

Families and their Children in Japan

-Demographical Changes, Marital Instability, and Child Rearing Stress-

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Japanese families have been changing their structures and functions, and experiencing new challenges in their childrearing, care or education issues as well as in the marital instability among many couples, gradually since the Second World War. Their family problems varied from such vulnerable family functioning as separation or divorce, and childrearing to such family-related problems as mental or psychological troubles like maternity blues, women alcoholics, and domestic violence, including child abuse.

Our discussion will focus on family burdens related not only to the socio-economic pressure, but also the physiological and psychological stress, which based on the explorative analysis about the relationships between such family issues as internal change and the industrialization and urbanization as external change. In this paper, we are talking about what kind of social services or measurement is needed and enacted in order to solve issues such as the decrease in the number of children, vulnerable marital relationships, childcare or children's education, child abuse, and mental health problems. The well-being of society is built on the strong social policy and strategy of the future.

Keywords: structural and functional family changes, marital instability, childless society, childrearing stressors

1. Changes in Japanese Family: Structural and Functional Changes

Japan has witnessed various societal changes since World War II, especially the abrupt economic change or development caused by industrialization and the urbanization, influential factors on various family life patterns. Many Japanese families have been experiencing unprecedented changes such as environmental fluctuation but also structural and functional transformations or transition in their family systems. Although it is very difficult to pinpoint the specific causal relationships among factors such as the external challenges including economic development, industrialization and urbanization, and internal fluctuation in so-called structural-functional family changes, many researchers, sociologists, educators, and psychologists are interested in searching those causal relationships and predicted various concurrent or future problems in Japanese families.

In fact, especially in the last 15 years when Japan has faced severe economic depression and the following it's upheaval, Japanese families have struggled with different types of family problems in the areas of

childcare, childrearing or education, juvenile delinquency, social withdrawal of young people, marital instability, child abuse and domestic violence. Those socio-economic challenges and their stressful family circumstances will require Japan to make much more effective social services to meet their diverse needs.

(1) Structural Family Change: Heading toward Childless Society

Based on the data by Statistics Bureau and Statistics Center (The Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, 2001), the total number of Japanese population reached 127 million in 2001(127,768,000 in 2005), which reflects its aging society while struggling with issues of extremely low or declining birthrate. The number of households was 46.78 million in 2000 and 49.06 million in 2005. Specifically, we have observed a growing the number of nuclear type of family while decreasing the number of three generation households (Kokumin Eisei no Doko; Journal of Health and Welfare Statistics, 2007, pp.38-41).

One of the most prominent phenomena is highlighted in a change of the Japanese family structure: the decreasing number in the family household in Japan. According to the data from studies in health, welfare, and policy (Kosei-gyousei-kiso-chosa) and in Japanese fundamental or basic daily life (Kokumin-seikatsu-kiso-chosa), the average number in the Japanese family household has been gradually declining from in 1960, to 3.28 in 1980, 3.05 in 1990, and eventually 2.76 in 2000 (2.56 in 2005).

The following data clearly indicates the demographical changes in Japan; from 1960 through 1980 to 2006, the total number of **nuclear families** gradually increased (10,058,000 households in 1960, 21,318,000 households in 1980 and 28,026,000 households in 2006), especially one type of the nuclear family, a wife-husband-without-children family (4,619,000 households in 1980 and 10,198,000 households in 2006), while the number of **three-generation-type families** has decreased (5,714,000 households in 1980 and 4,326,000 households in 2006). In addition to these phenomena, we have to pay attention to the increasing number of single households (3,894,000 households in 1960, 6,402,000 households in 1980, and 12,043,000 households in 2006) due to the gradually increasing number of single elderly, which will contribute or create several service issues for elder care in this country in the future, which will be discussed in another paper (Kokumin Eisei no Doko: Journal of Health and Welfare Statistics, 2007, p.38).

As aforementioned, the decrease in the number of children in Japan, which will be focused on in this paper, is the current or future issue. The number of children women give birth to their lifetime has decreased. Thus, a decline in the total fertility rate has been phenomenal since 1975: the total fertility rate was 2.14 in 1973, 1.91 in 1975, 1.42 in 1995, and 1.35 in 2000 (1.26 in 2005), which was far below the level of 2.08 thresholds to maintain the current population (The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2001). Japan will need to increase the number of children in their concurrent aging society to prevent such various socio-economic problems in the future as the decrease in the labor force population, changes in the age structure of the labor force population; the possibility of a declining economic growth rate; the increased socio-economic burdens for the working population in an aging society; the hovering net income for the working population; and the possibility of losing

family bond concept and diminishing the socio-educational opportunity for Japanese children to interact and develop their social skills (Council on Population Problems of the Government of Japan, The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 1997).

Table 1. The Estimated Number of Households by Family Types in Japan

	Total	A	Nuclei households			D	E	F
			Total	B	C			
Estimated numbers : /000								
1960	22476	3894	10058			8523		4.13
1980	35338	6402	21318	4619	16700	5714	1904	3.28
1986	37544	6826	22834	5401	17433	5757	2127	3.22
1989	39417	7866	23785	6322	17463	5599	2166	3.10
1990	40273	8446	24154	6695	17458	5428	2245	3.05
1992	41210	8974	24317	7071	17245	5390	2529	2.99
1995	40770	9213	23997	7488	16510	5082	2478	2.91
1998	44496	10627	26096	8781	17315	5125	2648	2.81
2000	45545	10988	26938	9422	17616	4823	2796	2.76
2001	45664	11017	26894	9403	17490	4844	2909	2.75
2004	46323	10817	28061	10161	17899	4512	2934	2.72
2006	47531	12043	28026	10198	17828	4326	3137	2.65
Percentage: %								
1960	100.0	17.3	44.7			37.9		
1980	100.0	18.1	60.3	13.1	47.3	16.2	5.4	
1986	100.0	18.2	60.8	14.4	46.4	15.3	5.7	
1989	100.0	20.0	60.3	16.0	44.3	14.2	5.5	
1990	100.0	21.0	60.0	16.6	43.3	13.5	5.6	
1992	100.0	21.8	59.0	17.2	41.8	13.1	6.1	
1995	100.0	22.6	58.9	18.4	40.5	12.5	6.1	
2000	100.0	24.1	59.1	20.7	38.5	10.6	6.1	
1998	100.0	23.9	58.6	19.7	38.9	11.5	6.0	
2001	100.0	24.1	58.9	20.6	38.3	10.6	6.4	
2004	100.0	23.4	60.6	21.9	38.6	9.7	6.3	
2006	100.0	25.3	59.0	21.5	37.5	9.1	6.6	

A: One-person households

C: Married couple with child (ren)

E: Other type households

B: Married couple only

D: Three generation households

F: Average numbers of one household

Source: (1) Kosei Tokei Kyokai (2006). Kokumin no Fukushi no Doko (Journal of Social Welfare). pp.222-223. (2) Kosei Tokei Kyokai (2007). Kokumin Eisei no Doko (Journal of Health and Welfare Statistics). p.38.

It is difficult to analytically verify the various specific causes for this decline related to the shrinking number of the total fertility rate in Japan. However, several hypothesized causes exist (1) increased number of the non-married-group and late-married-group, (2) emerging highly educated, career-oriented group, (3) increase number of people avoiding high child rearing stress, (4) a growth in the number of women concerned about the high cost of child rearing and education, and (5) spreading uneasiness about inadequate, proper housing for child rearing, especially among urban residents (The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2001).

In 1997, the National Institute Population and Social Security Research, conducted interesting research into “the reasons for not having children or ideal number of children” and released the data and explained why Japanese women did not have or want to give birth to an ideal number of children, which would be over two or three children. Those reasons would specifically be summarized as follows:

- (1) the high cost of child rearing (37.0%),
- (2) the high cost of child education (33.8%),
- (3) the reluctance of giving birth in mid-life (33.5%), and
- (4) inability to psychologically and physically endure child-rearing tasks (20.8%).

After the Second World War, industrial structural changes in Japan have also had a strong influence on the employment structure of female Japanese workers. As stated before, today we observe an increasing number of female workers working at workplaces outside their homes. Female work or employment empowers or develops Japanese families’ purchasing ability or spending power for their family lives, but it creates a new type of shift in their family functioning or various family roles, especially in female roles in their households, which enhances changes in child rearing and education as their care takers.

There will exist many female workers struggling or facing family problems balancing between family and child related tasks and their work outside their homes in Japan, which is still a male-dominated working structured society. Many Japanese females would be very reluctant to have children more than at any other period of time. Their real needs and strategy to meet their various socio-economic-educational needs should be further explored in order to develop new policy measures in Japan.

Trying to solve those issues, Japanese Government released its future plan to fight those issues as the “Basic Direction for Future Child Rearing Support Measures” so-called “Angle Plan” in 1994. It will promote 5 major issues: (1) Efforts to support working parents in their efforts to raise a family; (2) Support in raising children at home; (3) Creation of a housing and living environment which is supportive of child rearing; and (4) A more flexible education system and promoting the health and wholesome growth of children. In the 1999 “New or Revised Angel Plan”, more specific policy issues were explored and proposed concrete measures for their future plan, although there will still exist its funding allocation and policy enactment process (Council on Population Problems of the Government of Japan, The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 1997; Matsubara, 2001).

(2) Functional Family Change: Vulnerability of Family Functioning

According to one prominent sociologist, Ogburn (1933), family functioning consists of seven factors: economic, role distribution, education, protection, religion, recreation, and affection. Today, many current Japanese families or households as family systems have been diminishing their fundamental family role functioning aforementioned, or specifically the economic and educational functions. Thus, to put it in the extreme, it indicates that Japanese families have been deprived of their autonomy as its intact family units or showing its vulnerability in child rearing to depend significantly on the outside of the home institutions such as regular school educational systems or child care units and economic systems as financial resources for their family.

For the past 15 years, various family problems have been repeatedly pointed out, including unstable marital relationship or separation and divorce problems, childcare or rearing stress, child abuse, children's bullying in school systems, and mental health issues like anorexia, social withdrawal and suicide. Ironically, in order to face and solve those own family problems, many Japanese families desperately need effective social services or family-oriented interventions such as marital counseling, family therapy, family life education, childcare or rearing support, which are also societal helping systems outside their own family units.

Their social resources for the prevention programs have been underdeveloped both quantitatively and qualitatively in Japan. The issues remain about how to encourage or empower the currently existing service agencies to create or develop effective prevention-oriented programs in their communities. The real problems lie in the agencies themselves as organizations or systems which are also faced with serious difficulties such as a shortage of funding; inadequate systems in the recruitment of the qualified personnel or specialists; a lack of the training for the staff members; problems in creating suitable new knowledge or skills and finally inadequacy in creating staff's motivation.

2. Family Problems and Concurrent Issues in Japanese Stressful Society

Japanese families experience diverse unpredictable socio-economic change. In this circumstance, they struggle with their own family issues. Not only marital relationship and its related problems, but also the stressful childrearing are their major concerns. They desperately need their services to solve their concurrent issues. As I mentioned before, Japan does not have adequate family-related counseling schemes and family life education programs; especially it has to develop programs to fight against the serious problems of domestic violence and child abuse.

(1) Marital Relationship and its Problems

Many Japanese couples now have to more seriously consider their marital relationship than in any other eras. A lack of intimacy between husbands and wives has been obviously reflected in their marital problems, children's school-related troubles and other various family-related struggles that eventually result in separation

or divorce. Thus, their marital relationships and their problems should be carefully analyzed by its concurrent alteration or change in divorce rates and the emerging divorce related issues.

Table 2. The Divorce Rates of EU Countries and USA

Countris	A	Countries	A
Japan (06)	2.04	Germany(04)	2.59
USA (05)	3.60	Netherlands(04)	1.91
Austria (04)	2.40	Russia(04)	4.42
Denmark (04)	2.92	Sweden(04)	2.24
France (03)	2.09	UK(03)	2.80

A: Divorce rates per 1000

Source: Kosei Tokei Kyokai (2007). Kokumin Eisei no Doko (Journal of Health and Welfare Statistics). p.65.

Table 3. The Number of Divorce Cases in Japan

	A			
	Cases	B per 1000	C	
			number	(%)
1955	75,267	0.84	45,710	60.7
1965	77,195	0.79	44,963	58.2
1975	119,135	1.07	74,668	62.7
1985	166,640	1.39	113,681	68.2
1995	199,016	1.60	122,067	61.3
2000	264,246	2.10	157,299	59.5
2001	285,911	2.27	171,802	60.1
2002	289,836	2.30	174,042	60.0
2003	283,854	2.25	170,331	60.0
2004	270,804	2.15	161,298	59.6
2005	261,917	2.08	154,104	58.8

A: Number of divorce cases B: Divorce rates per 1000

C: Number of cases and percentage of children involved with parent's Divorce

Source: Nihon Kodomo Katei Sogo Kenkyusho (2007). Nihon Kodomo Shiryo Nenkan 2007 (Alamanac of Data on Japanese Children 2007). p.18.

According to Kumagai (1983) and the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, Japan witnessed an increase in divorce rate after World War II, especially since 1960. Based on those research data in Japan, the divorce rate of 0.74 per 1,000 in 1960 jumped from the comparatively high one, 1.39 per 1,000 in 1985, to the highest one, 2.27 per 1,000 in 2001. Sasaki and Wilson (1997) concluded the reasons of divorce as follows: "In Japan, the most frequently cited reasons for divorce were incompatibility for males and financial problems for females"

(p.126). The most significant concern is the problems involved or affecting children from their parents' divorce. The number of those children has increased from 80,481 in 1950, to 89,687 in 1970 and 169,624, and to finally 246,979 in 1998. Their problems could be summarized as following: Many of these children are reared in a single-parent lifestyle situation headed by women who usually are economically vulnerable. The Japanese government provides several programs targeted at this group, but not enough has been done. In the future, Japan needs to make stronger efforts for developing more extensive social benefits and services to meet the many and varied needs of single-mother families (Sasaki and Wilson, 1997, p.126).

The comprehensive counseling services connected with psycho-legal problems have been scarce and will be needed by many divorced women, especially those who have experienced severe marital relationships with abused or violent husbands and have struggled with financial problems in their alimony and child support.

Table 4. Number of Divorce Cases and Percentages of Divorce Types

	Num.	Percentage: %						
		Total	A	B	C	D	E	F
1950	83689	100.0	95.5	3.9	0.0			0.5
1960	69410	100.0	91.2	7.8	0.1			0.9
1970	95937	100.0	89.6	9.3	0.1			1.0
1980	141689	100.0	89.9	9.0	0.0			1.0
1990	157608	100.0	90.5	8.4	0.0			1.0
1995	199016	100.0	90.4	8.7	0.0			0.9
2000	264246	100.0	91.5	7.7	0.0			0.8
2005	261917	100.0	89.0	8.7	0.1	0.9	0.0	1.2

A: Divorce by agreement of both parties
 C: Divorce by judgment
 E: Divorce by legal assent

B: Divorce by arbitration
 D: Divorce by legal settlement
 F: Divorce by judicial decision

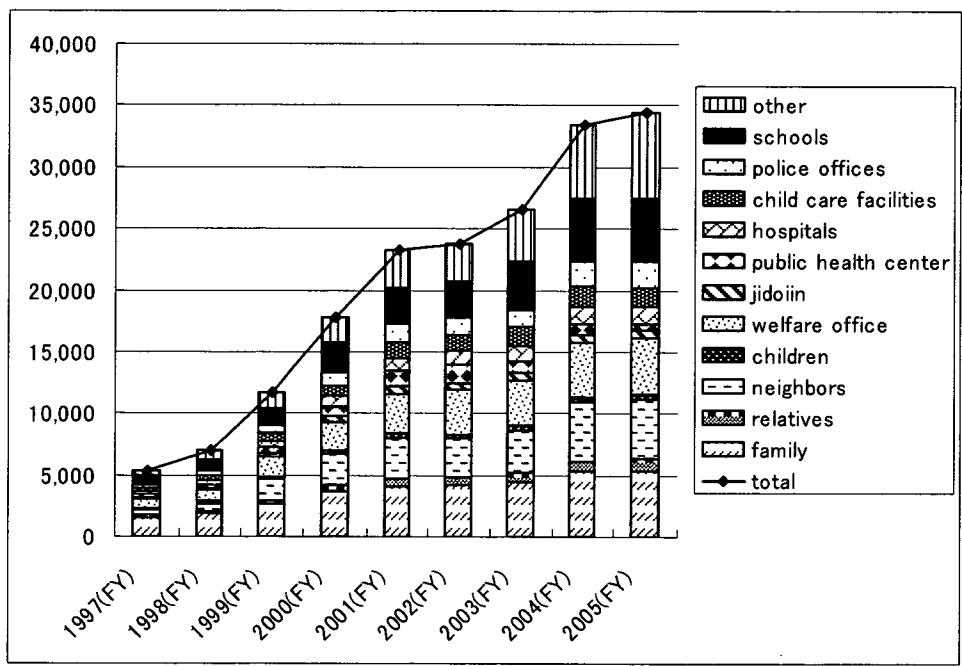
Source: Nihon Kodomo Katei Sogo Kenkyusho (2007). Nihon Kodomo Shiryo Nenkan 2007 (Alamanac of Data on Japanese Children 2007). p.18.

(2) Childrearing Issues and their Stressors and Stresses

There are many families struggling with stressful child rearing in Japan where a depopulation trend or decreasing number of children is significantly observed and requires women to raise their children with more careful attention. In this social situation, most families with children have various types of problems and less confidence in their child rearing and educational issues or anxiety: (1) childcare in early infant period, (2) school learning or higher education in the future, and (3) children's health. Especially, female parents have experienced the most stressful child rearing problems in Japan, which traditionally expects them to take or perform the perfect parental roles in the so-called "myth of a perfect mother". Their struggles in childcare and rearing would be the leading causes of their psycho-social problems including maternity blues, childcare neurosis, and child abuse in the extreme cases. Japanese female parents have felt much more parental pressure

or problems than the male partners in their unresponsive community.

There have been a reported abrupt increasing number of child abuse cases in the last fifteen years, which strongly reflected one of the typical examples of the concurrent family problems. This issue related to child-care or rearing has focused on societal struggles and challenges among not only families themselves but also many service professionals. In 1990, the number of child abuse cases reported to child guidance clinics was 1,101 cases. Within around ten years, this number has increased dramatically: 2,722 cases in 1995, 5,352 cases in 1997, and 11,631 cases in 1999, and eventually 34,472 cases in 2005. Their tasks are enormous in terms of creating solid service systems or professional organizations to effectively search for abuse case, to offer the abused children a proper and adequate treatment, and provide effective counseling to the abusing parents or offenders. Their challenge has just started and requires much stronger efforts to solve those new and urgent social problems.



Source: Nihon Kodomo Katei Sogo Kenkyusho (2007). Nihon Kodomo Shiryo Nenkan 2007 (Almanac of Data on Japanese Children 2007). p.218.

Figure1. Number of Child Abuse Cases and Referral Sources in Japan

3. Conclusion

In this paper, the socio-economic changes in Japanese families induced by industrialization and urbanization have been discussed, especially in the time of abrupt development of global world economy after the Second World War. Japanese families have directly been experiencing those changes in their family structures and functions. Consequently, many of them are now facing the new challenges or problems in their vulnerable family systems from the different types of psycho/social pressure or stress related to not only the childrearing or care issues but also serious current concerns of the marital instability which would be causes for separation or divorce, mental or psychological troubles like the maternity blues, alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse.

Many Japanese women/wives are feeling various burdens not only from the socio-economic pressure, but also from the physiological-psychological-oriented stress. In order to meet their needs for child rearing issues, Japan has to develop and provide new effective types of social services or schemes for reducing various life stressors to motivate to create intact families and bring up healthy children. Well-being in society should be built on strong social policy and strategy. Thus, Japan will need to further enhance its social service resources, prevention-oriented family services in the communities. The concurrently existing social service and social work agencies as well as many other major service systems, especially school systems must make their best effort to create those effective community service resources to meet various family needs or be the leading agents to motivate different types of non-voluntary and voluntary service agencies to respond to the requests of communities.

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