

The Mentality of Mothers with Problems of Childcare Difficulty or Maltreatment : The Wrong Cycle Surrounding Self-denial

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KEY WORDS

child care, mother, difficulty, mentality, maltreatment

Introduction

There are many factors that are intricately intertwined in the background of the incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment. Besides the problems of malfunctioning parent-child relationship due to anxiety and struggle experienced by the mother, there are also problems of conflict in relationships between husband and wife, with one's own parents, family, neighbors, friends and social resources (public/private organizations) that have been pointed out as factors. Other factors that have also been pointed out are emotional and behavioral characteristics commonly observed in mothers, i.e., the tendency to think one is at fault, expectations and feelings of betrayal toward a specific person, strong feelings of suspicions, of being harmed, impulsiveness, tendency for falling into a dominant-subordinate relationship in human relations, and tendency for isolating oneself by escaping from social stimulation.

Nishizawa¹⁾ has comprehensively perceived such characteristics of mothers as trauma reactions that occurred in the mother's own experience of abuse, by incorporating van der Kolk's concept of "the Internalization of the Trauma" (1996) to explain the incidence of abuse. In other words, the characteristics shared by mothers are the results of the trauma that occurred in experiencing abuse in childhood having distorted one's recognition of self, subject or the environment and one's relationship with the subject. Such characteristic, that is to say, self-recognition as in "I who is being harmed by violence" and the recognition of the subject or the environment that is "a dangerous

entity that behaves violently or attacks me," subsequently create the re-experiencing of an abusive relationship in human relations. Moreover, he described that abuse occurs as the repetition of trauma experience further fixates and patternizes the distortion of the mother's recognition and the mother perceives her child as "an entity that attacks her." This explanation is the result of Nishizawa's profound insight and analysis based on clinical experience and findings of foregoing research and is highly thought-provoking. However, it is likely that there are actually incidences of abuse that do not necessarily correspond to such a description.

In researches and case analysis that examined the mechanism of the incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment, the following are cited as elements of the incidence of abuse. 1. The mother's psychological resources (personality determined by the person's upbringing or assurance in one's heart and soul) or the mother's experience of suffering abuse or deprivation in infancy. 2. Cognitive distortion of the mother about herself or her child. 3. Presence of a critical state beyond the limit. 4. Lack of support resources.^{2)~6)} However, "the connections between these elements" and "the patterns of the incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment that could probably be explained from such connections" are still unclear as to what sort of situations these elements create and what sort of emotions the mother goes through that lead her to abuse.

With this in mind, we had an idea of explaining the incidence of maltreatment from the mother's perspective through clarifying what sort of emotions the mother goes

through in finally abusing her child and what that means to the mother. We hope to extract more comprehensive ideas and perspective that would ultimately explain the incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment. Core of Amos's model summarized in the systematic review of the literature on the psychology of maltreatment, is the hypothesis that a mother's maltreating behavior arises from unconscious attempts to experientially avoid the reemergence of an attachment-related dissociative part of the personality that contains the distress arising from her own early experiences of attachment relationships⁷⁾. According to the results of this research, we can explain mother's psychology (hypothesis) "avoiding suffering unconsciously" by using cases.

Method of Research

1. Subjects

Mothers who have or experienced the problems of childcare or maltreatment or anxiety of abuse are the subjects of this study. However we decided to exclude mothers who did not talk about anxiety that they are likely to abuse their children as it is or inappropriate child rearing behavior to the child in the interview of this study.

2. Recruitment

We requested for cooperation in the study by distributing a letter of request for participation in the study to participants of a session organized by a mother's group dealing with anxiety of child-rearing and also by preparing a letter of request in a mother and child meeting place where child-rearing mothers gather for one month, and having those who are thought to correspond to the subject of the study fill out and submit their preferred date, time and place of interview on the application for participation in the study by fax or post. When distributing the letter of request for participation in the study in the mother group, I asked group leaders to explain it easily. In the letter, we called for mothers who are taking their frustration out on their child, having a hard time caring for their child and those who think it is difficult to keep distance with others tactfully, and noted the objectives of the study as well as the contents, ethical considerations, affiliations of the researchers and contact details. These characteristics of mother written on the letter are almost the same content as the items

of the distress subscale of the Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory, and these characteristics of mothers are significantly related with inappropriate parenting experiences in childhood. Further analysis has revealed that the distress subscale of the CAP inventory is one of the most meaningful dimensions in the understanding of why some people abuse children⁸⁾. Therefore, we judged that the mother who offered that these characteristics are applicable applied to the subject of this study who is in childcare situation of childcare difficulty and abuse.

3. Data Collection

The researcher visited the mothers at home and conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview consisted of four parts: 1. Self introduction and explanation of the objectives of the study and ethical considerations, 2. Introduction, 3. Main subject, and 4. Conclusion. Mothers with problems of childcare frequently have low self-esteem and a strong feeling of anxiety. They also often hide their true feelings, as they think their profound distress cannot be understood, though they may be criticized or hurt by reproach if they confess to their actual condition. Therefore, words of expressing empathetic and receptive stance were incorporated in the self introduction and after discussing about the emotions of the mothers who are suffering with problems of childcare in the introduction to the interview, we had them talk freely about; 1. The subject's status of childcare and her feelings when she is treating their child unkindly, and: 2. Feelings for her child. The researcher asked her on points that raised questions and interest while being careful as to not change the direction of the mother's story and I got her to talk about them in detail: 3. Relationships with her husband, parents, neighbors and friends, and: 4. Her supporters. When the mothers seemed to have problems talking in the introduction part, the interviewer asked safe questions that were easier for the mothers to answer such as topics on childbirth and so on where necessary. We recorded the the contents of the interview after obtaining the permission of the mothers. The period of data collection and initial analysis is from 1999 to 2005. The results of the first analysis were reanalyzed from January 2016 to March, and the accuracy was improved.

4. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the interview was left to the freewill of the subjects, which was noted in the letter of request

for participation in the study and even at the interview after the subjects had expressed their intention to participate, their informed consent was obtained. 1. A participant is free to discontinue participation in the interview or refuse a statement, 2. Information obtained will not be used for purposes besides the study and individual information shall be kept strictly confidential, 3. An individual shall not be specified in the publication of the study, 4. The tapes shall be kept under lock and key, and 5. No disadvantages for the mother shall be guaranteed regardless of her participation or non-participation in the study (such as the disclosure of the mother's participation in the study in mother's group, etc.).

The contents of the interview included the mother's feelings in abusing her child, troubles she feels in the relationships with her child, husband and neighbors, which are personal and internal. As it was expected that some mothers would be hurt by responding to the interview, reminded of hard experiences she has had in the past or perhaps talk unintentionally about something she had no intention of bringing up, the interviewers were asked to pay particular attention to the facial expression and demeanor of the mothers and do not force them to speak unnecessarily. If there are mothers who did not talk about anxiety that they are likely to abuse their children as it is or inappropriate child rearing behavior to the child in the interview, at the end of the interview, I will give thanks for cooperation to the interview and also provide information on consultation agencies and self-help group according to request.

5. Analysis Method

We created verbatim records from the contents of the interview. A grounded theory approach(GTA) was used

in the analysis, which was carried out in the following procedures. The reason for using the GTA is that the purpose of this research is to extract concepts and perspectives that explain the psychological phenomena of mothers who maltreat children.

- 1) What leads the mother to abuse? In what conditions does abuse occur? What sort of feelings does the mother have in facing her child? What does the phenomenon of abuse mean to the mother? The data of the verbatim record was interpreted with these questions as guidelines and phenomena were collected as ideas by naming (encoding) each sentence or paragraph. As the same time properties were picked up as ideas explaining the phenomenon and dimension that represents individual unit (degree, classification) of the property extracted.
- 2) Collected ideas were separated into categories, which were given names
While comparing the categories with other cases and different circumstances.
- 3) We examined the relationship of categories. And we noted the underlying
Storyline using the extracted categories, in other words, what sort of emotions does the mother have or under what sort of conditions does she abuse her child. Furthermore, we also named the contents of the experience of the mother that are apparent in the storyline (the extraction of core categories).

Results and Discussion

1. Summary of the Subjects (Table 1)

There were seven mothers who cooperated in the interview, and although two of them did speak of their difficulty and status of childcare, they were omitted as

Table.1 Characteristic of Subject

| Case | Age range of Mother | Number of child and sex | Developmental period of child | occupation |
|------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | 30s | 2 boys | 1 pupil, 1 preschooler | part job |
| 2 | 30s | 2 boys | 1 pupil, 1 preschooler | housewife |
| 3 | 30s | 2 boys and 1girl | 1 pupil, 2 preschoolers | housewife |
| 4 | 20s | 2 boys and 1girl | 3 preschoolers | housewife |
| 5 | 20s | 1 boy | preschooler | housewife |

subjects in the analysis, as they did not speak of their maltreatment or anxiety towards their potential abuse (anxiety that they would end up abusing their child if their problems are not addressed). The five mothers who spoke of their abusing behavior or anxiety toward potential abuse were in their 20s and 30s who have one to four infants or primary school children. One of them is a part time worker and four are housewives.

2. Incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment and improvement

As the result of analyzing the part where the mentality and conditions of maltreatment were spoken in the data of the verbatim record, it became clear that the mothers with the problems of childcare and maltreatment had periods of “undisturbed period of childcare” and “emotionally out of control period of childcare,” and that these two periods were repeated cyclically by being triggered by some sort of factors.

The reasons why mothers get seriously angry, verbally abuse, hit or reject her child that; Her feelings of “inadequacy” or “not being accepted by others” that she originally has had consciously or unconsciously (『negative self-image』) seem to be further confirmed by raising children, or Her feelings of being persecuted as 『a failure of a mother』 by her child (or used to be no good as a child) are leading her to violent anger and frustration. It became apparent that the mother’s self-accusation or self-hatred towards herself, who is taking out her anger on her child intensified the 『negative self-image』 that she has always had, which causes her agony and anxiety to mount, which gets her into the vicious cycle of venting her anger more on her child (This has been categorized as 『the vicious cycle surrounding self-denial』).

In order to make the creation of the meaning of the data significant, here we have described the results of the data interpretation and analysis altogether (extracted ideas as a category, properties and the storyline explained by them). Categories bracket 『』 and properties (lower categories) bracket 『』. So that the reader can confirm the relevance of the data interpretation, we have inserted the mothers’ spoken words as they are to the extent that they are not specifying particular persons. However, we have supplemented explanations in brackets for sentences that were unclear.

1) Cycle of Childcare

It became clear through talking to mothers that they have two cycles of childcare: The 『emotionally out of control period』 in which she would snap at the most trifling things that she would severely scold, verbally abuse, hit or reject her child, and would tend to treat her child 『unreasonably』, 『on impulse』. The other is the 『undisturbed period』, which in comparison has no violent emotional roller-coaster rides where emotions are controlled relatively well.

In the 『emotionally out of control period of childcare』, the mother has negative feelings that makes her hate her child, not think of her child as adorable, cannot accept or approve of her child, but in the 『undisturbed period of childcare』, such negative feelings are either relieved or the mother would have in contrary, positive emotions that she thinks of her child as adorable, and no matter what she is told, she is able to accept her child and she thinks she enjoys being with her child.

In such ways, the mothers were 『periodically』 experiencing two cycles with distinctively different emotions and treatment toward her child, and it seemed that there are two patterns to the cyclical changes depending on 『whether the emotional and behavioral patterns changed abruptly or gradually』.

2) Patterns of Cyclical Changes of Childcare

The mother in the following spoke of how her emotional and behavioral patterns change abruptly and into two extreme conditions.

There seems to be a cycle of some sort and I am not sure what causes it. There is such a big gap in my feelings that there are times when I really adore (my child) and times when I really hate my child. Yeah. I am not sure when this swing occurs. What is it? How should I describe it? When I hit (my child) once, it seems that what I have been holding back is unleashed. Then I really get angry from that point onwards that I explode in rage. I know it is bad to hit, but I cannot help myself. By hitting my child, I become obsessed with self-hatred again and become increasingly frustrated. It is such a vicious cycle and it does not continue forever that something sets me off to really think of my child as adorable (smile). Then, no matter what my child says, I

can listen willingly.

This mother has experienced dramatic changes cyclically in which she has negative feelings toward her child and tends to treat her child on impulse (emotionally out of control period of childcare), and the opposite in which something sets her off to enable her to accept her child positively and her impulsive treatment is diminished (undisturbed period of childcare). We decided to call such a dramatic cyclical change as “explosive cyclical change”.

The mother who goes through a cycle in this pattern spoke of her feelings when she is hitting her child.

It seems that I become a different person. My personality changes. How shall I say...? I do not feel anything when I am hitting my child that I do not even feel sorry for the child. Well, I really hate my child at that point and I do not know how to describe it, but my personality changes. It does not last long, though. It does not last for a day and it is more like a second. In the beginning it was not very frequent, but at one point, hitting my child was a form of releasing stress. So much so that, this would sound strange, but making my child obeys by hitting became fun (pleasurable?). Yeah, there was a period when I was going through that. Though perhaps I was getting more stressed out. People tell me that I have no reason to be stressed out. I think so myself. I think it must be my personality and that I always have that element in me. Something triggers me to hit my child, which brings out that side of me... I remember there were times like that.

In that moment, the mother has not so much a sense of guilt towards her own behavior but pleasure in controlling her child by hitting the child. Her unreasonable behavior is not caused by her stress but rather caused by the hidden personality of the mother herself. In this interview, the mother said that her highly impulsive and aggressive behavior was inherited by her parent and that she actually hated herself for being that way.

There were some mothers who experience their emotional and behavioral patterns change not dramatically but gradually into slightly different conditions rather than into extreme conditions. This is

the second pattern of the cyclical changes of childcare. Specifically, mothers are found to go through cyclical changes of her volatile emotional swings becoming less, becoming able to control her emotions relatively well, her negative feelings being relieved (undisturbed period of childcare) or the reverse. We named the gradual change of a mother’s emotion and behavior as “wavelike cyclical change.”

A mother whose cycle changes in a wavelike pattern spoke of her feelings when she is maltreating her child as follows.

There was a time that I clearly remember when my child did not tidy up the toy blocks and I burst into a fit of rage. Though I thought to myself in the corner of my mind that I should not get angry at such a thing (tearfully), but at that moment I did not care if I made my child cry and told the child to tidy up even if that means throwing the toys away. Somewhere in me, another me was thinking that I might carry this emotion with me forever. I am frightened of myself when I am like that and I hate myself for it. So I thought I would probably be rather emotionally volatile in raising my child. It was as if I had given up on myself who permitted such a behavior, but I also thought I should not be that way. But because I am with my child constantly in everyday life, I frequently get into a rage though I know it is not right. I have been languishing over for so long about how I cannot control my emotions.

The mother had a sense of guilt towards her behavior when she hit her child, thinking in the corner of her mind that she should not abuse her child. This is the difference with mothers who go through an explosive cyclical change. On the other hand, she was compelled to feel the undeniable self who gets emotionally volatile and also had the sense of helplessness towards the situation that she always struggles and suffers.

3) Wrong cycle surrounding self-denial and related factors

Mother’s negative self-image rooted in their childhood experience related to the incidence of problems of childcare difficulty or maltreatment. What the following two mothers describe here are typical examples.

It is probably my inherent personality (that I go into a rage). I think my father may have had that trait as well when I think back on it now. When he had a drink, it is not that he went into a sort of drunken frenzy, but he became violent. But he normally took us out to play during the day or on Sundays, so to us children, he was a good father. There were some times like that. So I might have that sort of trait, though I do not drink, but I think to myself that I might be a sort of a battle-axe, too. (Abbreviated) If I am to be true to myself, I really hate myself because I honestly want to become big-hearted like my husband.

My mother used to get suspicious and when I was betrayed by my friends she used to enjoy it. Like, “ha ha ha. I told you so”. (Abbreviated) That is why I am rather suspicious of my friends and do not really know how to make one. But then I am really committed to my friends and in return, sort of expect them to be good to me... How shall I explain? Then I get fed up. (Abbreviated) My mother used to make me think it was my fault when I made a mess of things. So at first, I used to blame myself thinking everything was my entire fault even when someone else was to blame, I blamed myself for everything.

The first mother said that she inherited her emotionally volatile personality from her father and that she hated herself for being that way, and the second mother spoke of how she always blamed herself as her mother made her think that her failures were all her fault.

In the following, the mother spoke about how she vents her anger on her child, as [her difficult experiences in childhood are overlapped with the real situations in caring for her child].

*I get angry (at my child) unknowingly. Why is that? Because I was a very good child, and because my brother was *injured/handicapped*, and since I was the eldest daughter, I tried very hard so that I was not a burden to my parents. So I think to myself, what is so tough to raise my child, though it is normal. Because I was not a burden to my parents, I sort of want to make my child experience the same thing I did. But if I did that, my child would probably end up like me (laughs).*

But it is like I cannot accept my child does not have to be the same way I am.

The mother is expecting her child to be considerate towards her just as she had done as a child. Although she knows it is not good to make her child be the same way she was, she does not want to accept her child who is different from her. She was not able to allow her child to not be careful towards her and to accept her child.

The second related factor is that [they tend to reflect on other's words pessimistically and negatively]. The following mother spoke of her condition.

Your own child can not really be controlled the way you want. I thought my child cried a lot so I fed him/her all day long. Then I spoke to many people and many of them told me that their child does not cry that much, which devastated me as I thought to myself, we are special. I think that is when I started comparing myself to others.

Since the mother was told, “baby does not cry that much,” she believed that she was [no good mother] and said that she started comparing herself to others unnecessarily. Many of those interviewed had spoken of their pessimistic views, believing that they were special. For instance, when she is told, “he/she is such a mommy's child” when her child follows her, or “it is because he/she is always alone with you all the time” when her child is shy of people, or “why can not he/she go in the ocean when he/she is taking swimming lessons?”, the mother gets more depressed than it is about herself.

The tendency for mothers to vent their anger was not only directed toward their child but in some cases, also to their siblings, parents, friends, boss and outrageous happenings in the world. And [the feelings of self-condemnation and self-hatred] or those that occur in the behavior towards others than her child when she vents her anger, and their subsequent reaction, reinforces the mother's negative self-image that was already there, Which causes her suffering and anxiety to moun.

4) Improvement process from the problems of Childcare difficulties or maltreatment

Some of the mothers, who have experienced a

wavelike cyclical change, were aware of the gradual shortening of the gap between her impulsiveness (intensity of the emotional swings and whether or not she is able to control her emotions) and her negative feelings toward her child, and of her becoming less impulsive with her treatment of her child. For instance, some mothers spoke of how she has been able to not result to violence when she gets angry, though she used to hit her child as soon as she lost her coolness, and how she had been able to not take out her anger at times when she would normally have gone into a rage by talking to her child about the “impulsive mommy’s” faults and weaknesses.

However, as we can see in one particular mother’s experience, it seems that the changes to impulsiveness occur not smoothly but gradually, improving to a peaceful condition of childcare by repeating the cycle of good days and bad days.

Now I am able to think of both my children as equally adorable. Until I have been able to feel this way, I did not think that my eldest was adorable at all. Yeah. My youngest child was very easy to control. So, that in a way is a bit frightening now. I think perhaps my youngest is repressing her/his feelings? But I am now able to accept them both equally and I do not get that angry anymore. Of course, I would sometimes yell my child, and although on rare occasions, I yell at my child so much as to hurt my child emotionally, but I regret it afterwards. Having said that, I do not verbally abuse my child as I had done in the past on a daily basis to a degree that I almost consider it to be child abuse.

It is likely that the abovementioned change indicates that the improvement process from problems of childcare and maltreatment is a process in which the gap between the two periods diminishes.

5) Triggers leading to improvement from problems of Childcare difficulties

What elicits the changes toward improvement mentioned above? The following dialogue of a mother indicates the trigger to such change. This mother spoke about [‘how the word and advice she received’] from [‘a place that accepted her no matter what she said’] had prompted the change. The place that accepted her in her

case was a meeting place for mothers who have similar problems.

It is difficult to explain, but when I receive words (advice) in a place where I could show my whole self, where I am accepted and acknowledged, where I can say anything I want, it seems I can accept those words without hardly any resistance. It gives me a real chance (to change myself) in that way. Although in the end, I think I must be the one to find the answers, but it seems I am saved by those words.

It was also important that [‘the mother’s husband accepted her’] , who was suffering an abusive condition that he accepted the situation to be fine just as it is.

It may sound strange but (my husband thinks that) the fact that I am suffering in this way and that I go wild with rage (chokes up) cannot be helped and that it is okay because I am exposing my emotions naturally. My child had been in a sort of hell, but I want to get better now that I am making effort and I am more towards improving my condition. So even if I do not express that clearly, my child knows it perfectly well. So he says it is okay the way it is. Even if I am crying or get angry, though at such times, we both get worked up, he says it is okay the way it is, as if somehow things would work out.

This mother experienced her husband’s view that things are “okay the way it is” through something that her child said. That experience dispelled her mental suffering to the extent that she thought everything was okay and said that it lead her to change as a result.

My child said to me, “you get angry at me all the time, but you teach me a lot (discipline and so on) so I am all right” (smile). I was so glad when I found out that he/she thought of it that way, that he/she was accepting me though I had been very harsh on him/her. That incidence was helpful (abbreviated). My child’s words got to me slowly and not like, “Wow Great!” and when I reflected on how my child was thinking about the situation, it made me feel how important it is to show by example. And also when my husband said that it is okay to be true to myself, it gave me a realization. That gave

me such a relief and I thought, it's okay to get angry and although I do want to be the ideal mother, I began to think that I should first attain a comfortable condition that I am happy with and even if I do suffer mentally, I should try and come to my own conclusions after agonizing over it so that I do not regret. Doing so would allow me not to abandon my child like I did before though I may still have problems with my child and get anxious and go out of control. I really did hate my child before. I often thought how I should never have had this child.

The following mother spoke of how she was relieved when her child said, "you do not have to care about me." What the child means by that is the child is giving a message of affirmation and acceptance saying, "you are fine the way you are."

A while ago, my child spoke to her/his sister of how I did not care much about him/her. Then my eldest said to me, "you do not have to care about me." So noble of her. Like, well, it is okay you know. So if you can not, you do not have to do sort of thing. She probably forgot about it, but that is what she told me. I felt guilty, but at the same time, I was relieved.

The findings that adequate caregiving or the child's attachment security associated with higher parental reflective functioning, defined as the parental ability to

understand his/her child's mental states, have emerged from the most recent studies⁹⁾. The result of this study that a mother suffering an abusive condition need to have an experience of acceptance from key persons in order to enhance parental reflective functioning supports the results of these previous studies that secure attachment and good child rearing are associated.

Result of this study; mother's negative self-image that she originally has had seem to be further confirmed by raising children, or her feelings of being persecuted as a failure of a mother by her child are leading her to violent anger and frustration can illustrate this hypothesis of the model. It became apparent that mother's negative self-image was one of the core concept of the distress arising from mother's own early experiences of attachment relationships.

In addition, there was no significant difference in mental psychology related to mothers' childcare difficulties or maltreatment depending on the age of the mother and the number of children. However the abovementioned lacks variation. It needs to accumulate cases and deepen analysis in the future.

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