

COMPLETION REPORT

Employment experiences of Japanese and Malaysian mothers caring for special needs children

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The research explores the employment experiences of Japanese and Malaysian mothers caring for special needs children (SNC) through the application of in-depth interviews. Two trips made to Tokyo, Japan, throughout the research duration. The first trip was a research meeting with the Japanese collaborator and also to recruit the potential Japanese participants. The researcher found that the Japanese participant recruitment procedures were rather formal than in Malaysia; hence, improvements to the existing recruitment procedures. The second trip, on the other hand, was a participation of the First International Disability Inclusion Symposium on Higher Education and Career. There were presentations from Japan and ASEAN with similar research focus on education experiences, technology, skills, learning tools and social welfare services concerning the people with disabilities. A theme on the parents of people with disabilities was almost absent. During the round table dialogue of the researcher, one of the audiences commented that she rarely came across the theme regarding the working experiences of mothers of SNC and found it as intriguing. The findings of this research provide evidence that the mothers face substantial challenges in reconciling their employment and caregiving roles. These are mainly due to the inflexible work environments and discrimination that make the mothers vulnerable to the stresses of employment, explained their minimal job performance. The mothers are also suffering additional stress and frustration due to the fathers' reluctance to shoulder a reasonable share of parenting responsibilities, resulting in some mothers to reduce hours of works (from permanent to part-time employment). The research also provides evidence that the mothers' wellbeing is compromised, as signs of depression and mental distress, including the desire to commit suicide found in some of the mothers. The present research reveals the need for the policymakers and practitioners to develop employment policies and guidelines specific to parents of SNC, facilitating for decent employment conditions. Such policies and guidelines will allow the mothers to resume, retain and reinforce their labour market participation and the fathers to align their paternal involvement better while on paid work. As the research has identified a weak parenting contribution by fathers as a partial cause of challenges facing the working mothers of SNC, it is essential to document the insights of the fathers of SNC to understand such low paternal commitment. The future research should, therefore, designed to illuminate contextually specific issues that arise for fathers of SNC and which may impact their willingness to offer paternal support.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

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

- 1) 25th to 26th January 2020, The University of Tokyo, First International Disability Inclusion Symposium on Higher Education and Career, Employment Experiences of Mother Caring for Special Needs Children: A Comparative Study between Japan and Malaysia, Azzarina Zakaria
- 2) 19th September 2020, IDEAS Autism Centre, Online Charity Event 'Austim Rocks!', Public Perception of Autism, Azzarina Zakaria and Khairul Saidah Abas Azmi

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

- 1) Family Relations, Working Mothers with Special Needs Children: Japanese and Malaysian Experiences, Khairul Saidah Abas Azmi, Azzarina Zakaria, Chie Yorozu (submitted on 13th of July 2020 – awaiting for recommendation)
- 2) Journal of Family Issues, Challenges for Malaysian and Japanese Working Mothers with Special Needs Children, Azzarina Zakaria, Khairul Saidah Abas Azmi, Chie Yorozu (submitted on 25th of October 2020 – awaiting for review)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)