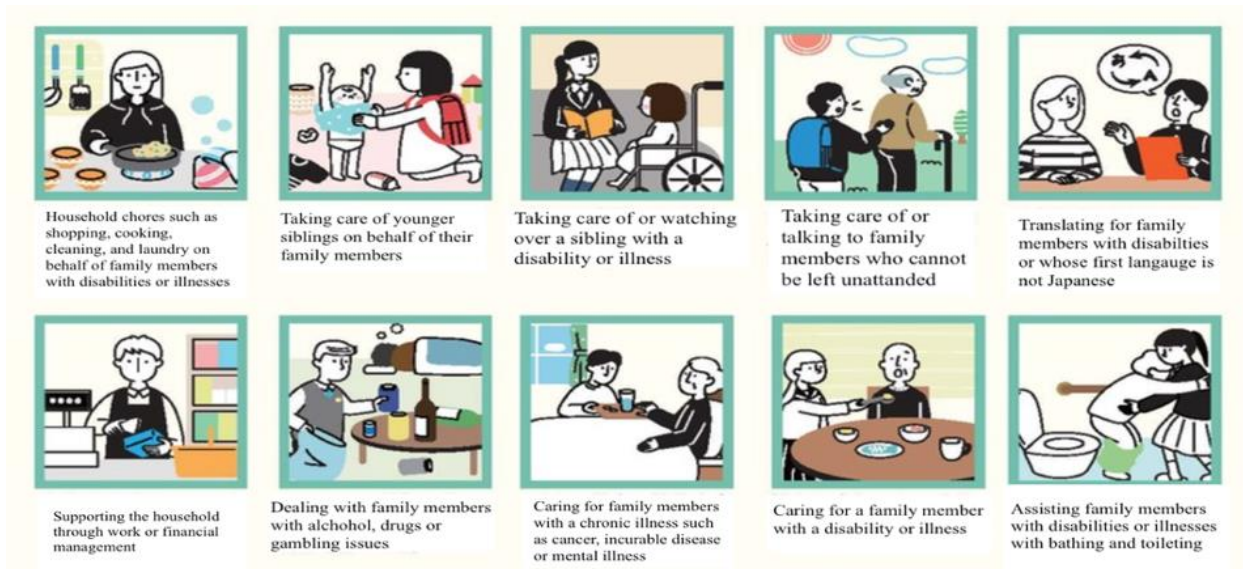
**Figure 6: Activities of YCs Through the view of Carers Japan**



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Own Translation of the Activities of YC ([Carers Japan](#))

**Figure 4: Activities of YC Through the view of Yokohama Local Government**



Own Translation of the Activities of YC ([Local Government of Yokohama](#))

**Figure 5: Activities of YC Through the view of the Nippon Foundation**



Own Translation of the Activities of YC ([Nippon Foundation](#))



## 6) Conclusion

YCs exist and assume similar caring activities regardless of the welfare regime and whether they are from the global north or south. But the difference is whether the state chooses to react to the situation or make this population hidden. The paper used the theoretical framework of welfare regimes and childhood to understand the rise of the topic of YCs as a political topic in Japan. The prevalent idea in Japan has been that care work is a responsibility of the family who take care of each other. However, such ideas started to change when children are the ones doing the care work instead of adults. Hence, understanding the context behind the rise of the topic provides insights into the fluidity of welfare regimes and care work that continue to alter as a response to ever changing societal and economic trends.

Understanding welfare regimes through social care allows us to see the multiple layers that affect changes in welfare provision and how care work is assumed by YCs. An emerging concept of community support is rising because of YCs; changing the previous ideas that issues of the family should remain in the household, and it is the responsibility of the family to take care of each other. As evident with the amendment on the Act on the Promotion of Support for the Development of Children and Young People. This shows that with the right of being supported, care provision is the responsibility of someone else (Wihstutz, 2017, p.182). Care work as a responsibility of the family is no longer feasible in the current society with the rise of nuclear households and high dependency ratios that highlight the inverse relation between the rise in the number who need care and the decrease in the number of caregivers. This makes children more likely to act as caregivers to respond to caregiving along with the role of socio-economic backgrounds of YCs; low economic households and single mother households are more likely to have YCs.

YCs are a unique part of the population as they challenge expectations of childhood from being involved in full time education and being dependent on adults. Hence, intervention to support YCs is seen as necessary where the actions are taken by multiple bodies at the national, prefectural and non-governmental levels to support YCs due to the nature of YCs, who are unlikely to voice their need for support and tend to remain hidden among the population. Along with the discrepancies among local governments in their awareness and support for YCs and the low societal awareness about YCs which is important to consider in order to connect YCs to support as YCs are unlikely to seek support by themselves. Hence, the role of adults being protectors of children is emphasized to ensure early discovery of YCs.

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