

Ageism among mothers with young children in Japan: Efficacy and control in marital relationships

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日本の育児中の母親が抱くエイジズム—夫との関係効力感に着目して—

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要約

幼い子供を持つ母親にとって、円滑な育児を行うためには周囲の人々の協力が不可欠である。夫との関係効力感が低い母親は、夫と協力して子育てをすることのハードルが高いかもしれない。そのような場合、自分の両親や義理の両親、および地域の高齢者のサポートに頼ることが有効である。しかし、夫との関係効力感が低い母親は、他者一般を避けやすく、高齢者に対するエイジズムを抱きやすくと考えられる。本研究では、幼い子供を持つ日本人の母親 ($N = 476$, 20 ~ 52 歳) を対象にオンライン調査を実施し、夫との関係効力感とエイジズムの関連について検討した。調査では、参加者が抱くエイジズム、夫との関係効力感、夫へのアタッチメント、参加者および夫の1日あたりの育児時間、参加者の年齢、子供の年齢、子供の性別、世帯年収について尋ねた。結果、夫との関係効力感が低い参加者ほどエイジズムの程度が高かった。この関連は、夫へのアタッチメントやデモグラフィック変数を統制してもなお顕著であった。よって、夫との関係効力感が低い母親ほどエイジズムを持ちやすく、それが高齢者からの支援を受ける妨げになる可能性がある。今後、本研究で得られた知見が、幼い子供を持つ母親が抱くエイジズムの軽減、および育児における世代間協力の促進を目指す老年学、心理学的な試みにつながることを期待したい。

Key words

ageism, mothers, efficacy, marital relationships, childcare

1. Introduction

Most mothers with young children devote a significant amount of their time to childcare, and help from surrounding people is essential for smooth childcare. The impact of childcare on mothers' lives can be remarkable, sometimes leading to worsening mental health status, such as increased depressive tendencies (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Zhang, Ma, & Li, 2023). People who support mothers in raising children include husbands, parents, and parents-in-law. Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of having a good relationship with one's husband on childcare (e.g., Aoki, 2009; Craig & Mullan, 2011). This study focused on mothers' efficacy and control in marital relationships, which is the sense of efficacy in interpersonal relationships with one's husband (Asano, 2009; Murray & Holmes, 1997).

Mothers with low efficacy and control in marital relationships may have difficulty raising children together with their husbands. In such cases, help from parents, parents-in-law, and older people in the community may be helpful, at least in the short-term. Previous studies have reported the positive role that grandparents and older adults in the community play in childcare (DeVore, Winchell, & Rowe, 2016; Sasaki, Takahama, Kitamura, & Kimura, 2017; Zamberletti, Cavrini, & Tomassini, 2018). Especially in Japan, which has an aging population, older

adults are likely to participate in childcare (Fujiwara, Sugihara, & Shinkai, 2005).

Furthermore, ageism is generally directed toward older adults. Younger people, including mothers raising young children, hold particularly negative and discriminatory attitudes toward older people (Donizzetti, 2019; Harada, Sugisawa, Sugihara, Yamada, & Shibata, 2004). In addition, older adults who are sensitive to ageism tend to view younger people negatively (Harada, Kobayashi, Fukaya, Murayama, Takahashi, & Fujiwara, 2019; Shimizu, Suzuki, Hata, & Sakaki, 2022). Thus, mothers with young children who have strong ageist views might not receive the support from parents, parents-in-law, or other older adults.

Therefore, this study conducted an online survey of mothers with children between two and four years of age to explore the association between efficacy and control in marital relationships and ageism. Mothers with low efficacy and control in marital relationships may tend to avoid others and hold negative attitudes toward older adults. As such, this study tested the hypothesis that mothers with low efficacy and control in marital relationships have a high degree of ageism. We controlled for adult attachment, which consists of two sub-concepts: avoidance, the degree to which one does not feel comfortable being intimate with others, and anxiety, the fear of being abandoned by others (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011; Komura, Murakami, & Toda, 2016). Lower values indicate higher attachment quality. In the context of the marital relationships, mothers with

a higher quality of adult attachment to their husbands are more likely to have higher efficacy and control in marital relationships (Kohlhoff & Barnett, 2013; Meredith, Strong, & Feeney, 2006). Therefore, we also measured adult attachment as a factor behind efficacy and control in marital relationships.

To the best of our knowledge, previous studies on mothers with young children have not dealt simultaneously with marital relationships and ageism. If the degree of ageism is higher in mothers with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships, it is possible that such mothers may be less likely to receive appropriate help from older people around them and their husbands. There is a strong need to provide public support to avoid the isolation of such mothers. We examined the association between efficacy and control in marital relationships and ageism in mothers with young children and aimed to provide budding insights into the broad areas of gerontology and developmental psychology.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Participants

Participants were recruited using the crowdsourcing service, CrowdWorks. As this is a major crowdsourcing service in Japan, it is unlikely that the sample was biased. Assuming a multiple regression analysis with ageism as the dependent variable, a power analysis was conducted with a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992; $f^2 = .15$, $\alpha = .05$, $\beta = .80$, $N_{\text{parameter}} = 10$). The required sample size was $N = 118$. This study was approved by the University of Tokyo (approval number: 21-385). We explained the study content on the first page of the online survey. It clearly stated that by participating in the survey, participants were deemed to have agreed to the content. Informed consent was obtained from all participants as described above.

Participants were 476 Japanese mothers with husbands and young children between two and four years old, with a mean age of 34.86 years ($SD = 5.29$; 20-52 years). This study was conducted as part of a larger survey for a master's thesis by the second author. It examined a completely different topic/hypothesis (the dependent variable was children's mental health), and part of the questionnaire items used for that study (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires; Goodman, 1997) was designed for between two and four years old. Therefore, the participants in this study were also limited to mothers with young children between two and four years old. Raising children of these ages often places a heavy burden on mothers. However, one of the limitations of this study may be that mothers with children outside of these ages were not included among the participants.

Participants who answered any of the three items in the survey incorrectly, such as "Please choose the rightmost option," were excluded from the analysis ($N = 24$) as they may not have read the questionnaire items carefully. Participants who answered "I don't know" to the item of household annual income were also excluded from the analysis ($N = 37$; including overlap

with those who answered incorrectly to the trap item above). Consequently, the data used in the analysis was $N = 418$, with a mean age of 34.97 years ($SD = 5.31$; 20-52 years). When the data of all participants ($N = 476$) was analyzed, the results were similar to those reported in this main manuscript. Details are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) repository (<https://osf.io/t4swj/>).

2.2 Measurements

Ageism was measured using the 14 items of the Japanese short version of the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (Harada et al., 2004), including "Many older people are stingy and hoard their money and possessions." Answers were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The mean was taken as the score ($\alpha = .89$), with higher scores indicating higher ageism.

Efficacy and control in marital relationships were measured using the nine items of Asano (2009), including "My partner and I are always successful in influencing one another into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict." Answers were rated on a five-point Likert scale. This scale's reliability and validity were confirmed. This study used the Japanese translation version of the items on Murray and Holmes (1997). The mean was taken as the score ($\alpha = .96$), with higher scores indicating higher efficacy and control in marital relationships.

Adult attachment was measured using the nine items of the Japanese version of the Experience of Close Relationship-Relationship Structure (Komura et al., 2016). This scale consisted of two sub-concepts: "avoidance," with six items including "I don't feel comfortable opening up to my partner," and "anxiety," with three items including "I worry that my partner won't care about me as much as I care about him." Answers were rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The means were taken as the scores (in order, $\alpha = .86, .85$), with higher scores indicating higher avoidance and anxiety.

Demographic items included participants' and husbands' daily childcare time, participants' age, children's age (age of first child), children's gender (gender of first child), and household annual income. Daily childcare time was measured by one item each, "Please answer how much time you/your spouse spend(s) on childcare per day." Regarding household annual income, participants selected one from the 13 options (unit; 10 thousand yen): 1 (0 yen), 2 (less than 50), 3 (50-99), 4 (100-199), 5 (200-299), 6 (300-399), 7 (400-499), 8 (500-599), 9 (600-699), 10 (700-799), 11 (800-899), 12 (900-), and 13 (I don't know). Frequency distribution tables for age and gender of children and household annual income are available on OSF.

2.3 Procedure and analysis

Participants responded to questions on ageism, efficacy and control in marital relationships, adult attachment, and demographics. The reward for participation was 165 yen per person.

The statistical software R (ver. 4.1.0) was used for the analysis, with a statistical significance level of $\alpha = .05$. The data used in the analysis, the R scripts, the list of questionnaire items, and histograms for each indicator are available on OSF.

3. Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for each indicator are shown in Table 1. Participants with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships had a higher degree of ageism ($r = -.20$, 95 %CI = $[-.29, -.11]$, $p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis was conducted with ageism as the dependent variable and efficacy and control in marital relationships, adult attachment (avoidance/anxiety), participants' and husbands' daily childcare time, participants' age, children's age, children's gender, and household annual income as independent variables (Table 2). The results showed that even after controlling for the above variables, the degree of ageism was higher among participants with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships ($\beta = -.20$, 95 %CI = $[-.33, -.07]$, $p = .003$), supporting our hypothesis.

Considering the effect of adult attachment on efficacy and

control in marital relationships, a structural equation modeling was conducted with adult attachment as the independent variable, efficacy and control in marital relationships as the mediating variable, and ageism as the dependent variable (Figure 1). We controlled for the participants' and husbands' daily childcare time, participants' age, children's age, children's gender, and household annual income. The model showed mostly adequate goodness of fit (RMSEA = .03, CFI > .99, AGFI = .92). Results indicated that participants with higher avoidance and anxiety had lower efficacy and control in marital relationships, whereas participants with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships had a higher degree of ageism.

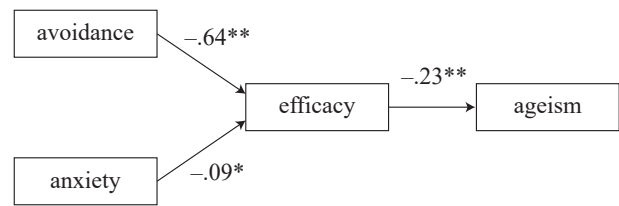


Figure 1: Structural equation modeling results

Notes: Coefficients were standardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of each indicator

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2.49	0.72	—					
2	3.42	0.97	-.20 **	—				
3	3.01	1.31	.16 **	-.69 **	—			
4	2.68	1.43	.13 **	-.29 **	.32 **	—		
5	10.15	5.89	-.06	-.11 *	.06	.13 **	—	
6	2.44	2.87	.03	.12 *	-.06	.04	.01	—
7	34.97	5.31	-.05	-.07	.02	-.07	-.17**	-.10

Notes: 1 = ageism, 2 = efficacy and control in marital relationships, 3 = avoidance, 4 = anxiety, 5 = daily childcare time (participant), 6 = daily childcare time (husband), 7 = age (participant). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2: Results of multiple regression analysis on ageism

	β	95 %CI	VIF
efficacy	-.20 **	$[-.33, -.07]$	1.99
avoidance	.01	$[-.12, .14]$	1.97
anxiety	.08	$[-.02, .18]$	1.16
childcare (p)	-.08	$[-.18, .02]$	1.10
childcare (h)	.05	$[-.05, .14]$	1.05
age of participants	-.10	$[-.20, .01]$	1.16
age of child	.05	$[-.05, .15]$	1.14
gender of child	-.08	$[-.17, .02]$	1.03
household income	.08	$[-.02, .18]$	1.11
adjusted R^2	.05 **	$ [.01, .09]$	—

Notes: Regression coefficients were standardized. (p) = participant, (h) = husband. gender of child; 0 = male, 1 = female. ** $p < .01$.

4. Discussion

This study conducted an online survey of Japanese mothers with young children between the ages of two and four years and explored the association between efficacy and control in marital relationships and ageism. The results demonstrated that the degree of ageism was higher among participants with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships. This association was pronounced after controlling for variables such as adult attachment and daily childcare time.

Compared to mothers with higher efficacy and control in marital relationships, mothers with lower efficacy may need help with childcare from parents, parents-in-law, and older adults in the community. However, our results suggested that mothers with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships are more likely to have ageism, which may hinder receiving help from older adults. Thus, it would be worthwhile to encourage mothers with young children to view older adults in a positive light. Nevertheless, as ageism measured in this study was toward older adults in general, it is possible that participants held different attitudes toward their own parents and parents-in-law. Future research should further examine the impact of mothers' efficacy and control in marital relationships on their attitudes toward specific older adults, such as their parents and parents-in-law.

4.1 Limitations

This study had some limitations. First, participants were limited to those registered with CrowdWorks. We should examine the differences between mothers who register for such crowdsourcing services while raising children and those who do not. Furthermore, a follow-up study by a mail survey with random sampling is necessary. Second, the adjusted R^2 value in multiple regression analysis was small. We found that the degree of ageism was higher among participants with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships, even after controlling for several variables. However, we did not measure other key variables associated with ageism. For instance, many previous studies have shown that contact experience with older adults is closely related to ageism (Allan & Johnson, 2008; Bousfield & Hutchison, 2010; Shimizu, Hashimoto, & Karasawa, 2022a). We should re-examine our hypothesis after measuring other variables. Third, we did not examine the mechanisms by which efficacy and control in marital relationships and ageism are related. It may be due to the participants' tendency of general aversion regarding others; in other words, mothers who tend to avoid others in general may be more likely to have lower efficacy and control in marital relationships and more ageism. To confirm this assumption, future research should measure variables such as general trust (i.e., trust in others in general) and extroversion in Big Five (Shimizu, Hashimoto, & Karasawa, 2022b).

5. Conclusions

Despite the above limitations, we found that mothers with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships had a higher degree of ageism. To our knowledge, this was the first study on mothers with young children that dealt simultaneously with marital relationships and ageism. As this study was exploratory, other variables and mechanisms should be considered in the future. Relying on help from parents or parents-in-law may contribute to successful childcare among mothers with lower efficacy and control in marital relationships. Therefore, the present findings could lead to more gerontological and psychological attempts to reduce ageism and improve marital relationships among mothers with young children.

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