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(Citation)

Bulletin of health sciences Kobe, 30:35-54

(Issue Date)

2014

(Resource Type)

departmental bulletin paper

(Version)

Version of Record

(JaLCD0I)

<https://doi.org/10.24546/81008794>

(URL)

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14094/81008794>



Significance of Social Support in Mothers' Communities Created through the Child-rearing Process

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Abstract

This study examined mothers' communities created through the child-rearing process and the significance of available social support in these communities. Qualitative analysis using grounded theory was performed to analyze the surveys conducted from September 2013 to July 2014 on 24 mothers with young children between the ages of one to four years. Six categories were created for mothers' child-rearing communities and five categories were established for social support. Mothers' communities included people of various generations who mothers meet because of their children; acquaintances they socialize with at only one particular place; friends with whom they share everyday child-rearing experiences; public sector staff who provide support for exchanges amongst mothers; parents-in-law who support their grandchildren; and husbands, who are understanding of their wives' exchanges with others. Social support categories included a sense that "the way I approach child-rearing is appropriate," personal child-rearing motivation arising from empathy, a sense of belonging to one's local community, broadening interest in social issues related to child-rearing, and sharing the child-rearing burden amongst relatives. The results of this study are expected to provide useful materials for understanding modern day child-rearing in order to consider the creation of mechanisms for community-based child-rearing support.

Key Words

Social support, Community support, Child rearing, Convoy model, Grounded theory

INTRODUCTION

In general, social support includes the functions of emotional support (e.g., empathy, trust, acceptance, and encouragement), informational support (e.g., advice provided for problem resolution, guidance, and suggestions), instrumental support (e.g., financial assistance and other material support), and companionship

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(e.g., providing a sense of social belonging)¹⁻³⁾. Social support is also influenced by one's cultural context. For example, there are cultures in which it is considered shameful to receive support in public places⁴⁾, and support can differ in its effectiveness depending on how it is received.

The functions of social support are further categorized into generalized support and specific support⁵⁾. Generalized support refers to support that exists regardless of whether or not the individual is facing a specific stressor, and provides a sense of both belonging and acceptance. Specific support refers to social support connected to problem-focused coping in response to specific stressors. Various approaches to measure social support have been established based on these frameworks. Approaches that examine social support for specific issues measure the structure of the networks that provide support⁶⁻⁸⁾ and criteria have been developed that take into account the type of social support provided⁹⁾, which have led to the accumulation of literature on the importance of social support in child-rearing¹⁰⁻¹⁴⁾. However, a survey conducted by Rhodes et al.¹⁵⁾ from a generalized support perspective referred to people who were not relatives of mothers and provided continual encouragement and information as “natural mentors,” and showed that mothers with these “natural mentors” were more resistant to depression. There are also studies that referred to hairdressers, beauticians, bartenders, and others who carry out emotional conversations with individuals as a part of their profession as “natural helpers”¹⁶⁾. A study conducted by Ohno et al.¹⁷⁾ also emphasized the importance of generalized support in child-rearing by spotlighting the value of having “someone in the neighborhood with whom the mother can chat.”

It is said that mothers become removed from society soon after giving birth due to child-rearing, and that they lose their existential value and become isolated¹⁸⁻¹⁹⁾. Under these circumstances, mothers' sense of isolation can be eased by conversing with shop assistants and elderly neighborhood residents¹⁸⁾. However, in Japan—with declining birthrate and increasing individualism—the current reality is that mothers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet and engage in exchanges with other mothers at the same stage of child-rearing in their local communities²⁰⁾. It is a problem that isolated parenting away from the society which often causes child maltreatment. Consequently, the national government

has begun to formulate policies related to child-rearing support, and respective local governments have begun to provide public exchange opportunities through parenting support centers and parenting salons ²¹⁾. However, a study conducted by Peters et al. ²²⁾ in the United Kingdom found that while mothers gained opportunities for exchanges with staff and other mothers in the public setting of a children's center, the support obtained through these exchanges amounted to superficial interactions, such as exchanges of information about local preschools. Mothers participated in these exchange opportunities very guardedly, due to their fear that they would be labeled incompetent if they sought parenting support in a public forum. Modern day neighborhoods that once provided a foundation for residents—children and the elderly included—to help each other have weakened. Mothers today are responsible for choosing the support they require for child-rearing. Specialists who are engaged in assisting childcare can determine the important elements in developing the community support for mothers by understanding the effectiveness of social support provided by mothers' community, how they make up the relationship between the resources both generalized and specialized support. Therefore, this paper aims to determine the key components of mothers' communities created through the child-rearing process and significance of available social support in these communities.

METHODS

This study used a grounded theory approach from a symbolic interaction theory perspective to derive theories related to social support in mothers' child-rearing communities. Charmaz's grounded theory ²³⁾ takes a structuralism stance by identifying the location where a certain phenomenon takes place as well as "how," "when," and "to what extent" the research subjects' experiences exist within networks, situations, and relationships. This requires sensitization to conditions for specific phenomena to appear. Thus, Charmaz's grounded theory does not stop at simply recording the experiences of research subjects, but rather is a methodology that makes it possible to extract meaning from interpretations of these experiences. There are some philosophies in Grounded theory approach. Objectivists get rid of the interpretation of researchers in analyzing process and their approach is systematic for the generation of the theory. On the other hand,

constructivists generate the theory through interpretation by the researchers. The descriptions of mothers' talking we interviewed comprised recognition and behavior in parenting scene. It required interpreting the data were located into context to understand dynamics of the mothers' community and significance of the social support. Therefore, this study used Charmaz's grounded theory which is social constructionism.

Operational Definition Regarding "Community"

Maciver ²⁴⁾ stated that, regardless of their size, communities refer to areas that share geography or locality or are structured around a particular interest; the element shared by these two categories being common life. In addition, community sentiment ²⁵⁾ and sense of community ²⁶⁾ are elements that pull people together and create communities through membership, mutual influence, and sentimental ties. In this study, the term "community" is defined as something created through interactions between people, and is distinct from communities that share a locality or are structured around a particular interest, such as self-help groups ²⁷⁾. Even though relationships may initially be formed around a particular interest, such as mothers' peer groups, it is possible that they will later transform into relationships in mothers' local communities. Conversely, it is envisioned that relationships in local communities may also transform into relationships that do not share a locality. The Convoy Model ²⁸⁾ formulated by Kahn and Antonucci was used to define structural elements in mothers' communities and changes in their relationships with others.

The Convoy Model categorizes the relationships between an individual and others from the perspectives of life span and life course into three groups: 1) relationships that do not change, such as those with spouses and relatives; 2) relationships that can easily change with the passage of time in part due to people's roles, such as seen with school friends; and 3) relationships that easily change due to people's roles, such as those with specialists who are consulted on specific issues. The Convoy Model has been applied in many studies on social support and its effectiveness has been proved ²⁹⁾.

Hiller ³⁰⁾ defined "community" as a social group. However, in this paper mothers' communities do not necessarily refer to social groups; here the definition of "community" includes exchanges that are more simple and natural than those of a social group and can be entered and exited freely, and the

structural elements are mothers who meet through child-rearing and people who influence the relationships between them.

Sample and Setting

Permanent parenting salons are operated based on government grants²¹⁾, which many mothers make use of. Accordingly, mothers who participate in parenting salons were selected as the subjects for this study.

The subjects in this study consisted of mothers of varying ages with young children between the ages of one to four. Working mothers with children in nursery schools were also included as research subjects in order to include their experiences in the analysis. It didn't matter whether they had spouse or not. Regionality was expected to have an impact on mothers' interactions with other people, but sampling from multiple municipalities enabled common elements to be identified while also considering the impact of these regional differences. Accordingly, we chose parenting salon/nursery school survey locations in municipalities of varying populations: four were selected from city with populations of approximately 1.9 million, one was selected from a municipality that represented a population of approximately 90,000, one was selected from a municipality that represented a population of approximately 20,000, and three locations were selected from municipalities with populations of 10,000 or less.

Data Collection

Before conducting the survey, we first asked the directors of each facility for their cooperation, and explained both verbally and in writing the purpose of the study and ethical considerations for subjects. Research subjects were recruited from amongst the mothers who attended the parenting salon on the day of the survey through introductions by facility staff. The purpose of the study and ethical considerations were explained to the participants. We conducted the interview after receiving the letter of consent from the participants. Because sociable mothers tended to be chosen through introductions by facility staff, we also directly recruited four subjects at each parenting salon. Two mothers declined the participation and three mothers couldn't take part in because their child burst out crying. Interviews were conducted in a small room adjoined to the parenting salon, ensuring a space where privacy could be maintained. In addition, assistants were assigned to look after subjects' children and efforts were made to

create a survey environment that would enable mothers to concentrate as fully as possible on the interviews, and speak easily based on a relationship of trust with the researchers.

Data was collected between September 2013 and July 2014. Because parenting salons are around 90 minutes in duration, only two subjects could be interviewed at each visit. Interviews were recorded on IC recorders and transcribed verbatim to provide data. Interviews ranged in duration from 25 minutes to 58 minutes depending on the subject, and averaged 36 minutes.

A semi-structured interviewing method was used, and interview guidelines were prepared to enable interviewers to ask mothers about their thoughts on experiences and/or exchanges in their communities since their child's birth.

Aiming for theoretical saturation, the scope of the theory development examined in this study was narrowed down to the identification of structural elements and changes in mothers' communities and the social support received from these communities. Notes were made of questions and points of interest raised in the analytical process as well as content related to concept construction, which were utilized in the next session of data sampling. Theoretical sufficiency was achieved after around 15 interviews, and although nine additional interviews were subsequently carried out, no new concept discoveries were observed and thus sampling was concluded after a total of 24 interviews.

The fieldwork consisted of 37 visits to 18 parenting salons for participant-observation of mothers' behavior and interactions with staff and other mothers.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was performed using Charmaz's grounded theory²³⁾. The data used were verbatim transcriptions of interview recordings. Data that focused on the relationships between mothers and child-rearing communities were extracted and coded based upon anecdotes regarding people mothers met through child-rearing activities, mothers' thoughts on child-rearing, and comments related to emotion. The codes were examined for similarities and integrated into secondary and final codes in order to create subcategories to explain specific concepts. Furthermore, for *in vivo* codes such as "my lifestyle has 'changed completely' since my child was born"—a comment expressed by many of the mothers—the context of this comment's background and the experiences and shared awareness of subjects who made this comment were carefully explored. In

this way, subcategory characteristics were examined while focused coding was carried out. The scope and conditions of subcategory characteristics such as “who did what, when, where, and how?” in addition to characteristics such as peace of mind and sense of freedom were carefully explored. Furthermore, relationships between subcategories were multi-layered in accordance with the structural and process aspects of the subcategory characteristics, and categories were created. These categories provided important concepts to explain the theories used in this study. Researchers returned to and checked codes and data as necessary in the process of categorization while carrying out posteriori analysis.

During the theoretical codification processes, participant checks ³¹⁾ were performed on five subjects in order to ascertain the appropriateness of our interpretation of the data, and corrections were made if necessary. The participant observations conducted over multiple sessions were beneficial in verifying the appropriateness of the generated concepts and in exploring new perspectives. Furthermore, after the interviews were conducted, the authors reviewed the interview content with research assistants to ensure that we had correctly interpreted the mothers' experiences, the context of these experiences, and the meaning of what was said. Research collaborators familiar with public health nursing and richly experienced in qualitative research also examined the data.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted with the approval of the Ethical Review Board of the Hokkaido University Graduate School of Health Sciences (Authorization Number: 09-21).

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The mothers' demographic characteristics are shown in table 1. Findings showed that mothers' age and educational background didn't have an impact on social support they received. There were mothers who have a child and there were some who have 2 – 3 children. These mothers talked about their experiences basing mainly on their first child. There are differences in strength of social support provided by mothers' networks according to living area, urban or not, and distance from their parents but common key components were extracted.

Table 1 Mothers' demographic characteristics

	n
spouse	24
age	
25–29	1
30–34	6
35–39	13
40–44	4
employment	5
education	
high school	11
vocational/junior college	3
university	10
number of children	
one	14
two	7
more than three	3
residence	
single-family house	9
condominium complex	4
rental or company housing	11
area*	
urban	13
non urban	11
dwelling history (year)	
–1	3
1–4	11
5–	10
frequency meeting their parents	
1– par week	1
1– par month	16
2–3 per year	4
–1 per year	3
anxiety regarding their children's health	
non	24

* urban: population more than a million

Key Components of Mothers' Communities Created through the Child-rearing Process

Six categories and 21 subcategories were identified as key components of mothers' child-rearing communities. These categories explain the characteristics of mothers' communities with regard to mothers' interactions and structural changes to communities based on the strength and degree of psychological distance of relationships. The following is an explanation of the categories. Hereinafter, the subcategories are denoted using “ ”.

1) People of Various Generations who Mothers Meet because they Have Children

The subcategory “my lifestyle has ‘changed completely’ since my child was born” refers to changing lifestyles in which mothers' actions and activities give priority to their children. At the same time, the relationships that mothers previously had with others were reset, signifying that they were attempting to build new relationships as mother with children. People in local communities tended to speak to mothers more frequently when they saw their children, and the mothers felt that “my child/children is/are a cushion for interactions with other people.” Furthermore, prior to giving birth, mothers only had interactions with others in the workplace—no exchanges within the local community—but after having quit their jobs or taken maternity leave upon giving birth, the mothers' relationships with others changed. Mothers reported that “since my child was born, I have come to talk with people of various generations in my neighborhood,” and experienced “a gradual increase in the number of acquaintances in the neighborhood” through child-raising, including elderly people and those met through parenting salons.

2) Acquaintances at only One Place

Parenting salons differ according to the program and locality, but generally 20-40 mother-child pairs attended each meeting. Although each time mothers attended salons they had opportunities to meet new people and participate in exchanges, they felt that “acquaintances met at parenting salons are relationships conducted only at one place” and created psychological distance in these relationships so as to “not get too deeply involved,” resulting in superficial, innocuous relationships.

3) Friends with whom Mothers Share Everyday Child-rearing Experiences

Mothers reported that they “made friends through participation in parenting salons and other public opportunities.” In these forums, it is easy to become friends with “mothers of children around the same age,” and in some cases exchanges developed into “relationships where we kept in contact with each other and went on social outings together.” There were also exchanges at salons with “experienced mothers who could be relied upon” as they had older children, and therefore had longer child-raising experience than the mothers that were interviewed. Moreover, although mothers spoke of “friends from before I became pregnant,” in reality they met these friends only infrequently, with the main form of exchange being via e-mail.

4) Public Sector Staff who Support Exchanges Amongst Mothers

Mothers meet public health nurses at local health centers when their children undergo medical examinations, and are able to consult childcare workers about child-rearing matters at parenting support centers. The mothers reported that they could “trust nurses and childcare workers because they see a lot of children.” In addition, health center and parenting support center staff recommended that mothers participate in parenting salons and other opportunities for exchanges with other mothers. Staff at parenting salons initiate conversations with first-time participants and mothers who have difficulty interacting with others, performing a “role in supporting mothers’ exchanges” as gentle intermediaries that bring participants together.

5) Mothers’ Parents-in-law Available for Child-rearing Support

This category denotes the changing relationships between mothers and their parents-in-law. Mothers reported that “I cannot ask my in-laws for something for myself, but I can ask for things for my children,” explaining that “the psychological distance between my husband’s parents and myself has shrunk due to my child’s birth.” Specifically, by having mothers’ parents-in-law provide child-rearing support, the children bond with their grandparents and the relationship between mothers and parents-in-law develops into one that is closer, which enables friendly conversation between them. In this way, “building a good relationship with my husband’s parents” impacts the quality of supportive relationships.

6) Husbands who are Understanding of Mothers' Exchanges with Others

A "sociable husband" refers to someone who might, for example, enjoy family get-togethers such as barbecues or make efforts to build good relationships with relatives. In addition, husbands who "as far as possible, participate in events together as husband and wife" influenced wives' motivation to participate in opportunities for interaction. Furthermore, a "husband who is understanding of my exchanges with other people," such as accepting his wife's friends at their home, had a large impact on the richness of mothers' exchanges with others.

Significance of Available Social Support in Mothers' Communities

Five categories and 11 subcategories were created for the social support that mothers receive from their communities. These categories included a sense of belonging, peace of mind, empathy, refreshment, and morale from emotional support, as well as informational support that provided useful information for problem-solving and stimulated mothers' issue awareness. In addition, instrumental support that lightened the burden of child-raising was also observed.

1) A Sense that "the way I approach child-rearing is appropriate"

Mothers obtained "beneficial information for child-rearing" through exchanges with other mothers and parenting salon staff. Mothers felt that they could clarify any methods or knowledge pertaining to various questions and anxieties of child-rearing by, for example, mentioning issues they had investigated on the Internet and listening to other people's opinions. Furthermore, parenting salons enabled mothers to compare their child's development with other children and hear about other families' child-rearing methods, leading to the sentiment that "it was possible to accumulate a stock of parenting reference materials through actual case examples." In this way, the relationships between mothers and/or parenting salon staff serve the function of guaranteeing mothers peace of mind by enabling them to compare their situation with others, realizing that "everyone is in the same boat."

2) Motivation Arising from Empathy in Child-rearing

Mothers reported that they felt isolated and unhappy when in their homes with just their children, but felt that participating in parenting salons and "talking to other mothers provided a distraction." Furthermore, mothers were able to share

their questions and anxieties regarding problems with their children's growth with other mothers of children around the same age, and reported that parenting salons "enabled me to share my child-rearing concerns and gain peace of mind." In this way, relationships between mothers currently raising children can serve the function of providing motivation for child-rearing.

3) A Sense that Mother is a Part of their Local Communities

Mothers were enveloped in the positive emotion that "people in my neighborhood are interested in my children and myself" due to their experiences of people who remembered their children's names and/or greeted them when they were out walking or shopping (e.g., supermarkets or convenience stores). Mothers also reported feeling "happy when someone speaks to me because I feel they are concerned about me." Thus, such moderate relationships on the level of casual daily greetings with people in one's local community provided subjects with a sense that "I can make a place for myself in the community by increasing the number of people I know here."

4) Broadening Interest in Social Issues Related to Child-rearing

This category describes how mothers' interests expanded from inward-looking—raising my children—to include local environments relevant to child-rearing in exchanges with other people. Mothers reported that "I became interested in government-provided child-rearing support," which indicates that by becoming beneficiaries of child-rearing support services mothers are able to compare and evaluate services through the exchange of information with other mothers. Interest germinated within them regarding issues that affect their children's futures, such as the consolidation of elementary schools. In addition, the sentiment that "I have interest in the neighborhood environment where I am raising my children" spread beyond the perspective of safety (i.e., traffic conditions and people's comings and goings) to include the potential for exchanges (i.e., the number of children around the same age as their children).

5) Sharing the Child-rearing Burden Amongst Relatives

Mothers receive concrete support from relatives such as mothers-in-law (the children's grandmothers), who not only care for their grandchildren, but also prepare meals and more. Mothers reported that relatives "provide support not

only for child-raising, but also for everyday living.” Furthermore, with regard to relatives who contributed “thoughts on child-rearing and discipline”, many of the mothers reported that “I depend on relatives to a greater extent”. However, at times stress was experienced due to different approaches to parenting or from other stressors particular to relationships with relatives, but even so, mothers were grateful for the tangible support from relatives, and reported that “although there are both positive and negative aspects, overall the support is greatly appreciated.”

The Relationship between Mothers' Child-rearing Communities and Social Support

The relationship between mothers' child-rearing communities and social support is shown in Figure 1. Hereinafter, categories are denoted by [].

Mothers' communities were sub-classified into component communities based on local communities and particular interests. From the social support provided by [Mothers' Parents-in-law Available for Child-rearing Support] mothers obtained support in the form of [Sharing the Child-rearing Burden Amongst Relatives]. The support provided by [Husbands who are Understanding of Mothers' Exchanges with Others] affected the formation of relationships within both local communities and communities built around particular interests.

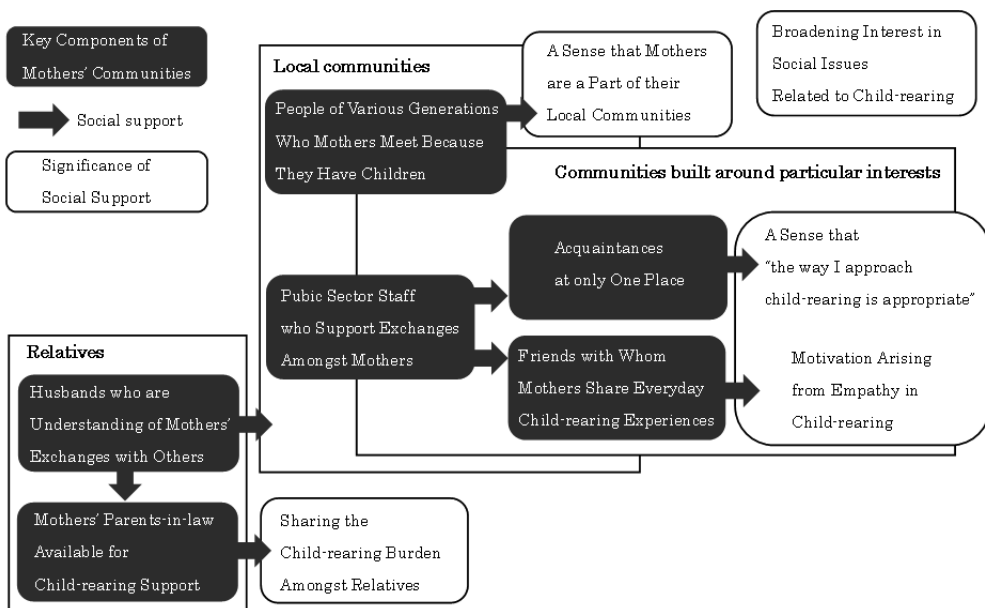


Fig.1 The relationship between mothers' child-rearing communities and social support

Many of the mothers interviewed had moved to their neighborhoods when they had gotten married or given birth, and so their circles of friends mainly consisted of people they had met after their children were born. Consequently, [Public Sector Staff who Support Exchanges Amongst Mothers] provided support for exchanges with [Friends with Whom Mothers Share Everyday Child-rearing Experiences] and [Acquaintances at only One Place]. Mothers received support through exchanges with other mothers, gaining [A Sense that “the way I approach child-rearing is appropriate”] and [Motivation Arising from Empathy in Child-rearing]. Furthermore, although public sector staff, friends, and acquaintances of mothers were in communities based around particular interests, mothers would also sometimes later socialize with these people as members of the local community—while shopping at supermarkets, visiting doctors’ offices, at sports days organized by local neighborhood associations, and so forth. Within local communities, support from [People of Various Generations Who Mothers Meet Because They Have Children] resulted in [A Sense that Mothers are a Part of their Local Communities]. Moreover, mothers gained a [Broadening Interest in Social Issues Related to Child-rearing] from exchanges with members of their local communities and/or communities based around particular interests.

DISCUSSION

Mothers’ child-rearing communities are comprised of their husbands, relatives, local community residents, health center and parenting salon staff, and friends/acquaintances with whom they share common child-rearing issues and topics. These communities include ones that are formed in an area—the local community in which the mother lives—and ones formed in response to a specific purpose. In addition, volunteers who mothers meet at parenting salons may also, for example, be senior members at local neighborhood organizations, thus leading to relationships in local neighborhoods even after mothers have left parenting salons. Thus, relationships formed by mothers in communities that are not area-based may transform into such.

Mothers may experience a sense of belonging within their local communities when they maintain relationships that involve friendly greetings. For mothers feeling lonely and isolated from society, these relationships provide important social support to confirm their connection with society ¹⁸⁾ and provide

companionship ²⁾. Granovetter ³²⁾ referred to such relationships as the “strength of weak ties” in a local community and suggested that they provide mothers with a sense of belonging and peace of mind.

Previous papers have noted the importance of social support from public sector staff at health centers and parenting salons ³³⁾. According to the Convoy Model ²⁸⁾, relationships with specialists are positioned the farthest away from mothers, and are the most susceptible to change depending on specialists' anticipated role and degree of necessity. The Convoy Model also states that the existence of public sector staff is important at a relatively early stage of child-rearing but their role diminishes as mothers begin to establish relationships for themselves.

There are two types of relationships between mothers raising children: acquaintances, who mothers see at only one specific place, and mutually supportive friends in child-rearing. Through relationships with acquaintances, mothers receive social support similar to companionship ²⁾ with members of the local community, which results in a sense of belonging, peace of mind, and the guarantee of social contact by talking with adults other than family members. Furthermore, similar to the phenomena observed at children's centers in the United Kingdom ²²⁾, mothers receive superficial support such as having their children's development compared with other children and receiving information about other parenting salons. The social support gained from friends who mutually aid each other in child-rearing activities includes emotional support, evaluative support—including affirmation—and informational support, which helps mothers evaluate their own performance in terms of child-rearing as acceptable, which is important given the difficulties of feeling certain and remaining motivated while child-rearing.

Virtually all of the mothers who were interviewed spoke about the importance of their relationships with parents-in-law. There were mothers in this study with relatives who accepted their children as collective property and were able to share in the burden of raising them. This study found that mothers—who do not have a blood connection with their parents-in-law—changed their relationships with parents-in-law due to their children, which brought mothers and relatives closer together. Kakizaki ³⁴⁾ also reported that in the process of having a baby, the wife gets a feeling that she is becoming one of the husband's relatives. According to the Convoy Model ²⁸⁾, relatives are positioned closest to

the mothers and their relationship does not change. However, this study clearly showed that mothers' relationships with parents-in-law continued to build through child-rearing in a present progressive form. This result is new finding in social support studies.

Furthermore, husbands were an influencing factor on the relationships that mothers had within their communities. Tanaka ³⁵⁾ also mentioned the importance of fathers' support in mothers' sociability for making networks. And it is known that these mothers' marital satisfaction during the child-rearing years is related to distress ³⁶⁾. The results of this study indicated that the relationship between a husband and wife must also be considered when measuring the amount and quality of social support that mothers receive from outside of their families.

In this study, data on the age distribution of subjects, employment status, educational background, residence status, and municipality was obtained and analyzed from a diverse range of samples. Consequently, because the study did not focus on phenomena occurring in specific child-rearing environments, it is possible that not all of the specific support could be explained. In addition, because the survey targeted average, ordinary mothers who were able to participate in parenting salons of their own volition and were not concerned about their children's health, there is also a possibility that the extracted data was centered on generalized support. In the case of mothers raising children who are ill or disabled, or in cases where the mother herself is ill or has a disability, explanations of specific support could have been given. In addition, this study didn't include single mothers and other situations, so these sampling conditions have limitations and will not apply to all mothers' situation. However, the results of this study are novel in that they explain the relationships between child-rearing mothers and their communities with regards to social support, and explore changes in these relationships. The results also painted a picture of mothers becoming members of their local communities /neighborhoods through child-rearing activities. The research results are expected to provide useful materials for understanding modern day child-rearing in order to consider the creation of mechanisms for community-based child-rearing support.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided insight about the significance of social support and the mothers' community. First, from the standpoint of community theory, mothers built both local communities and communities based on particular interests in order to obtain the generalized support they needed for child-rearing. Furthermore, relationships that began in communities based around particular interests could transform into relationships within local communities.

Second, mothers' relationships with people in their communities changed as children grew and developed. For example, the relationship between a mother and her parents-in-law became closer through child-rearing, the reliance on specialists and staff at health and parenting support centers gradually diminished, and relationships with people in local communities were gradually enriched.

Third, from the standpoint of social support theory, a mixture of strong and weak ties was identified in the relationships between mothers, a diverse range of social support sources—people a mother meets because of her children, specialists, relatives, and her husband—was examined, and significance of the social support available to mothers was investigated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grant Number 23792682, Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B). The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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