

*18th Leave Policies and Research  
Annual Seminar 16.–17. September  
2021, Helsinki*

---

Politics of Parental Leave Policies in  
Japan:  
Ideals and Realities in the reform to  
promote fathers' take-up

Hideki Nakazato  
Konan University  
nakazato@konan-u.ac.jp

---

This is a preliminary draft and based on the content to be submitted to a journal. Please do not cite this without the permission of the author.



---

# Introduction

---

❖ 2000s

There is an increasing concern in promoting fathers' take-up of parental leave in Japan,

2010s

This social and political climate was accelerated.

Politicians, employers, trade unions, and not-for-profit organizations share an ideal to achieve this.

But

Conflicting interests and goals seem to hinder a co-ordinated policy design



---

# This presentation

---

Examine:

- ❖ the common and conflicting goals of various actors,
- ❖ the process that have produced the current policy outcome,
- ❖ how the policy making process and actors changed over time



---

# Japanese Mystery?

---

- ❖ The generous provision of paid parental leave to fathers
- ❖ Low take-up rate

(Unicef Report 2019)



---

# The statutory Parental Leave scheme

---

- ❖ Ikuji Kyūgyō (child care leave) introduced in 1992
- ❖ Employed parents can take paid leave until the day before their child becomes a year old.
- ❖ Eligible even if their spouses are not working or are on leave (2010-)
- ❖ Leave can be extended to a maximum of 14 months from the child's birth if both parents take some of the leave (Papa Mama Ikukyu Plus= Dad and Mum Childcare Leave Plus)) (2010-) (still 12 months max. for each parent)



---

# The statutory Parental Leave scheme (continued.)

---

- ❖ The leave benefit: 67% of earnings **for the first 6 months for each parent.**
- ❖ The rate goes down to 50 % afterwards.

(Before April 2014, it was 50 per cent for the whole period)



---

# The statutory Parental Leave scheme (continued.)

---

## Special Extension

- ❖ From 2005, leave and payment can be extended until a child was 18 months (for each parent)

## Conditions

1) the child needed care for a period of two weeks or more because of injury, sickness, etc.; or

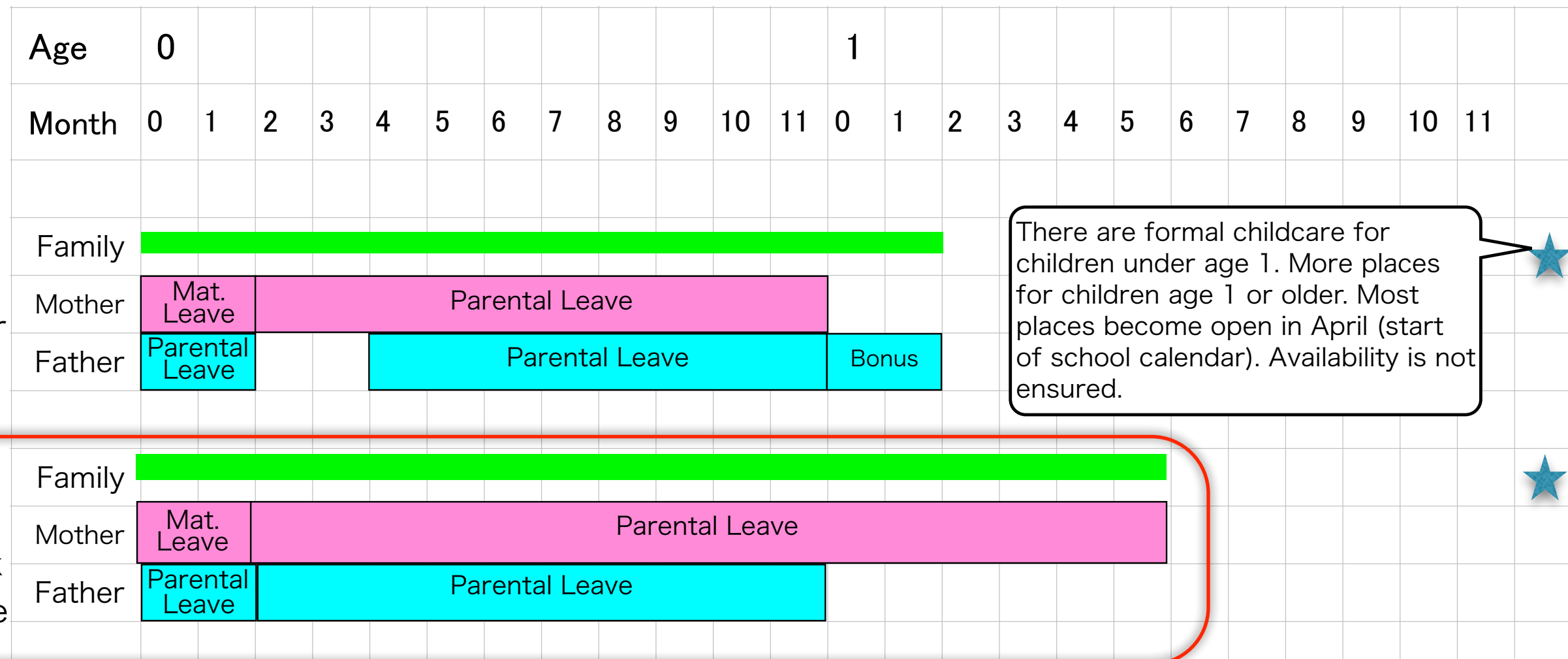
2) admission to a childcare centre has been requested but denied for the time being,



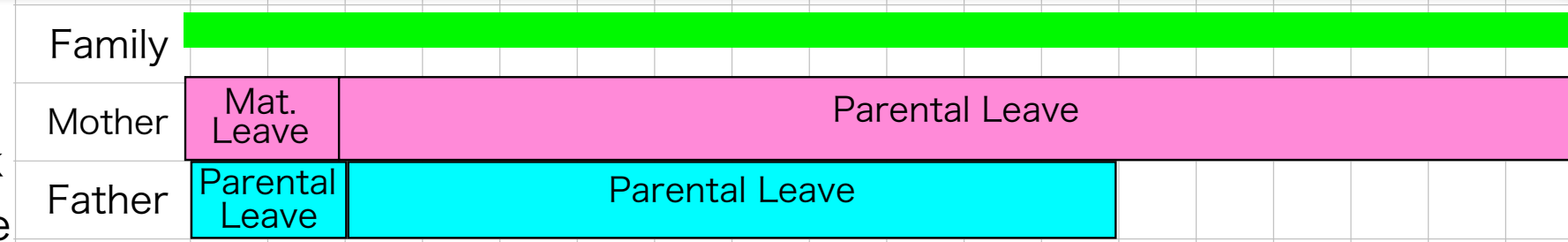
# Length of paid leave period for a father

★ Age for ECEC Entitlement

Japan  
Without  
Extension for  
the lack of  
childcare



With  
extension  
for the lack  
of childcare



- ❖ When the extension in case of no availability of childcare places is used by the mother:

Father's taking leave does not extend the total leave period for family

- ❖ From 2017, another extension from 18 months to 24 months was added.



---

# The statutory Parental Leave scheme (continued.)

---

In June 2021, another amendment bill of the Childcare and Family Care Act was passed. (To be enforced in 2022)

- ❖ Introduction of 4 weeks of **paternity leave** called Shusshōji Ikuji Kyūgyō (Childcare Leave on Birth) during the first eight weeks after birth, which can be **taken by two segments. Announced as “Daisei Sankyu (Male post-natal leave)”**



---

# The statutory Parental Leave scheme (continued.)

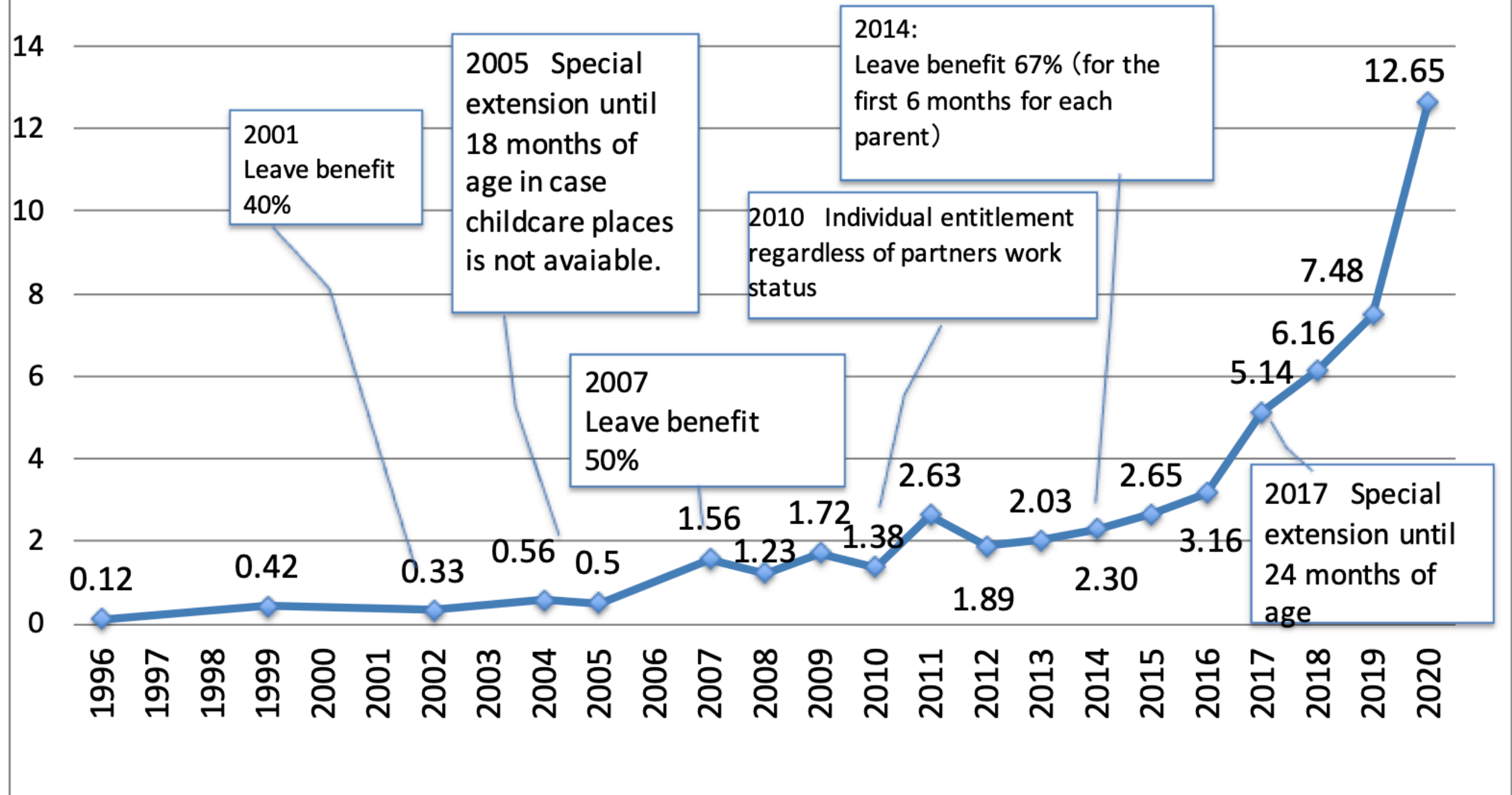
---

## 2021 amendment (continued)

- **Parental leave** after this period can now **be taken in two segments**
- ❖ Employers are required to provide prospective new parents with information about their leave entitlement and confirm the employee's intention to take parental leave.



## Proportion of eligible fathers who took parental leave (%)



\*The 'eligible fathers' here represent male employees whose wives gave births within one year before the survey.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 'Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management' in 1996, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2007–2020.

Increasing (doubled in last 2 yrs) but still low

and short 28.3% <5 days



---

## Existing studies: Causes of the low leave uptake rate of fathers

---

- ❖ Lack of information about the leave entitlement for fathers
- ❖ The **atmosphere** and the situation at the workplace that discourage fathers from taking leave
- ❖ Only partially successful synthesis and messy policy transfer (Windwehr et al. 2021)
- ❖ Some adjustments such as **the special extension of leave** to cover the shortage of childcare were necessary, which may, in fact, **deteriorate the purpose of the father quota** (Windwehr et al. 2021)



---

# Research Questions

---

- ❖ How this complicated (and uncoordinated) leave system have been developed in terms of policy making processes?
- ❖ Are the recent amendments directed to systematic design of leave scheme?



---

# Data for the current analyses

---

- ❖ Proceedings of :
  - the National Diet [the Japanese Parliament]
  - the Labour Policy Council [a body composed of representatives of public interests, workers and employers, offering advice on labour policies to the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare]
  - The related research committees of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.
- ❖ Web articles and books related to the actions to influence the amendment outside the formal policymaking listed above.

(Amendments in 2014 and earlier are covered in Nakazato (2019))



---

# Introduction of statutory unpaid Parental Leave (1992)

---

- ❖ Under LDP conservative government
- ❖ Repeated efforts to introduce legislation of paid parental leave, with advocates referring to research on European countries and recommendations by international organisations.
- ❖ Important advocates:
  - 1980s: Japan Socialist Party and opposition parties, the trade unions
  - 1990-: LDP
- ❖ Veto points: Japan Federation of Employers' Associations
- ❖ Common goal: Enable women to bear child and stay in labour force



---

# Introduction of leave benefit 25% (1995)

---

- ❖ The Women and Youth Affairs Council
  - ↓ recommendation
- ❖ the Central Employment Security Council
  - ↓
- ❖ the National Diet



---

# Special extension of leave period (2005)

---

- ❖ The Labour Policy Council (the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW))→ the National Diet
- ❖ Common goal: to help parents to stay at home when they could not find a childcare place. Opportunity for longer leave



---

# Sharing bonus ‘Papa Mama Ikukyu Plus’ (2010)

---

- ❖ Research Committee on Future Support of Work and Family (the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare): five academics from law, economics, sociology and management, a newspaper reporter, a trade union official and a HR manager



- ❖ Labour Policy Council



- ❖ the National Diet



---

# Sharing bonus ‘Papa Mama Ikukyu Plus’ (2010)

---

- ❖ Research Committee on Future Support of Work and Family (the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare): five academics from law, economics, sociology and management, a newspaper reporter, a trade union official and a HR manager



- ❖ Labour Policy Council → National Diet
- ❖ Common Goal

Promoting fathers' take-up of parental leave

- ❖ Conflict: Length of bonus months



---

## The leave benefit: 67% of earnings for the first 6 months for each parent (2014)

---

- ❖ MHLW→ the National Diet

- ❖ Common Goal

Promoting fathers' take-up of parental leave

- ❖ Conflict: the level of benefit, funding



---

# Amendments in 2017

---

- ❖ Another extension **from 18 months to 24 months was added to the special extension** from 12 months to 18 months, in case that admission to a childcare centre has been requested but denied for the time being.
- ❖ "Economic Measures to Realize Investment for the Future" (approved by the Cabinet on August 2, 2016)  
→ the Labour Policy Council (the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW)) → the National Diet



---

# Amendments in 2017

---

- ❖ Concerns about another extension were expressed and suggestions that this should be taken by another parent (mostly a father) were made by the Council members (and lawmakers in opposition parties in a Diet meeting)
  - ❖ A council member representing employers' associations expressed her opposition. "If we say that part of the extension is to be taken by the other sex, it is the same as making it compulsory for the other sex"
- Added as a supplementary resolution of the amended act to address the concerns and opinions expressed in the process.



---

# Amendments in 2021

---

- ❖ Four weeks of paternity leave (formerly included as part of parental leave)
- ❖ Some more flexibilities
- ❖ Employers are required to provide prospective new parents with information about their leave entitlement and confirm the employee's intention to take parental leave.
- ❖ **Fundamental issue (the special extension of leave to cover the shortage of childcare were necessary, which may deteriorate the purpose of the father quota) were discussed in the Research Committee and the Council, but was not addressed in the final amendment bill.**



---

# Amendments in 2021

---

- ❖ Items for consideration in Labour Policy Council are set outside, i.e. by the Cabinet
- ❖ "Project Team for Mandatory Male Childcare Leave" (a private organization rooted from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's Ikumen [male carer] Project) → the Liberal Democratic Party project team → Government (cabinet) plans



---

# Conclusion

---

Difficulty in designing parental leave scheme elaborately

- ❖ Small presence of opposition parties in presenting alternative plan
- ❖ Decreasing power of the bureaucracy of MHLW, its research committees and deliberate councils.
- ❖ Increasing power of Cabinet Office and Cabinet Secretariat



---

# References

---

- ❖ Boling, Patricia. 2015. *The politics of work-family policies : comparing Japan, France, Germany, and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ❖ Chzhen, Yekaterina, Gwyther Rees, and Anna Gromada. 2019. "Are the world's richest countries family friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU." Innocenti Research Report.
- ❖ Matsuda, Shigeki. 2012. "Soredemo Dansei no Ikujikyugyo ga Fuenai Riyu [The Reason Why Fathers Leave Take-up Would not Increase]." *Life Design Report* (201):32-34.
- ❖ Morita, M. (2008). Chichi-oya ha ikuji-kyugyo wo toritainoka? [Do fathers want to take parental leave?]. In R. Yamato, S. Onode, & K. Nachiko (Eds.), *Otoko no ikuji, onna no ikuji: Kazoku shakaigaku karano apurochi*[Men's and women's childcare: a family-sociological approach, Showa-do, pp. 181–205.
- ❖ Nakazato, Hideki. 2019. "Japan: Leave policy and attempts to increase fathers' take-up." Pp. 91-109 in *Parental leave and beyond: recent developments, current issues, future directions*, edited by Peter Moss, Ann-Zofie Duvander, and Alison Koslowski: Policy Press.
- ❖ Windwehr, Jana, Ann-Zofie Duvander, Anne Lise Ellingsæter, Guðný Björk Eydal, Živa Humer, and Hideki Nakazato. 2021. "The Nordic Model of Father Quotas in Leave Policies: A Case of Policy Transfer?" *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*.