

Prevent Your Town from being another Fukushima

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Do you know spontaneous fetal death? If you have children and you gave birth vaginally, you may have had no chance to know it. It must be much more unfamiliar for men. The words explain the case to bear a baby who dies spontaneously in the womb.

In Fukushima prefecture, we saw 12 spontaneous deaths out of every 1,000 births in 2011, and 15 in 2012. The actual figure in 2011 is 186 out of 15,072, and in 2012, 212 out of 13,770. The number increased by 25 percent, which cannot be brushed off as a coincidence. In 2012 the number of births decreased by 1,302 from the year earlier, but on the contrary the number of spontaneous fetal death increased by 26. Stillbirth is defined as to deliver a fetus with no signs of life at or after 22 weeks gestation when it grows the viability outside the womb. If we add miscarriage and abortion before 22 weeks gestation, the number of the fetal deaths could be larger. I'm concerned about the number in 2013.

I learned the words spontaneous fetal death at the time of my daughter's miscarriage. In autumn last year my daughter called me, saying, "Mom, you'll have a grandchild next summer!" Since then I was looking forward to the day. Just 3 weeks later, she had to get an abortion. According to an ultrasound, it was not confirmed that the fetus was alive. It was silent miscarriage. It was before her 10 weeks pregnancy, her fetus was not included in the stillbirth children.

After that my daughter fell sick for some time and stopped away from work. During the period, she knew three of her friends got the same diagnosis before 22 weeks of pregnancy. Two of them lost their babies because of the same missed abortion as my daughter. One of the three, getting the diagnosis that her fetus was underdeveloped and the heartbeat was poor, gave birth without any complications. She said, "I worry for the future of my child, because my baby is underdeveloped and has a poor heartbeat. But my husband and I have decided to raise our child carefully no matter what happens." I respected the young couple, and at the same time I envied them. My daughter's husband concealed his internal shock at first. I knew, however, he wept somewhere with nobody around him. I remembered my

daughter's small fetus seen in the ultrasound image. I thought that if she waited for some more time, the baby could have come to us.

Afterwards, my daughter wanted to know why her fetus couldn't grow, and asked the doctor for the result of blood test and exams of cells. The doctor told her to go to the Fukushima Medical University. But he also said that he had never known anyone who asked the university things like this. She felt a sense of discomfort. The doctor said that miscarriage itself was not rare, and he had experienced such cases many times. If so, why did he send the fetal cell to the university? Where would the university send the diagnostic data, and how would it be utilized? When did the university start collecting and checking the cells of aborted fetus? My daughter came to feel doubt.

There was a reason why she felt it. We used to live near Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power plant that exploded immediately after the 3.11 earthquake. Both Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the government did not tell the truth to us. And the media covered the government view. They didn't divulge everything about the data of spreading radioactive materials, the fact of the core meltdown or the possible occurrence of a health hazard caused by radiation exposure. Many residents asked the TV stations and the newspaper publishers to express the truth, but they fell on deaf ears. I conveyed information that the expansion of evacuation zones was needed to the 3 TV stations which was from the staff evacuated to the earthquake-proof building of the TEPCO with the plant manager, Mr. Yoshida. It was rejected as one of the false rumors.

Later doctors and scientists worried about children exposed to radiation, and they insisted with tears that children needed evacuation. But there were people who said that permissible lifelong exposure level was 100 millisieverts and that it was important to lead a merry life in order to escape from radiation. While those people made a safety myth of Fukushima backed by the government, they themselves left Fukushima for the safety zone.

The weekly magazine "Friday" published on Feb. 21, 2014 ran the story titled "The fake safety declaration by doctors who take stable iodine preparations." Fukushima Medical University stated, "It is not clear that there is a strong cause-and-effect relation between diffusion of radioactive materials caused by the nuclear plant explosion and increase of cancer patients, sudden death or children's poor health." From Mar. 12, 2011, the university distributed 4,000 doses of stable iodine tablets, however, not only to its doctors and staff but also staff's families and students who didn't practice medicine so as to "suppress unrest." In addition, the

university forbade them to mention it. A doctor outside the university, after filing a Freedom of Information Act request, said to the reporters, “At the time, many residents desperately asked stable iodine tablets, but they couldn’t get them.”

Things have not changed even now. It is not people’s lives but the offending companies that are protected by Japanese government. Our government keeps radioactive contamination a secret in order to encourage economic development, and saves appearances as a “strong” nation. Given this fact, my daughter cannot trust information on the power plant and press reports on health issues, and has a strong doubt about artificiality and concealment. Sad to say, we learned, from the stance of the government and the major media, so that we need to seek information by ourselves because a given piece of data has so little truth.

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In December two years ago, at the lecture meeting I listened to a woman who lived out of a wheelchair. She raised her children and was devoted to caring for her mother at the time. I heard the words “Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NPT)” there.

She said, “What do you think of us with disabilities? Do you think we are unhappy? I have a difficulty to speak, and cannot move as intended. But I have a good partner, delivered three children and raised them up. Little while from now, I was taking care of my own aged mother using all sort of social services. Disability isn’t always in the opposite end of duty and happiness to support family. It is true that we have some difficulties compared to non-disabled people in some environments. I, however, have lived with enjoying my disability and have been making big difference surrounding me. I heard in Fukushima an increasing number of young women decide not to have children or not to marry by fears of radioactive contamination. I am so sorry to hear that. There are non-disabled individuals and at the same time, there are people with disabilities. Only non-disabled people care about people who needs reasonable accommodation, I believe that we can build an accessible, inclusive and sustainable society. In the past, Japan had the Eugenic Protection Act which strengthened a tendency to say that disabled children should not be born. And even now we find a feeling like this underlying inside the society. After the nuclear accident, the government has considered introduction of NPT, which will soon be permitted. Doctors can find fetal abnormality immediately through mothers’ blood tests. I don’t know why the government wants to switch the inspection method from the conventional one at this time. This may be the biggest ethical dilemma in light of the situations in Fukushima. But look at me. I am very happy now. I wish you to think with me

what deteriorate someone's happy life is, not his/ her disability but exclusive people's attitude."

Her words gave me two impacts. One was that she pointed out my invisible ableism bias to see the disabled as someone pitiful, though I believed that I understood what she said: "Only non-disabled people care about people who needs reasonable accommodation, I believe that we can build an accessible, inclusive and sustainable society." or "what deteriorate someone's happy life is, not his/ her disability but exclusive people's attitude." I was ashamed.

Another one was "Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NPT)". I fueled mounting suspicions that the government wanted to demonstrate as if there were no birth defects or no health damage among children in Fukushima like Chernobyl. The testing is done to check chromosomal abnormality in the fetus. On Mar. 9, 2013, the government issued the "New Guidelines for Prenatal Genetic Testing." And clinical research trial was going to be conducted at the authorized hospitals in the following April. But it was not a trial. The testing was ready to start at that time. I was surprised.

The Exploratory Committee on prenatal genetic testing under Ethical Committee of Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology raised an alarm as follows.

"In the wake of medical advancement, prenatal diagnostic technique is improved. As for illness in general it has become possible to treat a pre-born child or a newborn infant based on the prenatal diagnosis. But if the case is congenital malformation which is not a target symptom, there is a concern that the prenatal diagnosis could lead to preclusion of birth of a baby whose disability is expected, which is denial of both the right to life of disabled people and respect for human life. (http://www.jsog.or.jp/news/pdf/guidelineForNIPT_20130309.pdf) Nevertheless, some medical institutions presented how to apply to the testing and how much it cost.

Prenatal testing was under long-time study, and prenatal genetic testing was also started to discuss 10 years ago. I think I worry too much about its connection to nuclear accident in Fukushima. The guideline was kept intact for a long time, because "there is a concern that the prenatal diagnosis could lead to preclusion of birth of a baby whose disability is expected, which is denial of both the right to life of disabled people and respect for human life." Why was it suddenly announced after the disaster, in June, 2011?

At the end of last year, on the very day when the Diet passed the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, the Cancer Registration Act was passed.

Under this Act the government centralizes administrative control over cancer patients' information for treatment and prevention of cancer. Patients cannot reject registration.

The Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets is modeled on the National Security Council (NSC) in America. The Act stated its purpose as follows ; "This Act aims to prevent unauthorized disclosure of information concerning Japan's national security which is particularly required to be kept secret." We are not informed what is secret and what is not. Some people say that this Act aims to conceal inconvenient truth related to the nuclear power plant. Indeed, information concerning the power plant site is decreasing in the newspaper. A news reporter says that subcontract utility workers have bitten their tongue. The Act was enacted into law, but it hasn't be enforced now. Nevertheless, the subcontract workers become very nervous as is the intention of the government.

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The media proactively tells us positive news such as in Fukushima "a traditional festival is restored," "a marathon race is held" and "an evacuee restarts his own business." But they neglect negative information. Decontamination is a slow process. We see an increasing number of suicide or sudden death among young people. It is recommended to return home to Fukushima, but the project was decided without consensus among residents. In consequence, there are many evacuees who lead a hard life because their consolidation money is cut off or compensatory payment is reduced. The government plans to make 30 incinerators in the prefecture to burn decontamination waste. Scientists who study ecology argue that will cause radioactive pollution in the air all over Fukushima whose earth, rivers and sea are already polluted. Burning has started, but few people in Fukushima know it.

There are various views about hazards of radioactivity. Evacuation or not? To accept or not to accept the recommendation of returning home? People face a difficult choice. Residents are divided into two parts, those who can get consolidation money and those who can't. People in Fukushima split into various directions. I get pessimistic when I think that we can no longer become as one.

Stop disappointing us any longer. Be honest to us. I want those who run the government, and bureaucrats and business leaders who substantively steer the nation, to direct attention to Fukushima's current status. I wish the media to report the truth and stories which raise our awareness of the issue.

26 children were diagnosed thyroid cancer as of December, 2013, and the number has grown to 33 recently. It is said that an incidence of childhood thyroid cancer is from 1 to 3 in one million children. At the time of disaster, there were 385,000 children who were from 18 years and under in Fukushima prefecture. In light of this, 33 is a critical number.

Now in Japan, the media devote much space to the 3.11 disaster-stricken areas only once a year around March 11. The nuclear power plant in Fukushima gets a lot of coverage only in case of trouble on the site. In Tokyo gubernatorial election, a candidate who held up a campaign promise to improve welfare got more votes than another candidate who called for breaking with nuclear power generation. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, the government insisted that reconstruction of the affected area by the consumption tax hike. But people in Tokyo forgot it. It seemed that the severe economic situations made them difficult to think of evacuees living away from home, or nuclear accident that shows no sign of a settlement.

“Remember that we, residents of Fukushima prefecture, are citizens of Japan.” This is what Mr. Idogawa, a former mayor of Futaba-machi said to Mr. Noda, the then prime minister when the Democratic Party of Japan was in power. I would like you to consider his message again to prevent your town from being another Fukushima.