# Single motherhood and work-family conflict in Japan

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the levels and correlates of perceived work-family conflict among married and unmarried mothers in Japan. Using data from the 2011 and 2012 rounds of the National Survey of Households with Children, I begin by demonstrating that single mothers report significantly higher levels of work-family conflict. I then estimate a series of regression models to assess the extent to which this relationship reflects differences between married and unmarried mothers in (a) labor force participation, (b) work circumstances, (c) family environment, and (d) economic well-being. Substantially higher levels of labor force participation among single mothers account for half of the observed difference in work-family conflict. Conditional on employment status, single mothers' work characteristics, especially their long work hours, explain much of the remaining difference in work family conflict. Children's health problems, children's poor academic performance, and economic need are associated with higher levels of work-family conflict, but explain very little of the difference between single mothers and their married counterparts. I conclude by discussing the potential implications of these results for understanding the role of single parenthood and employment circumstances in shaping patterns of social stratification within and across generations.

Cross-national differences in the economic well-being of single mothers are well documented. For example, single mothers are more likely to be in poverty in countries where public income support is less generous (OECD 2011). Other research has shown that the poverty rates of single mothers are higher in more gender inegalitarian settings, reflecting both relatively low wages for women (Christopher, England, Smeeding, and Phillips 2012) and limited public policy support of work-family balance (Misra, Moller, Strader, and Wemlinger 2012). While there is a good deal of interest in the relative economic deprivation of single mothers (and their children), little attention has been paid to other aspects of well-being. Work-family conflict may be particularly important in light of evidence that the countries with the highest levels of poverty among single mothers are also those in which the labor force participation rates of single mothers tend to be highest (OECD 2013).

Japan stands out as an extreme case. Recent data show that Japanese single mothers not only have the highest poverty rate (51%), but also have the highest labor force participation rate (85%) among OECD countries (OECD 2013). Promotion of work-family balance (or work-life balance) is a central focus of recent efforts by the Japanese government to promote family formation in response to very low fertility and associated aging of the population (Yamaguchi and Higuchi eds. 2008). However, these efforts focus almost exclusively on promoting marriage among the unmarried and childbearing among the married, paying little or no attention to the steadily growing population of formerly married women who are typically both mothers and employees.

A few studies have hinted at high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers in Japan. For example, Abe (2008) summarizes qualitative interview data in which single mothers work multiple jobs, are stressed about children, and report health problems induced by excessive

work. Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, and Zhou (2014) noted particularly high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers in their analyses of mothers' time with children but this was not a central focus of their study.

A better understanding of the prevalence and correlates of work-family conflict among single mothers is important in light of research linking higher levels of perceived conflict to a range of unfavorable outcomes including worse emotional and physical health, poor health behaviors, lower satisfaction with work and family life, and less effective performance of work and family roles (see Bellavia and Frone 2005 and Voydanoff 2002 for summaries of related research). A focus on work-family conflict is also important to the extent that we are interested in understanding how differences in the well-being of single mothers and married mothers may depend upon context. In settings where most mothers work, differences in work-family conflict by mothers' marital status may be relatively limited. However, in societies like Japan where married women's labor force participation is relatively low (while that of single mothers is high), the gap may be particularly large.

Single mothers in Japan are responsible for economically supporting their families in a setting where mothers' labor force participation has been discouraged by both social norms and public policies and where wives' earnings remain supplemental to husbands'. In contrast to married mothers, who typically choose employment that allows for prioritization of childrearing and domestic work (or do not work at all), single mothers need to prioritize both employment and childrearing. They do so in an policy environment characterized by relatively limited income support for single mothers and a strong emphasis on economic independence through employment, and efforts to provide in-kind support such as prioritization for public housing and day-care (Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005; Ono 2010). The rarity of joint custody arrangements and

limited support from ex-husbands mean that single mothers are often the sole providers of earnings, childcare, and domestic work – a situation conducive to high levels of work-family conflict. The potential for high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers in Japan may be exacerbated to the extent that strong cultural norms and expectations regarding the value of intensive mothering (Hirao 2007) are internalized and provide a source of emotional conflict or guilt.

At the same time, however, the relatively high prevalence of coresidence with (grand)parents may mitigate such conflict and the associated implications for maternal well-being and children's outcomes. Recent studies have shown that roughly one-third of single mothers in Japan coreside with their parents, a much higher level than in other countries (Raymo, Smeeding, Edwards, and Caruthers 2014; Shirahase and Raymo 2014). Ascertaining the link between single motherhood and work-family conflict in a setting like Japan where normative expectations about "appropriate" or desirable work and family roles for mothers are strong and the potential for the provision of intra-familial support via intergenerational coresidence is pronounced thus represents an important contribution to our understanding of how relationships between single motherhood and well-being may be shaped by context.

In this paper, I follow up on these earlier studies to address the following research questions:

1) To what extent is the level of work-family conflict reported by single mothers in Japan higher than that of their married counterparts?
2) To what extent to differences in work-family conflict simply reflect higher levels of employment among single mothers?

3) What explains differences in work-family conflict between married and unmarried mothers (other than employment)? Is the primary source of conflict in the work sphere, in the family sphere, or in in both?

**Background**

*Work-family conflict*

One widely-cited definition of work family conflict is: "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985:77). This definition closely resembles the emphasis on role conflict or role overload in the literature on the "second shift" (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Work-family conflict and associated stress have been encapsulated in the notion of the second shift, reflecting the rise in mothers' employment combined with norms and expectations about the division of household labor (including childcare) and limited support from men. For single mothers in particular, the second shift reflects that fact that they typically need to work full-time in a policy environment that prioritizes employment as the primary pathway to economic independence and the fact that they do not have a partner to provide support in the family sphere (Bellavia and Frone 2005). Consistent with these expectations, several studies have documented relatively high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers in the U.S. (Casey and Pitt-Castouphes 1994; Ciabattari 2007; Grzywacz, Almeida, McDonald 2002).

One important feature of work-family conflict as defined above is its bidirectional nature. Just as work responsibilities spillover into the family sphere to create conflict, family responsibilities can generate conflict with work. It is thus important that measures of work-family conflict capture perceptions of conflict in both directions and that efforts to understand

the correlates of work-family conflict consider sources of stress in conflict in both the work and family spheres (Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997).

Work-family conflict and the closely related concepts of work-family balance and work-life balance have received a great deal of recent attention in countries characterized by very low fertility rates, including Japan. Theoretical underpinning for this focus can be found in the work of McDonald (2000, 2009, 2013) and others who argue that conflict generated by emerging employment opportunities for women, combined with little change in gender-inegalitarian division of labor within the home, forces women to make an either-or choice between work and family. In this scenario, ultra-low fertility is the result of more women choosing to postpone or avoid family in favor of employment. These ideas inform ongoing policy efforts to promote family formation by reducing barriers to women's (and men's) ability to balance work and family responsibilities (Yamaguchi and Higuchi eds. 2008). In this context, it is not surprising that existing research on work-family conflict in Japan has focused primarily on unmarried men and women and childbearing among married couples. Although there is good reason to expect that work-family conflict may be particularly high among single-mothers (e.g., Hays 2003), related research is scarce.

*Single mothers in Japan*

The number of single-mother families has increased markedly in Japan. According to the National Survey of Single Mother Households conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, the number of households that include a single-mother (unmarried mother with a coresident child under the age of 20) rose by 72% between 1983 (718,100) and 2011 (1,237,700) (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2005, 2012). The number of households including a single-father is much lower – estimated at 223,300 in 2011 (Ministry of Health, Labour and

Welfare 2012). Data from the 2010 census indicate that 9.4% of households including at least one minor child (age 18 or younger) were single-mother households and 6.5% of all minor children lived in a single-mother household (http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/GL08020101.do?_toGL08020101_&tstatCode=000001039448&requestSender=search/, accessed on 9/30/14).

In contrast to the United States and other countries where nonmarital childbearing is common, the increase in single-parent families in Japan is due almost entirely to increases in divorce. The number of divorces nearly doubled between 1980 (141,689) and 2010 (251,378), and roughly one in three marriages is now projected to end in divorce (National Institute of Social Security and Population Research 2014; Raymo, Iwasawa, and Bumpass 2004). As a result, the proportion of single-mother families formed via divorce increased from 49% in 1983 to 81% in 2011 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2012). The growing prevalence of single-mother families also reflects the fact that about 60% of recent divorces involve minor children, with the mother receiving full custody of all children in the large majority of these cases (83% in 2010; National Institute of Social Security and Population Research 2014).

*Single mothers' employment*

The most important reason to expect relatively high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers in Japan is their much higher levels of labor force participation relative to married mothers. Unlike the U.S., where the labor force participation rates of unpartnered mothers are similar to those of partnered mothers (OECD 2013), single mothers in Japan are substantially more likely to be in the labor force. In 2010, labor force participation rates were 86% for single mothers but only 48% for married women (National Institute of Population and Social

Security Research 2014; Nishi 2012). The labor force participation rate of Japanese single mothers is the highest among OECD countries (OECD 2013) and reflects public policies characterized by limited income transfers to single parents and a strong emphasis on independence through employment (Abe 2008; Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005; Ono 2010). Overall, Japan has one of the lowest expenditures on public assistance among OECD countries, and recent studies have shown that single mothers' post-transfer income is actually lower, on average, than their pre-transfer income (Abe 2003, 2008). The large gap in the labor force participation rates points to the possibility of relatively high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers.

At the same time, it is possible that differences in work-family conflict by mother's marital status are limited in a country like Japan where the internalization of strong norms regarding the importance of mothers' intensive investment in childrearing (especially educational success) may result in working mothers perceiving high levels of work family conflict, regardless of their marital status. Similarly, husbands' very limited participation in domestic work and childrearing (Tsuya et al. 2005) suggests that the presence of a spouse may do little to alleviate stress associated with the second shift for employed married mothers. Lim and Raymo (2014) provide evidence for the health-compromising effects of employment among married women, demonstrating that the better health of married women in Japan reflects their relatively low levels of employment (vis-à-vis unmarried women).

*Work circumstances*

Several features of the work environment have been identified as predictors of work-family conflict, especially work-to-family conflict or work interference with family (WIF). These include long work hours, precarious employment, and shift work (e.g., Voydanoff 2002).

Yamaguchi (2009, 2010) and others have found similar relationships in Japan and have emphasized the importance of long work hours and employment in professional/managerial jobs in producing higher levels of work-family conflict, especially among women. While it is clear that single mothers' high levels of labor force participation should result in more work-family conflict, it is not clear whether their work circumstances, conditional on employment, should contribute to higher or lower levels of work-family conflict.

Despite their high rates of employment, most single mothers work in "bad jobs," reflecting the relatively weak position of women in the Japanese labor market (Brinton, 2001). The employment opportunities of single mothers are further limited by the fact that a large majority of women leave the labor force prior to childbirth (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2011). As a result of their discontinuous work histories, (formerly) married mothers typically employed in relatively unstable, low-paying jobs, often on a part-time basis (Abe and Ōishi, 2005; Tamiya and Shikata, 2007). Despite policy efforts to promote single mothers' economic independence via employment (Zhou 2014), their ability to engage in full-time, standard employment is constrained by the fact that expectations of long work hours are common, commute times are often long, the operating hours of publicly provided child care are limited, and the participation of noncustodial fathers in parenting is minimal (Abe 2008; Zhou 2008).

If single mothers are employed in more stressful circumstances, their level of work-family conflict may be higher. For example, some anecdotal evidence highlights the long hours that single mothers work, the relatively irregular hours that many face, and the doubling up on jobs to support their families (Abe 2008). To the extent that single mothers are also more likely to be

employed in insecure, non-standard jobs, the associated employment uncertainty may contribute to stress that is related to higher levels of work-family conflict.

*Family circumstances*

Established correlates of work-family conflict within the family sphere include the number and ages of children, with young children being particularly important predictors of more work-family conflict (Milkie and Peltola 1999). Time spent on household tasks, support from spouse (absent by definition in single-mother families), support from other family members, and children's well-being are also associated with reported levels of work-family conflict. Higher marital satisfaction has also been identified as a buffer between stressful work circumstances and perceived work-family conflict (Barnett 1994).

Research on the family circumstances of single mothers in Japan is quite limited. In contrast to the U.S., where young, nonmarital births are a common pathway to single motherhood, the large majority of single mothers in Japan are divorced, meaning that their children tend to be somewhat older on average than those of married mothers and that they tend to have slightly fewer children (Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, and Zhou 2014). Both of these factors should contribute to lower levels of work-family conflict among single mothers. At the same time, however, there is some evidence to suggest that stressful family circumstances may be particularly problematic for single mothers.

Qualitative interview data presented by Abe (2008) describes the stress and work-family conflict resulting from children's difficulties. Several of her respondents discuss the guilt associated with the inability to spend more time with their children and the stress induced by children's own health problems, behavioral issues, and poor school performance. While research on the well-being of children of single mothers (relative to their counterparts living with married

mothers) is rare in Japan (but see Raymo 2014), Abe's (2008) data suggests that the stigma and poverty associated with growing up in a single-parent family may be particularly detrimental to children's well-being in Japan. To the extent that children's well-being is correlated with mother's perceived work-family conflict, this may be an important source of higher perceived conflict among single mothers in Japan.

At the same time, however, the relatively high prevalence of coresidence with (grand)parents (Nishi 2012) and strong norms of intrafamilial support (especially support from (grand)mothers with childrearing (e.g., Kato 2013; Morgan and Hirosima 1983) suggest that single mothers may not be particularly disadvantaged with respect to work-family conflict in Japan. Research in the U.S. shows that family-provided support mitigates perceived work-family conflict (Gryzwacz and Marks 2000) and two recent analyses of Japanese data show that intergenerational coresidence is associated with better health and lower levels of poverty among single mothers (Raymo and Zhou 2012; Shirahase and Raymo 2014). At the same time, however, it is also clear that the (grand)parents with whom single mothers coreside often have limited economic resources themselves (Shirahase and Raymo 2014). It is thus unclear whether the relatively high levels of intergenerational coresidence should lessen perceived work-family conflict among single mothers.

*Economic circumstances*

Efforts to identify the predictors of work-family conflict have naturally focused on potentially stressful features of the work and family environments. However, it is possible that limited economic resources may contribute to higher levels of work-family conflict, particularly among groups for whom economic disadvantage and poverty are pronounced (such as single mothers in Japan). Poverty and need are well-documented life stressors that may contribute to higher levels

of work-family conflict via unobserved characteristics of the work and family environment. For example, economic need may motivate mothers to work longer hours in more distant jobs that are characterized fewer psychological rewards, less flexibility, and more stress. Similarly, economic need may strain family relationships in ways that increase family to work spillover. I am not able to observe the quality of parent-child relationships in the data analyzed below, but it is conceivable that economic stress impacts relationships in ways that contribute to higher levels of work-family conflict among single mothers.

This may be particularly true in Japan where over half of single mother households fall below the poverty line (OECD 2013, Shirahase and Raymo 2014). Per capita income in single-mother households is about half the amount for all households with children, reflecting single mothers' low earning capacity, limited public income support (Abe 2003; Akaishi 2011), and the fact that less than 20% of single mothers receive any financial support from their ex-husbands (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2012).

**Data and method**

I use data from the first two rounds of the National Survey of Households with Children (*Kosodate Setai Zenkoku Chōsa*). Conducted in November of 2011 and 2012 by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, this survey (NSHC, hereafter) is a national survey of households that include parents and their minor children, with an oversample of single-parent households. In each year, two-stage stratified sampling based on data from the Basic Resident Registry (*jūmin kihon daichō*) produced a target sample of 2,000 two-parent households and 2,000 single-parent households. Interviewers delivered a self-administered questionnaire to respondents' homes and returned to collect the completed questionnaires at a pre-specified date and time. In 2011, completed questionnaires were collected from 2,218 respondents, for a 56%

response rate (61% for married parents and 50% for single parents). In 2012, the corresponding numbers were 2,201 respondents for a 55% response rate (61% for married parents and 49% for single parents). A preference for information from mothers was emphasized both by the interviewer and in the survey instrument but a small number of questionnaires was completed by fathers (131 married fathers and 151 single fathers). We exclude these respondents from our analyses, leaving a sample of 4,137 for the two years. Analyses presented below are based on the 4,037 respondents with no missing data on the dependent or independent variables.

The response rates of 55-56% are similar to those of other recent sample surveys in Japan but are low enough (especially among single parents) to raise concerns about the representativeness of the resulting sample. However, comparison of the characteristics of the 2011 NSHC respondents with two large, nationally-representative surveys conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2011 demonstrates that the samples are similar (Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, and Zhou 2014). In the both the descriptive and multivariate analyses presented below, we use post-stratification weights that reflect both the intentional oversampling of single-mother households and their lower response rate. These weights, provided by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, allow for generalization to the population of mothers of minor children.

*Variables*

*Work-family conflict* is an index constructed by summing responses to three questions asking respondents how often during the past year they felt (a) so tired from work that they could not do necessary housework and childcare, (b) that long work hours made it difficult to do housework and childcare, and (c) that the burden of domestic responsibilities made it difficult to concentrate at work. The six response options range from never to every day, resulting in an index that

ranges from 0-15 ($\alpha = .83$). This measure is equal to zero for mothers who are not currently working for pay.

*Employment*: To answer my second research question, I include a 0-1 measure of employment that distinguishes mothers who are currently working for pay from those who are not. To address the third research question, I sequentially introduce a range of variables reflecting mothers' employment circumstances, family circumstances, and economic well-being.

*Work circumstances* include measures of work hours, employment type, occupation, irregular work hours, night shift work, and multiple jobs. Mothers' work hours are the reported number of hours per week at work (including overtime). This measure is equal to zero for those who were not employed at the time of the survey and non-zero values of work hours are collapsed into quartiles (mean work hours for the four quartiles are 16, 30, 40, and 50, respectively) and a sixth category includes those who did not respond to the question on work hours. Employment type is a dichotomous indicator distinguishing those in regular, full-time employment from those in other types of employment (part-time, non-standard employment, and self-employment) and non-employment. This distinction is based on preliminary results indicating substantially higher levels of perceived work-family conflict among regular, full-time employees. Similarly, occupation is measured by a 0-1 indicator of employment in a professional or managerial job, which preliminary analyses showed to be associated with particularly high levels of work-family conflict. Irregular work hours is a 0-1 indicator distinguishing those who reported their work hours to be "irregular" or "often irregular" from those who did not. Similarly, night shift is a 0-1 measure of whether or not the respondent reported working between the hours of 5:00 pm and 5:00 am. An additional dichotomous indicator distinguishes mothers who reported working at two or more jobs simultaneously during the past year. To the extent that

single mothers are more likely to be characterized by employment conditions associated with higher levels of work-family conflict (e.g., longer work hours, irregular work hours, multiple jobs), controlling for these characteristics is expected to account for some of the posited difference in work-family conflict.

*Family circumstances* include living arrangements, number and age of children, indicators of children's health and education, and receipt of instrumental assistance. Living arrangements are measured with a 0-1 variable that distinguishes those who live with their parents or parents-in-law from those who do not. I identified mothers coresiding with parents(-in-law) from a question that asks respondents to identify their relationship to all individuals with whom they are coresiding. The number of coresident children ranges form 1-4, and the presence of a pre-school age child is a 0-1 indicator distinguishing women who coreside with a child age 0-5 from those whose youngest child is at least six years old. The presence of a preschool age child was included based on the results of preliminary models showing that, among working mothers, having a young child is associated with particularly high levels of work-family conflict. I constructed 0-1 measures of children's health problems and academic difficulties based on information provided by mothers about each child in the child roster section of the questionnaires. The former distinguishes mothers who reported any child with a minor illness, chronic illness, or disability from those who did not and the latter distinguishes mothers who reported having any school age child who was performing at a lower than average level from those who did not. The measure of help with housework and childcare is equal to 1 for mothers who responded that nobody (other than their spouse) helped them with either housework or childcare, and zero for those who reported receiving help from someone. To the extent that single mothers are more likely to be characterized by family circumstances associated with higher levels of work-family

conflict (e.g., children with health problems, less help with housework and childcare), controlling for these characteristics is expected to account for some of the posited difference in work-family conflict.

*Economic circumstances* include household income, savings behavior, an indicator of economic need, and a subjective evaluation of economic well-being. Equivalent household income is reported annual pre-tax household income (from all sources) divided by the square root of household size to account for income sharing and economies of scale. Because a relatively large number of respondents did not respond to this question (n = 527 or 13% of the analytic sample), I collapsed non-missing values into quartiles and added a fifth category for missing values. Savings behavior is a six-category indicator of the frequency with which respondents report saving. The categories are: almost every month, sometimes, rarely, never, spending down savings, and missing. Need is a 0-1 indicator of the inability to afford food and clothing. Respondents were asked how often in the past year, they were unable to buy needed food or clothing. I constructed a measure that distinguishes respondents who responded "frequently" or "sometimes" to either question from those who did not. Note that for this and other variables that have been dichotomized, a small number of missing values were coded as zero. Subjective economic well-being was also assessed on a five-point scale that ranges from difficult (1) to comfortable (5) and, based on the results of preliminary analyses, I dichotomized this to distinguish those who said very difficult or difficult from the rest. To the extent that single mothers are more likely to be characterized by economic circumstances associated with higher levels of work-family conflict (e.g., low income, inability to save), controlling for these characteristics is expected to account for some of the posited difference in work-family conflict.

*Background variables:* In all models, I control for mother's age and educational attainment. Age is a continuous measure and educational attainment distinguish six different levels of highest degree attained: junior high school, high school, vocational school, junior college, university or more, and a category for those with missing data on these questions. Previous studies have shown single mothers to be slightly older and have lower levels of education than their married counterparts (e.g. Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, and Zhou 2014).

*Method*

I estimated a series of six linear regression models for the composite measure of work-family conflict. In the first model, I included only the indicator of single motherhood, age, and educational attainment. This model provides a baseline estimate of the extent to which the level of work-family conflict reported by single mothers differs from that of their married counterparts (research question 1). To address the second research question, I added the indicator of mothers' current employment status. Because single mothers are much more likely to be employed than married mothers and because the measure of work-family conflict is zero, by definition, for those who are not working, controlling for differences in employment should substantially reduce the higher levels of work family conflict for single mothers expected in Model 1. To address the third research question, I estimated a series of models that sequentially control for factors posited to contribute to higher levels of perceived work family conflict among single mothers. Model 3 includes the measures of employment circumstances, Model 4 includes family circumstances, Model 5 includes economic circumstances, and Model 6 includes all three sets of variables. Models 4 and 5 also include the dichotomous indicator of current employment, allowing for comparison with the estimated coefficient for single motherhood in Model 2. If there is some part of the difference in work-family conflict between single mothers and married mothers that is

not explained by single mothers' higher levels of employment, it is important to understand the source of that difference. Is it the result of more stressful work conditions (Model 4), more stressful family circumstances (Model 5), or economic disadvantage (Model 6)? In these models, my primary interest is in assessing the extent to which controlling for additional covariates attenuates the posited positive relationship between single motherhood and work-family conflict.

**Results**

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics separately for single mothers and married mothers. The first row shows that single mothers report significantly higher levels of work-family conflict. The difference of 2.11 points is equivalent to half a standard deviation in the index of work-family conflict. The two groups of mothers are similar in age but single mothers have lower educational attainment (55% of single mothers vs. 41% of married mothers have a high school education or less). The proportion working for pay is similar to the census figures cited earlier for single mothers (84%) but the proportion of married mothers working is higher in this sample (64%).

Single mothers employment circumstances also differ from their married counterparts in ways that suggest higher levels of work-family conflict. They are more likely to be in the highest quartile of work hours (25% vs. 13%), more likely to be a regular, full-time employee (32% vs. 20%), more likely to work irregular hours (14% vs. 9%), more likely to work night shifts (20% vs. 9%), and more likely to work two jobs (7% vs. 2%). Higher levels of intergenerational coresidence (35% vs. 22%), a lower likelihood of having a preschool child (17% vs. 38%), and a lower likelihood of receiving no help with domestic work (17% vs. 29%) suggest that family circumstances may contribute to lower levels of work-family conflict among single mothers. However, it is also clear that single mothers are more likely to have a child with a health problem

(8% vs. 4%) and a child who is performing below average in school (20% vs. 11%), both of which may exacerbate perceived work-family conflict – especially family to work conflict.

Consistent with the results of existing research summarized above, single mothers face significantly greater economic disadvantage than their married counterparts. Single mothers have significantly lower size-adjusted household income (43% vs. 12% were in the lowest income quartile), are more likely to report never saving or spending down savings (34% vs. 17%), and are more likely to report frequently economic need (21% vs. 11%) and "tough" economic circumstances (68% vs. 45%).

Estimated coefficients for Models 1-6 are presented in Table 2. Model 1 replicates the significantly higher level of work-family conflict among single mothers shown in Table 1. Other coefficients indicate that work-family conflict is positively related to mother's age and her educational attainment. Model 2 shows that a large part, but not all, of single mothers' relatively high levels of perceived work-family is explained by the fact that they are much more likely to be working. Conditional on age, educational attainment, and marital status, mothers who are employed reported an average level of 6.18 on the work-family conflict index (compared to 0 for those who are not employed) and net of employment status, single mothers report .93 points higher levels of work-family conflict than their married counterparts.

The goal of Models 3-6 is to understand the relative importance of work, family, and economic circumstances in explaining the remaining difference between single and married mothers' perceived work-family conflict. Model 3 shows that much of that difference is accounted for by single mothers' more stressful work conditions. The coefficient for single mothers is reduced from .93 to .28, although it does remain statistically different from zero. Each of the work characteristics is significantly related to work-family conflict in expected ways.

Longer work hours, full-time employment, professional/managerial jobs, irregular work hours, night work, and working more than one job are all associated with higher levels of perceived work-family conflict. Auxiliary analyses (not shown) indicate that long work hours are a particularly important source of higher work-family conflict among single mothers.

In Model 4, it is clear that having a preschool age child, a child with health problems, or a child with lower than average academic performance is associated with higher levels of work-family conflict (net of current work status), but inclusion of these stressful family circumstances does little to explain the relatively high levels of work-family conflict among single mothers. The coefficient for single mothers is largely unchanged from Model 2 and remains statistically significant.

Model 5 shows that two of the four measures of economic circumstances are associated with mothers' work-family conflict and that their inclusion attenuates the difference between single and married mothers to a small degree. Mothers who report frequently being unable to afford necessary food or clothing and those who report their economic circumstances are "tough" have higher levels of work-family conflict. Controlling for the relatively poor economic circumstances of single mothers reduces the difference with married mothers from .93 (Model 2) to .73.

When all three groups of variables are included in Model 6, the difference between single and married mothers is reduced to zero. In other words, single mothers' higher levels employment, combined with their stressful work, family, and economic circumstances account for their relatively high levels of perceived work-family conflict. Clearly, employment and stressful employment circumstances (especially long work hours) are much more important sources of work-family conflict among single mothers than are their stressful family circumstances and economic disadvantage.

**Discussion**

Rising divorce rates and the attendant increase in single-mother families is one of the most striking, and potentially important, features of family change in contemporary Japan. While much has been made of the high labor force participation rate of single mothers and of their high levels of poverty, little is known about other dimensions of well-being among this group. In this paper I focus on differences in work-family conflict – a potentially important indicator in light of single mothers' high levels of labor force participation and economic disadvantage.

Results of the models presented above demonstrate that single mothers perceive significantly higher levels of work-family conflict than their married counterparts and that this disadvantage is due primarily to their high levels of employment and long work hours. Family circumstances and economic disadvantage are related to work-family conflict in expected ways, but do not explain much of the difference between married and unmarried mothers. The limited importance of intergenerational coresidence is particularly interesting in light of limited public support for single mothers and evidence from earlier studies that coresidence with parents mitigates some of the disadvantages associated with single motherhood. One possibility is that the benefits single mothers derive from intergenerational coresidence (e.g., emotional support, assistance with childcare and domestic work) are offset by stress generated by the economic disadvantage faced by the older generation. As shown by Shirahase and Raymo (2014), nearly half of the (grand)parents with whom single mothers coreside are themselves near or below the poverty line. This is further evidence that families may have limited capacity to provide the support needed to ameliorate the disadvantages associated with single motherhood.

The findings presented in Table 2 are clear but important limitations should be kept in mind. Foremost is the limited information used to construct the measure of work family conflict. The

NSFHC questionnaires include only three questions about work family conflict (two on work-to-family conflict and one on family-to-work conflict), fewer than other sources of data typically used to study work-family conflict. The survey also contains no information about work-family enhancement, an important theoretical (and empirical) component of work-family balance with implications for individual and family well-being. Additionally, the survey contains little or no information on other established correlates of work-family conflict including access to, and utilization of, support from family members and friends, workplace characteristics including autonomy and flexibility, and the salience of work and family roles.

Taken as a whole, the results of this study shed new light on the disadvantages faced by single mothers in Japan. They suggest that policies promoting independence through employment may have unintended consequences to the extent that stressful work circumstances are detrimental to mothers' well-being. Higher levels of work-family conflict have been linked to a wide range of physical and mental health outcomes in research on the U.S., with implications not only for stratification within generations, but also for the quality of parenting and the transmission of disadvantage across generations. Evaluating these linkages in the Japanese context is an important topic for future research.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics, by family structure

| | Single-mother family | | Two-parent family | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Mean/proportion | s.d. | Mean/proportion | s.d. |
| *Work family conflict* | 5.96 | 4.13 | 3.85 | 4.20 |
| *Age* | 39.86 | 6.83 | 39.81 | 6.63 |
| *Educational Attainment* | | | | |
| Junior high school | 0.10 | | 0.04 | |
| High School | 0.45 | | 0.37 | |
| Vocational school | 0.14 | | 0.15 | |
| Junior college | 0.17 | | 0.24 | |
| University | 0.07 | | 0.17 | |
| Missing | 0.07 | | 0.04 | |
| *Working for pay* | 0.84 | | 0.64 | |
| *Hours per day working* | | | | |
| Zero, not working | 0.16 | | 0.36 | |
| First quartile | 0.11 | | 0.21 | |
| Second quartile | 0.20 | | 0.16 | |
| Third quartile | 0.27 | | 0.12 | |
| Fourth quartile | 0.25 | | 0.13 | |
| Missing | 0.01 | | 0.02 | |
| *Regular, full-time employee* | 0.32 | | 0.20 | |
| *Professional/managerial job* | 0.16 | | 0.16 | |
| *Irregular work hours* | 0.14 | | 0.09 | |
| *Works at night* | 0.20 | | 0.09 | |
| *Works more than one job* | 0.07 | | 0.02 | |
| *Coresiding with parents(-in-law)* | 0.35 | | 0.22 | |
| *Number of coresident children* | 1.64 | 0.76 | 1.94 | 0.81 |
| *Lives with a child age 5 or younger* | 0.17 | | 0.38 | |
| *Child has health problem*[a] | 0.08 | | 0.04 | |
| *Child has low academic performance* | 0.20 | | 0.11 | |
| *Receives no help with housework, childrearing*[a] | 0.17 | | 0.29 | |
| *Equivalent household income* | | | | |
| First quartile | 0.43 | | 0.12 | |
| Second quartile | 0.18 | | 0.24 | |
| Third quartile | 0.07 | | 0.30 | |
| Fourth quartile | 0.16 | | 0.23 | |
| Missing | 0.17 | | 0.11 | |
| *Savings behavior* | | | | |
| Saving almost every month | 0.21 | | 0.45 | |
| Saving sometimes | 0.21 | | 0.19 | |
| Rarely saving | 0.19 | | 0.16 | |
| Not saving at all | 0.26 | | 0.11 | |
| Using savings | 0.08 | | 0.06 | |
| Missing | 0.05 | | 0.03 | |
| *Frequently unable to afford food or clothing* | 0.21 | | 0.11 | |
| *Economic circumstances are "tough"* | 0.68 | | 0.45 | |
| N | 1,325 | | 2,812 | |
| Weighted Proportion | 0.11 | | 0.89 | |

Table 1: Results of OLS models for work-family conflict (range 0-15)

| Variable | Model 1 Coeff. | Model 2 Coeff. | Model 3 Coeff. | Model 4 Coeff. | Model 5 Coeff. | Model 6 Coeff. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Single mother*[a] | 2.24** | 0.93** | 0.28* | 0.89** | 0.73** | 0.06 |
| *Age* | 0.06** | -0.01# | -0.02* | 0.01 | -0.02* | 0.00 |
| *Educational Attainment* | | | | | | |
| Junior high school | -0.08 | 0.43* | 0.48* | 0.39# | 0.24 | 0.24 |
| High School (omitted) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Vocational school | 0.54* | 0.45** | -0.01 | 0.45** | 0.56** | 0.10 |
| Junior college | 0.21 | 0.25# | 0.03 | 0.29* | 0.40** | 0.21# |
| University | 0.94** | 1.03** | 0.53** | 1.02** | 1.19** | 0.70** |
| Missing | -0.28 | 0.19 | 0.03 | 0.30 | 0.24 | 0.13 |
| *Working*[a] | | 6.18** | | 6.25** | 6.14** | |
| *Hours per day working* | | | | | | |
| Zero, not working | | | -4.14** | | | -4.13** |
| First quartile (omitted) | | | 0.00 | | | 0.00 |
| Second quartile | | | 1.55** | | | 1.57** |
| Third quartile | | | 2.10** | | | 2.06** |
| Fourth quartile | | | 2.86** | | | 2.80** |
| Missing | | | 0.25 | | | 0.38 |
| *Regular, full-time employee*[a] | | | 0.68** | | | 0.85** |
| *Professional/managerial job*[a] | | | 0.49** | | | 0.58** |
| *Irregular work hours*[a] | | | 0.96** | | | 0.88** |
| *Works at night*[a] | | | 0.82** | | | 0.73** |
| *Works more than one job*[a] | | | 1.13** | | | 0.97** |
| *Coresiding with parents(-in-* | | | | 0.23# | | 0.06 |
| *Number of coresident children* | | | | -0.09 | | -0.02 |
| *Lives with a child age 5 or* | | | | 0.62** | | 0.43** |
| *Child has health problem*[a] | | | | 0.40** | | 0.21# |
| *Child has low academic* | | | | 0.83** | | 0.51** |
| *Receives no help with housework,* | | | | 0.07 | | 0.03 |
| *Equivalent household income* | | | | | | |
| First quartile (omitted) | | | | | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Second quartile | | | | | -0.06 | 0.03 |
| Third quartile | | | | | 0.12 | 0.12 |
| Fourth quartile | | | | | 0.28# | 0.19 |
| Missing | | | | | -0.02 | 0.12 |
| *Savings behavior* | | | | | | |
| Saving almost every month | | | | | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Saving sometimes | | | | | -0.08 | 0.18 |
| Rarely saving | | | | | -0.11 | 0.09 |
| Not saving at all | | | | | -0.22 | -0.06 |
| Using savings | | | | | -0.05 | 0.11 |
| Missing | | | | | 0.21 | 0.25 |
| *Frequently unable to afford food or clothing*[a] | | | | | 1.06** | 1.00** |
| *Economic circumstances are "tough"*[a] | | | | | 0.75** | 0.80** |
| *Constant* | 1.24** | 0.14 | 4.70** | -0.99* | -0.28 | 3.18** |
| N (mothers) | 4,037 | 4,037 | 4,037 | 4,037 | 4,037 | 4,037 |

**p < .01, *p < .05, #p < .10

Note: a) omitted category is "no"