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TANSHINFUNIN : EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIOEMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Tanshinfunin, men's job relocation without being accompanied by their families, is one of the specific social phenomena impacting on fathering in Japan. This study examined the effects of the fathers' tanshinfunin on their children's socio-emotional development in comparison with children of fathers whose job relocation was accompanied with their families (Taidofunin). Conducting a follow up study after five years, this study also examined the long-termed effects of tanshinfunin. The fathers' physical absence did not have so much of a direct negative effects on their children's socio-emotional development, but the physical absence in addition to functional absence seemed to result in negative effects. The follow-up after five years indicated that fathers' long term absence weaken family integration and had negative effects on children's stress-coping.

Key Words: father absence, job-related transfer, tanshinfunin, children's socio-emotional development, family mental health

INTRODUCTION

The role of the father in a family

The importance of the father in the development of his children has been the topic of many sociological, psychological studies (Lamb, 1986, 1987, 1997). Among the many social changes brought about by economic development, tanshinfunin, or men's job relocation without being accompanied by their families, has been an important factor in taking the fathers away from modern Japanese family life, and as a consequence, further weakening the fathers' role in the socio-emotional development of their children. In this study, we focused on the effects of father absence on the child's socio-emotional development.

Father absence can be caused by the death, divorce, and job requirement of the fathers. As the reason for the absence of father in Tanshinfunin is different from other forms of father absence, it is assumed that its effect would be different on the members of the family.

In previous studies, the effects of father absence on child's socio-emotional development have been examined from four aspects: sex role, personality-social, moral, and intellectual development. The following are the summaries of two review papers addressing this issue (Furuichi, 1978; Lamb, 1981).

- (1) Sex role development: Boys who lose their father under 6 years old are less masculine than boys whose fathers are present. However, girls show no such differences.
- (2) Personality-social development: Father absent boys are either less aggressive or hyperaggressive (overcompensation).
- (3) Moral development: Father absent boys show lower moral development. The percentage of juvenile delinquent boys who lose their father under 6 years old is high.
- (4) Intellectual development: Father absent boys show lower math ability.

These results examined the effects of father absence from the point of view of direct effect of father absence as the loss of male model. However, there are also indirect effect, mediated by mother's behavior and presence or absence of other male models such as male siblings, uncle and so on. We would look into these aspects.

Tanshinfunin: Father absence in Japan

One of the social conditions impacting on fathering in Japan is the increasing tendency for middle-aged company men to be dispatched to places away from their families for extended period of time. Under this condition, many married men have to live by themselves away from their families in different town or city for various length of time, ranging from one to several years. This practice, called "Tanshinfunin", has become very common since 70's. According to the survey of the Ministry of Labor of Japan about 20% of new transferees are Tanshinfunin, and the percentage of Tanshinfunin has been increasing in recent years (Figure 1, Tanaka, 1992).

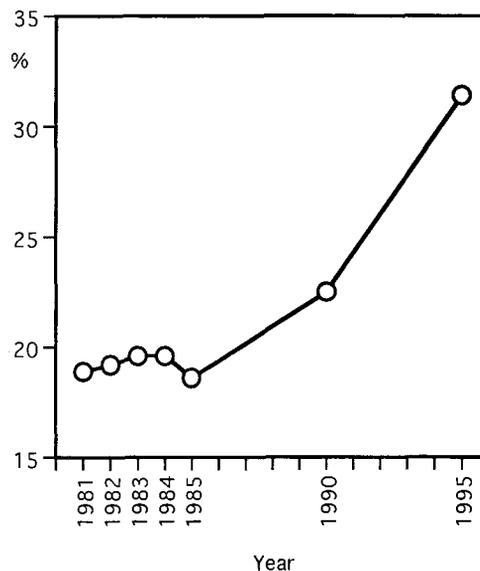


Figure 1 Percentage of Tanshinfunin in New Transferees. (Ministry of Labor; Tanaka, 1992)

In many instances, families are hesitant to move their children to a new school district, due to the great urgency associated with academic success and children's reluctance to leave their classmates and friends. In addition, owing to the general shortage of housing facilities and therefore the high cost for residence in Japan, it is impractical financially to obtain a second house large enough for the family when job requirement demands relocation to a new town or city. As a result, many company men leave their families behind and move to the new location alone (Shwalb, Imaizumi, & Nakazawa, 1987).

Our data from 1990-1995

There are studies that examined the Tanshinfunin men's psychological stress and its impact on their families (Tanaka, 1988). However, most of these studies addressed their questions to the Tanshinfunin men and their wives only but not to their children directly. The influence of the practice on their children's development was inferred from answers derived from the adults. It is our view that research taping the children's voice is required to reveal the true effects of their fathers' Tansinfunin on their development.

This study examined the children's socio-emotional problems of Tansinfunin men by comparing social-emotional problems of children whose fathers move to their new job location with their families. This latter practice is known as Taidofunin, arriving at one's new post with the family. This study also examined the effects of long term Tanshinfunin on children's socio-emotional development.

METHOD

Subjects

(1) Original survey at 1990:

Subjects were Japanese children from Tanshinfunin and Taidofunin families. Their age ranged from 11 years (Grade 5) to 18 years (high school). 229 children were from Tanshinfunin families (mean age 14.2); and 180 children were from Taidofunin families (mean age 13.8). Subjects were recruited by newspaper ads.

(2) Follow-up survey at 1995:

Five years after the original survey, a follow-up survey was carried out. We managed to obtain information from 75 children from Tanshinfunin families, and 41 children from Taidofunin families. Children from Tanshinfunin families were divided to two groups: the Prolonged Tanshinfunin group (n=26) whose fathers were still living apart from their families, and the Rejoined group (n=49) whose fathers terms for Tanshinfunin had ended and fathers were living with their families.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire, designed to find out about social norm, stress symptom, cognition of parents, and changes in family atmosphere, was used in these two surveys.

RESULT

Principal component factor analyses with Varimax rotation on each variable were conducted. A 2 (father's relocation type: Tanshinfunin or Taidofunin) x 3 (subject age: Elementary, Junior High or Senior High) x 2 (gender of subjects: Boy or Girl)

ANOVAs was performed on these factor scores in the first survey.

In addition, a 3 (father's relocation type : Taidofunin, Prolonged Tanshinfunin, or Rejoin) x 4 (subject's age : Junior High, Senior High, College or over) ANOVAs on these factor scores in the follow-up survey.

The original survey of 1990 (Nakazawa, Nakazawa, & Tanaka, 1992)

Table 1 summarized the results of the original survey. We selected only results with statistic significance with regard to the relocation type.

With respect to Social Norm, the degree to which Tanshinfunin children permit early delinquent behavior such as smoking, drinking, truancy, was grater than that of the Taidofunin children. A Relocation type x Gender interaction was also found. Among Tanshinfunin subjects, the degree to which boys permit early delinquent behaviors was greater than that of the girls, while among Taidofunin subjects, there were no gender difference (Figure 2). A Relocation type x Subject Age interaction was found, while Junior High Tanshinfunin children showed greater tolerance of interpersonal problem behavior such as not complying with parents and teachers, quarrelling and fighting with peers, not such relocation type differences in elementary and senior high school children were found.

With regard to Stress Symptom, Taidofunin children were found to feel greater loneliness (eg. 'I feel lonely.', or 'I think I am alone.') than Tanshinfunin children.

Relocation type x Subject Age interaction showed Taidofunin elementary school children perceived their health condition more negatively (eg. 'I am tired all the time.', or 'I have lost appetite.') than Tanshinfunin elementary children, but no difference was

Table 1 Summary Results of Original Survey

	Relocation Type	Subject Age	Gender
Social Norm			
Early Delinquent Behavior	Boy : Tanshin > Taido, Girl : ns	EL < JH < SH	
Interpersonal Problem Behavior	JH : Tanshin > Taido, EL, SH : ns	EL < JH < SH	
Social Rule Deviation			Boy > Girl

Psychological Stress			
Anxiety		EL < JH = SH	
Irritation		EL < JH = SH	
Loneliness	Tanshin < Taido	EL < SH	
Unstableness			Boy > Girl
Physical Fatigue	EL : Tanshin < Taido, JH, SH : ns		Boy > Girl

Cognition of Parents			
Father			
Strictness		EL < JH = SH	
Acceptance	Tanshin > Taido		
Reliable Worker			
Lax		EL < JH = SH	
Mother			
Strictness			
Acceptance	EL : Tanshin < Taido, SH : Tanshin > Taido	EL > SH	
Lax			

Family Change			
Positive Change	Tanshin > Taido		
Negative Change	Tanshin > Taido		
Family Role	Tanshin > Taido	EL < SH	Boy > Girl

EL : Elementary School Children, JH : Junior High School Children, SH : Senior High School Children

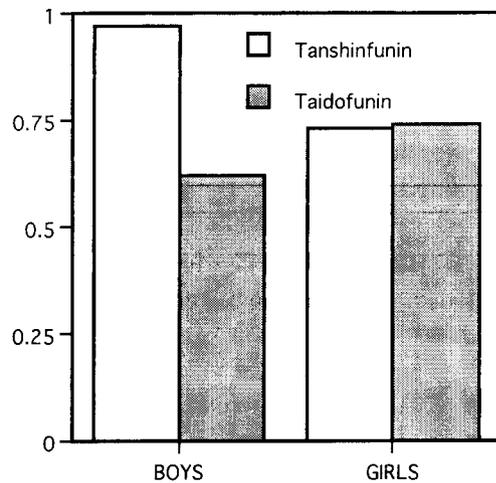


Figure 2 Children's permission about early delinquent behavior.

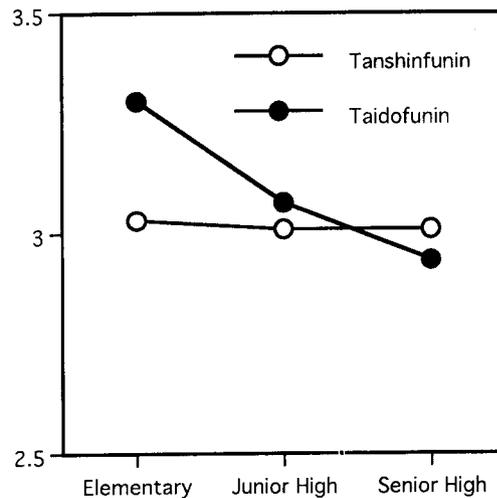


Figure 3 Children's acceptance of mother.

found between those two groups in junior and senior high school children.

In Cognition of Father, Tanshinfunin children tended to perceive their fathers as more acceptable (eg. 'I find it easy to talk to my father.', 'My father understands me.') than Taidofunin children.

In Cognition of Mother, no developmental change in Tanshinfunin children was found, whereas Taidofunin children's acceptance of mother (eg. 'I feel easy to talk to my mother.', 'My mother understands me.') decreased with age (Figure 3).

In Family Change, Tanshinfunin children perceived their family changed positively ('I talk with mother and father more than before.', 'My mother can rely on me.') as well as negatively ('My family became gloomy.', 'Minds and behaviors of my family members became scattered.') greater than Taidofunin children. Tanshinfunin children's family

role ('Role assignment to each family member is increasing.', 'I became more able to help with household affairs.') was also greater than that of Taidofunin children.

Follow Up Survey at 1995

Table 2 summarized the results of the follow-up study of 1995. We also selected only 'significant results' in relation to relocation grouping.

In Social Norm, there was no difference among the groups.

In Stress Symptom, A Group x Subjects Age interaction was found: Prolonged group felt more languor/loneliness (eg. 'I feel monotonous every day.', 'I have nothing to live for.', 'I think I am alone.', 'I feel lonely.') with age; Rejoined group felt it less with age. There was not so much developmental change in Taidofunin group (Figure 4).

In regard to Cognition of Father, no difference among groups was found.

In regard to Cognition of Mother, junior high school children and college/university students of the Rejoined group perceived their mothers as reliable workers(eg. 'She sets everything right.', 'She works hard.').

In Family Change, Rejoined children perceived their family a undergoing negative change (eg. 'My family becomes gloomy.', 'Minds and behaviors of my family members becomes scattered.') less than the other two groups. Rejoined college students perceived their families as loosening/freely change (eg. 'My family becomes behave freely.',

Table 2 Summary Results of Follow Up Survey

	Relocation Type	Subject Age
Social Norm		
Adult Norm		JH > SH > CS > W
General Norm		JH > SH = CS = W

Psychological Health		
Stress		
Physical Fatigue		JH = SH > CS < W
Languor/Loneliness	W: Rejoin < Prolonged > Taido	JH = SH = CS < W
Lack of Self Efficacy		
Unstableness		
Irritation		JH = SH > CS < W

Cognition of Parents		
Father		
Acceptance		JH = SH < CS > W
Reliable Worker		
Strictness		
Lax		
Mother		
Acceptance		JH = SH < CS > W
Strictness		
Reliable Worker	JH, CS: Rejoin > Prolonged = Taido	
Lax		JH = SH > CS < W

Family Change		
Positive Change		
Negative Change	Rejoin < Prolonged > Taido	
Loosing/Freely Change	CS: Rejoin < Prolonged = Taido	
Family Role		

JH: Junior High School Children, SH: Senior High School Children, CS: College and University Student Children, W: Working Children

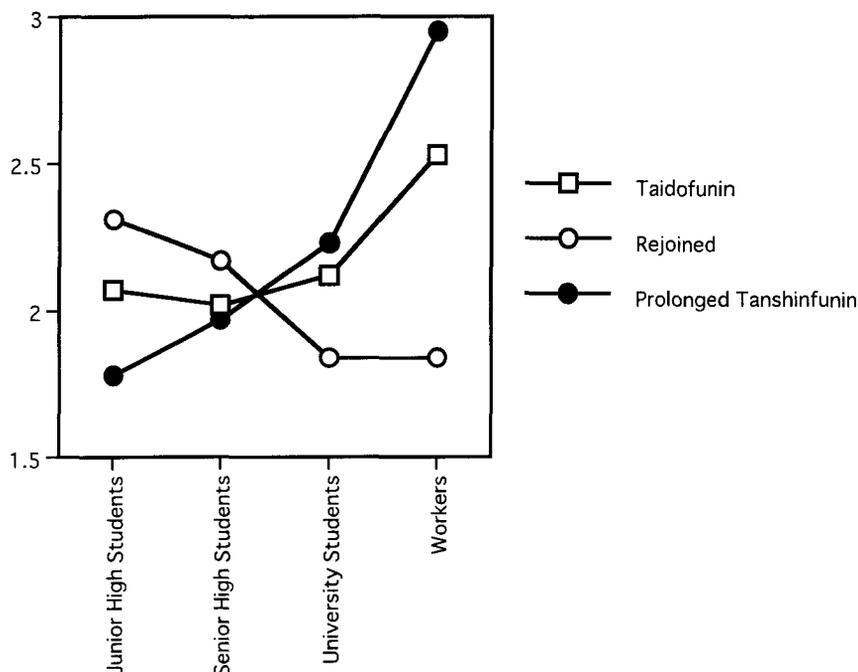


Figure 4 Children's perceived languor/loneliness.

'Behaviors of my family members becomes loosening.') less than another two groups.

DISCUSSION

Original Survey

Tanshinfunin children, especially boys, permitted early delinquent behavior and junior high Tanshinfunin children showed greater permission of interpersonal problem behavior. It showed when fathers living apart, children's social norm turn to deviate. These data are accord with former father absence studies.

Tanshinfunin children perceived their fathers as acceptable. When Tanshinfunin fathers go back to home they may accept what their children do and say.

Tanshinfunin families showed positive or negative atmosphere change and increase of family member's role. Tanshinfunin caused coping behavior of families such as positive change and increasing family role, but it also caused negative change of family atmosphere and deviation of children's social norm.

Taidofunin children feel loneliness and Taidofunin elementary school children feel physical condition badly. Because their family moved to new town, they have to adjust new environment, new school, new friend and so on. It is very stressful events for them.

Taidofunin children also want their mothers to concern about them. It showed mother-child relationships in Taidofunin family is weaker than that of Tanshinfunin family's. It is said that there are different effects of father's relocation type on their children's psychological problems.

Follow Up Survey

Prolonged Tanshinfunin family children feel languor/loneliness and perceived their family bad change with age. When children became later adolescent and get their job, each family member behaves his/her own schedule and their family become to lose unity. It caused the difficulty of dependence and made them feel languor/loneliness.

Rejoined family children perceived their mothers as reliable worker. It may be because their mothers protected and maintained their home/family while fathers were out. In this group, college students perceived their family as least losing/freely change, and workers feels the least languor/loneliness. Father's back may reestablish in family order, repressed losing, and make family cohesiveness.

There were not specific features of Taidofunin children. As they have lived same place more than 5 years, they almost adjusted their situation.

Japanese Father Absence

(1) Effects of the Tanshinfunin on children

The number of significant developmental effects are greater than that of father's relocation effects. Tanshinfunin dose not have disruptive father absence effect as Western studies reviewed before (Furuich, 1978; Lamb, 1981). There are two reasons.

First, comparing Western father absent studies derived from death and divorce, Tanshinfunin is a relatively slight father absence. In Tanshinfunin, most of children are over 6 years old, usually over junior high students. Children can meet their father regularly and talk with him easily by phone. The term of Tanshinfunin is usually 3-5 years. Even children participate the decision process of choosing Tanshinfunin. Family economical condition is relatively stable. Usually Tanshinfunin leads father's promotion in the company. These futures are differ from father absence by divorce or death.

Second, Japanese family relationships differ from that of Western's. In Japan, family managed child centered. Parent-child relationship regards more important than husband-wife relationship. Mother-child relationship also regards more important than father-child relationship. Thus, father's physical absence dose not have heavy negative effect on children.

(2) Comparison with Western temporary father absence studies.

There are some Western studies that examine the effect of work related father absence. In these studies, temporary/intermittent father absence in military and petroleum worker's family is examined. For example, Hiew(1992) found military father's absent adolescent children used inappropriate coping with increased risk for delinquent activities and poorer school adjustment.

Comparing these Western temporary absence studies, our subjects had not so much negative effect of Tanshinfunin. Japanese family is daily managed like father absence. Long distant commuting father, workaholic father, and fixed gender role (Male-working, Female-child rearing) is daily pictures in Japanese family. There are not so much differences between Tanshinfunin families and non-Tanshinfunin families. That is another reason, we cannot find heavy negative Tanshinfunin effects.

(3) Excessive pressure for mothers about child rearing

As the results of regarding mother-child relationship, Japanese mothers experienced

excessive social pressure about child rearing. Tanaka, Nakazawa, & Nakazawa (1993, 1994, 1996) found the Tanshinfunin mothers' child care anxiety accounted for twice as much variance in their stress reaction, compared with Taidofunin mothers'. Tanshinfunin child's early delinquent behavior influenced their mothers' child care anxiety and stress. In addition, Tanshinfunin mothers recognized that their spouse's father/husband role performance affected children's problem behavior and her stress.

These data suggest that physical father absence does not have so much of a direct negative effect on their families' well-being, but physical absence in addition to functional absence lead to more child's problem behavior, and mother's child-care anxiety or negative stress.

In nuclear family, mothers who have not any social support, experienced much stress and child rearing anxiety. It is difficult to depend traditional community support systems, because they have already broken.

(4) Prolonged Tanshinfunin and functional defect of family

However there are not so many negative effects of Tanshinfunin, five years follow-up suggest prolonged Tanshinfunin lead adolescent workers' stress response. Long term fathers absence may weaken family integration and family function such as mutual psychological support.

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