

Living Together, Loving Together

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In Japan, many people have an unusual lifestyle, dictated by the father's employer. We call it "*tanshin funin*" or "bachelor husband". This is the situation when a man's employer transfers him to a location where his wife and family are unable to live with him. Sometimes it is only for a short time, but sometimes it is for many years. The Japanese government accepts this strange situation as "normal" for our society. However, nearly 50% of Japanese people say, "this practice should not be done". Now, about 1 in 25 children in Japan are separated from their fathers.

Occasionally, the Japanese government will say how strongly they support the Japanese family. The government is even offering money to people who will give birth to children. But, they are giving no consideration to the needs of the children after birth. This is a case where the actions of the government and the companies are shouting much louder than the words they are speaking.

I was eight years old when my father left our home for the first time. I can still remember that day when I sat crying and crying in the entryway of our apartment. My father works for the Japan Coast Guard to protect the ocean. His job deserves great respect. "Dad, thank you for working hard for us. I love you and respect you." But, my father has sacrificed so much to do this job. Even now, after working the same job for many years, he only gets to return to see his family once or twice a year! He has missed almost all of the important times in his children's lives.

There are two main reasons why it is hard for men to return home. The first is financial. The small bonus is not enough to pay for the upkeep of two households plus travel back and forth to a distant place, either for him or his family. Secondly, school holidays and business holidays often do not overlap. So, it is very difficult to spend time together.

A father is important for everyone, not just his employer. The children who are separated from their father are influenced by his absence. According to statistics by a sociologist in America, children who live with only one parent are twice as likely to develop mental illness. My own sister has suffered a great deal from mental illness in recent years. It is said that healthy father-child relationships strengthen emotional security. Emotional security, in turn, helps children cope with stress and makes them less vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

Can we solve these problems? I would like to suggest three things to our government and companies. The first is to make laws that support better economic conditions for men working away from their families.

The second is to create a family national holiday weekend where both schools and companies would give people time off to spend with their families.

Thirdly, I would like to petition our government and employers to follow their words with positive actions. While the government talks a lot about support for family life, their actions still show that they believe the company life and culture is more important than the family.

In the future, I would like to live with all my family members, laughing together, eating together and loving together like it was before I was 8 years old. It's time for us to speak out loudly and push for change in our society. Our future children will be grateful.