

COMPLETION REPORT

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Barriers for foreign children and their parents in adapting elementary and junior high schools in Japan and its psychological consequences.

Japan, as a worldwide economic hub and a peaceful place to live, attracts people from all over the world and welcomes a large number of immigrants every year. The growing number of immigrants means that more of their offspring with different languages, cultures, and customs will be eligible to enroll in the Japanese education system. However, little is known about the issues that these children and their parents face when they attend schooling system in Japan. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the barriers that foreign parents and their children face while children attending elementary and/or junior high school as well as assess its psychological consequences to them.

From August to October 2023, we conducted a cross-sectional survey among 96 foreign parents living in Kagoshima areas in Japan with at least one child attending elementary or junior high school. We selected parent-child pairs using the simple snowball sampling method. We assessed parents' stress level using the perceived stress scale (PSS-10) and examined the children's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral issues using the pediatric symptom checklist-17 (PSC-17). Parents or guardians grade the PSC-17 on behalf of the child, and it is intended for use with children aged 4 to 15.

Sixty-parents reported that their child goes to elementary school, 12 parents reported their child goes to junior high school, and 24 parents reported that they have children who attended both elementary and junior high schools. More than half of the foreign parents (56.3%) identified language problems as a barrier for them and their children who go to elementary or junior high school, while 75% reported cultural problems, 68% reported religious problems, and 50% of the respondents specifically identified school instructions and homework in Japanese for their child as major problems. Results also show that 40% of the sampled children showed emotional and behavioral problems ($PSC \geq 15$): 18.8% of children reported having internalizing problems, 29.2% showed attention problems, and 31.3% reported having externalizing problems. Overall mental health problems were reported to be higher among students who were going to junior high school. Results further document that nearly 38% of the parents reported having perceived stress ($PSS \geq 10$). The bivariate association shows that language problems ($p < 0.001$), and school instructions and homework in Japanese ($p = 0.011$) were significantly associated with the parents' higher perceived stress level. Both the problems had a significant relationship with the children's mental health outcomes. Both of these problems were also found to be higher among the parents whose purpose of stay in Japan was to pursue higher study, and stay in Japan for less than 5 years.

The study highlighted that foreign parents and their school-going children in Japan had several challenges, with language being a prominent issue. Children as well as their parents struggled to understand school instructions and complete homework written in Japanese. The prevalence of mental health issue among parents and their school-going kids are notable. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by foreign parents and their children attending schools in Japan, as well as to measure their mental well-being, further qualitative and quantitative research is warranted.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

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