

Abstract

Title:

Children's Involvement in Housework among Nuclear Families: Focuses on Parents' Housework and Parent-Child Communication

Name:

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When Japan's major industries were agriculture, forestry, and fishing, children worked with their families; they were considered a precious source of labor for the maintenance of the household's living standard. However, changes in the structure of industry resulting from economic growth during the post-war period led to a separation of work and residence, and at this stage, participation of children shifted to only that of housework (Miwa 2000). Moreover, with an increase in the usage of electric appliances in the home, the time required for housework was reduced and with the availability of various ready-to-serve and semi-prepared dishes, along with the rationalization and outsourcing of housekeeping, the participation of children in housework was further reduced.

In modern times, children are involved in housework to encourage independence in daily living and increase their self-esteem through the development of autonomy. Furthermore, it is expected that, with participation in household work from an early age, boys will understand the importance of gender equality in family roles. Previous studies have focused on the division of household labor between husbands and wives. Few studies have investigated what factors have an impact on the involvement of children in housework, especially as regards micro-interactions between parents and children.

The first purpose of this study is to examine how the housework done by parents impacts children's involvement in housework. Second, the study aims to clarify how communication between parents and children influences the children's participation in household labor. The third is to reveal how factors affecting children's involvement in housework differ by gender.

The subjects of this study were 216 boys and 187 girls, aged between 9 and 18, and their parents, all of whom live in Tokyo or its suburbs. These subjects were selected from the Survey of Nuclear Families in Japan, conducted by the Institute for Research on Household Economics in 2008. To accomplish the above-mentioned objectives, a descriptive statistical analysis and simultaneous analyses based on theoretical concepts were conducted, accounting for differences in gender.

Three main results were obtained. The first was that greater participation of fathers in housework encouraged boys to be more involved. Second, conversations with their mothers also had a positive impact on boys' participation in household labor, and conversations with their fathers had a positive effect on girls' involvement in housework. Third, it was observed that the involvement of boys and

girls in housework decreased when they returned home late, which differed, as did other factors, depending on gender. The factors that affected the involvement of boys in housework were primarily the father's participation in housework, the mother-son conversation, and the number of siblings. As each of these factors increased, so did the involvement of boys in housework. On the other hand, the main factors affecting the involvement of girls in housework were the father-daughter conversation and the number of hours the father worked per week. As both of these increased, so did the participation of girls in housework.

This study finds that mechanisms for the modeling of housework behaviors differ based on gender. Boys are likely to be more involved in housework if their fathers are and if they verbally communicate with their mothers about it; girls are more likely to engage in housework through communication with their fathers. These findings imply that these differences reflect gender-based differences in the cognitive development of gender role behaviors and differences in the content of the conversations between parents and a same-/opposite-sex child.