

Advisory Opinion

Unwanted Pregnancy of Adolescent and Young Adult Women: Support for the Mother and Child and Prevention of Child Abuse



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Subcommittee on Child Birth and Development,

Committee on Clinical Medicine

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Abstract

1. Background of the Advisory Opinion

Nurturing of the next generation is one of the policy issues of top priority in Japan, where declining birthrate and aging population have advanced, and economic, health and educational disparities have widened. From the viewpoints of not only widening disparity but also of child abuse, unwanted teenage pregnancies, and abortion or childbirth associated therewith, are a serious problem requiring investigation and countermeasures from broad perspective covering medicine, welfare, education and human right. Therefore, in the 25th session of the Subcommittee on Child Birth and Development of the Science Council of Japan, we decided to express our opinion on enriching policies to support for the mother and child following unwanted pregnancy.

2. Current issues

Issues from Pregnancy to Childbirth

In Japan, a large number of female junior and high school students experience unwanted pregnancy, followed either by abortion or childbirth. As having nobody to consult with, many of them kill or abandon the baby immediately after isolated birth. Education for them, as well as social and economic support, remains insufficient. Legal systems for anonymous fostering and confidential birth have neither been established nor thoroughly discussed.

Issues from Childbirth to Child Rearing

For a mother who cannot rear the baby by herself, Japan has a system for special adoption. Nevertheless, the number of adopted babies is small, and the ratio of children under family nurturing is low. Even if babies are adopted, economic and social support for their foster parents is insufficient. Systems to manage information on the origin of child have not been established. About the treatment and development of children under facility care, little information is available.

We will express our opinions in detail toward solving these issues.

3. Opinions

(1) To improve situation of pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing of young women:

Systems of telephone consultation and prenatal health checkup, available at any time and in an anonymous way, should be established and their information widely disseminated. [Children and Families Agency] Education to protect children from sexual assault should be promoted. Schools for girls in pregnancy or engaged in childrearing should be established. [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology]

(2) To address issues regarding anonymous entrustment and confidential birth:

Aiming at benefiting both social help for both mothers in trouble due to unexpected pregnancy and lives and human rights of their babies to be born, a legal system for anonymous entrustment and confidential birth should be established. Whereas the national guideline on confidential birth (Treatment of a pregnant woman who has given birth with her identity information revealed only to a limited staff of a medical institution. Government notification by Director, Ministry of Justice Civil Affairs Bureau and Director, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Child and Family Policy Bureau. September 30th, 2022) is an important step, introduction of a more comprehensive system should be discussed [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; Children and Families Agency; Ministry of Justice]

(3) To improve the treatment and rearing of newborns requiring social care:

Utilizing the system of special adoption, child's relationship with a biological mother with no wish or capability of child rearing should be ended, and adoption with foster parents should be conducted. Measures to improve the foster parent system should be discussed. [Children and Families Agency; Ministry of Justice]

(4) To strengthen economic and social support for fostering parents:

National support should be enhanced for special adoption system and self-help organizations and support groups . [Children and Families Agency]

(5) To address issues regarding the origin of children:

A national system should be created for safe and secure management of child's origin information without a public notice in family register. [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; Children and Families Agency; Ministry of Justice]

(6) To assess and improve the situations of treatment and development of children:

Investigations should be conducted on the treatment of children institutionalized in infant homes and on the development of children under social care. [Children and Families Agency; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology]