

# An Analysis of Surveys on Domestic Violence by Japan's Cabinet Office (1999-2017)

Tomoko Suga

Education Center, Rakuno Gakuen University, Hokkaido, Japan

Email: [tsuga@rakuno.ac.jp](mailto:tsuga@rakuno.ac.jp)

**How to cite this paper:** Suga, T. (2018) An Analysis of Surveys on Domestic Violence by Japan's Cabinet Office (1999-2017). *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 56-66. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.67005>

**Received:** June 18, 2018

**Accepted:** July 13, 2018

**Published:** July 16, 2018

Copyright © 2018 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Japan's Cabinet Office conducted surveys on DV seven times (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017). As a secondary source, we used the data on the Cabinet Offices website. In 2001, the first DV law, the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence was passed, after which the Japanese public began to recognize DV. Based on the question item on "domestic violence from a spouse" the data of the Cabinet Office's survey from 2005 to 2017 indicated that on average, just over 30% of women experienced DV, while just under 20% of men did. These figures have not changed much. The proportions of victims who use advisory services have increased with every survey due to political movements and Japanese policy. In 2017, the data showed that a little less than 58% of women and almost 27% of men used advisory services. The most recent survey conducted in 2017, showed that people who do not separate from their spouse experience DV. In terms of the reasons that they do not separate, "children" weighed high on the list.

## Keywords

Domestic Violence, Japan, Cabinet Office, Survey

---

## 1. Introduction

In consideration of respect for individuals and equality under the law, which are expressly stipulated in the Japanese Constitution, progress has been made in Japan through efforts to protect human rights and realize genuine equality between women and men. Nevertheless, although domestic violence (DV) constitutes a serious violation of human rights, as well as being a crime, attempts to efforts to relieve victims have not always been adequate in all instances [1]. Given that the Diet passed the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence in April 2001, the history of DV measures in Japan is relatively brief. In 1992, a pri-

vate-sector women's group conducted the first nation-wide fact-finding survey into spousal and intimate partner abuse. The results led the Prime Minister's Office (now the Cabinet Office) to carry out the first of a series of surveys on DV starting in 1999 [2]. The surveys are conducted triennially, with seven so far (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2017). In this article, we summarize the trends seen in the findings. Now that nearly twenty years have passed since the first surveys, it is essential to share the data on DV in Japan with the wider world.

The 1999 survey had a significant impact, prompting the government to propose the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence, which the Diet passed in April 2001. At the time, only physical violence was defined as DV, and a stay-away order would only be available for the victim. Similarly, a protection order could only be applied to a spouse. Moreover, the perpetrator could only be prevented from returning to a residence for up to two weeks.

In December 2004, the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence was amended for the first time. The definition of DV was broadened to include psychological and sexual abuse, and stay-away orders were made available for the victim's children as well as the victim him/herself. The amendment also extended the scope of protection orders to include a former spouse or cohabiting partner. The perpetrator could now be prevented from returning to a residence for up to two months and prohibited from loitering around the residence.

A second amendment was approved in January 2008 which imposed a duty on municipal authorities to make efforts in setting up DV shelters. The scope of stay-away orders was further expanded; perpetrators could now be forbidden from approaching, children or kin living with the victim (in addition to the victim him/herself), and could also be barred from phoning such persons.

The third amendment was passed in January 2014. Protection orders would now apply to intimate partners who were economically linked as well as spouses, former spouses, and cohabiting partners [3]. Taiwan enacted a DV law in 1998, which in addition to spousal violence, covered violence against children the elderly, and family members in general [4]. By comparison, Japan's DV legislation had many shortcomings. The legislation was amended three times in large part due to the Cabinet Office's triennial survey on DV. In this study, we look at the change to "domestic violence from a spouse", "physical violence", "psychological violence", "sexual violence", "the proportions of victims who use advisory service", "women's actions after suffering domestic violence", and "men's actions after suffering domestic violence". Hereunder, we examine how DV patterns in Japan have changed over time to derive hints for how to tackle the problem.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Procedures

As a secondary source, we used public accessible data from the seven DV surveys

published on the website of the Cabinet Office's Gender Equality Bureau [5].

1) December 1999: 4500 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3405 (75.7%) women = 1773, men = 1632 [6]

2) December 2002 4500 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3322 (73.8%) women = 1802, men = 1520 [7]

3) December 2005 5000 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 2888 (64.2%) women = 1578, men = 1310

Married or have married in the past: women = 1283, men = 1045 [8]

4) December 2008 5000 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3129 (62.6%) women = 1675, men = 1454

Married or have married in the past: women = 1358, men = 1077 [9]

5) December 2011 5,000 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3293 (65.9%) women = 1751, men = 1542

Married or have married in the past: women = 1403, men = 1195 [10]

6) December 2014 5000 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3544 (70.9%) women = 1811, men = 1733

Married or have married in the past: women = 1401, men = 1272 [11]

7) December 2017 5000 men and women aged 20 or above were randomly selected. Questionnaire surveys were posted to these individuals, and the completed questionnaires were returned. Effective response rate: n = 3376 (67.5%) women = 1807, men = 1569

Married or have married in the past: women = 1366, men = 1119 [12]

## 2.2. Contents of the Questionnaire

Of the question items on the seven DV surveys, we selected those that appeared in all seven. From among the question items, we selected nine important ones: 1) the rate of DV victims; 2) the rate of physical violence; 3) the rate of psychological violence; 4) the rate of sexual violence; 5) the rate of DV who received advisory services; 6) reasons for not using advisory services; 7) actions of female DV victims; 8) actions of male DV victims; and 9) reasons why DV victims do not leave the perpetrator. Since the question format in the 1999 survey differs from

that of the surveys from 2002 and onward, we cannot show the results in a graph. Therefore, we have only presented the descriptive data.

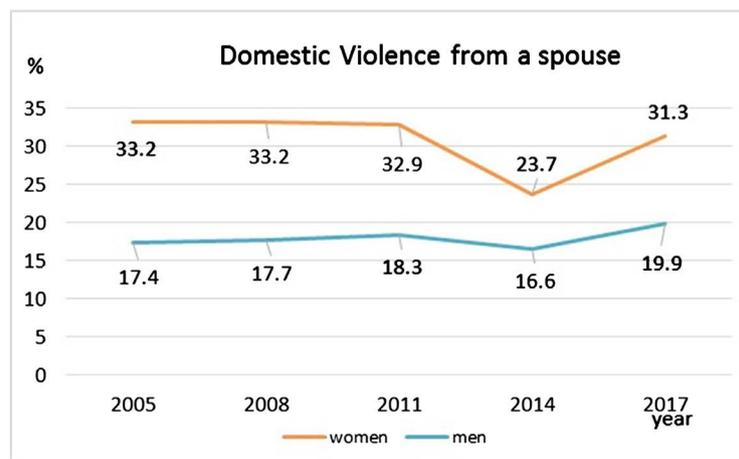
### 3. Result

#### 3.1. Domestic Violence from a Spouse

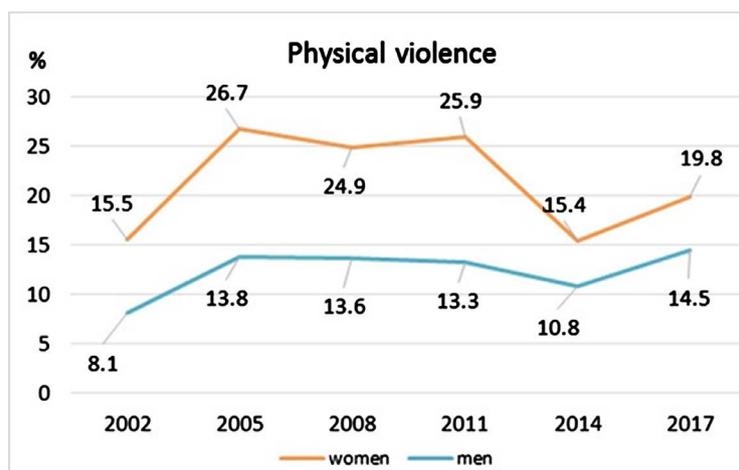
**Figure 1** shows the results for the question item “domestic violence from a spouse”. Since this item was not included in the 1999 and 2002 surveys, the figure pertains to the data from 2005 onward. Regarding the outcomes for women in 2005, 33.2% experienced DV by a spouse; that figure was, 33.2% in 2008, 32.9% in 2011, 23.7% in 2014, and 31.3% in 2017, respectively. The rate dipped in 2014, but this was only temporary. As for men, the rate has not significantly differed since 2005, as 17.4% experienced spousal violence in 2005, 17.7% in 2008, 18.3% in 2011, 16.6% in 2014, and 19.9% in 2017, respectively.

#### 3.2. Physical Violence

**Figure 2** shows the outcomes for the question item “physical violence”. In terms



**Figure 1.** Domestic violence from a spouse.



**Figure 2.** Physical violence.

of the findings for women, 15.5% experienced physical violence from their spouse in 2002, 26.7% in 2005, 24.9% in 2008, and 25.9% in 2011, respectively. The rate decreased to 15.4% in 2014, and rose to 19.8% in 2017. As for men, 8.1% experienced physical violence in 2002, 13.8% in 2005, 13.6% in 2008, 13.3% in 2011, and 10.8% in 2014. In 2017, 14.5% of men experienced DV, indicating a rising trend.

### 3.3. Psychological Violence

Figure 3 shows the outcomes for the question item “psychological violence”. Regarding the results for women, 5.6% experienced psychological violence from their spouse in 2002, 16.1% in 2005, 16.6% in 2008, 17.8% in 2011, 11.9% in 2014, and 16.8% in 2017, respectively. Among men, 1.8% experienced psychological violence in 2002, but this figure rose to 8.1% in 2005, 8.8% in 2008, 9.5% in 2011, 9.1% in 2014, and 10.0% in 2017, respectively. The rate of male DV victims is clearly rising.

### 3.4. Sexual Violence

Figure 4 shows the results for the question item “sexual violence”. In terms of

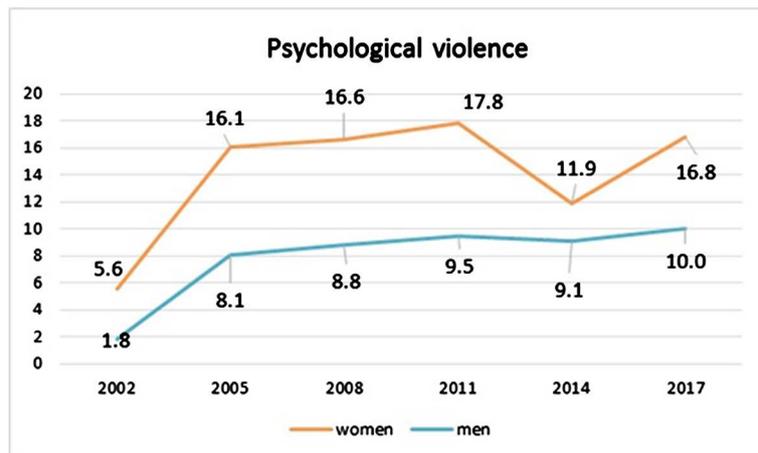


Figure 3. Psychological violence.

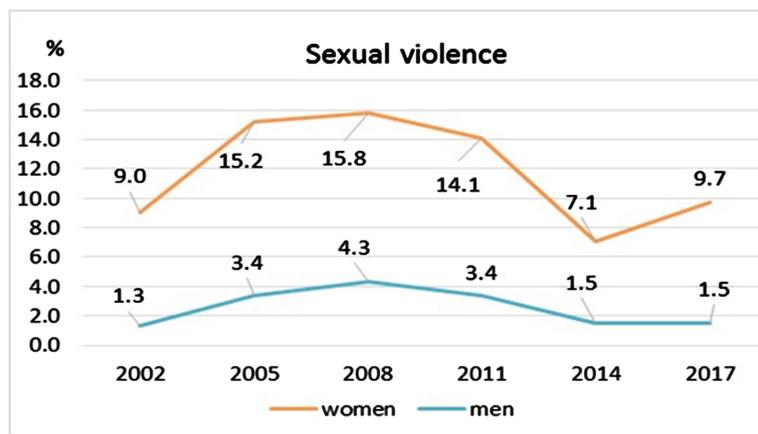


Figure 4. Sexual violence.

the results for women, 9.0% experienced sexual violence from their spouse in 2002, 15.2% in 2005, 15.8% in 2008, 14.1% in 2011, 7.1% in 2014, and 9.7% in 2017, respectively. Among men, 1.3% underwent sexual violence in 2002, 3.4% in 2005, 4.3% in 2008, 3.4% in 2011, 1.5% in 2014, and 1.5% in 2017, respectively. While the figures for men are low, they are consistently present.

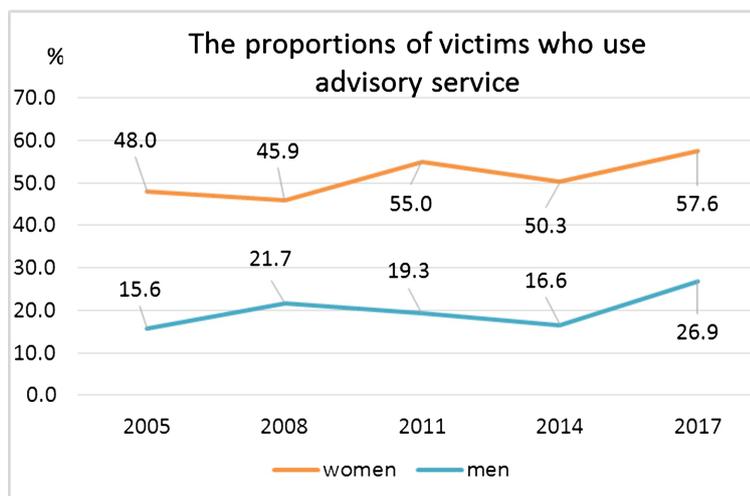
### 3.5. The Proportion of Victims Who Use Advisory Services

**Figure 5** shows the trends in using DV advisory services. Looking first at the outcomes for women, 48.0% used advisory services in 2005, 45.9% in 2008, 55.0% in 2011, 50.3% in 2014, and 57.6% in 2017, respectively. As for men, 15.6% used advisory services in 2005, 21.7% in 2008, 19.3% in 2011, 16.6% in 2014, and 26.9% in 2017, respectively. Usage rates are rising for both men and women.

### 3.6. Reasons for Not Using Advisory Services

We analyzed multiple answer options for the question of why a person did not use advisory services after suffering violence. In 1999, 41.2% of women had thoughts such as “If I can put up with this, we might be able to carry on the way things are” or “I’m partly to blame”. As for men, 48.1% answered “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help” [6]. In 2002, 52.9% of women and 66.7% of men said “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help”, while 50.0% of women and 55.6% of men answered “I thought there would be little point in seeking help” [7].

In 2005, 45.2% of women and 69.7% of men answered “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help”, while 39.3% of women and 44.7% of men replied, “I’m partly to blame” [8]. In 2008, 50.0% of women and 67.6% of men answered, “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help”, while 35.7% of women and 43.7% of men stated, “I’m partly to blame” [9]. In 2011, 50.0% of women and 76.1% of men said, “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking



**Figure 5.** The proportion of victims who use advisory service.

help”, while 34.3% of women and 44.8% of men reported, “I’m partly to blame” [10].

In 2014, 47.0% of women and 64.2% of men claimed, “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help”, while 32.2% of women and 33.3% of men answered “I’m partly to blame” [11].

In 2017, 54.6% of women and 61.9% of men stated, “It was not serious enough to warrant seeking help”, while 33.7% of women and 34.8% of men answered, “I’m partly to blame” [12].

### 3.7. Women’s Actions after Suffering Domestic Violence

In 2005, 4.7% of women reported that they left the perpetrator. The rate has steadily risen since then, reaching 12.6% in 2017. The proportion of women who reported that they did not separate from the perpetrator despite wanting to has remained largely the same, trending between 42.1% and 49.1%. The ratio of women who wanted to stay with the perpetrator was 42.4% in 2008, but had fallen to 26.7% by 2017 (Figure 6).

### 3.8. Men’s Actions after Suffering Domestic Violence

In 2005, 1.5% of men reported that they left the perpetrator. The rate has increased steadily since then, reaching 7.2% in 2017. The proportion of men who stated that they did not separate from their perpetrator despite wanting to was 21.4% in 2005, 17.8% in 2008, 27.4% in 2011, 28.9% in 2014, and 21.5% in 2017. The rate of men who wanted to remain with their perpetrator was 60.4% in 2005, but had fallen to 46.2% by 2017 (Figure 7).

### 3.9. Reasons for Not Separating from Spouse

On multiple question items, we asked the respondents about their reasons for

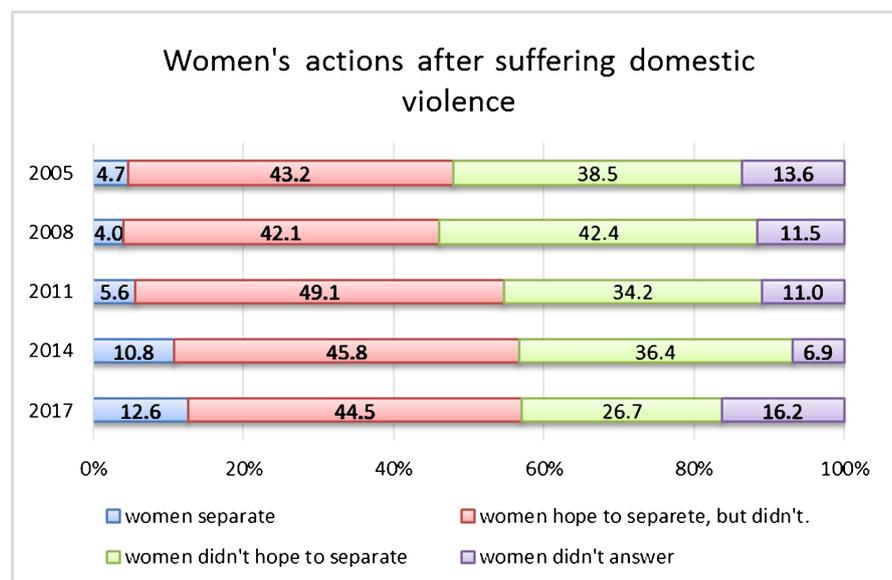
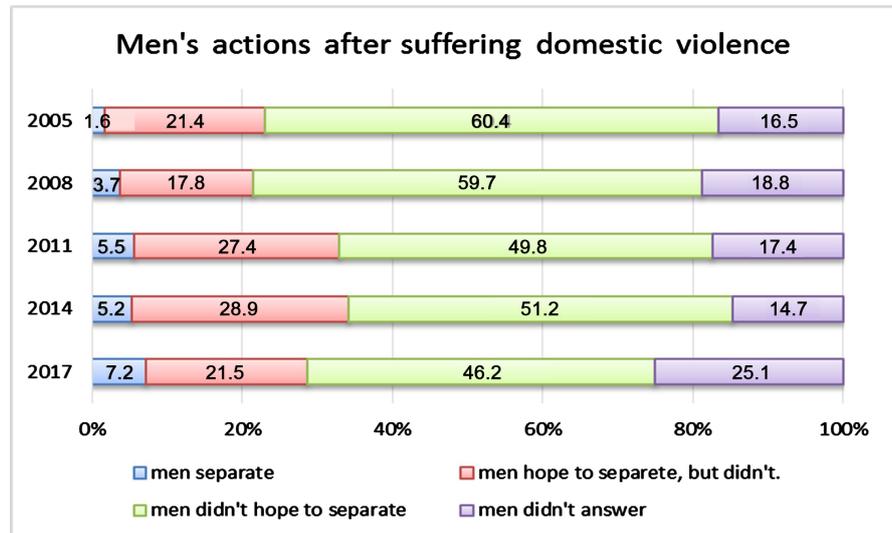


Figure 6. Women’s actions after suffering domestic violence.



**Figure 7.** Men's actions after suffering domestic violence.

not wanting to separate from a violent spouse. In 2005, 27.7% of women and 23.1% of men cited “worries about financial issues”, while 15.8% of women and 17.9% of men said “I believed that my spouse would not inflict further violence” [8]. In 2008, 28.4% of women pointed to concerns about financial issues, while 14.2% claimed that their spouse would not inflict further violence. In the same year, 32.4% of men expressed their desire to “keep up appearances”, while 20.6% said, “I thought that my spouse couldn't manage without me” [9]. In 2011, 57.3% of women and 65.0% of men said “because of my child/children” while 18.9% of women and 5.0% of men mentioned worries about financial matters [10]. In 2014, 65.8% of women and 59.0% of men cited their child/children, 44.7% of women pointed to concerns about financial affairs, and 26.2% of men stated their belief that their spouse would change [11]. In 2017, 66.8% of women and 60.4% of men said their child/children, 48.9% of women expressed worries about financial issues, and 33.2% of men cited their desire to keep up appearances.

#### 4. Discussion

According to the 1999 survey, many women opted to stay with a violent spouse out of a deeply rooted self-abnegating mentality, as indicated by reasons such as “If I can put up with this, we might be able to carry on the way things are” or “I'm partly to blame”. The enforcement of the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence in 2001 helped establish a broad understanding in Japan of what constitutes domestic violence, prompting victims to break their silence. However, at the time of the 2002 survey, the law still only recognized physical violence to be DV, which probably explains why the figures for psychological and sexual violence are so low in the survey.

At the time of the 2005 survey, the first amendment of the law, in 2004, had broadened the scope of DV to include psychological and sexual violence. Accor-

dingly, the figures for psychological and sexual violence reflected a sharp rise. These higher rates do not necessarily indicate a surge in the number of DV victims; it is more likely that victims who had not previously recognized themselves as such started speaking out. The amount of men and women suffering spousal violence varied little across the 2005, 2008, and 2011 surveys. The data suggests that around 32% of women and about 18% of men experience DV. However, the proportion for female victims was lower in the 2014 survey, which was conducted in December. January of that year saw the fourth amendment to the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence, which extended the scope of protection orders to include economically linked intimate partners [3]. The policy of targeting violence at the stage of dating in relationships may have led to a reduction in the overall number of women experiencing DV. Another factor is that Japan made progress in matters concerning DV between December 2011 and December 2014. In March 2012, Japan established an emergency hotline offering one-stop support for DV victims. In June 2012, Tokyo established violence rescue shelters, and in June 2013, the country strengthened its anti-stalker law [2].

In the 2017 survey, the proportion of female DV victims increased to a little over 30%. Likewise, victim rates among men indicate a rising trend. The fact that 2017 saw record numbers of male and female victims using advisory services indicates that social policies have gained traction. However, the answer rates for “I thought there would be little point in seeking help” remain high—just shy of 50% for women and around 65% for men—which suggests that more needs to be done to raise public awareness. While the number of victims who opt to separate from their perpetrator continues to rise, the percentage remains at about the 10% mark; it is necessary to find ways to change this trend. Looking at the free descriptive responses regarding why the victim did not separate from their spouses, “worries about financial issues” was the most common motive among men and women before 2008; since 2011, “child/children” has been the top reason. According to a recent study, children who witness DV between their parents have 6.1% less occipital lobe volume compared to other children [13]. The public needs to be better informed about the negative consequences of staying married to a violent spouse for the sake of one’s children.

Another point to note is that the problem of DV is not solved by divorce alone. A Japanese study has highlighted how much energy victims need to rehabilitate themselves psychologically [14]. How then can we reduce the numbers of DV victims? In a US study, a prevention program targeting young people was effective [15]. Likewise, a Japanese prevention program targeting high school students was effective for instilling awareness of DV [16]. Such programs also promote understanding of relationships [17]. A 2011 US study reported that 9.4% of 12-year old boys and 9.2% of 12-year old girls had already experienced physical violence from a dating partner [18]. As for the Japanese research in this area, a 2017 study examined dating violence among people aged 18 or older and reported that 21.4% of women and 11.5% of men had experienced such violence

[12]. Thus, an effective strategy to reduce DV would be to focus on preventing dating/intimate partner violence among young people, in addition to spousal violence.

In this study, we found that physical violence continues in high proportions, and according to recent data from 2017, only half of the women and one quarter of the men who experienced DV used an advisory service. We need to cultivate prevention and help for them. In addition, we need to obtain information on foreign countries' DV policies to prevent Japanese people from experiencing DV.

## 5. Conclusions

Japan's Cabinet Office conducted surveys on DV seven times (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017), as a secondary source, we used the data on the Cabinet Offices website. In Japan, the Diet passed the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence in April 2001. Before this, the 1999 survey revealed that 41.2% of women who suffered from violence had thoughts such as. "If I can put up with this, we might be able to carry on the way things are". The question item on "domestic violence from a spouse" began in the 2005 survey, and from 2005 to 2017, just over 30% of women suffered violence, while that figure was a little less than 20% for men. In 2005, for the question item on "the proportion of victims who use advisory services" this figure was just under 50% for women and nearly 27% for men. This may be due to political movements and Japanese policy.

As of 2017, nearly 27% of men and almost 46% of men still do not wish to separate from their partners, even though they suffer from violence. The reason why they do not hope to separate is "for children". In the future, we must cultivate an awareness of the negative effects of parental violence on children.

## Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with the supported of JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP18K18294.

## References

- [1] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2001) Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims, Act No.31 of 2001, 1. <http://www.gender.go.jp>
- [2] Ogawa, M. (2015) Domestic Violence and Women's Shelter. For the Support of Victim. *Seori Syobou in Japan*, 354-356.
- [3] Suga, T. (2015) Domestic Violence Prevention Education for Junior High School Students. *Kazama Syobou in Japan*, 8-10.
- [4] Kitanaka, C., Inoue, M., Kiyosue, A., Mtsamura, U. and Ri, K. (2016) The Problem of the DV Victim Support of Taiwan and Malaysia. *Asian Women's Research*, **25**, 37-55.
- [5] The Cabinet Office's Gender Equality Bureau. <http://www.gender.go.jp/research/index.html>
- [6] Gender Equality Bureau Prime Minister's Office (1999) Survey on Domestic Vi-

olence.

- [7] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2002) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [8] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2005) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [9] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2008) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [10] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2011) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [11] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2014) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [12] Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2017) Survey on Domestic Violence.
- [13] Tomoda, A., Polcari, A., Anderson, C.M. and Teicher, M.H. (2012) Reduced Visual Cortex Gray Matter Volume and Thickness in Young Adults Who Witnessed Domestic Violence during Childhood. *PLOS One*, **7**, e52528.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0052528>
- [14] Masui, K. (2017) Models of Recovery and Giving Meaning to Experiences of Domestic Violence: An analysis of Post-Traumatic Growth of Survivors of Domestic Violence. *Japanese Journal of Social Welfare*, **58**, 55-66.
- [15] Foshee, V.A., Benefield, T., Dixon, K.S., Chang, V.S., Ennett, S.T., Moracco, K.E. and Bowling, J.M. (2015) The Effects of Moms and Teens for Safe Date: A Dating Abuse Prevention Program for Adolescents Exposed to Domestic Violence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, **44**, 995-1010.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0272-6>
- [16] Suga, T. and Shiota, M. (2018) The Effectiveness of Preventive Education against Dating Violence in Japanese Agricultural and Commercial High Schools. *Open Access Library Journal*, **5**, e4542. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1104542>
- [17] Suga, T. (2017) Results of Dating Violence Prevention Education for Japanese High School Boys. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, **5**, 173-185.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.512013>
- [18] Rothman, E.F. and Xuan, Z. (2014) Trends in Physical Dating Violence Victimization among U.S. High School Students, 1999-2011. *Journal of School Violence*, **13**, 277-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2013.847377>