



# Exploring Youth and Irregular Employment in Japan During COVID-19 : A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Manami Uptegrove

<sup>1</sup>University of Oregon, <sup>2</sup> Robert D. Clark Honors College , Department of Global Studies



## Introduction

- Irregular employment in Japan can be considered as any work that is not “regular” or full-time and long-term.
- Makes up a significant percent of the work force in Japan, and many irregular workers fall in the category of “youth”, and as represented in this research aged 20-36

## Research Questions

- How have irregular workers in Japan been impacted by COVID-19?
- What measures has the government as well as companies taken to support irregular workers?
- How is the current state of treatment of irregular workers a reflection of ongoing societal and policy level disparities towards irregular employment?

## Methods

### Analysis of:

#### Quantitative Data Including:

- The Employment Status Survey “Shugyo”
- “Survey on the Impact that Spreading Novel Coronavirus Infection has on Work and Daily Life” (JILPT)

#### Qualitative Data Including:

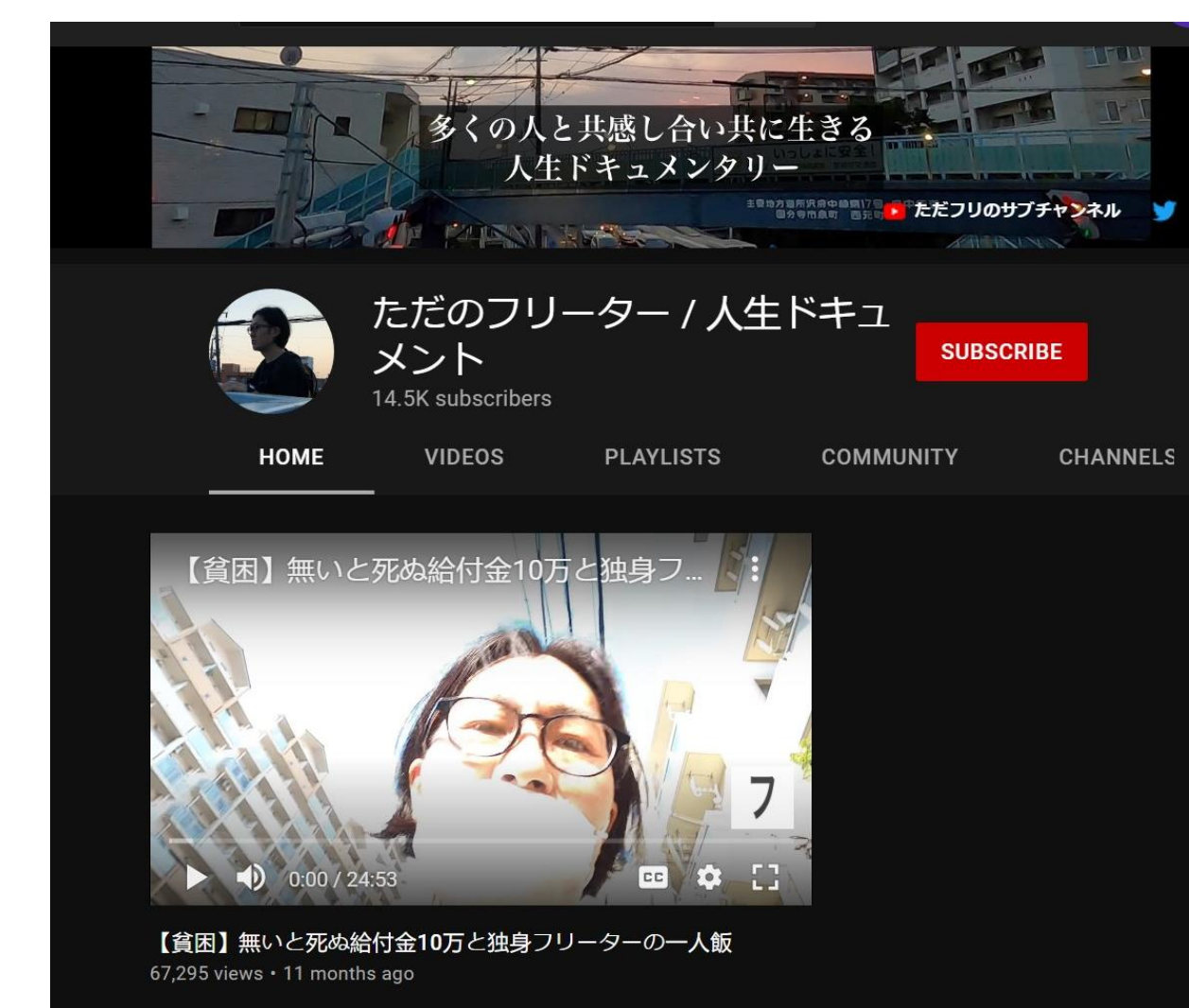
- The 2019 and 2020 White Papers by the Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare
- Ethnographic Papers from the Series “Vulnerable Populations Under COVID-19 in Japan: A Lull in the Storm”
- *Tada No Furita* YouTube Channel

Exploration of additional sources and themes including Japanese culture through Hofstede’s Intercultural Dimensions, pop culture and media representations through television dramas and film, as well as topics of a hyper-aging society, and *ibasho*.

## State of Irregular Employment

### During COVID-19

- Visible disparities between irregular and regular workers during COVID-19 as outlined by the JILPT results on the “Survey on the Impact that Spreading Novel Coronavirus Infection has on Work and Daily Life”.
- Occurrences of mistreatment, villainization and dehumanization of irregular workers during the pandemic.
- Showcasing of financial struggle during the pandemic due to reduced work hours, and overall feeling outcasted as an irregular worker



## Responses by Policy Makers and Employers

- Lack of urgency by the government as well as companies, to assist irregular and young workers before and during the pandemic.
  - Many irregular workers including freelancers were unable to access COVID-19 relief funds either due to not being affiliated with a company, or companies not applying for the funds for their employees
- As highlighted in the 2019 MHLW White Papers, there was a widespread desire for Japanese companies to hire more regular workers, but many companies faced the issue of not being able to find workers to apply for or follow through with positions. There was effort to extend the required age of retirement, but no clear indication of efforts being made to increase opportunities for irregular employees to be promoted to regular positions, or to improve working conditions to be suitable for younger generations.

## Conclusions

- There are significant disparities in how COVID-19 effects regular and irregular employees in Japan, with irregular workers having a much higher chance of having reduced hours and wages over regular workers. While this is the case during COVID-19, inequality as well as a general disapproval of irregular employment has been an idea that has been prominent for a significant period of time, even since the beginnings of irregular employment in the 1990s.
- While there has been recognition of Japan having a labor shortage, and many companies have desired to increase regular workers, there seems to be a disconnect in structural changes that could be used to employ younger workers and shift irregular workers into regular positions.
- Irregular workers have seemed to bear the brunt of the pandemic, and have been taken advantage of by companies simply by not being seen as “as loyal” as regular workers in a company

## References

- The Japanese Institute for Labor Policy and Training, “What Impacts is the COVID-19 Crisis Having on Work and Daily Life? —From the Results of “Survey on the Impact that Spreading Novel Coronavirus Infection has on Work and Daily Life” (May 2020 Survey)” Japan Labor Issues , vol. 4, no. 27, (October 23, 2020). <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jil/documents/2020/027-03.pdf>
- Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. “White Paper on the Labor Economy Total Contents.” Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/l-economy/index.html>
- Slater, David. 2020. “Vulnerable Populations Under COVID-19 in Japan: A Lull in the Storm?” Asia Pacific Journal 18, no. 18 (September 15, 2020). <https://apjjf.org/2020/18/Slater.html>.