Topical News: “Changes in the Household, the Community, and their Influence on Children”

1. Introduction

- The government has promoted various policies related to youth development based on The National Youth Development Policy formulated on December 2003. While there have been certain achievements, there is an increasingly noticeable critical awareness of the fact that the seriousness of the problems involved was not sufficiently recognized at the time of creating the policy.
- Over these 5 years, awareness of the social situation of youth, and of youth problems, has drastically changed. Above all, there is a need to address the various issues related to the household and the community, which form the immediate environment that supports the healthy development of youth.
- This special report focuses on the “Household and Community,” in which children are encompassed, and, from a variety of data, analyzes the present state of affairs in the light of the transformations of recent years and their influence on children.

2. Changes in Household- and Community-Related Factors

   (1) Household-Related Factors

   The household serves to create and maintain a bond between family members, particularly between parents and children. The household as a fundamental site, where children acquire a variety of skills and are able to develop, has changed in the following ways.

   - Weekday Contact between Parents and Children has Decreased.
     Comparing 2000 and 2006 data about what children aged 9 to 14 and their parents do together, and how much time they spend together, in 2006, the number of fathers whose contact time with their child(ren) on weekdays was “almost zero” increased to 23.3, which is 1 father out of 4. The figure for mothers is not as remarkable as that of fathers, but it shows roughly the same trend. (Figure 29)
   - Long Working Hours
     For changes in working hours per month by age group, in the five years between 2002 and 2007, the general trend was on the increase. In particular, the working hours of parents in their 30s and 40s who are raising a child increased by approximately 5 hours. (Figure 30)
- Later Homecoming by Parents
For homecoming times of working fathers and mothers on weekdays, compared between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of fathers returning by 7pm in 2001 was 40%, which decreased to 26.1%, and fathers returning home after 9pm increased to more than 30% in 2007. The number of mothers returning home by 6pm decreased and mothers returning home between 6pm and 8pm drastically increased in 2007.

- Decrease in Frequency of Having Dinner with Family
Between 1976 and 2004, the number of families that have dinner together “everyday” or “more than 4 days in a week” decreased, while the number of “2 to 3 days in a week” families increased, which was the most common.

- Parents being unaware of Children’s Worries
For the extent to which parents know about their children’s worries and problems, fathers tend to be less aware than mothers, particularly in the areas of “names of friends,” “places where children always play,” “names of their teachers,” etc. Furthermore, for the things that it is always necessary to know, like “what was learned today” or things that are difficult to understand, unless they sit down to talk with their children like “difficulties that children are facing and things they are worried about,” even mothers tend to be less aware than any other thing, and fathers’ awareness of these things is remarkably low. (Figure 31)

- Long Contact Time with Information Media
In 2006, 31.6% children aged 6 to 12 and 85.4% of children aged 13 to 19 used their own mobile phones. Daily internet use (including email) on mobile phones or home personal computers was 55 minutes for elementary school children, 125 minutes for junior high school children and 166 minutes for high school children. Television watching time was 161 minutes for elementary school children, 165 minutes for junior high school children and 176 for high school children. Television games playing time was 60 minutes for elementary school children, 50 minutes for junior high school children and 46 minutes for high school children. On the other hand, one out of 4 high school children studied at home for 0 minute.

- Late Bedtimes
For bedtimes of 5th grade elementary school children and 2nd grade junior high school children, compared between 1999 and 2006, the number of 5th grade elementary school children who go to bed before 10 decreased and the number of children who go to bed after 11 increased. The number of 2nd grade junior school children who go to bed before 11 decreased, and the number of children who go to bed after midnight increased. More children tend to stay late.

- More Children Skipping Breakfast because of “No Appetite”
Compared between 2000 and 2005, approximately 85% of elementary school children and 80% of junior high school children “have breakfast everyday”, which showed no change in 2000 and 2005. The number of children who “hardly ever have breakfast” was slightly reduced, and overall there was no drastic change.
In 2000, the reason for elementary school children and junior high school children to skip breakfast was mainly “no time for breakfast”, and in 2005, the reason for elementary school children was mainly “no appetite” and for junior high school children it was mainly “no time for breakfast”. This reason is now decreasing however, and “no appetite” trend is on the increase.

(2) Situation with Community
- Attenuation of Neighborly Relations
Regarding the extent of neighborly relations compared between 2000 and 2007, trends like “frequently visit” and “to some extent visit” decreased and trends like “don’t often visit” and “hardly ever visit” increased. Furthermore, if people who have no one to visit” are added to this, approximately 60% people are reluctant to engage in neighborly relations and have become estranged from neighbors. (Figure 32)
- Awareness among Guardians of Degradation of “Community Education Levels”
  When asked about “Local Education Levels,” more than half of elementary and junior high school guardians answered that the Levels deteriorated compared to their childhood period. (Figure 33) As for the reason, more than 50% answered “pervasive Individualism (involvement from others is not welcome)” which was the most common reason, and approximately 30% answered “the community is no longer safe, having feelings of resistance toward having their children contact with others”, “lack of opportunities for parents to associate with neighbors”, “less sense of community with where they live”, “increase in number of mothers going to work”, “change in housing status like increasing high-rise housing (apartments)”, etc.
- Lack of Place, Company, Time to Play
  Elementary school and junior high school children gave multiple answers to “what troubles them after school hours or on holidays”. Approximately 1 child in 5 answered “there is no place to play near their house,” Other reasons are “there is nobody to play with near their house”, “there is no free time”, “there is nothing interesting to play, or they have never played before”, and “It is dangerous for children to be only with children”, supported by 10% of children, respectively. They feel that there is no time to play, no one to play with, and no freedom to play.
- Importance of Childhood Experience and Exchange Opportunities
  In a survey of youth aged 25 to 35, when asked about their current job, lifestyle and experience in elementary school and junior high school, it was found that “confidence in attitude and capability towards their jobs” in youth is related to childhood experiences and relations with parents and especially that youth with “experience of talking to adults other than teachers and parents” in their elementary and junior high school period has gained more “confidence in attitude capability towards their jobs.”
  Besides this, childhood experiences like “discussing about the future with parents”, “playing with a lot of friends”, “participating in local activities,” etc. have a great influence on gaining confidence in being able to do a job.
(3) Family in Difficult Situation

- Single-Parent or Single-Female-Parent Household on the Increase

For changes in the number of single-female-parent households, in 1995 it was 483,000 and in 2007 increased to 717,000. (Figure 34)

- Situation with Single-Female-Parent Household
  - More mothers engaged in “temporary/part-time” jobs
    84.5% of Single-female-parents are working and 43.6% among them work “temporarily/part-time”. 42.5% are “regular staff” followed by 5.1% of “temporary staff”
    As the youngest child grows, the ratio of “regular staff” increases and that of “temporary/part-time” jobs decreases
  - Hard Life Situation
    The average annual income of a single-female-parent household in 2005 was 2,130,000 yen, which accounts for 38% of the average income of all households, which was approx. 5,638,000 yen. (Figure 35)
    As for receiving welfare benefits, 9.6% live on welfare. (2.3% in all households)

- Families with Child Abuse
  - Multiple difficulties in family situation leading to child abuse
    According to the survey conducted by the Bureau of Social Welfare and Public Health, Tokyo in 2001 and 2005, the family factors which led to child abuse were 31.8% of single-parent families, 23.6% of distance from relatives or neighbors, 30.8% of financial difficulties, 14.0% of job insecurities. (Figure 36)
    As for the top five of the family factors, 3 of them are related to other factors, which are “single-parent families”, “financial difficulties”, “distance” and “Job insecurities”
  - Hard situation of families with serious abuse
    Among families who have lost their child(ren), for reasons other than suicide, for the guardian situation of the families where abuse took place, families with both biological fathers and mothers account for approx 50%, while families with single parents approximately 25%.

For financial conditions of the families, the total ratio of families who live on welfare, families with municipal tax exemption and families with municipal tax imposition (Income rate) was approx 67% in 2005 and approx 84% in 2006.

Regarding community contact, the ratio of “almost no contact” and “rare contact” is high, while no “frequent contact”. As for psychological, mental problems with guardians, the ratio of biological mothers who have “child raising anxiety”, “poor parenting ability” and “depression” is high.
3 Conclusion

- Listening to the activities carried out at actual places by a lot of experts before formulating new general policy, the primary feedback was that there are a lot of problems like family issues or local issues in the background of youths facing difficult situations.

- Particularly, where contact with the people outside the family has become rare due to urbanization and the trend of the nuclear family, responsibility for solutions to difficult situations is held inside the families and because of that, it has been often said that those difficult situations become more serious, so the approach towards the family is considered more closely as a big issue.

- As for supporting youths facing such difficult situations, apart from supporting the said person, the approach towards their growth environment such as families, schools, areas supporting healthy growth etc is also important. Hereafter, while formulating new general policies, concrete measures should be taken for comprehensive efforts including a private sector.