

# Fatherhood Drive Drives men Crazy

TOKYO—A baby smiles in the arms of a doting dad. “A man who does not help in child-rearing can’t be called a father,” the voice on the TV public announcement gently warns.

The Japanese government campaign that began last month had the best intentions: encouraging men to lend their wives a helping hand with children at a time when more and more women are holding jobs outside the home.

But the campaign proved a trifle too much for male-dominated Japan, where a government report released Friday found that husbands spend far less time cooking, cleaning or taking care of the children than do their American counterparts.

Exactly how controversial fatherhood can get in Japan couldn’t have had a more blatant reminder than the outburst over Tokyo’s fatherhood campaign.

The posters and TV segment set off a public wrangle, drawing protests from fuming men. And the topic is being taken up on TV talk shows as well as in a special “absent dads” series in the major *Asahi* newspaper.

“Of course there’s outrage,” said Kiichi Inoue, a lawmaker who opposes the campaign. “A parent-child relationship is not determined by child care.”

Inoue couldn’t help out around the house when his kids were young because he wasn’t home until midnight, he added.

“I’d have died,” he said in an interview at his parliamentary office.

## Longer Hours

According to Friday’s report, however, Japanese women work

longer hours than do their husbands. The women are burdened with work at home in addition to the office, totaling nearly 10 hours of work a day—one hour more than their husbands.

Japanese men spend a fifth of the time their wives spend on childcare and less than a tenth of that on housework. In contrast, American men did almost as much of the shopping and about half of the childcare and other



Japanese mom taking her children to school. Will dads take this role soon?

housework, said the “white paper” on sexual equality by the prime minister’s office.

“It was a battle to get my husband to help out with the kids,” said nurse Chieko Ota. “Japanese men tend to think only about their jobs and aren’t very interested in taking care of their children.”

The fatherhood campaign features Japan’s most famous father—the dancer-husband of singer Namie Amuro, who goes by the single name Sam. They had a baby boy last year.

The Health Ministry, which sponsored the 500 million yen (\$4.2 million) campaign, received letters and telephone calls of protests, demanding that the government stop meddling in private affairs.

## Men are busy

“Many men feel that they are very busy, they have to work late and can’t help with childcare even if they wanted to,” said ministry official Masaki Matsuoka.

Even Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi felt compelled to defend the campaign in Parliament as deepening his “awareness about men’s participation in child-rearing.”

Hiroyuki Nurusawa of the Tokyo advertising company I and S, which designed the campaign, said he received quite a bit of negative feedback from his coworkers.

“But others thanked us for coming out and saying it,” Nurusawa said.

A major motive for the campaign is the nation’s dwindling birth rate, now at a record low of 1.39 children per woman. Fearing that fewer babies will lead to shrinking prosperity, the government says women are avoiding pregnancy because of uncooperative dads.

## Takes two to tango

Tateo Hoshi, 50, of the Men’s Child Care Organization, a grassroots support group for fathers, acknowledged that Japanese men have come a long way, compared to 20 years ago.

“When I was seen carrying our child around, people thought I was out of my mind,” Hoshi said.

But fathers like Hoshi are still rare.

Japanese men average just 17 minutes a day taking care of their children, the campaign posters says, citing a 1996 government study.

“It takes two people to have children. But the mother seems to be raising them all by herself,” it said.

Source: Associated Press, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 April 1999