

Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture

Special Lecture Series: Vulnerable Populations in Japan under Covid-19 - 9

Invites you to a discussion with **Sarajea Rossitto**, Tokyo-based social impact architect, and **Kozue Oka**, Executive Director at Mirai no Mori

“Isolated Together: Amplified vulnerabilities in Japan’s Children’s Homes”

Date: Wednesday, December 2

Time: 7pm-8pm (Tokyo time)

Presentation will be followed by Q and A

On Zoom. Open to all; language English



Please register [HERE](#)

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=p-YOaaVN3E-jFrtZnYKlopSDtnsMuJVAtzRnSitkskJUMU1WNjAyTFpNSU9SQVooRTNDSDE1SVJRUC4u>

There are 608 “children’s homes” (児童養護施設 jidō yōgo shisetsu) across Japan that care for children and adolescents whose parents are unable to care for them (even though in many cases, their parents are known and still in contact with them). The causes for separation vary, including financial or psychological pressures, often taking the form of neglect or abuse. Institutionalization of any kind is always difficult for both children and their caretakers. Inside the children’s homes, the situation is difficult due to limited staff and tight budgets. The onset of COVID-19 has meant a dramatic decrease in the support services, staff, and resources that these institutions can provide, putting an already vulnerable population at added risk. Based on interviews with administrators at some of the leading nonprofits working with these children, this article lays out both the immediate difficulties within children’s homes during this difficult time, and the longer-term challenges they face in providing support for these young people.



Sarajea Rossitto has worked with nonprofit NGOs in Japan for 20 years, conducting skill-based trainings such as project development and management, fundraising, grant proposal writing and volunteer management. She has coordinated programs including experts in humanitarian response and HIV/AIDS in Japan and has also helped corporations develop effective community engagement, CSR and philanthropy programs. Sarajea has worked with multinationals such as Morgan Stanley and Facebook, and international agencies such as JICA, Japan Platform and Give2Asia. She has taught university classes at Sophia University and Temple University Japan Campus and serves as an Advisor to [The Asian Rural Institute](#), [A Place to Grow](#) and [Mirai no Mori](#). She holds a Columbia University Masters of International Affairs degree with a focus on human rights in East Asia, and completed her undergraduate degree in sociology focusing on social movements at SUNY Purchase.



Kozue Oka is the Executive Director at Mirai no Mori. Born and raised in Japan, she has always believed in the power of nature. After studying Environment/Outdoor Education in Sweden for a year, she joined Mirai no Mori to share her experiences and to create an environment in which youth can be steered toward a positive cycle of self-actualization and creativity by discovering new possibilities and develop into confident individuals.

[Mirai no Mori](#) creates life-changing outdoor programs for abused, neglected, and orphaned children in Japan, supporting their growth into happy and successful young adults. Our programs are designed to provide the skills and knowledge that the children need to be able to choose and create their own path for the future. Through new experiences and overcoming many challenges, children discover new possibilities for themselves, leading to self-actualization and a flourishing future.

Sarajea and Kozue will be discussing Sarajea’s recently published paper: “[Isolated Together: Amplified vulnerabilities in Japan’s Children’s Homes](#)” from our collection in the [Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus](#)

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Notes on the full series: This discussion is the first in a series we will hold over the autumn on the causes, effects and current status of vulnerable populations in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each discussion will be moderated by David Slater and will give listeners a chance to meet the authors and others associated with the articles (advocates, activists, supporters, and participants). The authors will provide insight into the articles, as well as background to the conditions of data collection in the age of Corona, an update on the situation and a look forward—asking if we are any better prepared for next time.

An introduction to the whole collection here: [Vulnerable Populations in Japan under Covid-19: A lull in the storm](#) by David H. Slater

Abstract for the full collection of papers: This is a collection of original articles on diverse vulnerable populations in Japan in the wake of the new coronavirus

pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 are felt differently, with some among us at much greater risk of infection due to preexisting health and welfare conditions. For others, perhaps more than the risk of infection, it is the precautions taken to mitigate the risk for the whole population, such as lockdowns and business closures, that have pulled away the already fragile safety net of state and civil society organization (CSO) support, leading to increased marginalization and social exclusion. The goal of this set of papers is to document the conditions of those that have been most directly affected by the virus and to provide background on the conditions that made them vulnerable in the first place, notably chronic conditions that are brought into more obvious relief in light of emergency measures. Each of the authors had a pre-established relationship with those affected populations and employed various ethnographic approaches, some face to face, others digitally via Zoom interviews and SNS exchanges. In this moment of what appears to be relative calm, we hope that our collection, quickly compiled in an attempt to capture the ever-changing situation, will give some insight into how those most vulnerable are faring in this time of crisis and provide information that will allow us to prepare better before the next wave comes our way.

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