

The Experience and Consequences of Being a Young Carer

– A case study on childhood and adolescent care-giving –

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Children and young adults who provide assistance and support for family members with disabilities or other conditions are known as “young carers” in the United Kingdom—where research into this topic has progressed significantly in recent years. Existing studies on these individuals highlight the challenges that youth face when providing care as well as the impact on their educational and social development. Young caregivers are, of course, also present in Japan, but there has not been much research into the unique circumstances that they face nor into the societal support necessary for their childhood development.

The purpose of this study is thus to analyze the impact that caring has on young individuals through literature review and interviews with young carers in Japan. The interviews were analyzed using two qualitative techniques: the Trajectory Equifinality Model (TEM) and the KJ method (named after KAWAKITA Jiro). The results of the KJ analysis elucidate the specific functions provided by the interviewee while caregiving as well as their difficulties with social interactions. Additionally, the KJ results revealed the critical support that the interviewee received and the actions taken to progress their development into adulthood. The TEM analysis paints a clear picture of how the interviewee came into caring, the critical turning points in their life, and—when coupled with the KJ analysis—the effects of caregiving on the interviewee. While only one case is fully explored in this work, this research illustrates the problems faced by young carers in Japan and the need for further work to develop the social support systems that they require.