FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Hidden Trauma of Japan's Religious Persecution

Knut Holdhus
October 23, 2026



The Family Federation facility stands empty following the start of liquidation proceedings by the court-appointed liquidator. Kashiwa, a city with a population of ca. 135,000 in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, October 14, 2026.

Sekai Nippo

Psychologist sheds light on the trauma hidden behind religious stigma and social exclusion in the wake of the dissolution order against the Family Federation in Japan

Tokyo, 23rd October 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. Original article.

Feature interview

"Losing Their Foundation": Family Federation Believers Suffer Psychological and Physical Distress and a Sense of Loss

Part 1 of Interview with Clinical Psychologist Kenichi Endo

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

A survey conducted by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church) between 15th July and 5th October found that more than 80 percent of the believers who responded reported psychological distress. We spoke with clinical psychologist Kenichi Endo (遠藤健市) about the survey findings and the kinds of mental health care that believers may need.

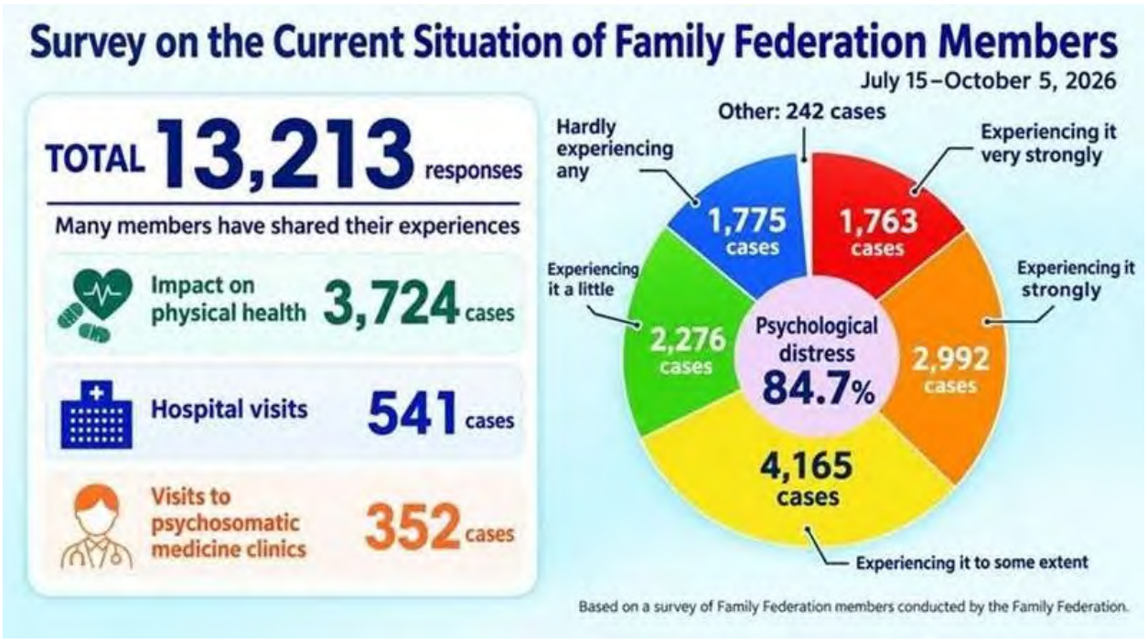
Interviewer: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

- According to the organization's survey, 3,724 of the 13,213 responses reported physical health effects.

Many believers are suffering from a sense of loss because they have lost what could be called the "foundation" of their lives. This is likely to be particularly true of those who found a place where they belonged in the local church and were actively involved in its activities. There are even stories of children who struggled to enter their classrooms at school but were able to go to church.

When something a person has devoted themselves to wholeheartedly for much of their life is rejected by the state and society, it can be difficult to come to terms with that rejection or make sense of it. When people are unable to fully process their circumstances, psychological stress can manifest itself in physical symptoms, such as feeling sluggish or experiencing a vague lack of energy. This is hardly surprising.

Of course, the impact will vary from person to person, depending largely on their everyday circumstances and relationships within the local church.



Graph showing the results of a new survey on the impact of the dissolution order against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan on its members (as of October 5, 2026). Illustration ChatGPT

However, human beings are individuals while also being social creatures who live in connection with others. It is certainly true that seemingly trivial interactions, such as greeting familiar people, stopping for a brief chat, or engaging in casual conversation, can help maintain emotional stability.

As we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, a decline in social interaction can lead to both psychological and physical health problems. Losing the "foundation" that supports us is undoubtedly a significant burden.

- There were 541 reports of visits to medical institutions and 352 visits to psychosomatic medicine specialists. Some respondents also reported difficulty sleeping at night.



No more access to hundreds of its own buildings: Here, the property housing the Family Federation in North Hamamatsu, a city on the South coast on the main island of Honshu, Japan

That is certainly understandable. Various thoughts tend to come to mind, particularly before going to bed, and the balance of the autonomic nervous system may also become disrupted. I hope people can find approaches that work for them, such as adjusting their sleep schedules, improving their overall daily routines, or finding ways to shift their mood.

There may also be various reasons why people sought medical attention. For example, someone who was already prone to feeling heaviness in their head may have experienced worsening headaches following the dissolution order. In other words, pre-existing symptoms may have become more severe.

Concerns About Flashbacks

- Some people reportedly begin experiencing physical and psychological problems only after a certain period has passed, such as six months or a year.

This can happen with trauma resulting from major earthquakes or accidents, too. At first, people try their best to cope with the situation. However, once they reach a certain point and begin to feel relieved, symptoms may emerge.

In other cases, even several years later, accidentally encountering something associated with the experience can trigger a "flashback," causing renewed psychological distress. For people who have been

emotionally wounded, various things can serve as triggers: passing by a church facility by chance, for example, or having a relative denounce their religious organization.

People may appear to be living normal lives on the surface while remaining deeply hurt inside. If that condition persists for a prolonged period, they may eventually find themselves unable to keep going. Some may reach a point where they can no longer suppress or conceal the pain they have continually tried to avoid confronting.

Flashbacks can occur even after many years have passed. The same applies to believers who have experienced abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking. For example, simply seeing a key while shopping might bring back memories of what happened to them at the time. In that sense, they could be described as "living with landmines inside them."

- How should people deal with flashbacks?



Japanese Family Federation believers gathering in a private home for prayer March 2026

It is difficult to prevent flashbacks from occurring. Even seeing news reports related to the church may provoke a reaction, and it is hard to avoid memories suddenly resurfacing.

What matters is developing ways to calm oneself internally, such as relaxation techniques or breathing exercises, so that even when memories arise, one can regain a sense of calm. By repeating these practices, people can gradually train their minds and bodies to learn that they are safe and that things will be all right.

In some cases, the reaction may not be triggered by an explicit denunciation. Someone might simply overhear a conversation about the church at school or at work and feel as though they themselves have been rejected.

Given the current social climate, one could say that conditions have developed in which even small incidents can easily hurt believers. If that social environment contains a considerable amount of exaggeration or factual misunderstanding, believers may understandably want to correct it. However, it is difficult to change the situation immediately.

If people feel able to speak out, I think it is worth making the effort. However, they need to be careful not to become too caught up in such efforts. Otherwise, they may end up blaming themselves for being unable to speak out or become emotionally exhausted.

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New Survey: Widespread Distress Among Believers

October 22, 2026 • The News Desk

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Survey finds 84.7% of Family Federation members report distress following Japan's 2026 dissolution order as social exclusion deepens

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Unable to Find a Place Where They Belong, Believers Continue to Suffer

Family Federation President Reports on Victims at CESNUR 2026 International Symposium

Logo of the Sekai Nippo

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of Sekai Nippo



***Masaichi Hori**, here in Gapyeong, South Korea 24th Aug. 2025. Photo: FFWPU*

At CESNUR 2026, an international symposium on minority religion studies held in Taichung, central Taiwan. Masaichi Hori (堀正一), the president of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU, formerly the Unification Church), reported on 12th October on the serious situation facing members following the order to dissolve the religious corporation.

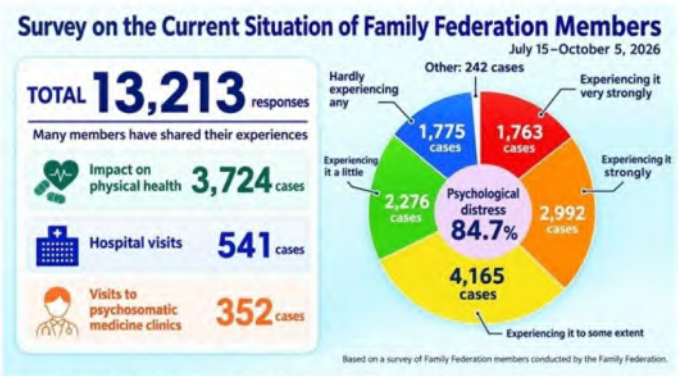
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Suffering from a Profound Sense of Loss

On 4th March, the Family Federation entered liquidation proceedings following the *Tokyo High Court*'s decision upholding the order to dissolve the religious corporation. While ordering the corporation's dissolution, the court also stated that "there is no justification for believers to be subjected to social discrimination, social exclusion, or persecution."

Numerous Cases of Family Violence and Discrimination



Graph showing the results of a new survey on the impact of the dissolution order against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan on its members (as of 5th October 2026). Illustration: FFWPU, English version by ChatGPT, October 2026.

According to the Family Federation, however, many members are experiencing psychological distress in practice. Drawing on the results of a survey conducted among members, Hori reported cases involving medical treatment for physical and mental health problems, violence by family members, discriminatory treatment at schools and workplaces, and even cases of suicide.

The survey was conducted from 15th July to 5th October and received a total of 13,213 responses. Regarding psychological distress, 1,763

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respondents said they were experiencing it "very severely," 2,992 said "severely," 4,165 said "to some extent," and 2,276 said "a little." The combined total was 11,196 responses, meaning that 84.7% of respondents reported experiencing some degree of psychological distress.

In addition, 3,724 respondents reported adverse effects on their physical health. Of these, 541 had sought treatment at a hospital, while 352 had visited a psychosomatic medicine clinic.

Hori further explained that the survey had documented more than 2,000 instances of critical remarks or violence by family members and relatives; 462 cases in which members felt uncomfortable after the Family Federation was brought up at school or work; 19 cases in which teachers or counselors questioned individuals about their religious beliefs; and 44 cases of business-related disadvantages. These findings illustrate how members are being affected in various areas of their daily lives.

Commenting on the results, clinical psychologist Kenichi Endo (遠藤健市) observed:

> "Quite a few people are suffering from a profound sense of loss, feeling as though they have lost something that served as the foundation of their lives. The impact is likely to be particularly severe for believers who found a place where they belonged in the church and had been actively involved."

The findings suggest that the dissolution decision and the accompanying liquidation measures are having a significant impact on the personal foundations of individual believers, including their values and outlook on life.

Endo added that "when people feel that the faith and activities to which they have devoted themselves seriously for many years have been rejected by the state and society, it can become extremely difficult for them to come to terms with the situation psychologically."



*Changed the interpretation overnight of the Religious Corporations Act: Former Japanese prime minister **Fumio Kishida**, here on 14th July 2022. Photo: 首相官邸 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped*

The process surrounding the Family Federation's dissolution extended over a prolonged period. It began with critical media coverage following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), followed by statements in the Diet by then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) that involved a change in the interpretation of the *Religious Corporations Act*, the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology*'s exercise of its right to question [See editor's note below] the religious organization, and ultimately the court's decision.

Did the Judicial Decision Underestimate Human Rights Violations?

Criticized by a Doctor

The survey results suggest, however, that the psychological distress experienced by believers during this process has not received sufficient consideration.

Some of the cases Hori presented raise serious human rights concerns. In one reported case, a member who sought treatment at a psychosomatic medicine clinic was confronted by a doctor who criticized the religious organization and pressed the patient with the

question,

> "Do you still believe in it?"

In another case, a university student receiving counseling was treated as though the student's religious faith itself were the cause of their psychological difficulties.

Hori also described a case in which a believer sustained injuries after being subjected to violence by family members. Another case involved an employee of the Family Federation, identified as N., who was dismissed as a result of the liquidation proceedings and forced to leave staff accommodation. The resulting difficulties with utility contracts and payments, including water and gas, contributed to a deterioration in the employee's living conditions.



Constitutionally highly problematic proceedings *against Family Federation were held behind closed doors in the joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan. Photo: 663highland / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp*

The High Court's decision stated,

> "Even if a religious corporation loses its legal personality, it may continue its activities as a religious organization without legal personality, provided that the organization itself continues to exist." The court also noted that "employment relationships with staff may continue."

However, with all facilities and assets subject to liquidation, turning that stated possibility into reality is far from straightforward.

The decision also explicitly stated,

> "It goes without saying that social discrimination, social exclusion, and persecution against believers are impermissible, whatever the reason may be."

In reality, however, numerous cases have arisen in which individual believers have found themselves at the receiving end of criticism and prejudice following the dissolution of their religious corporation. This is an issue that cannot be overlooked.

Hori also referred to a female believer in her 60s who took her own life in May,

> "According to the reports we received, this woman had been experiencing psychological difficulties since the beginning of the year, and her symptoms worsened after the 4th March decision."

He concluded by emphasizing the significance of losing a source of daily support:

> "What I want to convey here is the need to ask just how profound an impact losing a place and relationships that have provided daily support can have on someone who is struggling psychologically."

Hori called for greater understanding of the effects that the dissolution of the religious corporation can have on the lives and mental well-being of individual believers.

See also The Fallout from Japan's 2026 Dissolution Order

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***Featured image** above: Members of the Family Federation demonstrating for religious freedom and human rights in Shinjuku, Tokyo on 30th June 2024. Photo: Reiwa Kato (加藤玲和)*

[***Editor's note***: The **right to question**: In Japan's dissolution case against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) used what is known as the "right to question" under Article 78-2 of Japan's Religious Corporations Act. It was an administrative investigative procedure intended to establish whether there were sufficient grounds to seek a court-ordered dissolution.

The "right to question" was the investigative stage preceding the government's application for dissolution, not the dissolution decision itself. Its stated purpose was to establish whether the Family Federation's activities met the statutory criteria for dissolution. Its broader significance lies in how the state exercises investigative powers over religious organizations while balancing enforcement of the law against freedom of religion and the safeguards required by the Religious Corporations Act.

The right to question gives the competent government authority the power to require a religious corporation to submit reports and documents and to put questions to it concerning its activities when there are legally specified grounds for investigation.

The government argued that it needed to establish the facts systematically before deciding whether to ask a court to dissolve the organization. The investigation was intended to gather evidence about the nature, extent and continuity of alleged unlawful activities, rather than rely solely on media reports, public complaints or allegations by individual parties.

MEXT subsequently exercised the right to question the Family Federation seven times, seeking reports and documents. The government also interviewed more than 170 alleged victims, according to MEXT's March 2026 account of the process.

The case raised questions about the boundary between legitimate government oversight and interference with religious organizations. Although the law expressly protects freedom of religion, critics of the investigation argued that the scope and repeated use of the questioning procedure placed excessive pressure on the organization.]

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