

Chapter #4

FACTORS RELATED TO THE PARENTAL BURDEN OF CHILDREARING IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

The parental burden of childrearing is considered to be a cause of the declining birth rate in Japan and has an adverse effect on children's development (Matsuda, 2010; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2006). How, then, can this burden be reduced? This study aimed to answer this question by examining factors related to the burden of childrearing. Data from the 'Survey on Children and Child Rearing' (Survey Research Centre, 2012) was analyzed. The survey targeted 3,000 Japanese parents over the age of 18, who had children under the age of 6 years. A total of 2,481 valid responses were analysed. The results indicated that parents who felt a greater burden of childrearing tended to be women, have more children, have less income, and be mothers without regular work. On the other hand, those who felt a lesser burden were parents who had relatives, friends and acquaintances who took care of the children in emergencies, and who had neither anxieties nor worries about childrearing. In addition, for parents with anxieties and worries about childrearing, their burden was eased by asking acquaintances. The result suggests that support from others is important in order to tackle the anxiety of childrearing and to ease the burden felt by parents.

Keywords: childrearing, support, Japan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Japan's declining birth rate is a major social problem, and may affect the sustainability of its labour force and social security programs. Figure 1 shows the decline in the total fertility rate in Japan since 1950, compared with U.S.A., France and Sweden. Although the total fertility rates in other countries in 2014 were about 2 (1.86 in U.S.A., 1.98 in France, and 1.88 in Sweden), in Japan was 1.42. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2006) cited that the parental burden of childrearing contributed to this decline. Matsuda (2010) also indicated that the parental burden of childrearing was a fundamental problem affecting the declining birth rate in Japan. In fact, according to the National Women's Education Center Japan (2005), less than half of Japanese parents thought childrearing was very fun, contrasted with about 60% of parents in U.S.A., France and Sweden (see Figure 2). In addition, Nozaki (2017) analysed the data on married 371 fathers and 298 mothers from the Japanese General Social Survey (Osaka University of Commerce, 2006) and found the mothers who thought that families rather than government had the responsibility of childrearing did not have three or more children. Thus, this study focused on perceived parental burden of childrearing in Japan.

Figure 1.
Total fertility rate (Cabinet Office, 2016).

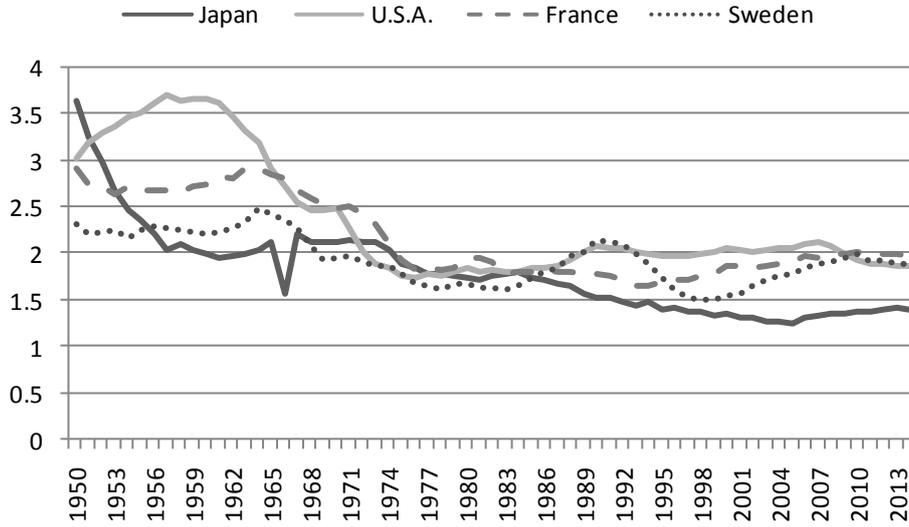
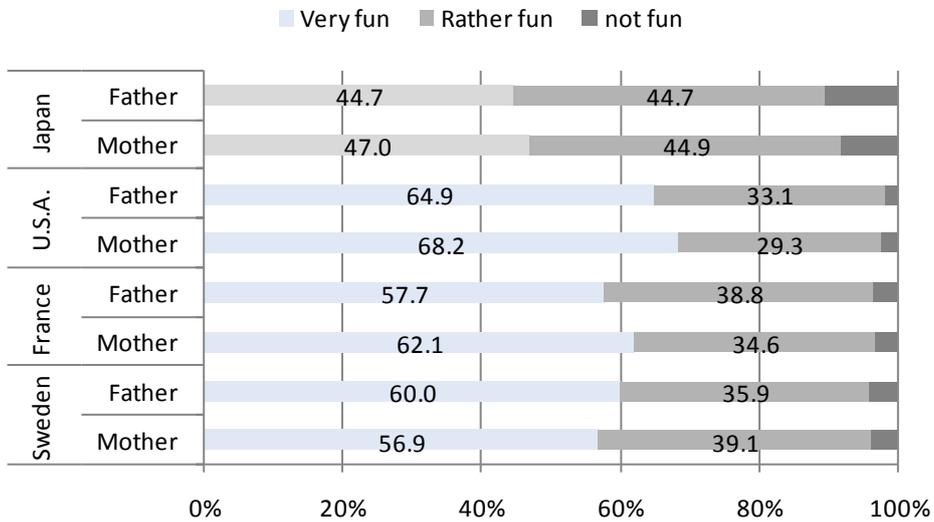


Figure 2.
Parental burden of childrearing (National Women's Education Center Japan, 2005).



2. BACKGROUND

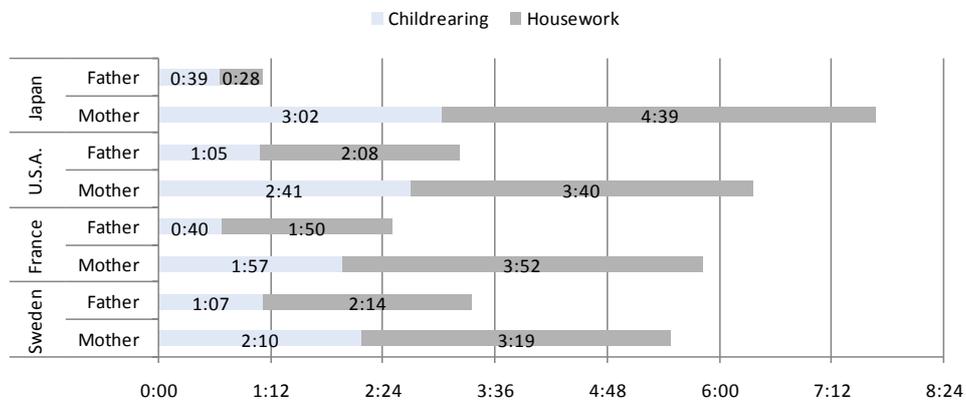
Previous studies have focused on mothers' anxiety and worry about childrearing as a major factor concerning the burden of childrearing (Matsuda, 2007; 2008; 2010; Mishina, Takayama, Aizawa, Tshuchida, & Sugama, 2012; Tanaka & Lowry, 2013). For example,

Mishina et al. (2012) analysed the data on 1,229 mothers who had 3 months infants from Birth Cohort Study (National Center for Child Health and Development, 2003) and found that their childrearing anxiety related to their childrearing burden positively and their quality of life negatively. Matsuda (2007) conducted a survey of mothers whose children went to nursery schools or kindergartens in Japan. The analyses of the data on 2,350 mothers, who were over 40 years of age and married, indicated that mothers who felt anxious about childrearing did not desire to have more children. Furthermore, their children’s psychological development was delayed (Matsuda, 2010). Although these previous studies have only targeted mothers, it was necessary to also target fathers in Japan.

Rush (2015) reviewed previous research on the changing role of fathers in Japan and concluded that since 2000s normative social policy discourses aimed at ending the social norm of ‘male breadwinning female homemaking’ based on the division of labour by gender and aimed gender equality and work-life balance.

As shown in Figure 3, in Japan, fathers with children younger than 6 years of age spend an average of only 39 minutes a day with them. However, according to the Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute (2014), the number of fathers who desired to participate in housework and childrearing more than the current average increased between 2005 and 2014 in Japan. At the same time, the number of fathers who cannot have confidence dealing with their children also increased (see Figure 4). Such lack of self-confidence may lead fathers to worry and to have anxiety about childrearing.

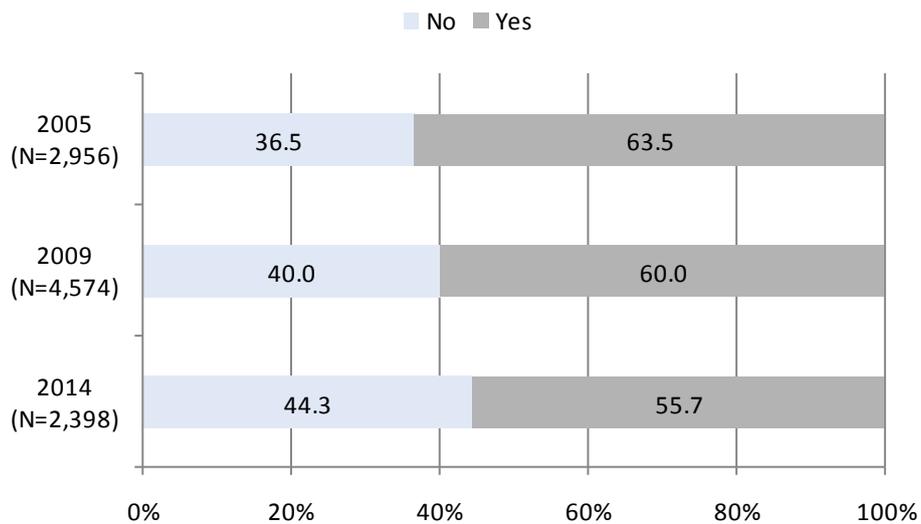
Figure 3.
Time given for childrearing and housework -Family with children younger than 6 years of age (Fathering Japan, 2017).



What are the factors that can reduce the burden of childrearing for parents who worry about childrearing? Previous studies have suggested that social support is effective. Matsuda (2008) analysed three surveys’ data on mothers with preschool children: The first data consisted of 481 mothers with preschool children, the second data consisted of 587 mothers with children younger than 5 years old, and the third data consisted of 407 mothers with 4–6 year-old children. The results of these investigations were consistent; Matsuda (2008) concluded that mothers who have non-kin social networks, such as friends and acquaintances, did not feel anxious about childrearing. Moreover, Matsuda (2010) found that mothers’ childrearing networks reduced their worry about childrearing. Specifically, mothers with social networks, either kin or non-kin who take care of their children when

they go out and provide some advice on childrearing, are not likely to worry about childrearing. On the other hand, Tanaka and Lowry (2013) explored the correlation between mothers' unmet need for spousal support (in those living with spouses) and their mental health. The data were drawn from 495 mothers of 3–5 year-old children (Japan Institutes for Labour Policy and Training, 2003). Mothers' need for support was measured on items such as supporting childcare and housework, listening and communicating about childcare, etc. They found that mothers' unmet need for support from their spouses significantly led to their childrearing depression or neurosis. In addition, Ueki et al. (2015) conducted a survey of 1,077 mothers arrived at the outpatient unit of a Japanese pediatric hospital with sick children and indicated that their state anxiety was correlated negatively with the availability of support persons for childrearing. These results suggested that social support was critical for easing parents' worries about childrearing. Thus, even if parents have anxiety and worries about childrearing, social support can lighten this burden.

Figure 4.
Self-confidence in dealing with their children (Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2014).



In addition to support from spouses, family and friends, professional support is also helpful because parents often have problems with childrearing which cannot be solved without specialised knowledge, skill or advice. For example, when children suffer from injuries or illness, professional support from doctors and nurses is necessary. If children have trouble in nursery schools or kindergartens, support from the staff is useful. Parents also can consult with officers in municipalities and childrearing support centres. Because such professional support can alleviate parents' worries about childrearing, this study examined not only social support but also professional support for parents.

Furthermore, parents may gather technical information from specialised magazines and Internet sites. For example, Porter & Ispa (2013) analysed online messages posted by mothers of 0-2 year olds on the websites of two best-selling parenting magazines in the United States. They found that mothers questioned of advice from family members and

pediatricians because they wanted to get second opinions and asked whether their children were normal. Gaining information from magazines and Internet sites anonymously can also reassure parents.

3. METHODS

The data from the 'Survey on Children and Child Rearing' (Survey Research Centre, 2012) were analysed to examine factors that contribute to perceived parental burden. The survey sample consisted of 3,000 parents over 18 years of age who had children under the age of 6 years from Internet research monitors; one respondent from each household was screened out; all parents were living in Japan at the time of the survey. In total, 2,592 parents responded (valid response rate: 86.40%). Date: 27-31 October 2012; Method: Internet (self-administered); Consent: Confirmed before starting to respond the questions; Incentive: Frequent shopper program points worth 40 yen. This study analysed 2,481 responses from the respondents lived with their children and their children's other parents.

3.1. Variables

Regarding 'Burden', the respondents were asked, '*How do you feel about childrearing?*' They answered 1 = *Very fun*; 2 = *Rather fun*; 3 = *Cannot say*; 4 = *Rather hard*; or 5 = *Very Hard*.

For 'Income', the respondents were asked to rate '*Income of household*' where 1 = *Less than 3 million yen*; 2 = *Less than 5 million yen but more than 3 million yen*; 3 = *Less than 10 million yen but more than 5 million yen* or 4 = *More than 10 million yen*.

For 'Relatives', the respondents were asked, '*Do relatives live near enough to be able to reach your home within 30 minutes?*' They answered 1 = *Yes* or 0 = *No*.

For 'Emergency', respondents were asked, '*Do you have relatives, friends or acquaintances taking care of your children in emergencies?*' They answered 1 = *Yes* or 0 = *No*.

For 'No worry', the respondents were asked a multiple choice question '*How do you cope with anxieties or worries about childrearing?*'. This study recorded 1 = selected *I have neither anxieties nor worries about childrearing in particular* or 0 = did not select the choice. The other choices were as follows: asking '*Relatives*', '*Acquaintances*', '*Nursery staff*', '*Office*' and '*Medical worker*', '*Information gathering*' '*Other*' and '*No*'. Regarding 'Measure', with the respondents who did not select '*I have neither anxieties nor worries about childrearing in particular*', this study set '*No*' as reference choice and recorded the other choices as 1 = selected or 0 = did not select respectively.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Respondents

The mean age of respondents was 37.29 ($SD = 5.12$) years. The sample was balanced in terms of gender (men 49.74%; women 50.26%). They had 1.67 ($SD = 0.71$) children on average. 97.30% of the fathers worked regularly and 0.93% irregularly. 21.08% of the mothers worked regularly and 19.67% irregularly.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

For 'Burden', 28.90% of the 2,481 respondents answered 1 = *Very fun*; 52.40% answered 2 = *Rather fun*; 14.35% answered 3 = *Cannot say*; 3.67% answered 4 = *Rather hard*; or 0.69% answered 5 = *Very Hard*.

For 'Income', 8.83% of the 2,481 respondents answered 1 = *Less than 3 million yen*; 35.27% answered 2 = *Less than 5 million yen but more than 3 million yen*; 46.96% answered 3 = *Less than 10 million yen but more than 5 million yen* or 8.95% answered 4 = *More than 10 million yen*.

For 'Relatives', 64.85% of the 2,481 respondents answered 1 = *Yes (Relatives live near enough to be able to reach your home within 30 minutes)* or 35.15 % answered 0 = *No*.

For 'Emergency', 78.03% of the 2,481 respondents answered 1 = *Yes (I have relatives, friends or acquaintances taking care of your children in emergencies)* or 21.97% answered 0 = *No*.

For 'No worry' and 'Measure', 8.79% of the 2,481 respondents selected *I have neither anxieties nor worries about childrearing in particular*; 65.26% selected '*asking relatives*'; 63.64% selected '*asking acquaintances*'; 22.41% selected '*asking nursery staff*'; 12.41% selected '*asking office*'; 10.36% selected '*asking medical worker*'; 29.83% selected '*Information gathering*'; 0.64% selected '*Other*'; and 3.79% selected '*No*'.

4.3. Multiple regression analysis

This study used several multiple regression analyses to examine the factors correlated with parental burden of childrearing. Table 1 shows the results.

First, the results of Model 1 (whose dependent variable was 'Burden' and independent variables were age and gender, $F(2, 2478) = 43.55, p < .001$) indicated that parents who felt a greater burden of childrearing were women rather than men.

Second, other demographic variables were added as independent variables in Model 2 ($F(8, 2472) = 16.20, p < .001$). The results indicated that parents who felt a greater burden of childrearing had more children, had less income, and were mothers without regular work.

Third, 'Relative', 'Emergency' and 'No worry' were added as independent variables in Model 3 ($F(11, 2469) = 15.80, p < .001$). The results indicated that those who feel a lesser burden were parents who had relatives, friends and acquaintances who took care of children in emergencies and who had no anxieties or worries about childrearing.

Next, limiting the analysis target to the parents who had anxieties and worries about childrearing, seven measures to cope with anxieties and worries were added as independent variables in Model 4 ($F(17, 2245) = 14.41, p < .001$). The results indicated that their burden was eased by asking relatives, acquaintances and medical workers and by gathering information from specialised magazines and Internet sites. In addition, income's effect was not significant.

Finally, Model 5 ($F(16, 1037) = 3.33, p < .001$) limited the analysis target to fathers and Model 6 ($F(16, 1192) = 8.53, p < .001$) limited the analysis target to mothers who had anxieties and worries about childrearing. Comparing these results, it was concluded that though mothers with regular work felt a lesser burden than other mothers, there is no connection between the fathers' burden of childrearing and whether their spouses worked regularly or not, and asking relatives reduced fathers' burden, but living near relatives reduced mothers' burden. Although asking medical workers and gathering information eased mothers' burden, such an effect was not significant for fathers' burden.

Table 1.
Multiple Regression analysis.

Dependent Variable: Burden			
Model	β		
	1	2	3
N	2,481	2,481	2,481
Age	.03	.04†	.04†
Gender (0. Men, 1. Women)	.19***	.19***	.17***
Number of children		.07**	.08***
Income		-.05*	-.06**
Fathers' work; Regular		.01	.00
Fathers' work; Non-regular		-.01	-.01
Mothers' work; Regular		-.08***	-.07**
Mothers' work; Non-regular		.01	.02
Relative			-.03
Emergency			-.10***
No worry			-.06**
R ²	.03	.05	.07
† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

Dependent Variable: Burden			
Model	β		
	4	5	6
N	2,263	1,054	1,209
Age	.03	.05	.03
Gender (0. Men, 1. Women)	.21***	/	/
Number of children	.08***	.09**	.08**
Income	-.03	-.06†	-.01
Fathers' work; Regular	.00	.00	.00
Fathers' work; Non-regular	-.01	-.05	.02
Mothers' work; Regular	-.07**	-.03	-.10**
Mothers' work; Non-regular	.03	.03	.04
Relative	-.03	.01	-.07*
Emergency	-.08**	-.09*	-.07*
No worry	/	/	/
Measure; Relatives	-.06**	-.07*	-.05†
Measure; Acquaintances	-.14***	-.08*	-.21***
Measure; Nursery staff	-.01	-.00	-.02
Measure; Office	.03	.02	.05
Measure; Medical workers	-.06**	-.06†	-.06*
Measure; Information gathering	-.06**	-.05	-.07*
Measure; Other	-.02	-.02	-.02
R ²	.10	.05	.10
† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

5. DISCUSSION / FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study showed that anxiety and worry over childrearing were key factors in the burden of childrearing. In the future, we should survey both mothers and fathers and investigate how to alleviate their anxieties and worries about childrearing. According to results of the Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute (2014), fathers who return home from work later (after 9 p.m.) cannot have enough time with their children and are likely to lack self-confidence in childrearing. Therefore, making fathers' working hours flexible and cutting back on work hours could be helpful strategies.

Asking acquaintances is an effective means for reducing the childrearing burden of both fathers and mothers. These findings propose that social support from acquaintances is valuable to parents for lightening their burden of childrearing. Moving forward, how to increase parents' social support is worth examining. Incidentally, based on results of fieldwork and interviews, Kawano (2014) argued that drop-in centers provided preschoolers' mothers friendly interactions with non-family members. Furthermore, since asking relatives and acquaintances can alleviate fathers' childrearing burden, studying how to expand fathers' childrearing networks might prove to be useful.

Technical support, such as asking medical workers and gathering information from specialised magazines and Internet sites, reduces mothers' burden of childrearing, but not fathers'. This result might be because mothers are the main providers of childcare (Holloway, 2010). In case children have difficulties and need special support, mothers in Japan primarily have a duty and responsibility to ask experts and gather technical information to deal with problems. In the connection, while father's childrearing burden is reduced by asking relatives, it is that relatives live near to ease mothers' childrearing burden, because mothers may have more practical burden and need more concrete support than fathers.

The number of children with developmental disorders, such as Learning Disorder (LD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and high-functioning autism, have increased recently in Japan. According to a survey conducted by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006), the percentage of elementary and junior high school students who show remarkable difficulty in learning ability or behavior conduct was estimated at 6.3% in 2002 and at 6.5% in 2012. This change means an increase of approximately 20,000 elementary and junior high school students who may have developmental disorders. These children and their parents need appropriate expert support. Furthermore, even if children do not have developmental disorders, parents are likely to experience anxiety about such a possibility. Therefore, expert support is becoming more important for all parents.

In this study, parents who felt a greater burden of childrearing were mothers, had more children and less income, without mothers' regular work, had social networks they could rely on in emergencies. For parents with low income and many children, financial support is effective. However, taking measures to cope with anxieties and worries into consideration, the effect of income on parental burden of childrearing was not significant. This finding suggests that the correlation between income and parental burden of childrearing might be spurious because each of them correlates with measures to cope with anxieties and worries. This also indicates that, even though less income, having measures to cope with anxieties and worries can reduce parental burden of childrearing. Therefore, it is important to offer parents measures to cope with anxieties and worries.

Concerning mothers' work status, this study showed that while mothers with regular work felt less childrearing burden, mothers' non-regular work did not such effect on parents' burden of childrearing. This might be because mothers with regular work do not have as heavy responsibility for childrearing as mothers with non-regular work and mothers without work. This result implies that women's empowerment can reduce mothers' childrearing burden. However, only 38.0% of the married women who delivered their first child between 2005 to 2009 and employed before their childbirth, continued to work after their first child (Cabinet Office, 2006). In the future, we should examine the factors that let mothers continue to work regularly. Moreover, for inevitable emergencies, enhancing extended daycare, holiday and night childcare and care for sick or convalescent children is vital.

By examining both social and professional support for both mothers and fathers, this study found that mothers felt greater burden of childrearing than fathers and suggested that mothers might bear the heavier and more practical responsibility of childrearing than fathers according to the division of labour by gender role. In order to reduce mothers' burden of childrearing, fathers should share the responsibility of childrearing more than now. Fathers' gender role attitudes (Keizer, 2015) and masculinity (Schmidt, Rieder, Zartler, Schadler, & Richter, 2015) can be the keys to share the responsibility and burden of childrearing with mothers. In the future, more investigation to improve fathers' attitudes towards childrearing is needed.

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