

A critical evaluation comparing some key issues that impact on children's lives in two contrasting countries and cultures.

In contrast with the past centuries, the concept of childhood has been evolved disparately to increase more focus on the care and education of children (Unicef, no date). The development has enhanced the professionalization on both aspects, besides, it centralized more on the holistic development and the well-being of the child starting from the twentieth century (Sandin, 1995). The Unicef (2005) and UNESCO (no date) has determined childhood as the period from birth to the age of eight, where the individual has the necessity to be cared and protected according to their immaturity. Moreover, it is also seen as the critical period to the fulfillment of the individual's cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language development. Which childhood was also defined to be the stage where the individual should be provided the care of meeting the physiological and safety needs in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Children should have the opportunity to be educated, to play, to feel safe and be healthy during their early years of developments (Unicef, 2005).

However, as the needs and the rights of children have improved during these two centuries, the society and the mass media has created new pictures of children and its meaning of childhood. The perspective and expectations from adults and the society to children's abilities, futures, and their giveback to the society have enhanced simultaneously with their provisions to children (The International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2012). Children therefore have more circumstances nowadays that have to deal with different types of emotional pressures from their surroundings. In this article, the centralized issues that will be discussed in-depth are the disparities of mental health and emotional well-beings of children from Japan and Finland. Where the difference between those cultural aspects, traditional ethics, rights, supports, care and schooling experiences will be reflected on. Besides, the differentiated provision in the two pedagogical approaches in these two countries will also be discussed.

In the report of the World Happiness Report 2018, Finland has been measured to be the best happiest country out of 156 countries in 2018, by measuring their happiness

levels, their satisfaction of life, their well-beings, as well as the happiness of their immigrants (Helliwell et al., 2018 and World Happiness Report, 2018). Despite the fact that Finland has reached the top of the happiest country in the world, researches often show Japan as one of the highest rates of suiciding country. Report from the World Health Organization (2018) presented Japan as the 18th highest country over the world with the rate of 19.7 suicides per 100k this year, which in another word there is an average of one in four, nearly one quarter of Japanese have decided to suicide (Ross, 2017 and WHO, 2018). The results from the World Happiness Report 2018 analyses that Finland has moved from the fifth happiest country from last year's report to the top in 2018, by the increase of 0.100%, where Japan has decreased 0.012% from 51th to 54th (Helliwell et al., 2017a and Helliwell et al., 2018). The disparities of people's emotional well-being in between the two countries are interrogative. Although the researches are not centralized on children's well-being, the societal issues and their social trends could still affect children's live as they are becoming a kind of culture and tradition where children learn and follows.

The Mental Health Foundation (2018b) has determinate that mental health problems could range from everyday worries to long-term conditions. Where the most common mental health problems often include the mixed in anxiety, depression, self-harm, generalized anxiety disorder and conduct disorder in childhood. The major factors that cause children to result mental health issues are the lack of self-esteem and confidence, the lack of good physical health, the lack of emotional secure, and the long-term pressure from surroundings for example bullying or abuse (Mental Health Foundation, 2018a).

In the report from Lim (2017) analyses that bullying in schools and cyber bullying are one of the reasons that keeps children and youngsters' suicide rate high in Japan. The report mentioned that although there was a passage of Anti-Bullying Legislation in 2013 in Japan, bullying in school is still a major issue with an increase of 19% of school bullying statements reported from 2016 to 2017, more than 320000 cases (Kyodo News, 2017). Bullying during schooling experience has become one of the most major issues that cause children under long-term pressure and mental health problems in Japan (Wingfield-Hayes, 2015). Undeniable the fact that bullying occurs in every school setting around the world, the frequency of bullying is

particularly high and is increasing in Japan which leads to a wariness consideration in this seriousness circumstance. A report from BBC News (2006) claimed that bullying is part of school life in Japan. The most common types of bullying that occur the most are ridicule and slander, from the average of 62.5% in 2017 (Kyodo News, 2017). In 2016, the Human Rights Watch report discovered that young children in Japanese schools had experienced physical and verbal bullying, harassment and continuous insults from both peers and staffs. Moreover, the research also discovered that bullying that includes physical violent actions and money related cases are also growing in elementary schools. The study from Eryk (2013) convinced that the most common reason that will cause bullying happens in Japan is when an individual appears to be the differentiated being in the group. Reasons including gender differentiation, ability differentiation, stereotypical views on individuals, or when surroundings and status changes could cause children being involved in bullying in Japan. These include situations such as having a new comer in class, an individual has unique and specialist skills or personality, or even when the individual's background or family status is not similar to the rest of the group. Beyond, bullying is also found to occur easily when individual is jealous or fear of something (Kyodo, 2017). For example, as stated by the reports from Hoffman (2017), Yokohama (2017) and Wilson and Funakoshi (2017), Fukushima child evacuees were found being bullied because of peers and their families' fear of the possibilities of infection of radiation that had affected individuals from the Fukushima seven years ago. In addition, student that maintains an easy-going and cooperative personality often seems to be the victim of group bullying in Japanese schools.

A study from Yoneyama (2015) explained some cultural aspects that were believed to be the main cause of this serious societal issue in the community. The study analysed that in the Japanese society, being part of the group is a particularly significant approbatory in Japan's social and societal communication norms. Fitting into the team is highly valued, where conforming with others in the group and maintaining similarities in values, actions and perspectives are more admired and appreciated in their culture rather than having differences and being unique as self. Conformity in Japan is extremely high valued over individualism, which has also started to be extreme and intense that the society has lead individuals to blindly follow the trends and obey its norms so they will not be isolated or removed from the

community (Mino, no date). Individuals are modeled to act and think alike each other in the group. The consideration of right and wrong, black-and-white have been ambiguous due to this society propensity. In addition, individuals became uneasy, worried and anxious to convey their own thoughts deep down, where they tend to follow the masses even though it is antithetical with their own values (Luck, 2017 and Yoneyama, 2015). Simultaneously, the Japanese culture also values the respects and reverences to each other and especially to the older ones. A study from Mino (no date) considered that although this courtesy of manner is very virtuous, but it also hid the constrained emotions behind obedient. The study from Eryk (2013) concluded that this rule-oriented society tradition in Japan has caused individual difficulty on expressing themselves. Their deep-down values and true feelings were found hard to listen, valued and expressed when there is limited or nowhere to convey. Consequently, raising worries on emotional well-beings and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression on individuals.

In addition, the study also emphasized that the hidden structure of Japanese education, where the group emphasis and consistency tends to foster the culture of isolating the outlying individuals (Kawano, 2016). Study from Shinkichi (2012) provided insights on some historical perspectives about why bullying has become so common and usual in Japan. The study explained that in the lean years in Japan they were following the World War II. During that period of time violence, crime and abusive behavior were extremely common comparing to nowadays. The bullying and abusive behaviors were considered to be the symbol of strong and powerful. This concept proceeds to their next generations and children were then educated that it is better to be the bully than to be bullied. The reports from Mino (no date) and Shinkichi (2012) interpreted that these society norms are causing children to join the bullying so they could keep the attention away from themselves. Either to be one of the onlookers of audience – those who enjoy or encourage the bullies on actions, or the bystanders – those who pretend they did not see what is going on or pretend they do not know what is happening. The reports claimed that there are limited cases of students defending the victims. Instead, there are numerous facts discovered about students hiding bullying from adults, even the victims, where they tend not to tell anybody about it. Which in consequence, teachers, and parents often found it hard to perceive any signs of happenings so then to conduct actions to prevent or help

those individuals (Kawano, 2016).

However, researches from Taki (2001) determined that another reason that bullying became so common in Japan is because teachers and the school institutions were found not possessing enough training and knowledge to handle bullying problems. In the research, a survey investigated that 70% of the teachers were found that the time limited and the opportunity finite are stopping them to take actions even though they want to do more to prevent any forms of bullying happen in the class. Furthermore, report from The Japan Times (2018b) indicated that teachers were hesitant to report bullying as many of them do not think they are confident or possess the skills and abilities to deal with these cases. Most of them will then choose to ignore the happenings to build up a defense to these behaviors. This resulted in that most victims do not feel comfortable or be useful to inform the teachers about the incidents. Simultaneously, schools were also found of hiding bullying cases from the outsiders, or not handling or valuing children's reports earnestly. Eryk (2013) explains that these situations exist because those institutions want to avoid having bad reputations from the mass media, so then the school will not be affected on receiving fewer newcomers on the following year. Even when the Anti-Bullying Act 2013 came into force in Japan, which then requires every education institutions to make actions on preventing bullying and to regularly investigate suspected of bullying cases; illustrating that schools and local authorities have their responsibilities to possess a bullying acts and policies in their property; as well as requiring teachers to report and support the investigation on bullying cases (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2013a; MEXT, 2013b and MEXT, 2013c), the incidents where teachers or schools trying to avoid taking the responsibilities in happenings were still found existing (Kawano, 2016).

Consequently, all of the above cultural and sociological cause of issues retained the high rate of bullying happening in Japan, which are causing concerns of children maintaining unhealthy emotional well-beings, or may even causing children mental health issues such as depression, generalized anxiety disorder or conduct disorders. However, studies from Luck (2017) indicated that children were found hard to gain appropriate supports and help in regard to mental health well-beings in Japan. As one of the major problems is that the mental health care system in Japan has an acute

shortage of psychiatrist professionals and government supports in such areas. And yet, most of the individuals are not aware of the essentialness, or in another word they do not know when and where to get help, as the cultural norms of seeking help from ‘outsiders’ are not particularly encouraged in Japan. Besides, committing the fact of having mental health problems are still being seen as a kind of weakness in the culture. Individuals will then rather keep everything to themselves than seeking help from others, as they want to avoid to possibilities of being treat as the ‘special one’ who is not similar to the group, to avoid any isolations or further issues.

But in contrast with the society norms and trends in Finland, researches and the united nations reports often observed that residents in Finland are one of the most open-minded people who promote the most non-discriminating behavior in the world (Helliwell et al., 2017b). The BBC News (2018) reported that the immigrants’ happiness level in Finland is the highest in the world out of 117 countries. These studies show people’s equality and their non-discrimination values are differentiated from the Japanese’s conformity culture as they are more open-minded and acceptance. Which could than explains why the Finns are maintaining a better metal health well-being than the Japanese, as they will not have to worried about the ‘consequences’ of committing the fact of having mental health problems and could gain appropriate supports and treatments from an early stage. Moreover, the UNICEF (2016) remarks that children in Finland have the second lowest inequality among the world. Save the Children (2017) also detailed that children in Finland have the third most secure childhood in the world. Besides, their 2016 report identified that Finnish children’s well-being is the second best in the world (Save the Children, 2016).

In the reports from the Freedom House (2018a and 2018 b), Finland is determined as the freest country in the world together with Norway and Sweden, with the aggregate score of 100 out of 100, as well as scoring the ‘most free’ data in the freedom rating. Simultaneously, Finland was also analyzed as the country that promotes most personal freedom and choices for residents around the world (Reports Without Borders, 2017). These data all showed children in Finland experience incidents of bullying much lesser than other countries in the world (The Global Happiness Council, 2018), which were explained as one of the reasons they maintain good mental health well-being. Besides, another reason is that the government in Finland values and promotes

appropriate supports to patient who suffers from mental issues form an early stage, and yet they have a more well planned mental treatment system than to the Japanese's system (Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, 2016).

Besides the mental health and well-being system in Finland, their educational system is also observed as providing one of the best quality in fulfilling and educating children and young persons around the world (Global Competitiveness Index, 2018). In Finland, under their Basic Education Act 1998 (Finland Government, 2011) and their education policy, equal opportunities and fundamental rights are the basic in the system. The compulsory education in Finland starts at the age of seven, and lasts for nine years to the age of sixteen. Where in Japan, their educational system follows under the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law. Compulsory education starts from the age of five and last for eight years (Kumagai, no date). Both of the countries provide similar length of compulsory education and student could proceed education for three years of secondary education, then to higher education. However, in Finland, students do not have to pay for tuition fees in the whole educational process, where even in private schools, they are under requirements from the law to follow and provide the same strategy as the publicly funded school. Where private schools could not select or stream students, nor allowing tracking to happen in children's education (Population Europe Resource Finder & Archive, 2014). As in the Finnish's educational system, national tests of learning outcomes nor any school ranking lists do not exist in children's education. But in contrast, students in Japan was observed as one of the groups of children who suffers from educational pressure the most in the world, as ranking, competing and students' outcomes are highly valued in the country (Kumagai, no date). Which might lead children feeling under pressure and anxious to achieving their set outcomes from the curriculum.

Pedagogical approach in Finland is based on constructive and supportive learning where children learning by building knowledge on their previous understanding. Children have their empowerments on their own learning activities. The strategy and classrooms are designed as learner-centered. Students are encouraged to conduct collaboratively work in groups on activities. Besides, education in Finland has a big focus on outdoor learning as well as indoor, which is believed to encourage

children to learn from experiences together with academic studies (Sahlberg, 2007). This is differentiated to the Japanese learning approach in which their educational system is based on inputting knowledge to students directly without much focus on student's understanding or acquisition. The educational system focuses more on the standardized testing of children's outcomes and achievements, but as well as their individualism in learning rather than collaborative work with others (Hayashi, 2011). However, although students from Japan ranks highly in the Programme for International Student Assessment - PISA (OECD, 2015), children were found more easily to result in mental health issues such as anxiety as some of them are under the pressure for catching up in learning rather than progressing in their own pace.

Overall, under the aspect of the mental health and emotional wellbeing within both Japan and Finland, bullying was found as the main issue that causes pressure and mental health problems to children in Japan. As according to Japan's cultural values on mental health and bullying, children were found hard to access help and gain treatments from an early stage. Their rule-oriented society norms and the Japanese's conformity to incidents declined the opportunities for children to experience open-minded social values as in Finland. Furthermore, the pedagogical approach implemented in both countries are distinguished as well according to their system of education and the strategies in curriculums, from traditional learning approaches to active learning in both out and indoors. However, as both pedagogical approaches leads students to achieve good outcomes in their learning, it is difficult to determine which approach lead children to develop and achieve better outcomes, as the two approaches focus and targets on similar, but different perspectives on children's learning and development.

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