

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: In Japan Raising Children in Faith Is Suspicious

Knut Holdhus
August 15, 2026



Raising children is made exceedingly difficult for persecuted [Family Federation](#) families in Japan as schools target the faith of a new generation. Illustration: ChatGPT



Patricia Duval - Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally

Human rights attorney points out violations of basic rights and how raising children is made exceedingly difficult for persecuted Family Federation families in Japan as schools target the faith of a new generation

For parents who belong to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), raising children in their faith has traditionally been regarded as part of ordinary family life. Like parents belonging to many other religious communities, they may take their children to worship services, teach them their religious beliefs, celebrate religious holidays, encourage participation in community activities, and seek to pass on values they consider important.

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In Japan, however, this seemingly ordinary exercise of parental responsibility has become increasingly difficult. Following the Japanese government's campaign against the [Family Federation](#) and the subsequent dissolution proceedings, concerns have emerged that the country's public institutions are beginning to treat children from [Family Federation](#) families not simply as students who happen to have a particular religious background, but as potential victims of their parents' beliefs.

This development raises a fundamental question: **what happens to freedom of religion when a child is effectively encouraged to view his or her family's faith as something suspicious that should be investigated by teachers and counselors?**

In the fourth installment of her four-part series, international human-rights attorney Patricia Duval addresses precisely this issue in a 4th June 2026 op-ed published by [Bitter Winter](#), entitled "[Unification](#)

[Church in Japan: After the Dissolution, the Purge. 4. School Surveillance and Coercive Counseling.](#)" Her concern is not merely that [Family Federation](#) children may encounter criticism of their parents' religion.



[Bitter Winter](#), the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights



The front cover of the Japanese booklet [Guide for Psychological Counseling on Cult Issues](#)

Rather, she argues that new school-based procedures risk institutionalizing a system in which children from religious families are identified, questioned about their home life and religious practices, and potentially referred for psychological counseling or other interventions.

Schools instructed to look into children's religious backgrounds

At the center of [Duval's argument](#) is a booklet prepared by the Japanese Society of Clinical Psychologists, reportedly with encouragement from officials of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The Guide for Psychological Counseling on Cult Issues is intended for school counselors and clinical psychologists dealing with what are described as religious or "cult"-related problems.

According to Duval, the Guide relies heavily on anti-cult literature and the controversial concept of "mind control". [See editor's note below] More importantly, she argues, it encourages school personnel to investigate children's family circumstances specifically to determine whether religion is involved.

Counselors are instructed to ask children questions about where they go on Sundays, what their parents tell them, and other details of their family life. Once a child is identified as having a potentially problematic religious background, the Guide recommends that the matter be discussed with school administrators.

From the perspective of a [Family Federation](#) parent, this changes the character of the relationship between the family and the school.

Religious education that previously took place primarily within the family and religious community can become a subject of institutional scrutiny.

A child may begin to understand that his or her parents' faith is something that teachers, counselors, and school administrators regard as requiring special attention.

The problem of privacy and religious freedom



In her [op-ed](#), Duval argues that this raises serious questions under international human-rights law. Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, while Article 17 protects individuals against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy and family life.

The UN Human Rights Committee has specifically stated that people cannot be compelled to reveal their religious affiliation or beliefs. Duval therefore regards systematic questioning of children about their parents' religious practices as potentially incompatible

with these protections.



Human Rights Committee, a subpage on the site of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

The issue becomes particularly sensitive because the children concerned are minors. **A child may be asked about what happens at home without necessarily understanding the broader implications of disclosing information about his or her family.**

Even when counselors are instructed to proceed gently and obtain the child's consent before information is shared, Duval questions whether such consent can genuinely be considered voluntary when the child is dealing with teachers, counselors, and school authorities.

Once information is shared, the Guide envisages coordinated

action involving a range of school personnel - including homeroom teachers, school nurses, social workers and administrators.

For parents, this potentially means that a matter that they regard as belonging to the private sphere of family religious upbringing can become known across an institutional network.

When parents' beliefs themselves become regarded as the problem

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Guide, in Duval's view, is its treatment of communication between children and parents.

The Guide reportedly cautions counselors against simply telling children to discuss their concerns with their parents. Its reasoning is that parents whose views are grounded in religious conviction may be unlikely to change and that children may already have learned that disagreement with their parents is not readily accepted.

There is an important distinction here. If a child is suffering genuine abuse or serious neglect, professional intervention may obviously be justified. But Duval's concern is that religious conviction itself can become an explanation for family difficulties, potentially turning ordinary disagreements between parents and children into evidence of a problematic religious environment.

This creates a particularly difficult situation for parents who want to transmit their faith to their children.

Every religious tradition involves some form of intergenerational transmission. Parents teach children what they believe to be true and morally important. Children are introduced to religious practices before they are old enough to make fully independent decisions about their worldview. That is not normally regarded as coercion; it is a basic feature of family and religious life.

But if one particular religion becomes subject to systematic suspicion, the same parental activities can acquire a very different interpretation.

To be continued.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Unification Church](#). Public outrage reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain the [Church](#)'s fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

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Liquidation Takes Psychological Toll On Members

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Survey after Japanese dissolution and church closures finds nearly 90% of believers report psychological distress

Tokyo, 13th August 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Nearly 90% Report Distress, Many Have Sought Medical Care

Believers Suffering Severe Psychological Distress: Interim Report by Family Federation

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU; formerly the [Unification Church](#)), a religious organization, has conducted a questionnaire survey concerning the harm suffered by its members since 4th March, when [liquidation proceedings](#) began following the [decision to dissolve the religious corporation](#). The survey found that nearly 90% of respondents reported experiencing psychological distress. In many cases, the distress was attributed to being unable to use [church facilities](#). Although guidelines adopted by the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT) concerning the liquidation of “designated religious corporations” explicitly call for consideration of freedom of religion, the situation has revealed a contradiction between those guidelines and the actual implementation of the [liquidation proceedings](#).

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On 4th March 2026, the day the liquidation of the [Family](#)



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Federation for World Peace and Unification began, three police cars were parked and the media gathered at the *Family Federation* church in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture. Photo provided by a related party.

Shortly after the *Tokyo High Court* issued its **dissolution decision** at 11 a.m., on the same day, liquidators and their deputies visited **FFWPU** facilities throughout Japan. At some churches, police cars arrived at the premises, creating scenes that appeared almost as though police powers were being exercised. Numerous media organizations also gathered with television cameras, creating the impression that the members inside the churches were criminals who were about to be arrested for having committed some offense. According to the report, many members were deeply shocked by the way they were portrayed.

Following the **decision**, the **religious corporation** was converted into a liquidation corporation. Members were no longer permitted to enter **church facilities**, while many employees were dismissed. Some remained employed by the liquidation corporation because their services were deemed necessary for the **liquidation process**.



Rev. Masaichi Hori, here in January 2026. Screenshot from video by **FFWPU**

The Greatest Concern Is Isolation

Meanwhile, the **organization**, which has a large number of members, maintained the **Family Federation** as a religious organization in July, with Masaichi Hori, who had served as president when it was still a religious corporation, becoming its president. Beginning 15th July, it conducted an “**All-Members Victim Survey**” to investigate the harm suffered by members since the **liquidation proceedings** began on 4th March.



Family Federation for World Peace and Unification Survey of Japanese Members' Experiences (as of 12th August 2026). Illustration: FFWPU, English version by ChatGPT, 13th August 2026.

According to figures compiled as of August 12, **86.6% of the 10,594 respondents reported experiencing psychological distress**.

The breakdown was as follows:

- **14.1% (1,492 respondents):** “Feeling it extremely strongly”
- **23.0% (2,437):** “Feeling it strongly”
- **32.2% (3,408):** “Feeling it to some extent”
- **17.3% (1,830):** “Feeling it somewhat”

Among those who reported psychological distress, **288 respondents** said that they had visited a psychosomatic

respondents said that they had visited a psychosomatic medicine or mental-health clinic.

In addition, **3,093 respondents reported an impact on their physical health**, of whom **451 said they had visited a hospital**.

The [Federation's Public Relations and External Affairs Office](#) has been encouraging members to participate in the survey while also periodically publishing the results on YouTube since 22nd July. It has reported receiving accounts from members experiencing psychological distress such as:

"The church, which had been my emotional refuge, was taken away from me. I lost the will to live and became unable even to leave my house,"
and *"There were many consecutive nights when I could not sleep."*

The [religious organization](#) also reported cases involving children who had attended church together with their parents. Some of these children have reportedly become frightened and hypersensitive to even small noises, fearing that police officers might suddenly enter their homes.

People who join religious organizations often already have emotional vulnerabilities or personal concerns, and the [Family Federation](#) is said to be no exception. It is not difficult to imagine the shock and emotional pain caused when a place where someone had found "salvation" through religious teachings and interaction with other people suddenly disappears.



Entrance to the Suginami Church of the [Family Federation](#) – Suginami Ward, Tokyo. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

For example, in the series ["Where Will the Believers Go?"](#), published by [this newspaper](#) in June last year, the then pastor of the [Suginami Family Church](#) in Tokyo testified that *"the disappearance of a church is not simply a matter of losing a place for worship."*

He said, *"The greatest loss is the disappearance of the community that has been formed around the church facilities."* In particular, he was concerned about opposition and isolation within families faced by people who were the only member of their household to belong to the [religious organization](#).

The church also had many elderly members, and he expressed concern that among members who had been widowed, **"there could be an increase in deaths in solitude."**

Liquidators Showing Little Consideration for Freedom of

Liquidators Showing Little Consideration for Freedom of Religion

The Guidelines Are Being Rendered Meaningless

On 20th October last year, anticipating the dissolution and liquidation of the [Family Federation](#) as a religious corporation, MEXT adopted its “**Guidelines Concerning the Liquidation of Designated Religious Corporations.**”

The guidelines explicitly state that freedom of religion should be taken into consideration insofar as doing so does not interfere with the [liquidation process](#). They state, among other things:

“When managing and disposing of the property of the liquidation corporation, [liquidators](#) are expected to take into consideration the freedom of religion of members of the existing [religious organization](#), including by permitting them to use facilities, insofar as this does not interfere with [liquidation work](#) and taking into account the degree of necessity and other relevant factors.”

Many members have called for permission to hold worship services in church facilities.

In a [contribution to this newspaper](#), Pastor Hiroshi Kurose of Tokyo West Baptist Church stated:

“It is only natural that [liquidators](#) should carry out the liquidation process in a manner that does not infringe upon the freedom of religion of the [religious organization](#). At present, the [liquidators](#) have seized all of the [Family Federation](#)’s places of worship. Since places of worship are essential to religious activities, they must immediately be returned to the [Family Federation](#).”



Pastor Hiroshi Kurose (黒瀬博) of the Tokyo West Baptist Church.
Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

The [liquidators](#) have so far announced that they have seized assets worth **more than ¥80 billion** (ca. US\$ 501 million) from the [religious organization](#).

Is that not more than sufficient?

The fact that the [liquidators](#) and the court supervising them have deliberately refrained from implementing the provision in the guidelines that permits members to use facilities “insofar as this does not interfere with liquidation work” constitutes a biased response and raises human-rights concerns.

Attempting, through the practical administration of the liquidation proceedings, to render the wording of the guidelines meaningless amounts to an infringement of freedom of religion and should be avoided.

Featured image above: [Family Federation](#) place of worship in Japan closed due to dissolution. Illustration: ChatGPT, 13th August 2026.

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