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*\* Serial \* Home Economics Education in Japan 11*

This serial focuses on the characteristics and current issues surrounding home economics education in Japan, while also providing a historical perspective.

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## Home Economics Education Sustaining the Development of Children

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### Key words

home economics education, parents' perception, independence

### 1. Enhancement of children's academic abilities, moral excellence, along with health and physical strength in relation to housing, food, and clothing

It is reported that after the Great East Japan Earthquake a lot of people empathized with the words in a valedictory speech made by a student representative at a graduation ceremony of a junior high school in Iwate prefecture. It ran: 'I realized the value of being able to live an ordinary daily life, something which we have mistakenly taken for granted.' It goes without saying that maintaining a stable family life on a daily basis with sufficient housing, food, and clothing is a basic ingredient for the development of children's academic abilities and moral excellence, as well as their health and physical strength.

The preamble to the Basic Act on Food Education enacted in the 17th year of Heisei stipulates food education is essential for us to live well and that it is a prerequisite for intellectual education, moral education, and physical education. It clarifies the roles food education play in developing sound mind and body, enhancing richness in humanity over the course of a lifetime. We cannot live in comfort without housing, food, and clothing. They are the necessary ingredients for the enhancement of children's academic abilities, moral excellence, along with health and physical strength.

### 2. Parents' perception of children's independence

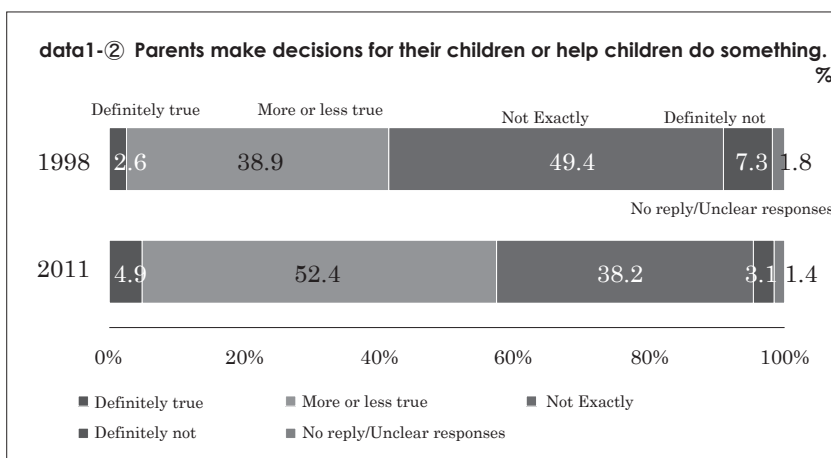
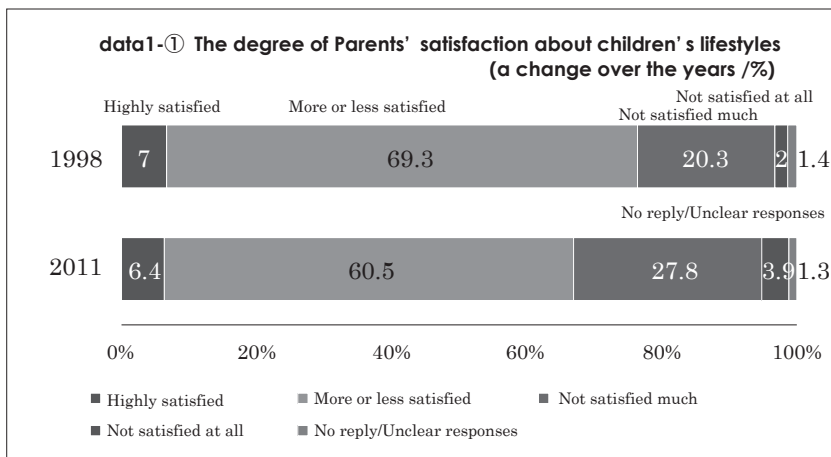
As we live in content in terms of housing, food, and clothing, we seldom pay conscious attention to them. Thus, it is unlikely we know whether or not children have acquired the ability to live an independent life. The results of a basic survey of child rearing (elementary and lower secondary education version) conducted by Benesse.Co.jp will shed light on this question.

The survey has been conducted four times since 1998 asking mothers of third graders through twelfth graders to fill in a questionnaire. On one of the question items regarding satisfaction with their children's lifestyles and independence, the percentage of mothers who made affirmative responses

dropped by 10% from 76.3% in 1998 to 66.9% in 2011. In addition, the percentage of mothers who made decisions for their children or help children do something increased by 16% from 41.5% in 1998 to 57.3% in 2011.

Regarding the question about their concerns relating to their children, the percentage of mothers who replied they were concerned about their children’s homework, preparation and review of lessons, or their career choice has raised, while the percentage of mothers who pay attention to table manners, what they eat, or whether they keep regular hours

including the hour of rising and going to bed. Judging from these data, we can conclude the ratio of mothers who show interest in their children’s independence has been decreasing, while the ratio of mothers who tend to be overly involved in children’s affairs verbally as well as physically has been increasing.

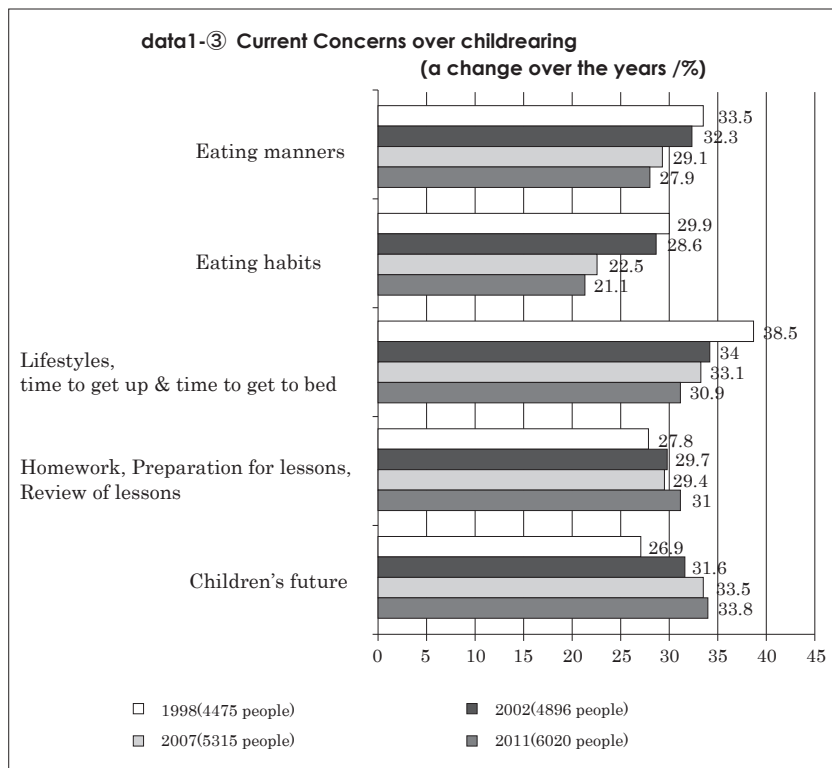


### 3. Children’s life skills and their sense of independence

Another concern is whether children have acquired life skills properly. The survey conducted in 2007 by the National Institute of Educational Research on the life skills acquired by ninth graders shows they can slice Japanese radishes in rounds and then quarter them but that they have difficulty using a kitchen knife in an efficient and safe manner or coming up with ways to cut foodstuffs into sizes or forms best suited for dishes. Thus, a fair number of children do not have satisfactory life skills to be used for daily cooking. We can ascribe this result to children’s fewer opportunities of cooking at home or fewer lessons allocated for Home Economics or Technology and Home Economics at school.

According to White Paper on Children and Young People issued by Cabinet Office in 2009, 88.6% of Japanese young people gave an affirmative reply to the question, “Do you think children should become financially independent of their parents as early as possible?” marking the highest among the surveyed countries, followed by South Korea (83.7%), France (80.0%), the U.S.A., and the U.K.

As for the question, “Choose the things you are trying to do in your dietary habits,” Only 16.3% of Japanese young people chose “I cook myself,” marking the lowest, followed by South Korea (17.1%), the U.S.A. (26.5%), the U.K. (29.8%), and France (32.4%).



#### 4. The necessity of improvement in home economics education that turns students' attention more to everyday life

Judging from these data, it can be said that Japanese young people have little awareness of their daily life or they are nearly oblivious to it. While they admit to the importance of financial independence from their parents, they have poor intentions of leading a quality life or achieving independence from their parents in housing, food, and clothing.

We should take the statement made by the aforementioned junior high school student seriously by improving the quality of home economics education where students can learn the meaning of life.

#### 5. The necessity improving home economics education that assists students' growth

It has been twenty years since we implemented mandatory home economics education for both genders. I am delighted that we can perceive some gradual but positive change taking place within our community, for we have more opportunities to see men actively involved in child-rearing. To my regret, however, hours allocated for home economic education in the school curriculum have been decreasing in spite of the fact that children's awareness of the importance of independence in life is unfortunate. It is crystal clear that the solid foundation for a decent living made possible by the stable home life is essential for sound growth of children.

Students are put in an awkward situation in learning livelihood culture and life skills because many parents fail to impart them. I firmly believe home economics education should compensate for this loss by playing a more active role in the school curriculum with more lesson hours, which is absolutely necessary to enhance our children's learning in a better living environment.