

Stories & Facts from Fukushima

December 31, 2014
Vol.4



Fukushima Beacon for Global Citizens Network (FUKUDEN)
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A Story

Unpredictable health hazards in Fukushima (2)

—Start broad medical tests and collection of data now!

Toshiyuki Takeuchi & Emiko Fujioka



A doctor of Pediatricians' Network for Saving Children from Radiation examines a child in a health consultation meeting in Fukushima ©Fukushima 30-year Project

Controversy raised by the comic “the truth of Fukushima”

On April 28th, 2014, a hot debate had been given rise by a popular comic published on a weekly comic magazine “Big Comic Spirits” which has 30 million copies regularly sold. The comic is “Oishinbo”, a popular gourmet comic which has been running for approximately 30 years. The author of this comic published 24 series of stories named “the truth of Fukushima” based on his own actual reporting on Fukushima.

The major controversy surrounding this comic was the description where the main character had a nosebleed after observing the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. In the next story sold the following week, the author further describes ex-mayor of Futaba-machi; a town in Fukushima whose whole town hall had to evacuate outside of the prefecture after the accident, under his real name, as mentioning “There are a lot of people having nosebleeds or suffering from terrible fatigue in Fukushima because they were all exposed to the radiation”.

Why did a lot of people, including prefectural and government officials, needed to express their comments on this fictitious comic?

– This is because of the never-ending debate on the long-term impact on the health by the low dose radiation exposure

In response to these stories, some people criticized or protested to the publisher, saying “though it might be possible to get a nosebleed if exposed to high radiation dose of more than 1,000 mSv., it is impossible under current low radiation dose as in Fukushima.” or “this is an invalid and irresponsible description.”

However, others responded “a lot of children actually do get nosebleeds” or “well done to the author for describing issues of damage on health which everyone hesitates to mention” - a lot of people ranging from the general public to so called experts stated their own opinion through the media or on the internet.

The mass media picked up on these stories sensationally, and the Fukushima Prefecture protested that these stories hurt the citizens of Fukushima and increased a sense of distrust towards Fukushima and foster damages caused by rumors. Furthermore, several government officials including Prime Minister Abe contended that relationship between radiation and nosebleeds cannot be verified and that we need to communicate accurate information to avoid any damage caused by groundless rumors.

As a result, the publisher who had been publishing “Oishinbo” disclosed a “statement from their editorial department”, together with various opinions stated by experts and government bodies and decided to stop publishing these series temporarily.

Why did a lot of people, including prefectural and government officials, needed to express their comments on this fictitious comic? - This is because of the never-ending debate in various areas related to the question on the long-term impact on the health of the citizens caused by the low dose radiation exposure following the accidents in the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

However, such discussions are not always based on scientific research or statistical data, and make the residents of Fukushima or people nearby even more stressed. It is even more so for people who had to evacuate from their homes due to the radiation.

What is the data based on which the Fukushima Prefecture protested?

The Fukushima Prefecture, which expressed its protests promptly on their official web page, had conducted the “Fukushima Health Management Survey” from July, 2011. However, the survey did not include investigation on change of physical conditions, such as nosebleeds. It only included investigation on estimates of radiation exposure, asking people where they were right after the accident, check up on thyroid of people in Fukushima who were below 18 years old at the time of the accident, blood tests directed for limited scope of people such as people living in evacuation zones, questionnaire surveys on stress and life habits such as sleep, exercise, diet, and so on, and surveys on pregnant women.

In other words, neither the Fukushima Prefecture nor the government had enough data based on their own investigations to conclude that the relationship between nosebleeds and the accident at the nuclear power plants were invalid. Instead, the Fukushima Prefecture repeatedly quoted, in their statement of protest; a report published by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (“UNSCEAR”), that the risk of radioactive substances discharged by accidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant causing damage on health was significantly low. However, this UNSCEAR report repeatedly provides a disclaimer that it does not have enough actual data to calculate radiation dosage and supplements it with estimations by modeling.

A 19 doctors’ group participating in the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (“IPPNW”) published criticism towards this report in their joint name and casted doubt on its relevance from various perspectives.*¹

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A seminar by experts of UNSCEAR was held for the civil servants of Fukushima prefecture in September 2014 in Fukushima city. There was no such seminar held for the general public.

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1. Critical Analysis of the UNSCEAR Report (http://www.fukushima-disaster.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/english/Akzente_Unscear2014.pdf)

The most skeptical point raised in the report was that the source term used in the estimation of total amount of radiation discharged after accidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was that conducted by the Japanese Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) which results were significantly low compared with the estimates conducted by other research organizations.

More info:

A joint statement to request revision of the reports of UNSCAER on Fukushima was submitted to the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly 69th Session on October 24th, 2014.

40 civil society organizations from Japan and 7 other countries supported the request.

The whole statement is available here.



<http://bit.ly/1JX8Oxu>

An expert conference convened by the Fukushima Prefectural government and Ministry of Environment for the purpose of examining the health effects caused by the radioactive substances released due to the accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is being criticized.*²

This is because they took the position of merely affirming in advance the conclusion put forth in the UNSCEAR report, which said "the risk of health hazards is very small," and the discussions were carried out so as to support this conclusion.

The Ministry of Environment's "Experts' panel on the health management of the residents affected by the nuclear accident at TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant" held their 8th meeting on July 16 where five experts who gave their opinions said the government should take responsibility in conducting health checkups and fundamentally review the radiation measurement evaluation system. However, every single one of their opinions was virtually ignored by the committee.*³

Women enjoy an icebreaking game in "Fukushima Gathering for Living", a regular meeting called by a Citizen's group for information exchange among women with different background in Fukushima; who are evacuated from their home, returned to their home from evacuation, and who continue living in their home.

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- 2 An exclusive was revealed by the Mainichi Newspaper that members of the investigative commission of the "Fukushima Health Management Survey" and some officials of the Fukushima Prefecture had a pre-meeting and agreed in secret on how to explain the results of the health survey and how to arrange the discussions before the official meeting which would become public.
- 3 One of the panelists, Prof. Toshihide Tsuda, an epidemiology specialist who takes large numbers of human samples to observe and find out the causes of different diseases insisted that "When we analyzed the results of the thyroid cancer survey conducted in the Fukushima Prefecture according to location, it is obvious that there are more numbers of thyroid cancer cases in the Nakadori area (middle area), and we urgently need to take necessary measures." He warned that specialists should not be wasting their time arguing about the relativity of cancer incidence and level of radioactive exposure and failing to take necessary measures in time. Furthermore, in regard to the fact that many researchers continue to insist that "exposure of less than 100 mSv would not cause cancer," Prof. Tsuda criticized them and said they should stop making such statements based on the fact that since ICRP's former organization, IXRPC, reached a conclusion in 1949 which states that "There is no threshold dose of radioactivity that would cause cancer," such an internationally common understanding has not changed at all.

Now is the time to collect comprehensive data on health effects

Given the circumstances explained above, some citizens groups and parents are starting to conduct health surveys on their own. Save Fukushima's Children Lawyers' Network (SAFLAN) called on a group led by Prof. Tsuda of Okayama University in November 2012, after one-and-a-half years from the nuclear accident, and coordinated an epidemiological comparative study on the relationship between low level radioactive exposure, symptoms, and diseases amongst people from three different locations: Futabamachi, which is one of Fukushima's caution zone; Marumori of Miyagi Prefecture, which is next to Fukushima and has shown high level of radioactivity; Kinomoto-cho of Nagayama City in Shiga Prefecture.

Because of the recent heated arguments on nosebleeds, SAFLAN has renewed the study results on their website. According to this study, there was more apparent number of nosebleed cases among people who evacuated from Futabamachi, which is contrary to the view of the Fukushima Prefecture.

However, what we need to realize is that the problem here is not the causal relationship of nosebleeds and the radiation levels after the nuclear accident, though research should continue to find an answer to this problem. The main problem is that even in a country like Japan, which is internationally recognized as a developed country, neither the government nor the Fukushima Prefectural government has to this day conducted a comprehensive and detailed health survey.

Because there is not enough data on the health conditions of people living in the wide area affected by the nuclear accident, we have to depend on the authority of the United Nations and have no choice but to quote from its research papers.

The national and prefectural governments both need to respond to the voices of the mothers and other people who are desperate to protect the children, and work on collecting the basic health data of all residents. If we do the collecting now, we might even be able to put it in the hands of our future generations to make further evaluations. But collecting of the data must be done now; otherwise we will lose it forever.

Being caught up with finding the causal relationship and, as a result, not being able to provide adequate care to the victims in time is a lesson we learned from pollution issues in the past. We must not make the same mistake again.⁴

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Translation into English: Akiko Fukami & Nomura Group Translation Volunteer Team

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4. In the case of Minamata disease, Chisso Corp. continued to release highly poisonous methylmercury out into the sea until 1968, when Minamata disease was officially acknowledged as a pollution-caused disease. This was 26 years from 1942 when the first Minamata disease was said to have been discovered, and 12 years from 1956 when the outbreak of Minamata disease was officially confirmed. This means that during those times, no adequate measures to save the victims were taken.

Background Facts

The number of Fukushima children diagnosed as thyroid cancer rose to 112

Four more children, who were diagnosed as not having cancer in the first survey, are suspected of suffering from thyroid cancer

The number of young people in Fukushima Prefecture who have been diagnosed with definitive or suspected thyroid gland cancer now totals 112, according to Fukushima prefectural government.

The thyroid inspections, which started from October 2014, completed its first survey which covered all 370,000 children in the prefecture who were aged 18 and under at the time of the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident. As a result, 109 children had been found as confirmed or suspected thyroid cancer. The second survey, which began last April, covers some 385,000 children, adding those born in a year after the nuclear accident.

According to the latest result released on December 24th 2014, an additional four children, who are diagnosed as not having cancer in the first survey, were suspected of suffering from thyroid cancer.

Professor Toshihide Tsuda of Okayama University warns that the figure has already exceeded the estimation by WHO in 2013 and the survey should be extended to the surrounding prefectures of Fukushima and children over 18 at the time of the accident.

Fukushima prefecture has not changed its position that there is no direct relationship between those cancer cases and the radiation released by the nuclear accident.

Table 1: Results of the first and second survey of thyroid examination as of October 31, 2014

		The 1st Survey 2011-2014 (Complete)	The 2nd Survey 2014-2016 (As of Oct.31,2014)
Number of participants for primary examination		296,586	82,101
Number who required confirmatory test		2,241	457
Number of participants for confirmatory test		2,051	248
Number who underwent aspiration biopsy cytology		519	11
Malignant or suspicious for malignancy		109	4
Surgical cases	Papillary carcinoma	81	0
	Benign thyroid nodules	1	
	Suspicious poorly differentiated thyroid carcinoma	3	
	Total	85	
Male:Female *		38:71	3:1
Age * (Age at the time of disaster)		8-21 (6-18)	10-20 (6-17)
Tumor size *		5.1-40.5mm	7.0-17.3mm

*for those who underwent aspiration biopsy cytology

Source: Materials provided in the 17th Prefectural Oversight Committee Meeting for Fukushima Health Management Survey

Results of Thyroid Ultrasound Examination of Fukushima Health Management Survey
 ⇒ <http://www.fmu.ac.jp/radiationhealth/results/>

Information

Lessons of Fukushima will be shared in the public forum and related events of UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai

On 14-18 March 2015, the United Nations will hold the third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, northeastern Japan.

Fukushima Beacon for Global Citizens Network (FUKUDEN) is currently working as one of the joint secretariat organizations for the Japan CSO Coalition for this conference, JCC2015 (<http://jcc2015.net/en/>) organizing some parallel related events, and particularly working to ensure that the voices of local communities are reflected in the official programs - especially those affected by the nuclear power plant disaster.

Before and during the conference period, some events for sharing lessons of Fukushima will be organized in Fukushima and Sendai.



Fukushima

March 12

Field Exchange

Bus trip to Fukushima to witness the present situation and to hear local voices from affected communities.

March 13

Global Symposium

A global event with both international and domestic scientists, doctors, academia and civil society

Sendai

March 14

Public Forum Session

A session by JCC2015 members on nuclear focused DRR by ensuring public participation. Based on the lessons learnt on Fukushima, the session will provide suggestions for the future.

March 17

Public Forum Session

A session by a coalition of agencies working in Fukushima to draw key lessons from civil society perspectives on the nuclear disaster. After reviewing what has been happening in Fukushima since before the disaster, round discussion will be held on what we can do for building community which do not depend on the nuclear energy.

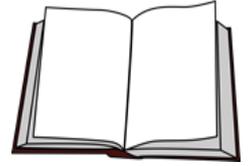


An outline of the week's events is available here (A new flyer of JCC2015's Six Action Pillars for the 3rd WCDRR in Sendai)

↓
<http://jcc2015.net/wpJCC/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/6PillarsA5s.pdf>

Information

A booklet with essential lessons learnt from Fukushima will be published in March !



As part of the events organized in parallel with UN World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in March, we are planning to publish and distribute a comprehensive booklet to share the lessons of Fukushima globally, containing key facts about the disaster and based on local voices of those affected. We intend to launch the booklet at the above-mentioned events in March 2015 in many languages, and hope that it will help education for the prevention and reduction of risks of nuclear disaster.

The booklet will contain the topics as follows:

1. Basic information on nuclear power plant and radiation
2. Experience of Fukushima and action tools for Civil Society
 - Myth of safety/ Widely spread Contamination/ Problems faced in evacuation / Problems in information flow and Instructions by the government/ Affect on children / Problems on contaminated soils and decontamination/ Responsibility for the accident and compensation for the affected people/ Divisions of the people and Discrimination/ Exposed labor/ Cost of the nuclear accident
3. International laws and regulations which we can use for advocacy

About this news letter

Stories & Facts from Fukushima is a newsletter presenting real stories of Fukushima and its background after the nuclear disaster of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant happened on Mar. 11, 2011.

Having more than 3 years passed since the disaster, this newsletter aims to introduce present situation of Fukushima people (both

living inside and outside Fukushima) and to explain the facts behind their life.

Some of the contents are linked to our website, Fukushima on the Globe (www.fukushimaonthe-globe.com). Please see the site as well as this newsletter.

We welcome your feedback.

Acknowledgement

Translation of the contents of this newsletter is supported by Nomura Group Translation Volunteer Team.

Our project is funded by organizations as below:





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