

# Working Parents' Transition to Elementary Schools in Japan

Kai Takemori

Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo  
Tokyo, Japan  
Email: kaitakemori [AT] gmail.com

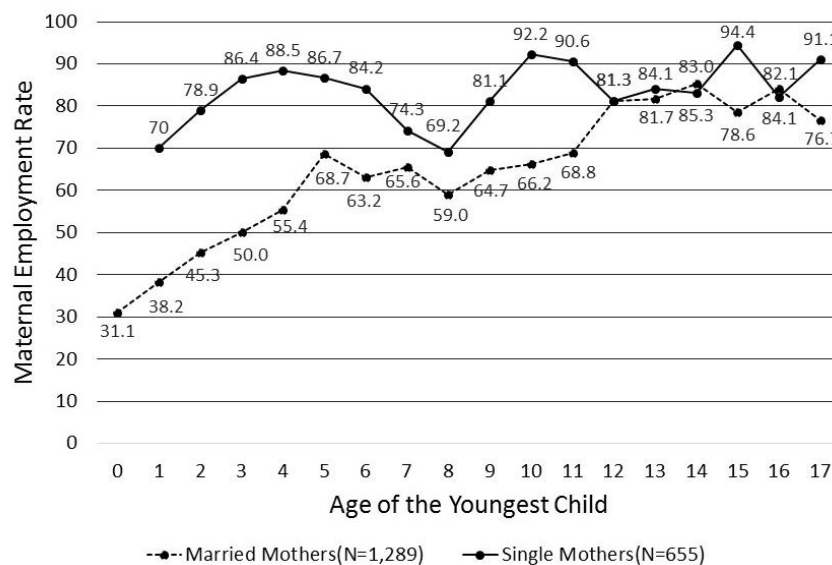
**ABSTRACT**— Recently in Japan, “The First Grade Barrier” phenomenon as the qualitative and quantitative shortage of out-of-school-hour care has become a big problem to working parents with children entering elementary schools. However, there is a possibility that working parents in Japan face barriers not only in reconciliation between their jobs and childcare, but also in relationships with schools or PTAs on their children’s entering schools. In this paper, the details of the gaps which working parents of first graders face in the transition from day-care centers to elementary schools were examined through an analysis of interview data of 25 parents. The problem shows a part of the discrepancy between the Japanese system of education and social welfare assuming male-breadwinner model and the changing lifestyles of Japanese families.

**Keywords**— “The First Grade Barrier”, parental involvement, working parents in Japan, male-breadwinner model

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently in Japan, a phenomenon called “The First Grade Barrier” has become a social problem. It does not have a strict academic definition yet, but is generally understood as “the childcare problem which double-income or single parents face when their children enter elementary schools” (Amano, 2009). In the increase of parents (mothers) in paid work, the demand for out-of-school-hours care (OSH-care) is rising more than its supply in Japan. Amano (2009) says that there are two types of this “barrier.” The qualitative barrier is the problem of caring time and quality assurance of OSH-care, and the quantitative barrier arises from the shortage of OSH-care facilities.

Facing the “barrier,” not a few Japanese parents of elementary school children are forced to consider giving up their jobs. The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2013) reports that a fall in the employment rate is seen common to married mothers and single mothers about the time when their youngest child is in the lower grades in elementary school (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Maternal Employment Rate Classified by the Youngest Child’s Age (based on JILPT, 2013, p.18)

The report considers the fall in the employment rate as a manifestation of “The First Grade Barrier.” It does not make a strict definition of or a detailed analysis on the phenomenon, but mentions to it as follows:

It is said that there are not a few people who change their working styles or think about quitting their jobs at this timing, not only because the caring time of OSH-care facilities is shorter than that of day-care centers, but also because the PTA activities and school events are often held in the daytime of weekdays. (JILPT, 2013, p.18)

It is important here that not only the shortage of OSH-care, but also the demands for parental involvement in elementary schools is referred to be affecting parents’ working style in Japan. However, researches have not paid enough attention to this problem. This paper examines the gaps in family life (including reconciliation between their own jobs and children’s OSH-care) and mainly in parental involvement which working parents in Japan face when their children enter elementary schools from day-care centers (provided that facilities taking care of the pre-school children are divided depending on parents’ working status in Japan, “day-care center” in this paper refers to *hoikuen*, which takes care of children of working parents). As a result, a part of the discrepancy between the Japanese system of education and social welfare assuming male-breadwinner model and the changing lifestyles of Japanese families is observed.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In Japan, OSH-care for children whose parents are not at home in daytime is under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. As shown in “The First Grade Barrier” phenomenon, OSH-care in Japan has problem in its quality and quantity. In contrast to the day-care centers which provide care mostly from early morning to between 18:00 and 20:00, the average caring time of public OSH-care in 2012 was from the time school is over to 18:20. About 80% of the public OSH-care facilities opened on Saturdays and provided care from 8:20 to 17:56 in average. Also, in long-term vacations when children have to stay at OSH-care facilities from morning (e.g. summer vacation), childcare was provided from 8:09 to 18:18 on average (Zenkoku Gakudouhoiku Renraku Kyougikai, 2014). This becomes a big problem to the parents who work full-time and have to leave their houses before their children go to OSH-care facilities. In terms of quality assurance, Japanese OSH-care does not have the minimum standard like authorized day-care centers and there is only the guideline without legal binding force. Thus, difficulties in ensuring children’s safe and comfortable lives and poor employment conditions of the staff are pointed out (Miyoshi 2012). In terms of quantitative problem, the presence of 9115 “wait-listed children”(=the children of double-income or single parents who cannot enter OSH-care facilities though applying) were recognized in 2014 (Zenkoku Gakudouhoiku Rennraku Kyougikai, 2014).

On the other hand, recently in Japanese public schools, practice for “open management school” has been progressing. Systems promoting involvement of parents and community residents to school were created, for example, the school council system from 2000 or the school management committee system from 2004. Suetomi (2005) points out that in decentralizing educational reform, public schools are increasing their character as “club goods” (Buchanan, 1965), which are possessed, managed, and utilized by fixed members. At the same time, she feels apprehensive about the danger that by assuming “homogeneous membership” of parents and community residents, the preference of those who are active and participating is centralized and the will of those who are not actively participating is marginalized.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 OSH-care and Parental Employment in Japan

OECD reports that with parents increasingly in paid work, there is growing demand for all-day supervisory services in order to make school schedules more compatible with full-time employment. This demand is increasingly met through the use of OSH-care services, but these services are underdeveloped in most OECD countries, which contributes to the existence of so-called “latch-key kids” (OECD, 2007). In case of Asia, according to the comparison of 6 regions by Ochiai (2014), facility care for children is most substantial in China and Singapore. Policies for utilizing women’s labor force have been adopted from socialistic view in China and capitalistic view in Singapore. In Singapore, Student Care Centres (SCCs) provide care and supervision to school-going children (Ministry of Social and Family Development, Government of Singapore, 2014). It is pointed out to be undeniable that facility care for children is a category of problem which is strongly influenced by policy (Ochiai, 2014). In Japan’s case, Ikemoto (2009) points out the insufficiency of after-school programs in Japan by comparison with 8 other countries. As its background, Ikemoto points out that in other countries, education and welfare are increasingly discussed together and captured by the concept of “educational welfare.” Thus, school education becomes a part of “educational welfare”, and cooperation and role division with after-school programs is argued. However, in Japan, education and social security/social welfare is independently argued as different topics in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

The insufficiency of OSH-care is a part of the severe isolation and lack of support in raising children which Japanese working parents (mothers) are facing. As the division of labor by gender role and men’s long-time work are remarkable in Japan, managing to work and raise children at the same time is a difficult problem for Japanese women. Looking at Japanese women’s employment rate, M-shaped curve has been observed which shows the working pattern of women

leaving job after marriage or childbirth and coming back to mainly part-time jobs when their children do not require a lot of taking after (Honda 2008). Such M-shaped curve can also be seen in Korea, but the poor conditions of supporting network for child raising in Japan, where the number of relatives is greatly decreasing and foreign houseworkers are not politically received, is said to be making raising children difficult (Ochiai et al., 2008). The amount of time which Japanese fathers contact with their children is overwhelmingly small compared with Japanese mothers or fathers in other countries, and ways of contact is quite limited (Taga, 2005).

Honda (2008) points out that even after their children enter school, Japanese mothers feel conflict between their self-realization and children's home education, and in most cases give priority to child raising and become resigned to quitting jobs or working in compromising styles such as part-time jobs. It is presumed that the pressure for "perfect mother" with omnidirectional educational concerns for both the child's personality and academic achievement, aiming to make up "perfect child" (Hirota, 1999), is affecting women's choice for life course (Honda, 2005).

### **3.2 Parental Involvement and Working Parents in Japan**

A large number of studies show the benefits of parental involvement including children's increased academic achievement or development of academic related attributions (Fao & Chen, 2001; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Researchers have shown several typologies on parental involvement (home-school partnership) at home and/or school (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986; Williams, Jr. & Chavkin, 1986; Swap, 1993; Chrispeels, 1988; Lueder, 2000). Among them, Epstein suggested the most influential framework for parental involvement (Epstein, 1992). However, Chung (2013) points that researchers from socio-cultural and critical perspectives (e.g., Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001; Lareau, 2003; Lew, 2006; Olivos, 2006) argue that the definitions of a "good" parent and an "ideal" model of home-school relations are conceptualized based on the assumptions associated with particular groups' social class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and marital status (p.462). In the UK and the US, qualitative studies have found out that parents' socio-economic status (class, race) has influence on mothers' way of involvement in schools (Vincent 1996; Lareau, 2003). Griffith & Smith (2013) describes middle-class housewife mothers tending to give high priority to complementary educational work than working-class mothers or mothers with jobs in Canada. Also, studies about barriers between the parents and the school say that the individual parent/family factors such as time, resources, energy (Lueder, 2000) or working situation (Hornby & Rafaele, 2011) act as barriers to parental involvement.

In Japan, clear difference in relationships with schools by mothers' educational background is not reported (Honda, 2008), but the parents segmentation studies which classify parents into segments according to attitudes toward parental involvement point out the possibility that having jobs might restrain mothers' involvement in schools from quantitative data. Tsuyuguchi (2009) found out that mothers working full-time or part-time tend to belong to the "dependent" segment which shows high degree of expectation for but low degree of cooperation with schools, more than housewives. He says that in the cases which mothers have jobs or raise children single, there might be more restrictions on parental involvement than other cases. Moreover, Suetomi (2005) found out that long-time working mothers comparatively tend to belong to "the passive members," which shows the low degree of recognition of her involvement (at present) and the low degree of motivation to participate in public schools or educational support activities (in future). She points out the importance of "time" as a cost variable of collective management of public schools. Yet, these quantitative studies do not describe in detail the process in which the working parents face barriers against parental involvement.

Also, researches have shown that parental network has educational effects (Coleman 1988; Hoover, Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie 1987) or positive effects to parents' trust to school (Tsuyuguchi, 2012). However, different from countries like Korea, where facility care for pre-school children is not divided by mother's working status and mothers are forming network regardless of having job or not, housewife families and double-income families are raising pre-school children separately in Japan (Yamane & Kou, 2007). Such division can be affecting the network of parents with first graders.

PTA (parent-teacher association) activities are also an important part of parental involvement in Japan. Though the heavy burden of PTA activities is widely known to Japanese parents and arguments based on practical concerns are frequently made (Kawabata, 2008 etc.), there have been few academic researches on the modern problems of PTA. However, it is pointed out that PTA is a space where plurality of values among diverse parents is confined (Hirota, 2002), and is strongly gendered assuming mothers' participation (Kodama, 2005).

### **3.3 Parental Transition from Day-care Centers to Schools**

Though "The First Grade Problem" (Shimpo, 2007) as children's adaptation problem to elementary schools has already been widely recognized in Japan, there are few studies on the transition problem of parents themselves. One of those studies (Benesse Kyouiku Sougou Kenkyujo Jisedai Ikusei Kenkyushitsu, 2010) points out that the mothers' anxiety and worry about the child's study, safety and friends increase after their children's entering school. Also, preparation for the next day (preparation of the child's belongings to bring to the day-care center or elementary school, or supervising homework) and the child's after-school lessons in weekdays increased in the life of mothers and children. In contrast, the chances to go to elementary school compared with day-care center (except for driving from and to schools) and information about how the child spends time in the daytime of weekdays decreased.

Other studies on transition in Japan have mainly been targeted on adaption to schools or lessons of children themselves, or how teachers or curriculum should be to promote children’s adaption (Kyou, 2012; Ogawa, 2012). Also, the idea of parents as supporters for children’s transition is paid attention to (Yamada & Otomo, 2010). However, in Germany, parents’ developmental transition to being parents of a school child has become a new focus of research (Griebel & Niesel, 2013). Sociological exploration to this problem is demanded.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHOD

##### 4.1 Outline of the Interviews

Semi-structured interviews which ask the parents about the changes (gaps) in their daily lives and in parental involvement after their children’s entering schools were held with 25 Japanese parents who have elementary schoolchildren in the first or second grade. The interviews were conducted from August 2013 to January 2014. The parents lived in three wards of Tokyo and included working mothers, housewives, and working fathers. The interviewees were selected by snowball sampling in each of the three wards (X Ward—an educational district; Y Ward—an office building area; Z Ward—a traditional working-class neighborhood). X Ward and Y Ward have the high rankings and Z Ward has the low ranking of average income level within the 23 wards of Tokyo. The interviews were held for 30 minutes to 4 hours and recorded by an IC recorder with permission. The profiles of the interviewees are in Table 2. The parents with second graders were included in the subject of the research, as they were considered to be able to understand the situations or conflicts that the parents of first graders face objectively. It is natural to think that the degree of parents’ adaptation to school would differ depending on the children’s order of birth, but to catch the parents’ diversity including the details of siblings, the interviewees were selected regardless of the order of birth of the children in the first or second grade.

##### 4.2 Sample Characteristics

There were no ethnic minorities in the interviewees. The interviewees of this paper are relatively high-class and highly educated, and in that view the sample can be said to be biased. However, it is considered to be appropriate to control the effects of class which has already been referred to as a factor which affects parental involvement in other countries, and to examine the influence of parents’ working status as a socio-economic status that conforms to Japanese context.

##### 4.3 Analytical Method

Tape transcription was done by the author and the interview data was coded using qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA11. The number of the coded segments were 2407 and 580 codes were created. Among all the codes, the ones which directly relates to the gaps in parents’ daily lives, or their relationships with schools or other parents were picked up, and classified into higher categories. Thus, the changes (gaps) before and after the children’s entering schools were found out.

Table 1: Interviewees’ Profiles

	Interviewee’s occupation	Spouse’s occupation	Ward	Child(ren)’s grade (age)
<b>Mother 1</b>	Civil servant	Design office manager	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 5 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Mother 2</b>	TV production staff	TV production staff	Y	4 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 3</b>	Social welfare service corporation staff	College teacher (planning to remarry)	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade (twins)
<b>Mother 4</b>	Restaurant manager	Sales staff	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, Day-care center child, Day-care center child
<b>Mother 5</b>	Doctoral student	Banker	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 6</b>	Doctor	Singer	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, Day-care center child
<b>Mother 7</b>	Office clerk	Auction company staff	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 5 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Mother 8</b>	Certified public accountant	Consultant	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 9</b>	Manufacturer staff	Design office manager	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 10</b>	Manufacturer staff	Venture company staff	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 4 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Mother 11</b>	Publisher staff	Designer	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 12</b>	Housewife	Editor	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 2 years old
<b>Mother 13</b>	Housewife	Construction supervising company staff	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 14</b>	Health center staff	Company managerial staff	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade

<b>Mother 15</b>	Housewife	Department store staff	Y	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 2 years old
<b>Mother 16</b>	Housewife	Web related company staff	Z	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 17</b>	Public interest incorporated foundation staff	Public facility manager	Z	6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Mother 18</b>	Public interest incorporated foundation staff	System engineer	Z	6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade
<b>Father 1</b>	Day-care center teacher	Part-time job ×3	X	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade, Day-care center
<b>Father 2</b>	College teacher	Advertising agency staff	X	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade, Day-care center child, Day-care center child
<b>Father 3</b>	Stock company staff	Office worker	X	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade, Day-care center child, Day-care center child
<b>Father 4</b>	Self-employed	Printing company staff	X	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade
<b>Father 5</b>	Venture company staff	Manufacturer staff	X	1 <sup>st</sup> grade, 4 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Father 6</b>	Civil servant	Civil servant	Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade, Day-care center child, Day-care center child
<b>Father 7</b>	Civil servant	Day-care center teacher	Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade, 5 <sup>th</sup> grade

## 5. GAPS IN PARENTS' DAILY LIVES

On their children's entering school, working parents in Japan were facing gaps in daily lives as follows. In terms of jobs, about half of the offices introducing the system for reducing working time for raising children quits it before the employee's children enter schools (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013). Moreover, the parents themselves build career and get in responsible positions, and often become required to work long or overtime to be highly evaluated. In addition, as shown before, the qualitative and quantitative shortage of OSH-care makes it difficult for the parents to ensure children's after-school safety. Also, after their children entering schools, it is often the case that parents' burden gets heavier because they have to take their children to and from the after-school lessons. Through these changes in their daily lives, the parents come to think of quitting or changing their jobs. This supposed to be the reality of "The First Grade Barrier" phenomenon which has been narrowly regarded as childcare problem (labor problem).

### Mother1 (Civil Servant)

I really felt that it is reasonable to quit jobs when the child enters elementary school. "The First Grade Barrier" is so reasonable. Now what I have to do is not taking care of food or diapers or milk, but it is really communicating with a person, like mentally following my child up. Now I think it might be better not be working, though it is an ideal. Or working twice or three times a week and so I can have time to spare in matters about my child's school. In addition, then I can always meet my child coming back home from school, though my child comes home earlier than I now.

However, the extent these changes sets on the parents' lives differs by the situations of each family. The analysis of interview data shows that variables on mother (time to come home, values put on working), father (extents of participation in housework and child raising), child (personality, adaptation to school, extent of development, the way of spending time at home), siblings, housework, supports by relatives (grandparents), supports by non-relatives (neighborhood residents, mother friends, family support system, baby sitter) were affecting the gap and difficulties parents face on their children's entering schools.

## 6. GAPS IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

On their children's entering school, working parents in Japan were facing gaps in parental involvement as follows. Through the interviews, the parents were found out to be experiencing gaps not only in parental involvement at home or school, but also in relationships with teachers or other parents (including PTA activities). These relational gaps are also referred to in this section.

### **6.1 Parental Involvement at Day-care Center → Parental Involvement at School**

The date, time and frequency of parental involvement at schools (e.g. parent-teacher meetings, school events, school open days, personal consultations, volunteer activities) differ from those of parental involvement at day-care centers (e.g. parent-teacher meetings, day-care center events, parents' visitation days). Demands for parental involvement at day-care centers, which assume parents to be working, are on Saturdays or evenings and are not frequent. However, at elementary schools, which do not assume parents to be working, there are frequent demands for parental involvement in the daytime of weekdays. Thus, working parents' involvement is impeded when their children enter schools.

Mother2 (TV production staff)

At day-care center, there were only about two events per year which parents had to attend and we were told at first to keep those days open. So it was easy for me to work. However, after entering school, there are many, about twice a month, school events which parents have to attend. I can't attend them all! If I did so, then what happens with my job? Even parent-teacher meetings are in the busiest daytime in weekdays and there are many events which I have to ask to myself how in the world I could attend them. They are not thinking about working mothers at all and in fact I can't attend them. Nor could I feel like attending them sacrificing my job.

**6.2 At-home Preparation for Attending Day-care Center → Parental Involvement in School at Home**

In elementary schools, parents have to prepare what the children have to bring to school considering the schedule of that day, and manage or supervise children's homework. This puts heavier burden on parents' time at home compared with day-care centers, where things to bring to are relatively simple and fixed, and there is no homework. Moreover, the parents of first graders have to prepare a lot of belongings in April just after entering school, but that often becomes troublesome and inefficient work.

Mother 3 (Social welfare service corporation staff)

I even shudder now just remembering of the preparation for everything in April. It was a very hard job, like writing the child's name on each of the tiddlywinks.

Father 1 (Day-care center teacher)

The information about what to bring to school, like a core of toilet roll or a milk carton, often comes just before the day it is needed. My family doesn't drink milk so often, so I have to go to convenience store at night.

**6.3 Relationship with Day-care Center Teachers → Relationship with School Teachers**

As they drive children to and from day-care centers, parents of day-care center children have many chances to communicate directly with day-care center teachers. Also, as both the parent and the day-care center teacher write down the details of what has happened everyday on the communication notebook, two-way communication is observed. However, parents do not have to drive their children to and from elementary schools and they do not have enough chance to have direct communication with elementary school teachers. Information is mainly transferred through a lot of handouts indirectly and one-way, and the communication notebook is used mainly for businesslike communication.

Mother 4 (Restaurant management)

Compared with day-care center, it is surely difficult to know what my child is doing in daytime. When she was going to day-care center, I went to pick her up and had time to talk with the teacher every morning, and the day-care center teacher wrote down what was done that day on the communication notebook. Now, that has disappeared.

**6.4 The Parents' Association Activities → PTA Activities**

The parents' association at day-care center, shouldered by busy double-income or single parents, tend to regard efficiency as important and do not make demands for parental involvement more than necessary. However, elementary school PTA, which does not assume parents to be working, require parental involvement which is frequent and heavy burden and thus working parents' involvement is impeded.

Mother 5 (Doctoral student)

I suppose that working parents are taking breaks from job for PTA activities. That may be able for double-income and stabled mothers, but it seems difficult for single mothers to take a break only for PTA activities. It becomes a big problem if she take a break here and loses her job.

**6.5 The Parents' Association Committee → PTA Committee**

In contrast to the committee of parents' association at day-care center consisted of working parents, many parents pointed out that members of elementary school PTA committee are mainly housewives. This can be said to show the heaviness of burden required of PTA committee members, but it becomes a problem when the will of the parents with particular backgrounds is treated as the will of the whole PTA.

Father 1 (Day-care center teacher)

Elementary school PTA is completely led by the parents of "team kindergarten." There are few parents from day-care centers in the PTA committee. (...) The problem is the difference in degrees of commitment. The parents' association at day-care center is very efficient, and regards unanimity as important. It does not do things which someone said she or he cannot do that and does do what everyone can do. However, in elementary school PTA, the committee has the

will. They say, “We would do this, so please join us.” If I deny, they come to persuade me. Or, they exclude me saying “You don’t have to work.” The difference in degrees of commitment is rather big, especially in conservative areas like here. Or maybe in most elementary schools.

### **6.6 Homogeneous Parental Group → Diverse Parental Group**

Different from day-care centers where the group of parents is consisted of working parents only, the parental group in elementary schools is consisted of diverse parents, regardless of working status. This brings about differences in life styles or values among parents.

#### Father 1 (Day-care center teacher)

I think that the biggest difference between day-care centers and elementary schools is that the day-care center parents are a group of working people, but the elementary school parents are a group of diverse people.

### **6.7 Close Parental Network → Alienated / Cut Off Parental Network**

Though day-care center parents have many chances to see other parents through driving the children to and from day-care centers or attending parent-teacher meetings, elementary school parents have much less chances to communicate with other parents. Also, parental involvement at schools does not directly lead to close communication with other parents. In addition, parents who used to send their children to day-care centers face the difference in lifestyles or ways of taking care of their children between the parents of kindergarten graduates. The parents have to make transition from the close parental network to alienated / cut off parental network.

#### Mother 3 (Social welfare corporation staff)

In day-care centers, mothers were in close cooperation like sharing information about belongings to prepare. There really was a network between mothers. Every time I went to pick my child up, I met someone.

#### Mother 5 (Doctor)

As we don’t drive our children to and from elementary schools, there are no chances to see other parents and make friends with them.

#### Mother 2 (TV production staff)

At the school explanatory meeting before the entrance ceremony, I was asked by another mother which kindergarten my child is from. When I answered “He is from a day-care center,” she said, “Oh, I feel sorry for him.” I was shocked to know that parents from kindergartens in elementary school see mothers from day-care centers like that.

### **6.8 Participation of Fathers → Absence of Fathers**

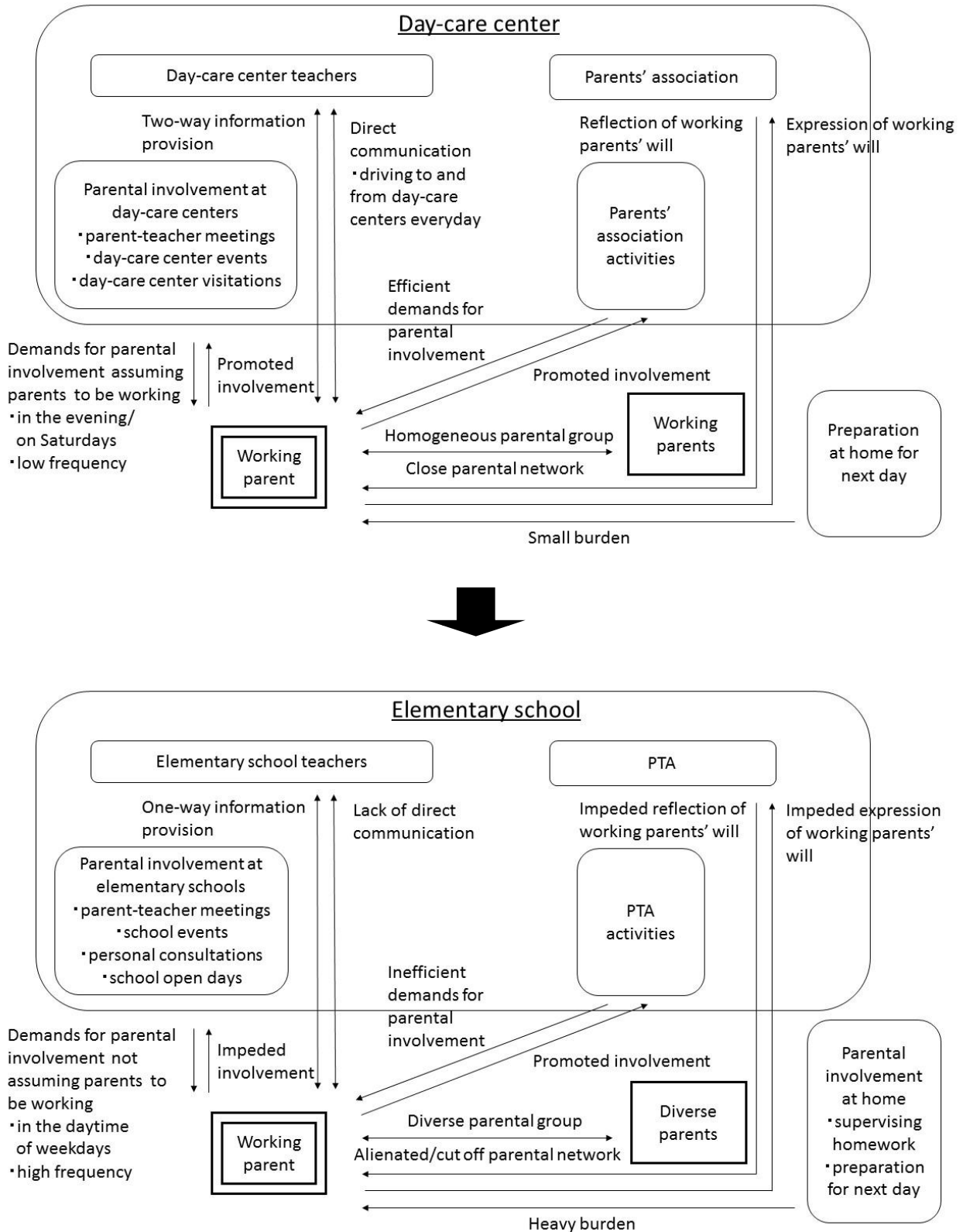
Many interviewees noticed that though fathers’ participation was not rare at day-care centers, there are few chances to see fathers attending schools. Most of the attendees of parent-teacher meetings are mothers, and the existence of fathers are considered to be unusual.

#### Mother 6 (Office clerk)

The rate of fathers attending parent-teacher meetings were higher in day-care center. When my husband attended the meeting, I received an E-mail from a mother in the same class in elementary school, which said “Wow, your husband was coming! It’s cool!”. I thought, “What is cool?” Everyone seems to think “Father is coming!”

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the gaps in daily life and parental involvement in schools which working parents face when their children enter elementary schools. These gaps show the fact that systems of social welfare and education in Japan are not catching up with the drastic change which is occurring with Japanese families. The systems of social welfare, from the OSH-care on down, are showing qualitative and quantitative shortage to the changes in families like the increase in number of double-income families or long-time working parents. Moreover, working parents regard that demands for parental involvement premise parents to be at home in the daytime. Parental involvement in Japan can be said to be standardizing male-breadwinner model (modern family model) and that is supposed to be preventing working parents from involvement into schools.



**Figure 2:** Gaps in parental involvement between day-care center and elementary school



Also, in Japan, the fact that education and social welfare are separated both in concept and jurisdiction is making it difficult to deal with children's after-school problem, which is the area the two functions overlap. In Korea, after-school programs have been positioned as a part of family policy by public sector using the concept of "educational welfare." However, it is pointed out that viewpoints concerning easing gap between social classes and diversification of families were weak in Japan, where explicit family policy has not been suggested and Action Plan to Support Raising Next-Generation Children as a tacit framework has been adopted (Souma & Han, 2009). Integrated argument on education and welfare from a perspective for comprehensive support for children and families is needed.

In addition, as Honda (2005a) has pointed out the possibility that the pressure for "perfect mother" is restricting mothers' choice on work in the increase of educational responsibility on families, the interviewees in this paper were having conflict between their jobs and maternal role of schoolchildren. Honda (2005b) states the necessity of addressing expansion of chances for high quality education and preparation of routes for occupational attainment by the whole society, and suggests the improvement of educational function of OSH-care not only its quantitative provision. Also, the standardization of the image of parents actively participating in school might be functioning as a pressure for parents. Parental involvement needs to be argued concerning more to the diversity of families.

### 7.2 Significance and Limitation of this Paper

This paper has made the first academic report of "The First Grade Barrier," which has become a social problem in Japan. Also, the characteristic of parental involvement in Japan which standardizes male-breadwinner model was examined. The findings contribute to comprehensively understanding the problems which have been discussed separately in the areas of education and welfare. However, this paper has the limitation in sampling bias. The interviews were held with the parents of limited number living in three wards in Tokyo. They were relatively highly-educated and high class, and the barriers or gaps in parental involvement caused by class or ethnicity could not be fully revealed in this paper. Quantitative research in larger scale may be needed for further exploration.

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