

Fathers' Family Involvement and Wives' Employment in Japan

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Abstract

This study examines how in Japan, fathers' family involvement and housework are influenced by job conditions and wives' employment. Research shows that Japanese fathers are less frequently engaged in child care and housework than their wives are because of their long working hours. However, it is also reported that wives' employment will tend to increase fathers' involvement in child care and housework. This study reports the results of a questionnaire conducted in February 2010 on 208 Japanese males residing in Tokyo, who had children under 12 years of age. Three main results were obtained through path analysis. The first is that the frequency of fathers' family involvement and housework increases when their wives are employed. This finding is consistent with previous results. The second is that fathers recognize the work-family conflict resulting from longer working hours, which decreases the frequency of their involvement in child care and housework. The third is that fathers with more liberal gender ideology are likely to increase only the frequency of housework. This study discusses two implications for fathers' involvement in child care and housework, and work-life balance in Japan. The first is that fathers' involvement in child care and housework increases when their wives are employed—a little progress for gender equality in the division of housework among dual-earner couples. The second is that the job condition is important to fathers' involvement in child care and housework, especially if they work long hours.

Key words: Father with young child, Fathers' involvement, Fathers' housework, Wives' employment, Job conditions

Introduction

It is said that Japanese fathers with young children are not involved in child rearing and housework. According to an international family research conducted in 2005 (Makino, Watanabe, Funabashi, and Nakano, 2010), only 2.5% of Japanese fathers took responsibility for feeding children and 7.6%, shared feeding duties with their wives. In comparison, 6.5% of fathers in the United States and 16%, in Sweden, were responsible for feeding their children. Other child care and housework duties had similar differences.

It has also become a problem that many Japanese mothers with young children have to spend a great deal of time on child care and housework even though they themselves may have occupations. Research on the child care and housework of mothers with young children in Japan shows that these mothers spend an average of approximately Three hours a day for childcare and about 4.5 hours for housework. In contrast, fathers perform child care duties for an average of only 25 minutes a day and housework duties, for only 23 minutes. However, the National Population Research Institute (2006) has reported that among dual-earner couples, the fathers' family

involvement with child care and housework has been gradually increasing.

Within this context, this study attempts to show how the amount of a Japanese father's family involvement and housework is influenced by their job conditions and their wives' employment status. This research contributes to a better understanding of fathers' family involvement and work-life balance issues in Japan; furthermore, it could help create better policies involving work-life balance.

Literature Review

Japanese Fathers' Involvement in Child Care and Housework

Previous research has dealt with factors that impact on a Japanese father's involvement in child care and housework. Ishii-Kuntz (2009) reported that the factors affecting Japanese fathers' involvement in child care responsibilities were time availability; relative resources between husbands and wives; gender ideology; paternal identity; the support network of families, relatives, and friends; household demands; and child care skills and standards. Ishii-Kuntz (2004) also explained that factors that affected the amount of husbands' housework were the support network of families, job conditions, time

availability, relative resources between husbands and wives, and gender ideology. In this paper, I will focus on fathers' job conditions and their wives' employment. I will, however, review research about time availability, gender ideology, and household demands.

As to time availability, the individual who has more time to do housework and child care at home will consequently take on these tasks. It has been reported that shorter working hours (which included the husbands' commuting time) were increasing the frequency of husbands' participation in child care (Nakagawa, 2008; Ishii-Kuntz, 2009). In the case of dual-earner couples, wives find it hard to divide their time between work, household, and child care duties. In this situation, their husbands tend to take over household and child care duties.

When analyzing gender ideologies, it is evident that the more liberal-minded the husbands are, the more likely they will participate in child care tasks (Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane, 1992). In Japan, some researchers have observed that the degree of husbands' gender open-mindedness did not influence the frequency of their child care participation (Kato, Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, and Tsuchiya, 1998; Nagai, 2004). Regarding housework involvement, the more liberal gender ideologies the husbands have, the more frequently they participate in housework tasks, especially among dual-earner couples (Ishii-Kuntz, 2004). It is often said that there are deep-rooted traditional ideologies in Japan. Recently, however, it has also been reported that Japanese men have become more liberal, although their involvement in the family, child care, and housework is still low (Ogasawara, 2009). Furthermore, the wives' gender ideologies are also an important factor affecting their husbands' participation in child care and housework. When both husbands' and wives' gender ideologies are more traditional, husbands' housework involvement is typically lower (Greenstein, 1996). Furthermore, it has also been found that wives are more likely to keep husbands out of child care and housework involvement in such situations (Nakagawa, 2010b). It is thus important to take the "wife factor" into consideration when analyzing husbands' involvement in child care and housework.

Kato, et al. (1998) observed the impact of household demands and found that a greater number of children and the age of the youngest child increased housework and child care demands, prompting the husbands' to increase their participation in child care. In contrast, Nagai (1999) reported that in the case of families having more than two children, the mothers' traditional roles of child care and housework involvement have been increasing, and in turn, the fathers' involvement these responsibilities tended to decrease.

Wives' Employment and Husbands' Family Involvement

Previous research has shown that when wives' employment increases, so does their husbands' involvement in child care and housework. In Japan, fathers with young children whose wives are employed attend to child care and housework responsibilities more frequently (Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, Kato, and Tsuchiya, 2004; Nagai, 2004). Among dual-earner couples with preschool children, husbands acceded to their wives' negotiation and increased their participation child care and housework (Nakagawa, 2010a). Based on these findings, I conclude that the employment status of Japanese wives will prompt their husbands to participate more in child care and housework.

Work-Family Conflict and Work Style among Japanese Fathers

Concerning time availability, it has been found that Japanese fathers who have young children and work long hours do not have enough time to be involved with their families—even if they know that their wives need their help and their children want to spend quality time with them. Matsuda (2006) observed that fathers with preschoolers often encounter family conflicts, and when they resolve them, the amount of their child care and housework is reduced.

After Japan's economic bubble burst in the 1990s, the perceptions of work styles among Japanese men may have changed as regards working hours and employment mobility. According to the qualitative research undertaken by Taga (2006), Japanese men working in competitive companies were exhausted because of meritocracy and were therefore reevaluating their work-life balance and masculinity. Suemori (2010) reported that the longer the husbands' working hours were during a week, the lower the marital satisfaction and the fewer the hours of husbands' housework duties. Suemori added that since long working hours affected marital relationships negatively, Japanese employment conditions needed to be altered. I argue that one of the reasons Japanese fathers' family involvement has not increased beyond our expectations is their long working hours. Furthermore, even if the perceptions of fathers' work style may have become more flexible, work-family conflicts resulting from long working hours still need to be resolved.

In Japan, there is an accumulation of research on fathers' involvement, although few studies have focused on fathers' job conditions and their perceptions of work and family. In this paper, I use a conceptual model about fathers' perception of work and family to understand the intermediate factors between job conditions and fathers' involvement in housework and child care.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates my conceptual framework, which draws from previous studies. This paper examines how Japanese fathers' family involvement and housework are influenced by their job conditions and their wives' employment. I predict that fathers' job conditions, age, education, the number of children, and the age of the youngest child will influence perceptions of family priority, flexible work style, work-family conflict, wives' priority, flexible work style, work-family conflict, wives'

employment, and gender ideology. Furthermore, I predict that fathers who have positive perceptions of family priorities and a flexible work style will increase the frequency of their involvement in housework and child care. As for work-family conflict, the higher the conflict for the father, the lower his involvement in housework and child care. I predict a wife's employment and husband's liberal gender ideology will increase his housework and child care participation.

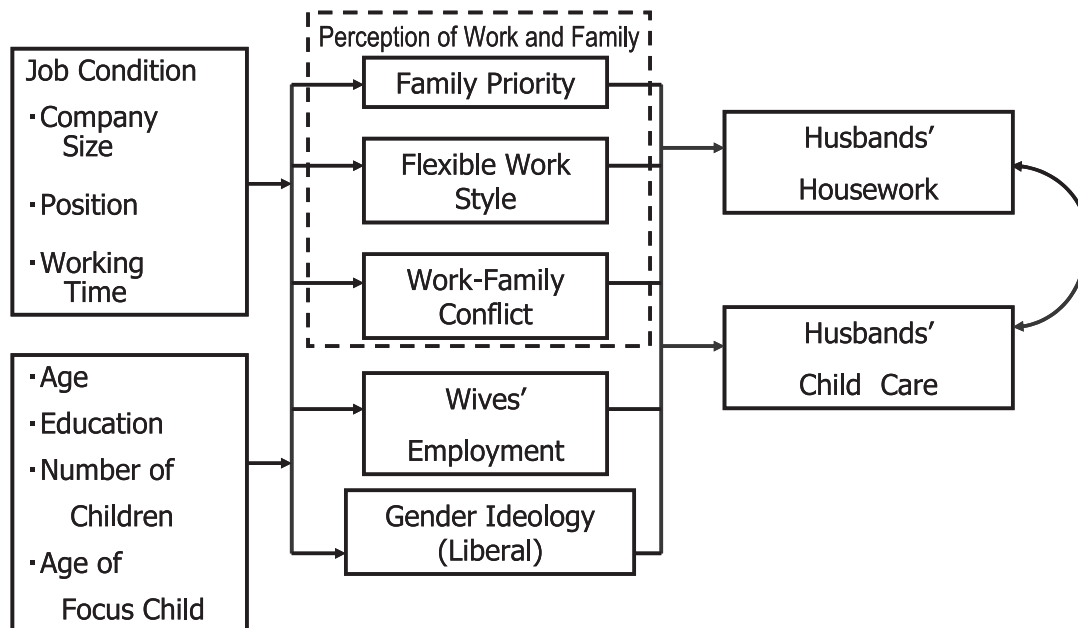


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Method

Sampling

The data in this study were collected from questionnaires sent to Japanese fathers in February 2010, touching on several aspects of their family involvement and job conditions. The data were gathered by a research project, "Work and Life Balance from Gender-Sensitive Perspectives." A total of 548 sets were distributed to men whose children were enrolled in the kindergarten, elementary school, and junior high school connected with a university in Tokyo. Two hundred and eight married fathers (N=208), aged 32–60 years, who had at least one child under 12 years old responded to the survey, for a response rate of 38.0%.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 shows the sample characteristics of the fathers. Their mean age was 42.95 years; 2.5% graduated from high school and 1.9%, from two-year college courses, and 89.9% attended four-year university or graduate school. The educational level of the group was higher than the national average (Population Census, 2000). In terms of

their employment positions, 27.4% were managers; 12.9%, department heads; and 23.6%, directors or presidents. Their mean income was about eight million yen. Approximately 28% had wives who had their own occupations. The mean number of children was two, and the mean age of the focus child was 6.15 years. In this paper, "focus child" refers to the child for whom the fathers answer on child care.

Measures

Independent Variable

Husbands' child care: The variables involving the frequency of Japanese husbands' involvement in child care were measured in two ways, depending on the age of the focus child. For fathers with a preschool focus child, the variables were measured using seven items: (1) taking care of the child's food, (2) having a meal with the child, (3) taking care of changing the child's clothes and preparing the child for the day, (4) playing with the child, (5) bathing with the child, (6) changing the child's diapers or taking care of the child's toilet needs, and (7) reading books to the child. The questions were answered in five-point response categories: (1) No time, (2) Once to twice a week, (3) Three

Table 1 Sample Characteristics

N=208	Fathers		
	Mean	SD	Range
Age	42.95	4.78	32 — 60
Education	High School 2.5% College 1.9% University-Graduate School 89.9%		
Income (1 year)	10.21 (8million yen)	2.46	2 — 13
Position	Non-ranking position 15.9% Chief Clerk 16.8% Manager 27.4% Head of Department 12.9% Director, President 23.6%		
Wives' Employment	Employment 28.4%, Non-employment 66.8%		
Number of Children	2.02	.76	1 — 5
Age of Focus Child	6.15	3.43	0 — 12

to four times a week, (4) Five to six times a week, and (5) Every day. The seven questions were summed up and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .87.

For fathers with an elementary school focus child, the variables were measured using five items: (1) having dinner with children, (2) playing or spending time with children at home, (3) playing or going outdoors with children, (4) talking with children, and (5) helping children with studies and homework. The questions were also answered in five-point response categories (see above). The five questions were summed up and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .73.

Husbands' housework: The variables involving the frequency of Japanese husbands' involvement in housework were measured using six statements: (1) preparing meals, (2) cleaning after meals, (3) cleaning the house, (4) washing clothes, (5) buying food and daily goods, and (6) taking out the garbage. The questions were also answered in five-point response categories (see above). The six questions were summed up and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .77.

Dependent Variables: Job Conditions

Company size: The company size refers to the number of employees in the company for which the father works. Six response categories were used: (1) Less than 30 people, (2) from 30 to 99 people, (3) from 100 to 299 people, (4) from 300 to 499 people, (5) from 500 to 999 people, and (6) 1,000 or more people.

Position in the company: The father's position in the company was answered using six response categories: (1) Non-ranking position, (2) Chief clerk, (3) Manager, (4) Head of department, (5) Director, and (6) President.

Working Time: The fathers wrote down the number of their working hours, including time spent on extra work and commuting.

Intermediate Variables: Family Priority, Flexible Work Style, Work-Family Conflict, Wives' Employment and Gender Ideology

Family Priority: The variables involving the fathers' family priority perceptions were measured using four statements: (1) Family is more important than job achievement for me; (2) I want free time so that I can perform my job efficiently; (3) I am working in order to obtain wealth; and (4) I agree that I need time to devote myself to my studies. These questions were answered in five-point response categories ranging from (1) I do not agree at all to (5) I strongly agree. The four questions were summed up and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .58.

Flexible Work Style: The variables involving the fathers' flexible work style perceptions were measured using six statements: (1) I can work with flexible time; (2) I can decide on my own job quantity and order; (3) I can go home without feeling constraint after finishing my work; (4) I can take child care leave, nursing care leave, and short-time work; (5) I can take time for hobbies, studying, and volunteering; and (6) If I am absent from work, I will be disadvantaged on a possible promotion. These questions were answered in five-point response categories ranging from (1) I never think about it at all to (5) I strongly agree. The six questions were summed up and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .52.

Work-Family Conflict: The variables involving the fathers' work-family conflict perceptions were measured using three statements: (1) I do not have enough energy to be a good parent after work; (2) I do not have enough time to spend with my children because of long working hours; and (3) I do not have enough time to do housework because of long working hours. These questions were answered in five-point response categories ranging from (1) I never think about it at all to (5) I strongly agree. The three questions were summed up and the Cronbach's

alpha of the scale was .78.

Gender Ideology (Liberal): The variables involving the fathers' gender ideology perceptions were measured using five statements: (1) Housework should be a joint effort between men and women; (2) Child care should be a joint effort between men and women; (3) Women should continue working after having a baby; (4) Men should have occupations and women should be housewives (reverse); and (5) Mothers should be devoted entirely to child rearing until the child reaches three years of age. (reverse) These questions were answered in five-point response categories ranging from (1) I do not agree to it at all to (5) I strongly agree. The five questions were summed up and the alpha of the scale was .75.

Demographic Variables: Age, educational level, number of children, age of focus child, and wives' occupations were examined.

Analyses

The analyses were conducted using a path model based on the conceptual model. I choose this type of

analysis to be able to input family priority, flexible work style, work-family conflict, wives' employment, and liberal gender ideology as mediating variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations of all variables are shown in Table 2. The mean of the frequency of husbands' child care is 12.77 and housework, 12.05. Based on these scores, the husbands clearly do not participate in child care and housework frequently. The respondents also claimed to give priority to family (16.21) and to enjoy flexible working styles (20.45), but with the work-family conflict mean at 8.76, it can be assumed that they sometimes had a tough time balancing work and family. The fathers' gender ideology is slightly liberal. The mean of their working time, including commuting, was about 12 hours. For this reason, they likely do not have enough time to be involved in housework and child care on weekdays.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Range
Frequency of Husbands' Housework	12.05	4.04	6 — 30
Frequency of Husbands' Child Care	12.77	3.71	5 — 25
Family Priority	16.21	2.06	4 — 20
Flexible Work Style	20.45	4.97	6 — 30
Work - Family Conflict	8.76	2.77	3 — 15
Gender Ideology (liberal)	15.22	3.28	5 — 25
Working Time (including commuting)	11.72	2.09	4.5 — 17.3

Path Analysis

The results of the path model, with only significant relationships, are presented in Figure 2. The proposed model yielded $\chi^2=95.021$, $df=37$ ($GFI=.945$, $AGFI=.821$, and $RMSEA=.087$), which shows that my conceptual model fits the data reasonably well. When analyzing family priority, higher education levels (.17) and fewer children (-.19) predict the levels of family priority. A flexible work style is positively predicted by a higher position (.22) and negatively predicted by longer working time (-.27). A lower position (-.17) and long work hours working (.38) increase work-family conflict. Concerning wives' employment, when the husbands' income is low (-.25), and the focus child is older (.16), wives tend to seek employment. The husbands' child care and housework involvement was predicted by work-family conflict, wives' employment, and liberal gender ideology. Higher levels of work-family conflict significantly reduce the frequency of

husbands' housework (-.24) and child care (-.42). However, in cases where wives are employed, the frequency of husbands' housework (.26) and child care (.23) increases. Gender ideologies that are more liberal significantly and directly predict the frequency of husbands' housework involvement (.20).

As can be seen in Figure 2, fathers with lower job positions and longer working time experience higher levels of work-family conflict, which reduces the frequency of their child care and housework involvement. It is shown, however, that wives' employment predicted their husbands' lower income and the older age of the focus child; and that gender ideologies that were more liberal increased the frequency of husbands' child care and housework. The levels of family priority and flexible work style are not associated with the frequency of husbands' child care and housework.

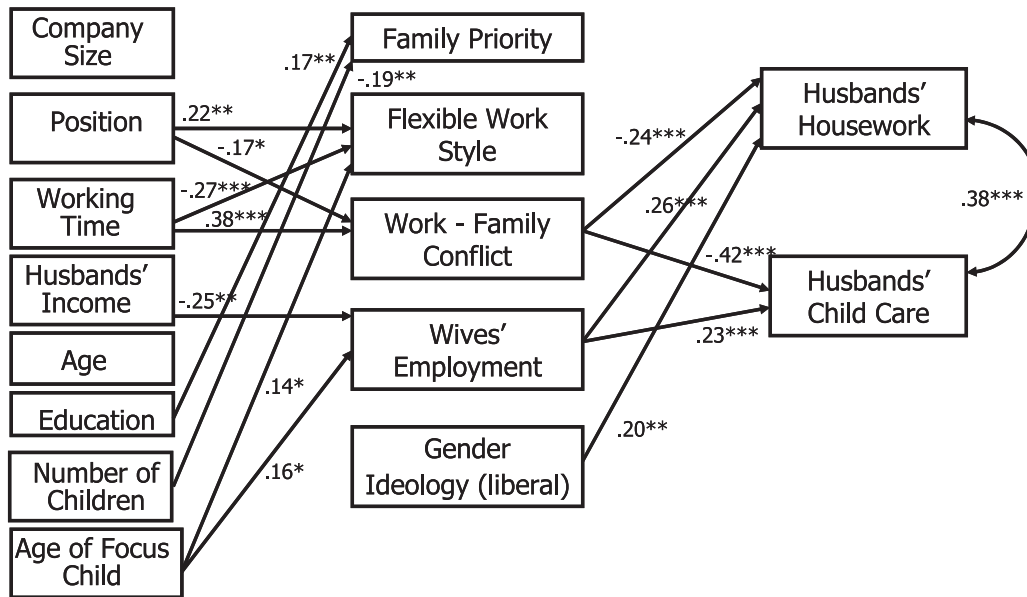


Figure 2 Factor Model of Husbands' Housework and Child Care, Mediated by Perceptions of Work and Family, Wives' Employment, and Gender Ideology

Conclusion and Discussions

The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of how Japanese fathers with children under 12 years increase the frequency of child care and housework concern according to their perception of work and families, and their wives' employment. Three major findings were obtained by this study. First, fathers with lower job positions and longer work hours are likely to have higher levels of work-family conflict, thereby reducing the frequency of their housework and child care. From this finding, it is speculated that Japanese fathers with young children want to be more involved in housework and child care, but are unable to do so because of long working hours and less autonomy in their work.

Second, I found that fathers' with lower incomes and older focus children are likely to have wives who are employed. Wives' employment is positively related to husbands' housework and child care involvement. I speculate that there are two main reasons Japanese mothers with young children are employed: to keep their own careers and earn money after the period of infant care is over. When their wives are employed, Japanese men participate more in housework and child care to support their wives' careers and maintain their standard of living.

Finally, I found that fathers' perceptions of family priority and flexible work style were not significantly related to the fathers' frequency of involvement in housework and child care. It is speculated that the fathers' perceptions of family priority and flexible work

style are important to accomplish work-life balance, but they are slow in changing their behavior.

This paper, which focuses on wives' employment and husbands' job perception, contributes to the collection of research on Japanese fathers. My findings may help generate more father-friendly policies. Furthermore, companies in Japan need some incentives or pressure to shorten working hours, especially for the younger employees.

The limitation to this study is that the men in the sample are almost all upper-middle class fathers in terms of educational levels, income, and occupational positions. However, my objective was to examine the factors of fathers' involvement in child care and housework, which are mediated by fathers' perceptions of job conditions and wives' employment. Future research can explore some of issues identified in this study using a larger and more representative sample of Japanese fathers with young children.

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