

Changes in the Everyday Life of Preschool Children: A 20-Year Survey

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The daily life of preschool children over the last twenty years has been affected by changes in Japanese society. First, the birthrate has continued to decline. Children spend less time playing with friends, and forming peer relationships has become difficult. For this reason, daycare centers and kindergartens have come to play a larger role in daily life because children gather there in numbers. Second, there has been an increase in dual-income families that send their children to daycare centers. In tandem with this trend, fathers are becoming more involved in child-raising, in particular, on weekends. Increased time spent in daycare also results in greater expectations of daycare centers and kindergartens, and the demand for intellectual education is also rising. Furthermore, although the typical family with a full-time housewife-mother is also decreasing, it continues to exist to a considerable extent. In all households, the mother is primarily responsible for caring for and spending time with the child on weekdays, in particular. Third, economic disparity is growing. Overall expenditure for education is declining, and there is a widening gap between households that can only afford a low absolute amount and those that are able to keep spending a certain amount. This results in a pronounced difference in enrichment lessons that parents can pay for as well as other disparities. Although the survey alone cannot establish whether low expenditure on education has a negative effect on the child's future, the question clearly requires further study. Fourth, values are diversifying. It is not possible to identify one primary view of child raising; opposing views are held by rather large percentages of the respondents. In any case, the survey indicates that satisfaction regarding child raising is rather high. Furthermore, when it comes to seeking advice, a greater percentage of younger parents tend to rely on information on the internet.

In Play and through Play—Toward a World where Children can Experience a Sense of Richness and Accomplishment

Akiko Sato (Associate professor, Tokyo Kasei University)

The survey of the everyday life of children was also the fifth survey that had been conducted every five years over a period of twenty years from 1995, and the children who had participated in the first survey were now in the position of being parents. In 2014, the total fertility rate was 1.42, and the average age of the parents who responded to the survey was between 38.5-36.5 years, three years older than in the first survey. This appears to be closely related to such factors as the mother's educational background, view of employment, employment conditions (maternity leave and childcare leave, age of eligibility for childcare services, childcare time schedule, and childcare expenses), etc. The increase in working mothers has affected the lives of children in various ways.

○ Early to bed and early to rise is an increasing tendency, and children are spending more time at daycare centers and kindergartens, and ECEC centers: *nintei kodomo en*. → This may be due to the wider childcare service such as after-hours childcare, over-time childcare provided by ECEC facilities and the varied working hours of mothers.

○ Children's development, toilet training, and independence of daily habits are slow and occurring later → Mother's changing awareness.

○ An increasing number of children are citing their mother as their weekday playmate and state that their number of friends is declining. → Due to the declining birthrate, the mother's working hours, etc., children do not have the time or a place to play with friends after leaving daycare.

In childhood, it is important to experience a sense of richness and accomplishment in play and through play. In the future, to achieve the greatest happiness of children, it will be even more important to improve childcare support services that place priority on child development and growth.

Changing Opportunities for Children to Grow Up Together

Misako Aramaki (Full-time lecturer, Mejiro University)

The most pronounced change in the past twenty years can be found in the answer to the question "Who do you play with on weekdays?" Children who answered "with my mother" increased by 30 points to 86 percent in the most recent survey. In contrast, those answering "with a friend" has gradually declined, and in the recent survey, accounted for only 27.3 percent. In addition to the fact that children are spending more time in daycare centers and have fewer opportunities to engage with children their own age outside the daycare center, this result can also be attributed to a change in the parents' approach to child-raising. For example, there is a steady decline in the percentage of parents who devote time and energy to "playing with friends."

However, the most recent survey also shows that although "to encourage the child to care about others" and "to help the child acquire social manners / follow rules" are given importance or show a slight declining trend, over 70 percent of parents expect childcare facilities to help children develop social skills. This indicates that parents are still very concerned about their children acquiring social skills, but rather than providing opportunities for children to play together, the growing tendency is for parents to depend on activities at childcare facilities.

Certainly, there is much for children to learn from their friends and caregivers. But, is experience at daycare and the home enough? In some small childcare facilities, for example, for years, children end up only knowing and interacting with fixed members of the facility. As ties with the local community weaken, children have fewer opportunities to learn from interaction with others, and this is also an issue that requires careful study and consideration.