Daily Care and Characteristics of Relationships with Children in Japanese Foster Families Compared with Intact-Marriage Families

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the daily care and relationship characteristics of Japanese foster families through a comparison with intact-marriage families (i.e., unbroken families where the marriage is the first marriage for both partners). For analysis of foster families, we used data from the *Survey on the Registration, Training, and Support for Foster Parents*. For comparison with intact-marriage families, we used data from the *National Family Research of Japan 2008*（NFRJ08）survey. The following variables were studied for this comparison: frequency of daily parenting behaviors, subjective assessments of the parent-child relationship, and parenting attitudes. The analysis revealed that relationships in families with current foster child placement were generally positive and stable. Furthermore, the comparison shows that the level of parenting involvement in foster families was as high or higher than in intact-marriage families. The results of the analysis lend support to recent policies giving preference to foster care over institutional care, demonstrating that foster parenting has the same benefits as parenting provided by a standard family, that is, foster parents provide stable relationships with specific caregivers.

Keywords: Japanese foster parents, social care in Japan, intact-marriage family, characteristics of foster family relationships, daily care of children in foster families

1. Objectives

This article aims to quantitatively investigate the daily care and relationship characteristics of Japanese foster families by comparing it with those of intact-marriage families.

(1) Summary and characteristics of the Japanese foster parenting system

This section describes the Japanese foster-parenting system and compares it with the foster systems of other countries. Presently（2019）, Japanese foster parents are classified into four types: 1）general foster parents, 2）special needs foster parents, 3）kinship foster parents, and 4）adoptive foster parents. This article focuses on the category of general foster

parents.

A general foster parent is defined by Japanese law as a certified individual who cares for children who do not have parents or guardians or whose parents or guardians are deemed unfit to provide adequate care. Japanese general foster parents are distinguished from adoptive foster parents (i.e., foster parents who wish to eventually adopt a child) and kinship foster parents (i.e., foster parents who are first-, second-, or third-degree relatives of the child). Children may be placed under the care of general foster parents for various durations. In longer placements, children may be raised by the foster parents until legal maturity. In some cases, general foster parents may later adopt the child under the general adoption system; for example, this occurs when the duration of their care is extended, since the foster child/family grow attached to each other and begin to believe that they are compatible, and the chances of their returning to the biological parents remain low.

After its inception in 1947, the Japanese foster parenting system underwent no major reforms for over 50 years. However, major changes were made to the social care system in 2002 that have given an increasingly prominent role to foster parents. Foster parents were re-categorized into general foster parents, specialized foster parents, short-term foster parents, and kinship foster parents. A further reform in 2008 distinguished foster parents who wish to adopt their foster child from general foster parents.[1] As of March 2017, the percentage of children in foster care placement is much lower than the percentage in institutional care: only 18.3% of all children who require social care. This trend had been consistent since the early days of the system, hardly changing through the present day.[2] The number of children in social care reached an all-time low in the 1990s, during which time the rate of children in foster placement also decreased to below 7%. However, various reforms since 2002 have resulted in new policies that prioritize foster care placement over institutional care, and, as a result, the percentage of children in foster families has gradually risen.

There are no specific regulations regarding the placement durations. The mean duration of placement is 3.9 years, but, compared to placement durations in other developed countries, placement in Japan are increasing in length, with 24.7% lasting less than 1 year, 18.9% lasting between 1 and 2 years, 56.4% lasting 2 or more years, and 9.1% lasting over 10 years.[3]

It will be helpful to note a few characteristics of the Japanese foster-parenting system that distinguish it from other countries. Yuzawa (2004) notes nine distinct characteristics of the Japanese foster-parenting system that distinguish it from other countries. These include the fact that, while many individuals are registered to become foster parents, the majority do not have foster children under their care because social care is predominantly provided by institutions, and foster care placement is viewed as an exceptional situation. Furthermore, the durations of placement in foster families tend to be relatively long, and there is usually little interaction between the foster children and their biological parents.

Additionally, most foster parents wish to adopt their foster children. Finally, the idea of giving care to non-biological children is not popular among the general population. These points collectively demonstrate that many foreign foster family systems are founded on the principle that foster parents will provide short-term care until the children are returned to the biological parents, while the Japanese system is characterized by the principle that the foster parents will provide long-term care to the children that they take in.

Until 2008, there was no distinction between foster parents who wished to adopt their foster children and those who did not. This was a peculiar aspect of the Japanese foster parenting system. In an overview of foster care systems in various countries by Colton and Williams (1997), the authors noted that many countries emphasize the idea that foster care is typically not a route to adoption. Moreover, given the very different set of motives, attitudes, and skills that are expected of adoptive parents from those expected of foster parents, the definition of foster care would seem clearly to imply nothing about adoption. Nakagawa (2004) remarks that it is becoming increasingly clear that there are two distinct motives among those who wish to become foster parents in Japan: those who simply wish to become caregivers to children and those who wish to adopt the foster children. Furthermore, he notes that the two should be distinguished from one another, arguing that it is desirable to treat the two separately in the foster placement process. At any rate, the much higher percentage of institutional care than foster care in Japan compared to other countries seems to demonstrate a lack of general awareness in the population of the benefits of welcoming children into families in order to provide better care for those who need it, and this seems to have been reflected in Japanese government policy, at least until 2008.

(2) Characteristics of foster parenting in Japan

Before investigating the problems and benefits associated with foster care placement and the support provided to foster parents, it is essential to first accurately understand the current state of foster parenting in Japan. Many studies in the field of social work have suggested that the behavior of foster children often confuse foster parents, which leads to various difficulties (Shoji 2004). The early period of placement is especially associated with a great deal of confusion, as both the child and the foster parents attempt to adjust to the new lifestyle (Kono 2017). In particular, regression (acting like a child younger than their actual age) and testing behaviors are often noted to occur in the early stages of placement. Furthermore, many foster children who grew up in inadequate environments, such as those who were abused or neglected by their biological parents and those whose primary caregiver changed frequently, were unable to form healthy attachments to their original primary caregivers. This aspect of their upbringing often introduces a set of challenges to foster parents that are unique from the common challenges encountered as part of normal child-rearing (Fukaya et al. 2013). As

such, it is often emphasized that foster parenting is a special variety of parenting from that of normal parenting, involving more effort and challenges.

Interestingly, however, foster parenting does not always require specialized expertise. When foster parent placement began to be promoted in 2002, one of the presumed benefits of foster parenting was "growing up in a relationship of attachment with specific adults." Izumi (2016) elaborates on this assumption, noting that it originates from the way foster parenting has been compared to institutional care, in which a) children cannot form strong attachments with their caregivers because each child is raised by multiple alternating staff members as they begin and end their shifts, and b) children cannot benefit from individual attention because a large number of children may be under the care of a few staff members or, sometimes, even a single worker. Hence, it is based on the logic that foster parents should be able to provide care that is superior to that provided in institutions because they are "parents" within a "family" rather than certified "parenting professionals" staffed at institutions (Izumi 2016). Thus, the assumption is that foster parents should model their child-rearing after the ideal of that provided by "ordinary families," which will provide guidance for confronting the challenges and problems that may arise.

However, can relationships with children in foster families and ordinary families be thought of using the same terms? According to Nobe (2012), "nonstandard families" are families that have traditionally been excluded from family studies as "deviations" from the norm.

Specifically, this comprises stepfamilies, adoptive families, gay and lesbian families, families of individuals with disabilities, and foster families. On the other hand, "standard families," according to Nobe, are nuclear families that provide care within a family unit formed by marital and kinship ties. For individuals in nonstandard families, the standard family may either be seen as a model to emulate or as a model to be shunned. In either case, nonstandard family life can never exist independent of the concept of the standard family (Nobe 2012). The fact that Japanese foster parents are caregivers to their foster children may inevitably require them to approximate parent roles for the foster children.

Furthermore, as the findings of Japanese family sociologists has made clear, this may be associated with a considerable amount of experiences in daily life situations in which they must resort to the practices or relationships of standard families (Izumi 2006; Ando 2017). As mentioned above, social care in Japan is characterized by a low rate of foster parent placement; however, among these, the long-term placement rate is high, as is the number of children in foster placement who rarely contact or visit with their biological parents. Thus, when it comes to creating a unique but appropriate parenting model for foster families, the differences between parenting in foster families and standard families are often underplayed. In that sense, the parenting caregiver model that foster parents can turn to may be even more obscure.

Hence, foster parents are expected to practice a family lifestyle similar to those of standard

families, even though the experience of raising foster children involves many unique problems that are not faced in standard families. These circumstances may expose foster parents to even more confusion and difficulties.

What, then, is the daily experience of Japanese foster parents, given the abovementioned societal circumstances? How do foster parents evaluate their relationships with their foster children? Are the characteristics of foster families similar to those of standard families, or are there certain unique patterns that distinguish foster families?

(3) Methods of assessing foster home placement

In previous studies, little attention has been paid to understanding the current status of foster parenting through subjective assessments of the daily parenting behaviors of foster parents or their relationships with their foster children. What kinds of values do such attempts at subjective assessment carry? One benefit would be the possibility that they could be used as an index to assess placement. Though it is very difficult to objectively assess whether a specific foster home placement is "going well," subjective assessments of daily care or of the relationship with the foster child are sure to have certain benefits as an index.

Meanwhile, existing assessments of foster home placement tend to focus exclusively on the final stage of the parenting process when concluding that it "did not go well." A typical example is an ending of placement due to conflict. Shoji (2003) affirms that it is not at all unusual for the relationship between foster

parents and the children placed under their care to deteriorate. Of these cases, some inevitably conclude with the ending of placement due to conflict. One survey has shown that among the reasons for dissolution of foster home placement, 24% result in dissolution due to conflict. These cases are further broken down into the following categories: returning to the family of origin due to poor relations with the foster family (3.9%); ending of placement due to foster parent-side problems, such as health and family issues (3.9%); ending of placement due to poor relations with the foster family (12.2%); and ending of placement due to foster child-side problems (4.2%), which comprises the most common reason for older children.[4] Furthermore, the increased strain and rejection of parenting faced by foster parents has been shown to contribute to these kinds of conflict.

Of course, ending of placement due to a conflict can be an extremely negative experience for both foster parents and children, and this is also one of the presumed reasons why child welfare services may be reluctant to place children with foster parents. However, it is important not to underestimate the benefits of experiencing a healthy family life and close relationships with the foster parents, even for a temporary period, both for cases that ultimately end in conflict and those that do not. Patterns of healthy and stable parenting behaviors and interactions that are repeated on a daily basis by a specific caregiver should be valued positively as a placement that is "going well." Shoji (2003) has found interesting results from a survey on foster parents with current child

placement in their homes. He found his results suggest that over 90% of foster parents assess their placements positively, with 63.1% describing problems that occur through the course of parenting as "generally stable, without any problems in particular to note," and another 29.1% assessing that there are "occasional problems and difficulties, which can be overcome." In other words, foster parents during the placements either have no problems in raising the children or believe that solutions and adaptations to problems that occur can be found. In other words, they tend to assess their placements as "going well."

Perhaps an absence of appropriate support or intervention by supporting institutions, including child welfare services, is one way to interpret why ending of placement due to conflict occurs in a fair number of cases, despite many foster parents assessing the current situation as good. It is arguably not adequate to assess a specific placement based on the event of ending the placement due to conflict alone. Rather, the focus should be placed on the parenting behaviors and interactions that are repeated on a daily basis and how that influences children.

Though small in number, cases of maltreatment or abuse by the foster parents do exist as the most extreme examples of conflicts or problems.[5] However, instances of abuse occur at the same rates in institutions and in foster homes.[6] A small number of cases of abuse tend to be picked up and sensationalized by the mass media, but a general assessment of foster parenting should be made on the basis of all foster parents and not on the basis of a few exceptions.

Given the above considerations, this article seeks to investigate the nature of daily parenting in Japanese foster families and the characteristics of the relationships between foster parents and children through a comparison with standard families. Furthermore, it aims to take advantage of a preliminary discussion on the characteristics of contemporary foster families to raise issues that need to be discussed in future studies on foster parenting.

2. Methods
（1）Data

The data for analyzing the foster parents are taken from the *Survey on the Registration, Training, and Support for Foster Parents* (hereafter, the foster parent survey). This survey was conducted with the aim of elucidating the current status and challenges associated with the registration, training, and support given to general foster parents in Japan and toward understanding the structure of the relationships between foster parents and foster children. It surveyed individuals who are registered as general foster parents in Japan (n=9,073 as of March 2016).[7] Individuals registered as foster parents in all local government districts nationwide were included in the sample population, of which those registered as general foster parents and residing in local government districts that agreed to participate in the survey were included. The survey method was by mail: envelopes with enclosed survey forms were mailed to local governments that provided their consent. The local governments were asked to label the envelopes with the addresses of individuals

registered as general foster parents and to send them to these individuals.

The actual survey took place from October 2017 to January 2018. All 69 local governments nationwide (47 prefectures, 20 designated cities, and 2 core cities where child welfare services are established) were contacted by phone with regards to the survey. An outline of the survey and survey forms were then sent to the local governments by email or mail and cooperation in the survey was requested after summarizing the survey and explaining its purpose. Survey forms were sent to the 42 local governments (55 regional blocks) that agreed to participate, and survey forms were ultimately sent to individual participants from 41 local governments (54 regional blocks). Among the 4,319 survey forms that were distributed, completed survey forms were returned from 2,230 individuals (recovery rate 51.6%).

The data used for analyzing the standard family for purposes of comparison with foster families were taken from the *National Family Research of Japan 2008* (NFRJ08). The NFRJ08 was conducted by the National Family Research Committee of the Japan Society of Family Sociology in January–February 2009. This was a nationwide survey of men and women aged 28–72 years. Samples were selected via a stratified two-stage randomized sampling method. Of the planned 9,400 sample size, surveys were collected from 5,203 individuals (recovery rate 55.4%).

(2) Analysis procedures

Inaba (2011) assumes the "standard family" to be a family (household) that includes one or more spousal relationships consisting of continued first marriage, which is also the standard model of family that is used for theorizing in family studies.[8] This definition is used in this article, which treats families of continued first marriage as the "standard family," as opposed to foster families.[9]

The comparisons are made on the basis of surveys that were taken in slightly different survey periods and with different sampling methods; thus, they are not methodologically rigorous comparisons.[10] However, it can still be considered to be valuable as an attempt to understand the general trends of parenting in foster families compared with intact-marriage families using large-scale data.

The sample of analysis is limited to data on respondents of the foster parent survey that have current placements of children under 18 years old (n=1,017, men: 259, women: 758). Furthermore, the NFRJ08 data used for comparison are limited to respondents aged 28–47 years in intact first marriages, with children younger than 18 years residing with them (n=1,042, men: 483, women: 559). For reference, data on single parent-headed families (single mother families[11]) have been similarly included in the analysis (n=50).

(3) Variables

Variables examined in the analysis were frequency of daily parenting behaviors, subjective assessments of the parent-child relationship, and daily parenting attitudes. Since the questions in the NFRJ08 were used as references to compile the items in the foster family survey form, the questions and choices

for answers of the two are identical. Specifically, the survey consisted of the following 11 items: 1）Playing together（hobbies, sports, and games）, 2）Teaching knowledge and skills （studying, cooking, etc.）, 3）Eating dinner together, 4）Quality of the relationship, 5）Viewing this child as currently "part of the family," 6）Talking frequently to the child, 7）Ignoring the child, 8）Spanking on their hand or body, 9）Angrily confining the child in the closet or bathroom or leaving them outside the house （e.g., balcony）, 10）Saying things that might hurt the child, and 11）Trying to understand the feelings or thoughts of the child. Items 1）–3）were to be answered by "Almost every day," "3–4 times a week," "1–2 times a week," "1–2 times a month," "Several times a year," and "Never," which were converted to frequency （number of days）per week for analysis.[12] With regard to 4）, respondents were asked to select among "Good," "Somewhat good," "Somewhat bad," and "Bad" to the question, "How is the relationship with this child?（Circle one for each）." For the analysis, the four categories were scored as continuous variables, such that higher scores indicated better relationships. With regard to 5）, respondents were asked to select the answer from "Yes," "No," and "Neither/I don't know" to the question, "Do you consider this child currently 'part of your family'?（Circle one for each）." With regards to items 6）–11）, parents were asked to select from "Very often," "Somewhat often," "Sometimes," and "None at all" to the question, "During the past year, how often did you do the following with your children?" For the analysis, the four categories

were scored as continuous variables, such that higher scores indicated higher frequency. Respondents were to provide a separate answer for each of the children （by order of age, from the first to the third child）for items 1）–5）（men of foster families: 382, women of foster families: 1,025, men of intact-marriage families: 1,000, women of intact-marriage families: 1,180, and women of single parent families: 106）.[13]

3. Analysis
（1）Frequency of daily parenting behaviors
　Figs. 1–3 display the frequency of daily parenting behaviors. The vertical axis represents the frequency （number of days per week）that parents engaged in parenting behaviors. Higher points on the graph represent higher frequencies. The horizontal axis represents the child's age.

　1）Playing together（hobbies, sports, and games）. Fig. 1 displays the mean values representing playing together with the child by various attributes. There were almost no differences between intact-marriage families and foster families for women, but in terms of men, there was a major difference between intact-marriage families and foster families, with men in intact-marriage families playing with their children less often. Furthermore, although there was almost no difference by sex in foster families, there was a remarkable difference between sexes in intact-marriage families, in which men played with their children less often than women. As a general trend common to intact-marriage families and foster families, parents played with the children more often when the children were young but did so less
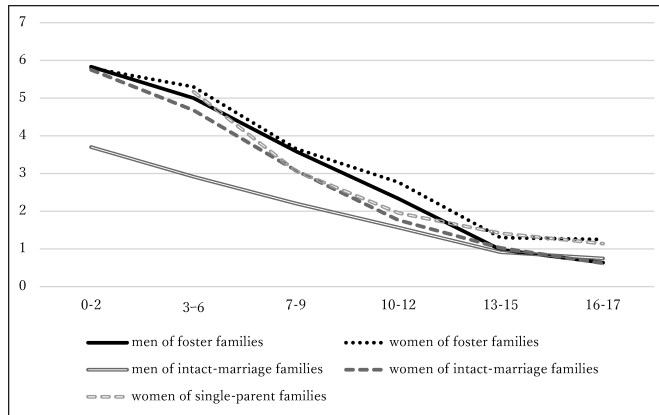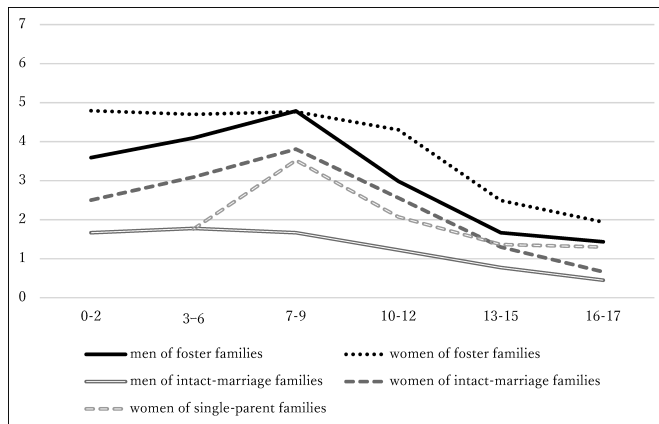
Figure 1. Playing together

Figure 2. Teaching knowledge and skills

often as the children grew older.

2) Teaching knowledge and skills (studying, cooking, etc.). Fig. 2 displays the mean values representing teaching knowledge and skills to the child by various attributes. There were major differences between intact-marriage families and foster families for both men and women. Parents of intact-marriage families taught knowledge and skills to the child less often than foster families. Furthermore, men of both intact-marriage families and foster

families did so less often than women. The parents taught children knowledge and skills at high frequencies up to children aged 7–9 years old, after which the frequencies gradually decreased.

3) Eating dinner together. Fig. 3 displays the mean values representing eating dinner together with the child by various attributes. There were almost no differences between intact-marriage families and foster families for women, who ate dinner with the child almost
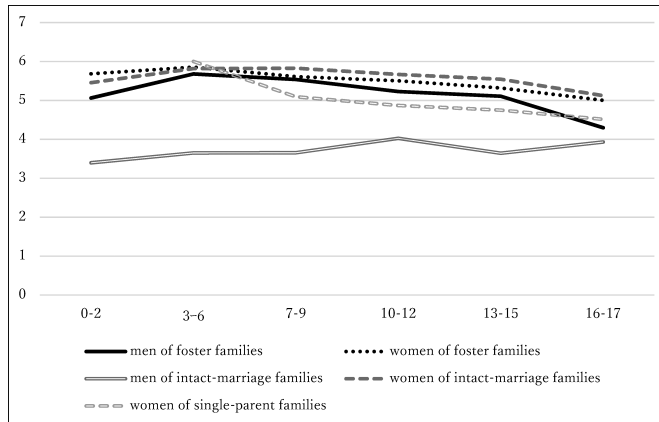
Figure 3. Eating dinner together

Figure 4. Quality of the relationship

every day. However, there were major differences between intact-marriage families and foster families in terms of men, with men in intact-marriage families eating dinner with the children less often. Furthermore, in foster families, there were almost no differences by sex of the parent, with men eating dinner with the child at high frequencies.

(2) Subjective assessments of the parent-child relationship

4) Quality of the relationship. Fig. 4 displays the mean values representing the quality of the relationship with the child by various attributes. Regardless of the child's age or the sex of the caregiver, the relationships with the children were extremely good. However, the quality of the relationship was slightly lower in foster families compared to intact-marriage families.

5) Awareness of this child as currently "part of the family." Fig. 5 shows whether or
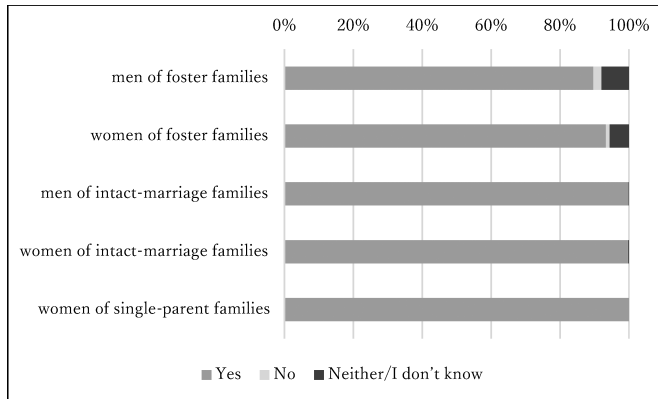
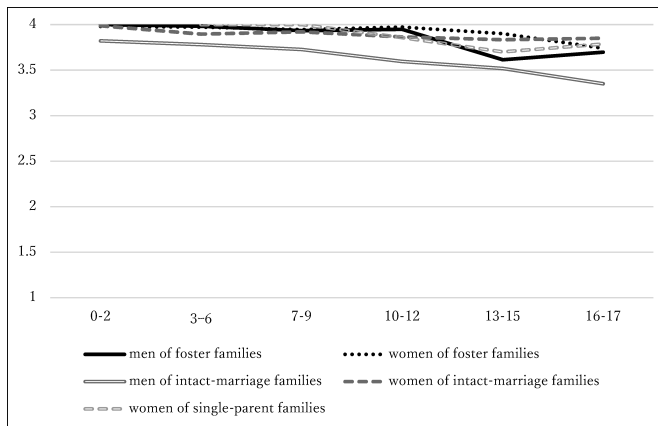Figure 5. Awareness of this child as currently "part of the family"

Figure 6. Talking frequently to the child

(3) Daily parenting attitudes

not children have the awareness of the family unit (i.e., that the children recognize themselves as members of the family) by various attributes. A large majority of children of both intact-marriage families and foster families responded affirmatively that they were presently "members of the family." However, 5–8% of children of foster families responded with "Neither/I don't know," which is a slightly higher rate than that of children of intact-marriage families.

Figs. 6–11 show daily parenting attitudes. The vertical axis represents the frequency at which the caregiver experienced or carried out certain attitudes or actions towards the child, with higher points on the graph representing higher frequencies. The horizontal axis represents the foster child's age.[14]

6) **Talking frequently to the child.** Fig. 6 shows the mean values for talking frequently to the child by various attributes. The great
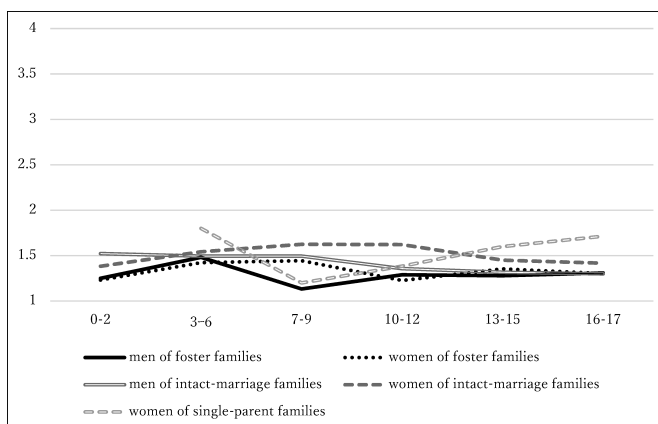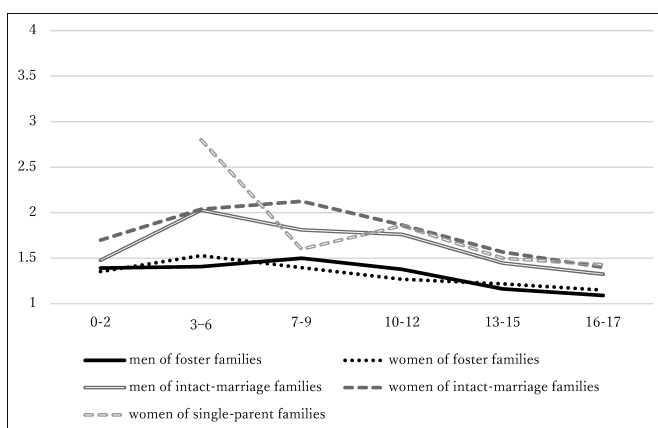
Figure 7. Ignoring the child

Figure 8. Spanking on their hand or body

majority of both intact-marriage families and foster families responded that they talked "often." However, the mean values for men in intact-marriage families were consistently lower than other groups, though only marginally, and this frequency decreased further as the child's age increased.

7) Ignoring the child. Fig. 7 shows the mean values for ignoring the child by various attributes. The frequency of ignoring the child was low throughout the entire sample of intact-

marriage families and foster families. However, parents of foster families had slightly lower rates of ignoring the child than parents of intact-marriage families. Furthermore, although there were some variations, men had slightly lower frequencies of ignoring the child than women in both intact-marriage families and foster families.

8) Spanking on their hand or body. Fig. 8 shows the mean values for spanking on their hand or body by various attributes. Compared
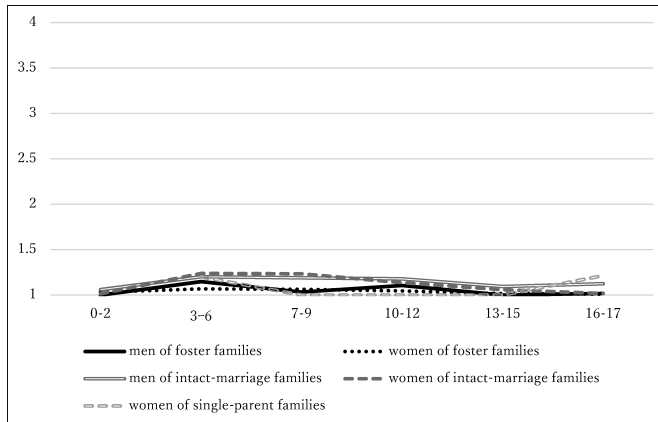
Figure 9. Angrily confining the child in the closet or bathroom or leaving them outside the house（e.g., balcony）
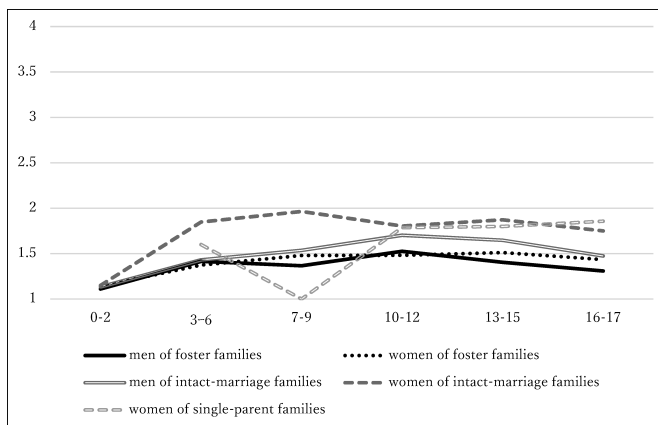

Figure 10. Saying things that might hurt the child

to intact-marriage families, parents of foster families had lower frequencies of punishing the child by hitting. There were almost no differences by sex in both intact-marriage families and foster families.

9）Angrily confining the child in the closet or bathroom or leaving them outside the house（e.g., balcony）. Fig. 9 shows the mean values for angrily confining the child in the closet/bathroom or leaving them outside the

house（e.g., balcony）by various attributes. Throughout the entire sample of intact-marriage families and foster families, parents confined the children or shut them out of the house at low frequencies.

10）Saying things that might hurt the child. Fig. 10 shows the mean values representing saying things that might hurt the child by various attributes. Foster parents said hurtful things to the child at somewhat lower
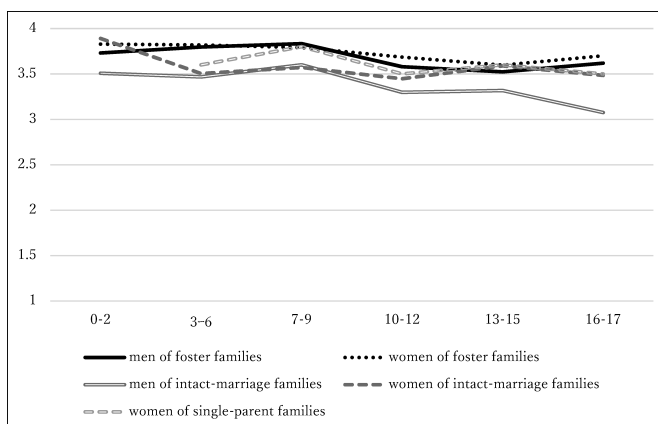
Figure 11. Trying to understand the feelings or thoughts of your children

frequencies than parents of intact-marriage families. In particular, there was a wide gap between women of foster families and intact-marriage families.

11）Trying to understand the feelings or thoughts of your children. Fig. 11 shows the mean values for trying to understand the feelings or thoughts of your children by various attributes. Parents of both intact-marriage families and foster families did this often throughout the entire sample. Although there was some dispersion, foster parents sought to understand the child's thoughts and feelings somewhat more often than parents of intact-marriage families. There were almost no sex differences in both intact-marriage families and foster families.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of this article was to understand the circumstances and conditions of foster parenting in Japan through the subjective assessments by foster parents of their own parenting behaviors and of their relationships with their foster children. The analysis allows us to reconfirm that recent policies prioritizing placement in foster families over institutional care has more benefits to foster children, as they can then be provided with stable relationships with specific caregivers, similar to children in standard families. Moreover, rates of participation of the male parent are higher and rates of severe punishment or maltreatment are somewhat lower in foster families than in intact-marriage families. In addition, the proportion of foster parents who perceived and treated their foster children as a member of their own family was equal to that of parents in intact-marriage families.

This analysis raises three interesting points of note for understanding the foster parenting system in Japan. First, the high participation of men in foster families is notable. There are several possible explanations to this point, including some biases.[15] First, as elaborated in endnote 7, the foster parent survey specifically asks "the person who is the primary caregiver to the foster child" to complete it. Therefore, it

is possible that the respondent is a man who is more active in parenting to begin with than men in intact-marriage families. If it is indeed the case that men in foster families have a higher likelihood of engaging in parenting activities than men of intact-marriage families, then there may be other indirect explanatory factors common to male foster parents, such as age, working hours, and type of employment, that may promote more active participation in parenting. This also brings up a related practical question: If male foster parents show tendencies toward more active involvement in parenting, have these tendencies always characterized their parenting or did it begin with the placement of the foster child? Perhaps such tendencies can be explained by the higher commitment emphasized as a requirement of receiving a child placement in the first place. In other words, families where the husband has not actively participated in domestic chores and parenting prior to the placement may be less likely to be selected as foster families. It should also be noted that low levels of participation of men in housework and child-rearing in intact-marriage families are frequently noted in Japan. To what extent do these tendencies apply to the parenting practices in foster families? The factors underlying these issues should be taken into account in considering these questions.

The second interesting point to note is that in the case of women there are almost no differences between foster families and intact-marriage families in terms of playing together and eating dinner together. However, in foster families, the frequency of teaching knowledge or skills is dramatically higher for both male and female parents than in intact-marriage families. The foster family placement guidelines of the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (2011) describes "opportunities to obtain life skills through rich life experiences" as one of the benefits of foster family placement. The comparisons made in this article suggest that teaching knowledge and skills (i.e., educational involvement) is practiced more actively in foster families in order to establish good habits in daily living. Needless to say, these types of educational involvements are extremely important for encouraging and supporting the eventual independence of children, including their future academic and occupational careers.

Finally, we obtained results showing little difference between foster families and intact-marriage families in terms of children's awareness of the family unit and sense of membership in the family. However, this awareness of being a member of the family decreases dramatically after dissolution of placement.[16] That is, this may show that foster parents tend to perceive the child placed under their care as family only during the period of placement. As was frequently noted, institutional care, as opposed to foster family placement, dominates social care in Japan as compared to other countries. The notions of family in Japan may be one of the background factors involved in this. Thus, it may warrant further investigation how Japanese foster families' notion of the sense in which a foster child is a member of their family may differ from those of other countries.

In the future, policies to extend the scope of foster family placement are expected; however,

it may not be desirable for the sole purpose of these policies to be to increase the foster family placement rate. Instead, they should aim to achieve stable, suitable, and meaningful parenting for both ends of the foster parenting relationship. Continued studies should be conducted to further examine what types of factors affect the parameters that were examined in this study, such as the frequency of daily care and subjective assessments of the relationship with the foster child. It is of particular importance to identify the specific forms of social support that effectively promote good and stable relationships with foster children.

Endnotes

1. Depending on the local government policies, foster parents who wish to become adoptive foster parents may be required to register themselves as general foster parents at the same time.

2. According to a quantitative analysis of macro data by Miwa（2011）, the occupancy rate of institutions has a negative effect on the foster family placement rate. Thus, Miwa notes that the historically low rates of foster care placement in Japan may be a result of preference given to institutional care.

3. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, "*Jidou yougo shisetsu nyuusho jidou tou chousa kekka* (Survey results: Children Admitted into Child Service Institutions)," (2013).

4. Zenkoku jidou Soudan shochou kai（National Assembly of Child Welfare Service Center Chairmen）, "*Jidou soudanjo ni okeru satooya itaku oyobi ikijidou ni kansuru chousa* (Survey:

Foster Family Placement and Abandoned Children at Child Welfare Service Centers)," (2011). The most common reason for dissolution of foster family placement is "Returned to the family of origin for reasons other than conflict in the relationship with foster parents"（27.7%）, followed by "Dissolution of placement for adoption"（22.7%）.

5. Undoubtedly, the prohibition of abuse is explicitly written out as a "minimum requirement related to foster parenting" in Japan as well, and the training and support in this regard are currently being reinforced.

6. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, "*Hisochi jidou tou gyakutai todokede tou seido no jisshi joukyou ni tsuite* (Updates on the System for Reporting Abuse in Children in Social Services)," (2016).

7. It is important to note that the unit of participants in this survey is an "individual" registered as a general foster parent. In Japan, registration as general foster parents and foster placements are made within the unit of the household. However, daily caregiving is generally more commonly managed by women; therefore, some additional instructions were added to the questionnaire form in order to ensure that we could collect data from the actual main caregiver. Registration as foster parents itself is not limited to the primary caregiver and is presumed to often be done under the name of the head of household, which is often the husband. Due to the procedures of sending the survey form, the survey itself is addressed to the registered person. However, the survey includes many questions on the trends and characteristics of daily life, so we assumed that it was not

necessarily appropriate for the addressee, the registered person, to be the respondent of the survey. Therefore, instructions were given by noting the following at the top of the questionnaire form: "The person who is, was, or will be the primary caregiver as foster parent to the child in the past, present and/or future is requested to fill out this questionnaire."

8. Inaba (2011) asserts that recent changes in modern families have resulted in an increase in the rate of non-intact-marriage families in society, that is, an increase in the rate of families that do not include a single spousal relationship of a first and ongoing marriage. Furthermore, he notes that an experience of being in a non-intact-marriage family is a disadvantage compared to the experience of being in an intact-marriage family. Specifically, he notes that children who grow up in stepfamilies or single parent-headed families experience more disadvantages overall, (e.g., in academic achievement or parental relationships) compared to children who grow up in intact-marriage families.

9. The term "standard" is used for convenience and is not intended to emphasize the non-standardness, including any negative connotations, of foster families.

10. The NFRJ08 may include participants with adopted children or foster children because it does not distinguish whether the children are biological children.

11. Single father families were excluded because very little data were available for this demographic group.

12. These responses were converted into frequency (number of days) per week for analysis: "Almost

every day" = 6; "3–4 times a week" = 3.5; "1–2 times a week" = 1.5; "1–2 times a month" = 0.35; "Several times a year" = 0.007; "Never" = 0.

13. With regard to children currently placed under their care, respondents were asked to answer the surveys only about the first to third child, in order of age. A separate question asked respondents about the number of children currently placed under their care. The mean number of children in placements was 1.4, with 96.2% of respondents having 3 or fewer children under their care.

14. It indicates the oldest child's age.

15. The same bias may apply to women, as well.

16. See Miwa and Dainichi (2019).

Additional remarks

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