



The influence of home-rearing environment on children's behavioral problems 3 years' later



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ABSTRACT

Reduction of children's behavioral problems has the potential to ameliorate parental stress, mental health problems, and family dysfunction. The current study was designed as a 3-year longitudinal study with secondary data. A total of 99 caregivers with preschool aged children were required to complete two self-reported questionnaires: the Index of Child Care Environment and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. It demonstrated that a positive home-rearing environment had a positive influence on children's behavioral problem 3 years' later. Our study suggests that we may reduce behavioral problems in children's later development by providing a positive home rearing environment.

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1. Introduction

Because of the traditional loyalty to one's extended family, the child rearing skills used to be taught to young mothers and supported by grandmothers. However, in recent decades, with the popularized working mothers, shortage of child care facilities, and rather limited paternal support, young couples are no longer living with their parents and instead are forming nuclear families; therefore, they have no advisers or consultants in child rearing available at home (Nishimura, 1998).

With the changing child rearing and plentiful material environment, many behavioral problems have appeared among children, such as the popularized verbal attack "Hikikomori" and "Ijime" at school and being overly self-centered (Information technology education center, 2001). Therefore, more attention should be paid to child rearing and behavioral development.

Society expects its member, including children, to behave within certain limits. Consequently, it is of grave concern to parents if their child's behavior does not meet their expectations or those of others. Children's development comes according to a pattern on the foundation of genetic potential and also by the influence of environmental factors (Kim-Cohen et al., 2004; Venetsanou and Kambas, 2010). Among environmental influences,

the family arguably plays a vital role in the child development (Harden, 2004). The overall quality of the child-care environment affects many aspects of a child's social development (Phillips et al., 1987). In other words, the environment in which children grow up and the quality of provided child-rearing is essential to ensure their healthy development (Anme et al., 2013).

Anthony et al. (2005) pointed out that young children develop social behavior through interactions with others in the two major contexts in which they spend time: home and preschool. However, for young children just entering preschool, such skills are heavily dependent on the family environment. According to previous studies, the family is considered the child's primary surrounding and has become an important risk and safety factor influencing the child's behavior development (Kovachevikj et al., 2009).

Previous studies have elucidated that the reduction of children's behavioral problems has the potential to ameliorate parental stress, mental health problems, and family dysfunction (Herring et al., 2006). Furthermore, after adjusting for confounding variables, behavioral problems are also associated with a child's later academic achievements as a long-term risk factor (Sayal et al., 2015).

A substantial body of research has demonstrated the significant association between home-rearing environment and children's behavioral problems from risk and safe factors perspectives. Several risk factors in the family context during the development of a child's behavioral problem have been clarified.

Research showed that most children with somatic complaints

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and somatization disorders are from inconstant families and display misbehavior (Craig et al., 1993; Bolghan-Abadi et al., 2011). An important study also documented that children born to low-income families have significantly higher initial levels of behavioral problems than peers from moderate and high-income families. Among children from low-income families, those exposed to changes in family structure (from a two-biological-parent to single-parent family) showed higher levels of behavioral problems (Ryan et al., 2015). Additionally, family structure changes have shown similar negative effects, in that children came from single parent family or having experienced the parents' divorce had a higher risk in participating in problem behaviors (Garwick and Millar, 1996).

Schreyer and Petermann (2011) stated that punishing parenting behavior was associated with children's behavior problems, while positive parenting behavior was correlated with prosocial behavior. Zuckerman et al. (1987) and Tiesler and Heinrich (2014) also demonstrated that persistent sleep problems and prenatal nicotine exposure are tied to behavioral problems in children.

On the other hand, the family context can also function as a protective factor. Children from families with higher cohesion had fewer internalizing and attention problems, and this relationship was stable from preschool to school age (Lucia and Breslau, 2006).

Cumulative body of studies strongly suggests that the fathers' involvement in child-rearing is associated with reduced behavioral and psychological problems among children, allowing them to gain better educational achievement and positive personal development (Allen and Daly, 2007; Jorosi-Tshiamo et al., 2013). For example, shared parent-child book reading is an enduring aspect of home literacy that contributes to young children's development of language and early literacy skills (Han and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2014).

The development of adolescent self-regulation can be related to peer and friend relationship quality characteristics and related research shows that young adults who are better emotion self-regulators tend to be more sensitive to others and engage in more prosocial activities (Farley and Kim-Spoon, 2014).

In summary, the findings mentioned above suggest that behavioral problems will have a negative effect on children's later physical and mental development. For preschool aged children, the home environment plays an important role affecting their behavioral development.

Although various previous studies explored the associations between family and children's behavioral problems using cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, most of them focused on social status, ethnicity, maternal factors, and so forth. Only a mere handful of studies focused on the home-rearing environment, specifically the association between child-rearing environment and children's behavioral problems. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to examine the influence of home-rearing environment on children's behavioral problems 3 years later. It was hypothesized that a positive home-rearing environment would have a positive influence on children's behavioral problems 3 years later.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

The current study was a secondary data analysis with a 3-year longitudinal prospective cohort design using the data from a cohort study named "Community Empowerment and Care for Well-being and Healthy Longevity: Evidence from Cohort Study" (CEC).

Beginning in 1991, conducted in the T village, the CEC Study sought to investigate factors associated with well-being and

healthy longevity, with the goal of creating a health-promoting program that would maximize quantity and quality of life for residents. The field of study was a typical community in a suburban area of Japan with a population of almost 5000. All of the residents were invited to participate and all agreed. Follow-up studies were conducted to investigate factors associated with longevity and life satisfaction. The goal was not just increased longevity but specifically to empower residents in the community to become educated about their own health, to both create and take advantage of options and resources for improving and maintaining their physical and emotional health, so that they could ultimately take charge of their own health choices and activities. The process goal was also to engage them in the inter-generational empowering process of designing and building community-based resources that they could use in the service of increasing the quantity and quality of their lives.

2.2. Participants

In the current study, 104 caregivers from T village Japan with preschool aged children participated in the baseline year 2011. After the 3-year follow-up, 4 children were excluded due to uncompleted data in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, 1 child was excluded because of a speaking problem. Therefore, the final available data for analysis consisted of 99 healthy children and their caregivers and the response rate was 95.2%.

2.3. Measures

In the current study, the baseline survey was divided into two parts: 1) demographic information was collected, such as age, gender, siblings, and family structure; 2) the home-rearing environment was evaluated using the Index of Child Care Environment (ICCE) for caregivers. The three-year follow-up also contained two parts: 1) demographic information was collected, including age, gender, siblings, and family structure; 2) behavioral problems were evaluated using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) answered by caregivers. The method used to collect data in the current study was the placement method. Questionnaires were taken to each caregiver's house by volunteers both in the baseline survey and the follow-up survey. Two weeks later, the volunteers went to collect all the questionnaires.

The Index of Child Care Environment (ICCE). This instrument measured home rearing (Anme et al., 2013). It consists of four aspects, which include "human stimulation," "social stimulation," "avoidance of restriction," and "social support."

For five items in "human stimulation," three items in "social stimulation," and the item "talking with spouse about child," response ranges were measured with a five-point scale (1 = rarely, 2 = 1–3/month, 3 = 1–2/week, 4 = 3–4/week, 5 = almost every day). For the item "appropriate response to mistakes" (what will you do if your child spills the milk on purpose?), response ranges were measured with a four-point scale (1 = slap or hit the child, 2 = scold the child, 3 = discipline in another way, 4 = think of other ways how the child can avoid spilling milk). For the item "punishment" (how many times did you slap your child last week?), response ranges were measured with a five-point scale (1 = never, 2 = 1–2 times, 3 = 3–4 times, 4 = 5–6 times, 5 = almost every day). For two items "support for childcare" and "have a consultation," response ranges were measured in a binary manner (1 = no, 2 = yes).

The Index of Child Care Environment shows a high correlation with the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME), which has been used worldwide in research assessing home environment. This supports the notion that the ICCE is an established, valid screening instrument, given the positive

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