

Is Family Life Education at school in Japan effective for Japanese fathers?: Focusing on Co-educational Home Economics Education and Intention to Do Household Work

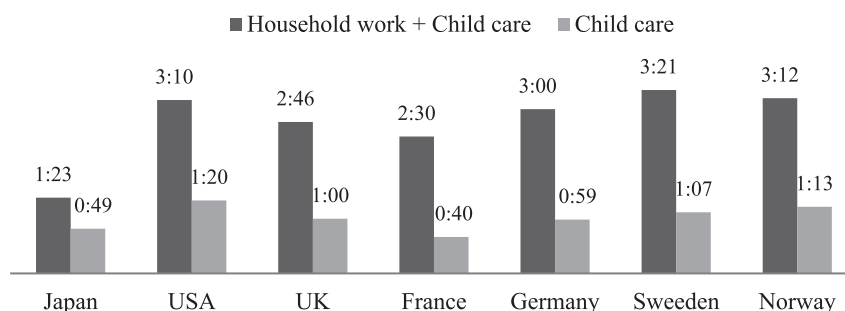
KUROKAWA Kinuyo*, TAKAHASHI Keiko** and KURAMOTO Ayako***

(Keywords: Japanese fathers, Household work, Family life education, Home economics education)

INTRODUCTION

Background

According to the Japanese “White paper on gender equality 2013” (Gender Equality Bureau, 2013), the number of dual-income households has been increasing constantly since 1980, and in 1997 the number of dual-income households exceeded the number of single-income households. This trend has continued ever since. With this growing number of dual-income households, how to share the family responsibilities between husband and wife has been one of the significant concerns in Japan. In reality, however, the time spent on household work by Japanese fathers has been significantly lower than those of other countries; in 2011 it was only 28 minutes per day. More recent survey conducted in 2016 revealed the same trend and 34 minutes per day, only 6 minute-increase in 5 years, regarding the time spent on household work by Japanese fathers. (Figure 1) (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2016). Studies to investigate factors that facilitate Japanese fathers’ involvement in household work are needed.



Data source: Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities, Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2016

Figure 1. Time Spent on Household work and Child Care by Husbands with a Child/Children under 6 Years Old (per day)

Literature review and objectives

Using various approaches, family researchers in Japan and other countries have made efforts to specify the factors regarding the involvement in household work. For example, based on middle range theory, studies were conducted from the viewpoints of “relative resource” (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz 1992, Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane 1992; Shelton & Daphne 1993), “time availability” (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, Kato,&

*Department of Home Economics Education, Naruto University of Education, Naruto, Tokushima, 772-8502, Japan

**Department of Human Sciences and Arts, Jissen Women’s University, Hino, Tokyo, 191-8510, Japan

***Department of Human Sciences, Seinan Gakuin University, Sawara, Fukuoka, 814-8511, Japan

Tsuchiya, 2004), and “gender ideology” (Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; Ferree, 1991; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992). Some others have used “demand/response capability” approach (Coverman, 1985), “doing gender” approach (Brines, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987), and “bargaining theory” approach (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996). More recently, “the theory of reasoned action” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2003) was applied (Takahashi, Kurokawa, & Kuramoto, 2013), and the study found that intention to do household work was a strong key factor to increase participation in household work. However, no research has been done yet from the perspective of educational effectiveness.

This study examines Japanese fathers’ intention to do household work in respect to family life education (FLE). The book “*Family Life Education*” (Powell & Cassidy, 2007) mentions that school is one of the main settings in which FLE is offered. Thus we regard home economics courses at school in Japan as FLE, because home economics education (HEE) in Japan has been taught with the main purposes of deepening the understanding of family and enriching family life, and includes “family in society,” “household work and skills,” “communication skills,” “gender roles,” and “family relationships” and others as the content.

The reason we focus on FLE at school is that Japanese education has a very unique curriculum history. Home economics has been required for both boys and girls in the 5th and 6th grades of elementary school since 1947. But until recently, it was only required for girls at junior and senior high school. Then, drastic changes in the curriculum were introduced in the early 1990s. Home economics became a required subject for both genders at junior high schools in 1993 and senior high schools in 1994. Thus, fathers in their 30s took different HEE credits depending on the curriculum (Table 1). By targeting fathers in their 30s as a sample, this study aims to examine FLE effectiveness on Japanese fathers’ intention to do household work.

Table 1. Participants’ ages and HEE credits

Age	4 ^a	5 ^b	8 ^c	9 ^d	12 ^e
32(n = 106)	3	0	42	0	61
33(n = 114)	11	0	43	0	60
34(n = 109)	21	0	46	0	42
35(n = 123)	39	73	0	11	0
36(n = 151)	57	85	0	9	0
37(n = 136)	45	78	0	13	0

a) 4 credits: Only elementary school

b) 5 credits: Elementary school (4) + Junior high school (1)

c) 8 credits: Elementary school (4) + Junior high school (4)

d) 9 credits: Elementary school (4) + Junior high school (1) + Senior high school (4)

e) 12 credits: Elementary school (4) + Junior high school (4) + Senior high school (4)

Research framework

Since the number of HEE credits varies widely (range: 4-12), subjective assessment of FLE effectiveness was taken into consideration. The effects of FLE were observed in 3 domains: “household work ability,” “traditional gender ideology,” and “household work effect” specifically. These 3 domains were derived from the overall objectives stated in the Home Economics Curriculum Guideline, which was issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. We expected that all of these would affect the intention to do household work.

Increase in doing household work is an ultimate goal of FLE. But as mentioned earlier, our previous study (Takahashi, Kurokawa, & Kuramoto, 2013) found that intention to do household work was a strong key factor in order to increase participation in household work. Therefore, we decided “Intention to do household work” as the dependent variable in this study. It is important to raise the level of intention to do household work first. The research framework and hypothesized associations between variables are shown in Figure 2.

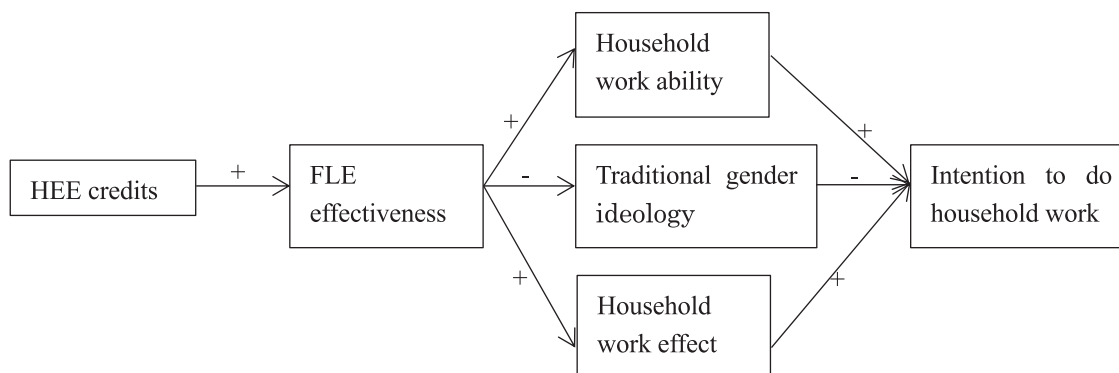


Figure 2. The research framework and hypothesized associations between variables

METHOD

Data collection

Data was collected through a postal mail survey in January, 2013. A questionnaire was sent to married men, who were members of the Japanese Trade Union Confederation. 3,918 individuals participated (the response rate was 55.2%) and the responses of fathers aged 32 to 37 years ($n=739$) were analyzed for this study. The major characteristics of the sample were as follows; the average age was 34.7 ($SD=1.70$), the average number of children was 1.64 ($SD=.96$), and about 40% finished a 4-year college.

Measures

FLE effectiveness. “FLE effectiveness” indicates the level change by the FLE in understanding of family and family life in general. An example is “Through FLE, I began to think of my family more than before.” This scale consists of 8 items. ($Alpha = .939$).

Household work ability. “Household work ability” measures skills and knowledge concerning household work. The respondents rated their ability to do household work subjectively by 5 statements. An example is, “I can cook a variety of dishes by myself.” ($Alpha = .795$).

Traditional Gender ideology. “Traditional Gender ideology” measures the level of traditional thinking about gender roles and is assessed by 5 statements including “A Husband is expected to work outside the home, while a wife is expected to take on domestic duties.” ($Alpha = .720$).

Household work effect. “Household work effect” means beneficial outcome for the family when the respondents do household work and is measured by 4 statements. An example is “I can have more time to spend with my child by doing household work.” ($Alpha = .746$).

Intention to do household work. “Intention to do household work” asked how frequently respondents would like to do 8 kinds of household work: room cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, etc. ($Alpha = .810$).

All the measures here employed a self-report, 4-point Likert scale, and the higher sum indicates the higher level of the concept respectively. As for all the items in the measures, see the appendix attached at the end of this paper.

Analyses

First, descriptive statistics and correlations of key variables were calculated, and secondly, path model analyses were conducted with AMOS.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of the variables and the correlations are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively. Figure 3 presents the results of path analyses; every index (GFI=.996, AGFI=.987, RMSEA=.022) of this model fits the observed data well; and except for 2 paths, the result supports the hypothesized paths, which indicates the more FLE (HEE credits) effectively increase the intention to do household work.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the variables

	n	M	SD	Ranges
HEE credits	739	6.7	2.88	4-12
FLE effectiveness	739	16.6	5.26	8-32
Household work ability	739	9.6	3.05	4-16
Traditional gender ideology	739	11.9	2.84	5-20
Household work effect	739	12.7	2.49	4-16
Intention to do household work	739	24.7	5.25	8-32

Table 3. Correlations among the variables (n = 739)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 HEE credits	-					
2 FLE effectiveness	.123**	-				
3 Household work ability	.005	.091*	-			
4 Traditional gender ideology	.043	.006	-.059	-		
5 Household work effect	.065	.221**	.191**	-.115**	-	
6 Intention to do household work	-.045	.108**	.370**	-.146**	.313**	-

p* <.05, *p* <.01 (two tailed).

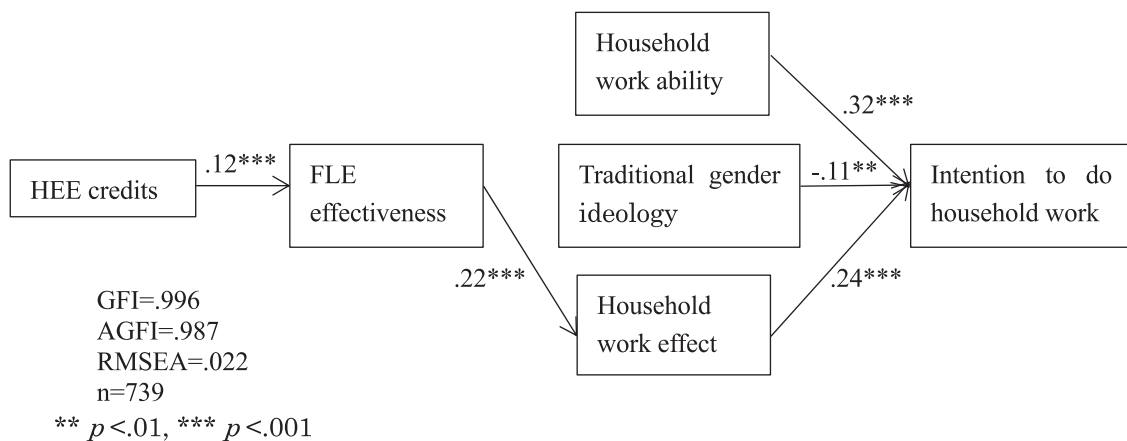


Figure 3. FLE effectiveness on Japanese fathers' intention to do household work

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

From the positive relationship between “HEE credits” and “FLE effectiveness”, it is clear that FLE at school can deepen the understanding of family and family life in general. Another research done by the Japan Association of Home Economics Education in 2017 also found that adults viewed home economics as a useful subject in understanding of family and daily life (the Japan Association of Home Economics Education, 2019). The results of this research, however, also showed that “the understanding of family and family life” was not significantly related

to “Household work ability” or “Traditional gender ideology.” Although Home Economics courses at school in Japan include cooking and sewing practices, class hours for these practices are very limited. Therefore, only with these practices at school, it must be difficult to acquire household work skills and knowledge.

It was an unexpected result that there was no significant relationship between “FLE effectiveness” and “Traditional gender ideology.” “Gender ideology” may be affected by other factors such as the reality of gender role sharing at home and gender role expectation in the society you live in. But, this is not a justification for doing nothing. FLE at school needs to improve the programs. Since Home Economics was only for girls for decades, it could be possible that teaching methods and learning activities may not be so sensitive to boys’ interests and perspectives. There might be some approaches more suitable for male students. Studies are needed on this issue.

As “Household work ability” is positively and most strongly associated with “Intention to do household work,” it is important to improve household work ability. However, FLE education at school has some kinds of limitation; restriction by the government course guidelines, not enough class hours, and the ages of students in home economics classes. They may be too young to imagine family life in middle and senior ages. In this regard, FLE should be offered not only at school but also in other settings in real timing of experiencing family life changes. We argue that FLE opportunities should be provided in community as well as workplaces. FLE programs for males/fathers should be developed and implemented.

NOTE

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APPENDIX

Items included in each measure.

FLE effectiveness: 8 items

1. Through FLE, I began to think of my family more than before.
2. Through FLE, my understanding about household work has been deepened.
3. Through FLE, my understanding about parental role has been deepened.
4. Through FLE, my understanding about gender equality has been deepened.
5. Through FLE, I began to see human life scientifically.
6. Through FLE, I learned family life should be formed with the cooperation between husband and wife.
7. Through FLE, I have changed my way of thinking and/or my attitudes towards my life.
8. Through FLE, my understanding about household economy has been deepened.

Household work ability: 4 items

1. I can cook a variety of recipes by myself.
2. The dishes I cook are delicious.
3. I know how to do household work.
4. I can find the information I need with books/on the Web when I am not sure about how to do the household work.

Traditional Gender ideology: 5 items

1. A husband is expected to work outside the home, while a wife is expected to take on domestic duties.
2. A husband should put a high priority on his business when his business work and household work occur at one time.
3. Family life should not be affected adversely when a wife works fulltime.
4. A wife should support her husband's career development than developing her own career.
5. When a child of working parents gets sick, it is the mother that should leave the workplace for the child.

Household work effect: 4 items

1. I can have more time to spend with my child by doing household work.
2. My wife's strain would decrease if I do more household work.
3. I can support my wife continuing her job by doing household work.
4. Our family's life would be more fruitful if I do more household work.

Intention to do household work: 8 kinds of household work

How frequently would like to do the following household work?

room cleaning, cleaning around the house, cleaning the bath room, laundry, grocery shopping, cooking, doing the dishes, and taking the garbage out.

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KUROKAWA Kinuyo^{*}, TAKAHASHI Keiko^{**} and KURAMOTO Ayako^{***}

In Japan, the number of dual-income families has been increasing constantly. However, little evidence shows the increase of fathers' involvement in household work, while family life education (FLE) in home economics education (HEE) has been co-educational up to the 12th grade at school. This study aims to examine FLE effectiveness on Japanese fathers' intention to do household work. Data was collected through a questionnaire in 2013 and the responses from fathers aged 32-37 were analyzed. The number of HEE credits they took at school varied from 4 to 12. Path analyses indicate the more HEE credits effectively increase the intention to do household work. However, FLE at school has limitation. FLE opportunities should be offered in community as well as workplaces.

^{*}Department of Home Economics Education, Naruto University of Education, Naruto, Tokushima, 772-8502, Japan

^{**}Department of Human Sciences and Arts, Jissen Women's University, Hino, Tokyo, 191-8510, Japan

^{***}Department of Human Sciences, Seinan Gakuin University, Sawara, Fukuoka, 814-8511, Japan