

**NAKAMURA SENIOR GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL**

# **NAKAMURA INTERNATIONAL COURSE**

**Class of 2025  
Thesis Projects**



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## **Introduction**

The Nakamura International Course (NIC) students, class of 2025, have successfully completed a one-year study abroad program. During their time in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, the students researched and wrote a thesis on the topic of their choice, selected from three of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), instigated by the United Nations. Choosing an additional subject relevant to their interests, each student conducted research, using the internet and the school library. From this information, they created a set of interview questions to ask both men and women during their study abroad and in Japan.

The students utilized critical thinking in order to plan and write a research thesis on their chosen topic, how this connects to their chosen SDG, and interpret the data collected from their interviews. In addition to this, the NIC students also presented their thesis to an audience to share what they have learned from their experiences.

In this collection are the theses written by each student.

Tomoko Soejima & Stasia Ise

# **The Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse**



**Koto Akao**

**Nakamura Senior Girls' High School**

**Nakamura International Course Thesis Project**

## Introduction

“There’s not a drug on earth that can make life meaningful” (Kane). Drug addiction is a worldwide problem in today's society. However, there are countries where some drugs have become legal. From April of 2024, Germany made the decision to legalize cannabis (Drug Abuse Prevention Center). There are many different types of drugs, and all are very harmful because they create dependence. Dependence is not only found in illicit drugs, but also in our everyday consumption, such as caffeine and alcohol. Despite being readily available to all people, these types of drugs are also extremely dangerous. This issue is also raised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out by the United Nations, and is included in the content of Goal #3, Good Health and Well-being. In this thesis, I will explain the current status of drug dependence in Japan and Australia, and the possible ways to prevent drug abuse.

## Background

I believe there should be more global outreach for drug prevention initiatives. This is not a local issue in a few nations; it is a global one. The majority of nations are attempting to step up their campaigns to increase public awareness of drugs and are trying to stop drugs from being imported from other nations. However, this isn't a universal program. I believe that drug abuse prevention measures in Japan are more effective than in other countries, and Japan is more drug-free than other countries. Marijuana, together with stimulants and other banned drugs, are also known to the public as the *Dame. Zettai*. This means “No. Absolutely

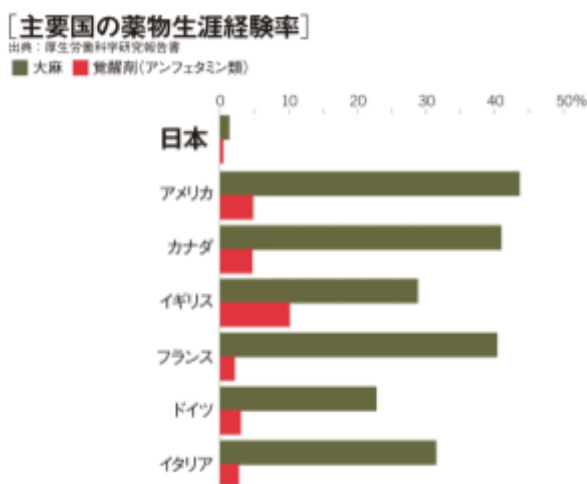


The anti-drug abuse awareness poster

not.” In Japan, this term has become well-known to the Japanese public through its use in anti-drug abuse awareness posters and commercials (ながさきプレス web magazine).

In fact, I saw drugs with my own eyes on the streets, in tourist areas of the USA. Some people also took drugs in public or tried to sell them. This surprised me and made me curious about the moral values of the people who use drugs in other countries. I first learned about the current state of drugs in Japan when a lecture on drug abuse prevention was given at elementary school, and additionally learned in health class at junior high school that famous people had been caught for drug control offences in the news. When I first learned about this, I didn't know that some Japanese celebrities were arrested for drug use, and wondered how they were getting them. However, my experience in the USA changed my views about drugs.

A news article posed the question; Why has cannabis been made legal in some areas of Europe and the US? The reason for this is that cannabis cannot be regulated because of its widespread dissemination. According to the article, cannabis was initially regulated in all countries, however as increasingly harmful



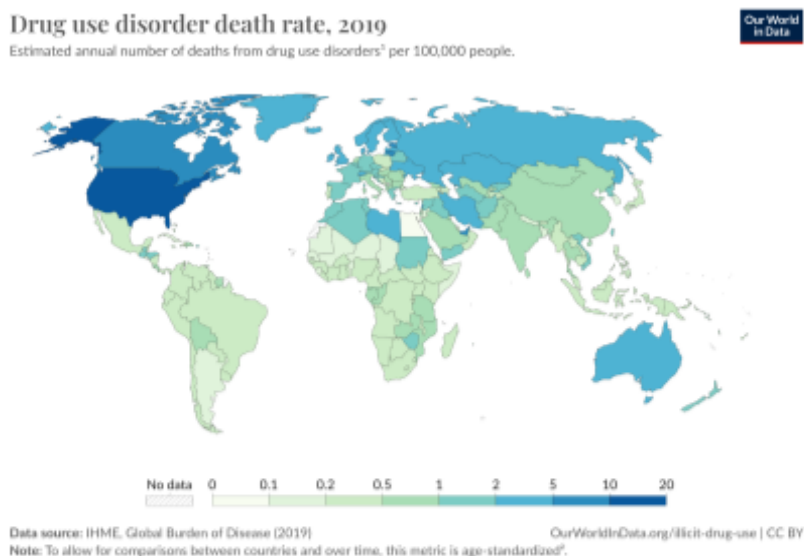
Lifetime drug experience rates in major countries

substances like cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, and LSD became more widely available, these limitations were relaxed in order to protect consumers. This had the unexpected economic consequence of developing

distribution networks that are now so broad that they cannot be controlled (Ishida, 2019).

The graph above shows the lifetime drug experience rates in major countries. From the top, the figures are for Japan, the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Germany and Italy. This shows that Japanese use cannabis at a rate of 0.5%, whereas most other countries have a cannabis usage of more than 20% (The Asahi Shinbun Globe, 2019).

In contrast, the map below shows the distribution of the population with substance abuse disorders in 2019. Australia's share is second only to the United States. Up until now, we have only been able to pinpoint high drug use rates in Western and European nations; however, why are the numbers from Australia so

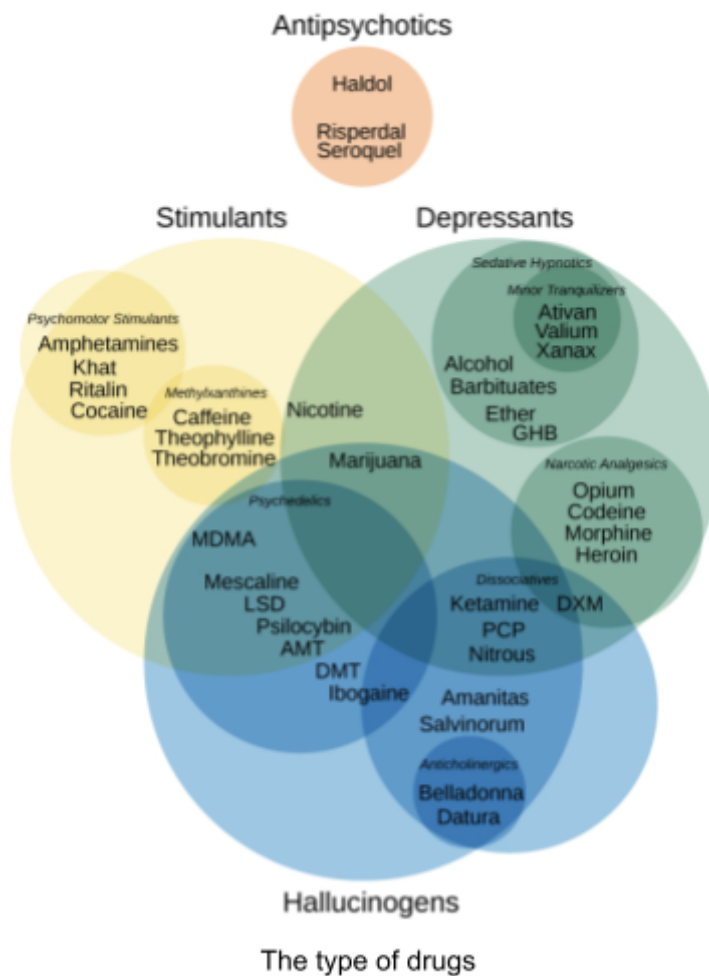


high? Drug-related deaths are shown on this map, with Australia having the highest numbers after the USA and Canada. Even though Australia has a lower percentage of drug users than other nations, the high victimisation and

fatality rates suggest that extremely deadly illegal drugs are the main cause of drug use in this nation (Our World in Data).

## Supporting Arguments

Before I left Japan, I interviewed two Japanese Physical Education teachers at my school to understand their perspectives on drug abuse prevention education in Japanese schools. While in Brisbane, Australia on a one year study abroad program, four Australians were interviewed about their opinions regarding drugs and



substance uses. One of the interviewees, an Australian female nurse, answered the question: *What kind of impact do drugs have on our health?* The interviewee suggested drugs impact us both physically and mentally, depending on the type of drugs. There are stimulants, depressants, and hallucinogenic drugs, which all do different things to the brain and body. This graph shows the type of drugs (Pressbook.com).

Stimulants, such as cocaine, work to increase overall brain activity, heart rate, and can lead to poor mental health. For example, stimulant drugs can cause feelings of depression, anxiety and paranoia (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Depressants, including alcohol and cannabis, slow down central nervous system activity. These substances may cause drowsiness, impaired coordination, and long-term damage to the liver and other

organs if the user takes too much. Hallucinogens, such as magic mushrooms or Lysergic acid diethylamide, can worsen existing mental health issues. Physical side effects may include nausea and abdominal pain. In serious cases, they can lead to seizures, stroke or brain damage. On the other hand, some medications use such drugs as an antidepressant. Mescaline, psilocybin, Phencyclidine, and Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) are examples of hallucinogen medications that can alter your senses and alter how you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel things. Cocaine and Methylenedioxymethamphetamine are examples of stimulant medications that can accelerate central nervous system activity (Gateway Foundation). She also emphasized that drug effects can vary not only by type but also by dosage and frequency of use. For instance, even legal substances such as alcohol can become highly dangerous when consumed excessively or combined with other drugs.

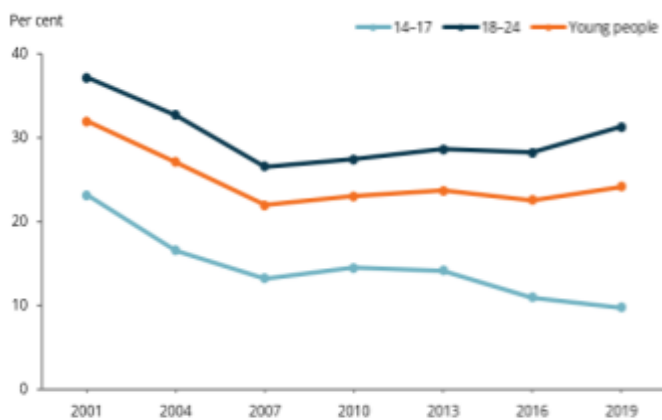
Next, a police officer of the Cleveland District State High School was asked, *How do people get drugs?* to which he answered, gaining drugs by whatever means is part of criminal behaviour. This implies that they will either steal them by breaking into homes, purchasing them illegally on the streets, robbing pharmacies, or stealing drugs to sell on the streets.



Adverse health effects of illegal drug use

They are occasionally bought illegally online and occasionally sold by family members living in the same home. According to the Recovery Village, an American organization, 21.8% of all high school students say that they have been sold, given

or offered drugs on school property. Moreover, medicine that is commonly used at home can be used to make people “high”. The article states, teenagers frequently abuse prescription drugs, particularly performance-enhancing substances like Ritalin or Adderall, as well as opiate medicines (The Recovery Village, 2024). According to the police officer, non-prescription drug use in the home is also a major factor that influences teen substance abuse. Further, witnessing parents and family members use drugs can legitimize or validate a teen’s own drug use. Additionally, there are spam emails advertising cheap drugs for sale online. People may learn of these sites through word-of-mouth and can easily buy drugs online. The graph below, published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, suggests the rate of drug use in Australia has been low due to the government regulations, from 2001 to 2007, but since 2007, drug use rates among youths have been steadily increasing (AIHW,



Drug use rates in Australia by age group

2021).

A final question was asked of the interviewees: *What can the government do to prevent drug abuse?* In the police officer’s opinion, the government needs to look into legalising and illegalising drugs such as

marijuana, because they are discovering that the medicinal marijuana system is becoming a significant issue all over the world. The governments are now legalising marijuana in some countries, because they can help people with cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues. This drug can also be used to help children who suffer from severe anxiety. Other countries have already

started legalising it as well, since they are seeing health benefits. In Australia, according to the Department of Health and Well-being, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and both over-the-counter and prescribed medications are all allowed. Illegal drugs, such as amphetamines, cannabis, MDMA, and heroin, are prohibited because they pose a health risk to consumers and are not regulated in the same manner that legal drugs are (Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing). Furthermore, another interviewee, an Australian guidance officer at Cleveland District High School mentioned that the government needs to provide enough funding to hire sufficient staff to make arrests, impose harsher punishments, and invest in rehabilitation programs in order to reduce drug abuse. Also, both interviewees pointed out that by helping people socially, it is possible to indirectly prevent illicit drug use. In practice, there are some organisations that help people who are seeking recovery from addiction. The American organisation Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is now a non-profit, worldwide mental health support association. They provide meetings, all aimed at offering support, guidance, and a sense of community for people seeking recovery from drug addiction. Attending NA meetings is free, and you can participate either in person or online (Miller, 2025).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, since drugs are known to be dangerous and harmful to our health, many countries have started to increase public awareness of drug use. Compared with other countries, Japan's experience with drugs is by far the lowest because Japan has had strong, successful prevention campaigns and strict regulations. Despite government prohibitions, drug-related death rates are still higher in Australia. In addition to law enforcement, public awareness efforts, and

international collaboration to prevent illicit imports, focused assistance for individuals at risk are also necessary for effective prevention. I would suggest that places which have particularly high death rates from drug use, such as South America, Russia and Australia, take inspiration from the Japanese proactive prevention strategy and tailor their tactics to local circumstances. Globally, we need to make legislation to better regulate drug use. I hope that will help people who are suffering from drug abuse around the world.

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## 薬物乱用の予防と治療 ～赤尾心音～

私はこのレポートで日本と海外の違法薬物の取扱方法の違いについてまとめました。この研究内容は国連のSDGs目標3「すべての人に健康と福祉を」に基づいたものです。薬物依存は日本国内だけではなく、世界的な問題となっています。そこで留学したオーストラリアと日本の薬物乱用の現状や、防止策についてそれぞれ調べました。日本は薬物乱用率は低く、死亡率も他の先進国と比べると大幅に低いです。しかしながらオーストラリアはそこまで使用率が高くないにも関わらず、危険な薬物の乱用により、死亡率が高いのが問題です。現地インタビューでは、薬物は刺激薬・抑制薬・幻覚薬に分けられ、心身に大きな悪影響を与えることがわかりました。また、薬物は路上やインターネット、家庭内などさまざまな経路で入手されています。若者の乱用は、家庭での薬の誤用や大人の使用を見て真似することでも増えるとされています。オーストラリアでは一時期規制強化で使用率が下がりましたが、近年は再び増加傾向にあります。今世界では、医療用大麻の合法化も進んでおり、危険な薬物との区別が課題です。今回の比較から、薬物乱用を防ぐには、早期教育、地域の協力、薬物の厳格な管理、国際的な連携が必要であるとわかりました。

# **Promoting Mental Health for Students in Japan and New Zealand**



**Anna Awamura**

**Nakamura Senior Girls' High School**

**Nakamura International Course Thesis Project**

## **Introduction**

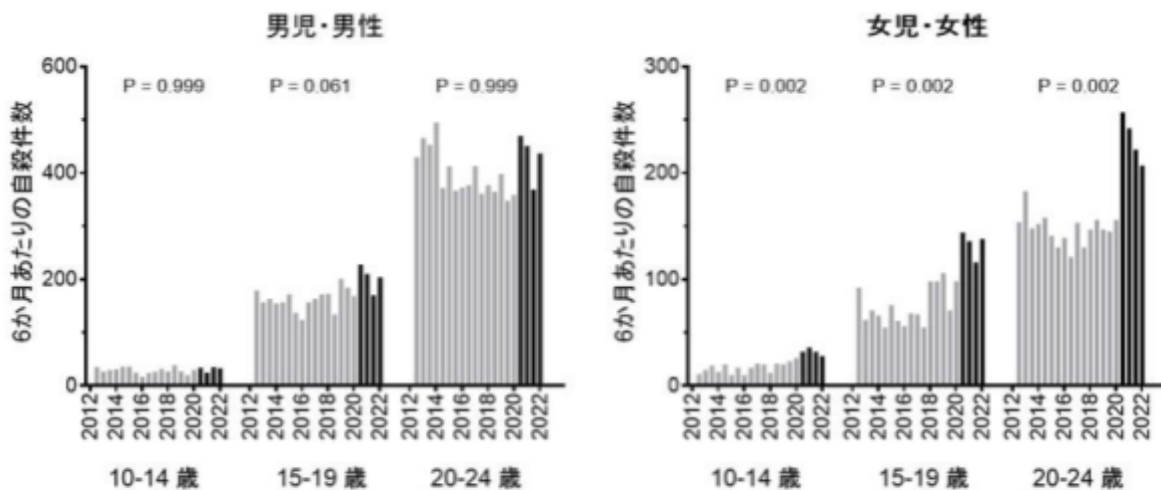
Have you ever had a difficult experience at school? There are many stressful issues, such as studying, choosing a career path, and interpersonal relationships, that need to be dealt with at school. To add to those difficulties, it is unlikely that you will get along with everyone in your class. In such a case, you have to solve these problems. If not, you might suffer from mental illness, which can present as limited school attendance, illness, and feeling lethargic. Students have to learn about stress management for themselves and to help in dealing with the people around them. If you do that, your school life will be more enjoyable. What can be done to solve these problems? In this thesis, I will examine the stress that students have in Japan and New Zealand, how they cope with it, and offer a solution to the problem.

## **Background**

I have experienced a lot of problems with my studies, family, and relationships. When I was in the first grade of high school, I was often absent from school because it took time for me to get used to the new surroundings and other students. However, I am not the kind of person who would miss school just because I felt uncomfortable. What ultimately prevented me from attending school? First, I didn't have any friends who could understand my worries. Their ideas were different from mine. Even though I thought my opinion was correct, people did not approve of me. Second, I had been struggling with it, but couldn't talk to anyone for a long time. The experience of having no one understand my thoughts was traumatic and hesitated me from talking to other people. This is not a rare case. It is a problem that many people experience. In that case, what course of action should we take? This

problem is difficult for students. I hope that solutions to this problem will be researched so that school life can be as stress-free as possible.

There is another reason why I came to write this thesis. It is the high rate of student suicides. During my health class, I was surprised to learn that suicide continues to rank among the top causes of death for teens to their 30s. As seen in the graph below, from 2020, the number of female suicides indicated an increasing trend, around the time of the new coronavirus infections (厚生労働省, 2023). As seen in other data for 2023, male suicides increased for the second year in a row, while the number of female suicides decreased for the first time in four years. In younger age groups, there was an increasing trend in the number of female suicides before and after the Coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, there was an increase in the number of suicides among women aged 10-24, with a particularly marked increase among women in their 20s (Horita, 2023).



Changes in the number of suicides from July 2012 to June 2022 (left: boys and males / right: girls and females) Black graphs show changes in the number of suicides during the new coronary disaster

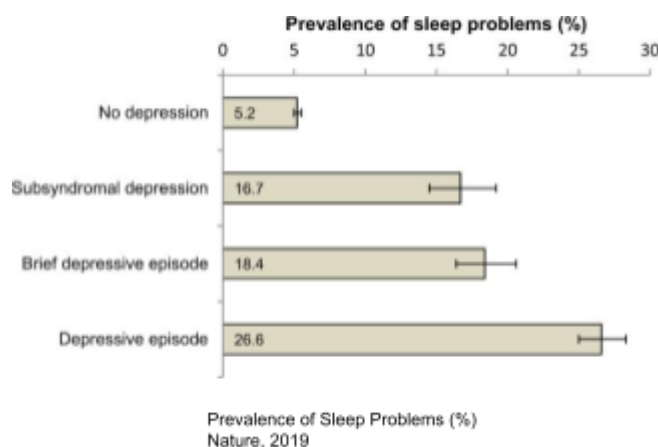
There are four possible causes why the rate of suicide among young people increased. First, oftentimes when watching the news, there is a breaking story about a suicide after a horrific bullying incident. If schools or families turn into obstacles for struggling students, it defeats the very purpose of education and care. I am well now

because my family and teachers understood me, but if I had to guess about those who committed suicide, they may never have been understood by anyone. The fact that suicide rates are rising as people move into their 20s and 30s means that more painful things awaited them. Specific knowledge is needed on the right way to keep themselves strong. What exactly can be done before depression and suicide ruins lives? We need to find ways to improve our mental health from different perspectives.

### Supporting Arguments

I resided in Auckland, New Zealand, for about ten months as part of my study abroad program and researched youth mental health. During this time, six peers and one teacher were interviewed, posing ten questions regarding youth mental health. All participants were from New Zealand, and two experts were also interviewed in Japan before going to New Zealand, providing insights based on local experience and perspective. Additionally, several specialists in the field of mental health, including a school counsellor, university students specialising in youth mental health, and professionals working as medical supporters, were also consulted.

One of the key questions posed was: How does a lack of sleep affect students? This question was motivated by a science magazine, called *Nature*, and

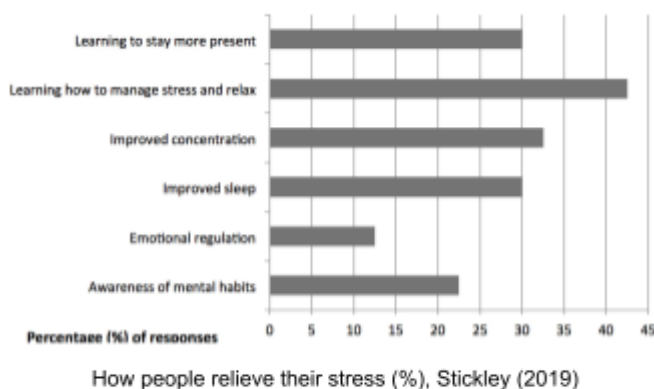


their observations of the relationship between sleep deprivation and depression, as well as the obvious lack of awareness regarding the extensive negative consequences of sleep deprivation (Stickley, 2019).

The responses revealed a clear

pattern. One interviewee noted, "It affects students in many ways; a significant impact is on their concentration and energy levels both in school and in their daily lives." Poor mental health among students reduces concentration, energy, and motivation, which leads to declines in academic and physical performance (Nightingale, 2024, personal communication). It increases anxiety and annoyance, making students more prone to negative thinking and social isolation. As a result, students struggle to sustain focus on individual work, participate less in class and extracurricular activities, and experience disappointment in personal development. Persistent psychological stress can stunt emotional growth, impair relationships with peers and teachers, and create a cycle of worsening performance and self-criticism. Scientific evidence supports these personal observations. The Better Health Channel explains that chronic sleep deprivation reduces students' ability to memorise information and stay focused (Better Health Channel, 2014).

The second question asked: *How can students reduce stress?* Since stress will never go away, relaxation methods that work for the individual need to be found.



It is crucial to relieve stress in ways such as sleeping at a regular time, talking to close friends, singing at karaoke, and listening or dancing to music (Stickley, 2019). These methods are also supported by the

Nakamura Girls' High School clinical psychologist, Ms. Shiba, who said that even the slightest change in movement, such as dancing, is said to create an illusion in the brain. It is an unprecedented way, but it effectively combats stress. Additionally, mindfulness and yoga are recommended for well-being, too. However, in serious

cases such as stress-related illnesses, the fundamental cause needs to be removed. For instance, removing themselves from toxic friend groups is effective, and by relying on medical care, the doctors will guide the way to solve problems logically. Furthermore, schools should be more flexible about school curricula and student results (Shiba, 2023, personal communication). In New Zealand, it is recommended to stay away from things that adversely affect a student's mental health. For example, if a student finds studying intensely stressful, then sufficient sleep and free time to do something fun without worrying about studying would be necessary to offset the stress. In this way, students in New Zealand do not need to worry about their schoolwork, as people who are susceptible to mental health issues are not judged unfairly if they fail assignments, tests, or stay in school for an extra year (Enicott, 2024, personal communication).

The third question is *“What kind of system would you like to see in place to protect students from stress?”* According to the interviewees, there are multiple angles to solve the issue. Before describing the solution, the situation in the two countries can be summarised as follows: The pressure to enter university is so strong in Japan that it is described as an “examination hell”, and students easily burn out (Momoki, 2016). On the other hand, more and more young people in New Zealand are getting depressed year after year, especially Maori and Pacific Islanders, who have a stronger tendency toward depression than white people (Payinda, 2024). This is because they have historical disadvantages and are still affected by racism and the economic gap (Calman, 2012 as cited by Tereposky, 2025). They experience difficulties in making connections with other students, such as the inability to attend playdates due to financial reasons.

However, these types of circumstances are experienced in both countries, and can cause serious mental health problems. To improve student well-being, both countries need flexible systems that balance freedom and motivation. At a broad level, society should recognise the challenges students face and offer diverse pathways to success beyond tertiary education (Rajapaksa, N., 2024 personal communication). This requires cooperation among schools, parents, and the government. At a local level, schools should provide accessible counselling systems. Counsellors could host informal sessions during lunchtimes or offer online consultations (Rajapaksa, H., 2024, personal communication). Similarly, Ms. Shiba suggested that consultations through Social Networking Services (SNS) or *LINE* would lower the barrier to seeking help. Having both male and female counsellors available would also make students feel more comfortable (Nightingale, 2024, personal communication). Moreover, stress management education should begin in primary school, and schools should connect students with external services, such as doctors or food banks, to reduce both academic and financial stress (Enicott, 2024, personal communication ). Parents would benefit from training programs on how to listen and respond effectively to their children's concerns (Sato, 2023, personal communication). Overall, a flexible, and comprehensive support system is essential for protecting students' mental health.

## **Conclusion**

Youth mental health still holds many problems, but it is solvable. Schools and governments should promote students' well-being by approaching different angles, such as adopting medical care, like separated-gender school counselors, offering flexible school schedules or career pathways, and collaborating with their parents.

Education is crucial in solving the mental health crisis. In Japan, students face heavy academic pressure, competitive exams, and strict career pathways, whereas in New Zealand, students face different challenges. Flexible systems and open counselling are more available, though depression rates are higher. These differences show that neither country has a perfect model, but both can learn from each other. Japan could adopt more flexible pathways and accessible counselling systems. Conversely, New Zealand could strengthen academic motivation and provide stable career guidance, reducing social stigma. Mental health problems will never disappear completely, but if societies continue to experiment and learn from one another, it will become easier for young people to seek help and improve their situations.

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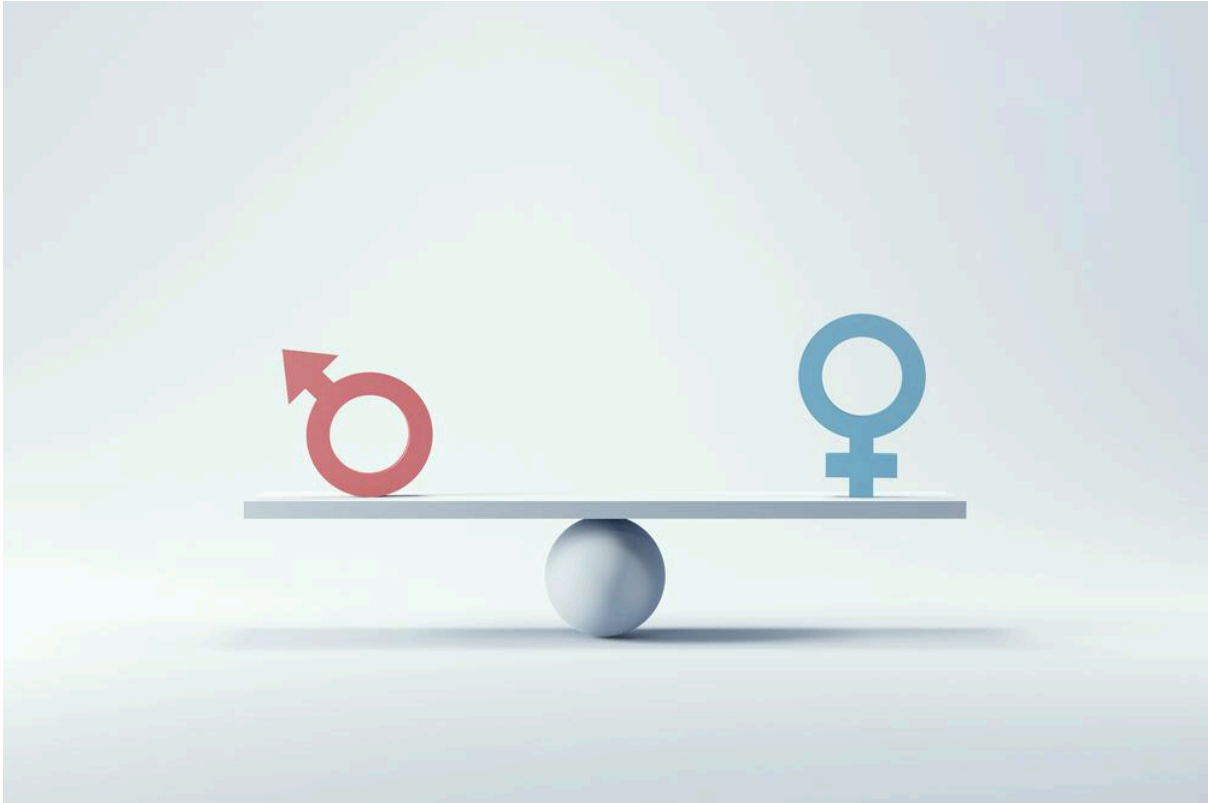
日本とニュージーランドにおける学生のメンタルヘルス促進 ~栗村杏那~

日本とニュージーランドの学生は、孤立感や自殺率の高さなど深刻なメンタルヘルスの課題を抱えています。私は留学中、現地の学生やカウンセラーにインタビューし、特に睡眠不足が集中力低下やうつに繋がることを学びました。

ストレス解消には音楽や運動、マインドフルネスが効果的で、重い場合は専門家の支援が必要です。ニュージーランドは失敗を許容し再挑戦を促す文化があり、日本は学業プレッシャーが強いという違いがあります。

両国の良さを組み合わせることで、学生のウェルビーイングを高める方法が見つかるでしょう。

# **A Comparison of Childcare in Japan and New Zealand**



**Aoi Kamo**

**Nakamura Senior Girls' High School**

**Nakamura International Course Thesis Project**

## **Introduction**

Who is supposed to take care of children? Should women do everything, or is it something that men can do, too? There is no evidence to support the idea that men can not take care of children, so why is it that women most often provide childcare? For example, my mother has done everything, such as cooking meals, bathing children, and taking care of me when I had a fever. There is a difference in the maternity environments of the *Reiwa* and *Showa* periods, however some people may not be able to keep up with the new environment. The future of our society is to question the socially and culturally created gender roles, and make it a society where each person can demonstrate their individual abilities. In this thesis, I will research the differences in maternity leave between Japan and New Zealand, the amount of childcare done by men and women, and suggest a solution to the problem.

## **Background**

As a child, I was cared for solely by my mother, while my father worked outside the home and didn't take any childcare leave. I was sad that my father didn't have free time to spend with me. Moreover, my grandmother lived with us, so when I was an elementary school student, I always ate dinner and took a shower with her. I always talked with her on weekdays. From that time, I realized that women are not equal to men. I often thought that my mother looked busy all the time. Even though my mother works outside the home and my father has retired, now spending more time at home, my mother still does all of the housework despite coming home at midnight. I think this shows how Japanese men think; that housework is the job of a woman. According to the data in graph one, there were approximately 6.14 million dual-earner households in 1960 in Japan. However, the number of dual-earner



Graph 1: A comparison of dual income and single incomes in Japan from 1980-2019

households increased to 12.45 million by 2019 (*Koseirodoshō*, 2020). In this way, we can see that modern lifestyles are changing. Are families distributing housework to fit in with these changes? According to *Naikakuhu*, women spend 203 minutes a day, on average, while

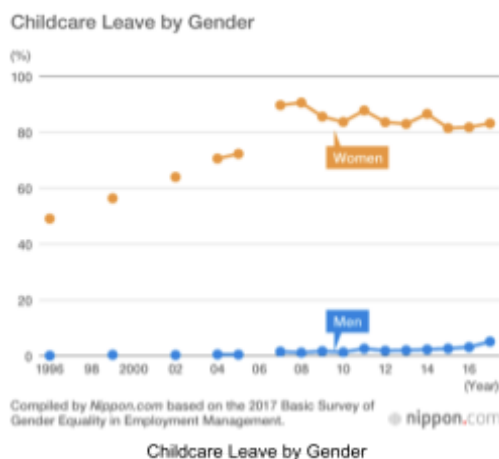
men spend an average of just 31 minutes a day on housework. This equates to a difference of 172 minutes (*Koseirodoshō*, 2020). However, Japanese people have deeply-rooted stereotypes, such as “men should work” and “women should do housework”. According to *Naikakuhu’s* data, more than half of all men and over 60 percent of women disagreed with the idea that women should stay at home and be responsible for all the housework, while men do all of the work outside the home (*Naikaku-hu*, 2016). If I ever get married, I would like to share the housework and childcare equally by setting up some basic rules about division of labor: who does which job, and what we are responsible for.

In fact, there is a paternity leave system for men in companies. According to *Koseirodo-shō*, there are three types of paternity leave. First, men can take paternity leave for a year. Second, they can take it divided between the parents. Third, they can take it if they are *senkyō shufu*, which means they are the dedicated home-maker, doing housework all the time, while their wife is working (*Koseirodo-shō*, 2022). I have tried to figure out why men do not take childcare leave when the environment allows them to. Women nurture a baby in her womb for ten

months, then after giving birth, they take time off to regain their strength. Then, women tend to raise the baby because the period of rest for a mother and the period of raising the baby overlaps. Also, it is difficult for men to take care of children by themselves because there are things that only women can do, such as breast-feeding. Despite this, I don't think it's right to leave everything to women. I think women can also experience a lot of problems. As an example, women who bear children have to recover physically and emotionally, and I think it is the role of men to support them, hence I want to look deeper into childcare.

### Supporting Arguments

I went to New Zealand for a year. I asked ten questions to three women and a man, and two women in Japan, for a total of six people. The first question was: *How much child care leave have you or your husband taken?* None of the male



interviewees took child care leave. As to why they didn't take it, some of the reasons cited were men have to earn money for their family, or their wife stays home and does the housework and childcare, so there was no need to take child care leave. New Zealand men take less paternity leave than women by a high margin. Over 90 percent of New

Zealand men take less than three months of child care leave, while more than 50 percent of women take over six months of child care leave (Cook, 2011). Likewise, in Japan, despite the increase in the number of men who have started to take childcare leave, the numbers are still very low compared to women. For the past 15 years, 80

percent of women have taken childcare leave, while men have only recently hit five percent (nippon.com, 2017). One possible reason for this is working hours are shorter in New Zealand than in Japan. The majority of fathers come home from work just after five p.m., and New Zealanders rarely work overtime (boundless, 2025). In Japan, however, an average of 22 hours per month in overtime was recorded, which may account for the inability to take extended child care leave, even if it is offered by the company (nippon.com, 2023).

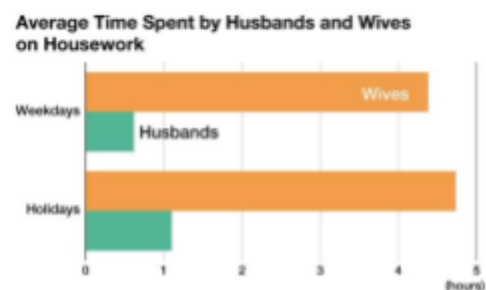
The second question was; *How is childcare divided in your household?* The New Zealander men said that they divided it with their wives. According to the Time Use Survey of 2001, New Zealand men and women spend about the same amount

Figure 1



of time working a paid job, but females spend two hours a day more than males on unpaid work, such as housework or caring for children. Approximately 60 percent of males' work is paid, and almost 70 percent of females' work is unpaid, according to the graph on the left. All in all, it is close to being even.

In stark comparison, Japanese women do seven times as much housework and childcare as their husbands. Japanese husbands spent just 37 minutes on average doing cleaning, cooking, and childcare on weekdays, while wives spent 4 hours 23 minutes. Even on holidays, in comparison to husbands spending 1 hour 6 minutes on housework



Compiled by Nippon.com based on the sixth national survey on household changes published by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. © nippon.com  
Comparing average time spent on housework between wives and husbands

and childcare, wives spent four times that, with 4 hours 44 minutes per day (nippon.com, 2001).

The third question asked was; *Have you ever used daycare center or kindergarten services in the past?* Two out of four people interviewed in New Zealand said they took their children to kindergarten or nursery school. In fact, figure.nz shows that of the 305,500 children in the 0-4 age group, 240,300 children, or 78.6%, attend some kind of

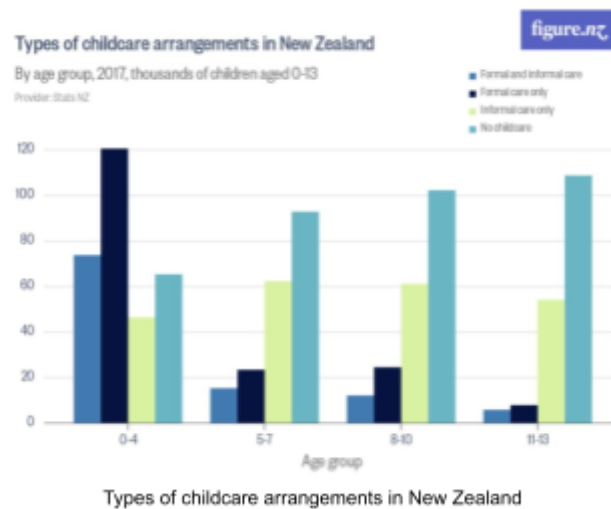
child care in New Zealand

(figurenz, 2017). New Zealand

has a population of 5.1 million and 664 kindergartens, meaning it has 13 kindergartens per one hundred thousand in population,

compared with Japan's 7229

kindergartens to cater for the 125 million population, which equates to 5.8 kindergartens per one hundred thousand in population. Additionally, to make it even easier for New Zealand parents, the government offers 20 hours a week of free childcare for three to five year olds. It is free to everyone, regardless of income or type of work that is done by the parents. Even part time and contract workers can use this child care. These kinds of programs make it easy for parents to return to work after childbirth, and have led to an increase in the number of households in New Zealand using childcare (Ministry of Education, 2023). By having a large number of child care facilities, government-provided free childcare, and more flexible working hours, New Zealand mothers are able to focus on their careers and avoid being pushed out of the employment market. Due to the flexibility of the New



Zealand system, many people choose to work from home, allowing them to simultaneously take care of children if and when they need to do so. To



Host father's work from home office, New Zealand

accommodate the work from home style, the majority of New Zealand houses have a work room or dedicated space to work from. Companies show flexibility by permitting workers to take breaks to deal with children, longer lunch breaks, and time for breastfeeding mothers. The New Zealand work from home system is more flexible and considerate of parents who are raising young children.

Japan, on the other hand, has long waiting lists and staff shortages at kindergartens and nursery schools, especially in urban areas. One of the more excluding issues parents face is that public childcare access is linked to parents' working hours. Part-time or freelance workers may have difficulty qualifying for certain services due to their shorter working hours. This forces the parents, mostly mothers, to take an extended leave of absence, or entirely quit their jobs to care for children. While New Zealand experiences an attendance rate of almost 80%, Japan has around 45% attendance rate for the same age group (Bühler-Niederberger, Gu et al., 2025).

## Conclusion

There are positives in both New Zealand and Japan. However, the problem which Japanese people have, is to improve childcare in Japan. I believe there are four solutions for the childcare crisis. First, the Japanese government should encourage fathers to take child care leave. Companies should pay them a living

wage and long enough childcare periods. Second, companies should stop forcing long, overtime hours on employees, especially those who have children. Third, children should get into the habit of doing housework from a young age. Japanese men will not think it is hard or unusual work when raising their children if they get into the habit of doing housework from childhood. Fourth, many companies should allow work from home options for employees who have children to care for, because nowadays, many husbands and wives both work. With these kinds of changes, we can achieve a more equal and fair system in Japan.

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## 日本とニュージーランドの育児を比べて ～加茂葵～

子供の世話は、男性と女性のどちらが行うべきでしょうか。共同で行うものだと私は考えます。この研究を通して、子育てへの関与における男女差をなくしていきたいと考えようになりました。この研究をしようと思ったのは、私の母が幼い頃から私の世話や家事をしていた一方で、会社員の父はお金を稼ぐため、家事をしていなかった姿を見ていたことがきっかけです。そこで私は日本とニュージーランドにおける育児への関わり方の差について疑問を持ち、解決に向けて調べようと思いました。

結果として、ニュージーランド、日本ともに、女性の方が男性よりも家事と育児をする時間が多いことが分かった。これらの結果から、ジェンダー平等の実現に向けて4つの対策を提案する。第一に、男性の育児休暇の取得をより強化する。第二に、会社が残業をさせないように決まりを定める。第三に、次世代の若者に家事の習慣を身に付けさせる。第四に、育児ができるよう在宅ワークのルールを企業が規定する。これらによって、近い将来ジェンダー平等を実現できると考える。

# **The Importance of Good Mental Health for Students**



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## **Introduction**

Nowadays, the number of students who do not attend school is increasing, and this is considered a big social problem. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan, a record number of 346,482 students refused to attend school for 30 days or more during 2023 (Nippon.com, 2024). In my junior high school, some students were unable to go to school, reducing their opportunities to take classes and talk with friends and teachers. In addition, the rise of bullying on social media has created new challenges, making it harder to find safe spaces outside school. To combat this, what should we do for student stress and bullying, whether in-person or online? It is not a problem that can be easily solved by themselves, therefore, we should cooperate and help them. In this thesis, I will examine the importance of mental health care for students and suggest some ways in which it can be achieved.

## **Background**

In recent decades, the number of young people who feel overwhelmed are increasing. A study analysing UK data from 2000 to 2020 found that the rates of these mental disorders among people aged 16-24 more than doubled during this period (UCL, 2023). In general, students have little knowledge of how to take care of their mental health and cannot deal with it.

My interest in this topic was influenced by a friend of mine. When I was in secondary school, I had a friend who was usually cheerful, but sometimes missed school or avoided getting involved with others. However, I was sad and frustrated because I did not know how to help my friend who was stressed at school, and at home. Besides her, I have met several other people in similar situations and I still

haven't figured out how to help them. I also have had trouble with relationships and grades, and it wasn't easy to talk to people about it, so I would like to learn how to create an environment where students can feel comfortable asking for advice. I feel that all teenage students have their worries, and that it is very difficult to talk to others about them. Therefore, I feel strongly that from now on, I want to help any friends who experience this kind of stress. Another key aspect of student mental health support is the role of the school counsellor. It is essential to know how important a school counsellor and family support is for stressed students (William and Mary School of Education). Students should be able to rely on their families, since home should be a safe space. For students, strong mental health gives them a good quality of student life. However, it is not only their immediate environment that stresses them; their lifestyle also plays a major role in their mental health. For example, lack of sleep can lead to physical and mental health problems, and poor nutrition can cause lethargy, poor concentration and increased stress. These problems can be altered through a change in lifestyle (Watson and Cherney, 2024).

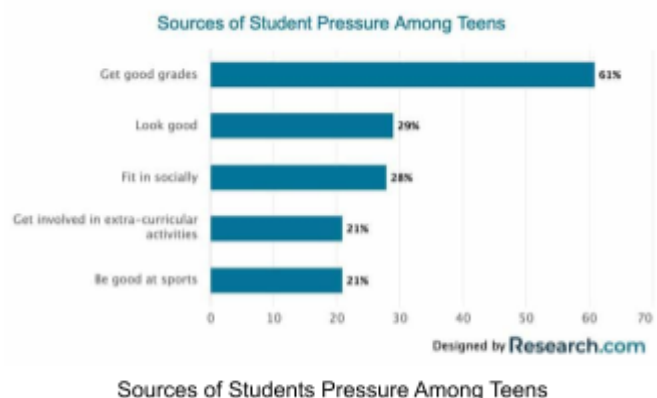
This subject is closely linked to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #3 which focuses on promoting health and well-being for everyone to have a thriving life both physically and mentally. The significance of prioritizing wellness among students aligns with this goal since it directly impacts their well-being; if their mental health is not good, it can negatively impact their quality of life and physical health as well. For example, mental health issues, social isolation, and poor sleep, all of which affect overall well-being (CDC, 2024). Balancing studies, exams and personal life can be difficult, but it can be even more difficult if your mental health is suffering, so it is extremely important for students to take care of their mental health.

## Supporting Arguments

I stayed in Brisbane, Queensland, in Australia for about one year. During my time in Australia, four interviewees were asked ten questions about the importance of student's mental health. In addition, two Japanese people were interviewed in Japan. The interviewees are as follows: Interviewee S is a male teacher from the UK. Interviewee K is an Australian woman. Interviewee P is a female teacher from Greece. Interviewee W is a male teacher from Australia.

In response to the question; *what do you think is the main reason students feel mentally exhausted?* interviewee S suggested that not getting enough sleep is the main factor. According to a study in the United States by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), research shows that a lack of sleep has a high impact on student stress. About seven-eight hours of sleep is recommended for teenagers in America, but at least 60% of university students get poor quality sleep, averaging about seven hours per night. This sleep deficiency is linked to higher stress levels, increased anxiety, and lower academic performance (CDC, 2024). Studies show that approximately 70% of university students report experiencing academic burnout at some point during their studies, especially when a lack of adequate sleep is linked to a 65% increase in academic burnout among university students (Eser, 2025). Academic burnout is described as a state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion, which may eventually lead to a loss of motivation (Liu & Zhang, 2022).

The chart *Sources of Student Pressure Among Teens* shows that the biggest source of pressure



causing burnout at 61% is getting good grades. This indicates that academic achievement is the top priority for teenagers, and many believe that school performance strongly influences their future. The data also suggests that students face burnout not only from lack of sleep, but also from academics, appearance, social relationships, and extracurricular commitments. (Engage the Brain, 2022). Additionally, 58% of children are not getting enough sleep. These children are at a greater risk of concentration problems, impulse control issues, risk of depression, aggression issues, and risk of anxiety. Children who get enough sleep have a tendency to perform better in school than those who do not sleep enough (Nelson, 2020).

In response to the question; *how much does the family environment affect students' mental health?* interviewee P answered that a supportive family helps kids and teens handle life, feel good, and gain confidence. On the other hand, if a family is stressful or lacks communication, children may struggle with emotions and schoolwork. Research shows that a family environment significantly influences a student's mental health. A study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that an unhealthy family environment is connected to a rise in emotional and behavioral issues among teenagers (PMC, 2014). This image

shows that one in every seven children has experienced abuse or neglect in the past year (Oathout, 2021). Furthermore, research in the United States, at the CDC, shows that a positive family environment is associated with better mental health outcomes in children (CDC, 2025). This



information implies that the family environment, especially parent's mental health and

family connections, are important influences on children's mental health. For instance, family connections can help to teach students how to cope with people at school and in their daily lives. In addition, they learn that they can rely on their family when they are stressed. In contrast, children who are abused by their parents, or who do not have a good connection with family, can experience stress (P.U.R.E).

To the question; *how important is it to do things we like, such as hobbies?*, interviewee K's answer was "having activities we enjoy boosts dopamine in our brain, making us feel happy. Balancing responsibilities with fun is important for our well-being." A study published in Nature Medicine found that having a hobby is associated with better health, mood, and overall well-being. In particular, doing physical activities and hobbies, such as exercise, can reduce stress levels and improve physical health (Kumar, 2023). Furthermore, when we enjoy something, we often relax, which reduces stress. It can be considered a win-win all around (Babcock, 2017). This cycle can reduce stress by enjoyment of an activity. Studies have shown that improved work-life balance leads to lower levels of anxiety, stress and depression among students (Sprung, 2020). A good work-life balance increases confidence, which can, in turn, lead to better academic results. Rather than just studying a lot and stressing out, an effective cycle for students is to balance study with the



Win-win cycle

enjoyment of hobbies and things you like to do. From this data, it is clear that doing enjoyable activities, such as a hobby, is very important for a student's happiness and well-being. In addition, balancing

responsibilities with enjoyable activities is key to staying healthy and feeling happy instead of concentrate on school work too much.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, mental health issues among students are very serious problems that can affect their learning, relationships, and overall happiness. An increasing number of students suffer from pressure at school, family pressure or bullying, both in person and online. In addition, their lifestyles are very relative to their mental health. To help students deal with mental health issues, I feel strongly that all schools should provide counseling services and safe spaces where students can talk about their feelings freely. Furthermore, it is better that teachers and parents recognize when students are struggling, and know how to help them. From this thesis, I learned about the causes of student stress and anxiety, the importance of a balanced lifestyle, and how providing counseling support through schools, families and society is a practical solution in managing students' mental health.

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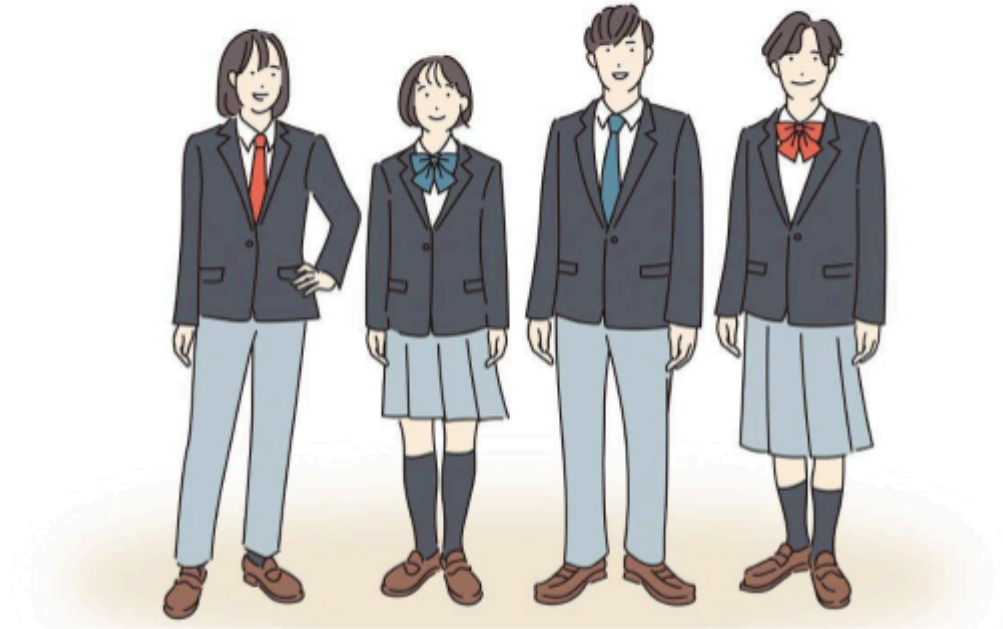
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#### 生徒のメンタルヘルスケアの重要性 ～坂本 南～

近年、不登校の生徒の増加やSNS上のいじめの増加の深刻化により、生徒のメンタルヘルスが大きな社会問題になっている。若者の精神疾患は増加傾向にあり、その原因として家庭環境や生活習慣の影響が指摘されている。オーストラリアと日本で実施したインタビューでは、睡眠不足がストレスや学業成績の低下につながることに、家庭の支えが精神的健康を向上させること、趣味を持つことがストレス軽減に有効であることが明らかになった。こうした背景から、学校はカウンセリングを充実させ、生徒が安心して相談できる環境を整えるとともに、家庭や社会が協力してメンタルヘルスを支援する仕組みを作ることが求められる。

# Genderless Fashion



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**Nakamura International Course Thesis Project**

## **Introduction**

Do you think genderless fashion will become more prevalent in the world? Genderless fashion means to enjoy yourself by wearing the fashion you like without thinking about femininity or masculinity. Recently, it includes men who wear skirts and women who like pants, and more and more people are wearing the clothes they like in their own way. For instance, an increasing number of famous people attending the Academy Awards and fashion shows, such as the *Paris Collection*, are wearing fashion that does not differentiate between genders. Genderless fashion has become more popular due to the fact that it has been taken on by world-famous actors and fashion brands. It has spread to Japan and is gradually being seen more often on television and in the streets. These influences quickly made genderless fashion easily accessible to the public. In this thesis, I will explore the influence of genderless fashion on people, and how it will affect us in the future.

## **Background**

Fashion styles are always evolving to be more comfortable and fashionable. Fashion reflects not only style, but also personality, such as those who always wear bright-colored clothes tend to look more cheerful than other people (Fetell Lee, 2023). When comparing the differences in values and perceptions of genderless fashion between Japanese and Canadians, I found that Canadian people don't seem to care about what they wear, however Japanese people still have stereotypes about their style. This difference connects with the histories of each country. Canada's various indigenous people and immigrant cultures have their own languages and customs, and this diversity makes it easier to accept genderless fashion and different values. In Japan, since the Meiji era, the traditional idea of "men work outside the

home and women do the housework” is influenced by Western culture and this stereotype still continues to this day. This connects to gender discrimination that continues even today, with ideas such as, “women should be more feminine, and men are expected to be more masculine”.

Lately, there has been an increase in the number of women dressed in stereotypical masculine outfits, such as baggy pants or tailored jackets, and no one comments on it, however many will comment and judge men who wear skirts.



Genderless fashion of Billie Eilish (L) and Harry Styles (R)

There are many famous people who wear genderless fashion. For instance, singer Billie Eilish, and Harry Styles, a former member of One Direction, both often wear genderless fashion and take the initiative to decrease prejudice in this area. Billie Eilish, in a 2019 interview, stated that, “I wear what I want to wear. Then people say,

“She doesn't want to be seen as a sexual object” or “She doesn't want to be stereotyped as a woman.” She says, “I've always been in favor of women, men, and anyone in the world having confidence in their skin and body and being able to show it however they want,” Harry Styles also once responded to an interviewer's question about his preference for feminine and genderless fashion. He stated that it doesn't matter whether the clothes he wears are feminine or masculine, and that if he finds a shirt he likes and someone tells him it is for women, it won't stop him from wearing it. He added, “I think it would be really easy if I could be myself...” (Elle girl, 2024).

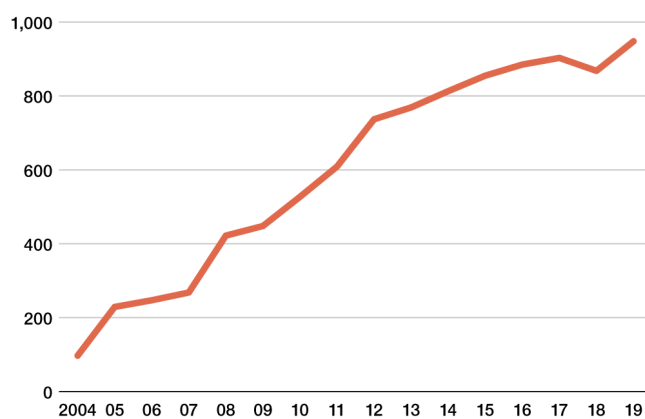
When famous people, such as Billie Eilish and Harry Styles wear genderless fashion, many people feel encouraged by them to do the same, without fear of embarrassment. I am of the opinion that it does not matter what people wear, as long as they find a style in which they are comfortable.

## Supporting Arguments

I studied abroad in Canada for one year and interviewed four Canadians, and two Japanese before leaving, for a total of three men and three women, to find out what they think about genderless fashion, and compare the differences between gender, age and nationality.

The first question asked was; *Do you think femininity or masculinity is necessary?* Five people answered that it's necessary. One Japanese person answered that gender boundaries are disappearing now, and some people are trying to change their gender to become a woman or a man by changing their voice and body. If femininity or masculinity disappeared, the people who want to change their

**Annual Total of People Who Officially Changed Their Gender**



Created by Nippon.com based on judicial statistics.

nippon.com

gender will not exist. This line chart displays the annual number of people who officially changed their gender between 2004 and 2019 in Japan. In 2004, the Japanese government enacted legislation to allow transgender people to officially change their gender in their family registers, and the number of people

doing so has risen ever since. It increased from just 97 people in 2004, to over 800

people in 2014 (nippon.com). The Canadian interviewer answered that drawing a clear line between femininity and masculinity is not that necessary, but it is up to each individual if they would like to express their femininity or masculinity, depending on how they feel about which fashion fits them. The answers received from this question varied greatly between interviewees, however most of the interviewees think that sometimes the border of gender is necessary. To illustrate using a recent example, people who identify as the opposite gender of that which they were born with often have difficulties when using a washroom. They want to use the washroom designated for the gender they identify with, however their physical appearance may not always align with their gender identity. Unfortunately, some incidents in washrooms have been reported in the past. Specifically, a transgender girl was hospitalized and left with a broken jaw after allegedly being attacked by three classmates at a Minnesota high school. She was very badly injured, and has since started using universal washrooms (Laviertes, 2024). Universal washrooms make it easy for any person to safely use a washroom.

The second question was: *Little by little it's becoming more widely known, but there is still prejudice against genderless fashion. What do you think about this?* One Japanese person answered that genderless fashion is not very popular in Japan at this time, and this type of fashion is only popular with young people. Conversely, all

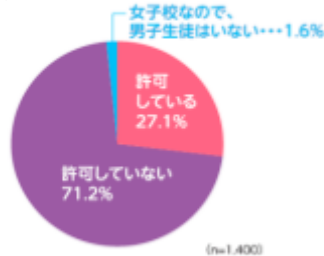


Male students in Canada wore skirts in protest, 2020.

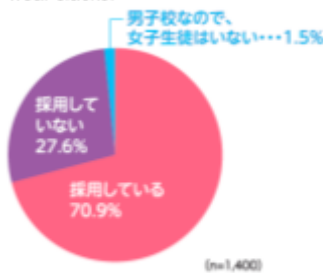
Canadians answered that genderless fashion is becoming more widely known by many people. The prejudice of genderless fashion still exists now but they attempt to fight against the prejudice and discrimination to change

people’s stereotype. For instance, in 2020 in Quebec, Canada, male students wore skirts to school to protest against gender discrimination. Their actions spread to

The number of school allow boys to wear skirts



The number of school that allow girls to wear slacks.



Percentage of Japanese schools that allow gender-free uniforms, 2023

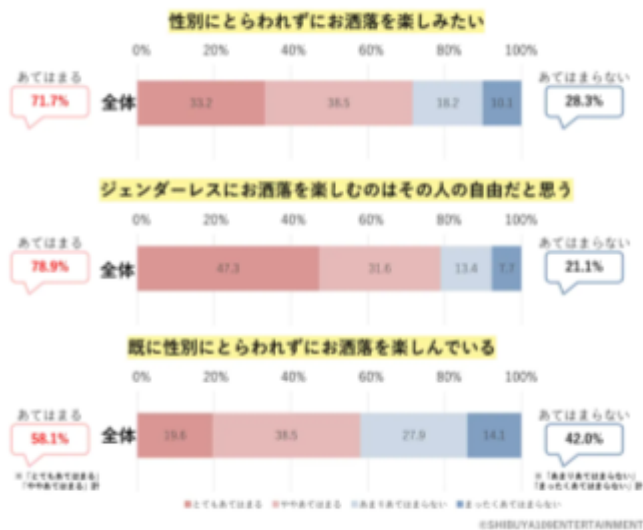
other schools with the hashtag *#jupepourtous*, which means “ a skirt is for everyone.” This hash tag implies that skirts are not only limited to women, who are able to wear any people. Not only in Canada, but also in Japan, some schools started to accept girls wearing slacks and boys wearing skirts. A few schools even decided to make it mandatory for both girls and boys to wear ties (kanko gakuseifuku, 2023). Although, genderless fashion is starting to prevail all over the world, there are still not many schools that give boys permission to wear

skirts and for girls to wear slacks.

The third question was; *In what way has genderless fashion become popular in your country recently?* One person answered that it's becoming easier for females to be part of genderless fashion. Conversely, it is more difficult for men wearing genderless fashion to go outside. For instance, some people feel more uncomfortable wearing a skirt because they are afraid of how other people will perceive it, and are scared of being discriminated against.

Genderless fashion became well-known in Canada because of the impact of various promotional or traditional events. In Canadian high schools, there is a pink shirt day in which students wear pink clothes in order to improve the negative image of genderless fashion. Pink Shirt Day began in 2007 when a student in Nova Scotia was bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school. It has since been recognized worldwide

as an annual day to stand against bullying (Alberta Government, 2025). On the other



Percentage of people who enjoy wearing genderless fashion, 2024

hand, genderless fashion has been gaining popularity in Japan, especially among young people. According to this graph, 71.7% of people want to enjoy fashion without being restricted by gender, and 58.1% of people answered that they already enjoyed wearing

any fashion which is not restricted from gender constraints. Furthermore, 78.9% of respondents felt that people should be free to enjoy fashion without gender distinctions or restrictions. Japanese men answered that genderless fashion is becoming more popular because of events and education, such as studying about SDGs at school (PRTIMES, 2024). These events and education would lead to genderless fashion becoming more generalized and part of our lives.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed how genderless fashion is becoming more known by many people, but there is still prejudice and discrimination. From the research and interviews, it is clear that opinions of genderless fashion are different depending on the country and gender. In addition, I came to understand the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding genderless fashion that are deeply rooted in many countries. In these circumstances, attempting to solve this problem immediately is neither realistic nor advisable, and it is a high risk for people who

already wear genderless fashion and might feel more stress and pressure from disinformation. However, it seems possible to reduce an individual's bias by organizing more events and spreading factual information on social media to foster acceptance toward genderless fashion. Although it will take a long time to become fully accepted, it is essential to create a diverse society in which all people are able to express their personality and respect others' styles.

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あなたは「ジェンダーレスファッション」という言葉を耳にしたことはあるだろうか。ジェンダーレスファッションとは自分の性別に囚われずに自分が好みとするファッションスタイルを選ぶことである。近年では女性が男性らしいゆったりとしたオーバーなズボンやジャケットを着ていたり、男性が女性らしいスカートを履いたりしている光景を目にする機会も増えてきていると思う。その一方で、依然として偏見が深く根づいている部分があり公に出すのが苦しいと感じる当事者も少なくない。私は人々のジェンダーレスファッションへの考え方を知るために日本人とカナダ人合計6人にインタビューを行った。彼らの考え方から国や性別、個人の考え方による違いでジェンダーレスファッションに対する様々な意見や向き合い方があることに気がついた。このプロジェクトを通して、各国でいまだ偏見やステレオタイプが根付いている現状を改めて実感した。こうした固定観念の押し付けが混在する中での即時的な解決は現実的ではなく、むしろ当事者にストレスやプレッシャーを与える危険性があると感じた。しかし、徐々に一人一人の偏見を取り除くためにイベント開催やインターネットを活用した情報の発信により無意識的に世の中に浸透させていくことは可能であると思う。そのためには時間をかけながらも皆が人の個性を尊重し、ジェンダーレスファッションに留まらず自分らしいスタイルを貫ける社会を築いていく必要がある。

# NAKAMURA SENIOR GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

## Nakamura International Course

### Thesis Projects

#### ～概要～

中村高等学校国際コースでは、高校2年次に1年間の海外留学(英語圏)を経験します。そして留学中に研究計画に沿って調査を進め、課題論文を作成します。

2025年度中村高等学校国際コース3年生は、「ジェンダー(社会的・文化的に創り出された男女の違い)」「すべての人に健康と福祉を」「住み続けられるまちづくりを」をテーマにしたプロジェクト学習に果敢に挑戦しました。少子高齢社会の日本で、様々な分野で女性の活躍が期待されます。女子教育の場でこそできる「社会貢献・社会創造を担う女性とは」を課題として、グローバルキャリアという視点を軸に、各自が設定したテーマを一人一人が追求しました。国際コースの目標「Think Globally, Act Locally」の実現です。

留学前にテーマ決定をし、調査方法を学びました。留学中も本校の教員(英語を母国語とするネイティブスタッフ)の指導を受けながら、現地の多様な人々にインタビューを実施、さらに図書館や資料館など必要な機関を訪ね、フィールドワークを行いました。帰国後に、調査結果を整理し、論文としてまとめました。昨年度に引き続き、その成果を刊行いたします。

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