

## "Team Parenting" Increases the Satisfaction Level of Work and Life Balance

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The survey shows that the level of satisfaction in the work-life balance of Japanese mothers recorded the lowest among the four countries, and the result is fairly remarkable. Such international comparison again revealed another remaining issue in Japan. Mothers in China arrive home later than those in Japan. However, the percentage of mothers living with grandparents is much higher in China, and grandparents provide assistance with housework and childrearing to a large extent. Also, the positive attitude of fathers in Japan, who try to cooperate in parenting and household chores at their best, even when they arrive home latest among the four countries was revealed in the survey. Such a result that "the more fathers engage in the household chores that they can do as part of family, the higher the level of satisfaction of mothers" means that a couple, as a team, supporting each other in parenting and housework, could increase mothers' satisfaction. Similarly, the study shows that mothers in Japan make higher use of services such as temporary daycare at childcare facilities compared to other countries. This shows the importance of effective use of childcare support provided by communities, as well as the necessity for the government to develop such services and programs. It can be said that team parenting, in which couples, relatives and community members share the tasks in childrearing, without isolating mothers, is necessary to further increase the level of satisfaction of mother's work-life balance. It is expected that the increased

level of mother's work-life balance will also nurture contentment and close relationship for both fathers and children in a good atmosphere.

At the same time, when thinking of work-life balance, it is necessary to consider the father's side as well. To that purpose, first, our society as a whole should give thorough thought to father's time of arriving home, based on the data collected through such international comparative research. Productivity and efficiency of our work style will be in question. With a view to increasing the work and life balance on both mother's and father's sides, dialogue between a husband and wife is also important, to understand each other's family visions as well as desirable role-sharing in household chores, parenting, and work. In addition, it is worth considering the long-term visions of work and life balance, along with the different stages of child's growth. The key to realize that is not only held by couples themselves, and it is critical for them to gather information on how to make use of various outsourcing services and how to get support from relatives, friends, and local communities. Together with enriching individual happiness and contentment, I regard it to be also important to enhance happiness and contentment among the members in the family and society as a whole, by fulfilling both parenting and housework.

## A Thought on the Work and Life Balance for Mothers of Young Children in China

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I watched the documentary film "The Beginning of Life" (directed by Estela Renner, 2016, Brazil), which is now earning itself a good reputation after its release in Japan last year. The film, co-funded by UNICEF, well described how significant it is for infants to spend time with their parents or rearers, through strong evidence and on-site information gathering. China is the only country selected from East Asia, as an exemplar case at the frontier of childrearing, among the nine countries represented in the film. Moreover, it shows the simple attitude of grandparents, who seriously, more than the parents, take roles in childrearing with full of dreams. Bearing this in mind, let us look at the research findings.

Among the targeted countries, around 60% of the Chinese working mothers are "living with own or spouse's/partner's parents," and more than 80% of mothers indicate "grandparents and relatives" as child care providers on a daily basis. Both of China's percentages of children living with grandparents, and of mothers depending on grandparents for childrearing are absolutely in a top position. Those mothers were born after the 1980s, as the one-child policy generation, and apparently their grandparents seem to engage in "skipped-generation parenting." In addition, China records the highest rate (12%) of working mothers not living with their children, which implies that grandparents and relatives take part in childrearing on behalf of mothers.

Furthermore, the home-arrival time of working mothers in China is rather late among the surveyed countries, thus the mothers spend the shortest amount of time with their children. During that short period of time, the mothers seem to focus on upbringing of the subject child and educational approaches as well as collecting information on education, rather than looking after their daily habits that can be taken care of by other supporters. Apparently, these Chinese mothers were encouraged to place importance on their own intellectual development, study and work, during their own growing process; in the same way, they seem to be involved in their field of strengths when childrearing.

Let's say, on the other hand, the generation of the grandmothers were urban, full-time

workers during the transition period from China's planned economy of a socialistic society to a market economy. Most of them must have been working mothers who left their children to other family members, babysitters, daycare centers or kindergartens to accomplish their work life, and retired at around the age of 55 or before. After retirement, the chances of rearing children themselves have come again. While their health is still good, it is often said that it turns out to be a new joy of life after retirement. From the above, it is fairly understandable that the aforementioned film did reporting from China to emphasize the fact that "grandparents also take on significant roles in childrearing."

As a matter of fact, specialists often emphasize the problems of childrearing done only by grandparents, or the importance of children spending time with their mothers. Mothers themselves thus cannot be blindly passing their parenting responsibilities to other people. However, devoting the attentions only to their children is unrealistic for mothers taking part in a highly competitive work environment, and one can see such a situation in the ambivalent responses in "Working Mothers' Awareness on Parenting." (\*1)

Finally, as for the husband's (father's) participation in housework and childrearing, which is deeply related to the mother's emotional stability, the "Questionnaire on Daily Life of Children in Five East Asian Cities: Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, and Taipei" conducted in 2005 (\*2) and "Survey of Father's Views on Childrearing in Japan - A Comparative Study of Fathers in Four East Asian Cities" conducted in 2010 (\*3), revealed that the life of fathers in China seemed more carefree when compared to that in Japan, taking "early home-returning time," "lengths of time engaged in household chores and parenting," and "daily partnership with wives" for example. However, this international comparative survey shows that fathers in China arrive home later than before, with less time spent with their children, and they also appear to take roles in upbringing and playing with their children, with the daily support from grandparents and home electronic appliances, just as mothers do. (→ P.27)

### Hope for "Work Style Reforms" to Realize Parents Arriving Home Early so that Both Can Participate in Childrearing

The long duration of working hours in Japan and its impact on the participation in childrearing is thought to have contributed to the decline in the birth rate. In this survey, the working mothers and fathers in Japan (Tokyo metropolitan area) turned out to arrive home later, in the four countries researched. As a result, Japan marked the lowest in the time spent with children, particularly during weekdays when fathers are at work. Also, the frequency of father's engagement in childrearing is lower in comparison with other countries. On the other hand, the frequency of Japanese fathers participating in household chores "3-5 times a week" such as "clean up the kitchen after meals," "do laundry," and "take out garbage" is the second highest, following Finnish fathers who arrive home the earliest. In particular, "do laundry" scored the highest in the four countries. Such housework can be done even when fathers arrive home late. Accordingly, it can be inferred that working mothers in Japan who do not receive daily support from grandparents, unlike those in China,

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mainly take part in childrearing after work, while fathers take charge in housework, which is not restricted by the time of arrival at home.

The result shows the lowest level of satisfaction of Japanese mothers in terms of the balance between work and family life among the four countries researched. It can be considered that various factors contributed to the low level of satisfaction. However, the survey also points out that mother's satisfaction level could increase in accordance with the father's increased participation in household chores.

It is desirable that the "Work Style Reforms" help create an environment in which Japanese fathers arrive home earlier, spend more time with their children, and cooperate with mothers in childrearing. I hope that this survey provides good food for thought in searching for better balance in which mothers and fathers share housework and childrearing together in the Japanese society where double-career households are rapidly increasing.

The research presents the situation where the changes in working conditions due to rapid improvement in information technologies, as well as the generation alternation of parents group, have brought about another change in the work and life balance of mothers in childrearing. At the same time, the findings also revealed that the tradition of "culture of nurturance" in China, where multiple generations cooperate together for the growth of the next

generation, is still ingrained even in such a rapidly changing era.

\*1: In the two-alternative questions between "a mother should always stay with her child until s/he is around 3 years old" and "it is OK if a mother is not always around her child as long as she raises him/her with love," 80% of the working mothers in China selected the former.

\*2 and \*3: conducted by Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute

## Work and Life Balance in Indonesia

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From the International Survey Research on Home Education in Early Childhood, I concluded that Indonesian women show a relatively high level of satisfaction regarding work and childrearing, among the targeted four countries. This is related to factors in the data such as the time mothers spend with their children, do household chores, arrive home from work, and the support gained from their family members including spouses/partners. The trend of working mothers in Indonesia is basically the same as the survey results. That is, women in Indonesia have a high level of contentment with both their work and family life. The traditional teachings in Indonesian culture say that women should do housework, engage in childrearing, and take care of their spouse/partners.

As for the father's engagement in household chores, it is less common for males to clean the house or do the dishes or laundry, take the garbage out, or prepare meals. In Indonesia, males are expected to act as breadwinners to financially support the family, and thus females take care of the household chores. However, in response to the changing era, women also need to work to improve the economic status of the family, in addition to being a good housewife. Such contradicting situations of the changing society casting over traditional culture, women in Indonesia are currently forced to take on double responsibilities of work and family.

Working mothers in Jakarta arrive home earlier than fathers, so that they can take care of childrearing and house work such as meal preparation. On the other hand, fathers arrive home later than mothers so that they earn more income for the family members. By the time the fathers arrive home, mothers will have finished most of the housework, and thus fathers help out with only the remaining chores.

During weekdays, the time parents spend with children are only during breakfast (from 6 am to 7 am) and after they arrive home until the child goes to bed (from 4 pm to 9 pm), which means around 5 to 6 hours regularly. During weekends, more time can be spent with children, but from time to time parents engage in other activities without children. Some mothers go shopping for the family, some fathers work second jobs, or others might simply take some rest

at home. Nonetheless, they basically spend time with their families on weekends/holidays.

In Indonesia, neighbors play highly important social roles in childrearing. Our culture encourages us to be kind and warm-hearted, willing to help each other. Therefore, it is commonly seen that children play around together with neighboring families when one's parents are out at work. Children seldom play alone, but play with a couple or more of their neighboring friends.

Grandparents are expected to look after children and help with the household chores rather than provide financial support.

In Indonesia, married and independent couples do not receive financial aid from the parents. Of course, it depends on the economic status of the grandparents, so if the grandparents are fairly well off, they might help their children both financially and practically. On the contrary, if the economic status of the grandparents is rather restricted, the parent generation offers financial assistance to the grandparent generation on a regular basis. The grandparents usually live at their own home if there is someone who can take care of them. If they have nobody around to be looked after, in many cases the grandparents live with their married daughters. From the standpoint of the Indonesian culture and religion, children should respect and take care of their parents. The reason why the parents choose to live with their daughters is that we regard houses to be owned by females, as daughters take on more housework and deal with family issues more than males. Therefore, in Indonesia, grandparents on the mother's side generally look after their grandchildren when the mothers go out to work, which is considered safe and reliable.

As shown in the data collected from the International Survey Research on Home Education in Early Childhood, it is accurate to say that women in Indonesia have a high level of satisfaction with work and family. To offer future prospects, I propose to conduct research on the roles of grandparents and community in childrearing.

## A Peek into the Life of Finnish Families with Preschool-age Children

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The International Survey Research on Home Education in Early Childhood opens a captivating comparative view into the lives of Finnish children and families. The survey also shows interesting cultural differences between Finland and the participating Asian countries in childrearing practices and in factors affecting family life.

Even if the survey covered only mothers whose child was in daycare, the share of mothers working full time was almost twice as high in Finland as it was in Japan and three times as high as it was in Indonesia. Only in China their share was close to that in Finland (78 % vs. 89 %). The share of full time employed fathers was almost equally high in all countries, however.

One explanation to the difference between Finnish and Japanese mothers seems to be that despite the full-day work, four out of five Finnish mothers arrived home before five o'clock, whereas almost as many of the Japanese mothers returned home only after five, a majority of them an hour or more later. Furthermore, in Finland, also half of the fathers arrived home from work before five o'clock, making the difference in parents' arriving home from work the widest between Finnish and Japanese fathers.

It is thus evident that the Finnish world of work differs greatly from the Japanese in the length of working hours, allowing Finnish parents more time to spend with their children. The shorter working hours are also reflected in other factors related to family life. Live-in grandparents are almost non-existent in Finland, and few families need to rely on outside caretakers on a regular basis. Instead, parents often share childcare with one parent taking the child or children to daycare and the other bringing them back, thus allowing both longer workdays without extending the child's time in daycare. Most daycare facilities also close at 5 pm, so there is no option for parents other than to fetch the children at that time. Moreover, no child or parent wants to be always the last one. Consequently, Finnish parents – both mothers and fathers – seem to spend more time with their children than Asian parents.

The role of grandparents in families' lives seems also to differ between Finland and the participating Asian countries. If the grandparents live close by, they might help families in taking children to after-school activities, but few parents resort to the help of their parents on a daily basis. Collaboration with the parents of the other children is quite common, however, in taking children to football practice or other such activities. Most parents value grandparents highly, however. Grandparents often act as a resource for vacation times when schools are closed but parents are at work.

Finnish parents – also fathers – clearly spend more time with their offspring than their Asian counterparts and, unlike for them, this often includes a lot of outdoor activities. This emphasis on outdoors begins early in Finland with babies often napping in their prams on the balcony or in the courtyard, also in the sub-zero temperatures of the Finnish winter. Outdoor activities play a large role also in the daycare centers' daily schedules.

The survey also reveals that Finnish mothers and fathers have relative equality regarding household chores and the many activities parents do with their children. However, as in the other countries, mothers still seem to carry the main burden especially of the former. In this, the results reinforce national studies' picture of just partial gender equality in Finnish families.

Likewise, the results regarding mothers' overall life satisfaction confirm earlier Finnish and comparative studies. They, too, show, that Finnish people on the whole and parents among them are generally very satisfied with their lives even if parents of small children do feel tension with balancing work and children. Maybe this is why – with financial support from the state and municipalities – Finnish mothers tend to stay home longer with small children than mothers in most Western nations, an aspect missed by the present survey, presented to mothers through public daycare centers.