

Factors that Empower Mothers of Children with Severe Motor and Intellectual Disabilities who Attend School in Japan

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Background: From an international perspective, Japan's neonatal mortality rate is low. However, children needing daily medical care (i.e., children with motor and intellectual disabilities (SMID)) also need to be considered. In Japan, mothers are the main caregivers for children, and because of a lack of support systems, they encounter a range of difficulties in child-rearing. When a child starts with school, it can be a time of worry for mothers in regards to responding to any changes in the child's well-being due to changes in the environment and the process of managing this with the school.

Aim: To clarify the factors that empower mothers of school-attending children with SMID to consider support to mother.

Method: An interview survey was conducted between August and November 2017 with eight mothers of school-attending children with SMID. The data were analyzed using qualitative and inductive methods. The research was approved by the affiliated university's ethics committee.

Results: Seven categories were extracted from 198 codes. The main factors empowering mothers were "medical staff responses based on professional judgment," "skilled school staff who can be entrusted with childcare without worry," "having time away from family tension," "feeling that school is important for the child," "the child's growth," "peer support," and "aiming for improvement by trial and error." "Aiming for improvement by trial and error" meant that mothers were fighting to ensure the best environment for their children because they were dissatisfied with the care provided by the school system.

Conclusion: It is important that mothers feel connected with specialists and other mothers and are able to track their child's development while also having free time. The main finding of this research was that "aiming for improvement by trial and error" itself also made a contribution to mothers' empowerment.