

Research on Working Status and Family Lives of Mothers in Fatherless Families

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1. Foreword

A family consisting only of mother and a child or children is referred to as a “fatherless family”. Fatherless families, in general, are said to be placed in an unstable condition, financially, emotionally and socially. Research conducted by the Ministry of Welfare estimated that there were approximately 849,200 fatherless families as of November 1, 1988. The average annual income per fatherless family is 2,020,000 yen, and it is less than one half that of a conventional family (5,130,000 yen).

This report, targeting only fatherless families, summarizes a part of the results of my “Research on Working Status and Family Lives of Childcaring Mothers” (1992)¹⁾ conducted in Hiroshima Prefecture. It does not present conclusions since the results only represent a remote city and its surrounding area and the number of specimens is insufficient to support conclusions. This report is presented as basic material for posing a problem in improving the conditions of fatherless families.

2. Comparison in Terms of Father's Presence

All questions from the research conducted in 1992 were cross-tabulated against the presence of a father.

As shown in Table 1, a significant difference was recognized in types of employment history. In reply to the question, “How have you been employed?”, a large proportion (87.1%) of mothers in fatherless families chose the “Suspended then re-employed” type. Only 6.5% of the mothers in fatherless families indicated the “Continuing” type. These factors would indicate that mothers in fatherless families have to work regardless of their preferences.

The reason for working was requested by the question, “Please choose up to three (3) major reasons from below, indicating the reasons for working presently”. A large propor-

Table 1 Presence of Father and Types of Mother's Employment History

	W/ father	W/o father
Continuing type	162 (34.8%)	2 (6.5%)
Suspended then re-employed type	257 (55.3%)	27 (87.1%)
Initially not employed then employed type	19 (4.1%)	1 (3.2%)
Other	27 (5.8%)	1 (3.2%)
Total	465 (100%)	31 (100%)
$\chi^2 = 12.621$ $df = 3$ $p < 0.01$		

Table 2 Presence of Father, and Mother's Income

	W/ father	W/o father
Satisfied	153 (33.0%)	5 (16.1%)
Dissatisfied	138 (29.7%)	16 (51.6%)
Unable to determine	173 (37.3%)	10 (32.3%)
Total	464 (100%)	31 100%
$\chi^2 = 7.250$ $df = 2$ $p < 0.05$		

tion of women in fatherless families selected financial reasons, such as "For earning a living" (80.6%) and "For children's educational expenses" (48.4%). In the case of families with father, financial reasons also accounted for a fairly large percentage ("For supplementing income for household expenses" : 41.8%, "For earning a living" : 35.1%) ; however, the ratio was lower than that for fatherless families. In the case of families with father, the reasons for mother's working vary widely and include "Because it is a family occupation" (25.3%), "For making funds for purchasing my home or for repayment of housing loan" (24.0%), and "For making use of my ability, skills and/or qualifications" (23.6%).

They were then asked whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied, from four (4) different perspectives, with the question "Please answer about your job regarding each of the following four perspectives. "The four perspectives were : 1) working conditions (e.g., working hours), 2) actual work, 3) income (remuneration), and 4) human relations. Cross tabulation revealed a significant difference in "income (remuneration)", as shown in Table 2. Respondents in fatherless families indicated a high percentage (51.6%) of dissatisfied cases. No significant difference was recognized in any other criteria.

To identify the source of worries of working mothers, several aspects were selected and they were asked to indicate the relative rates of frequency. The selected aspects were :

Table 3 Presence of Father and Occurrence of Financial Problems

	W/ father	W/o father
Yes	131 (28.1%)	14 (45.2%)
Occasionally	164 (35.1%)	13 (41.9%)
Scarcely	119 (25.5%)	3 (9.7%)
No	53 (11.3%)	1 (3.2%)
Total	467 (100%)	31 (100%)
$\chi^2=8.036$ $df=3$ $p<0.05$		

"My own health", "Family members' health", "Aiding aged member(s) of the family", "My own job", "Husband's job", "Financial problems", "Children's education", "Relation with husband", "Relation with mother-in-law", and "Relation with relatives".

In comparisons based on the presence of a father, significant differences were recognized in "Financial problems" and "Relation with mother-in-law".

As shown in Table 3, financial problems occur more frequently in fatherless families, with a higher percentage of mothers in fatherless families choosing "Yes" or "Occasionally". In contrast, a higher percentage of mothers in fatherless families chose "No" in answer to the question about worries related to relations with the mother-in-law.

There was no significant difference based on the presence of a father in terms of the availability of an advisor when a worry arises. However, there was a remarkable difference based on the presence of a father when those mothers who answered "Yes" (Yes, I have an advisor.) or "Depending on the type of problem" were asked the question, "Who do you usually consult with? Please choose up to two". Among the options given ("Husband", "Friend", "Neighbor", "Parent", "Brother/sister", "Relative", "Colleague", and "Other"), "Husband" represented a high percentage (73.6%) in families with father. In contrast, "Friend" was the most frequent answer (72.4%) in fatherless families, followed by "Parent" (44.8%), "Brother/sister" (27.6%) and "Colleague" (27.6%). On the whole, advisors for mothers in fatherless families widely varied.

Differences were seen in relation to emotional conditions. The following options were provided with no limitations on the number of choices.

"Feel nervous and irritated"

"Worry about trifling matters"

"Somehow not in the mood to do anything"

"Cannot concentrate on one thing as I am distracted"

“Am growing forgetful recently”

“Somehow feel unsatisfied and lonely”

“Feel like always chased by something (Somehow feels always under pressure”

“Have sharp emotional ups and downs”

“Have great strain on my nerves”

“Other (Please specify :)”

Both “Feel nervous and irritated” and “Somehow feel unsatisfied and lonely” were the most frequent answers (41.9%) among mothers in fatherless families, followed by “Have sharp emotional ups and downs” (35.5%), “Have great strain on my nerves” (25.8%) and “Worry about trifling matters” (22.6%). “Feel nervous and irritated” ranked highest (43.6%) among mothers in families with father, and “Somehow feel unsatisfied and lonely” accounted for only 19.5%. No significant difference was in relation to the presence of a father when the numbers of options selected were compared (This was checked under the assumption that the more options chosen the worse the respondent’s emotional condition.).

A question regarding mother’s health condition indicated no significant difference with respect to the presence of a father.

The last question of this survey, however, “How do you rate yourself in terms of satisfaction with your family life in general?”, produced the results shown in Table 4. A small percentage of respondents from fatherless families chose “Satisfied” or “Fairly Satisfied”, and a large percentage chose “Half & Half”. The same characteristics were observed in the previous research in Ehime Prefecture in 1989. Careful consideration is necessary for analyzing these characteristics.

Table 4 Presence of Father and Rate of Satisfaction with Family Life

	W/ father	W/o father
Satisfied	72 (15.5%)	1 (3.2%)
Fairly satisfied	263 (56.4%)	11 (35.5%)
Half and half	78 (16.7%)	17 (54.8%)
Somewhat dissatisfied	36 (7.7%)	0 (0%)
Dissatisfied	17 (3.6%)	2 (6.5%)
Total	466 (100%)	31 (100%)
$\chi^2 = 30.339$ $df = 4$ $p < 0.001$		

3. Sampling of Families consisting only of Mother and Child/Children

Among fatherless families, those families consisting only of mother and a child or children, and with no other constituent, are assumed to have an especially large number of problems on daily life. Based on this assumption, such families were selected, and their characteristics were summarized. It is, however, necessary to note the small number of samples subject to this analysis.

There were a total of nineteen (19) families consisting only of mother and a child or children. In terms of the type of employment history, as shown in Table 5, seventeen (17) of the nineteen (19) mothers were of the "Suspended then re-employed type". As for the reason for employment, financial reasons naturally accounted for the largest percentage with the reason, "For earning a living", chosen by fifteen (15) respondents.

The questions regarding problems indicated a high overall ratio of respondents with problems : sixteen (16) out of the nineteen (19) mothers indicated worry about her own health, and sixteen (16) mothers also indicated problems with her child/children's education, followed by "Financial problems" (15 mothers), problems with her own job (14 mothers), and problems with "Family members' health" (14 mothers). The results indicated the seriousness of problems with families consisting only of mother and a child/children.

In terms of a primary advisor, "Friend" is most frequently consulted (by fourteen (14) mothers out of nineteen), followed by "Parent" (6), "Brother" (5), and "Colleague" (4).

It can also be assumed, from the fact a substantially large number of options were chosen, that mothers in a family consisting only of a mother and a child/children are emotionally insecure.

Table 5 Type of Employment History of Mother in Family consisting only of Mother and Child/Children

Continuing type : Continuously employed since initial employment (regardless of the number of job changes)	1	5.3%
Suspended then re-employed type : Once left work and stayed home, then started working again	17	89.5%
Initially not employed then employed type : Initially not employed but then employed.	0	0.0%
Other	1	5.3%
Total	19	100.0%

4. Conclusion

The following overall characteristics of fatherless families were found from the results of this research.

- 1) In terms of employment history, a large ratio of mothers in fatherless families were found to be of “Suspended then re-employed” type.
- 2) A large ratio of mothers in fatherless families chose financial reasons for working.
- 3) A large ratio of mothers in fatherless families were found to have financial problems.
- 4) Seventy-two point four percent (72.4%) of mothers in fatherless families had “Friend” as advisor, while seventy-three point six percent (73.6%) of mothers in families with father chose “Husband” as advisor.
- 5) In terms of emotional conditions, a large ratio of mothers in fatherless families replied “Somehow feel unsatisfied and lonely”.
- 6) Seriousness of problems is assumed with families consisting only of mother and child/children.

Note

- 1) Keiso Imura : “Research on Working Status and Family Lives of Childcaring Mothers”, Social Welfare Research Center, 1993

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