

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Outdated Evidence Against Unification Church Weakens Japan's Case

Knut Holdhus
January 16, 2025



Sign at the entrance of the headquarters of the [Family Federation](#) of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo

Sankei Shimbun publishes figures that clearly show weakness in Japanese authorities' case against Family Federation - much outdated evidence



Publication on operations of the Japan Legal Support Center, issued by Ministry of Justice



The Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan's top circulated national dailies, disclosed in an article 16th January 2025, figures from the Japan Legal Support Center (Houterasu) that could spell troubles for the authorities' campaign against the relatively large religious minority the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#). The headline of the Sankei piece was "Spiritual Sales Consultations - Only 20% Related to the Former [Unification Church](#); 40% of Monetary Troubles Date Back Over 20 Years".



The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has requested Tokyo District Court to issue a court order to dissolve the [religious organization](#). The authorities have largely built their case on terms taken from consumer affairs laws, even to the extent that donations are called "spiritual sales".

According to the Sankei Shimbun it turns out that less than 20% of the cases handled by the "Spiritual Sales Consultation Hotline" operated by Japan Legal Support Center are associated with the [Family Federation](#). Furthermore, 41% of the monetary disputes involving this [organization](#) occurred more than 20 years ago. A critical question is how the Tokyo District Court will interpret the continuity of these issues, a key argument in the petition by the administration led by the Liberal Democratic Party for the dissolution of the [religious organization](#).



Consultation hotline

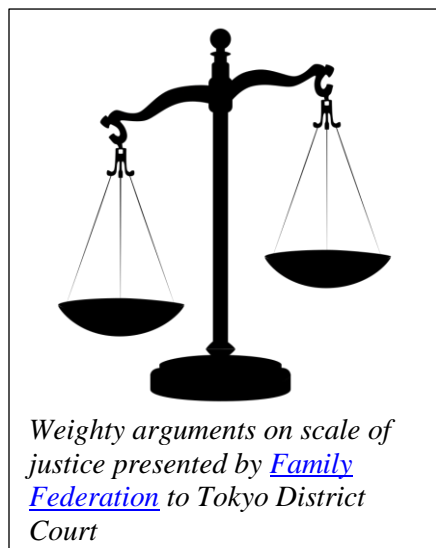
According to the large newspaper, this hotline, established in November 2022 to replace the government's previous phone consultation service, has fielded 10,003 inquiries over the last two years, ending in November 2024. Of these, 1,979 (19.8%) were linked to the [Family Federation](#). The names of other implicated organizations have not been revealed by the Japan Legal Support Center.

The timeline of financial troubles involving the [Family Federation](#) provides some insight:

- 5% occurred within one year prior to the consultation.
- 2% occurred within three years.
- 3% occurred within five years.
- 11% occurred within ten years.
- 12% occurred over ten years ago, but within twenty years.
- 41% occurred more than twenty years ago.

The Sankei Shimbun points out that this distribution suggests a reduction in incidents over time, particularly after the [organization](#) introduced a compliance declaration in 2009, which committed to stricter adherence to laws and regulations.

According to the newspaper, MEXT has based its dissolution request on the argument that the [Family Federation](#) meets the criteria for organizational dissolution, namely illegality, maliciousness, and continuity. These elements are central to the Ministry's claim that the [federation](#) has engaged in systematic and ongoing "harmful activities".



According to informed sources, the Tokyo District Court is expected to conclude its review of the case by the end of January 2025. A judgment may be announced as soon as March.

On 15th January, the [Family Federation](#) issued a statement emphasizing the declining number of complaints linked to the [organization](#) in recent years. The statement read, "The analysis of the hotline, which specifically targeted our [organization](#), highlights that 'troubles' involving us have significantly decreased in recent years."

This issue has sparked significant public and legal interest, with many watching closely as the court deliberates the fate of the [organization](#). Central to the decision will be whether the [federation's](#) past activities, many of which predate 2009, still bear relevance to its current operations and whether they satisfy the criteria for dissolution under Japanese law.

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Young Members Protesting Horrifying Persecution

• January 15, 2025 • Knut Holdhus

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Young victims of horrifying persecution speaking out against orchestrated campaign against minority faith Family Federation



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 14th January 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

“Let’s Make Japan a Place Where People Can Freely Speak of Their Faith”

Family Federation members take to the streets in Shibuya, Tokyo

by the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*



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The area around Shibuya station, Tokyo. Photo (February 2024): Syced / Wikimedia Commons. *Public domain* image. Cropped

On 13th January 2024, members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) held a rally and did street-preaching in front of Shibuya Station in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward to protest media coverage of their [organization](#).

A woman in her 20s, a second-generation member affiliated with a [Family Federation](#) place of worship in Tokyo and working as a nurse, shared her experiences of being hurt by critical media reports. She recalled,

"What saddened me most was when a colleague at work, after seeing news about the [Family Federation](#), said, 'I feel sorry for the second-generation members.'

I strongly felt the stigma of being labeled as 'someone people pity' just for being a second-generation believer. My dream is for Japan to become a place where anyone can confidently talk about their faith."

A man in his 20s, who joined the federation three years ago and has worked as a staff member at one of the places of worship in Tokyo since April last year, defended the [organization](#). He emphasized,

"The media portrays us as anti-social, but that's not true. Coming to this place of worship has brightened my life and has had a positive impact. I want people to find out for themselves what is true or false, using their own eyes and feet. Despite opposition from various people, I am determined to continue down this path."

The rally also included a panel display highlighting cases where believers had been confined by members of their own family and others opposing the religious organization, in attempts to force the believers to renounce their faith.

[Editor's note:
Forced de-



Young believer being abducted in order to have his faith broken. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 10th August 2024.

conversion in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (*Kōfuku no Kagaku*) and other newer religious movements. However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million

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Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to de-conversion attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of forced de-conversion. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

Featured image above: A second-generation member of the [Family Federation](#) doing street-preaching – afternoon of 13th January 2024, Shibuya Ward, Tokyo. Photo: David Chang

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