Creating Housing Environments That Are Coducive to Raising Children
– *Yokohama Survey Results* –

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1. Introduction

Along with aging, the declining birth rate has been discussed extensively as a phenomenon of modern day society. Japan's total fertility rate, in steady decline since the late 1970s, is already well below what is needed to maintain the population level (the population replacement level) of 2.08 children.[1] As of 1997, the national average stood at 1.39 children.

The decline in children has been particularly pronounced in metropolitan areas. Along with the poor child raising environment and financial difficulties, couples invariably cite cramped and expensive housing in metropolitan areas as a reason for not having more children.

Japan's housing construction situation is said to have shifted from an era of quantity to one of quality in 1968, when the number of total dwellings surpassed that of households for the first time. Housing for the elderly has already received much attention, leading to a greater diversity of alternatives being offered. However, a dialogue has yet to be started regarding ways to improve housing and community environments so that raising children becomes less of a burden.

The decision to have children is an individual right, which the government must not infringe on by intervening too deeply. But if we find that people are deciding against having more children because of factors as fundamental as their housing situation, something clearly needs to be done to alleviate the problem.

This paper examines the housing situation in a metropolitan area among families raising children, and identifies their needs with regard to the housing and community environment.

2. Housing and the Decline in Children

We begin with a review of the literature to examine how the relationship between decline in children and housing is treated.

The *Fiscal 1998 Health and Welfare White Paper* treats the decline in children as its main theme. Two of the top three reasons that housewives refrained from having their ideal number of children were related to the financial burden of raising children, followed in third place by age. All three responses scored over 30%. The highest ranked housing factor, cramped dwellings, is mentioned in fourth place at over 10%.[2]

The Tokyo metropolitan government's Opinion Survey of the Younger Generation Regarding Living in Tokyo (1998) found that the housing factor contributing most to the decline in children was the high cost of housing, cited by over 80% of respondents, while almost 70% could not secure the number of rooms or space needed as their children grew older.[3]

Furthermore, in the *Yokohama City Survey of Opinions and Behavior Related to the Decline in Children* (1997), the top three reasons people refrained from having their ideal number of children were other priorities in the household budget (34.1%), cost of education (29.4%), followed by small dwelling space (28.9%).[4]

3. Housing Policies in Tokyo's Wards

Against the backdrop of bubble-era land prices and high housing costs, local governments at the Tokyo ward (ku) level have attempted to address the decline in children and suburban flight of families through such measures as building family-oriented public housing and subsidizing rents with ward finances. Below we look at the status of these housing policies geared toward families.

Policies generally fall into the two categories of financial assistance and housing supply. Financial assistance is provided to families and newly married couples to help pay rent payments and facilitate relocation to a new dwelling. Housing supply measures consist of supplying public housing and leased housing for families. Chuo-ku and Shinagawa-ku do not specifically have family housing, but give preference to families when allocating the general housing supply.

The main objective of these housing policies is to stabilize the population (that is, to prevent an outflow). Eligibility is limited to people who live in private rental housing and also have

parents (or spouse's parents) living in the ward. In addition, financial assistance requires complying with an income ceiling, and lasts from four to ten years.

Recently, tight public finances have caused the wards to revise their financial assistance policy and rely more on the national policy of supplying designated high-quality rental housing through the private sector. However, the wards had only 15,000 units of this housing as of the end of fiscal 1997.

These policies thus limit eligibility and focus strictly on dwelling units, and fail to address the suitability of housing for families raising children, including the quality of the residential environment.

4. Housing Policies in the U.S. and Sweden

For reference purposes, we briefly look at the status of family housing policies abroad.

Federal Fair Housing Laws in the U.S. prohibit the sale or rent of private sector housing if there is any discrimination based on race, color, ethnic origin, or religion. With public housing and federally subsidized private housing, it is illegal to deny housing to families with children.

In Sweden, home to one of the world's most advanced welfare systems, relatively low-income households and single-parent households are provided with public rental housing. In addition, housing allowances are provided to households with children and to retirees, and approximately 25% of households with children receive allowances regardless of the type of housing or ownership. In planning residential neighborhoods, communities are designed for diversity by preventing discrimination or segregation based on ethnic background, income level, and age.

Furthermore, in 1993 Sweden announced a family policy program aimed at enhancing childcare services by bolstering the role of communes, thereby integrating its housing policy and childcare policy.

5. Status of Housing for Families Raising Children

Below we present the findings of our *Yokohama City Survey of Housing and Community Environment for Raising Healthy Children*, which looks at the status of family housing in the metropolitan area and needs with respect to the residential environment.[5] In the survey sample, the

average age was 37.7 years for men and 37.3 years for women; 65% of the sample had children, with an average of 1.9 children per household; the average length of residence in Yokohama City was 8.0 years.

According to a 1996 survey, the men in Yokohama married at age 29.2 and women at age 27.0. The average respondents in our survey were families with children who started living in Yokohama after marriage.

(1) Yokohama's Abundance of Cramped Collective Housing

Our survey found that the average floor space of dwellings was 76.3 square meters, with approximately half of all respondents living in dwellings less than 80 square meters in size with a 3K (three rooms plus kitchen) to 3LDK (three rooms, living room, dining room and kitchen) layout.

In the seventh national 5-year housing plan, the targeted standard for urban dwellings was 91 square meters for a family of four.[6] Although Yokohama's basic housing plan set similar goals (for public rental housing, 55 sq. meters for three persons and 65 sq. meters for four; for condominiums, 75 sq. meters for three persons and 91 sq. meters for four), an extremely large number of dwellings do not meet these standards.

Looking at dwellings by type and ownership, the most common are owned free-standing houses (34.8%), and the proportion of all owned and rented free-standing houses is 37.8%. On the other hand, the proportion of collective dwellings is 48.9% (condominiums, private and public collective rental housing, company/public employee housing, and dorms). Compared to the nationwide proportions in the 1993 housing statistics survey, in which the ratio of free-standing houses to collective dwellings was 59.2 to 40.3, Yokohama has a disproportionate number of densely concentrated urban dwellings.

Asked whether they have had any unpleasant experiences relating to neighborhood children, respondents living in collective housing frequently cited encountering ill-behaved children in public places, and being disturbed by noise from children. The simultaneously conducted group interviews concerning childcare revealed difficulties arising from cramped dwellings and the densely populated residential environment.

Typical comments include receiving complaints about noise caused by children from the residents living below, property devaluation caused by soiling by children playing in public spaces, loud noise on weekends, and time restrictions for playing in the front yard of condominiums.

(2) Ideal and Actual Number of Children

We next examine how housing affects the number of children. The ideal number of children by housing type (Table 1) is smallest at 2.28 children for private rental housing, while the largest number is 2.48 children for company/public employee housing. Thus regardless of housing type, the ideal number spans a narrow range from 2.3 to 2.5 children.

However, the actual number of children varies more widely, ranging from 2.05 children for owned free-standing houses, down to 1.49 children for private rental housing. The disparity between ideal and actual numbers is thus largest for private rental housing. By dwelling size, the ideal number of children increases for large dwellings with 4LDK and 5LDK layouts. Thus dwelling size is correlated with the number of children, and as the number of children increases, so does the present and desired dwelling size. Likewise, the more spacious the dwelling, the larger the ideal number of children.

We look at this situation in greater detail below.

Table 1 Ideal and Actual Number of Children by Housing Type

	Overall	Owned house	Condo	Rental apartment	Public housing	Employee housing
Ideal no. of children	2.38	2.43	2.35	2.28	2.3	2.48
Actual no. of children	1.88	2.05	1.86	1.49	1.86	1.81
Ideal – actual	0.5	0.38	0.49	0.79	0.44	0.67

(3) Housing Factors that Affect the Number of Children

Housing factors thought to affect the number of children include housing cost, floor space, and housing quality. Table 2 looks at different types of housing and describes the residents, housing cost, and their self-evaluation of housing.

Table 2 Resident Characteristics and Number of Children by Housing Type

	Overall	Owned house	Condo	Rental apartment	Public housing	Employee housing
Respondent's age	37.5	40.2	38.5	33.7	35.1	35
Youngest child's age	8.6	11.3	8.3	4.4	7.5	5.5
Two-income households (%)	41.8	45.7	41.1	42.4	42.4	29.3
Monthly housing cost (¥)	103,151	36,480	140,358	105,758	77,436	22,051
as % of annual income	19.5	7.2	22.9	24.4	19.7	4.5
Floor space (m2)	76.3	102.3	59.5	53.1	56.3	57.1
Years of residence (avg.)	8	12.2	6.8	4.1	6.8	5.1
Overall rating (points)	3.3	3.6	3.4	3	3.1	3
1. Residential environment	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.5
2. Child raising	3.2	3.3	3.2	2	3.1	3
3. Affordability	3.1	3.8	3.5	1.9	2.4	2.4
4. Spaciousness	3	3.4	3	2.6	3	2.6
5. Structure	3.2	3.4	3.3	3	3.1	2.8
6. Functionality	3.2	3.5	3.3	2.8	2.9	2.7

Notes: Housing expense refers to all monthly expenses associated with housing such as rent, loan payments, management fees, and maintenance deposits.
Evaluation of housing uses a 5-point scale and covers residential environment (9 items), childcare (4 items), finance (3 items), space (2 items), structure (4 items), and performance (8 items). Average values are calculated for each axis.

Financial burdens such as housing cost have a direct impact on the household budget and standard of living. Housing costs in Yokohama tend to be higher than in non-metropolitan areas, making it more expensive to secure the desired quality and convenience of housing and residential environment.

Overall, the average monthly housing cost was 103,151 yen, amounting to 19.5% of annual household income. According to MACA's *1997 Household Survey*, the average salaried worker household in Japan spent 53,761 yen on housing, or the equivalent of 9.0% of income. Yokohama residents thus spend approximately twice the national average on housing.[7]

By housing type, there is a large difference of approximately 120,000 yen between the lowest monthly housing cost (company/public employee housing, 22,051 yen) and highest (condominium, 140,358 yen). Housing cost as a proportion of household income is highest for private rental housing (24.4%).

By floor space, the smallest is for private rental housing (53.1 sq. meters), which is roughly half that of owned free-standing housing (102.3 sq. meters). When floor space is compared, private rental housing is more expensive.

In particular, only 10% of owned free-standing houses had a floor space of less than 60 sq. meters, compared to over 50% for public and private collective rental housing, as well as for company/public employee housing.

Due to cramped conditions in collective housing, 54.6% of the youngest children age 6 to 10 and 20.9% of those age 11 to 15 share bedrooms with their mother or both parents. This raises the problem that neither the children nor parents have a private bedroom. With regard to individual rooms for children, among home owners (both free-standing houses and condominiums), 50% to 60% of children have individual rooms, compared to only 20% in rental housing.

The self-assessments of residential environment, childcare, finance, space, structure, and performance indicate that rental housing is rated lower in all categories than owned housing.[8]

The lower the age of the youngest child and respondent, the larger the proportion living in rental housing, indicating the difficult residential situation of young couples raising children.

Considering that collective dwellings are only half as large as owned free-standing houses, priority must be placed on finding ways to enhance the quality and size of collective dwellings.

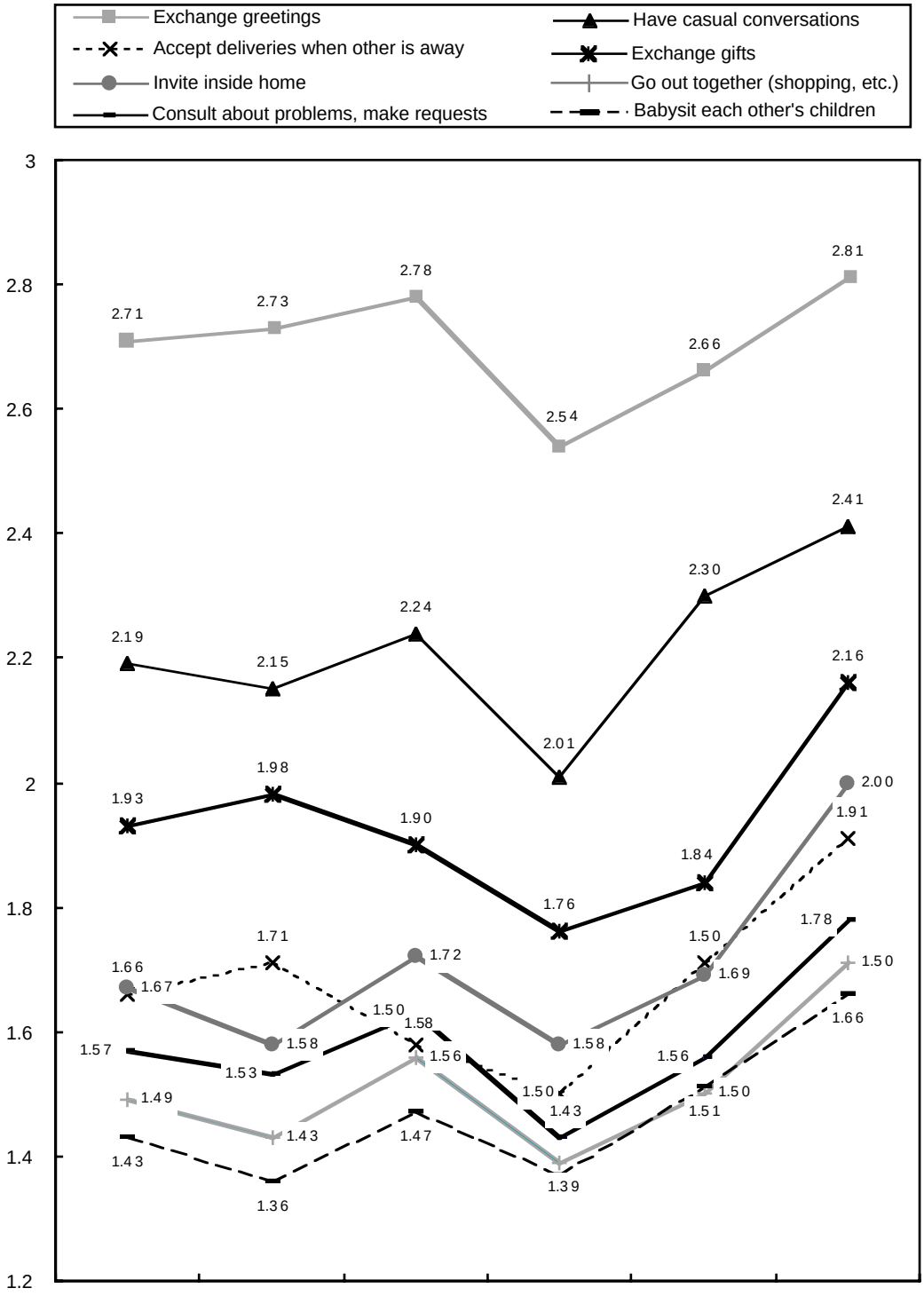
(4) Relationship with Neighbors

With the growth of nuclear families and changes in local communities, three-generation households and communities that watch over children are becoming scarce. One problem is what might be called "childcare behind closed doors," in which the mother and child are alone most of the time in the dwelling, with no one else at home or in the community to talk to about raising children or to vent frustrations. Generally, the younger the child, the more easily the parent (mother) becomes isolated within the home, and the more conducive the situation becomes for child abuse. Rather than treating such problems as personal problems, we need to view them as social problems and strive to enhance community involvement in childcare and increase contact outside the home.

With respect to neighborhood contact, 78.4% of all respondents said that their personal relationships expanded due to childcare activities, and almost all of this contact occurred with others whose children were the same age (94.9%). On the other hand, relatively few contacts involved experience with multi-generational childcare in the community (28.3%) and contact with persons related to childcare and education (19.3%). As shown in Table 3, residents exchange greetings with several neighbors, but in general few persons discuss problems with

neighbors, make requests, or babysit each other's children.[9] While results differ by housing type, neighborhood contact appears to be scant overall in collective private rental housing. Since contact tends to increase with length of residence and whether the youngest child has reached school age (6-10 years), the shortage of neighborhood contact in private rental housing may be attributed to a shorter length of residence and the youngest child's age.

Figure 1 Level of Neighborhood Contact by Housing Type



Overall	Owned house	Condo	Rental apartment	Public housing
1,019	389	152	70	100

(5) Housing and Community Environment Sought by Families Raising Children

Thus far we have examined housing situations and neighborhood relationships based on housing type. Next, we look at housing factors that families raising children emphasize. In Table 3, from the 30 items that were grouped into evaluation categories (residential environment, childcare, finance, space, structure, and performance), we took the 20 most emphasized items and examined priorities by grouping the respondents according to the age group of the youngest child (0- 5, 6-10, and 11-15 years).

Of the 20 conditions, the first priority regardless of the youngest child's age is good sunlight and ventilation. For the 0-5 and 11-15 age groups, the second priority is car and bicycle parking space, while that of the 6-10 age group is health safety of construction materials. While points were low, the 0-5 age group, which is strongly represented in private rental housing, emphasized floor space, location not adjoining a major street, neighborhood with families of the same age, and low housing cost more than the other age groups. Thus when supplying housing, attention must be paid to the different needs of each age group.

Moreover, raising healthy children requires not only increasing the supply of dwelling units, but improving other less tangible but equally important conditions such as childcare facilities and parks to enhance the residential environment, and new work arrangements and values and practices so that both parents can contribute to childcare.

We next turn to what measures these families want the government to take (Table 4). Most frequently cited as the top priority is providing affordable built-for-sale housing for families raising children (15.9%), followed by enhancing parks and the natural environment in residential neighborhoods (13.1%).[10] Most frequently mentioned as one of the top five priorities are enhancing parks and natural environment in residential neighborhoods (48.9%) and building libraries, sports and other facilities for children (44.1%).

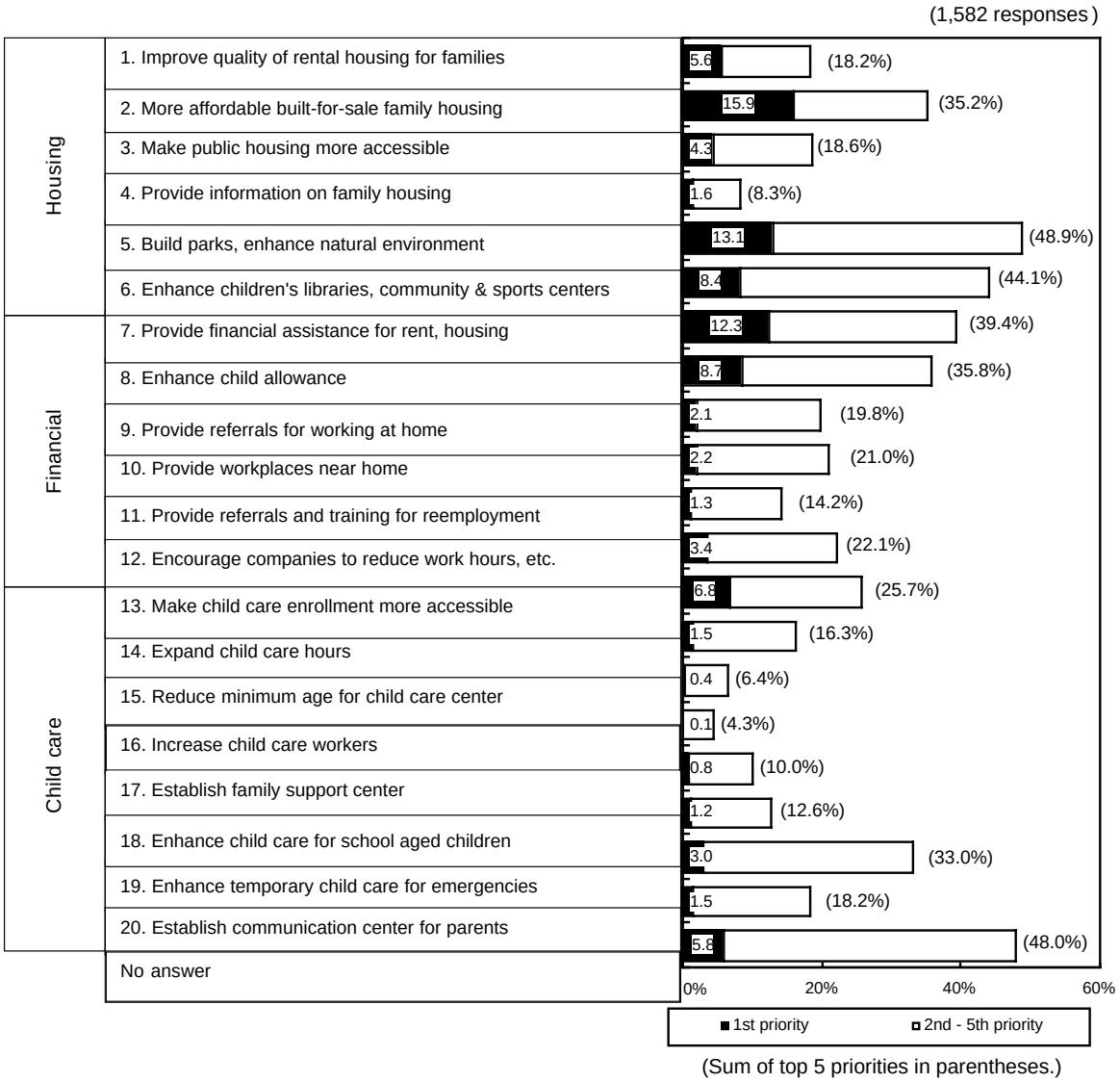
In terms of household characteristics, families with lower income levels put more emphasis on financial assistance and assistance finding work. Families whose youngest child is school aged emphasize measures related to housing and the residential environment, while families with young children and mothers who work full time emphasize improvement of the childcare environment.

Table 3 Housing Priorities and Youngest Child's Age

Age of youngest child	Overall (1,019)	0 - 5 (435)	6 - 10 (185)	11 - 15 (192)	16 - 20 (140)
Location					
1 Commuting convenience	4.33	4.28	4.4	4.25	4.44
2 Natural environment nearby	4.06	*4.14*	4.07	3.96	3.91
3 Enhanced health/medical facilities	4.12	4.11	*4.2*	4.01	4.17
4 Convenient shopping	4.3	4.35	4.3	4.13	4.42
5 Neighborhood is orderly	4.26	4.21	*4.34*	4.32	4.26
6 Not adjacent to major road	4.01	*4.05*	4.03	4.03	3.84
Childcare					
7 Access to nursery, child care center	3.75	*4.1*	3.63	3.35	3.42
8 Other residents in same age group	3.23	*3.46*	3.14	3.07	2.91
9 Parents live nearby	3.31	3.4	*3.46*	3.16	3.1
Financial					
10 Own dwelling	3.98	3.79	4.07	4.08	4.25
11 Low housing cost	4.37	*4.42*	4.35	4.35	4.31
Space					
12 Large floorspace/room count	4.09	*4.16*	4.09	4.12	3.94
13 Large storage space	4.4	*4.46*	4.4	4.29	4.44
Structure					
14 Earthquake, fire resistant	4.44	4.4	4.49	4.46	4.52
15 Privacy from neighbors	4.11	4.01	*4.23*	4.16	4.21
Functionality					
16 Sunny, good ventilation	4.73	*4.76*	4.71	4.71	4.7
17 Good noise/thermal insulation	4.38	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.47
18 Safe construction materials	4.47	4.43	4.53	4.48	4.52
19 Have parking space for car/bicycle	4.54	*4.61*	4.49	4.5	4.46
20 Have own yard/balcony	4.09	4.04	*4.19*	4.16	4.05

Note: Italicized numbers indicate top score for each item.

Table 4 Housing and Other Policies Sought by Families Raising Children



(Sum of top 5 priorities in parentheses.)

3. Conclusion

The primary aim of our survey was to examine the housing situation and needs of families raising children in metropolitan areas. Through the Yokohama survey, we were able to obtain quantitative data such as floor space, housing cost, and evaluations. Moreover, the group interviews of families raising children revealed many interesting opinions on a diverse range of issues: the decrease in outdoor activities as the natural environment deteriorates, the harsh childcare situation in rapidly growing areas, the management aspects of facilities for children, and weak neighborhood ties in urban settings.[11]

Compared to residential conditions in more remote areas, conditions in metropolitan areas are quite severe. To provide a reliable foundation for daily life and welfare, it is urgent and vital that families raising children be provided affordable, good quality housing, and receive assistance when relocating as warranted by their life stage.

However, to create a society that truly addresses childcare, many other issues need to be addressed besides housing: building playgrounds, enhancing the natural environment, reducing commuting distances, enhancing childcare and other facilities for children, operating them flexibly to better meet the needs of residents, and so forth. The most effective way to approach these issues is to incorporate diverse perspectives and organize broad ranging cooperation among the general public, non-profit organizations, and the public sector.

Notes

1. The total fertility rate is an estimate of the number of children that would be born per woman if she were to pass through the childbearing years and bear children according to a current schedule of age-specific fertility rates.

2. *11th Basic Survey of Birth Trends*, National Social Security and Population Research Center, 1997.

3. The survey was conducted in March 1998 and covered 4,000 men and women age 25 to 49 living in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

4. The survey was conducted in January 1997 and covered 3,000 men and women age 20 to 69 living in Yokohama City.

5. Commissioned by the Yokohama City Construction Bureau, NLI Research Institute conducted a survey of 5,000 men and women age 25 to 50 living in Yokohama. 1,582 valid responses were collected, for a response rate of 31.6%.

6. The seventh housing construction 5-year plan established a minimum dwelling size standard of 50 sq. meters for all households, and also set targets for urban dwellings. These levels apply to collective dwellings in the central city and surrounding areas. For free-standing houses in suburbs and other areas, the general target was set at 123 sq. meters.

7. Housing cost is the total of loan payments, rent, land lease, maintenance fee, etc. Actual income is the pre-tax income from employers, and ordinary and extraordinary income.

8. For explanation of evaluation axes, see Table 3.

9. With regard to the level of contact, 3 points were given for 5 or more neighbors, 2 points for several neighbors, and 1 point for rarely if ever. Results were then averaged.

10. Up to 5 prioritized multiple responses were allowed.

11. While considering the age of the youngest child, group interviews were conducted for nine categories including an informed persons, housewives, mothers whose children attend nursery school or kindergarten, fathers, and multi-generational community childcare club members.