






CSRDA Discussion Paper

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Sense of Effort Effectiveness:
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Parent and Two-Parent Families**

No. 85	Date June. 2024	SDGs   
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**The Effect of Family Structure Disparity on the Sense of Effort Effectiveness:
Focusing on Children's Learning Time in Single-Parent and Two-Parent Families**

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Abstract

In this study, we used the indicator “sense of effort effectiveness” (i.e., if you work hard, you can do most things) to determine whether differences in family structure affect children's effort (i.e., time spent studying outside school). The data were from the 2020 Japanese Longitudinal Study of Children and Parents Survey Questionnaire. The following results were obtained.

First, a slightly larger proportion of children from two-parent families had greater effort effectiveness than children from single-parent families. Second, growing up in a single-parent family is associated with the occurrence of reduced motivation in children's educational achievement in which the notion that effort is rewarded is not directly linked to learning. This may be because growing up in a single-parent home reduces the number of experiences in which learning is recognized and connected to the notion that effort is rewarded. In recent years, emphasis has been placed on the role of learning support programs in creating a social place for children in addition to supporting their higher education. Importantly, this emphasis functions to encourage children to have a positive outlook on society, where they are recognized for their learning and rewarded for their efforts.

Keywords: Sense of Effort Effectiveness, Family Structure Disparity, Learning Time, Japan

I Introduction

The internet slang term “parent-gacha” was ranked among the most popular words in 2021. The term implies that if one's life is not going well, it can be attributed to luck, similar to a lottery like a gacha machine. It therefore emphasizes the significant influence of parents on their child’s motivation (Doi 2021). This has given rise to considerable sympathy for young people. Doi expressed alarm at the spread of a fatalistic view of life that holds that young people's “destiny is largely determined by the environment in which we were born and our inborn attributes, such as the qualities and talents we were born with, rather than by the attributes we have independently grasped” (Doi 2019).

One part of a child's “birth environment” is the family structure. Especially in Japan, where the child poverty rate is high, a large body of domestic research targets single-parent families, especially “single-mother families” (e.g., Abe 2008, Kambara 2006). Child poverty greatly limits children's own life chances due to systemic and economic challenges, making it difficult for them to improve their prospects and motivation for the future (Osawa 2008).

The aim of this study was to investigate whether such life-chance limitations and difficulty in gaining motivation for the future might be problems for children who have “parent-gacha”. We use the measure of sense of effort effectiveness (i.e., if you work hard, you can do most things.) to determine whether differences in family structure have an effect on children's

effort (i.e., time spent learning outside school).

II Review

1 Growing up in a single-parent family

Why does growing up in a single-parent family lead to a disadvantage in educational achievement? Previous studies have proposed two hypotheses to explain this mechanism. The first is the "economic deprivation" hypothesis (McLanahan 1985), which explains why a lack of economic resources affects children's educational attainment because economic wealth allows resources to be invested in children's education (Mayer 1997). Furthermore, economic wealth may structure the family atmosphere and increase children's motivation to learn (Downey 1994). In domestic research, the economic deprivation hypothesis has raised the issue of the impact on children of single-mother families with low household income (McLanahan 1985, Inaba 2011).

The second is the "relational-deprivation" hypothesis (Shirakawa 2010), which states that children are affected not only by economic factors but also by a lack of resources in the form of cultural and time investment between parents and children. Daily conversations between parents and children, educational involvement, and expectations of children are related to children's awareness of and involvement in educational achievement (Tohyama 1996, Okabe 2008, Yoda 2012). Growing up in a single-parent household not only causes economic problems but

also reduces the amount of time parents and children can share, which in turn affects children's awareness and lack of motivation to learn and results in poor academic performance and early dropout (Yoda 2014). In fact, children with single parents tend to “believe that studying is not good enough” (Hatori 1982), It is therefore important to help children understand the benefits of learning, which provides many opportunities to praise them through outside learning support.

Based on these two hypotheses, we address the differences in family structure with regard to a “sense of effort effectiveness,” the attitude toward effort among children who grow up in single-parent families.

2 “Effort is Rewarded”

As mentioned above, restrictions in the environment of a child's upbringing have a significant impact on the child's future prospects. Kariya's research used out-of-school learning time as an indicator of effort and found a gap in the amount of effort (out-of-school learning time) depending on social class; furthermore, the author noted that this trend is expanding (Kariya 2000). In other words, the author proposed the existence of a motivational gap (incentive divide) in modern society in which there are differences between social classes in the incentive to make an effort, but “there is no choice but to make effort” (Kariya 2001).

Therefore, in this study we focus on individuals’ awareness of how much significance

they perceive in making efforts. A previous study by Park et al. (2015) discussed the “sense of effort effectiveness” (i.e., the attitude toward effort that “if you work hard, you can do most things”). In the “Japanese National Character Survey” of men and women aged 20 or older living in Japan, Park et al. asked respondents to choose one of two opinions: “I think that if you work hard, you can do most things” or “I think that no matter how hard I work, I often do not get rewarded at all”. Park et al. found that choosing the former was an affirmation of the sense of effort effectiveness, while the latter was a denial of the sense of effort effectiveness. The results showed that the percentage of respondents who answered “I think that if you work hard, you can do most things” has declined over the past 25 years based on a comparison between the 1988 and 2013 surveys. This decline is due to the awareness of disparities caused by social structural factors (class identification), social isolation (feeling left out in the world), and attachment to one’s own country (whether an individual would choose to be born in Japan if he or she were born again) and the sense of social fairness (whether the individual feels that Japan is fair) (Park and Maeda 2015).

In this study, we rely on Park et al.'s sense of effort effectiveness to analyze the impact of growing up in a single-parent family, particularly with regard to the orientation toward effort. To examine the impact of family structure, it is necessary to specify whether the difference in the impact of effort effectiveness is due to poverty or single-parent households. Therefore, we conduct

a multiple regression analysis controlling for household income.

Research Question 1

Is children's sense of effort effectiveness lower in single-parent families than in two-parent families?

Research Question 2

Is the effect of children's sense of effort effectiveness on learning time greater in two-parent families than in single-parent families, controlling for household income and parental involvement?

III Research Methods

1 Analytical Data

To achieve the objectives of this study, we used the “Japanese Longitudinal Study of Children and Parents Wave1~7, 2015-2021”, which was conducted by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo. This was a panel survey of children (i.e., the Child Survey Form) and their parents (i.e., the Parent Survey Form) in grades 1 through 3 of elementary school across Japan who were registered with the Benesse Institute of Education and followed. In this study, we used

the Children and Parents Survey Wave 6, which was conducted from July to September 2021.

2 Subjects of Analysis

The term “single-parent families” in this study refers to “single-mother families” only.

This is mainly because in this study, 90% of the respondents who completed the parent survey form were mothers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Relationships with Children

	Relationships with Children									
	Mother		Father		Grandmother		Other		ALL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Two-parent Families	2980	91.5%	265	8.1%	4	0.1%	9	0.3%	3258	100.0%
Single-parent Families	193	94.6%	10	4.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	204	100.0%
	3173	91.7%	275	7.9%	4	0.1%	10	0.3%	3462	100.0%

In fact, since approximately 90% of single-parent families in Japan are single-mother families (1,195,000 single-mother families and 149,000 single-father families, according to the 2021 National Survey of Single-Parent Families conducted by the Child and Family Agency), we decided to focus our analysis on single-mother families in this study. Surveys of single-father families are also important (e.g., Iwata 2009, Iwashita 2013), but their analysis is a subject for future study.

3 Missing values

As a result of listwise elimination of missing values for all variables used in this study, we used data from 3,173 pairs of middle and high school students and their mothers.

IV Creation of Variables

1 Structure of parental involvement

The first step was the creation of variables related to parental involvement. Principal component analysis was conducted using all 17 indices in the “How much do the following apply to you about your father or mother?” section of the Children’s Survey. As a result, three factors with eigenvalues of 1.0 or higher were obtained.

Table2 Principal component analysis of parental involvement

	I	II	III
They teach me what to study	0.783	0.176	0.019
They teach me how to enjoy studying	0.776	0.195	-0.027
They teach me how to plan our studies	0.763	0.196	0.123
They ask me to think of different ways to solve problems	0.741	0.066	0.223
They tell me the meaning and importance of study	0.715	0.273	0.111
They give me advice when I have problems in my study	0.681	0.400	-0.046
They tell me to check what I don't understand when I study	0.652	0.146	0.300
They help me with my homework	0.649	0.063	0.001
They praise me when I do something good	0.204	0.799	-0.055
They encourage me when I make mistakes	0.257	0.796	-0.115
They support me when I want to do something	0.173	0.789	-0.094
They scold me when I do something wrong	0.057	0.614	0.323
They recognize my effort even if the result is not good	0.348	0.591	-0.260
They tell me to study hard	0.110	-0.071	0.777
They chastise me when I do poorly on a test	0.078	-0.130	0.761
They are quick to interfere in everything	-0.049	-0.019	0.700
They told that it is important to go to a good high school or college	0.280	0.057	0.487
Eigenvalue	4.53	3.018	2.278
Contribution ratio	26.645	17.753	13.398

The first principal component, which consists of “teaches me what to study” and “helps me with my school homework,” indicates that parents take their children's learning seriously and support it by helping them with their school homework and showing them how interesting studying can be. Parents also tend to emphasize communication by consulting with their children when they have problems with their studies, making study plans, and working together to solve problems. The variable “parental involvement” therefore involves “enthusiasm about study support.”

The second principal component, which consists of “praises me when I do something good” and “acknowledges my effort even if the result is not good,” shows that parents actively praise good behavior and results while harshly scolding failure and bad behavior but also supporting subsequent effort and growth. Additionally, parents emphasize children’s self-growth by recognizing effort as well as results. Therefore, the variable “positive and supportive” is used to indicate “parental involvement.”

Finally, the third principal component, which consists of “be told to study hard” and “be told that it is important to go to a good high school or university,” reflects overprotective parental involvement and attempts to control the child based on parents’ immediate interference. In addition, these parents tend to have direct expectations and demands for their children, as evidenced by their instructions about studying hard and their emphasis on the importance of going

to a good high school or university. The variable “overprotective and directive” represents this type of parental involvement. These principal component scores are used as the scale variable for “parental involvement.”

2 Other Variables

(1) Family Structure (single-parent family/two-parent family)

In the Parents’ Questionnaire, parents who answered “mother” to the question, “What is your relationship with your child(ren)?” and “have a spouse” were defined as “two-parent families.”

(2) Sense of Effort Effectiveness

The questions on the Children's Questionnaire included the item “What do you think about the following? If you work hard, you can do most things” rated on a four-point scale of “strongly agree” (4 points), “agree” (3 points), “disagree” (2 points), and “strongly disagree” (1 point). Selecting “strongly agree” indicated “high effort effectiveness,” while selecting “strongly disagree” indicated “low effort effectiveness”.

(3) Household income

In the parent questionnaire, the following question was asked: “What is the income of the household as a whole (or the total income of the couple if both are working)? Please include

bonuses, etc., and tell us your approximate income for the past year, including taxes.” The answers were “less than 2 million yen,” “2~3 million yen,” “3~4 million yen,” “4~5 million yen,” “5~6 million yen,” “6~7 million yen,” “7~8 million yen,” “8~10 million yen,” “10~15 million yen,” “15~20 million yen,” and “more than 20 million yen.” The median value of the applicable items was used for those who answered 2.5 million for “less than 2 million yen,” 1.75 million for “less than 2 million yen,” and 22.5 million for “more than 2 million yen”) and standardized using Z scores.

(4) Years of mother’s education

The mother's highest level of education was converted into years of education as follows: junior high school (9 years), high school (12 years), vocational school (14 years), junior college (14 years), university (4 years or 6 years (16 years)), and graduate school (18 years).

Table 2 confirms the background of two-parent and single-parent families.

Table 3 Family Structure Differences in Household Income and Years of Education for

Mothers

	Household Income		Years of Mother’s Education	
	Million	N	Years	N
Two-parent Families	800.79	2980	14.27	2980
Single-parent Families	363.99	193	14.07	193
average	774.22	3173	14.25	3173

There was no difference in the number of years of education between two-parent families and single-parent families; both groups graduated from vocational schools and junior colleges. However, there was a gap of almost 5 million in household income. The average annual income of single-parent families in Japan was calculated to be 3.73 million yen (Children and Families Agency 2022), making it an appropriate subject for analysis.

(5) Learning Time

The Children's Questionnaire asked, "How much time do you usually spend doing the following things in a day (on school days)? Please exclude the time you spend at school. If it varies from day to day, please tell us the average amount of time." The answer options for "study other than school homework (excluding tutoring time)" were "more than 4 hours/4 hours/4 hours/3 hours/2 hours/1 hour/30 minutes/15 minutes/10 minutes/5 minutes/none" (more than 4 hours = 270, 4 hours = 240, 3 hours = 180, 2 hours = 120, 1 hour = 60, 30 minutes = 30, 15 minutes = 15, 10 minutes = 10, 5 minutes = 5, and none = 0).

(6) Scores

In the Children's Questionnaire, the respondents were asked, "What is your current grade in your grade level?" (for subjects consisting of more than one subject, such as science and social studies, please answer approximately on average)." The total score was calculated as follows: lower=1, below middle=2, about middle=3, above middle=4, and above middle=5.

(Minimum = 5, Maximum = 25)

(7) Desired stage of schooling

In the Children's Questionnaire, the question “Which school would you like to go to in the future?” was answered with the responses “up to junior high school/up to high school/up to technical college (college of technology)/up to vocational school/up to junior college/up to university (four-year or six-year)/up to graduate school/other/undecided”. Each variable was converted into years of education and scored as follows: up to junior high school = 9, up to high school = 12, up to technical college (technical college) = 14, up to vocational/vocational school = 14, up to junior college (junior college) = 14, up to university (four-year or six-year) = 16, up to graduate school = 18.

(8) Dummy for tutoring cram school

The Children's Questionnaire asked, “How many times a week do you usually go to tutoring cram schools (during a normal day, not during summer vacation)?” A dummy variable was created that counted “once” to “more than 7 times” as “attending” and “0” as “not attending.”

(9) Males' dummy

In the Children's Questionnaire, for the question “First of all, tell us about yourself,” a male dummy was created with male = 1 and female = 0.

(10) Grade

In the Children's Questionnaire, for the question "First of all, tell us about yourself," the answer to "what is your grade?" was converted to a binary variable with junior high school students = 0 and high school students = 1 or a continuous variable scored as follows: 1st junior high school students = 7, 2nd junior high school students = 8, 3rd junior high school students = 9, 1st high school students = 10, 2nd high school students = 11, 3rd high school students = 12. It was treated as a continuous scored variable.

V Results

1 Family Structure Differences in Effort Effectiveness

The question of whether the sense of effort effectiveness of children raised in single-parent families is lower than that of children raised in two-parent families, was examined with the item "If you work hard, you can do most things." The responses "strongly agree" and "agree" were considered to indicate "high effort effectiveness," while "disagree" and "strongly disagree" were considered to indicate "low effort effectiveness." Differences in family structure were also examined.

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference between two-parent families and single-parent families, but children in two-parent families tended to have a slightly greater sense of effort effectiveness than children in single-parent families. Research Question 1 was supported.

Table 4 Family Structure Differences in Effort Effectiveness

		Two-parent Families		Single-parent Families	
		N	%	N	%
Sense of Effort Effectiveness	High	2194	73.6%	133	68.9%
	Low	786	26.4%	60	31.1%
		2980	100.0%	193	100.0%

2 Relationship between Sense of Effort Effectiveness and Learning Time Focusing on Family Structure

Based on the results of RQ1, we examined the question, “Is the effect of children's sense of effort on learning time greater in two-parent families than in single-parent families, controlling for household income and parental involvement?” With out-of-school learning time as the dependent variable, we determined whether the sense of effort remained significant after controlling for household income and parental involvement. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Determinants of learning time

	M1		M2		M3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Male	-0.014		-0.012		-0.016	
Grade	0.195	***	0.216	***	0.218	***
Scores	0.119	***	0.117	***	0.110	***
Desired stage of schooling	0.149	***	0.145	***	0.141	***
Clam School	0.207	***	0.204	***	0.205	***
Household Income	0.021		0.019		0.016	
Years of mother's education	0.047	**	0.039	*	0.042	*
Family Structure						
Single-parent family			0.015		0.095	
Parental Involvement						
Enthusiastic about Study Support			0.069	***	0.058	**
Positive and Supportive			0.035	**	0.017	
Overprotective and Directive			0.006		0.005	
Sense of Effort Effectiveness					0.088	***
×Single-parent Family					-0.084	
N	3173		3173		3173	
AdjustedR2	0.137		0.141		0.148	
F	64.038		48.491		43.242	
P	***		***		***	

***p<0.001、**p<0.01、*p<0.05、+p<0.1

Model 1 (M1) shows that children's learning time is largely determined by their grades, the desired stage of schooling, and the cram school they attend. Furthermore, when we examine the hierarchy factor, we find that the number of years of mothers' education is statistically positively significant, while household income is not significant. This is because the hierarchy factor is reflected in a large proportion of parents' parenting policies and educational expectations

that have an impact on their children (Matsuoka & Maeda 2015), indicating that higher household income alone does not increase children's learning time. In Model 2 (M2) and Model 3 (M3), mothers' level of education has a statistically positive and significant effect on learning time, but the standardized coefficient β is relatively small compared to the effects of other variables.

In M2, variables related to being a “single parent” and “parental involvement” as family structures were entered. The results show that being a single parent is not statistically significant for learning time; therefore, being a single parent alone is unlikely to explain the direct effect on learning time. When we examine the involvement of parents, we find that being “enthusiastic about study support” or “positive and supportive” is responsible for the increase in learning time. Thus, even for single parents, if they are enthusiastic about study support and approve of their children's efforts, children's motivation to learn tends to increase.

Finally, we examined M3, the interaction between effort effectiveness and single parenting and effort effectiveness, which is the focus of this study. The results show that while sense of effort effectiveness independently affects learning time, the effect of the sense of effort on learning time is not statistically significant when the child is raised by a single parent. As a solution to RQ2 in this section, we can say that the effect of children's sense of effort on learning time is greater in two-parent families than in single-parent families, even after controlling for household income and parental involvement. In other words, even when household income

(economic deprivation theory) and parental involvement (partly relational deprivation theory) are equal, being a single parent eliminates the association of effort effectiveness with learning time. Further mechanistic clarification is required here, but we can hypothetically propose that instead of a “positive and supportive” involvement in terms of relational deprivation theory, where the parent acknowledges the child's effort, another factor, the notion that when growing up in a single-parent household “effort is rewarded,” is not linked to learning and that the child's involvement explains reduced motivation in educational attainment. As Kitayama and Ishikura (2015) revealed, one possible factor is the excessive domestic role played by children in single-parent families. Even if children want to study, this may not lead to learning time. Clarification of this issue is required in future research.

This result overlaps with the tendency of children of single parents to “believe that studying is not good enough,” as shown in previous studies (Hatori 1982). In other words, when children grow up in a two-parent family, the notion that effort is rewarded is easily linked to learning because it is recognized in terms of learning, which is frequently praised. Children who grow up in a single-parent household lack this experience.

VI Conclusions and Discussion

This study examined whether differences in family structure influence the belief among

middle and high school students that if you work hard, you can do most things and whether this belief is reflected in children's learning time. The findings revealed the following. First, while there were no significant differences in the effectiveness of effort between the two family structures, a slightly larger percentage of children from two-parent families had greater effort effectiveness than children from single-parent families. Second, growing up in a single-parent family is associated with a process in which the notion that “effort is rewarded” is not directly linked to learning. This process reduces children's motivation for educational achievement. This may be because growing up in a single-parent household reduces the number of experiences in which learning, which is connected to the notion that effort is rewarded, is recognized.

Based on the above results, we find that learning support opportunities for children who grow up in single-parent households can compensate for the fostering of opportunities to acknowledge learning. In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the role of learning support programs in creating a social place for children in addition to supporting their higher education. This is an important function that allows children to gain recognition for their studies and to develop a positive outlook on society because they believe that their efforts will be rewarded.

One limitation of this study is that it lacks a perspective on cohabiting families. In recent years, 24.2% of single-mother families in Japan lived with grandparents, which is not a small

percentage. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the influence that children receive from their grandparents. This issue needs to be addressed in the future.

VII Acknowledgments

The data for this secondary analysis, the Japanese Longitudinal Study of Children and Parents Wave1~7, 2015-2021, were obtained from the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

This work was supported by JST, which has established university fellowships for the creation of science technology innovation (grant number JPMJFS2122).

This paper is a slightly revised version of an oral presentation given at the 15th International Workshop on Regional Innovation Studies held at Mie University on October 12, 2023. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who provided us with the opportunity to present our paper and those who provided useful questions and comments during the presentation.

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