

A Study on Gender Equality in Families Raising Young Children

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ABSTRACT

This study elucidates the circumstances of families raising infants and toddlers in Japan, focusing on the life and mental health conditions of men and women. From June to September 2024, participants were invited to engage with a plaza-type child-rearing support facility for parents and children under three years of age. An unmarked survey was administered online using a QR code. The survey included the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), Mother-Infant Bonding Scale, and Work-Life Balance Scale (SWING-J). A total of 21 men and 67 women responded completely to the survey, and their data were analyzed using χ^2 and t-tests. The mean age was 36.24 for men and 33.0 for women. The mean K10 score was 8.38. Among male, 81.0% were company employees or civil servants, and none were on maternity leave. Among women, 34.3% identified as housewives. Income was significantly higher among men ($p < 0.001$). No participants utilized childcare support. Among men, 33.3% reported being unlikely to use childcare support systems. Moreover, 52% of the men and 20.9% of the women reported consistently going out on holidays ($p = 0.017$). Half of both men and women experienced difficulty sleeping. The SWING-J negative affect score was significantly higher for men (average score: 14.1) than for women (average score: 11.0; $p < 0.01$). The findings suggest that men in Japan face challenges in accessing childcare support. The primary barriers to achieving gender equality in child-rearing for men include limited understanding of workplace support services, difficulties in sharing work-related stress, and inadequate support for women's employment.

Keywords: Mental health; Parenting challenges; Work-life balance; Workplace initiatives