

# Parental abduction victims hold rally to push for joint custody rights

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Parents deprived of their children held a rally Friday to push for introducing joint custody to the Japanese legal system and to raise awareness of the plight faced by their offspring when marriages fall apart.

Marching through the Asakusa district in Tokyo's Taito Ward, about 30 Japanese and foreign participants held up a multilingual banner reading, "Stop Parental Child Abduction!" Demonstrators also carried signs reading "More visitation time" and "Affection from both parents to children" during the hour-long march on Children's Day.

It was the first rally organized by Kodomo no Kenri wo Mamoru Bekkyo Oya Forum (Forum for Left-Behind Parents Protecting Children's Rights) to address the problem of parental child abduction in Japan.

"I want people to know that children have the right to see both of their parents and that parents are responsible for accomplishing that," said Daisuke Tanaka,



A group of about 30 parents whose children were abducted by spouses take part in a demonstration in Taito Ward, Tokyo, on Friday to lobby for the inclusion of joint custody rights in the Japanese legal system. DAISUKE KIKUCHI

the organizer of the event. Tanaka has been struggling to spend time with his daughter since his wife whisked her away in March 2016. Since then, he has only

been allowed to meet her twice a month for three hours at a time, he said.

Other participants told The Japan Times similar stories. In most cases, a spouse

abruptly leaves with the children before filing for divorce or custody rights. Tanaka said cases will continue unless Japan approves the concept of granting joint custody.

"It's usual for the court to give custody to the parent who lives with the child, and that's why there are so many cases of abduction. If there's joint custody, better conversations and negotiations would likely take place," he said.

Michihiko Sugiyama, a lawyer who participated in the demonstration, said the biggest issue is that Japanese law only allows custody to be awarded to one parent. Once separated from his family, he decided to take part to share his experience.

The civil code requires parents to decide on visitation and custody arrangements, but research shows people are increasingly forgoing such discussions and heading straight to court mediation. In fiscal 2015, 12,264 cases of mediation involving visitation rights were accepted in family courts nationwide, almost double from 10 years earlier, according to court data.