

Health Access, Family Burden, and the Mental Health Matrix in Japan

Bisma Akbar 

Master's Student in Diplomacy and Strategic Studies (DSS), Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Correspondence: bismaakbar1216@gmail.com

Article information

Article History:

Received: 2025-03-27

Received in revised form:
2025-05-17

Accepted: 2025-06-19

Published Online: 2025-06-25

Keywords:

**Pediatric Healthcare Access;
Family Caregiving Burden;
Mental Health Services;
Children with Medical
Complexity; Maternal Health;
Social Welfare.**

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the intersection of healthcare access, family caregiving burdens, and mental health services for children with special needs in Japan. Utilizing demographic data and health reports, the article identifies a critical "mental health matrix" where specialized psychiatric care is alarmingly scarce, particularly in rural areas. While 24-hour pediatric inpatient services are physically accessible to most children within 60 minutes, highly specialized care for "medical complexity" remains concentrated in urban centers, imposing significant travel burdens on families. Qualitative analysis reveals that mothers bear a disproportionate share of the emotional and physical caregiving load, often resulting in high levels of psychological distress and depression. The research evaluates the "Family APGAR" scores in Japanese contexts, noting that family functioning is negatively impacted by the chronic nature of disabilities and inadequate social support. Furthermore, the study critiques the existing child welfare system for its disconnect from mental health services, leaving traumatized or neurodivergent children underserved. The article concludes that a coordinated, multi-sector strategy—linking education, health, and employment—is essential. It advocates for home-visiting medical services and increased financial allowances to mitigate the economic strain on families and facilitate the transition of special-needs individuals into meaningful adult participation.



© 2025 by the Authors. Licensee Akbar. This article is an open-access distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

On the other hand, the services that are offered in mainstream educational settings are not always aligned with or integrated into the national curriculum. As a result, students who require specialized facilities or services, or who may be located at a considerable distance from existing special schools, often find themselves attending designated mainstream institutions instead. The framework known as Special School Designation (Tokusyushien-Gakkō-Sentaku) provides a pathway for students to apply to specific mainstream schools that offer the specialized facilities and tailored support they need.

Furthermore, this can happen independently of the school's designated catchment area, as long as the assignment does not exceed the capacity of the facility thereby preventing overcrowding. However, a broad extension of this policy allowing an unlimited number of applicants could put significant strain on the personnel and material resources of these mainstream institutions. To enhance collaboration between mainstream and special schools. To address this, the establishment of Support Units was motivated; these units allow mainstream schools to receive additional funding, thereby expanding their ability to enroll inclusion students successfully. In addition, the Home-Stay Program, which is typically created for children attending special schools, may also allow children to participate in regular classes if appropriate and advantageous, with the adequate permission of parents.

Still, social stigma and discrimination continue to have a really negative effect on children with special needs in Japan. While societal understanding and supporting systems are ever so gradually being developed, many families still feel quite a degree of embarrassment or discomfort, or are ambivalent to talk about their atypical child or children with developmental issues. In turn, this can lead to a sense of being besides themselves, as so many parents worry about how their child is perceived by others, leading to silence on issues that need to be voiced.

In response, educational awareness campaigns

such as "So, the Next Time Children Want to Talk," and "Stop Bullying Campaigns," are working hard to try to raise awareness and acceptance in different communities, but persistent social biases and attitudes that are negative remain prevalent in many areas of life, sometimes in dark and disturbing ways. These persistently negative attitudes create barriers that are significant to provide needed support for children and families, and, at times, make it much more challenging for the family to reach out to others who may have compassion, understanding, and possibly act supportively, or direct them to others who have education, resources, and acceptance.

Thus, Families can be, or feel isolated from needed support systems, which can and does impact the child and family's development and well-being, and instead of breaking the cycle of stigma, can instead contribute to a new cycle of relegation and discrimination. (Yoneda, 2020).

Indeed, one of the significant causes behind the slow implementation of inclusive education policies and the limited options available for children with special needs in Japan is the prevailing and persistent stigma surrounding disability that exists in society. Despite the enactment of the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which aimed to establish a comprehensive foundation for promoting inclusive education throughout the country, deep-rooted discriminatory attitudes and beliefs continue to impede meaningful progress in this essential area.

Moreover, a widespread lack of awareness regarding disability and the challenges faced by individuals with special needs, which often results from infrequent personal contact or interaction with disabled individuals, further perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about what disability entails. It is unfortunately not uncommon for parents to recommend that their children with special needs refrain from attending regular, mainstream schools, even when inclusive education programs and resources are available to support them.

Therefore, Various activities and initiatives, such as employment support services in the

community, social-integration programs designed to facilitate interaction, and social skill instruction aimed at improving communication and interpersonal abilities, have been proposed to promote a more effective and genuine societal inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Nonetheless, significant obstacles remain, such as bureaucratic hurdles that are complicating the implementation of these efforts, restrictions on funding that restrict the available resources, and prevailing cultural attitudes that continue to create connections between academic success and social success, which ultimately hinder and obstruct these important efforts toward inclusive." (Oishi, "Immigration and Social Integration in Japan", 2012).

Alongside educational structures, cultures' communication styles also contribute significantly in influencing the social integration of children with special needs and their families. To begin with, High-context communication is defined by a systematic reliance on various features or implicit cues other than those specifically stated to convey meaning and enter into a valid set of understandings. Traditionally, Japan is known as a prototypical high-context culture, in which an individual's spoken language conveys only a moderate portion of the entire message intended in the communication event. In this regard, most of what is communicated is implicit based on the circumstance of the communication and the collective knowledge shared by the communicators.

Literature Review

High-context communication endorses a spoken-word style of communicating, where to spoke word is critical, and linear logic de-emphasized in favor of impressions, intonation, overtones, face expression, tempo, pauses, and silence to indicate meaning. As a result, Sometimes, explicit language is omitted or minimized, because the context relates greatly to the meaning intended. Because of this subtlety of style, it is generally not necessary to explain, elaborate, or delineate things point by point, which corresponds intricately to the function of politeness, indirectness, and the pressure to create harmony in the culture.

Moreover, the intention of successful communication is not simply to convey information, but is a more important part of relationship-building that greatly communicates trust between parties. This is a critical indicator of relationship-building that is much more than just simply presenting facts, or solving some problem. Communicating well creates a deeper connection and assistant understanding of people. Consequently, more often than not, in order to make proper conclusions and meaningful decisions, one may need to "read between the lines." The ability to interpret the vast array of implicit and indirect cues requires an understanding in order to understand the complete meaning behind the patterns of the interaction. With this read, individuals create stronger relationships and manage the social dynamics of participation.

In addition, managing new information forms a complex system of connectors (which are understood as sets of elements that are interconnected either directly or through intermediaries who perform the role of facilitators). Through this system of connectors, the transition from one context to another becomes – even within the same community – a process that is straightforward and significantly less costly. Various channels underlie and support this mechanism. The system of connectors involves factors such as the span and density of the social, personal, and organizational networks involved. Specifically, In Japan, it is interesting to note that information has the tendency to reach others only indirectly and primarily through individuals who are considered trustworthy, especially senior members within various contexts. (Foundation, 2023).

One key feature of these connectors is their strong correlation with power, status, prestige, and the micro-credentials that have been accumulated by individuals and organizations over time. At the same time, there exists a notable difference across various geographies, along with differences in mechanisms of information transfer, strength of the ties, and composition of the connectors themselves. The complexity inherent in these

mechanisms helps explain, at least in part, why communication tends to be indirect, extensive, and multidimensional to a significantly greater extent than in many other cultures. The social networks play an essential role as a facilitating device for the transmission of information within a high-context culture. On the other hand, when examining the political and institutional networks, it becomes apparent that the connections are less extensive, less dense, and less active. You know, these factors really do impact how information flows and how communication works overall. It's pretty fascinating when you think about it.

Children with special needs can place immense stress on families. Beyond the emotional stressors, there are financial stress and informational challenges as well. Often times it appears that mothers are taking on most of the emotional burden. And they are usually very stressed. The presence of a special child produces a unique situation that raises complex issues with family relations, which is a topic of both interest and increasing focus internationally and culturally. In Japanese families, the presence of children facilitates the sharing of family tasks and responsibilities, thus amplifying the benefits that come from a large and supportive family network; interestingly, family size is found to be negatively related to the burden experienced by mothers. However, raising children in and of itself presents particular problems and stresses that put intense pressure on families; when a "normal" family includes a "special child," the adjustment to the new reality can create crises while adding to issues that already exist and generating pressures that weigh on family relationships. The result can be a strain on the care and quality of life of ALL family members, which makes all of these family concerns even more difficult to negotiate. (Yamaoka, Y.; & Tamiya, N.; & Izumida, N.; & Kawamura, A.; & Takahashi, H.; & Noguchi, H., 2016) (Yoshikawa, h.; & Aber, J. L.; & Beardslee, W. R., 2012). Thus, the challenges faced by families extend beyond the classroom, encompassing emotional, psychological, and economic dimensions that influence overall family well-being.

Furthermore, The Family APGAR, which is a straightforward yet effective screening tool designed to assess and capture individual satisfaction with Family Adaptability, Partnership, Growth, Affection, and Resolve, was first introduced and published by Smilkstein in the year 1978. Since that time, it has been rapidly and widely adopted for use around the globe. Notably, this tool was translated into Japanese by Kabayama, leading to its establishment and recognition in the literature that pertains to families in Japan. In reviewing various family groups assessed with the APGAR scale, the overall average score recorded was 13.3, marking it as the lowest score among a total of eleven different family groups that were studied using this specific scale. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this score did not present as significantly different from data gathered from similar families located in Tokyo.

In particular, one specific item, which inquired about the "hope for family care when ill," was found to have scored significantly lower when compared to the average score reported for a healthy family group also based in Tokyo. This notably low average score was attributed to the presence of a high rate of illness among the members belonging to the surveyed family groups; on the other hand, the number of years' families have resided in their communities has been shown to have a positive relationship to family functioning overall.

Similarly, the average family size was considerably larger than that which was present in Yamagata to Tokyo showing a clear demographic disparity. Interestingly, half of the families contained family members older than 70, while one quarter of the same families consisted of two people older than 70, which aligns with the model of family members being well-represented. Moreover, the larger family included a variety of individuals including minor children under 17, older seniors 70 and above, and in-laws contributing to family life. With the traits measured, Mutuality received the highest score followed by Stability and Individuation, once again indicating the inter-relationship in these family households.

Moreover, the large family size, accompanied by the involvement of multiple roles, resulted in peaceful, traditional family relationships with closeness and connectivity, allowing them to handle several social roles and responsibilities effectively. It is also interesting to note that when we consider the average mental status score for the families in this study, it is the lowest from all previous research.

And what's even more striking is that this low score seems to be linked mainly to issues like illness and various family problems or changes. Does this concern you? The only significant relationships that were found to be negatively related were related to illness in the family, or problems or changes in family. According to the interpretations of these findings, this may be helpful to those who are working as community and home health care nurse - there is great value in the concept of preparing appropriate and relevant care for families using the perspective of trying to maintain mental health as families are faced with stress or problems caused by illness or challenging family members.

Analysis

At the same time, Families that have children with special needs face a myriad of challenges that can often feel overwhelming and complicated. In Japan, there are more and more families with special needs children who are living with them, which also represents the value of family ties where emotional support is appreciated, even in difficult times.

However, there remains a significant problem: the absence of sufficient social support services available that would assist families in dealing with their unique and often challenging situations. Furthermore, there are still elements of discrimination and negative public attitude toward special needs children, which can inhibit the children's comfort and ability to integrate into society.

It is important to note that, the challenges families face include much more than social integration. Families experience emotional, psychological, and financial responses to stress, which can shape

their every day, and their decision- making.

In fact, the effect on family life can be profound and life-altering when a family member has a disability, particularly marked when the birth of a disabled child occurs. This development presents substantial challenges and adjustments for the parents involved. The birth of a child with disabilities can create an intense emotional reaction in parents, as opposed to the birth of a healthy child, which is typically experienced with excitement and celebration. This anxiety often develops from multiple sources, including ethical dilemmas regarding care and support, typical day to day issues, limitations on usual family activities, financial stress tied to caregiving in the home and widespread disconnect and social isolation many families experience. Moreover, these pressures often extend to siblings and other relatives, creating a web of emotional responses and family dynamics that must be considered.

Have you ever seen the way that having a special-needs child can affect the whole family? It is not just the parents who are affected, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and to some extent family friends can be caught up in emotional turmoil. It really does affect everyone in one way or another, right?

More commonly than not family members are dealing with anxiety, frustration, stress, etc. Stresses of raising a special-needs child can take a toll. In fact, you will experience times when it feels like it has become yet again too much. You can feel that pressure around all of this building, connecting family members and creating family friction or conflict. It is all a lot to handle, and feelings run high.

In particular, Parents and guardians frequently wrestle with anxiety over their child's future potential for independence. Significant questions arise regarding the child's education—deciding where they should be educated, the appropriate methods of instruction, and the nature of employment opportunities that may be most suitable for them as they transition into adulthood. In many cases, it is anticipated that long-term care will need to be provided to best support the child's development, and that can last

for many years after the child is out of school. So, you know, if we think about the challenges of caregiving especially for a child with a disability, it does seem very daunting. There's not just the emotional toll, but also all the daily chores and the financial strain that parents face. Because of this, governments have stepped in to create compensation policies. It's like they're finally recognizing how tough it really is for families.

These policies aim to provide financial assistance, services, and support for the family unit and the child in a program level context. There are also allowances for families with children with special needs, which are paid monthly. However, the allocated financial support falls short of the many expenses incurred under group care in special facilities. Accordingly, other programs and assets have been established, mainly to enhance families' welfare and well-being, that have children with disabilities. Nevertheless, despite these structured programs, many families continue to face unmet needs, highlighting the urgent necessity for more comprehensive and coordinated support services.

This kind of service includes several types of services that offer consultation opportunities for parents, workshops that promote and enhance parenting skills, and supports for in-home care with respite services to give families a break. While the nature of these services is structured, they rarely fulfill the significant and multidimensional needs of these families. Thus, there is a pressing need to develop more coordinated programs of support and systemic support to make sure families in these situations have the essential resources to not just survive, but to thrive in their situations. (Yamaoka, Y.; & Tamiya, N.; & Izumida, N.; & Kawamura, A.; & Takahashi, H.; & Noguchi, H., 2016).

Indeed, Family support systems, which include family consultation, play an essential role in addressing the needs and well-being of children with special needs. These vital systems offer much-needed assistance to families struggling with chronic illnesses and poverty, which can severely hinder effective caregiving. Yet, despite a growing number of positive attitudes toward the importance of special education, authorities often

demonstrate a lack of necessary flexibility to fully accommodate these evolving attitudes and to provide adequate support to the families involved. For instance, In April 2012, Japan took a significant step forward in this regard by promulgating a Ministerial Ordinance aimed at the Establishment of the Special Support Education Center, with the objective of promoting the independence and encouraging the social participation of children who face developmental disabilities. However, significant obstacles continue to exist, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies that impede progress and limited access to vital medical and mental health services that are offered at no cost. In addition, Family support systems, which include family consultation, play an essential role in addressing the needs and well-being of children with special needs. These vital systems offer much-needed assistance to families struggling with chronic illnesses and poverty, which can severely hinder effective caregiving. Despite this progress, a growing number of positive attitudes toward the importance of special education, authorities often demonstrate a lack of necessary flexibility to fully accommodate these evolving attitudes and to provide adequate support to the families involved. For instance, In April 2012, Japan took a significant step forward in this regard by promulgating a Ministerial Ordinance aimed at the Establishment of the Special Support Education Center, with the objective of promoting the independence and encouraging the social participation of children who face developmental disabilities. However, significant obstacles continue to exist, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies that impede progress and limited access to vital medical and mental health services that are offered at no cost.

Consequently, these challenges represent significant barriers to ensuring that children with special needs receive the comprehensive care and support they deserve from their families and communities. (Yoneda, 2020).

It's noteworthy that the systems challenge we are noticing really illustrate the value of integrating education, healthcare and social services. We

cannot talk about supporting families when we only look at one sector. Therefore, these sectors all connect and so integration of services is essential and necessary if we hope to create real change.

Moreover, Children with special needs in Japan require a wide range of various medical services, but access to these essential services can be quite difficult. Care for children with disabilities is generally concentrated in medical centers located in urban, metropolitan areas of the country, making it difficult for families living in rural, less populated areas. While Japanese society is becoming more aware of the importance of safeguarding adequate care to children with disabilities and the threshold role these services play in children's growth, such resources are often insufficient to meet the growing demand. As a result, there exists a significant gap between the number of children requiring care and the range of appropriate resources and facilities for those children. (Ehara, 2018).

"Limited access to essential health services increases stress on families, thereby providing the importance of home support and targeted outreach programs to support well-being."

In particular, Parents of Children with Medical Complexity (CMC) face multiple, contrasting and diverse challenges, originating from the children's extreme level of medical need and, their frequency and intensity of hospital-based care and other support services. These persistent challenges can be all-consuming, and often result in a considerable emotional and physical burden on the parents. Paradoxically, as the healthcare environment for children with developmental disabilities has improved in the 21st century, Japan's current landscape of care is inadequate in addressing the needs and aspirations of such families. Families often struggle to find their way through the healthcare matrix increasing their stress and feelings of isolation. (Yamaoka, Y.; & Tamiya, N.; & Watanabe, A.; & Miyazono, Y.; & Tanaka, R.; & Matsuzawa, A.; & Sumazaki, R., 2018).

Home-visiting medical services for children represent a very important and central part of health and medical care in the community. These

services are important to provide holistic care and support for young patients in their home environment. In addition, flexibility and coordination between different clinics and hospitals is necessary to provide excellent care in general. For children with severe motor and intellectual disabilities, home based medical care goes far beyond just visits from the home visiting nurse and doctor, significantly increasing families' need for continuous access to pediatricians and specialty care. Indeed, having a pediatrician or an accessible medical facility that one can call upon when an accident or health issue occurs can be a source of great comfort and reassurance to patients and their families during challenging times. This helps ensure a safety net for them and builds trust in the health care system, providing that every child obtains the timely response when their health is at issue. This health care does not act in isolation of educational and social services; they form an important total support system for children with special needs and their families.

At the same time, all citizens in Japan, including children of all ages, are part of the national insurance system, which serves to facilitate access to and vis-à-vis healthcare services. In addition, children's medical care expenses are significantly assisted through co-payments by local governments, which decreases the financial burden on families. Although many economic barriers of healthcare visitation have been removed, barriers based on geographic principles are prevalent—the distance to hospitals and time-consuming travel burdens are still apparent.

Most concerning is that detailed calculations based on the locations of the hospitals, where children reside, and travel time of vehicles indicate that with regards to inpatient services, there is only 2% of children who lived within 60 minutes of available services. In addition, highly populated regions have a greater percentage of children residing within a reasonable hospital distance of a hospital with at least five full pediatricians. Thus, In trying to increase overall access to pediatric care, initiatives are being implemented to place available medical resources into regional pediatricians that aim to build a larger healthcare

system to improve access for families needing timely medical intervention.

As a result, it has been reinforced the need for a more inclusive education system that supports all children who face learning difficulties. The OECD states that children experiencing social or economic disadvantage fit within the designation of 'special educational needs' alongside children with disabilities. In today's global context, As the global economy is globalizing and inequalities are growing, inclusive education can provide a safety net for children impacted by economic or cultural disadvantage and can mediate the onset of the academic and behavioral difficulties that often accompany contexts of inequality. Therefore, increased inclusion into special-support education may not only reflect increased awareness of admissible developmental disabilities, but also economic worries for families. As indicated by the Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, the social inclusion of children with special needs through community programmers represents a crucial goal for Japan in the twenty-first century. "The effectiveness of inclusive education is closely tied to societal attitudes, family engagement, and the availability of supportive resources, highlighting a multifaceted approach to child development."

Honestly, things can be pretty challenging these days, right? Many people with disabilities end up in unstable jobs without security or decent benefits. It's a constant struggle just trying to get by without the proper support. In fact, It's a tough situation, really. The discrimination and marginalization they experience, along with Japan's pretty rigid and hierarchical social structures, really highlight how much change is needed. We need to push for more inclusion and equality.

Even today, in the 21st century, yet kids with disabilities in Japan still encounter significant hurdles in their daily lives. It's honestly disheartening to think about how these challenges affect everything from their education to social interactions. School attendance can be difficult for a variety of reasons, including interference of treatments and interventions, side effects, fear of bullying, multiple absenteeism, and mental health

issues such as school refusal. Moreover, Adult social integration also remains challenging, as some adults with special needs in Japan are restricted to residing in institutions or group homes due to a lack of well-established jobs or the stigma often associated with special needs. Families frequently require support due to the long stays at medical facilities or the perception that they are unable to care for their children. Honestly, the challenges that patients and their families face can feel really daunting, especially when you throw in all those cold, impersonal bureaucracies. It's just a lot to deal with, right? Right when you think it can't get any harder, they ramp it up. It's like, resources are all over the place, and getting timely care? Well, that's not always easy. Plus, when it comes to end-of-life care, there just isn't enough support. And let's not even get started on mental health services—there's a huge gap there. Honestly, it's frustrating to see how these issues pile up and make everything so much harder for those who need help the most. Designing holistic, continuous support programmers for children with special needs, their families, and education authorities continues to pose significant challenges that have yet to be fully addressed. A coordinated strategy linking education, employment, healthcare, and social services is essential to mitigate these systemic gaps and promote meaningful inclusion at all stages of life."

Altogether, the culmination of these various and complex difficulties manifests in a severely underdeveloped system that fails to meet the basic standards of service that are present in many other more developed countries. (Saito-Kitanosako, 2012)

As it stands, the lack of a targeted approach could put many vulnerable children without the supports they specifically need. Integration of welfare resources with significant institutions or organizations must be considered. For instance, the public long-term care insurance scheme for older populations is particularly important to consider because disproportionately disabled children are in care facilities in Japan and the prevalence of family issues these families face to

raising a disabled child. Hence, we have to deal with all of these issues if we truly think that every child, irrespective of their skills, should have equitable access to education and equitable resources, correct? It is important. We can't leave anyone behind here. After all, education should be a right for everyone, don't you think?

Subsequently, the following year, the Japanese government published Guidelines on Social Welfare and Services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, seeking to enhance overview, family support, employment opportunities, and daily life assistance. Nonetheless, stigmatization persists widely, engendering discrimination and hindering social participation of children with special needs. Even the Children and Youth Basic Act has not fully eradicated rejection or inadequate treatment. Moreover, Bureaucratic and financial obstacles further complicate access to services, inhibiting support when and where it is most needed. These interconnected factors prevent stable engagement in education, health, and community life (Ozawa, E.; & Hirata, y., 2019). "International lessons from inclusive education systems in Germany, Sweden, and Finland may provide useful insights to Japan to improve integration, accessibility, and language-based skills for global engagement."

In fact, Numerous countries have expressed their intention to promote inclusive education. The study of such systems and the lessons they provide are invaluable for Japan as it seeks to build a cohesive and equitable society.

For instance, in recent years' German special needs schools have come partially under pressure to phase out separated schooling. One or two states have determined that inclusive settings have major advantages and are to be given priority. Similarly, Bilingual inclusive education in Sweden offers us important lessons in that mainstream classrooms were comprised of Sami children who herd rein deer with Swedish children.

With this in mind, as the world becoming more unstable but also globalizing, special needs education systems are being asked to provide English-language education to enable

international mobility and to support adapted economic growth. Therefore, Japan may therefore find inspiration in the Finnish approach, where special needs schools are allowed to conduct some instruction in English.

Conclusion

Diving into the topic of diversity in Japan, especially when we look at disability and education, really shows us a society that's at a pivotal point—caught between its rich traditions and the winds of change. You can't deny that Japan has made strides toward being more inclusive. You know, it's interesting how there are these quiet barriers, almost like they're part of the fabric of society, that keep true equality from really happening.

So, after digging into various studies and personal stories, it really struck me that Japanese families—especially moms—seem to bear a lot more emotional and social stigma than what the system recognizes. It's like, there's this weight they carry that often goes unnoticed. You know? What this study shows are honestly pretty surprising. The whole drive for inclusion in Japan isn't merely about passing new laws or making changes in institutions—it's way more ingrained in the culture itself. You know, despite all the reforms and policies that have been put in place, it really seems like the way people view disability hasn't changed all that much. It's kind of disappointing, isn't it? A lot of people are moving from just feeling sympathetic to actually embracing and empowering those with disabilities, but it's a slow process. Honestly, it makes you wonder how long it'll take for that shift to happen.

The ongoing shame and silence surrounding disability really shows us something important. Cultural harmony, while it's great for society, can sometimes hold us back. It often stops people from having those crucial conversations. Honestly, it's impressive to see just how strong these families are. They've really managed to push through despite all the challenges. Plus, with advocacy networks popping up and inclusive education programs gaining traction, it feels like we're finally starting to notice a shift in social awareness, even if it's a gradual one. You know, it's

crucial to understand that inclusion isn't just something that happens on its own. It really requires a team effort — schools, communities, and policymakers all have to join forces. Education shouldn't just tolerate our differences; it really ought to embrace and celebrate them, don't you think? Honestly, if you take a moment to think about it, our varied backgrounds and viewpoints really do enrich the whole learning process, don't you think? It's pretty amazing how much we can learn from one another. It's kind of incredible how diversity can deepen our understanding of things. I mean, it's not just about recognizing that diversity exists; it's more about truly valuing it. You feel me? Those differences? They're what make us human, don't you think?

Take Japan, for example. They're really shifting their approach. It really highlights that having the right buildings or policies isn't quite enough for true inclusivity. You know, when we're discussing disability, it's time for a shift in our mindset. Seriously, we shouldn't view it as a barrier that keeps people from thriving. Let's look at it as just one piece of the beautiful puzzle that is our world, shall we?

Sincerely, if you sit back and give it some real thought, it comes down to empathy and ensuring we keep those lines of communication as wide open as possible, right? Everyone deserves a voice—seriously, everyone, including those with disabilities. It's so important that we don't just listen to their stories and opinions, but that we truly value them. You know, if you take a moment to really think about it, each of us has something special to offer. It's really interesting to consider how those unique contributions can enhance our society, isn't it? Honestly, they might bring value in ways we haven't even thought of yet.

Let's really focus on empowering families! We can tackle this in a few ways—like through counseling, building peer networks, and sharing info across various platforms. And honestly, it's really crucial to boost professional development, especially when we're talking about teaching with empathy. It makes a huge difference, doesn't it? That's what makes classrooms truly inclusive.

Looking ahead, future studies should really dive

into the personal stories of students and parents. I mean, there's so much to gain from those first-hand experiences that go beyond just the usual institutional stuff.

Now, when we talk about Japan's path to inclusive education, it's like a balancing act between fitting in with societal norms and celebrating individual differences. Honestly, this is something many places around the world struggle with. Real diversity? It's only going to happen when we stop seeing acceptance as a favor or charity. Honestly, when we dive into this topic, it's not just about the nitty-gritty details. We really need to step back and look at the bigger picture—justice, right? It's something that we all share a responsibility for. When you think about it, it's really all about equality and dignity for everyone involved. That's what truly matters. Honestly, every child should have that sense of belonging, don't you think? You know, it's really a basic truth that we just can't ignore.

References

- Ehara, A. (2018, January 29). Children of Access to Major Hospitals Estimated to Provide Pediatric Inpatient Services 24h a Day in Japan. (P. H.-J. Mentzel, Ed.) *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 177(4), 559-565. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-018-3106-1>
- Foundation, N. C. (2023, march 7). Who do Japanese people trust for news? Retrieved September 23, 2025, from Nippon.com: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h02326/>
- Hiroyuki Ariyasu, & Takashi Akamizu. (2018, May 15). Current status and issues regarding transitional health care for adults and young adults with special health care needs in Japan. (E.-i.-C. M. Medicine), Ed.) *Internal Medicine*, 57(10), 1337-1344. doi:10.2169/internalmedicine.9740-17
- Inoue, Y.; Umebayashi, H.; Matsui, T.; Nishiyama, S.; Sakurai, I.; Maru, M.; Takeda, T.; Tanigawa, K.; Miyamae, T. (2022, December 6). Social Independence Evaluation Index for Japanese Patients with Childhood-onset Chronic Diseases. (P. H. Odagiri, Ed.) *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, 10, 1-12.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fped.2022.923497>

Ito, H.; Chang-Leung, C.; & Poudyal, H. (2022, September 4). Inclusion of Students with Developmental Disabilities in Japan: Barriers and Promising Practices in Primary and Secondary Education. (P. K. Shibata, Ed.) *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 24(3), 415-431. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-022-09763-8>

Maebara, K.; & Yamaguchi, K.; & Ikeda, K.; & Takahashi, h. (2025, july 3). Current Status and Issues of the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Small- and Medium- Sized Enterprises in Rural Areas of Japan: A survey from Business Owners Perspectives. (D. L. Barnes, Ed.) *Disabilities*, 5(3), 62. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities5030062>

Ministry of Health, L. a. (2018). Annual Health, Labour and Welfare Report 2018. Government of Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Tokyo: MHLW Japan. Retrieved from <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-hw12/dl/summary.pdf>

Ministry of Health, L. a. (2020). Annual Health, Labour and Welfare Report. Government of Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Tokyo: MHLW Japan. Retrieved september 9, 2025, from https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-hw13/index.html?utm_source=

Ministry of Health, L. a. (2020). The 18th ASEAN & Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies: Promoting inclusive society for the children's future – Focusing on support for children with developmental disorders including Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (WHLLW), Government of Japan, Institution Affairs Division, Minister of Secretariat (WHLW). Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (WHLW), Government of Japan. Retrieved september 28, 2025, from <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000705699.pdf>

Mithout, A. (2016, July). Children with Disabilities in the Japanese School System: A Path Toward Social Integration? (P. W. Manzenreiter, Ed.)

Contemporary Japan, 28(2), 165-184. doi:<https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/cj-2016-0009/html>

Nurullayevna, I. S.; Maxmud, X. Z., & Jaloliddin, M. S. (2025, January). Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities: Overcoming Challenges and Embracing Benefits for a More Equitable Future. (D. R. Andriani, Ed.) *Indonesian Journal of Community and Special Needs Education*, 5(1), 27-32.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.17509/ijcsne.v5i1.82690>

Oishi, N. (2012). Immigration and Social Integration in Japan. In McGill-Queen of University Press eBooks (pp. 165-184). Montreal 7.

Oishi, N. (2012). Immigration and Social Integration in Japan. In J.-F. a. Biles, McGill-Queen of University Press eBooks (pp. 165-184). Montreal & Kingston, Quebec, Canada, Canada: McGill-Queen of University Press. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781553395133-010>

Ozawa, E.; & Hirata, y. (2019, December 28). High School Dropout Rates of Japanese Youth in Residential Care: An Examination of Major Risk Factor. (D. S. Brown, Ed.) *Behavioral Sciences*, 10(1), 19.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10010019>

Peckitt, M. G. (2025, February 2). Disabled student filmed in school toilet, serious bullying incident in Mie. (B. F. Team, Producer, & Barrier Free Japan Media Organization) Retrieved 10 14, 2025, from Barrier Free Japan: <https://barrierfreejapan.com/2025/02/02/disabled-student-filmed-in-school-toilet-serious-bullying-incident-in-mie/>

Saito-Kitanosako, Y. (2012). Applying Principles of Universal Design for Learning to Early Elementary Math Classes in Japan: A Case Study. University of Kansas, USA, Department of Curriculum and Teaching. Lawrence: ProQuest LLC / University of Kansas.

doi:<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/entities/publication/1b13e1af-d469-47ef-b561-0f3e60655fea>

Sorensen, R. (2018, December 5). Japanese university students with disabilities face many obstacles to succeed. Retrieved October 22, 2025,

from USC Annenberg Media:
<https://www.uscannenbergmedia.com/2018/12/05/japanese-university-students-with-disabilities-face-many-obstacles-to-succeed/>

Special Needs Education Division, E. a. (2017). Recent Policy and Status on Special Needs Education in Japan. National Institute of Special Needs Education (Japan), Special Needs Education Division, Elementary and Secondary Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Tokyo: National Institute of Special Needs Education (Japan). Retrieved 10 16, 2025

Tateno, M., Inagaki, T., Saito, T.; Guerrero, A. P. S., & Skokauskas, N. (2017, September 11). Current Challenges and Future Opportunities for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Japan. (P. Y. Ahn, Ed.) *Psychiatry Investigation*, 14(5), 525- 533. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4306/pi.2017.14.5.525>

Tomoko Yamamoto & Koichi Moriwaki. (2019, March 4). Japanese system to support inclusive education for children requiring medical care. *Children (Basel)*, 6(3). doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/children6030039>

Wahab, R., Ramli, F. F. A. (2022, June 28). Psychological Distress Among Parents of Children with Special Needs. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 7(46), 498-511. doi:<https://doi.org/10.35631/IJEPC.746037>

Yamaoka, Y.; & Tamiya, N.; & Izumida, N.; & Kawamura, A.; & Takahashi, H.; & Noguchi, H. (2016, August 3). The Relationship Between Raising a Child with a Disability and the Mental Health of Mother Compared to Raising a Child Without Disability in Japan. (D. I. Kawachi, Ed.) *SSM - Population Health*, 2, 542-548. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.08.001>

Yamaoka, Y.; & Tamiya, N.; & Watanabe, A.; & Miyazono, Y.; & Tanaka, R.; & Matsuzawa, A.; &

Sumazaki, R. (2018, July 20). Hospital-based Care Utilization of Children with Medical Complexity in Japan. (D. K. Kaneko, Ed.) *Pediatrics International*, 60(7), 626-633. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/ped.13586>

Yoneda, H. (2020). Development of the Japanese Inclusive Education System: From Special Schools to Curriculum Modification for Special-Needs Education in Regular Schools. Proceedings of the 1st Progress in Social Science, Humanities and Education Research Symposium (PSSHRS 2019). 464, pp. 1031-1040. Tokyo: Atlantis Press. doi:10.2991/assehr.k.200824.228

Yoshikawa, h.; & Aber, J. L.; & Beardslee, W. R. (2012, May). The Effects of Poverty on the Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health of Children and Youth: Implication for Prevention. (D. N. Anderson, Ed.) *American Psychologist*, 67(4), 272-284. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028015>

Ariyasu, H., & Akamizu, T. (2018). Current status and issues regarding transitional health care for adults and young adults with special health care needs in Japan. *Internal Medicine*, 57(10), 1337-1344. <https://doi.org/10.2169/internalmedicine.9740-17>

Ehara, A. (2018). Children's access to major hospitals estimated to provide pediatric inpatient services 24h a day in Japan. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 177(4), 559-565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-018-3106-1>

Yamaoka, Y., Tamiya, N., Izumida, N., Kawamura, A., Takahashi, H., & Noguchi, H. (2016). The relationship between raising a child with a disability and the mental health of mother compared to raising a child without disability in Japan. *SSM - Population Health*, 2, 542-548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.08.001>.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research.

Funding Statement

No funding is received for this project.