Actual role of age and gender in the child care environment

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Objective:
Japan’s birthrate is continuously declining, and in the Japanese society, women are becoming increasingly active in the society. As such, some changes are happening in the child care environment. A healthy child care environment is essential. This study describes the actual situation of the child care environment.

Methods:
This study was conducted in a farming community located near a major urban center in Japan. The sample consisted of the parents/guardians of 543 children aged 0 to 6 years. To conduct the survey, every household was visited using the distribution placement method. The Index of Child Care Environment (ICCE) was used for all children, with the survey factors being child’s age, gender, family type, and siblings. Statistical tests including the chi-square test were used to obtain the correlations between each item of the ICCE and the demographic information.

Results and Discussion:
Of the 543 children, 267 were boys and 276 were girls. There were 72 infants, 120 one-year olds, 102 two-year olds, 121 three-year olds, 115 four-year olds, 107 five-year olds, and 83 six-year olds. There were significantly lower risk ages 0 to 1, and higher risk ages of three to four related to ‘Read books to your child’. There were significantly higher risk ages of 3 to 4, and 5 to 6 related to ‘Sing songs with your child’. There was significantly lower risk ages of 0 to 1 related to ‘Eat meals together as a family’. There was significantly lower risk ages of 0 to 1 related to ‘Go grocery shopping with your child’. There was significantly lower risk ages of 0 to 1 related to ‘Go to the park with your child’. There was significantly higher risk ages of 1 to 2 related to ‘Pat your child’. There were significantly higher risk ages of 0 to 1, and 1 to 2 related to ‘Smack your child when he/she failed’.

Conclusions:
With regard to the interaction between child development and child care environment, the ICCE items ‘human stimulation’, ‘social stimulation’, ‘social support’, and ‘avoidance of restrictions’ are important at all ages. ‘Avoidance of restrictions’ is not preferable during infancy. This study provided the actual picture of the child care environment by age and gender. However, further validation about the combination of factors is needed. In order to contribute toward the enhancement of the child care environment, we need to examine the environmental signature of child care more closely.

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