

Nuclear Evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture's Five Neighbouring Prefectures

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1. Introduction

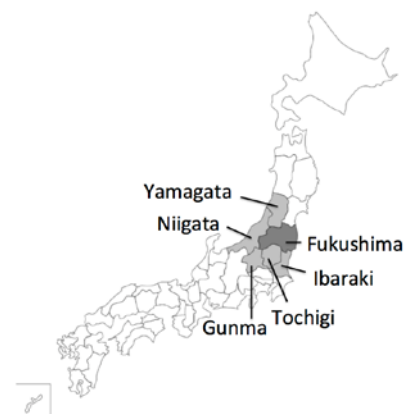
Almost five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. The radioactive material released into the atmosphere during the Fukushima nuclear accident has spread afar and continues to affect the natural world in myriad ways. Consequently, many residents have been forced to evacuate their homes due to exposure to radioactive contamination. How many people have evacuated? It is difficult to obtain an accurate number; however, according to the Japanese government's optional evacuee registration system of the Great East Japan Earthquake, there are 180,000 registered evacuees, of which at least 100,000 are estimated to be *nuclear* evacuees. About 52,000 nuclear evacuees moved outside Fukushima Prefecture to locations throughout Japan and have remained in these new locations for a long time.

Several previous studies have indicated that nuclear evacuees, particularly those who evacuated to other prefectures, often miss out on support and opportunities to participate in surveys. What kind of lives do these nuclear evacuees lead as they build new lives away from their contaminated home prefecture? What kind of situations do they face and what hardships do they suffer? Where do they intend to live in the future, why do they want to live there, and how have these intentions altered over time?

This study examines these issues considering nuclear evacuees living in five of Fukushima Prefecture's neighbouring prefectures: Yamagata, Niigata, Tochigi, Ibaraki, and Gunma. The study uses the results of a survey administered to registered evacuees living in these areas.

2. Questionnaire Types and Results

In Yamagata and Niigata, the two prefectures that received the most evacuees, the prefectural governments have administered questionnaires to the evacuees almost every year. However, in Tochigi, Ibaraki, and Gunma, which also incurred significant damages during the earthquake, the prefectural governments have either not administered independent surveys or not published the results of administered surveys. However, each prefectural government has



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cooperated in administering surveys independently through the national universities located within these prefectures by forwarding questionnaires to evacuees based on their evacuee registers.¹⁾ Moreover, in 2014, Fukushima Prefecture conducted its first survey of its evacuees throughout Japan (see Table 1). This paper will examine the nuclear evacuees' living situations and future prospects and compare the above questionnaire's results.

Table 1: Questionnaires Administered to Evacuees Living in Prefectures Adjacent to Fukushima Prefecture by or in Collaboration with Municipal Governments

	Yamagata	Niigata	Tochigi	Ibaraki	Gunma	All Japan*
Survey period	①2011/10 ②2012 ③2013/9-10	①2011/6- ②2011/12 ③2012/12-13/2 ④2013/12-14/2	①2012/8 ②2013/8	2012/8	2012/7-9	2014/1-2
Number of Responded households (response rate)	①1,649 (35.5%) ②1,275 (33%) ③850 (35%)	①1,614 (59%) ②1,475 (59%) ③1,604 (83%) ④1,353 (76%)	①225 (21%) ②107 (10.5%)	587 (35.1%)	185 (27%)	20,680 (35.3%)

* Fukushima Prefecture administered "All Japan" survey.

3. Questionnaire Results

(1) Living Situation Results

This section will discuss the evacuees' living situations as indicated in the questionnaire survey results.

a. *Evacuees' original location*

Some evacuees lived within actual "mandatory evacuation zones," whereas others lived in outside "evacuation zones." The ratio of mandatory to non-mandatory evacuees differed among the five receiving prefectures. In Yamagata, about 30% of the evacuees belonged to mandatory evacuation zones. In Niigata, initially, 70% were mandatory evacuees; by 2014, the majority of evacuees living in the prefecture were non-mandatory evacuees. This is because people gradually became aware that some of the non-evacuation zones were contaminated just like evacuation zones. Elsewhere, in North Kanto (Ibaraki, Tochigi, and Gunma), the proportion of mandatory evacuees was quite high.

b. *Housing*

The results of the surveys indicated the critical role of government-funded temporary housing rented from the private sector in housing evacuees. In Yamagata, Niigata, and Tochigi, 70–80% of evacuees lived in such temporary housing.

c. *Family structure*

In a remarkable number of cases, family members live separately; particularly in the

case of non-mandatory evacuations, a large number of families included the mother and children moving outside the prefecture without the father. In Yamagata Prefecture (2012), approximately 60% of the evacuated families had been separated due to evacuation and 40% of these were cases where the mothers and children had moved away without the father. In the surveys conducted in Niigata, Gunma, and Ibaraki, and in the national survey, more than half the families had been separated.

d. Returning to the evacuated home

In Gunma, Ibaraki and Tochigi, the respondents most commonly returned home more than 1–2 times a month. The national survey revealed the same trend. In contrast, in Niigata and Yamagata, where the proportion of mother–child evacuees is high and the prefectural government has established financial assistance measures for evacuees to use intercity buses and for free use of highways, the proportion of evacuees returning home more than twice a month is as high as 65%.

e. Financial situation

The Yamagata, Gunma, Tochigi, and Ibaraki survey results showed that household expenditures have increased as families lead second lives outside the prefecture. In particular, for many non-mandatory evacuees who cannot claim monetary compensation, almost all families have had to rely on their savings to protect their livelihoods and claimed that they have faced difficult financial circumstances.

f. Compensation for nuclear damage

Although a high proportion of families from the mandatory evacuation zones have received compensation for nuclear damage, the proportion among non-mandatory evacuees is remarkably low. For example, 66% of non-mandatory evacuees (households) living in Tochigi (2013) did not even claim compensation. Reasons given for this included comments such as “I don’t have time,” “I can’t leave the children,” “the briefing location is too far away,” and “The document for compensation is difficult to understand.” These people also express a deep sense of resignation as “it would be impossible to receive compensation anyway” and “we are ineligible to make a claim.”

g. Health conditions

Overall, a remarkable number of evacuees reported physical and/or mental health problems. In the five prefectural surveys and the national survey, more than 40% of the respondents reported that they “feel depressed,” “irritated” or “cannot sleep.” Moreover, just over 20% reported that their “existing complaints were aggravated,” they “get tired easily” or suffer from “headaches” and/or “stomach aches.”

h. Child care environment

The outpouring of mothers and children has financially and emotionally burdened families with children. In Yamagata, more than 30% of evacuees reported that “the

financial burden of child care and education is large” or that “I get frustrated with my children.” Furthermore, there are some cases in which families are unable to receive public services since their “children are unable to enter nursery school” or they have no access to “temporary child care,” “infant medical examinations,” or “preventative vaccinations.”

i. Access to information

Majority of the evacuees want more information about radiation levels near their homes in Fukushima, the decontamination effort, and damage compensation. In the All Japan survey, more than half of the respondents reported a lack of “information about radiation levels near our home in Fukushima” and “information about TEPCO compensation.”

j. Registering as a resident

Unless the evacuees transfer their resident card to their new location, they cannot receive various public services; despite the inconvenience caused by not completing this procedure, only about 10–20% of evacuees in all the surveys have completed this transfer. This can be considered as an indication of the evacuees’ desires’ someday return to their homes in Fukushima. However, in Niigata and Yamagata, this figure has increased annually, reaching almost 30% in 2013.

(2) Where Do the Evacuees Want to Live in the Future and Why?

Although 20–40% of evacuees wish to return to Fukushima, majority of the families have not decided when they will move back. In contrast, in all the surveys, 30–50% of families were completely undecided about where to live. These results suggest that it is still difficult for evacuees to make decisions about their future.

Under what circumstances would the evacuees want to move back? The most common response to this question

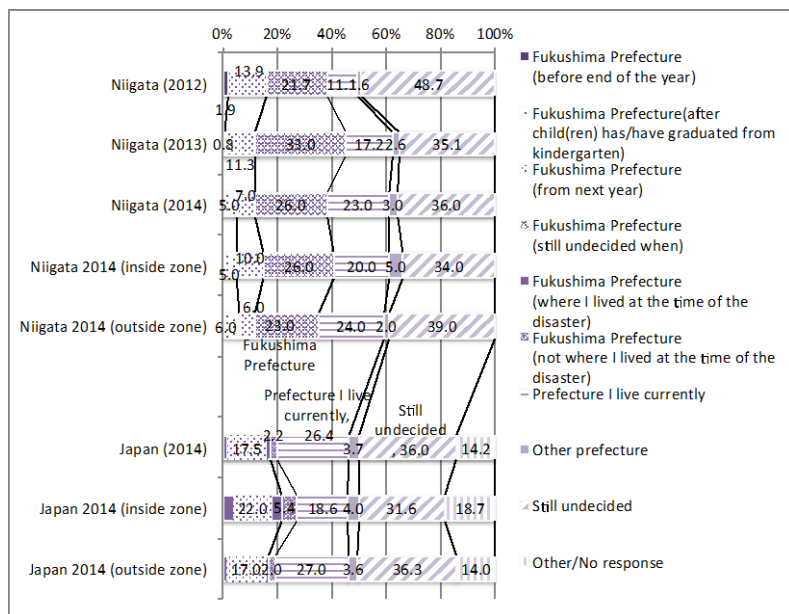


Figure: Evacuees’ Intentions Regarding Where to Live in the Future (Niigata and Fukushima surveys)

(60–70%) was “once the effects of the radiation and our anxiety have decreased.” The most common reason about why evacuees intended to continue living outside the prefecture or were still undecided was the “radiation level.” Regardless of whether or not the respondents wished to return to Fukushima, their intentions were shaped by strong concerns about the radiation level, once again highlighting how the radiation issue continues to cast doubt on evacuees’ living situations even three years after the accident. In addition, as a reason for wanting to reside permanently in a different prefecture, more and more evacuees are beginning to settle down in their new locations as they grow accustomed to living there and form relationships with others.

(3) Problems and Demands

The respondents reported a considerable number of problems; the most common being “housing problems” (61%), followed by “physical health problems” (60%), “problems concerning living costs” (66%), “mental health problems” (48%), “the effects of radiation” (43%), and “work-related problems” (32%). In particular, concerns about the burden of living expenses were high among non-mandatory evacuees. In terms of demands, a remarkable number of requests were noted for transportation subsidies and private rental housing. Furthermore, many respondents requested medical examinations, such as assessments for internal irradiation exposure and thyroid examinations. In the Niigata survey, increasing demands for employment support and mediation were observed, along with demands for temporary child care. This can be attributed to an increase in mothers seeking jobs due to the rise in living costs.

4. Conclusion

The results of the all surveys commonly have highlighted the widespread presence of evacuees with uncertain livelihoods. Some are mothers and children who have moved away unaccompanied by their fathers, many are experiencing financial difficulties, and others are suffering from physical or emotional problems as they have been deprived of their equanimity. Nevertheless, in many cases, as some free descriptive answers in the surveys show, evacuees have fallen victim to slander and have been forced to feel guilty, and there are many indications that complaining and raising one’s voice about the conditions of evacuation is, from the outset, difficult.

Since a legislative framework for nuclear evacuation has never existed in Japan, it was from the “emergent” response of individual actors, such as government bodies and the municipalities receiving evacuees, that comprehensive support measures are being developed, providing evacuees with something of a lifeline (Takahashi, 2014). However, such support is reducing over time. It is now crucial to continue investigating the situations of the evacuees and providing support that meets their needs.

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