

Mental Health Issues Related to Childcare Among Fathers in Okinawa Prefecture and Indonesia

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Introduction

This paper examines mental health issues related to fathers' childcare in Okinawa Prefecture and Indonesia based on existing research data. In Okinawa Prefecture, economic difficulties and lack of childcare knowledge have been identified as major factors increasing fathers' psychological burden, with particularly high risks in low-income households. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, strict role divisions based on religious teachings and father absence due to labor migration have profound impacts on the mental health of entire families. National surveys in Japan indicate that fathers' postpartum depression risk reaches 8-13%, with long working hours and sleep deprivation being major risk factors. While research specifically focused on fathers is limited in both regions, the necessity for comprehensive support including establishment of consultation services, expansion of childcare leave systems, and provision of childcare knowledge is suggested. This paper aims to clarify the characteristics of fathers' mental health issues in two regions with different cultural and economic backgrounds and provide insights for future support system development.

Fathers' Childcare and Mental Health in Okinawa Prefecture

While mental health research specifically focused on fathers in Okinawa Prefecture is limited, important findings have been obtained from data on child-rearing households overall. The FY2023 Okinawa Children's Survey indicates that economic difficulties increase stress within households and may lead to serious problems such as domestic violence and suicidal ideation (Okinawa Prefecture, 2024). These risks are notably higher in low-income households, suggesting that economic circumstances significantly affect the mental health of parents, including fathers.

A survey targeting parents of preschool children in City A, Okinawa Prefecture, yielded interesting results regarding childcare burden. While mothers' average childcare burden score was 9.9 ± 6.2 points, fathers' score was slightly lower at 7.3 ± 5.8 points. However, an important finding from this survey was the relationship that fathers with lower knowledge about parent-child play experienced higher childcare burden. Logistic regression analysis showed an odds ratio of 0.50 (95%

confidence interval: 0.26-0.95) for the high-knowledge group, statistically demonstrating that fathers' lack of childcare knowledge may contribute to mental burden (Kawakami et al., 2023). Although this survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it suggests that providing fathers with appropriate childcare knowledge may lead to reduction of psychological burden.

In Okinawa Prefecture's childcare support policies, improving fathers' childcare participation rate is positioned as an important goal, but it is emphasized that improvement of economic conditions is essential for its realization. The FY2024 Okinawa Children's Survey also continuously points out that economic difficulties affect the well-being of entire families, and comprehensive support systems are required (Okinawa Prefecture, 2025).

Fathers' Childcare and Mental Health in Indonesia

Research on fathers' mental health in Indonesia is even more limited than in Okinawa Prefecture. Data mainly focuses on parents overall, and as a trend across the Southeast Asian region, there exists a cultural background where mental health issues tend to be underestimated. Research on parents with children with developmental disabilities primarily targets mothers but also includes fathers, reporting high risks of anxiety and depression (National Center for Persons with Severe Intellectual Disabilities, 2024).

Regarding parental burnout, validation research of the Indonesian version of the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA-ID) has been conducted. This study confirmed the reliability and validity of the scale with 679 parents (including 86 fathers). This research has made it possible to assess fathers' psychological exhaustion in the Indonesian cultural context, opening the way to understanding the reality of childcare-related burnout (Ariyanti et al., 2024).

Fathers' roles in Indonesian society tend to be strictly defined based on religious teachings. Hakuodo's survey on household task division in Asia shows that fathers' and mothers' role divisions are clearly distinguished, with strong social pressure regarding family prosperity (Hakuodo Institute of Life and Living, 2025). Such cultural background may impose excessive psychological burden on fathers.

Research is also progressing on the impact of father absence on children's psychological development. Children in father-absent households are more likely to experience negative effects on psychological development, and fathers' insufficient involvement may indirectly lead to mental health problems (Ashari, 2017). Furthermore, the problem of labor migration in Indonesia is serious. Many cases have been reported where labor migration of parents, especially fathers, worsens children's mental health, and it has become clear that stress during father absence spreads throughout the household. A 2024 study analyzed in detail the relationship between parental migration and the social and mental well-being of left-behind children, showing the multifaceted impacts brought about by family separation (Fauk et al., 2024).

Postpartum Depression and Childcare Stress among Fathers Nationwide in Japan
National trends are also useful for understanding the situation in Okinawa Prefecture. According to nationwide surveys, fathers' postpartum depression risk is approximately 8-13%, and in a questionnaire survey including the Kyushu-Okinawa region, 13.7% were judged to be at risk (Benesse Corporation, 2024; Nakashima & Itou, 2021). Major factors include marital relationship quality, children's attributes, and economic circumstances.

In a survey targeting fathers caring for one-month-old infants, the non-favorable group according to GHQ12 (General Health Questionnaire) reached 15.4%. In this group, the proportion hoping for support was significantly higher, with statistical significance of $p=0.021$ for childcare and $p=0.030$ for housework. A tendency toward shorter cohabitation periods was also observed. Since fathers in mentally non-favorable conditions exceed 10%, the necessity for appropriate support is emphasized (Nakamura et al., 2020).

In another survey on postpartum depression risk, 11.0% of fathers in infant households and 3.4% of couples simultaneously fell into this category. Takehara et al.'s research identified long working hours and sleep deprivation as risk factors for both parents' poor condition, showing that improvement of working environments is important for protecting fathers' mental health (Takehara et al., 2020). The nationwide questionnaire survey by Nakashima and Ito systematically organized the current state and issues of fathers' postpartum depression, pointing out that improving social awareness of this problem and building support systems are urgent tasks (Nakashima & Itou, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Mental health issues related to fathers' childcare in Okinawa Prefecture and Indonesia each have unique characteristics. In Okinawa Prefecture, economic difficulties and lack of childcare knowledge are major factors increasing fathers' childcare burden (Kawakami et al., 2023; Okinawa Prefecture, 2024), while in Indonesia, cultural role norms and labor migration tend to increase mental health risks (Ashari, 2017; Fauk et al., 2024; Hakuhodo Institute of Life and Living, 2025).

Although direct comparative data focusing on fathers is lacking in both regions, important insights can be obtained from available data. National trends in Japan show that strengthening support such as establishing consultation services, expanding childcare leave systems, and providing childcare knowledge is effective (Benesse Corporation, 2024; Nakamura et al., 2020; Nakashima & Itou, 2021). Comprehensive support for low-income groups is particularly urgent, and an approach integrating economic support and psychosocial support is required.

Future research tasks include conducting longitudinal surveys specifically focused on fathers, promoting cross-cultural comparative research, and developing and evaluating effective intervention programs. Since fathers' mental health affects the well-being of entire families, addressing this issue is extremely important for supporting children's healthy development.

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