

The Policy Network for Child Helpline Services from the Viewpoint of a Private Organization

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Abstract

This study examined the features of a private organization, Hiroshima Childline, that provides helpline services for children and young people by focusing on a policy network among child helpline providers in Hiroshima City, Japan. Hiroshima City is a large city with high percentages of children and young people. Accordingly, it is likely to face many problems concerning children. A child helpline service is a mechanism to support children in distress. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Chief Director and the Secretary-General of Hiroshima Childline. This study concludes that Hiroshima Childline utilizes its expertise and specialized relationship with Childline organizations in varied areas and the national organization of Childline. It does not have to coordinate its operation of helpline services with other child helpline service providers in the same geographical area such as the city government's education board, Hiroshima Bar Association, and a regional branch of the Ministry of Justice.

I. Introduction

Similar to other countries, Japan has witnessed the COVID-19 pandemic influencing people's lives since the beginning of 2020. An indication of its impact is the increase in suicide of children and young people. In 2020, 499 students in elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools committed suicide. The number of young suicides recorded the highest figure since 1980, when the figure was first recorded, and rose by 25% from the previous year. An expert committee of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) comprehended that the increase in students' suicide was brought about by altered school and home situations owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Asahi shimbun* June 26, 2021; *Nihon keizai shimbun* June 26, 2021; *Yomiuri shimbun* June 27, 2021).

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Childline Support Center Japan (*Chairudorain shien sentā*, CSCJ) is the national organization that supervises child helpline organizations located in various parts of the country. The local organizations' helpline services using telephones and websites are called Childline. CSCJ reported changes in calls and messages to its helplines from children and young people aged eighteen years and younger in 2020¹⁾: decrease in calls and messages about bullying and increase in those about mental depression, problems of family members, and self-injurious behaviors. Through the received calls and messages, CSCJ ascertained the rise in the number of children and young people who may want to die (*Asahi shimbun* January 23, 2021).

In June 2020, CSCJ decided to establish a website on which children and young people could post their feelings and thoughts as COVID-19 obstructed Childline's helpline services. The Childline staff receiving calls and messages from children and young people using the helpline services found it difficult to work from their offices amid the risk of contracting COVID-19. They did not respond to messages posted on the website, Mutter (*Tsubuyaku*). Mutter obtained messages concerned with children's anxiety about COVID-19 (*Mainichi shimbun* February 9, 2021).

Before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, CSCJ and its helpline organizations across the country strived to receive calls and messages from children and young people. As of April 1, 2022, there are 67 organizations providing Childline helpline services for children and young people in Japan (*Chairudorain shien sentā* 2022, 34). Among these organizations, Hiromoto (2021) discussed Hiroshima Childline (*Hiroshima chairudorain kodomo sutēshon*), located in one of the cities with populations of approximately 700,000 or more (ordinance-designated cities, *seirei shitei toshi*). As Hiromoto described, Hiroshima City is a vast city where the percentages of children and young people are higher than in many other vast cities. Using

1) According to the amendment of the Civil Code in 2018, people aged eighteen years and older have been regarded as adults in Japan since April 1, 2022. Before the day, adults were twenty years of age or older and Childline organizations in Japan provided child helpline services for people aged eighteen years or younger. Childline organizations have operated child helpline services for people aged seventeen years or younger since April 1 2022 because people aged eighteen years are adults.

documents, reports, and newspaper articles, Hiromoto identified that Hiroshima Childline does not coordinate its child helpline services with Hiroshima City Government's education board and Hiroshima Bar Association (*Hiroshima bengoshikai*), which also provide helpline services for children and young people. However, Hiroshima Childline cooperate with the Board of Education and Hiroshima Bar Association in other activities that enlighten people on children's rights (Hiromoto 2021, 95–97 and 102–03).

In its guideline, CSCJ states that Childline differs from child helpline services operated by prefectural or municipal governments' departments such as Hiroshima City Government's education board. CSCJ emphasizes that some children refuse to consult with their schools or governmental organizations and that they desire helpline services operated by disinterested organizations (*Chairudorain shien sentā* 2015, 15). In this sense, Childline organizations intend to manage child helpline services independent of education boards, in conducting child helpline services. However, exchange of information between Childline organizations and education boards or other child helpline organizations may be significant to enhance their helpline services and improve children's accessibility to helpline services.

Why does not Hiroshima Childline attempt to coordinate helpline services for children and young people with Hiroshima City Government's education board and Hiroshima Bar Association while it holds collaborative relationships with the two organizations in other activities? Cooperative relationships between Hiroshima Childline and the Board of Education and between Hiroshima Childline and Hiroshima Bar Association may bring about harmonized helpline services and promote assistance for children and young people. Hiroshima Childline and two other child helpline providers do not have competitive relationships, however, do not form coordinated linkages for providing child helpline services. This study shows the reasons for this phenomenon.

II. Methodology

This study employed the concept of policy network, which is a linkage among actors concerned with a certain policy, as the focal point of research. The policy network theory is a framework for describing linkages among actors

and disclosing relationships of cause and effect in a certain policy field (Rhodes 1997, 29; Rhodes 2006, 426). Policy networks can be dependent and independent variables. The present study employed a policy network as an independent variable and presumed that a configuration of the policy network affects implementation of policy. Furthermore, the concept of policy network can be utilized to observe varied actors in a policy field. The concept captures varied actors: not only administrative organizations and officials but also other varied organizations and people belonging to them (Rhodes 2006, 426).

The literature that employed policy networks as independent variables includes Sandström and Carlsson (2008), Flickenschild and Afonso (2019), and Percival (2009). These studies differ in observed actors in policy networks.

Sandström and Carlsson revealed the explanatory power of policy networks by observing the correlation between policy networks' structures and performance in the higher education policy field of Sweden. Their research examined four policy networks that existed in four knowledge areas of a university and identified dense integration of a policy network and heterogeneous actors in a policy network as determinants of efficiency and innovativeness in the policy process, respectively. While some policy networks succeeded in establishing new multidisciplinary arenas for research and education in a short period of time and in creating innovative and novel concepts in these arenas, others failed. Policy networks' closure and heterogeneity brought about early establishment of new multidisciplinary areas and creation of innovative knowledge (Sandström and Carlsson 2008, 499–504 and 511–18).

Flickenschild and Afonso noted experts in policy networks as an independent variable influencing economic policies in Germany and the United States (US). The German and US governments dealt with the 2008 economic crisis using advices of economic advisory organizations, the German Council of Economic Experts, and the Council of Economic Advisors, respectively. The differences between the networks in the two countries' economist organizations were elucidated and connected with the disparity between the two countries' economic policies to respond to the economic crisis.

While the US economists tended to be unified in supporting the government's intervention in the economic recovery, the German specialists in economy were relatively negative about economic stimulus of the government and varied in opinions about economic measures. Structures of specialists' networks brought about this difference: while the US experts were connected with each other, the German economists' networks were fragmented (Flickenschild and Afonso 2019, 1292–93, 1300–03, and 1307).

Percival revealed policy networks' influence on implementation of an act to prevent use of illegal drug and crimes concerned with drug in California, the US. The study presumed that structures and behaviors of policy networks formed in counties extend to desirable implementation of the state act. The policy networks for implementing the act comprise public health agencies, criminal justice agencies, and public and private facilities for drug treatment. Percival's analysis disclosed that percentages of drug treatment completion were positively influenced by creation of specialized teams for implementation of the act and levels of drug rehabilitation expertise in policy implementation networks (Percival 2009, 796–97 and 808–09).

The national, prefectural, and municipal governments' provision of helpline services for children and young people is public policy implementation in the field of children assistance. MEXT implements a child helpline program, 24 Hour Child SOS Dial (*24 jikan kodomo SOS daiyaru*). Under this program, the education boards of the prefectural governments and ordinance-designated city governments, including Hiroshima City Government, receive calls from children who want to consult with the education boards about their concerns (MEXT <https://www.mext.go.jp/ijime/detail/dial.htm>). On its website, MEXT displays for children and young people its child helpline service telephone number and information of private organizations' helpline services including Childline (MEXT https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/seitoshidou/06112210.htm, https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/seitoshidou/06112211.html).

Moreover, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) manages a helpline service program for human rights protection of children (MOJ <https://www.moj.go.jp/JINKEN/jinken112.html>). Each prefecture holds a legal affairs bureau (*hōmukyoku*) or a district legal affairs bureau (*chihō hōmukyoku*), which is

the MOJ's regional or district office. Regional and district legal affairs bureaus receive telephone calls from children who desire to consult with the bureaus about their human rights problems.

Child helpline services are located in a policy field that includes MEXT, the education board of prefectural and ordinance-designated city governments, the MOJ, regional and district legal affairs bureaus, and private organizations including Hiroshima Childline.

This study focused on experts in policy networks. As enumerated above, Flickenschild and Afonso (2019) and Percival (2009) discussed the influence of the experts in formulating the economic policy and implementing the drug prevention policy, respectively. Rhodes (1990) displayed five types of policy networks: policy communities, professional networks, intergovernmental networks, producer networks, and issue networks. Rhodes' professional networks include professions influential in policy areas. Professions' remarkable roles feature this type of networks. Water engineers were cited as a profession in the British water policy because restrictions on it are limited (Rhodes 1990, 304–05).

Professions in Rhodes' typology of policy network can be regarded as experts. Ali et al. (2021) utilized Rhodes' typology of policy networks and applied it to their research on Renewable Portfolio Standard policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ali et al. termed Rhodes' professional network professional bodies network and regarded scholars as professionals (Ali et al. 2021, 10–13). Professions and experts who influence policy areas can be academics or workers who assume charge of particular roles.

Utilizing the concept of professional network may be of use in the present study. Through their services, child helpline organizations obtain information about children's opinions and service that children desire. This information is exclusively possessed by child helpline organizations rather than being generally recognized among people. Possession of the information may empower child helpline organizations to influence the policy networks of child helplines. On the assumption that expertise affects the policy field of child helpline services, this study examined features of Hiroshima Childline's helpline services.

This study employed semi-structured interviews with two Hiroshima

Childline staff members, the Chief Director and the Secretary-General. The Chief Director primarily answered questions while the Secretary-General contributed to the Chief Director's answers. Before the interviews, the author expounded the purpose of the study and swore to respect the human rights and not invade the privacy of individuals concerned with Hiroshima Childline. Moreover, the author submitted to the Chief Director the document comprising the aim of the study and the author's oaths.

III. Results

On July 30, 2021, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Chief Director and the Secretary-General of Hiroshima Childline from 1 pm to 2:30 pm. To ascertain details of the information that were obtained in the interviews of July 2021, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the Chief Director from 12:20 pm to 12:45 pm on September 25, 2022. The interviewees provided the author with the following information.

Relationship with Other Child Helpline Providers

Every fiscal year, Hiroshima Childline receives a grant-in-aid of 300,000 yen from the Hiroshima City Government's Child Consultation Center (*Jidō sōdan jō*). The author inquired of the interviewees why the grant-in-aid is defrayed by Child Consultation Center, not the Board of Education, which provides helpline services for children and young people. The interviewees did not know. Hiroshima Childline staff members visited the city government and sought assistance from the city government. The city government considered the request and decided to provide Hiroshima Childline with the grant-in-aid of Child Consultation Center. Hiroshima Childline staff members did not know the process by which city government officials reflected Hiroshima Childline's request. Hiroshima Childline does not form a linkage with Hiroshima City Government's education board in terms of the finance.

Hiroshima City Government's education board supports (*kōen*) Hiroshima Childline's events such as lecture meetings on assistance of children by recommending people attend the events. The author inquired of the interviewees why the Board of Education supports Hiroshima Childline's events

while the two organizations do not hold linkages in providing helpline services with children. The interviewees did not know the reasons. Hiroshima Childline staff members visit Hiroshima City Government after they decide to hold an event in a near future and request the city government to support the event in recommending people to participate in it. Hiroshima Childline staff members do not know how the city government determines that the education board supports the event. However, the Board of Education has supported many events held by Hiroshima Childline.

Every year, Hiroshima Childline creates cards with the telephone number of Childline which are sent to schools to be distributed to students. Hiroshima Childline acquires the permission of Hiroshima City Government's education board before sending the cards. However, Hiroshima Childline staff members and the education board officials do not discuss their child helpline services with each other.

Hiroshima Childline participates in activities with Hiroshima Bar Association, which also provides helpline services for children and young people. Hiroshima Bar Association established an organization, *Pipio kodomo sentā*, that manages a shelter for children. The Chief Director of Hiroshima Childline is an ordinary director of *Pipio kodomo sentā*. Hiroshima Childline and *Pipio kodomo sentā* are member organizations of the Network to "Form the Community for Children's Smile, Relief, and Safety!" (*"Kodomo no egao to anshin, anzenna chiiki zukuri!" nettowāku*), which is an alliance of organizations aiming to establish a community comfortable for children. Moreover, the Chief Director of Hiroshima Childline participated with members of Hiroshima Bar Association in a project that aimed to advance children's rights. However, Hiroshima Childline does not discuss or cooperate in child helpline services with Hiroshima Bar Association.

Hiroshima Childline does not have opportunities to contact the Hiroshima Legal Affairs Bureau of the MOJ in deliberating on child helpline services and collaborating on events concerned with assistance of children.

Hiroshima Childline does not discuss helpline services for children and young people with other organizations that manage child helpline services in the same geographical area because it acknowledges that each helpline service is unique and that it does not desire to criticize other helpline services

in the same area. Hiroshima Childline assumes that children who desire to converse with somebody select the Childline helpline and that those who are eager to solve their problems telephone Hiroshima Bar Association, Hiroshima City Government's education board, or Hiroshima Legal Affairs Bureau.

Relationship with Other Childline Organizations and CSCJ

Hiroshima Childline and other Childline organizations located in Chūgoku and Shikoku regions hold meetings to report to each other about the operations of their helpline services and discuss tasks that CSCJ assigns to them. These organizations illustrate their problems and methods to learn how to handle their difficulties and problems. In 2021, Childline organizations existing in Chūgoku and Shikoku regions cooperated in providing children with a non-stop helpline service from 4 pm on November 20 to 3 pm on November 27 while ordinary Childline helpline services are available from 4 pm to 9 pm. During the period of this continuous helpline service, the COVID-19 infections were not constrained and influenced children's mental health. The one-week helpline service in Chūgoku and Shikoku regions is a measure that the Childline organizations devised to alleviate children's mental pains. Childline organizations can cooperate and collaborate with each other to aid children.

The Chief Director of Hiroshima Childline was one of the Managing Directors (*jōmu riji*) of CSCJ when the interviews were conducted and attended the meetings of the national organization to debate on problems of the Childline helpline services and decide their schemes. Among CSCJ's sixteen directors including the Representative Director (*daihyō riji*), the Executive Director (*semmu riji*), and three managing directors, twelve directors are staff members of local Childline organizations. CSCJ divides the country into seven areas and assigns a staff member of each area to an ordinary director. CSCJ deliberates methods to deal with problems that local Childline organizations encounter and endeavors to devise new services such as the online chat helpline service and the online bulletin board service.

Specialization of Childline Organizations

A distinguishing feature of Childline helpline services is that it is available only for children and young people. Adults are declined to telephone Childline or send messages to Childline's online chat website.

In April 2022, Hiroshima Childline started an operation of dispatching its members as advocates to children living in temporary care center (*ichiji hogo sho*) to listen to them. This new operation is similar to that of child helpline services in listening to children to assist them. In this sense, Hiroshima Childline focuses its efforts on attentively listening to children on the telephone, on the website, and face-to-face.

According to the Chief Director, however, Hiroshima Childline does not devote its attention to the degree of its specialization in child helpline services. It is more significant for the organization to realize a society in which every adult closely listens to children. Hiroshima Childline intends to spread its operations for people to acknowledge the operations and participate in the creation of an ideal society.

IV. Discussion

The interviews with the Hiroshima Childline officials revealed that Hiroshima Childline does not coordinate with other organizations existing in the same area in providing helpline services for children and young people. In the interviewees' views, each helpline service has its own purpose and method of operation. Hiroshima Childline respects other child helpline services and does not interfere with the operations of the service providers. In conducting events and activities excluding child helpline services, Hiroshima Childline cooperates with Hiroshima City Government and Hiroshima Bar Association.

Childline organizations solve problems about their operations by discussing with each other and their national organization. Moreover, if Childline organizations agree that these organizations should cooperate in establishing new services for children and young people, they can realize the services. These features of Childline may suppress dependence on other child helpline service providers such as Hiroshima City Government' education board, Hiroshima Bar Association, and Hiroshima Legal Affairs Bureau.

The Chief Director and the Secretary-General of Hiroshima Childline function as supporters of receivers of calls and messages from children. They advise receivers about how to deal with children's conversations and messages. The executives and other staff members of Hiroshima Childline engage in operations of helpline services. This implies that all the Hiroshima Childline staff members are engaged in operations of child helpline services and are regarded as specialists of child helpline services. Other Childline organizations may also enjoy the services of many experts in child helpline services. Discussion and cooperation among these specialist organizations can facilitate solutions of problems in conducting helpline services and development of methods to assist children.

While the Chief Director of Hiroshima Childline considers the degree of specialization in child helpline services less significant than the creation of the ideal society, Hiroshima Childline's expertise in child helpline services is conspicuous. Hiroshima Bar Association and Hiroshima Legal Affairs Bureau manage helpline services that are provided for not only children and young people but also other people. To receive calls for consultation without fees, Hiroshima Bar Association manages helplines for children, older people, disabled people, workers, presidents of small companies, crime victims, and destitute people. Hiroshima Legal Affairs Bureau provides human rights helpline services for women and others. The education board of Hiroshima City Government has charge of overall operations concerned with education in the city and is not an expert organization of child helpline services.

V. Conclusion

This study presumed that specialists influence operations in a policy network and focused on experts in the policy network of child helpline services to discuss Hiroshima Childline's features. Hiroshima Childline employs its specialists of the child helpline services and operates in cooperation with Childline organizations in other areas and the national organization of Childline. In the policy network of child helpline services operated in Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Childline does not have to obtain cooperation from other providers of child helpline services in discussing problems and

improving methodology of its operations.

While child helpline organizations with specialization do not need to rely on other organizations in the policy network, less specialized organizations may attempt to connect to other organizations to operate their child helpline services properly. How can we describe a policy network from the viewpoint of less specialized organizations? This question requires further research on features of relationship between specialization and a policy network.

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