

#### 4. Supporting Child-Rearing Dads

ONISHI Sachiyo

The cheerful voices of children can be heard everywhere as they enjoy the summer holiday. I am sure that many parents are looking forward to spending lots of time with their children.

Countries around the world are adopting legislation to facilitate child rearing by dads, because involving working men in childcare should lead to the advancement of women. Of the 169 countries for which data are available, 66 countries (39%) including Japan have introduced a law providing for a parental leave scheme covering both mothers and fathers. Meanwhile, it has been shown that a father who takes at least two weeks off to care for his new-born child is likely to be actively involved in subsequent child rearing<sup>1</sup>, prompting more countries to adopt legislation for a childcare leave scheme that is available only to fathers (79 of the 167 countries (47%)).

Despite all its positive effects on mothers' way of working, the active involvement of fathers in child rearing is making little progress due to household financial worries. To address this concern, workers who take childcare leave are paid in 90% of countries. The paid leave period varies widely among the countries, ranging from one day in Tunisia to three months in Iceland.

An Austrian broadcasting station, renowned for its coverage of the Vienna Philharmonic New Year's Concert, introduced a 'Papa Campaign' in 2013. Since all male employees take childcare leave for their new-born child, their wives working for the same firm are relieved of their exclusive responsibility for child rearing, which effectively allows them to pursue promotion in their careers. A wife may also pursue a career by sharing at least part of her childcare responsibility with her husband, even if the couple works for different companies.

Promoting child rearing by men substantially improves the firm's relationship with the local

community.<sup>2</sup> Dad journalists who go shopping at local stores and use local childcare services have come to realise that news material can be found at the local grassroots level, not only in the Parliaments and diplomatic forums, thus effectively widening their scope of interest after returning to their information-gathering work. This campaign also received high acclaim from third parties as it had a positive impact on the advancement of female workers within the broadcasting company.

The involvement of dads in child rearing helps institutionalise shorter working hours and flexible working styles, in addition to parental leave itself. In Europe, it is now common for a dad to pick up his children at nursery school. The workplace rule of not scheduling any meeting after 5pm effectively allows dads to take their children to and from nursery, and wives to continue working.

Allowing dads to take their children to the workplace is another solution. By going to work with their children, fathers do not have to take a day off for childcare or to leave early in order to pick up their children in time. While many firms have set up an in-house nursery for their employees, a small company in Chiba Prefecture has created a working environment that is clean and safe enough for dads to take care of their children at work, and for children to see their dads work throughout the day. Other employees are supportive of the initiative. Whereas this case is pioneering in Japan, it is probably quite common in Europe.

Thus, there are many ways for a husband to play an active role in child rearing, effectively empowering his wife at work. Respect for the rights of self-determination and self-fulfilment in one's private life is also crucial for women to pursue a successful career. The protection of an even wider range of rights is essential, now that the structure of the family has changed. Support for working dads will surely help create a society where working mothers can shine.

<sup>1</sup> ILO, *Maternity and Paternity at Work*, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> OECD, *Policy Brief, Parental leave: Where are the father?*, 2016.