

Short Report

## Image of Mother — Questionnaire Surveys of University Students on the Image of Mother —

Hiroko YOSHIDA\*

(Accepted May 31, 2002)

Key words : the image of mother, university students, questionnaire surveys

### Abstract

The questionnaire survey about the image of the mother was done on under-graduate university students in Japan. The data collected on the 500 surveyed students was analyzed using Factor Analysis. This type of analysis was the same as that used by Ran in 1989. It was found that the image of the mother changed when compared with the data in 1989. For example, ‘the ideal type’ and ‘the timid type’ did not appear in any students’ image categories this time. And the results showed that the image of the mother was strongly affected by the structure of the family.

### Introduction

The children of parents who were themselves physically abused as children are said to be at risk for physical abuse [1]. There are many studies about how similarities in behavior patterns are inherited over two or three generations [2-4]. Gara et al. [5] found that abused mothers, whether abused by their mothers or fathers, tended not to identify with their own mothers; in sharp contrast, a mother in the control group was likely to view her mother as a model for her mothering. This result posed future research questions: if there is no strong identification with a mother figure, no model that guides everyday behavior in the mother role, is there a risk later on in the child’s development that the mother will turn to images and memories from a traumatic past to fashion such a model, and in doing so negate the adaptive barrier that she has built up between the image of self and the recollections of the mother? First, to answer this question, there is a need to show that the image of the mother/father, as held by their offspring relates to the behavior when that offspring becomes a parent. Some reports had shown that there was a significant stability between generations in the inhibited behavior patterns. There were many concepts [6,7] to describe the induction of interpersonal similarities, such as imitation, modeling, social reinforcement, reciprocity, and transactional analysis, that were introduced to account for social continuities between parents and children. But basically, how does the image of the mother relate to the behavior when she/he is parenting her/his offspring ? The difference of culture also should not be ignored. In Japanese society, TV news says that the number of abused children is increasing recently. If it is true, does it mean that the image of the mother also changed compared to that of 10 years ago ? If the image of the mother is based on

---

\* Department of Medical Social Work, Faculty of Medical Welfare  
Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare  
Kurashiki, Okayama, 701-0193, Japan

the experience of each individual in their society including family, this will be able to give us a good clue to discuss the importance of the social view when thinking about the relationship between mother and children, as Japanese researchers have already insisted [1.11.12].

The object of this short report is to show the first clue to answer these questions. In Japanese society, what is the image of the mother and which factors affect the image of mother? To find out, the image of the mother of university students who are likely to be parents someday was researched using the questionnaire survey in the same way as Ran's research [8] on university female students in 1989. The result was discussed comparing Ran's research, showing some factors relating to the image of the mother.

## Method

The questionnaire survey on the image of the mother as seen by university students was carried out in January 2001. The final questionnaire sheet was made after several pre-research attempts. The respondents were 551 under-graduate students in K University. Five hundred out of 551 respondents (383 females, 117 males), could be used for statistical analysis. The questions were composed of two types, both types of questions asked the real situation of the family including the mother and the respondents (e.g. When you were an infant, which members of your family lived together? Who was your main care taker?, etc.), and the questions also asked the image of the mother referencing to Ran's report in 1989. The same scale, which Ran used in her research, was used to compare this data with Ran's data directly. The respondents chose a suitable score up to 7 points between two conflicting words showing images of the mother (e.g. realistic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 fantastic). Thirty-four pairs of such words were shown. This data was analyzed using the same factor analysis as Ran.

## Result

### 1. The situation of family

The situation of the respondent's family, at the time the respondent was an infant, was made clear from the analysis of answers to the questionnaire. Here the results showed in short, a knowledge of the respondent's background, which created the students' image of the mother. Eighty-six point six percent of students called the biological real mother 'Mother'. Ninety percent recognized their mother as a caretaker in their growing up process. When they were infant, 53.4 % lived with their parents and siblings and 46 % lived with not only parents and/or siblings but also their grand- mother/father. Seventy-three point six percent felt that their mother and father kept 'good' relationships when they were children, and 57.8 % hoped to have a similarly nice family as that their parents created. Eighty-eight point six percent loved their mother and thought she was one of the most understanding persons for them. After they entered university, 41.8 % of students lived with their family. Seventy-four point two percent of these students living with their family thought that they talked frequently with their mother. Especially, 79.4 % of female students living with their mothers felt that they talked with their mother quite often (male student: 51.3 %). Fifty-eight point two percent began to live separately from their family after going to university. Thirty-nine point five percent of these students phoned their mother to chat, although they did not have anything to talk about, about a few times every one or two weeks, and 60.5 % called their mothers up only when they had something to talk about. Sixty-one point nine percent of their mothers phoned them a few times in a one to two week period without any special things to talk about. Thirty eight point one percent of their mothers called them up only when they had something to talk about.

## 2. The image of the mother

The image of the mother of these students was analyzed in the same way as Ran.

### A. The image of the mother of all students

The result of factor analysis of all data was shown in Table 1. The factors, whose contribution ratio was 7.0 or more, were shown with their interpretation. The original words in the questionnaire, whose absolute factor loading was 0.60 or more, were also described. The interpretation of each factor was done referring to these words, which established an image of the mother concretely, and at the same time the image categories which Ran reported were referred to.

The image of mother in Factor I was interpreted as ‘feminine type’ because the words, cute, beautiful, cheerful and warm, seemed to show the feminine side of mother. In Factor II, the words which showed a Japanese traditional type of mother (e.g. the mother who lived only for the happiness of her husband and children without complaining as a house wife in the traditional patriarchal system) were picked up, so this was named ‘traditional’ type. Factor III was named ‘stable type’ since the words showing ‘strong’ image were gathered. Factor IV was interpreted as ‘realistic type’ because the words, intuitive, emotional, customary, and skilful reminded them of the real state of their mother.

### B. Sex difference found in the image of mother

To make clear the sex difference found on the image of the mother, the data of all students was divided into two categories, males or females, and factor analysis was done in each category. The results are shown in Table 2. The way to interpret the results of factor analysis was same as shown in A. It was found that there were clear sex differences on the image of mother. In male students, Factor I was interpreted ‘traditional type’. Factor II was ‘great mother type’, Factor III was ‘feminine type’, Factor IV was ‘fantastic type’, and Factor V was ‘hyper-sensitive type’.

On the other hand, in female students ‘feminine type’ was extracted as Factor I. Factor II was ‘traditional type’, Factor III was ‘stable type’, and Factor IV was ‘realistic type’. According to this analysis, ‘great mother type’, ‘fantastic type’, and ‘hyper-sensitive type’ were the specific image of mother for male students, and ‘stable type’ and ‘realistic type’ were specific for female students.

Table 1 The image of mother

Factors [type of image]	The words which established image (factor loading)	contribution ratio (%)
Factor I [feminine type]	cute (0.64), beautiful (0.61), cheerful (0.60), warm (0.60)	12.1
Factor II [traditional type]	devotion to family (0.70), self-sacrificing (0.70), care of husband/children having top priority (0.70), patient (0.60), broad-minded (0.60)	11.4
Factor III [stable type]	powerful (0.81), strong (0.74), stable (0.64), confidence (0.60)	9.1
Factor IV [realistic type]	intuitive (0.72), emotional (0.64), customary (0.60), skilful (0.60)	7.7

Table 2 The sex difference of image of mother

Sex	Factors [type of image]	The words which established image (factor loading)	contribution ratio (%)
Male	Factor I [traditional type]	broad-minded (0.74), devotion to family (0.70), proper steps to save the situation (0.70)	12.3
	Factor II [great mother type]	strong (0.72), powerful (0.70), cute (0.64)	10.4
	Factor III [feminine type]	cheerful (0.80), warm (0.74), sensitive (0.70)	7.7
	Factor IV [fantastic type]	helpful (0.64), kindly (0.64), indulgent (0.60)	7.4
	Factor V [hyper-sensitive type]	worrier (0.80), patient (0.60)	7.2
Female	Factor I [feminine type]	beautiful (0.63), cheerful (0.63), cute (0.62), lively (0.60)	12.3
	Factor II [traditional type]	devotion to family (0.72), self-sacrifice (0.70), emotional support (0.60)	11.9
	Factor III [stable type]	strong (0.80), stable (0.64), confidence (0.60)	9.4
	Factor IV [realistic type]	intuitive (0.73), emotional (0.64), customary (0.60)	8.6

Table 3 The difference of image of mother relating to the structure of family

Family type	Factors [type of image]	The words which established image (factor loading)	contribution ratio (%)
A*	Factor I [selfish type]	egoistic (0.80), self-righteous (0.70), hoping to run away from (0.60), other-sacrificing (0.60)	13.8
	Factor II [stable type]	strong convincing (0.70), reckless (0.62), optimistic (0.61), lively (0.60)	10.2
	Factor III [great mother type]	strong (0.80), powerful (0.80), stable (0.70)	9.2
	Factor IV [feminine type]	sensitive (0.73), cheerful (0.64), warm (0.60)	8.2
	Factor V [fantastic type]	indulgent (0.70), relax (0.62), kindly (0.60)	7.2
B**	Factor I [ambivalent type]	beautiful (0.65), warm (0.64), cheerful (0.62), hoping to escape from (0.60), old (0.60)	14.1
	Factor II [traditional type]	care of husband/children having top priority (0.70), self-sacrificing (0.70), devotion to family (0.61)	10.4
	Factor III [great mother type]	strong (0.81), powerful (0.64), strong convincing (0.60)	9.8

A\*: Student's family living together when they were infants was composed of parents and siblings.

B\*\*: Student's family living together when they were infants was composed of parent(s), siblings and grand parent(s).

### C. The difference of image of mother relating to make-up of the family

To know the first clue to what kind of social factors affect the image of mother, here, all students were divided into two categories according to the difference of their family members when they were children. One used the data of students who were brought up in a small family composed of their parents and siblings, (in other words, two generations lived together in the house, in this report, this is called the 'two generation family') another was that of students who were brought up in an extended family composed of their parents, siblings, and their grand-mother(s) and/or father(s) (in other words, three generations lived together in the house. In this report, this is called the 'extended family'). The result of factor analysis in each category was shown in Table 3. The way to interpret the results of factor analysis was the same as shown in a. And b. There were differences of image of mother between these two categories. For the students who were brought up in the 'two generation family', the image of mother in Factor I was 'selfish type'. Factor II was 'stable type', Factor III was 'great mother type', Factor IV was 'feminine type' and Factor V was 'fantastic type'. On the other hand, the image of mother of the students who were brought up in the 'extended family', Factor I was 'ambivalent type'. This type was specific. Since the words which

showed positive image of mother (beautiful, warm, cheerful) were abstracted together with the words which showed negative image (the mother from whom her children wanted to run away, old), this was named 'ambivalent' type. Factor II was 'traditional type', and Factor III was 'great mother type'. The image of mother of the students growing up in the 'two generation family' was richer in variety of the image and the selfish image was stronger, compared with the students growing up in the big family.

## Discussion

When Ran researched about the image of mother on female Japanese university students in 1989, the results suggested 8 image types; hyper sensitive type, traditional type, realistic type, great mother type, fantastic type, feminine type, ideal type, and timid type. Twelve years later, we did the same research on female and male Japanese university students, and found that some image types of mother changed. Unlike the research in 1989, the ideal type and the timid type did not appear in any students' image categories this time. Yamamura wrote that for a long time the Japanese traditional image of the mother was the woman who worked hard only for family and whose meaning of life was to bring up their children [9]. But after the high economic growth in Japan, the housework was rationalized. Japanese women were free from heavy housework, cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, etc. The development of electrical appliances shortened the time for housework, and for thirty years, the number of working women increased from about 20 million in 1970 to 26 million in 2000 [12]. The mothers no longer have to spend their time only for their children/family and do not have to behave timidly in the severe patriarchal system. There is no longer only one female life model to be a mother. Such facts might affect the image of mother of students. On the other hand, the 'traditional type' image of mother (the mother devoted to family self-sacrificing) remained. Even though the Japanese society seemed to be highly modernistic, the students were not perfectly free from such a pre-modern traditional image of mother. This type did not appear in students who were brought up in the 'two generation family', and was shown in the image of students who were brought up in the extended family. Such Japanese traditional sense of values seemed to still survive and was inherited by the next generation.

In this research, the sex difference of the image of mother was found. According to the result of the data analysis, in short, the image of male students was 'fantastic', and that of female was 'realistic'. Such differences were pointed out by Young [10] 70 years ago or more, and this data showed that even now the image of mother was affected by such a sex difference, in spite of the difference of the number of samples; in this data the number of females was a multiple to that of males.

The most important findings in this research were that the image of mother was affected by the difference of the structure of family when the students were children. 'Selfish type', 'stable type', 'feminine type', and 'fantastic type' were shown only in the students that were brought up in the 'nuclear' family (the parents and the children), and 'ambivalent type' and 'traditional type' appeared only in the students who were brought up in the extended family (three generations living together).

Interestingly, negative images of mother were abstracted only when the students were divided into two groups depending on the members of their family; two generation families or extended families. It is suggested that the differences of family members changed the role of 'mother' and this caused the difference of image of mother. If the image of mother is changeable because of the social situation and the image relates to the mothering behavior toward the next generation, we have to make sure that not only parents but also the way of our society itself have an important responsibility for bringing up the next generation. This shows that the childcare is no longer only a mother's job in Japanese society. To make clearer this point, the data of image of mother is needed to be collected more from not only all over Japan but also

from other countries. After making clear these basic points, the relationships between the image of mother and the real behavior toward offspring will be researched in the future.

### Conclusion

The questionnaire survey about the image of mother was done on university students. It was found that the image changed when compared with the data in 1989, and the difference of the structure of family related with the image of mother strongly. These results suggested that in Japan the image of mother is affected by the social situation relating to family make-up. If the image of mother relates to the mothering behavior, it can also be said that in Japan, the care for children has not already been only for mother's/father's own job but also the important task for society itself [1.3.11.12].

### Acknowledgements

The data for this report was collected by Yui Hashiguchi for her graduate thesis in 2001. I wish to express my gratitude for her great effort. I also would like to thank Dr. Takanori Ogawa of the Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare for his help in providing statistical analysis for this paper. I would like to thank Mrs. Akiko Watanabe and Mrs. Jane T.R Dewar for their patient guidance and advice regarding the writing of this English paper.

### References

1. Watanabe, H (2000) *Boshi Rinsho to Sedaikan Dentatsu*. Kingoo Shuppan. (in Japanese)
2. Cairns, RB et al. (1988) Paths across generations: academic competence and aggressive behaviors in young mothers and their children. *Developmental Psychology*, **34** (6), 1162–1174.
3. Brook, JS et al. (1998) Behavior patterns of young children and their offspring a two-generation study. *Developmental Psychology*, **34** (6), 1202–1208.
4. Sibin, LA et al. (1991) Childhood aggression and withdrawal as predictors of adolescent pregnancy, early parenthood, and environmental risk for the next generation. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, **23**, 318–331.
5. Gara, MA et al. (1996) The abused child as parent. *Child abuse and neglect*, **20**(9), 797–807.
6. Gara, MA et al. (1992) The abused child as parent: Perception of self and other. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, **13**, 83–98.
7. Kavanagh, KA et al. (1988) Interaction between children and abusive versus control parents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, **17**(2), 137–142.
8. Ran, K (1989) *Hahaoya Moratorium no Jidai*, Kitaohoji Shobo. (in Japanese)
9. Yamamura, K (1983) *Nihon no Oya, Nihon no Katei*, Kaneko Shobo. (in Japanese)
10. Young, CG (1983) translated by Hayashi, Y *Gen-kei Ron*. Kinokuniya Shoten. (in Japanese)
11. Asai, M and Tsuge, A (eds.) (1995) *Tsukurareru Seishoku Shinwa*, Seisaku Dojinsha. (in Japanese)
12. Ohohinata, M (2000) *Boseiai Shinwa no Wana*, Nipponhyoronsha. (in Japanese)