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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND MATERNAL ATTITUDES AMONG JAPANESE MOTHERS

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1. Introduction

Influence of socioeconomic factors on parenting has been studied from various points of view. Bernstein (1960) argued that mothers from different socioeconomic strata would use language differently with their children, so that the children would acquire different communicative styles. Recently, parental belief was found to be associated with socioeconomic status (SES) in that higher SES mothers were likely to recognize their children as active agents of learning and development (Skinner, 1985). Studies focusing on SES suggest that lower SES parents prefer their children to be more submissive to authority, whereas higher SES parents expect their children to be more independent (Hoff-Ginsburg & Tardif, 1995).

In Japan, however, there are few studies which have investigated the relationship between SES and parenting. It has been widely believed that there are narrower social or economic differences in the Japanese society when compared to other countries such as the U. K. or the U. S. (Azuma *et al.*, 1981). There is still no consensus about how to measure socioeconomic status in Japan.

To our knowledge, only Azuma, Kashiwagi, and Hess (1981) and Kashiwagi *et al.* (1984) have examined the influence of SES upon parenting in Japan. In this paper, SES was calculated by the factors of father's job and the educational levels of both parents using Japanese and American families. Children's cognitive development was measured in a variety of methods such as Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, school achievement, WISC-R, and other instruments. In both countries, children from higher SES families tended to have higher scores in these cognitive measures. However, there were several remarkable contrasts between the two countries in maternal strategies which related to child's cognitive development. For example, Japanese mothers of higher SES were more likely to use their authority when controlling their children. This showed having a positive correlation to children's cognitive development. In the sample from the U. S., lower SES mothers were likely to use such strategy. This sug-

gests that there is different relation between parenting and SES in different cultures.

This study reports the relationship between parenting and SES in a large sample from a Japanese urban area.

2. Method

Participants: A total of 1329 pregnant women were recruited from attenders at an antenatal clinic in the obstetrics department of a general hospital in Kawasaki, a heavily industrial city next to Tokyo. After pregnancy was confirmed by the presence of foetal heart beat on echocardiography, each woman was asked to participate in the present longitudinal study. Women at more than 12 weeks gestation were excluded; no other exclusion criteria were applied.

The subjects' age ranged from 17 to 42 years, with a mean (S.D.) of 27.9 (4.6) years. Forty nine percent of them were primiparous. Maternal demographic information included age, educational history, job status of spouse and the women, and annual income of the family. Almost three fourths of women (72.5%) were housewives at pregnancy; this rate went up to 85% when job status was again asked at 6 months after birth. In Japan, many women quit job at the time of marriage or childbirth. High rates of unemployed women in this sample reflect such a social situation. Parental educational levels were asked on 7-point scale; 1 for "not educated at all (0 years of education)" to 7 for "graduate school or more (more than 18 years of education)". Only 9.4% of subjects have nine years of education which is compulsory to all Japanese. Twenty nine percent of them have junior college education or more. This sample seems to represent the average education in the same generation (Monbusho, 1995).

Measures: Questionnaires were distributed to participants 3 times before and 5 times after birth. The first five questionnaires were handed to participants and collected in the clinic. Subsequent three were mailed to participants and also returned by mail. Demographic data were mainly obtained at the first questionnaire. Attitudes to parental role were assessed with Maternal Role Scale (MRS) (Aoki *et al.*, 1986) at 6 months and 18 months after birth. This scale consists of two sub-scales, including positive (acceptant) and negative (rejective) attitudes toward maternal role. Sample items include, respectively, "I really feel happy to have a child"; "I think I am inept for a mother."

3. Results

Acceptance score of the MRS at 6 and 18 months after birth ranged from 0 to 12 with a mean (S.D.) of 10.7 (1.4), 10.4 (1.7), respectively. The mean (S.D.) of rejection score at 6 and 18 month were 3.6 (2.6), and 3.3 (2.4), respectively. No relations were found between maternal age and these sub-scales. Subjects were divided into two groups using a median of each score as a cut-off point. In order to compare this sample to a random-sampled data in the same area (Aoki *et al.*, 1986), Chi-square analysis was applied. Our sample had significantly higher acceptant attitude toward maternal role only at 6 months ($\chi^2=7.56$, $p<.01$) and lower rejective attitudes in both points (6 months; $\chi^2=20.89$, $p<.001$, 18 months; $\chi^2=36.98$, $p<.001$). At 18 months, no difference was found between the two data in acceptant attitude.

As shown in Table 1, annual income of the family were significantly related to rejective attitudes toward maternal role at the two points. Among all subjects, only 36% of mothers from low income families (less than 2 million yen per year) were classified as "low rejective group." There were no difference in acceptant attitude (6 months; $\chi^2=1.49$, n. s., 18 months; $\chi^2=4.54$, n. s.).

Table 1 Distribution of maternal role rejection by annual income
Percentages of each sample at 6 and 18 months

Annual income of the family	Groups by role rejection score			
	6 months		18 months	
	Low	High	Low	high
less than 2 million yen	36.0	64.0	38.1	61.9
2 to 4 million yen	61.8	38.2	66.1	33.9
4 to 6 million yen	66.7	33.3	79.5	20.5
more than 6 million yen	67.5	32.5	77.6	22.4
Chi-square	10.01 (p= .018)		21.27 (p= .0001)	

Paternal education showed no significant differences in either sub-scale at any point. However, maternal education was linked to negative attitudes at the two points (Table 2). There was no difference in acceptant attitudes.

Table 2 Distribution of maternal role rejection by education
Percentages of each sample at 6 and 18 months

Educational level of mother	Groups by role rejection score			
	6 months		18 months	
	Low	High	Low	High
Less than 12 years (High school or less)	59.4	40.6	66.4	33.6
More than 12 years (Junior college or more)	71.4	28.6	78.9	21.1
Chi-square	9.86 (p= .002)		8.64 (p= .003)	

Since almost three fourths of subjects were unemployed at the time of pregnancy, both part-timers and fulltime workers were combined in subsequent analyses. There were no relations between the two. However, mothers who came back to work after childbirth were more likely to be classified as low rejective group at both points. At six months postnatally, mothers who reported "now working" and "having maternal leave" were classified as "working." Others were classified as "non working." At both points, there were more acceptant mothers in the "working" group (Table 3). Role rejection had no relation with employment status after birth.

4. Discussion

Compared with the random sampled data in the same area, our subjects shows higher acceptant and lower rejective attitudes toward parental role at six months after

Table 3 Distribution of maternal role acceptance by employment status
Percentages of each sample at 6 and 18 months

Maternal employment status at 6 months after birth	Groups by role acceptance score			
	6 months		18 months	
	Low	High	Low	High
working	25.0	75.0	34.7	65.3
non-working	35.8	64.2	48.2	51.8
Chi-square	2.76 (p = .096)		4.22 (p = .040)	

birth. At 18 months, a lower rejective attitude was indicated. The age of the children seems to relate to the differences. Aoki *et al.* (1986) investigated the women with children whose ages ranged from 0 to 23 years old, whereas subjects of the present study were all, at least, having an infant. Lorenz (1965) stated that some characteristics of infants such as relatively big head or big eyes placed lower on face elicit our feeling of love toward them. Such innate release system could work in the mother of infants. This point, however, needs further detailed investigations.

Instead of combining SES-related variables into one global index, different variables were analysed separately in the present study. Family income was linked to the maternal role rejection. This suggests that there exists SES-related attitude differences among Japanese mothers. Very low income might be the index of other social disadvantages such as unemployment of husband or too young age. It is also suggested that economical advantage could modify maternal stress in daily life, and make mothers less rejective to their roles.

Maternal educational level was another influential variable upon role rejection while paternal education was not. Higher education enables a person to be more independent. In addition, higher academic achievement tends to make students' self-esteem higher and vice versa (O'Malley and Backman, 1979). Such difference might exist between high and low education groups in the present study and consequently influence upon role acceptance as a parent. Another finding is the ineffectiveness of fathers' education in predicting maternal attitudes. Paternal education is often an important component of SES index (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958). The present result indicates father's education has less influence upon mothering in Japanese urban samples, which is consistent with research in various cultures (Richman, Miller, & Levine, 1992).

Maternal employment status at pregnancy had no significant relation with maternal attitudes, whereas the employment at six months after birth did have positive influence. It is known that housewives with small children are more stressful in child-rearing than working mothers in Japan (Sorifu Seishonen Taisakuhonbu, 1983). The prevailing attitude that mothers should be constantly absorbed in child-rearing is a Japanese tendency (Ohinata, 1988), that forces housewives to be with their children all day long. In contrast, working mothers have time to be separated from children. This experience, or the anticipation of being apart from the child, would make working mothers more accepting than housewives. Kashiwagi and Wakamatsu (1994) reported that fathers who were less involved in child-care tended to have a more positive feeling

to their children. Such fathers were considered as being free from the ambivalence which was inevitable in real interactions with a child. Intermittent separation from children seems to have a positive effect on being a parent. Further investigation is needed to examine whether these subjective feelings of parents can actually have long-term influences on child development.

In conclusion, socioeconomic-related differences in maternal attitudes were confirmed in this study of Japanese families. Maternal rather than paternal education and family income have been especially highlighted as significant factors. This suggests that pediatricians, nurses, teachers and other practitioners should notice the notable effect of socioeconomic background on the mother-child dyad. Regarding mother's negative attitude as a mere reflection of maternal undesirable personality might deprive practitioners of the opportunity for appropriate intervention.

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