

[Original Paper]

A study on the present state of child care by fathers in Japan

— A survey of fathers in the Tokyo area —

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Abstract

A survey was carried out with 777 working fathers in the Tokyo Metropolitan area in order to study their views of daily life styles and the actual situation of child care by fathers. Seventy-eight percent of the families in the survey were of the “nucleus family” type. The survey was separately done with two groups of fathers: those whose wives were housewives (A) and those whose wives had full-time or part-time jobs (B). The results were also compared with respect to the father's age. The fathers were asked questions to measure their attachment to their wives and children (Attachment Score) and the actual situation of child care by fathers and in daily family activities. The attachment scores were almost the same between groups A and B. Contact with children and understanding of their children's interests were higher for group A than group B. Fathers in group A tended to maintain their opinions when there was disagreement with their wives while those in group B preferred having discussions with their wives in such cases. On holidays, fathers in group A went out with their families whereas those in group B tended to go out alone to pursue their hobbies, but more fathers in group B participated in housework. We thus conclude that group B fathers, more than group A ones, assume household roles in a more democratic manner, cooperating with their wives who were working. The number of day nurseries should be increased to support fathers and mothers of nucleus families.

Key words : childcare by father, actual situation of childcare, wives' job situation, attachment score

Introduction

In Japan, child care has been mostly left to the mother, with very little participation by the father. According to statistics issued by Statistics Bureau Management and Coordination Agency of Government (SBMCAG) in Japan (1996), fathers spend an average of only 17 minutes a day for child care on weekdays and 38 minutes on holidays, whereas mothers spend 159 minutes on weekdays and 129 minutes on holidays. One of the reasons for this may be due to the Japanese traditional gender role of fathers going out to work to support their families, and mothers being responsible for housework and child care.

After the World War II, in the number of the “nucleus” families (parents and children, without grandparents) has increased in Japan (SBMCAG, 1998), leading to a situation in which children must be taken care of by husbands and wives when both have jobs. In today’s society with the principle of equal opportunity for men and women, an increasing proportion of women is entering the labor market, including those continuing to work after marriage and after childbirth. However, SBMCAG (1998) reports a so-called M-shaped curve for the number of women having jobs versus age, implying that the number of wives having jobs decreases after the first peak following college or high-school graduation when they marry and have children. In fact, the present rate of wives having jobs is reported to be 48% (SBMCAG, 1997). After the middle trough, the number of job holders increases again when the children have grown up. This middle trough in the M-shape seems to be mainly caused by the fact that wives do not have jobs or leave their jobs because they become exclusively involved in child care and housework while fathers concentrate on their work and do not spend much time with their children (PMO, 1998). The hope is that this middle trough in the M-shape could be eliminated to form a plateau shape from the young generation through to the older one.

Another feature of Japan today is a steady drop in the birthrate, being 9.6 in 1999 (HWSA, 2000). One of the main causes for this drop is that the mothers are expected to be solely responsible for child care (MHW, 1998), whether or not they have jobs.

Thus, there is a strong need for the participation of fathers in child care. To promote this, the recent slogan of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW) says “Men who do not take care of their children are not supposed to be fathers.” However, there have been only few detailed studies on the actual situation of the fathers’ roles at home. In order to examine the present situation of the participation of fathers in family life and child care, we carried out a survey with 777 fathers mainly in the Tokyo area. We divided the subjects into those whose wives work outside the home or do not. This difference may be an important factor for husbands in terms of their roles in the family.

Methods

The aims and the period of the present study were as follows.

1. Aims

Fathers from different groups were the subjects; namely, fathers of infants who were born in Ohmori Hospital of Toho University Medical Department; fathers of infants who were born in Sanraku Hospital; employees of four pharmaceutical companies; and employees of M Milk Products Co., Ltd. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire, the overall response rate of which was more than 80%.

To compare the behavior of the fathers depending upon their wives’ job situation, the fathers were divided into two groups: A, fathers whose wives did not have jobs and B, fathers whose wives had full-time or part-time jobs. Data were also classified depending on the fathers’ ages.

2. Questionnaire survey

2-1. Measurement of the fathers’ attachment to their wives and children

We used the “Attachment Scale” of Ohinata (1988) who defined attachment as the demands of bonds of affection toward wives and children. The Attachment Scale has three modes, namely, behavior, concern, and understanding + support, which could be active or passive from the fathers’ side. There are 18 items with four choices each, including “exactly so” to “not exactly so.” The results are expressed as a total score, ranging from 18 (least) to 72 (full) points, the higher the score, the stronger the attachment.

2-2. Questions about the fathers’ daily home lifestyles

Four questions asked about the fathers’ relations with children: (1) contact with children, (2) understanding of

children's interests, (3) how to raise children, and (4) ideas on child care when there were differences between husbands and wives. Five questions were posed on the daily lives of the fathers: (1) how to spend holidays with children, (2) participation in housework, (3) father's cooperation with their child raising, (4) the father's presence at childbirth, and (5) self awareness as father. In addition to the above, the fathers were asked about their expectations, such as social support for child care.

The data were examined for the two groups, A and B, and data are also presented for the age ranges of over 50, 40-49, 30-39 and 20-29 years old.

3. Study period and methods of data analysis

The study period was from June, 1997 to February, 1999. SPSS 8.0 J for Windows was used for the data analysis. T-authorization and one-way layout analysis of variances were used for statistical authorization of the significant differences. A probability of 5 % or less was considered to be significant.

Results

1. Attachment Score

Table 1 summarizes the fathers' attachment score toward wives and children, for fathers whose wives do not have jobs (A) or those who have full-time or part-time jobs (B). The Attachment Scores were almost the same between groups A and B, between the scores toward wives and toward children, being approximately 60. Therefore, both groups expressed more or less the same attachment feelings for their wives and children.

2. Survey on life at home

2-1. Contact with children

The relationship between fathers and their children was surveyed and summarized in Table 2. A significant difference between groups A and B was found for item 1-1) and 3). Fathers of group A, i.e. wives who did not have jobs, considered themselves as fathers who had active contacts with their children. Also, the difference between groups A and

Table 1 Fathers' Attachment Score depending on wives' job situation

Subject	Numbers (%)	
	A : Not working outside (n=451)	B : Working full or part time (n=311)
To wives	60.1 (8.6)	59.1 (8.8)
To children	60.4 (7.3)	58.8 (8.2)

()=SD

Table 2 Fathers' daily life at home-1

Question items	Number (%)	
	A n=451	B n=311
1. Contact with children		
1) Very active	103 (22.8)	60 (19.3)*
2) Somewhat active	261 (57.9)	162 (52.1)
3) Not very active	57 (12.6)	65 (20.9)**
4) Not at all	6 (1.3)	7 (2.3)
5) No answer	24 (5.3)	17 (5.5)
2. Understanding of children's interests		
1) Understand very well	90 (20.0)	45 (14.5)*
2) Understand relatively well	49 (55.2)	177 (56.9)
3) Do not understand much	60 (13.3)	56 (18.0)*
4) Do not understand at all	17 (3.8)	7 (2.3)
5) No answer	35 (7.8)	26 (8.4)
3. Raising children		
1) Boys be masculine & girls feminine	243 (53.9)	132 (42.4)*
2) Boys and girls should be the same	162 (35.9)	135 (43.4)
3) Do not know	14 (3.1)	24 (7.7)**
4) Others	24 (5.3)	14 (4.5)
5) No answer	8 (1.8)	6 (1.9)
4. Action when differences arise in childcare opinions		
1) Maintain fathers' opinion	165 (36.6)	39 (12.5)***
2) Follow wife's opinion	107 (23.7)	93 (29.9)
3) Discuss until both agree	134 (29.7)	142 (45.7)***
4) Others	29 (6.4)	25 (8.0)
5) No answer	16 (3.5)	12 (3.9)

* : p=0.05, ** : p=0.01, *** : p=0.001

B was remarkable for item 2-1), suggesting that fathers in group A thought they understood their children's interests better than those in group B. This result coincided well with the result of item 2-3), showing that fathers in group B thought that they had less understanding of their children's interest.

A clear difference was also found for item 3 on ideas about child raising. Fathers in group A, as compared with those in B, considered that boys should be masculine and girls be feminine, while those in group B tended to consider that boys and girls should be the same.

Another conspicuous difference between the two groups was found for item 4 with respect to childcare when there were differences between fathers and mothers. Fathers in group A considered that they tended to maintain their own opinions, while fathers in group B, expressed a stronger tendency to discuss the matter with their wives until agreement was reached.

2-2. Home lifestyles

Family lifestyles also differed between the fathers in groups A and B, as shown in Table 3, item 1-3) and 7). Fathers in group B tended to go out for their hobbies while more fathers in group A than B went out with their families. Fathers in group B, as compared with A, actively participated in housework whereas those in the A did not participate actively, as indicated in Table 3, item 2-1), -2), and 3).

Table 3 Fathers' daily life at home-2

Question items	Number (%)	
	A n=451	B n=311
1. How holidays are spent		
1) Office activities or side jobs	15 (3.3)	16 (5.1)
2) Housework	9 (2.0)	7 (2.3)
3) Going out for hobbies	48 (10.6)	54 (17.4)**
4) Staying home for hobbies	20 (4.4)	24 (7.7)
5) Relaxing alone at home	21 (4.7)	19 (6.1)
6) Being at home with family	135 (29.9)	85 (27.3)
7) Going out with family	186 (41.2)	92 (29.6)***
8) Other activities	13 (2.9)	10 (3.2)
9) No answer	4 (0.9)	4 (1.3)
2. Participation in housework		
1) Very active	20 (4.4)	33 (10.6)***
2) Somewhat active	161 (35.7)	140 (45.0)**
3) Not very active	182 (40.4)	89 (28.6)***
4) Not at all	86 (19.1)	49 (15.8)
5) No answer	2 (0.4)	0
3. Cooperation with family		
1) Concentrating on job-related work	22 (4.9)	13 (4.2)
2) Help housework	11 (2.4)	16 (5.1)*
3) Give advice to wife and family	37 (8.2)	88 (28.3)***
4) Try to accompany children	17 (3.8)	7 (2.3)
5) Make final decision on important family matters	41 (9.1)	53 (17.0)***
6) Look after children	2 (0.4)	0
7) Others	2 (0.4)	8 (2.6)
8) No answer	319 (70.7)	126 (40.5)***
4. Presence at child birth		
1) Present	162 (35.9)	119 (38.3)
2) Not present	288 (63.9)	191 (61.4)
3) No answer	1 (0.2)	1 (0.3)
5. Self-awareness as father		
1) An average father	14 (3.1)	11 (3.5)
2) Not an average father	21 (4.7)	31 (10.0)**
3) An ideal father	25 (5.5)	6 (1.9)*
4) Have close cooperation with wife as to taking care of children	9 (2.0)	4 (1.3)
5) An indulgent father	9 (2.0)	6 (1.9)
6) A strict father	7 (1.6)	7 (2.6)
7) Take good care of family	43 (9.5)	26 (8.4)
8) Others	7 (1.6)	6 (1.9)
9) No answer	316 (70.1)	214 (68.8)

* : p=0.05, ** : p=0.01, *** : p=0.001

There was a remarkable difference in the manner of cooperation (Table 3). Fathers in group B very actively gave advice to their wives and families, as seen in the item 3-3). Interestingly, very few fathers were lacking in self-awareness as fathers, those in group A being less than those in B. Also, few fathers in both groups were absent when their wives gave birth, as shown in Table 3, item 4-1) and 2).

Interestingly, only few fathers expected social and financial support for child care from the government, or desired more vacation time, although the majority of fathers did not respond to this question. This may have been because they considered their family affairs as their own personal matter.

2-3. Data analysis by father's age

The younger the fathers' age, the more actively they maintained contact with their children (Fig. 1). This trend was also evident for the children's ages, namely, the contact was strong when both fathers and children were young.

Fig. 2 shows the data how much fathers thought they understood their children's interests in %, depending upon the age of the father. Fathers in the 30-39 and 40-49 year old groups thought that they understood their children's

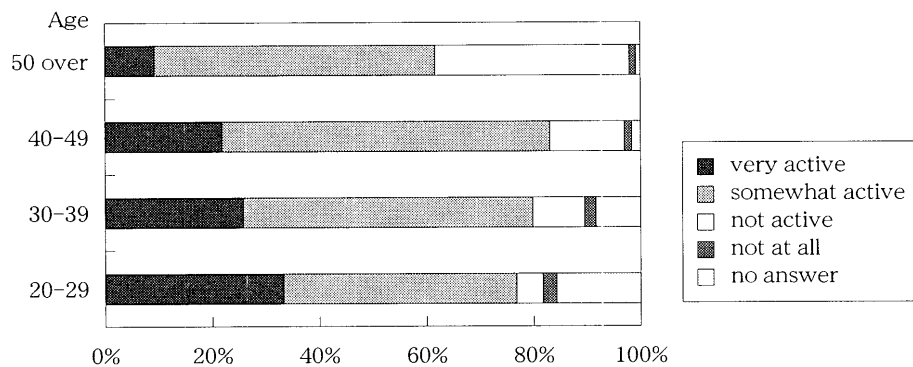


Fig. 1 Degree of fathers' contact with children depending on fathers' age.

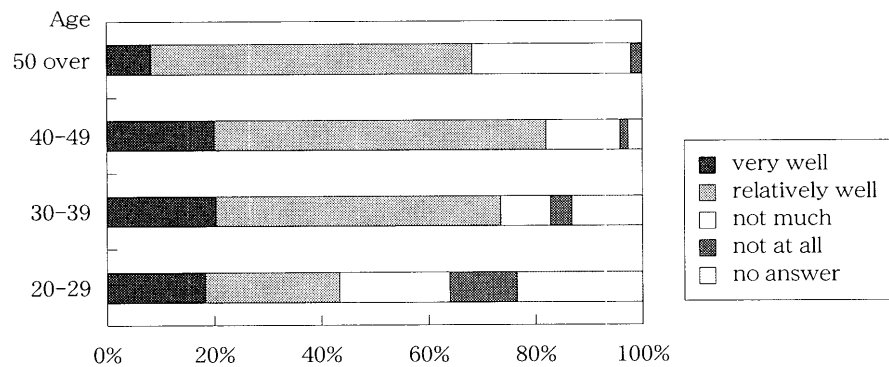


Fig. 2 Degree of fathers' understanding of children's interest depending on fathers' age.

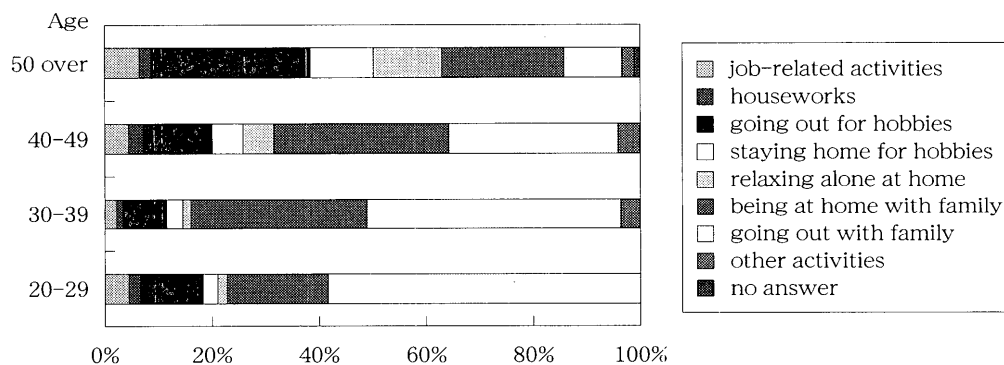


Fig. 3 Fathers' activities on holidays depending on their age.

interests very well.

Fig. 3 shows how fathers spent their holiday time in %, by age groups. Clearly, the younger the fathers were, the more they spent time with their families, while the older the fathers were, the more they went out for their hobbies. Also, fathers tended to be with their children more when the children were younger than 12 years old (data not shown).

Discussion

Judging from the attachment score (Table 1), the fathers' feelings of attachment toward their wives and children seemed quite high, approximately 60 of the total score 72. In addition, no significant difference was found among fathers in the groups A and B. It thus seems that the fathers' feelings toward their families were not affected by whether or not their wives had jobs.

However, if answers to questions are compared between fathers in groups A and B, we find conspicuous differences for several items, as can be seen from Tables 2 and 3. In general, group B fathers seemed to be more agreeable or democratic than those in group A in several respects, e. g. the answers to Table 2 items 3-2) and 4-3). Table 2 indicates that group B fathers tended to consider that boys and girls should be the same, and that fathers and mothers should discuss child care matters until they agreed if there were differences between them.

Of interest is the response to question items 1-3) in Table 2, indicating that fathers in group B, namely those whose wives had jobs, did not have much contact with their children, as compared with fathers in group A.

The results shown in Table 3 are also interesting and somewhat unexpected. The answers to question items 1-3) and 7) indicate that fathers in group B went out more for their hobbies while fathers in group A tended to go out with their families on holidays. While the general expectation may be that fathers whose wives have jobs might want to be with their families on holidays, the actual situation was against the expectation. Participation in housework by group B fathers was more active than for those in the group A, as shown in Table 3, item 2-1), -2) and -3). Fathers in group B seemed to be more active in giving advice to their wives, as shown by item 3-3). The self-awareness as a father was found to be rather weak, particularly with fathers in group A, as shown by item 5-2). Although more than half of the fathers had not attended at child birth, more than 30% were present when their wives delivered babies, as shown in item 4. This may not reflect the modern trend.

The general trend for all fathers of both groups was that the majority had good contact with their children and understood their children's interest quite well, but participated little in housework (less than 50%). In the International Comparative Survey of the Father and the Child conducted by Youth Affairs Administration Management and Coordination Agency of Government (YAAMCAG) in Japan in 1987 (1988), only 47% of fathers in Japan had active contact with their children, while those in our study reached 78%. After 10 years, Japanese fathers seem to have more active contact with their children. However, as compared with fathers of various foreign countries, the time which fathers in Japan spend with their children is short. According to the results of the International Comparative Survey of six countries including the United States, and those in Europe and Asia (JAWSE, 1995), Japanese fathers spent 3.3 hours per day with their children, the shortest among times reported by fathers of the six participating countries.

Table 4 shows that fathers in both groups A and B did not expect much or demand financial and social support from the government, with nearly 70% responding negatively. The reason for this result is not known. A high percentage of negative answers was also found for question item, being more than 7 % for fathers in group A in item 8 (Table 4).

In the present survey, 78% of the families were the so-called "nucleus" families consisting of two generations, i. e. parents and children. According to the National Census in 1995, the percentage of nucleus families in Japan was reported to be 58% (SBMCAG, 1998). This high rate of nucleus families may be a characteristic of large cities like

Table 4 Fathers' expectation on child care support

Item	Numbers (%)	
	A n=451	B n=311
1) Support of expenses for child education	16 (3.5)	15 (4.8)
2) Reformation of education system	26 (5.8)	16 (5.1)
3) Advantageous tax system	34 (7.5)	17 (5.5)
4) Maintenance of child care environment	22 (4.9)	21 (6.8)
5) Social support of expenses for raising children	3 (0.7)	1 (0.3)
6) More vacation and free time	20 (4.4)	14 (4.5)
7) Others	2 (0.4)	1 (0.3)
8) Nothing especially expected	3 (0.7)	23 (7.4)***
9) No answer	325 (72.1)	203 (65.3)

*** : p=0.001

the Tokyo Metropolitan area where people live far from their native homes and commute to work from suburban homes. Therefore, the results reported in the present study could not be generalized. Similar surveys need to be done in areas where the rate of nucleus families is low.

The degree of the fathers' attachment toward their children and their lifestyles depended upon the age of the father (see Fig. 1-3). As the fathers aged, the contact with their children decreased but their understanding of their children's interests increased. Younger fathers tended to go out with their families, whereas older fathers went out alone for their own hobbies on holidays. The present results are consistent with those for the International Comparative Survey Relative to Children and Family conducted by YAAMCAG (1995).

Table 5 is a rearrangement of the data in Table 1 and those in Figs. 1-3. The data support the present M-shaped situation, i. e. after the first peak where a high rate of unmarried women have jobs, there is a trough where only few wives have jobs for the 20-29 year age range of the husbands, then the percentage gradually increases to a high level of 50%.

After World War II and its defeat to the Allied Forces, Japan was forced to abandon its old traditions, one of which was the family system. Before the war, many families were of large size, usually consisting of three or even more generations. If a baby was born to the young couple, its grandmother not only helped the young mother but also taught her many things. The grandfather also played an important role in the family as a role model for controlling the whole family in many ways and also for strengthening family ties. Thus, there had been a clearer division of roles and labor in order to maintain a good family lifestyle. The disadvantage was that men worked outside to support their families and wives worked at home, taking care of parents, husbands and children. In this sense, husbands and wives were not equal in what they did. Under the new constitution promulgated after the war, both sexes are supposed to be equal, including in job situations. This equality may be theoretically correct but is difficult to achieve in reality. The family style has changed after the war, fathers not only work outside but are also expected to help at home, taking care of children and participating in housework, particularly when their wives have jobs. While dependent upon the age of the fathers, this modern trend was apparent in the present study.

As young wives seem to be unable to have jobs, because they must care for young children, support should be made available to young couples if the wife wishes to whole outside. Only few fathers expected and demanded support for child care or child education, but the number of day nurseries should be increased to support fathers and mothers of nucleus families. This need has recently been pointed out by Prime Minister Jun-ichiro Koizumi in the

Table 5 Wives' job situation depending on the age of fathers

Age of fathers	Numbers (%)			
	A (wife not working) n=451	B (wife working) n=311	Others n=12	No answer n=3
20-29	34 (87.2)	5 (12.8)		
30-39	234 (62.2)	133 (35.4)	6 (1.6)	3 (0.8)
40-49	113 (54.8)	89 (43.2)	4 (1.9)	
50 over	70 (45.5)	83 (53.9)	1 (0.6)	
No Answer		1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	

Diet. Our survey shows that approximately 80% of 20–29-year-old fathers expect support (data not shown).

In conclusion, although we found a general trend as to the present state of child care by fathers in Tokyo area, it seems necessary that similar studies should be carried out in other areas in Japan.

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〔原 著〕

父親の子育ての実態に関する研究

—— 首都圏の父親の調査から ——

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【要 旨】 父親の子育ての実態と日常生活についての意識を調べるために首都圏を中心とした勤労者の父親 777 名を対象に調査を行った。調査対象の 78%の家族は核家族であった。調査は、父親を妻が専業主婦であったグループ (A) と妻がフルタイムまたはパートタイムの仕事を持っていたグループ (B) に分けて行われた。結果はまた、父親の年代別に比較された。父親に与えられた質問は、(1) 妻と子どもに対する愛着の測定 (愛着得点)、(2) 父親の子育ての実態と日常生活の行動であった。我々は次の様な結果を得た。妻と子どもに対する父親の愛着得点は、A と B のグループ間でほとんど同じであった。子どもとの関わりと子どもの関心についての理解は、A グループが B グループに比べて高かった。妻と意見の不一致があった場合、A グループの父親は主に自分の意見を通し、B グループの父親は話し合うことを好む傾向があった。休日は、A グループの父親は家族と一緒に外出し、B グループは趣味のために一人で外出する傾向であったが、B グループの父親は家事を手伝うものが多かった。A グループの父親に比べて、B グループの父親は家庭内で民主的な父親の役割を果たしていた。

核家族の父親と母親の子育てを支援するために、保育所の増設が必要である。

キーワード：父親の子育て、子育ての実態、妻の就業状況、愛着得点

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