

Current Situation and Issues of the Baby Box in Japan

Takeshi Hasuda, Jikei Hospital

Jikei Hospital

Director:	Taiji Hasuda
Number of staff:	234 (13 doctors, 105 nurses)
Departments:	Obstetrics and gynecology, Internal medicine, Pediatrics, Anesthesiology
Number of births (2016):	1,714

Established in 1898

Jikei Hospital was established by Father Corre and five sisters who were sent from Rome for helping patients with Hansen's disease.

Activities of the Monastic Order

- Care of patients with Hansen's disease
- Protection, care and support of orphans

Japanese Society (2017)

Population:	126 million (2017)
Number of births:	970,000 (2016)
Ethnic composition:	Yamato people (98%)
Religious composition:	No religion (50-70%)

**According to statistics from the
Ministry of Education, Culture,
Sports, Science and Technology,**

Shinto: 48%

Buddhism: 46%

Christianity: 1%

Economic Situation in Japan

- Average annual income: 4.2 million yen (2016)

- “All-Japanese-are-middle-class” mentality

About 90% of the population considers that they are in the middle class. But in reality, the income gap between the rich and the poor is growing. The “relative poverty rate” was 16.1% in 2014.

The Environment Surrounding Japanese Children

- The number of abuse cases handled by child guidance center: 120,000 (2016)
- The number of children who cannot be raised by their parents: 46,000 (2016)

Most of these children are living in orphanages.

Those who are raised by foster parents: 12% (2010)

77% in the U.S.

50% in Germany

“Unwanted Childbirth” in Japan

The number of births per year: Approx. **970,000**

The number of abortions per year: Approx. **180,000**

Abandoned children (2001-2007): **27-66** cases/year

The number of persons arrested for murder, attempted murder, and abandonment of their babies soon after delivery (2007-2013): **7-13** cases/year

About 100 to 300 babies per year may be killed or left to die.

Dr. Hasuda, Director, Visited Babyklappe in Germany (2004)

**From 2005 to 2006, three newborn babies
were abandoned in Kumamoto.**

**Two babies died, and their mothers were
found guilty.**



**Dr. Hasuda determined
to set up a Baby Box.**

Issues in the Establishment of a Baby Box

Will the parents who used the Baby Box be charged with **abandonment by a person responsible for protection**?

Will Jikei Hospital be charged with **aiding and abetting abandonment by a person responsible for protection**?

Article 281, Penal Code

“When a person who is responsible for protection of a senile, immature, physically disabled or sick person, abandons or fails to give necessary protection to such person, the person shall be punished by imprisonment with work for not less than 3 months but not more than 5 years.”

Viewpoint of the judiciary and public administration:
“The use of a Baby Box is not considered to be abandonment by a person responsible for protection.”

When a baby is placed in the Baby Box, a nurse immediately comes to the box and takes custody of the baby.

A doctor examines the baby and provides necessary treatment.

The hospital makes contact with the police, municipal government, and child guidance center.

It is guaranteed that the babies placed in the Baby Box are protected, so the use of the Baby Box does not put the babies at risk. Therefore, it does not constitute as a crime.

Permission for the Baby Box Project

- Public administration does not have the authority to permit and license a Baby Box.
- When a hospital makes a change to functions of the facilities, it must receive permission from the municipal government (City Hall).



The establishment of the Baby Box was left to the decision of Kumamoto City.

The Mayor of Kumamoto City Approved

“We can not say that having a baby box goes against the laws and regulations, so there is no reasonable grounds for not giving permission.

In fact, there have been cases where babies are abandoned and left to die. Having a baby box available could have prevented the deaths of newborns in the past, so it would be necessary as the last resort to save the lives of babies.”

The Japanese Government Responded Negatively

Prime Minister Abe said,

“I feel very strong resistance to the name of the baby post. I think it is important that people know the responsibility of becoming parents when they give birth. There are already facilities which deal with such children. I wonder if it is really good to set up a facility that allows people to leave children anonymously...”

Our Baby Box: “*Kounotori no Yurikago*” (the Cradle of Storks)

Kounotori: Meaning a white stork in English. In Japan, we say babies are brought by storks. This comes from a German folktale.

Yurikago: Baby’s bed that can be pushed from side to side to please the baby
Cradle (English) / Wiege (German)

The official name of our Baby Box is “*Kounotori no Yurikago* (The cradle of storks)”, but it is often called “*Akachan Posuto* (Baby Post)”.



Notice board with a message persuading parents
to consult us before placing their babies in
“Kounotori no Yurikago” anonymously

When we find the parents who used the Baby Box, we listen to them and give needed advice.

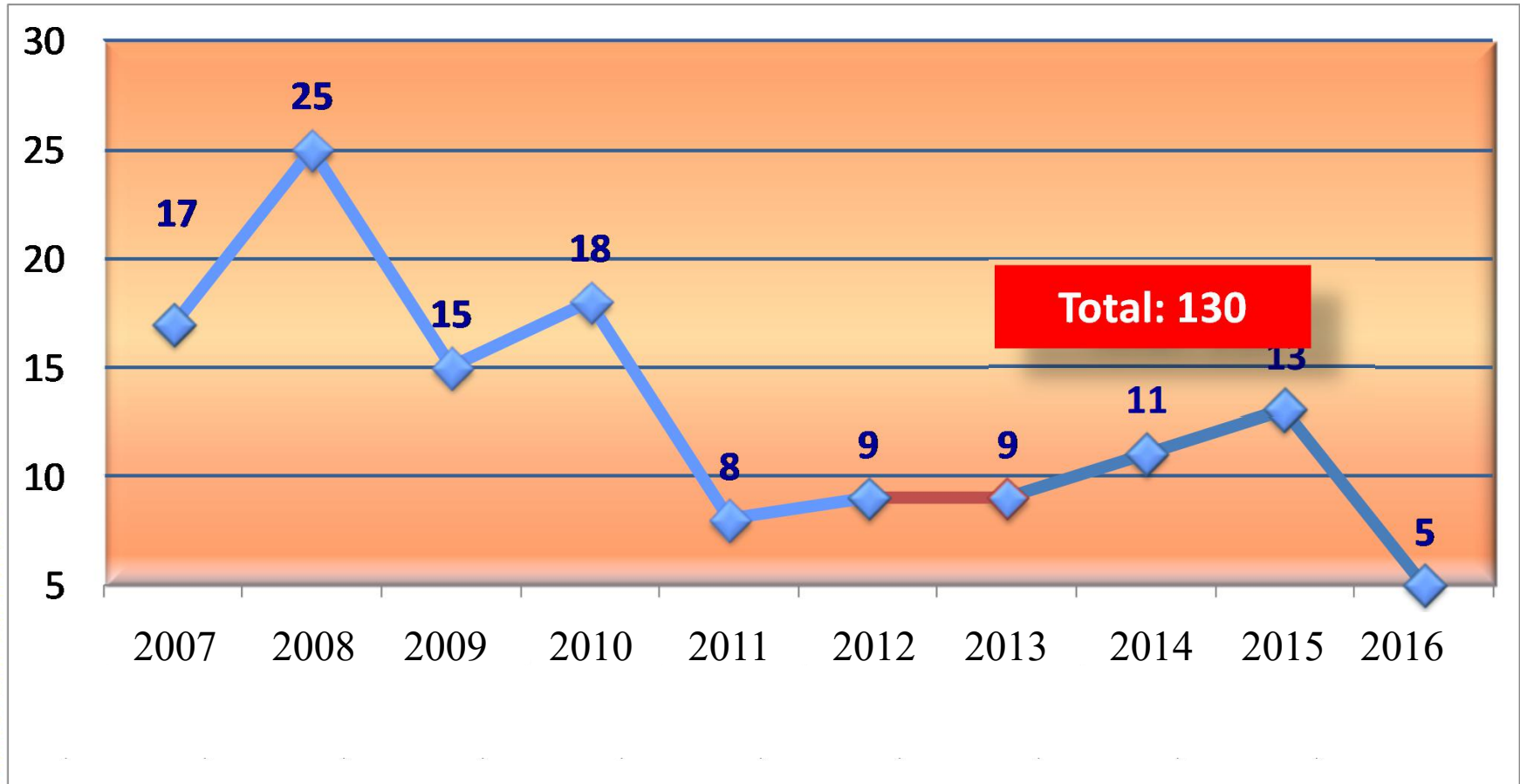
For the Safety of Babies

TV monitors in the nurse station and
newborn nursery

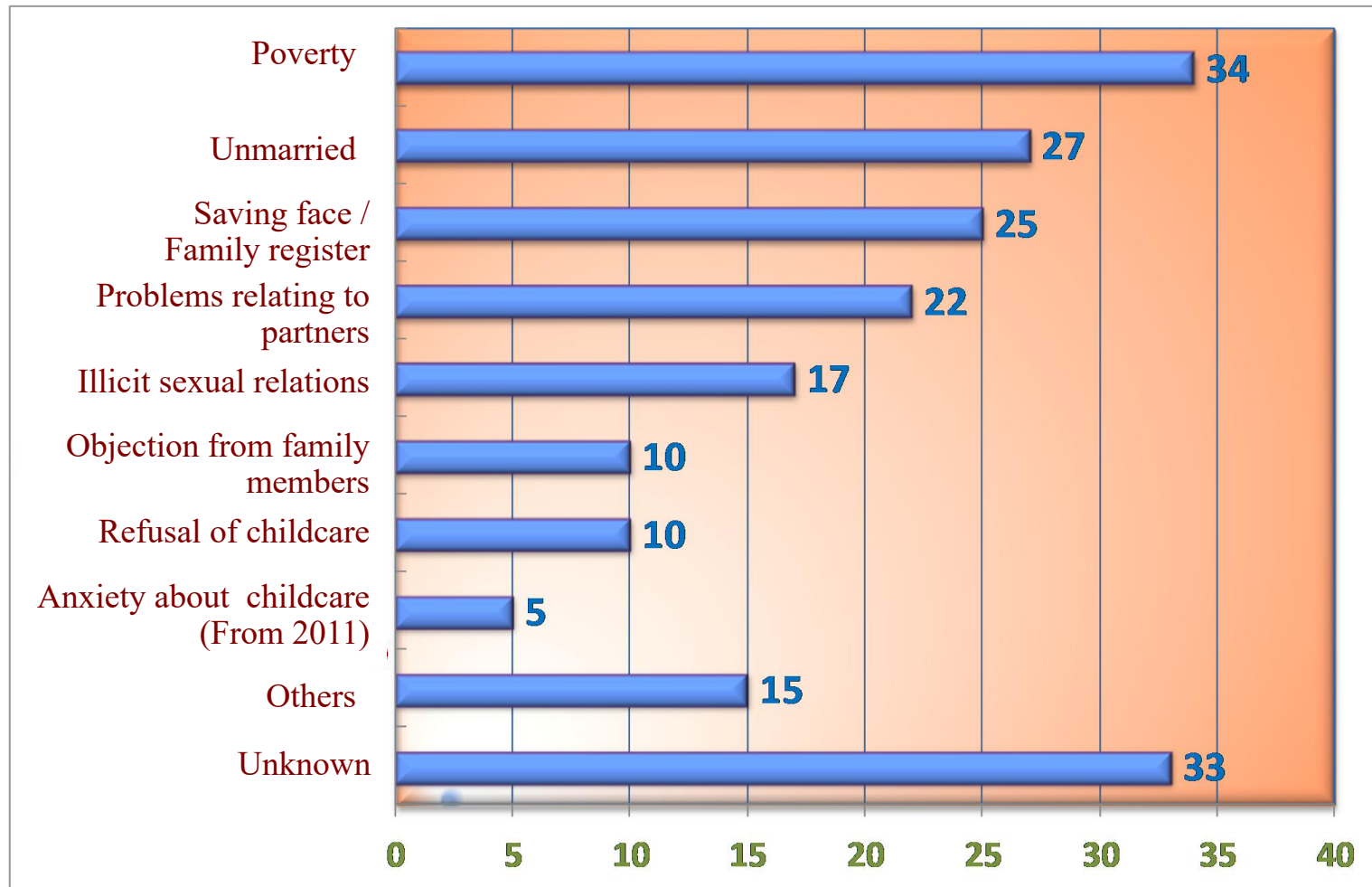
For the Safety of Babies

Nurses inspect the appliances three time a day.

The Number of Babies Placed in Our Baby Box



Reasons for the Use of Baby Box (Multiple answers)



Baby Box Flow Chart

A baby is placed in the Baby Box



Hospital staff immediately comes to the Baby Box to care for the baby.



Contacts a doctor



Contacts the nurse leader



Medical checkup



Director of nursing



Kumamoto City Child Guidance Center

Police

Babies' Future

Child Guidance Center

Babies home

(Up to the age of
3 years old)

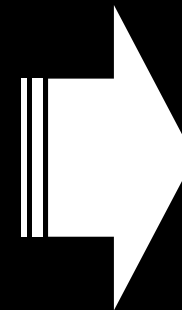
Children's home

(Up to the age of
18 years old)

Foster
parents

Plenary adoption

Society



Situation of the Babies after Being Placed in the Baby Box

(Number of babies)

Raised in/by	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	Total
Babies home or other facilities	4	5	2	4	1	2	2	3	1	4	28
Foster parents	5	3	1	1	2	2	3	1	7	1	26
Their families	0	5	3	4	3	2	0	3	3	0	23
Plenary adoption	6	12	8	7	2	3	4	4	1	0	47
Others	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Total	17	25	15	18	8	9	9	11	13	5	130

After the Use of “*Kounotori no Yurikago*”...

Babies may be put into babies homes or other welfare facilities.

Children who are unable to know their birth parents need to have their foster parents.

Instead of using the Baby Box, we would like their birth parents to ask for our advice and choose plenary adoption.

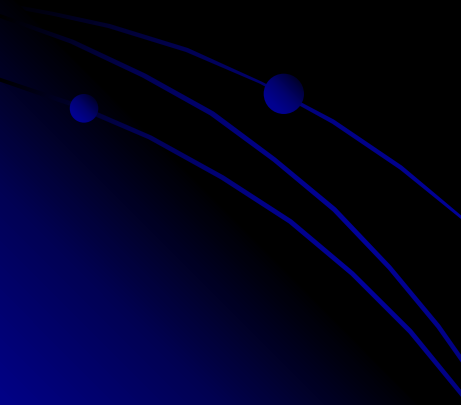
SOS Hotline

24 hours 365 days
Toll-free



Jikei Hospital Telephone Consultation Service for Babies and Mothers

Fiscal year	Number of calls
2007	501
2008	472
2009	513
2010	591
2011	690
2012	1,000
2013	1,445
2014	4,036
2015	5,466
2016	6,565
Total	21,279



Jikei Hospital Plenary Adoption

294

(Apr. 1, 2007 – Mar. 31, 2017)

By year

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
26	30	27	30	21	33	37	33	31	26

Criticism against “Kounotori no Yurikago”

- Abandonment of children by their parents is ethically unacceptable.
- It can facilitate child neglect and increase the number of parents who do not fulfill their basic obligation to raise their children.
- It violates a child’s right to know its origins.
- It can promote isolated childbirth which is dangerous to mothers and babies
- It is dangerous for mothers and babies to travel a far distance soon after delivery

But critics have not offered **an alternative means** to mothers who desperately want to make their childbirth a secret.

What People Say about “Kounotori no Yurikago”

[Public in general]

Compared with a decade ago, we are receiving positive feedback more often than negative one. But still, compared with other countries, Japanese society seems to be indifferent to the Baby Box issue.

[Mass media]

Some say that the Baby Box is “a system for saving babies’ lives.”

However, there are many articles written in a negative tone, for example, “It violates a child’s right to know its origins.”

“It triggers dangerous homebirth.”

“It is not functioning as a means to prevent abandonment or deaths of babies.”

[Government]

The municipal government of the City of Kumamoto has requested the national government to participate in this initiative again and again, but there is no response.

Operational Issues of “Kounotori no Yurikago”

1. Most of the babies are raised in babies homes, despite our wishes to send them directly to foster parents.
2. Information disclosed about the babies is very little. This makes us impossible to know what happened afterwards. Without information, it is impossible to discuss whether the Baby Box system is right or wrong.
3. The number of babies placed in the Baby Box is decreasing. Younger generation is less familiar with our “Kounotori no Yurikago”.
4. The national government has not responded to the city government’s repeated requests for participation in this project.
5. The cost for the Baby Box
 - Annual cost of operating the Baby Box: Approx. 20 million yen
 - Donations: 5 to 6 million yen
 - Jikei Hospital’s donation: Approx. 15 million yen

The Future of “Kounotori no Yurikago”

There are many opinions both for and against the Baby Box. And we have many issues to be solved.

But our Baby Box is an important **safety net** or a **refuge** for women who desperately want to hide their unwanted pregnancies or childbirth.

We would like to continue our efforts to help such mothers and babies.

Thank you for your attention.