Childrearing and Breastfeeding as Seen from Fatal Accidents:
Focusing on Newspaper Articles and Childrearing Books

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This research uncovered the state of and changes in cosleeping and breastfeeding by analyzing accidental fatalities of children during cosleeping as to why it occurred, the cause of death, the living environment, breastfeeding positions, and the age of death from articles of the Asahi Shimbun and the Yomiuri Shimbun. It also made clear how cosleeping was viewed and what the recommended length of breastfeeding was by studying childrearing books.

Fatal accidents due to cosleeping have been occurring since the Meiji period, and the cause of death differed according to the times. From 1870–1910, over 80% were crushing deaths at the breast. In the 1920s, crushing deaths at the breast accounted for 67%, and accidental deaths due to bedding and bedclothes accounted for 20%. Crushing deaths at the breast decreased to 50% in the 1930s, and accidental deaths due to bedding and bedclothes accounted for 26%. Such accidents had occurred regardless of occupation, in various residential areas.

Accidents occurred in the 1940s and the first half of the 1960s in blue-collar households living in significantly poor living environments such as slums, in the context of severe housing shortages. Crushing deaths due to cramped housing also occurred in the second half of the 1960s, however, crushing death accidents were caused by cramping of rooms due to the proliferation of household appliances and overcrowding by things such as wardrobes and study desks which accompanied the increased income due to rapid economic growth. In the 1970s, American childrearing methods were introduced and deaths of infants lying facing down was seen to be a problem, leading to further diversification of deaths.

Of the 18 childrearing books studied, 11 rejected cosleeping, and 5 warned about it. The danger of suffocation by the breast when breastfeeding while cosleeping was indicated by 12 childrearing books. These agree with newspaper articles warning of the dangers of cosleeping, indicating that it had become a social issue.

In studying 20 childrearing books, the start of weaning deemed appropriate was around 5 months in three books, 10 to 12 months in four books, and the latest was 2 to 3 years. No patterns specific to years were found for weaning periods. Late cases of weaning included breastfeeding 4-to-5-year-olds, the youngest, in particular, being breastfed until 5 to 6 years old. Breastfeeding is time precious for the
mother when she is able to rest, and this was one of the main causes of late weaning.

Cosleeping was rejected in the *Boshi Techo* (Mother and Child Health Handbook), but, in reality, many mothers practiced cosleeping. Discrepancy was observed in folk knowledge and printed knowledge regarding childrearing. A major revision of the *Ikuji Dokuhon* was published in 1985, and cosleeping, which had been rejected, was now recommended as physical contact between parent and child.

Key words: cosleeping, breastfeeding, breast, suffocation, housing shortage