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How do the financial disadvantages experienced by single-mother households in Japan impact upon their children's educational outcomes?

An exploratory qualitative study

Hitomi Imamura

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the University of West London

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Japan's social and economic structures are often perceived as having lower poverty rates compared to other nations, which has led to a lack of in-depth research on single-mother household poverty. Despite this perception, single-mother families face significant challenges, with limited research analysing the direct impact of maternal poverty on children's education. After Japan's 2020 education reform, children from wealthier families gained increased access to private education, further widening the gap between them and children from less financially stable households. This situation reflects Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, where social advantages are passed from parents to children, perpetuating educational and economic inequalities. Rising divorce rates and the impoverishment of single-mothers and their children offer a bleak outlook for future generations.

The current research focused on child poverty in Japan, particularly examining how economic hardships impact the education and career paths of children from single-mother households. Through qualitative interviews with NPO representatives and single-mothers and their adult children, this research examined the root causes of poverty and its educational repercussions. Interviews were conducted with seven NPOs, eight single mothers and ten adult children. The interviews were transcribed from Japanese into English and analysed using thematic analysis to explore common themes. It aimed to explore the multifaceted effects of poverty on both mothers and their children, delving into the factors and processes that contribute to poor educational outcomes.

The current research aimed to identify what measures are needed to break this cycle and provide insights that can inform national policy to address these disparities. The findings of the research were firstly, as assumed, that single-mothers' economic disadvantage affected their children's learning performance, and secondly, although not assumed, the psychological strain on parents and children. For children in particular, the interviews revealed a number of stigmas and psychological impacts following parental divorce.

The results of this research highlight the need for further support for NPOs, single-mothers and all adult children. For this to happen, it was possible to see the need not only for national policies, but also for a change in the attitudes of the Japanese people as a whole.

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents, now deceased, who have contributed greatly to my lifelong interest in academia. As a survivor of the Second World War as

a kamikaze pilot. Keinosuke Imamura devoted his life to the reconstruction of Japan and became a director of Hitachi High-Technologies. His way of life taught me the importance of living and the strength to work towards own goals, without giving in to difficulties. Yasuko Imamura, who demonstrated the importance of women's independence through her own life, became the third female school headmaster in Yokohama, and in 1990, after her retirement, was sent to the UK by the International Women's Education Association to promote lifelong education for women in Japan, a passion that encouraged my career path in education.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and overview of the national context

Japan was rated the third wealthiest country in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the International Monetary Fund in 2021(IMF, 2021). However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that Japan has the second highest poverty rate, after the United States, amongst the G7 countries in the OECD (OECD,2020). According to data from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2019, the poverty rate among single-parent families was approximately 50%, with 90% being single-mother families of which 86.7% report finding life difficult (MHLW,2019). This research will investigate this phenomenon, with particular attention paid to child poverty and its impact upon Japanese single mothers and their children in terms of their educational and career opportunities. This doctoral study will explore in what ways financial disadvantages create various forms of impact on the development and education of children from single-mother households that result from divorce.[1]

The Nippon Foundation, a public interest incorporated organisation that is engaged in support for public and welfare services and international cooperation in Japanese affairs, states that currently one in seven Japanese children are classed to be living in poverty and suffering its associated hardships. The term child poverty in Japanese terms denotes relative poverty. Relative poverty is defined as a household that earns less than half the median of the country's equivalent disposable income (income

[1] All single mothers' households referred to in this thesis are single mothers from divorce. This represents the majority of single mothers in Japan.

adjusted by dividing the household's disposable income by the square root of household members) (The Nippon Foundation, 2021).

The poverty rate for children in Japan has been rising since as early as the 1980s, compounded by the bubble economy crash (which occurred during the period 1991-1993), and subsequently Japan has the worst level of child poverty amongst the 38 members of the OECD (OECD, 2020). This data reinforces the importance of this doctoral project in the Japanese education and social policy contexts.

In 2020 neo-liberal education reforms were introduced in Japan (MEXT, 2020). According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter MEXT), the aim of these reforms was to ensure that children are able to problem solve, learn by themselves, think, judge, act and envision happiness, and create a bright future even in times when it is difficult to predict what the world will be like. Specifically, the emphasis has been on strengthening ICT skills, English, and moral education in primary schools (MEXT, 2020). Although these reforms have been planned and implemented, they are still not making a widespread impact. The present study contends that it is important to explore the complexities of the process of child poverty affecting educational achievement which will then inform policy and its proper implementation.

A specialist in Japanese neoliberal education, Koichiro Komikawa,[2] previously interviewed by the researcher as part of her master's thesis, stated that students in middle class and lower socio-economic status families will not benefit from these (Japanese government-led) reforms (Imamura, 2020). Komikawa also suggested that although reform is needed and based upon the premise that the poverty gap will

[2] Professor, Faculty of Education, Hosei University, specialising in career education, recent article 'How to question educational experiences in the neoliberal era 2023/02'.

widen, the continued promotion of neo-liberal education will push Japan into a fragmented society (ibid). He further maintained that previous policies aimed at raising the overall child poverty level were efficient, contributed to the economy and were equal in opportunity, however, the current reforms suggest that the government has decided not to consider the consequences of social inequality anymore (ibid).

In other words, these reforms point to a strengthening of public education that nurtures some elites at the request of the business community and promotes widening social disparities. Poverty among single mothers is noticeable in Japan and will worsen as a result of these policy reforms (ibid). A limitation of existing research on the academic achievement gap related to family structure is that it focuses on differences in the mean academic achievement of children in one-parent and two-parent families. The negative effect on children's academic achievement in single-mother families is deeper at lower quintiles, whereas the negative effect in single-parent families is deeper at the median level (Tobishima 2018). "This suggests that the larger achievement gaps at lower quantiles are closely associated with the absence of fathers" (Tobishima, 2018:115). Therefore, this research will focus on poverty among single mother families as a result of divorce in Japan and investigate the reasons why single mother poverty after divorce is so prevalent in Japan and how it might impact upon the subsequent educational and career opportunities of their children.

1.2 Background to this research – the social contexts of single mother households resulting from divorce in Japan

The most common reason for becoming a single mother is divorce, which accounts for about 80% of the total (Single Mother Forum, 2021). 80% of single mothers are working, and 40% of them are non-regular employees. Part-time workers tend to be

paid less and have less job security. According to the statistics of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (hear after MHLW) in 2016, 40% of single mothers had an annual income of just 2.4 million yen (£12,000) or less, and 45% of single mothers felt that their current life was very difficult. In addition, only 24% of them received child support from divorced partners (MHLW, 2012). The relative poverty rate of Japanese single-parent families was 50.8% in the 2014 statistics, ranking internationally as the worst of 33 OECD countries (Japanese Cabinet office, 2014).

The Japanese compulsory education system consists of six-years at primary school (6-12years old) and three-years at secondary school (12-15years old) (MEXT, 2021). The rate of children in single-mother families progressing to Higher Education has been much lower since World War II. In recent years, the gap has widened further. In fact, 64 % of girls raised in single-mother families and 40% of boys raised in single-father families have given up on going to college for financial reasons. Boys raised in single-mother families tend to have more academic problems than financial reasons for not aspiring to higher education (Inaba, 2021). In terms of national policy, the Japanese Child Protection Act was enacted in 1985, paying poor households the equivalent of 33,000-yen (£165) a month (Higashino, 2016). Since 2003, in order to promote the employment of mothers, the payment of this money is reduced five years after receiving the first payment, and the government has a system to lend money to mothers who are trying to obtain qualifications (MHLW, 2007).

Furthermore, there were cases where vocational training projects were offered to single mothers but which did not lead to recognised qualifications and where single mothers found permanent employment but fell back again into non-permanent employment, or where they received training without knowing their suitability for the

job, and stopped because it did not suit them when they tried it (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2019). The choice of training courses offered such as those for low paid positions such as associate nurses and childcare workers may also be a reason why single mother household incomes have not increased. In this way, it is necessary to identify the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the employment support project in terms of wages and how to improve the efficiency of the project. How to improve this is a challenge for the future (ibid.). Figures on how much of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is accounted for by all benefits provided by the Japanese Government, such as child allowances and childcare benefits, show that it is very low compared to other countries (OECD,2008). Compared to 22 OECD countries (for example USA, UK, Germany, France, Denmark etc,), the Japanese Government only provides a small amount of education-related public expenditure. In terms of the proportion of private and public contributions to higher education, parents in Japan pay as much as 50% of the burden privately. This means that although Japan has a high rate of progression to higher education, this is not supported by the government, but by the family (Abe 2010). In addition, the redistributive function of government according to OECD statistics for the mid-2000s shows that redistribution lowers poverty rates in all countries, but only in Japan did poverty rates rise after redistribution. This shows how indifferent Japan has become to child poverty (ibid). The redistributive function of government is that the government collects money from the public through taxes, social insurance contributions and consumption taxes, and distributes it to pay for healthcare, salaries of state employees, pensions, welfare and child allowances. In simple terms, redistribution is about collecting more taxes from the rich and passing them on to the poor to ensure a minimum standard of living. So, by comparing the

poverty rate before redistribution with the poverty rate after redistribution, we can see how much poverty has been eliminated by redistribution (ibid).

Research focusing on maternal poverty in Japan and its impact on children's education is limited compared to other topics in the field. The reason is that Japan's social and economic structure is often perceived to have a low poverty rate compared to other countries. An article on '*The Ones Left Behind'*, a film produced about single mother families in Japan, states that in making the film, they asked a number of support groups if they could help them make a film about single mothers, and most did not respond, with only a representative from one group being supportive (BBC 2023). It stated that this was the first warning sign and questioned why more people did not want to get involved. This indicates that there is still some resistance among Japanese people regarding the subject of single mother families.

From that perspective, qualitative research analysing maternal poverty and its direct impact on children's education by interviewing NPOs that support these families and their parents and children is also rare. In particular, through interviews, this current research will provide an in-depth analysis of the factors and processes by which poverty in single-mother families affects the educational performance of their children.

1.3 Poverty in Japan - the current situation

The empirical evidence shows that single parent households, a once unthinkable social status associated with shame and taboo in pre-war Japan, have been rapidly increasing year on year (Zhou, 2008). From 1993 to 2003, the number nearly doubled from 789,900 to 1,225,400. This has been identified as a possible societal destabilising factor which government policy is looking to address, however, during

the same period, the proportion of single-mother households with children among all households with children nearly doubled from 5.3 to 9.5% (ibid). Of the estimated 1.23 million single mothers with children in Japan (as of 2021), more than half are estimated to be divorced or unmarried and they have no relatives living with them, have graduated from high school and work as non-regular employees and do not receive child support from their ex-husband. Even if they receive state assistance, many of them have annual household incomes of less than 2.3 million yen (£11,500), which is only just under the threshold of relative poverty. The higher the mother's 'final level of education', the higher her salary income and household income tends to be, according to a 2016 survey (MHLW, 2016), with a household income of 4.3 million yen (£21,500) (Kanbara, 2020) for mothers who are university graduates.

1.3.1 Poverty among single mothers

In Japanese single-parent households, 93.9% of children go on to high school, but only 23.9% go on to university. 46% of children want to go on to higher education, but about half of the children fulfil their wishes. The average university enrolment rate for all households is 53.7%. Japanese single mothers and their children face financial difficulties that will negatively affect the progress of children from these households (Single Mothers Forum, 2021). Yamano (2008) asserts that Japan has been viewed as an achievement society, where school performance is defined by a person's effort and not by social hierarchy, but research (e.g., JELS, 2003) has shown that what was previously seen as the result of the child's own effort is considerably influenced by their family background. There is a clear difference between children from lower social classes and those from higher social classes in academic achievement: family background matters right from the start (Yamano, 2008).

To further understand the adverse societal factors affecting Japanese single mothers, it is important to examine the structure of Japanese families. A high proportion of Japanese women are expected to withdraw from the workforce after marriage and this expectation is particularly pronounced after childbirth (Shirahase, 2007). On return to the workforce, they are most likely hired on special temporary contracts with little or no company benefits (Yu, 2013). There is also an overriding cultural expectation that women are the main care givers in the family unit and bear the chief responsibility investing their time and skills in child rearing and in their children's education (Bumpass, Rindfuss, Choe, & Tsuya, 2009; Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). The main reason divorced women are linked to poverty is their low labour market position after the child-rearing period. The income from part-time work, which is common among women returning to work after childbearing, is beneficial for helping to cover household expenses and earning pocket money but is naturally inadequate for women who have to support their children on their own (Iwata, 2008). Compared to the larger metropolitan areas, wages are lower in regional cities and there are fewer job opportunities. Public services such as public administration are also inadequate. Many women cannot survive on self-help and public support alone and have to rely on some informal and exploitative social or financial resources, such as prostitution. When accessing such resources, they have to make certain sacrifices (Sakazume, 2019).

1.3.2 Poverty among youth and children

The 'rediscovery of poverty' in Japan is said to have been directly triggered by a programme entitled '*Working Poor'*: No matter whether you work or not, you cannot get rich', an NHK Special broadcast in July 2006 (Iwata 2009). Individuals covered in the programme could not find regular jobs and had to work day jobs to make ends meet (NHK 2006). There are two important aspects of what was represented here. The first is that it brings the 'working poor' to the forefront. This is because until then, the perception of poverty in Japan had largely been that poor households (strata) equalled households (strata) receiving welfare benefits. In this context, the fact that the film showed the reality that people who are not on welfare benefits are still poor even if they work hard caught the viewers' attention. This was because the film exposed the reality of Japanese society, where the conventional notion that 'if you work, you can manage to live' is no longer valid. Another point was the focus on 'young people'. This is because the situation of working poor young people means that the traditional vision of young people's future life, which was based on stable work, had collapsed: after graduating from high school or university, they get a job through school (through school introductions), initially at low wages but with guaranteed employment, with wages gradually increasing each year, and eventually they marry, have children and form new families (Murozumi & Lister, 2019).

In parallel with youth poverty, child poverty has also been rediscovered, and in 2009 the White Paper on Child Poverty was published in collaboration with researchers and practitioners, approached from multiple disciplines, including social welfare and education. According to this White Paper, child poverty and economic hardship are defined as the central core, which in turn causes seven conditions of hardship, including a 'lack of cultural resources', 'low self-esteem' and 'isolation and exclusion'.

This image of child poverty is commonly associated with Ruth Lister's (Lister, 2011) concept of adult poverty, which is constructed as a wheel model. That is, the central core of the wheel is 'unacceptable material deprivation', with the relational and symbolic aspects of poverty experienced by people in these conditions (such as contempt, shame and stigma, attacks on dignity and self-esteem, denial of human rights, voicelessness and powerlessness) positioned in the outer ring of the wheel (Lister 2011: 22), it presents the multi-layered conditions that poverty evokes. The rediscovery of poverty in Japan can be said to have developed as a result of the situation in Japan to date, i.e., a lack of social interest in poverty and a long period of inactivity in poverty research, in the form of a one-off description of each of the various aspects (current conditions) of rapidly encroaching poverty, as described above (Murozumi & Lister, 2019).

1.3.3 Poverty and education

Kariya (2008) stated it is possible that the socio-economic background of students has some influence on academic achievement, and that there are differences in academic performance depending on the social and cultural environment of the family in which the child is born and raised (Kariya, 2008). Social origin has some influence on academic performance in schools, and this is not limited to Japan, but it has now been empirically demonstrated. It could be said that it is a sociological fact. In addition, when looking at the differences in the effects between individual hierarchical factors, it was found that the unique influence of the mother's educational background contributed to the widening of the disparity (ibid). This is because mothers have more frequent contact with their children than fathers, and this has a stronger impact on educational attainment. (Nozaki, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, underprivileged families see their offspring leave education sooner which in turn reduces their future earning potential (Oshio, Sano and Kobayashi, 2009). These barriers, i.e., low education and low income in turn contribute to a marked decline in health and individual happiness. Hardships associated with child poverty are likely to affect the non-cognitive ability that is required for good future economic outcomes as well as being detrimental to the psychological attributes that influence the subjective assessment of individual well-being (ibid). “Studies of adults and adolescents suggest subjective socio-economic status (SES) is associated with health/well-being even after adjustment for objective SES. In adolescence, objective SES may have weaker relationships with health/well-being than at other life stages; school-based social status may be of greater relevance” (Sweeting and Hunt, 2014 p39).

Aoto (2011), revealed, in the results of a survey of children who dropped out of high school that they had been in serious poverty since childhood. The poverty continued from their parents' generation and was created from a chain of precarious employment and low-wage poverty. One of the roles of public education in the nation is social integration and national integration. If it reproduces inequality, it becomes a bigger problem. The term 'intergenerational chain of poverty' is used to describe such poor households. Data from a survey conducted by a Health and Welfare Bureau in Osaka showed that 40% of mothers with children on welfare were also on welfare in the family in which they had grown up. (Suzuki, 2015).

1.4 Social factors

One of the factors that form the intergenerational chain of poverty is that few social measures have been taken to deal with the poverty problem, since Japan tended to regard only absolute poverty as poverty, it is therefore probable that there was little awareness of the relative poverty problem (Kashiwagi, 2020). What further compounded this situation would be that within the Japanese cultural idea of personal responsibility, the problem of poverty is a family problem and should be solved within that family unit (ibid). Despite their economic deprivation and social vulnerability, single mothers are often subject to social exclusion, shaming and neglect under the term 'personal responsibility' (Sakazume, 2019). Personal responsibility refers to the assertion that a mother must have given birth to a child of her own volition and become a single mother (Suzuki, 2015). However, the actual ratio of self-determined single mothers is 7.8% compared to those who experience single motherhood following divorce (80.8%) or widowhood (7.5%) (Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). Also, there is a consensus that the family is a private and closed territory, and its internal life should not be made public. The literature points toward an implicit rule of not talking about child poverty, including family problems, and there exists the notion that if parents are unable to earn money, their children should earn money to support themselves and their family (Aizawa et al., 2016). The underlying theme was one of State and cultural optimism that poverty in all forms could be solved naturally within the family unit if Personal responsibility was combined with compulsory education (Kashiwagi, 2020)

1.5 Rationale for the research

As an educator with 27 years' experience working in Japanese schools, I was motivated to discover whether there might be an impact of poverty on the educational opportunities of children from single mother households. Many single mothers and their children attend the mandatory period required by Japanese state schools. The most difficult thing for them has been the decision to go beyond compulsory education. This is because many of these students do not perform well and have few options due to economic reasons. Moreover, the widening gap and cycle of poverty (Tzanakis, 2011) and the increasing number of children who do not have future aspirations for Higher Education do not seem to be positive for the future of the country.

After the recent Japanese education reforms, children from wealthy families who are able to receive private English language education at their own family's expense, are more likely to receive a better education, work, and family experience than children who cannot afford to do this and who will likely as a result endure poorer educational and work opportunities. Thus, parental cultural capital (See chapter 2.2.1 detail discussion on Bourdieu) will be passed down to the more privileged children previously described and capital reproduction will be further encouraged (Imamura 2020). According to a survey by the MEXT (2012), it is shown that the higher the educational background and income of both parents, the higher the academic ability of their children (Nakamuro,2015). Higher household incomes may have an impact on children's educational attainment as a result of higher spending on education and greater access to education. In addition, characteristics possessed by social class may influence children's education. Households with higher household incomes are

more likely to be highly educated, which may indicate that parents are more active in transferring the knowledge and skills they possess (Nozaki, 2018).

Given the situation where household income is related to higher education, the negative cycle of poverty amongst single-mother families, which is increasing due to divorce and other factors, is unlikely to stop, deepening an environment where young people find it difficult to have hope in their future life plans, and where more people have no hope for their future. This is an important issue for the future of Japanese society. Through direct interviews with representatives of NPOs influencing national policy and interviews with single mothers and their adult children, this study explores the reasons for poverty among single mothers and its educational impact on children, and hopes to inform national policy-making on what is needed to correct single mother poverty and to curb its negative educational impact on children.

The importance of the present study has been noted by GBSF - Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation – and funding was given for this research in the hope that it will provide policy solutions to a serious problem in the education sector of Japan.

1.6 Statement of Research Question

Therefore, this research seeks to investigate how this situation is perpetuated by exploring the following research question:

How do the financial disadvantages that divorced single-mother households experience in Japan impact upon their children's educational outcomes?

It will do this by addressing the following research aim and objectives:

1.6.1 Research Aim

To investigate how the status of divorced single-mother household in Japan impacts upon their children's educational outcomes.

1.6.2 Research Objectives

1) To explore the lived experience of divorced single mothers and their adult children (over 18 years old) who have experienced the mandatory state education system in Japan.

2) To seek the views of representatives of non-profit organisations (NPO) who support divorced single mothers and their children to find out new perspective upon the impact that inequalities in governmental policy have upon divorced single mother households in Japan.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of two parts. Firstly, it will outline the background to Japanese education policy, its implementation and evaluation in relation to the research question. When considering the issue of poverty, national policies are considered to have a significant impact, because a great number of Japanese single mother households subsist at a relative poverty rate among OECD countries, it is necessary to focus on such policies. Secondly, the theories of French social educator Pierre Bourdieu will be explored as a theoretical underpinning, specifically cultural capital, to explain the underlying factors behind academic underachievement in the current research.

2.1 National policy of Japan

Looking back at the history of Japan's welfare system, it appears that the cause of the increase in child poverty is government policy that has continued to rely solely on families for resolving issues of poverty with little or no public expenditure. The problem is the attitude of the Government, which does not appear to prioritise the issue (Yamano, 2008). Children are more likely to suffer physical, intellectual and mental disadvantages if they continue to live in poverty. Increasing family incomes was the first point to consider when thinking about guaranteeing the development of poor children. By refusing to focus on the reality of child poverty, Japanese society continues to suffer significant social losses. Their children struggle in a cycle of poverty; their talents are not utilised, and they become the next generation of parents with various developmental challenges. The social losses that occur there can lead to a decline in the productivity of society as a whole, demotivate individuals and families living in poverty, and even cause various disorders such as mental illness.

Ultimately, continuing to neglect the problem will conversely lead to increased social costs, such as medical and social security costs (ibid). It is said that if child poverty is left unchecked, it will cause a chain of intergenerational disparities that will increase economic losses by approximately 2.9 trillion yen and the government's financial burden by approximately 1.1 trillion yen in just one year (Lee, 2021).

According to a UNICEF report, the differences in poverty rates between countries mean that there is a great deal of correlation between the state of social policy in each country and child poverty. In other words, it is possible to reduce child poverty rates through national and government social policies. The problem of child poverty is by no means exclusive to developing countries. In many developed countries,

the OECD has analysed the trend of increasing child poverty and how it is having a negative impact on educational attainment: the 2021 OECD report found that children from low-income families face significant challenges in accessing quality education and resources, which in turn leads to poverty and further perpetuating the cycle of social inequality.

However, Japan may be the only developed country where no measures have been taken and where the government is not even willing to acknowledge its existence at all nor those of its impacts on the educational opportunities of those families affected (Yamano, 2008). Since 2008, Japan has made efforts to tackle child poverty, particularly in response to growing concerns about its impact on children's educational outcomes and overall well-being. In addition to government policies, organisations such as the Nippon Foundation have conducted studies highlighting the economic costs of child poverty.

However, the current situation of child poverty has not improved.

Therefore, through exploring lived experiences of single mothers and their children this thesis seeks to fill this gap in knowledge.

2.1.1 Welfare system

Japan should be a society where people can live in security because of the welfare system. However, there are various problems with that welfare system (MHLW, 2012). The purpose of public assistance originates in Article 25(4) of the Constitution of Japan, which stipulates two objectives: to guarantee a minimum standard of living and to promote self-reliance, and that 'the State shall provide necessary protection to all citizens in need according to their level of poverty, to guarantee their minimum standard of living and to promote their self-reliance' (Sai, 2015). The capture rate for welfare in Japan is 15.3-18%. This means that 82-84.7% of people with low incomes below the welfare threshold are not receiving welfare. In terms of the capture rate, France and the UK have a capture rate of over 90% where almost all low-income households are on welfare. This is due to the fact that anyone can apply for welfare assistance, but in practice, many people do not apply or, even if they do, are refused due to a 'frontline measures[3]' at the government office (ibid).

In the 21st century, Japanese society has become known as a society of inequality, and the number of households on welfare, which had not changed much during the 20th century, has increased dramatically. Meanwhile, as the cost of providing welfare continued to put pressure on Japan's public finances, the level of welfare benefits began to be restricted quite severely in the 1990s; in the 21st century, while the number of households on welfare has increased, the level of benefits has become increasingly restricted (ibid).

[3] Controls are in place to prevent an increase in the number of applicants.

Murozumi, a researcher who traces the history of household research from a gender perspective, clarifies the reality of women's and children's poverty in Japan, and is in a position to examine the welfare state's role in promoting anti-poverty policies, and Lister, one of the leading researchers in poverty and social policy research in the UK, who studies poverty and social exclusion, social security and welfare reform, citizenship, gender, children and youth, collaborated on a book (Murozumi & Lister, 2019). They focus on power relations within Japanese households and captured the phenomenon of individual deprivation and poverty in households and families from analysing household budgets. Additionally, they focus on power relations within Japanese households and capture the phenomenon of individual deprivation and poverty in households and families from households. They identify the interrelationships between female poverty and child poverty and advocate the urgency and importance of financial support. According to their analysis, the proportion of mother and child households covered by the welfare system has decreased by almost half, from 13.7% of all households receiving welfare benefits in 1965 to 7.7% in 2010. Almost half of mothers and children receiving welfare benefits are employed and are typically supported by the mother's employment income, child support allowances for the children and welfare benefits to supplement their low income.

In addition, while approximately a quarter of all welfare receiving households in Japan have been on welfare for more than 10 years, mothers and children tend to be self-sufficient in a relatively short period of time. This may be related to the fact that many mother and child households are in the working age group and are therefore the main target of support for self-reliance through employment. The promotion of self-reliance among mothers and children may also be related to the fact that this

has been reinforced by the Child Support Allowance Act, which was amended in 2002(MHLW, 2002). As a result of the pressure to become self-reliant under both the welfare and child support systems, mothers and child-headed households may be forced to become self-reliant from welfare in a relatively short period of time (Murozumi & Lister, 2019).

The issue of omission, where people are eligible for welfare benefits but do not apply has increased in many developed countries in recent years, especially in Japan. In recent years, low take-up rates have become a problem in many developed countries, and many studies and surveys have shown that Japan in particular has a low supplementation rate (Kurita, 2017). Stigma in Japan is an important issue when considering overpayment (cases where people who are not eligible for public assistance are receiving it) and leakage (cases where people are not receiving it when they are eligible for it). Stigma refers to attributes that create a negative identity for an individual, i.e., social stigmatisation. Stigmatised individuals, even if they are not directly discriminated against, are tormented by conflicts with psychological stress within themselves. Thus, the stigma suffered by welfare recipients may have two effects. One is the effect of reducing overpayment by increasing the costs of receiving benefits. On the other hand, it has the effect of making leakage more serious, as individuals who are eligible to receive benefits are also under psychological pressure and some people decline to receive benefits. In recent years, the rise in stigma has become stronger (ibid).

2.1.2 Child-support allowance system

For divorced or unmarried single-mother households, there is a child support allowance system. This allowance is intended to contribute to the promotion of

stability and self-reliance in the lives of families in which children are brought up who do not share the same livelihood as their father or mother due to divorce, etc., and to promote the welfare of the children; previously, the allowance only covered single-mother households, but since August 2010 it has also covered father-child households. Mothers or fathers who supervise and make a living together with their child until the first 31 March when the child reaches 18 years of age (or under 20 years of age in the case of disabled children) are eligible for the allowance (Maeda, 2022).

In FY2021, the allowance amount for one child was 43,160 yen(£215) per month for full payment and from 10,180 yen (£50) to 43,150 yen (£215) for partial payment; the additional amount for the second child is 10,190 yen (£50) for full payment and from 5,100 yen (£26) to 10,180 yen (£50) for partial payment; and for the third and subsequent children, the amount is 6,110 yen(£31) for the full payment and between 3,060 yen(£15) and 6,000 yen (£30) for the partial payment per child (however, there is an income limit). In addition, if a recipient who has been receiving the allowance for five years from the time, he or she started receiving it, or seven years from the date of the occurrence of the event that qualifies for the allowance, does not make efforts towards self-support despite the absence of circumstances that make employment difficult, one half of the allowance amount will be suspended (ibid).

Thus, in the case of divorce, although there is a Child Support Allowance, which is available in addition to the Child Allowance for all households with children, the amount of the allowance is not so large, and the amount added to the allowance is small even if the number of children increases. Divorced couples do not always receive child support, and the more children they have, the more difficult it is expected to be for them to make ends meet. The allowance is intended to help

mothers work and become self-supporting, and it is intended to have the role of motivating mothers to work so that they can earn more money (ibid).

2.1.3 Child-support payments (following divorce)

Following a partial amendment to the Civil Code in 2011, Article 766 clearly stipulates visitation and child support as matters to be decided by the couple upon divorce (effective from 1 April 2012). Although the article does not contain the phrase 'child support', there is a 'sharing of costs for the custody of children' which is regarded as synonymous with child support, and the Ministry of Justice Civil Affairs Bureau's leaflet *'When a couple divorces - what they should discuss for the children'* clearly states the concept of 'child support' as follows. 'Child support is the cost of providing for the care and education of the children' (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Generally, it means the expenses required for a child who is not economically and socially independent to become self-supporting, including the expenses required for food, clothing, housing, education and medical care. The obligation of parents to pay child support to their children (duty to support) is considered to be a strong obligation (duty to preserve life) to ensure the same standard of living as themselves, even if the parents do not have the resources to do so (Miyasaka, 2015).

A comparison of the existence of child support arrangements by method of divorce from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's 2011 National Survey of Mothers and Children's Households shows that 60% of all respondents did not make arrangements for child support at the time of divorce. However, there are significant differences by method of divorce. In Japan, the 'divorce by mutual consent' is a method of divorce in which the parties agree on the amount of child support, and accounts for approximately 90% of all divorces in Japan, but only 30.1% of the

divorced parties ‘agree" on child support, while 67.5% "do not agree’. On the other hand, in 'other divorces', which are a combination of mediated, adjudicated and judicial divorces in which the family court intervenes, a high 74.8% 'have agreed' on child support, while 23.9% 'have not agreed', reversing the figures for 'negotiated divorce'. Furthermore, differences in the rate of child support arrangements can be seen by the mother's final education. The agreement rate was low at 20.7% when the mother's final education was junior high school, but high at 58.0% for junior college and 51.8% for university/graduate school. It can be said that this shows some of the many issues related to child support, such as the presumed disparity in economic ability, which affects the ability to pay child support, and the disparity in educational background (ibid).

In the case of single-mother households that have agreed on child support, a look at the status of receipt of child support by divorce method shows that approximately 50% of the households still receive child support, both for divorce by mutual consent and other divorce. There is little difference by divorce method. However, among households that had 'received it in the past', 'other divorce' was 6.7 percentage points higher, at 26.4% for 'negotiated divorce' and 33.1% for 'other divorce'. Households that 'never received' despite having made arrangements were 21.4 % of those in 'negotiated divorce' but 13.4 % of those in 'other divorces', some 8 % points lower. This difference can be attributed to the influence of the courts to some extent. However, the above results also reveal the difficulties in fulfilling child support obligations. Looking at the monthly amount of child support received by single-mother households by number of children, 70% of those with one child receive less than 40,000 yen (£200), while approximately 80% of those with two children receive less than

80,000 yen (£400). The monthly childcare costs per child are generally low, at around 30,000 yen (£150) per month. The childcare costs per child are generally low, at around 30,000 yen (£150) per month (ibid).

2.1.4 Marriage and divorce for Japanese women

Thirty years ago, young women were considered to marry between the ages of 20 and 24, and women who were still single at 25 were pitied and scorned as 'sellouts' or 'overripe fruit'. Perhaps the main reason was that for women of that generation (now in their 50s), marriage was a must. It was the source of their economic power. Men, on the other hand, had children not only to carry on the family business but also to carry on the family name. Women who did not marry were sometimes considered cold and unattractive, and even men could not ignore marriage (Iwao, 1994). Mothers who leave work to raise small children often return to part-time work after their youngest child starts school. Mothers returning to work at this time cannot do full-time commuting work unless they have someone to help with morning and evening childcare (Iwao, 1994).

The unmarried status up to the 1980s can be explained mainly by the continued unmarried status of high school graduate women due to their avoidance of lower-level marriages, and from the 1990s onwards, mainly by the continued unmarried status of university graduate women due to the decline in upper-level marriages[4]. Furthermore, as an effect of the composition of women's educational background, it can be pointed out that the number of women with high school and junior college degrees, who have tolerated lower-level marriages to some extent, has decreased,

[4] Using detailed occupational data of spouses at the time of marriage, marriages with those in upper occupational status, those in lower occupational status.

while the number of women with university degrees, who have consistently avoided lower-level marriages, has increased (Tsutsui, 2010).

In Japan, while women are increasingly becoming more educated and entering the labour market, housework and childcare are still often shared based on traditional gender roles (Tsuya & Bumpass, 2004). This leads to difficulties for women in balancing work and family life, as indicated by the 'M-shaped' labour force participation rate, where women leave the workforce mainly during childbirth and child rearing (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000). In other words, compared to men, women's working patterns are more affected by life events such as marriage, childbirth and child rearing. At the same time, the difficulty of balancing work and family life may be linked to a tendency to delay marriage and having children or not pursuing marriage or having children at all. Previous research has also indicated that marriage is becoming less attractive for some women (especially those with higher education and a high motivation to continue working) because of these post-marital family roles (Raymo, 1998, 2003; Retherford et al., 2001). In addition, in traditional forms of marriage, marriages were maintained on the basis of a division of labour, with the man working outside the home and the woman taking care of the housework and childcare (Shinohara, 2012).

The increase in divorce has become a major social problem. One day, the family is suddenly split in two, living in two separate households. This is a conclusion based on consideration of the circumstances surrounding the couple's situation, which places a mental and financial burden on both parties, especially the children and the elderly parents. Since the number of marriages exceeded 200,000 in 1996, the number of divorces has been on the increase, reaching 289,836 in 2002 (Suzuki,2005). In Japanese society, divorce has long had a dark image, but in recent

years it has been referred to as "batsu ichi or batsu ni[5]“and people have simply brushed it off. Although divorce was originally supposed to be a matter of 'self-determination' and 'personal responsibility', life after divorce continues to be difficult, especially for single-mother households. These families rely on the help of inadequate state protection policies. This means taxation. The country as a whole need to think about how it will deal with taxation, how the state will deal with the increasing number of divorces in the face of the huge national debt and the reality of national and local financial difficulties (ibid).

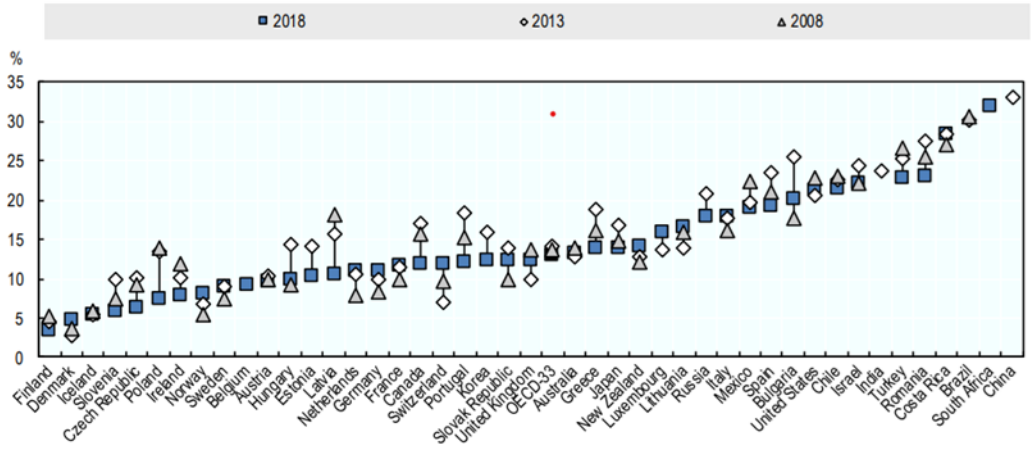
The level of divorce in Japan is already high by global standards. If this trend continues, divorce will no longer be a rare event in society, but will become an option in a person's life course. The increase in divorces will not only lead to the separation of husbands and wives, but also to changes in family structures and the repetition of remarriages and divorces.

[5] Batsu ichi means divorced once, Batsu ni means divorced twice.

2.1.5 Comparison of child poverty OECD countries

OECD research shows that despite the introduction of policies aimed at tackling child poverty and considerable efforts being made, the relative child poverty rate is rising. The chart shows the relative income poverty rates for children in 2008, 2013 and 2018 (or the latest available) Between 2008 and 2018 child poverty rates increased in 13 of the 33 OECD Member countries for which data are available (OECD, 2021).

Chart CO2.2.B. **Child relative income poverty rates, 2008, 2013, and 2018 or latest available year**
Relative income poverty rate (%) for children (0-17 year-olds)



South Korea has a low total fertility rate, smaller family sizes, older parents and single-parent families are rare. Taking these influences into account, the poverty rate in South Korea is comparable to that in Europe and the US, while Japan has one of the highest poverty rates among Western countries. The number of single-parent families in South Korea is small. They do not benefit significantly from public transfer programmes and are therefore at high risk of poverty. The poorest children's households in South Korea receive a significant amount of their income from other households (8%). This is particularly relevant for single-parent families. This includes child support allowances and similar, but also other ('voluntary') private transfers.

More detailed analysis shows that the bottom fifth of children in single-parent families receive 3%(Japan) and 40% (South Korea) of their income from private transfers in Japan and South Korea respectively. Single-parent households are relatively rare in East Asia (Bradbury et al., 2022). In Japan, only 6-7% of children live in single-parent households. In South Korea, the proportion is 11%, similar to Italy (9%) and Canada (10%). In all other Western societies, the proportion is higher, reaching 21% in the UK. In all societies, the poverty rate is lowest in couple households and much higher in single-parent households. The low level of single-parent households in South Korea may therefore be one of the reasons why the overall child poverty rate is relatively low. Despite the low proportion of lone-parent households in South Korea, these counterfactual virtual poverty rates are not much different from the actual poverty rates. This is due to the relatively high poverty rates among the larger 'other' family types in South Korea. Therefore, increasing the weight of single parents while reducing the weight of 'other' households has an offsetting effect. However, in Japan, the poverty rate among lone parent households is so high that this counterfactual calculation would result in an increase in the poverty rate (Bradbury et al., 2022).

In the United States, the number of children in single-parent families has increased dramatically over the past 40 years, causing great concern among policymakers and the public. Researchers have identified the increase in single-parent families (particularly single-mother families) as a major driver of the long-term increase in child poverty in the United States. The impact of growing up in a single-parent family goes beyond economic issues and has been shown to increase a child's risk of dropping out of school, being cut off from the labour force and becoming a teenage parent. While many children growing up in lone parent families are successful, others face significant difficulties in their transition to adulthood. Children from low-income

single-parent families face the greatest barriers to success in school and the workforce. Children from low-income single-parent families face the greatest barriers to success in school and the workforce (Mather, 2010). Most single-mother families have limited financial resources to cover their children's education, childcare and health care costs. Seven out of ten children in single-mother households are poor or low-income. Although the low number of potential breadwinners in female-headed households contributes to the problem, many of these families are disadvantaged because of problems in collecting child support due to the absence of the father. Recovery of child support from absent fathers in 2007, only 31% of female-headed households with children reported receiving child support payments in the previous year. This is because many fathers in this situation have very low wages; for younger children aged 0-8 years, the results are even more striking: in 2008, more than three-quarters (77%) of young children in single-mother households were poor or low-income (ibid).

Australia is one of the richest countries in the world and has enjoyed sustained economic growth for over 20 years. Despite this, lone parent families and child poverty have increased over the past six years. 32% of lone parents are in poverty, an increase of 6% since 2011. 39% of children in lone parent families are in poverty, compared to 13% of children in dual-earner families. This figure has increased by 2% over the past six years and is the highest among lone parent families. 59% of lone parent families with dependent children whose main source of income is government assistance are in poverty, an increase of 24% since 2013 (Global Sisters, 2020). Poverty mainly affects women and dependent children. Single-mother households have the highest poverty rate by gender as well as by family type, regardless of how poverty is measured. Those experiencing domestic violence,

indigenous people, migrants, refugees, those living in rural areas and those with mental illness are particularly vulnerable to economic insecurity. Poverty among single mothers is a significant problem in Australia. It is in urgent need of resolution if we are serious about promoting the rights of women and children. One in five Australian households is headed by a single mother, and the majority (83%) of these households are female (ibid).

In summary, in comparison with OECD member countries, South Korea has a low number of single-parent families and therefore not a very high poverty rate, and Australia has a lower poverty rate than Japan, but it should be noted that the rate has increased in recent years. In the US, the concern about the possibility of the problem developing into a problem causing social unrest may be instructive when considering how the situation develops in Japan.

2.1.6 The issue of divorced single mothers and social policies

The term social policy is used to refer to the policies that governments use for welfare and social protection, the way in which welfare develops in society, and the academic study of these subjects. In the first sense, social policy is particularly concerned with social services and the welfare state. In the second, broader sense, social policy refers to a wide range of issues that go far beyond the activities of government. It includes the means of promoting welfare and the socio-economic conditions that shape the development of welfare (Spicker, 2013).

Politics has traditionally been defined as the participation of citizens in the discussion of public issues (Isaacs, 2021). “Ideology, power relations, conflict and the struggle over the rights are one side of this public dialogue. Compromise, tolerance and responsibility are the other side. Politics is about debating rights and wrongs, justice

and injustice, the good life and the bad life" (Isaacs, 2021 p8). It could be posited that exploring social issues is about making judgements about social rights and social wrongs, and it is undoubtedly one of the most political areas of debate in the social sciences (Isaacs, 2021). Social issues may be distinguished from political issues in that governments do not always act on issues that are openly discussed. However, social issues are essentially political issues, as they are debates about the kind of society we believe to be just (ibid).

Capitalist economies inevitably experience boom and bust cycles, with periods of growth and expansion followed by periods of decline and recession. While the welfare state is clearly stable during periods of growth and expansion, capital is always seeking new areas in which to make a profit, and this includes the field of welfare services themselves. Whatever the state of the economy, the welfare state under capitalism is never completely safe or stable. Especially during times of recession and mass unemployment, when the welfare needs of the working class are most pressing, it is possible that capitalists will call for the downsizing of the welfare state. On the other hand, it is also possible that during such times, capitalists will support the use of social welfare in order to counter the anti-capitalist sentiment and agitation of the working class (Ginsburg, 2000).

In the neoliberal worldview, the world is a market, where people, divorced from their historical and socio-economic contexts, have the freedom to engage in various activities, while social problems are considered to be personal issues for which each individual is responsible (e.g. Clarke, 2005; Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Saito). Put simply, neoliberalism individualises people, decontextualises human relationships, and thereby 'conceals the effects of power' (Giroux, 2004).

Neoliberalism has an ambivalent relationship with nationalism. Neoliberalism weakens nationalism because, in a globalised world, the number of people and goods crossing borders increases, making the borders that nationalism seeks to establish and maintain more fragile. At the same time, neoliberalism relies on nationalism and seeks to maintain a nation torn between the haves and have-nots through neoliberal policies. Neoliberal policies often provoke a reaction of neo-conservatism, which attacks, excludes and assimilates foreigners, feminists and racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Apple, 2006; Harvey, 2005).

The skeleton of social policy covers the structure and function of policy, or its nature and purpose (Ginsburg, 2000). Needless to say, the skeleton of policy is empirically analysed from the perspective of public and private welfare finance, legislation and administration, or, to put it another way, from the perspective of suppliers and payers, to borrow Higgin's (1986) expression. Governments and policy analysts are good at producing factual information on these matters, but this information is relatively scarce in terms of the definition and incidence of the welfare needs that policies are responding to. This issue quickly leads to the discussion of the impact of the above policies. However, behind the empirical issues of the life of policies are fundamental issues of their function and purpose. In other words, it is this issue that drives governments to action or inaction in social policy (ibid).

In the UK, the proportion of single-parent families among all families with dependent children increased from 8% in 1971 to 14% in 1987. This reflects the increase in the number of divorced and unmarried mothers. As in other countries, the majority of single parents are women, and almost all of them have been divorced (Millar, 1989). Historically, the treatment of single parents has varied greatly according to status, with widows always enjoying a relatively respectable status, while unmarried

mothers were often considered less respectable and even punished (Finer, 1974). After the second world war, as divorce increased and attitudes towards unmarried mothers gradually changed, these distinctions of status became increasingly blurred. The women's movement and the poverty lobby played a central role in weakening some of the stigma attached to single parent families, and the National Association of Single Parent Families was an important element of the poverty lobby (ibid). It is only in the last twenty years or so that the common terms 'single parent family' and 'mother and child family' have come into widespread use. In terms of policy, this was most clearly reflected in the government-commissioned report on single-parent families (ibid). As a token gesture, the Labour government introduced higher child benefit and social assistance income credits for single parents in 1975. According to the Secretary of State for Social Security at the time, this was the 'maximum' that could be done for single parents (Millar, 1989). After the war, the poverty rate (based on net income relative to the level of social assistance) for single-parent families fluctuated between three and six times that of two-parent families (ibid). In 1981, 55% of single-parent families had a net income below 140% of the level of social assistance. The proportion of net income of single-parent families to that of two-parent families is much lower than in Sweden, much higher than in the United States, and about the same as in the Federal Republic of Germany (Hauser & Fischer, 1990).

Mothers in single-parent families in the UK have come to rely very heavily on social assistance and child benefits, and this reliance has increased over the past 20 years. In Millar's 1978/9 survey, only 17% of single parents claimed social assistance at some point during the year. Between 1981 and 1988, the number of social security officials pursuing absent fathers by social security officials fell by one-third, and the

proportion of single parents receiving social assistance who were also receiving support fell from 50% to 23% (DSS, 1990). In the 1960s, single parents were more likely to be in paid work than married mothers, but from the early 1970s the trend was reversed. In this respect, the UK is quite different from the other countries, with lone mothers more likely to be in paid work through relatively less pressured benefit systems than married mothers. This may be explained by relatively less pressured benefit systems, the poverty trap (whereby taking a low-paid job means losing out on welfare benefits), and the poor quality of employment opportunities and training available to women in the UK (NCOPF, 1990).

In 1982/3, a secret committee of the Cabinet considered the question of whether ‘the current policy of supporting lone parents strikes the right balance between ensuring adequate child support payments to prevent poverty and encouraging responsible and independent action by parents’ (The Guardian, 17 February 1983). The government was considering whether to shift this balance in the latter direction. For example, they considered scrapping the post-financing benefit revision and putting pressure on single parents to find work, as in the US workfare system. These concrete proposals were abandoned after secret cabinet meeting minutes were leaked to the press, sparking sharp opposition from women's and poverty groups. In 1990, the government returned to the issue of lone mothers with a more modest proposal to have courts deduct child support directly from absent fathers' incomes. This would do nothing to increase lone mothers' incomes, but if successful, it would transfer some of the cost of child support from the state to the fathers. The Thatcher government's response to the lone mother problem was confused, but it is clear that the growing poverty and income inequality, rising unemployment and the decline of the welfare state have discriminated against lone mothers. This in itself may be said

to have suppressed lone motherhood, even if it has not been very successful in doing so. The confusion lies in the contradiction of wanting to support families where the mother stays at home to look after the children, while at the same time wanting to reduce lone mothers' dependence on the welfare system by encouraging them to become independent by finding paid work or receiving support from the father (Ginsburg, 2000).

The position of lone mothers is a good indication of the achievements and limitations of family policy in contemporary Sweden. In 1983, 19.0% of families with children under 18 were single-parent families, and around 90% of these were single-mother families. The proportion of single-parent families is much higher than in the United Kingdom or the Federal Republic of Germany, but slightly lower than in the United States. In Sweden, 9.2% of single-parent families are poor, a much lower proportion than in the other welfare states surveyed. In 1979, 86% of Swedish single-parent mothers had paid work, a much higher proportion than in the other countries surveyed, and much higher than the proportion of married mothers in paid work (ibid). When adjusted for household size, the net income of single-parent households in Sweden is 87% of that of two-parent households, a much higher proportion than in the other three countries (UK, USA, FRG), especially the USA. However, it would be a mistake to think that the welfare state encourages the establishment of single-parent households. On the contrary, surveys and statistical analysis clearly show that single parents are economically disadvantaged in many ways. In 1982, 20% of single-mother families were dependent on social assistance, compared to 9% of single-father families and 3% of two-parent families. Although minimum income for single parents is not guaranteed, the Advanced Maintenance Payments were introduced in 1937 and has since been significantly improved (ibid).

In the UK, several community-based initiatives support single mothers outside of government policies. These include organizations and grassroots projects that focus on employment, childcare, and advocacy.

Gingerbread supports single parents with practical advice, peer support, and advocacy in the UK. They provide tailored guidance on navigating employment challenges, balancing childcare, and accessing resources. Gingerbread also campaigns for better workplace policies and childcare infrastructure to benefit single parents. Their recent reports highlight the critical need for flexible jobs and accessible childcare to improve single-parent families' financial stability (Gingerbread, 2024).

Single Parent Rights aims to end discrimination against single parent families in the UK. Its main campaign is to ask the UK government to add single parenthood as a characteristic to be protected by the Equality Act. It also conducts research on discriminatory policies and campaigns, and advocates for improvements in the situation of single parent families. At present, it is focused on eliminating discrimination in access to childcare support and social security policies. Single Parent Rights is the leading organisation for single parents fighting institutional discrimination. Led by and for single parents, the organisation was established during the UK's first lockdown in 2020, highlighting how policy makers, employers and businesses are consistently marginalising single parents in a rapidly changing policy making environment (Single Parent Rights, 2024).

Across the UK, informal mutual aid and support networks and local charities assist single mothers by providing community-based childcare, meal support, and job training. These include initiatives like ‘Good Shepherd Centres’ and community hubs

where single parents can exchange services or gain skills for better employment opportunities (Good Shepherd Centre,2024).

As for the other developed and industrialised nations, the organisation, Single Mothers by Choice (SMC) represent those who decide to become mothers without a partner, knowing that they will have to raise their children alone. Single Mothers by Choice (SMC) was founded in 1981 by Jane Mattes. Since then, more than 40,000 single mothers have benefited from membership, and SMC members are active across the USA, Canada, Europe and beyond, either through local chapters, or 24/7 online through active private discussion forums and benefit from SMC peer support through newsletters (Single Mothers by Choice, 2024).

However, in Japan, in response to the enactment of the Child Poverty Measures Law in 2014, addressing the economic difficulties of single-mother households has finally become an important policy issue. According to the Basic Survey on the Living Conditions of the People, the relative poverty rate for households consisting of one adult and their children was 50.8% (2015), which is significantly higher than the average level for households with children (12.9%) (MHLW, 2017). As approximately 90% of single-parent households are single-mother households (MHLW, 2016), the former figure can be said to strongly reflect the economic vulnerability of women to poverty (Saito, 2020). These percentages are also significantly higher than those of the other developed nations previously discussed.

Japanese single-mother households are characterised by not only a high poverty rate but conversely a high employment rate for mothers, especially when compared to other developed industrialised countries. The employment rate for single parents in OECD member countries is 65% on average, but in Japan it is surprisingly over

80%. In Western countries, employment among single parents reduces the risk of poverty for the household by around 50-60% (OECD, 2008), but in Japan this does not necessarily lead to poverty avoidance (Yuzawa, 2013). One factor behind this is that the earning capacity of single mothers is low, and many of them are *working poor* (Oishi, 2018).

The rise in the divorce rate is observed in many developed countries, both in the East and the West, as a result of the improvement in the economic status of women and the weakening of traditional family norms that occur during the process of industrialisation (Andress et al., 2006). In Japan, where the rate of extramarital births is significantly lower than in other developed countries, the dissolution of marriage through divorce often leads to the formation of single-mother households (CFA, 2021). According to a 2016 survey by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 79.5% of single-mother households were formed due to divorce, and 8.7% were formed by unmarried mothers. The average age of mothers in single-mother households was 41.4 years old, and when broken down by age group, the largest group was 40-49 years old at 48.0%, followed by 30-39 years old at 30.2%. The average age of the youngest child is 11.3 years old, and when looking at the age groups, the largest group is 15–17-year-olds at 21.5%, followed by 12–14-year-olds at 20.0%. The average household size for single-mother households is 3.29 people, and 38.7% of single-mother households have other people living with them, with the largest group being those living with the mother's parents at 27.7% (MHLW,2016). In recent years, the number of families with foreign roots (one parent is a foreign national) has also increased, and foreign mother-child households account for 9.4% of families with foreign roots. 67.2% of foreign mother-child households have an annual household income of less than 2 million yen, and are in a difficult financial

situation (Yamamoto, 2021). While same-sex marriage is currently recognised in 37 OECD countries, Japan is the only G7 country that does not provide legal guarantees to same-sex couples. Same-sex couples cannot marry legally and therefore cannot obtain various legal effects, including the right to legal inheritance. Many people suffer from the lack of social recognition, and suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts are particularly prominent among teenagers who question their sexuality. Although 70% of public opinion polls are in favour of same-sex marriage, the approval rate among parliamentarians is 40%, especially the Liberal Democratic Party, which is overwhelmingly low, and this has not led to a change in the law (Keidanren, 2024). Furthermore, these issued are reflected in the current research through the lack of diversity in the sample population (see chapter 3, section 3.5.2)

After divorce, women tend to increase their labour supply as workers supporting the household finances (Drobnic, 2000), but it is not easy to restore household income to the level it was before the divorce. Women tend to prioritize housework and child-rearing when they marry, and interrupt their professional careers, which leads to a depreciation of their accumulated human capital (Harkness, 2016). In particular, the phenomenon of women's earned wages declining after childbirth is called the *motherhood penalty* (MP), and in Japan, the MP is about the same as in Western countries (Takeuchi, 2018).

The decline in household income due to this MP is to some extent compensated for by an increase in the labour supply of the husband in households where both spouses are employed (Harkness, 2016). As a result, divorce brings the MP on wages to the surface, and the disadvantage persists in the medium to long term even after the formation of a single-mother household (ibid). Furthermore, since Japanese single mothers tend to be less educated than married mothers (Nagase,

2003), they have a lower economic status in the labour market than other women. Therefore, the mutual support relationship through three-generation households (or living with parents for single mothers) plays an important role in reducing the poverty risk of single-mother households (Shirahase & Raymo, 2014).

In July 2019, the National Council of Single Mother Support Organisations was launched, with 20 organisations from across the country. The Association gathers the various voices of single mothers nationally, disseminates the current situation of single mothers and their children, and requests the government to revise the taxation system. The organisations belonging to the group are diverse, including those that have made policy proposals mainly to the parties involved, those that have supported the parties involved in close proximity to them, and those that are involved in local initiatives such as children's cafeterias (子ども食堂). The common

philosophy is not only to support single mothers so that they can have confidence in themselves and have the ability to connect with the support available in society, but also to help them find a path that suits them by taking a break from time to time and making effective use of the support available in society, so that they can enrich the lives of parents and children within society. The Association aims to help parents and children to find a place in society where they can live in a spiritually enriching way (Eduwell Journal, 2021).

The above suggest that a combination of economic, social and policy interventions are needed to address the persistent poverty of single mothers in Japan. By improving wages, strengthening social safety nets, reforming the tax system, expanding housing assistance and promoting community involvement, Japan can move towards a more equitable society where single mothers and their children have

more opportunities to succeed. However, on the other hand, to do this without relying on government policies, the private sector, communities and individuals need to work together to create employment opportunities, provide childcare support and offer financial assistance. By fostering a culture of empowerment and mutual support, single mothers can be enabled to achieve economic independence and break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their children.

Improving the lives of single mothers and their children requires addressing a wide range of issues, not just poverty, but also education, healthcare, employment and social justice. By working together, governments, businesses, communities and individuals can build a fairer and more sustainable future by providing financial support, expanding educational opportunities and eliminating social prejudice.

2. 2. Capital Theories as a theoretical underpinning

Capital theories, in particular Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, provide insights into the economic disadvantages faced by children in single-mother households. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, education and other cultural assets possessed by individuals that can influence their opportunities for social mobility and success. For the purpose of the current study, I contend that, in the case of single mothers and their children, several factors can contribute to economic disadvantage. These factors can be understood through the lens of capital theory: in terms of economic capital, single mothers and children often face economic constraints because they have no one to earn additional income in the household. This lack of economic resources can limit access to educational opportunities associated with academic success, such as quality education, extracurricular activities and tutoring. Although cultural capital encompasses the

values, beliefs, behaviours and knowledge transmitted within a particular society (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986), Children of single mothers may have limited exposure to certain cultural practices and norms that are emphasised in educational settings. For example, they may have less exposure to cultural experiences, museums and books, which may affect their academic development. Social capital refers to the networks and relationships that individuals have that can provide access to resources and opportunities, and single mothers have more limited social networks than dual-earner households, which means that they may have fewer connections with mentors, tutors and others who can support their children's academic efforts.

2.2.1 Bourdieu's Capitals and Academic Success

Bourdieu's theory of education and social and cultural reproduction is based on the idea that access to education plays an important role in perpetuating social inequalities and exclusion. The main argument of Bourdieu's theory is that education does not function as an equalising force in society, but as a mechanism for reproducing existing social structures and privileges. Several key concepts central to understanding this theory are introduced. They are cultural capital, social capital, reproduction of inequality. Cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural practices that individuals acquire through socialisation and upbringing. Bourdieu argues that inequalities in cultural capital reflect inequalities in social class. Individuals from privileged backgrounds often have greater cultural capital, giving them an advantage in the education system and wider society. Social capital refers to the social networks, relationships and contacts that individuals have, which give them resources, opportunities and advantages. Bourdieu points out that individuals with valuable social networks, such as knowing influential people, can convert social

capital into economic capital, further strengthening their advantage (Bourdieu, 1979,1986,2017).

Bourdieu argues that schools as social institutions play an important role in perpetuating social inequalities. Teachers' pedagogical actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, tend to reward pupils with cultural capital associated with the dominant class and penalise those without it. As a result, the education system plays a central role in reproducing social exclusion and widening the gap between different social groups. In the context of the 2020 Japanese education reform, Bourdieu's theories and concepts provide a framework for analysing how this reform has contributed to widening poverty inequalities and strengthening social inequalities. By examining the distribution of cultural capital and social networks across different social strata, researchers can explore how particular groups may be at an advantage or disadvantage in accessing educational opportunities. Furthermore, the theory can shed light on the role of schools in perpetuating social exclusion and reproducing existing inequalities and can inform debates and critiques on the impact of reforms on social mobility and equity in education.

2.2.2 Cultural Capital

“Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case

of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu, 1986, p243).

Cultural capital is acquired to varying degrees in different periods, societies and social classes, without deliberate indoctrination and therefore quite unconsciously. Cultural capital is always characterised by the conditions of its initial acquisition, which help to determine its distinctive value by leaving more or less visible traces (e.g., class- or region-specific pronunciation). It does not accumulate beyond the sufficiency capacity of the individual human being, but fades and dies with its owner (e.g., biological capacity, memory). Because it is thus variously associated with persons with biological peculiarities and is always subject to largely disguised or invisible genetic transmission, the Greek jurists made a distinction between genetic property (ta patroa) and acquired property (epikteta), i.e., what an individual adds to his or her heritage. This ignores the old, deep-rooted distinction between the two. In this way, they succeeded in reconciling the prestige of the hereditary property with the benefits of acquisition (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, the most powerful principle of the symbolic efficacy of cultural capital undoubtedly lies in the logic of its transmission. On the one hand, the process of fulfilment of objectified cultural capital and the time it takes depends on the cultural capital embodied primarily in the whole family through (among other things) the generalised 'Arrow effect' [6] and all forms of tacit transmission. On the other hand, the initial accumulation of cultural capital, which is a prerequisite for the rapid and easy accumulation of all kinds of useful cultural capital, starts from the beginning, without delay and without waste, only in the children of families with strong cultural capital,

[6] The 'Arrow effect' is a metaphor for the comprehensive and subtle ways in which cultural capital is transmitted within family.

and in this case the accumulation period extends over the entire period of socialisation. The transmission of cultural capital is therefore arguably the most hidden form of genetic transmission of capital and therefore carries proportionately more weight in the system of reproduction strategies, as direct and visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled (ibid).

It is immediately apparent that the link between economic and cultural capital is mediated by the time required for acquisition. The differences in the cultural capital possessed by families are firstly the difference in the age at which the work of transmission and accumulation begins, i.e. the limitation of fully utilising the biologically available time and maximising the use of free time for cultural capital, and secondly the difference in the ability to meet the cultural demands of this defined, long-lasting acquisition process This is the case for the individual who has been in the process of acquiring the cultural capital. Moreover, the length of time an individual can prolong the acquisition process depends on the length of time his family can provide him with free time, a prerequisite for the initial accumulation, i.e. time free from economic necessity (time that can be assessed as a handicap to be made up) (ibid).

Objectifying cultural capital in the form of education is one way of neutralising some of the characteristics derived from it. This is due to the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer. It is this objectification that makes the difference between the capital of a self-taught person, which may be questioned at any time, or the cultural capital of a courtier who can only benefit from fluctuating and indefinite value in the market of hi-so exchanges,[7] and cultural capital authorised by

[7] social exchanges in upper-class society

a legally guaranteed qualification and formally independent of the individual owner The following are some of the most important factors (ibid). “By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them (by substituting one for another in succession). Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

In the field of cultural production, there are two forms of capital in particular. Symbolic capital refers to the degree of prestige, prestige, consecration and honour that has been accumulated and is based on the dialectic of knowledge and recognition. Cultural capital is formed of cultural knowledge, competence and disposition. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a form of knowledge, an internalised code, a cognitive acquisition that equips social actors with the capacity for empathy, appreciation and decoding of cultural relations and cultural artefacts. He suggests that 'a work of art only has meaning and interest for those who possess the cultural competence, or code, to which it is encoded'. Possession of this code, or cultural capital, is accumulated through a long process of acquisition and inculcation, including educational acts such as family and group membership, educational membership of social formations and social institutions (Bourdieu, 1993).

Extracts from Bourdieu's works are relevant to research on single mothers and child poverty in Japan because they discuss the concept of cultural capital and its transmission within the family. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, exists in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. The embodied state is the long-term disposition of mind and body that individuals acquire as they are socialised and

nurtured. This includes aspects such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural practices. In the context of research on poverty, this concept emphasises that those from families with strong cultural capital are in a better position to accumulate cultural resources and benefit from them. The objective status of cultural capital refers to cultural goods such as books, musical instruments and other artifacts that are manifestations of cultural knowledge and theory. These material resources can contribute to the accumulation and transmission of cultural capital. In the context of poverty research, this concept implies that households with limited economic resources face barriers to obtaining and accessing these cultural goods, preventing the accumulation of cultural capital. The institutionalised state of cultural capital refers to a state in which cultural capital is formally recognised and guaranteed through qualifications such as degrees. Possession of institutionalised cultural capital, such as a degree, enables comparison and exchange of individuals based on their cultural capital. This concept suggests that individuals with recognised qualifications have an advantage in converting cultural capital into economic capital. In the context of research on maternal and child poverty in Japan, these concepts of cultural capital are useful for understanding how the transmission and accumulation of cultural resources within families can lead to social inequalities. The concepts shed light on differential access to cultural capital based on family background, economic resources and educational qualifications. It also provides a framework for exploring how lack of cultural capital in disadvantaged families may perpetuate the cycle of poverty and hinder social mobility.

2.2.3 Social and economic capital

“ Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986 , pp248-249). Such relationships exist only in a practical state and may exist in material and symbolic exchanges that help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed through the application of common names (names of families, classes, tribes, schools, political parties, etc.) and a series of enactment acts designed simultaneously to shape and inform those who receive them. In this case, they are more or less actually enacted, maintained and reinforced in exchange. Because they are based on the establishment and maintenance of material and symbolic exchange, which is based on the reification of proximity, they are partially inseparable from the objective relations of proximity in the physical (geographical) space and in the economic and social space (Bourdieu, 1986).

"The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (Bourdieu, 1986, p249). In other words, although social capital is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural capital held by an agent, or by the whole of the agents to which he is connected, the exchange that carries out mutual recognition presupposes a minimum reification of objective homogeneity and a capital held by the person to exert a multiplier effect on it, so that it is never fully independent (Bourdieu, 1986).

The benefits arising from membership of a group are the basis of the solidarity that makes this possible. Even in the case of groups such as select clubs, which are

deliberately organised to concentrate social capital and benefit fully from the multiplier effect that concentration implies, and to secure benefits as members, are pursued as such - material benefits such as services of all kinds arising from useful relationships, rare and authoritative groups symbolic benefits, such as those derived from association with the group (ibid).

Like economic capital, other forms of capital are unequally distributed between social classes and class factions. Different forms of capital are mutually transformable under certain circumstances. (For example, the right kind and amount of academic capital can be converted into economic capital through favourable placement in the job market), but they are not mutually reducible. The possession of economic capital does not necessarily imply the possession of cultural or symbolic capital, and vice versa. Indeed, Bourdieu analyses the field of cultural production as an 'inversion of the economic world' based on the logic of 'winners lose', because economic success can represent a barrier to certain consecration or symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1993).

2.2.4 Habitus

Bourdieu's habitus is a system of embodied dispositions that produces practices according to the structural principles of the social world (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu's anthropology captures in the concept of habitus the unelaborated relations of homogeneity that give access to the formal and informal customs, practices and rules of a society, as well as to another level of order and meaning. Because, at the point of analysis - as structured culture, habitus is conceived as a grammar that allows for the generation of new forms of expression that may change the structure of the grammar itself (just as speech enabled by the grammar itself changes the

grammar). For Bourdieu 'culture' means these objective systems of meaning organised by generative cultural practices in terms of their structures (Nash, 1990).

Habitus is sometimes described as a 'sense of the game', that is a 'practical sense' which inclines the agent to act and react in a particular situation in a way that is neither calculated nor merely a matter of conscious obedience to rules. Rather, it is a set of dispositions that produce practices and perceptions. Habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which makes it a second sense, a second nature. According to Bourdieu's definition, the dispositions represented by habitus are 'durable' in the sense that they persist throughout the agent's lifetime. Habitus is also 'transferable', in that it has the potential to generate practices in multiple and diverse spheres of activity, and it is a 'structured structure', necessarily incorporating objective social conditions to instil habitus. This explains the similarity of the habitus of agents belonging to the same social class, and the authorised reference to class habitus (for example, Bourdieu, in Distinction (1984), shows that working-class habitus generates similar preferences across a wide range of cultural practices (and shows statistically that this is the case). Finally, the disposition of habitus is a 'structuring structure' because of its ability to produce practices adapted to specific situations (Bourdieu, 1993).

Concepts such as habitus (i.e. the system of dispositions), practical sense, strategy, etc., arose out of the effort to escape from structuralist objectivism without falling into subjectivism. In this way, you can see that it is not enough to formulate the problem in terms of spontaneity and speed, freedom and necessity, the individual and the social object, but we need to think of it in terms of the sense of the game. Habitus as a sense of the game is a social game that has become embodied, a social game that has become its very nature. The better the player acts, the freer and more

constrained at the same time. It's as if you're being controlled by the ball, but by doing so you're actually in control of it (Bourdieu & Ishizaki, 1990).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus plays a central role in these theories. Webb, Schirato and Danaher define habitus as follows (Huang, 2019):

A concept that expresses, on the one hand, the way in which individuals ' become themselves' - engaged in practices. An artistic habitus, for example, disposes the individual artist to certain activities and perspectives that express the culturally and historically constituted values of the artistic field (Webb et al.,2002, p xii – xiii).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is also related to the resource of knowledge. Knowledge is derived from the particular culture in which an individual lives. For example, working-class people have a particular worldview based on their class. This differs from the worldview of middle-class people. Furthermore, these understandings are reflected in their behaviour, such as the way they speak, their use of vocabulary, their attitudes and values. Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be used in part to explain this situation (Huang, 2019).

Habitus can be understood as a set of dispositions that influence people's expectations of social life. Compared to the working class, middle-class people may be more comfortable conversing with professionals such as lawyers or professors. The main reason for this is that they come from similar backgrounds and therefore have similar values, life experiences and education (Bao,1997).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is pertinent to understanding the experiences of Japanese single mothers and their children, particularly in relation to social, economic and cultural capital. In the context of Japanese single mothers, habitus shaped by social class, education and cultural background can influence their

behaviour, expectations and choices. Single mothers from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face difficulties in acquiring and transmitting cultural capital to their children. Limited economic resources, time constraints and social stigma may limit their ability to provide the same level of educational and cultural opportunities as two-parent families. Non-profit organisations (NPOs) can play an important role in helping single mothers and their children build social, economic and cultural capital. For example, education and capacity building, mentoring and guidance, access to resources, networking and community engagement, cultural enrichment programmes, advocacy and policy initiatives. NPOs can support single mothers and their children and create opportunities to bridge the gap in social, economic and cultural capital between single-parent and two-parent families. As a result, they can increase the chances of educational success, economic mobility and social integration for single mothers and their children.

2.2.5 Origin of Bourdieu's theories and their relevance to contemporary Japan

In 1955, Bourdieu was called to national service in Algeria during the struggle for independence of the French colony of Algeria and of Republican France. The bloody struggle in Algiers was a formative experience for a generation of French intellectuals. They betrayed what the state had always claimed to be a mission of liberation and civilisation, and saw the powerful forces behind colonialism revealed, albeit justified in terms of progress. Bourdieu addressed this issue both through direct opposition and through research on the nature of domination itself (Calhoun, 2006). His experiences in war-torn Algeria ultimately drew him away from a career in philosophy, which he considered symbolically more prestigious, and into the realms of ethnology and sociology. Interestingly, Bourdieu's first ethnosociological studies were conceived as a tentative deviation, dictated by his civic duty to convey reliable

information to a French public with limited knowledge of the Algerian situation (Peters, 2016).Bourdieu studied the difficult situation of those who chose to work in the modern economy and found themselves transformed into an 'underclass', unable even to attain full proletarian status due to the ethnic and national prejudices of the French colonialists (Bourdieu, 1958; Bourdieu et al.), where he began to develop a richer and more sophisticated analysis of how traditional orders can reproduce themselves without conscious intention, a clear template for reproduction or a direct exercise of power (Calhoun, 2006).The concept of habitus appears in broad form in Bourdieu's earliest writings in Algeria. Bourdieu (2013a [1963], 64) discusses gift exchange, barter and the temporal orientation of Algerian society as rooted in forms of 'pre-perceived anticipation' that guide practice. Cultural capital was also a concept first constructed by Bourdieu in his analysis of Algeria (without naming it as such) and subsequently extended to metropolitan culture. Specifically, Bourdieu conceptualised the resources of Algerian prestige and honour as a form of capital. He argues that colonialism destroys these 'ancient values, especially those of prestige and honour' and replaces them with 'impersonal and abstract monetary values'. Back in France, Bourdieu found a similar disconnect between a value system based on 'prestige and honour' and one rooted in economic capital (Steinmetz, 2022). Educational institutions can be important instruments for improving society. However, as Bourdieu continued to think about Algeria and began to analyse schooling in France further, he began to doubt this possibility. In Merton's words, he came to believe that the problem was not that schools failed to fulfil their manifest functions, but rather that they succeeded in fulfilling a variety of potential functions. Of the latter, the focus was on maintaining and pseudo-disguising class structures. However, it was also important to provide an institutionally specific place

for educators and intellectuals themselves. The involvement of educators in this place and in the goal of establishing a position within it made it highly unlikely that they could be the transformative force that Bourdieu had previously hoped they would be. Although the education system was central to Bourdieu's concerns, both his disappointment and his critical analysis were widespread. All modern institutions, including capitalist markets and the state itself, tend to promise more than they deliver. They pretend to work for the common good, but in fact reproduce social inequalities. While pretending to be agents of freedom, they are in fact organisations of power. They inspire the devotion of people who want a richer and freer life and let them down with the restrictions they impose and the violence they deploy (Calhoun, 2006).

Cultural capital is an important, but often elusive, concept in the study of educational processes and the reproduction of social classes. One reason for this is that a country's education system and the ways in which students are assessed during various educational transitions set the context for the mechanisms through which embodied and objectified cultural capital operate (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015).

Bourdieu depicted schools as places where symbolic violence is legitimately exercised. Education contributes to the transformation of class-based distinctions between pupils into a universally accepted logic of domination. Contrary to this, among Japanese researchers, schools are assumed to be devices for 'teaching' habitus, or rather for pupils to 'acquire' habitus. In other words, cultural capital is understood to mean human capital in cultural skills (Sanada, 2016).

Reliance on shadow education provided in the private extracurricular education market is also common in other East Asian countries such as Taiwan and South

Korea. In these settings, many parents invest directly in extra-curricular activities that enhance human capital, allowing the additional effects of cultural capital on educational attainment and achievement to be isolated (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015).

The type of parental investment that effectively contributes to children's academic achievement is likely to vary according to the cultural conditions and education system in a country. A number of studies outside France have shown that cultural capital beyond 'high culture' is related to pupils' academic achievement (Buchmann 2002; De Graaf et al. 2000; DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002; Kariya et al.) This suggests the importance of considering how educational settings are structured.

A number of empirical studies have measured cultural capital acquisition in high school and examined its impact on high school performance and subsequent educational achievement. The lack of an empirical link between cultural capital acquisition and educational achievement among high school students may be because cultural capital internalised in childhood has already been transformed into competence by the time students reach high school (DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002; Katsillis and Rubinson 1990). It is possible that cultural capital developed early in life enhances the human capital of adolescents.

The post-WWII Japanese education system sought to correct educational inequalities associated with family circumstances and to promote a meritocracy (Cummings 1980; James and Benjamin 1988). The complex pre-war system of post-primary school follow-up education was replaced by compulsory junior high schools, non-compulsory regular high schools and vocational high schools, followed by the higher education options of junior colleges and four-year universities (Rohlen 1983).

Japanese students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to and engage in literary, artistic and musical activities at home than their lower status peers (Fujita et al. 1987; Miyajima and Fujita 1991; Miyajima and Tanaka 1983), and this has consistently been found to be positively associated with students' academic motivation and academic performance (Kariya et al. 2002; Kataoka 1998; Miyajima and Tanaka 1983). Embodied cultural capital is expected to correlate with students' academic performance and indirectly influence subsequent outcomes (high school quality and final educational attainment) through academic performance. Embodied cultural capital in the Japanese context enters the subjective judgement of Japanese teachers in terms of the set of attitudes and dispositions they judge. More than 90% of Japanese youth go on to high school, but in most parts of Japan there is only one public high school in the district that students can apply to. Schools in these areas are highly stratified in terms of academic quality (Brinton 2005; Kariya and Rosenbaum 1987), with students who succeed in entering academically competitive high schools being much more likely to go on to highly ranked universities than those who fail (Kariya and Rosenbaum 1987) The authors define *shadow education*, which includes after-school classes ('juku'), tutoring and correspondence courses, as 'educational activities outside of formal schooling that are designed to increase the likelihood of students' success in their career choices'. Shadow education is an important component of the Japanese educational environment. It can take many forms, ranging from private tutoring and cramming (after-school private tuition) to a year-long study between high school graduation and university entrance exams (ronin experience). According to a recent survey by the Japanese Government, 15% of second-graders, 28% of fifth graders and about half of eighth-graders attending public schools in Japan also attend cram school on a

regular basis (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2003). This proportion is significantly higher in urban areas and among students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Rohlen 1983).

There are reasons to believe that objectified cultural capital may interact with gender in one of the transitions in education in Japan, namely the transition to higher education. The rate of female entry to higher education rose from 18% to 48% between 1970 and 2003, making it equal to that of men. However, higher education remains highly sex-disaggregated, with about one-third of female university students going to two-year universities and only 4% of male students. Higher education institutions for women, especially junior colleges, were originally established to target affluent families and to increase the cultural capital of young women (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015).

It is also important to note that, at least in Japan, the impact of cultural capital on academic performance is not as significant as the impact of parents' socio-economic status and students' academic performance. Objectified cultural capital is empirically associated with key pedagogical transitions in Japanese education that clearly elicit teachers' subjective input. The mechanism is the teacher's assessment of the student's home environment, facilitated by the teacher visiting each student's home and assigning a number of student tasks to obtain information on parental occupations, student aspirations, family recreational activities and other family and personal matters (ibid).

Pierre Bourdieu's thinking was heavily influenced by his experiences in Algeria, which are reflected in his theories of cultural capital and social reproduction. His research began with a deep understanding of the reality of French colonialism and

the social and economic inequalities within it. Through his experiences in Algeria, Bourdieu gained insight into social structures and power dynamics. This formed the basis of his theoretical framework and led to the development of the concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can also be applied to the analysis of inequalities in the Japanese education system and society. Specifically, Bourdieu's ideas can be seen to have influenced contemporary Japan in terms of the education system and cultural capital, shadow education, schooling and symbolic violence, and gender differences and education.

2.2.6 Cultural Capital as a Theoretical Model for the Present Study

Bourdieu states that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, in particular the ability to understand and use an educational language. Although the possession of cultural capital varies according to social class, the education system is predicated on the possession of cultural capital. This makes it very difficult for students from the lower classes to succeed in the education system (Sullivan, 2002).

Cultural capital is transmitted primarily through the family. From their families, children acquire modes of thought, types of temperament, sets of meanings and qualities of style. They are then given specific social values and status according to what the ruling class labels as the most valuable cultural capital (Giroux, 1983). Essential to cultural capital, therefore, is the possibility of a complex analysis of its interaction with the family environment, the schooling process and the child's educational career (Reay, 2004).

Parents who are rich in cultural capital promote their children's academic development in many ways, and participation in cultural activities is one of them. Most importantly, children acquire vocabulary, modes of expression, ideas, information and forms of discussion by listening to their parents (Sullivan, 2007). Education is an important mechanism of social reproduction, linking class origins to class destinations. The professional classes are more successful in communicating their professional status to their children than other segments of the middle class who are not highly educated. There is continuing interest in the ways in which the middle and upper classes use their cultural resources to promote those of their children's.

According to Bourdieu (1979), cultural capital refers to the familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, including language, knowledge, and social values. He argues that the possession of cultural capital varies by social class, and the education system tends to favour those who possess cultural capital. This can create barriers for students from lower social classes to succeed in education. In the case of single mothers and their children in Japan, the transmission of cultural capital through the family becomes significant. Bourdieu asserts that children acquire modes of thought, meanings, and qualities of style from their families. Wealthier families may have greater resources to support their children's education, such as studying abroad or attending prestigious schools, enabling them to acquire more cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979).

However, for single mothers and their children who may face economic challenges, the acquisition of cultural capital can be more difficult. Limited resources and financial constraints may hinder their ability to provide the same level of support for their children's education. This can contribute to educational disadvantages and

reduced access to prestigious qualifications. Moreover, Bourdieu emphasizes that family attitudes towards education are influenced by class values (ibid). Parents from wealthier backgrounds, who possess more cultural capital, are more likely to prioritize and promote their children's academic development. They can provide a richer learning environment, expose their children to cultural activities, and pass on valuable vocabulary, ideas, and modes of expression. In contrast, single mothers, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may face additional challenges in providing the same level of cultural capital to their children. They may have limited time, financial resources, or access to cultural resources that can enhance their children's educational experiences. Therefore, the theory of cultural capital helps illuminate the potential disparities faced by single mothers and their children in Japan's education system. It highlights how the transmission of cultural capital through families and the unequal distribution of cultural resources can influence educational outcomes and social mobility. Efforts to address these disparities may involve providing support and resources to single mothers and their children, including access to quality education, enrichment activities, and programs that promote cultural capital acquisition (ibid).

Although not all children of divorced single-parent families are poor in Japan, data show that a high proportion of them are (Bourdieu, 1986). Another possible effect of this poverty is that single-parent families tend to spend less time with their children than two-parent families. Bourdieu argues that it is very difficult for lower class pupils to succeed in the education system because the education system is predicated on the possession of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), but the point that cultural capital is familiarity with the dominant culture in a given society, in particular the ability to understand and use cultural language, means that children in ingle-mother families,

where mothers may find it more difficult to secure time to talk to their children or to express their vocabulary, may have fewer opportunities to use their cultural resources to promote their children's educational development.

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977).

In essence, Bourdieu is of the view that cultural capital is cultivated in upper-class families, enabling upper-class students to attain higher academic qualifications than lower-class students. This allows the upper class to maintain its class status and legitimises the dominant position that upper class individuals would normally hold. There are, of course, lower class individuals who succeed in the education system, but this does not challenge the system, but instead reinforces it by contributing to the appearance of meritocracy (Sullivan, 2002).

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital can shed light on the relationship between divorce, status change, the professional status of single mothers, lifestyle and the possibility of reduced opportunities. The possession of cultural capital varies according to social class, and the education system tends to favour those who possess cultural capital. Students from lower social classes find it difficult to succeed in the education system, thus perpetuating social inequalities. Divorce can lead to significant changes in status and environment, especially for single mothers who were previously married to someone from a higher social class. Divorce may lead to a loss of access to the economic resources, social connections and cultural capital of

the previous marriage. Following divorce, single mothers may experience a downward spiral in their professional status and lifestyle. Loss of financial stability and social networks may affect access to career advancement opportunities and resources. They may therefore struggle to provide the same level of educational support, cultural experiences and exposure to dominant cultural practices, further limiting their ability to pass on cultural capital to their children. According to Bourdieu's perspective, the education system reinforces and reproduces social inequalities by emphasising cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979). The upper classes, who traditionally have more cultural capital, are more likely to maintain their class status and enjoy the privileges associated with it. There are examples of people from lower class backgrounds succeeding in the education system, but these cases are often seen as exceptions that reinforce the appearance of meritocracy rather than challenge the system itself (Bourdieu 1986). For single mothers who have experienced a change in status due to divorce, the loss of cultural capital associated with previous marital status may pose additional difficulties in accessing educational opportunities and upward mobility. The lack of a home environment that conveys the dominant culture can also hinder their ability to succeed in the education system. To address this situation, it is crucial to help single mothers rebuild their lives and create opportunities for themselves and their children.

Bourdieu is sometimes criticised for being less than precise about which of the resources associated with upper-class families constitute cultural capital and how these resources are translated into educational qualifications. However, Bourdieu's emphasis on the immaterial resources of upper-class families is instructive. Evidence suggests that even though educational reforms such as free secondary education have dramatically reduced the cost of education borne by families, the link between

class of origin and educational attainment has not declined (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Halsey et al., 1980). This suggests that the educational advantages that upper class parents pass on to their children are not entirely attributable to economic factors, and that the concept of cultural capital deserves serious attention (Sullivan, 2002).

Bourdieu points out that working-class students are more likely to drop out of the education system than middle- and upper-class students, even if they control for their previous achievements. He argues that this is a more important mechanism of selection than examination failure (Sullivan, 2002).

Bourdieu argues that this phenomenon can be explained in terms of working-class habitus. Habitus is shaped in some way by the class's shared potential for objective success. The habitus then determines the behaviour of class members (ibid).

... Negative predispositions towards schools result in the self-exclusion of most children from the most culturally disadvantaged classes and strata... The sanctions objectively secured by the school against the strata and parts of the strata deprived of cultural capital must be understood as an expectation based on an unconscious estimation of the objective probability of success of the category as a whole (Bourdieu, 1977a).

Although economic and cultural capital are closely related, economic capital and habitus significantly influence cultural participation in the socialisation process (Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012). Economic capital enables analysis of educational power, suggesting that the middle class has more educational options than working-class families because they can afford higher tuition fees and extra-curricular activities such as music, sport and the arts (Lam, 2013; Yoon, 2020). Achievement in extra-

curricular activities is essential for a competitive edge in education (Vincent & Ball, 2007). Middle-class parents have the financial resources to invest in their children's co-ordinated upbringing, academic learning and future planning, while working-class parents cannot afford numerous extracurricular activities (Lam, 2013; Lareau, 1989)

The family is therefore the link between individual and class trajectories, and Wilkes argues that it should be the unit of study for class analysis. However, whereas the notion of cultural capital suggests the centrality of the family, Bourdieu appears to acknowledge the centrality of the mother (Reay, 2004).

It is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of mother’s free time) available to it (Bourdieu, 1986).

Working-class women have more difficulty in providing their children with resources of emotional capital than middle-class women because they were often hampered by poverty, negative personal experiences of schooling, inadequate educational knowledge and lack of confidence. Working-class women are often caught in a spiral of relative difficulty in providing their children with the benefits of emotional capital because of their lower levels of dominant cultural, economic and social capital. Working-class women often lack the appropriate conditions and contexts to provide either emotional capital or dominant cultural capital. However, this does not mean that working-class mothers did not provide emotional capital through their involvement in schooling; rather, they were not as closely associated with cultural capital as middle-class women. There are many examples of working-class women's

combined sensitivity, emotional support and encouragement enhancing their children's emotional capital, albeit under unfavourable conditions (Reay, 2004).

2.2.7 Bourdieu's Theory and Empowerment

The tendencies and distinctions involved in the frenetic activities to create middle-class children are of particular significance in terms of Bourdieu's understanding of the relationship between the functions of the education system and cultural and academic capital (Vincent & Ball, 2007). It is not enough to focus solely on the education system. Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of a combination of family and school cultural transmission (its efficiency depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family) (Bourdieu,1986). In other words, in order to fully understand the distribution of academic capital, we must take into account the activities within the family in the transmission of cultural capital, especially in the conditions of its initial acquisition... through the degree of visible traces they leave behind (Bourdieu, 2004). As Bourdieu argues, this is 'the most hidden and socially most decisive educational investment' (ibid). However, the inherited capital is supplemented by capital purchased as an activity. These activities contribute to the cultural capital held and embodied by the family itself, and thus become part of the accumulation of class resources (Skeggs 2004).

The development of children in terms of specific talents and abilities is the result of an investment of time and cultural capital (Bourdieu 2004), and also an investment of money. Acquiring expertise through activities (or private lessons or parenting classes) is one of the most obvious ways in which cultural capital is linked to economic capital (Vincent & Ball, 2007).

These activities can be understood as forward-looking planning, or a concern with the future that defines the approach to middle-class education (Ball 2003). As well as being fun for young children, there is another practical purpose that looks to the future: to ensure that the child is ‘ready to learn’. This means that the child's Curriculum Vitae is beginning to take shape. Achieving results in areas such as music, drama, art and sport can enhance the child's appeal in a competitive school market (Vincent & Ball, 2007).

In order to promote positive adaptation for single mothers and their children in all economic circumstances, it is necessary to understand the powerful protective process (Taylor & Conger, 2017) It has been demonstrated that even when exposed to extreme stress and hardship, there is the potential for positive outcomes for children. There is also consistent evidence that having competent and warm parents promotes a healthy developmental trajectory and protects children from maladjustment despite adversity (Masten, 2014) Two resilience factors that may promote the well-being of single mothers are (a) perceived social support and (b) human strengths. These factors are associated with positive coping strategies, specifically optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Taylor & Conger, 2017)

Single-parent families face unique socio-economic challenges, but they also demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in dealing with these issues. The support systems available to them, such as government support programmes, community organisations and family networks, play an important role in mitigating these challenges (Rees et al., 2023).

Single parents demonstrate their commitment to providing the best environment for their families by making careful financial plans, seeking educational and employment

opportunities, and building strong support networks. Several policy changes and interventions are needed to further support single-parent households and enhance their socio-economic well-being. Strengthening child support benefits, expanding access to affordable childcare, increasing investment in affordable housing, and enhancing tax credits are among the strategies policymakers can consider to reduce the economic pressures faced by single-parent families. And education and job training programmes tailored to the specific needs of single-parent families can empower them to secure stable employment and a brighter future (ibid). By fostering comprehensive policies, strengthening support networks, and providing educational and employment opportunities, we can empower single parents and their children to grow and contribute positively to society. In this way, we can not only strengthen individual families, but also build a stronger and more inclusive future for all (ibid).

For example, the Young Empowerment Solutions (YES) intervention applies empowerment theory to an after-school programme for secondary school students. YES is an active learning curriculum that enables young people to build self-confidence, think critically about their community and work with adults to create positive change in their community (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

YES (Zimmerman et al., 2017) is a programme designed to promote the growth of young people in secondary education and to bring about positive change in the local community. It incorporates empowerment theory, and includes content that fosters skills and confidence (internal elements), activities that encourage critical thinking about the local community and deepen connections (interactive elements), and the design and implementation of local community change projects (behavioural elements).

Young people who received more of the curriculum components were found to report more psychological empowerment and prosocial outcomes than those who received

fewer of the intervention components. This result supports both the empowerment theory and the effectiveness of the programme, as they reported more prosocial outcomes (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

In Japan, there are organisations like the YMCA that are working to empower young people (Figure 11).

Figure 11

At the YMCA, we define youth empowerment as the process of helping young people recognise their inner power and potential while encouraging them to take action on their own initiative. However, our goal extends beyond empowerment—we strive to help young people lead better lives and contribute to creating a fair, peaceful society with strong, positive networks.

The foundation of youth empowerment lies in two key elements:

Connections between young people and those around them

The creation of systems and structures that support youth participation

(YMCA,2025)

Interventions such as YES and YMCA could play a role in bringing about change by addressing the social, emotional and educational challenges faced by children in single-parent households in Japan. By fostering self-confidence, critical thinking and community involvement, the program could help such children in Japan break the vicious cycle of poverty and social inequality, and bring about long-term positive results for both individuals and their communities. Additionally, similar programmes to YES and the work developed by the YMCA need to be developed for single mothers in Japan who also need support in developing confidence and skills to improve their chances in the employment market. Empowering single mothers and their children in Japan requires economic opportunities, strong social networks, mental health support, and cultural capital investment. Through community-driven

initiatives, corporate involvement, and grassroots mentorship programs, the cycle of poverty can be broken and single mother families can be empowered to thrive.

2.2.8 Bourdieusian theory and gender inequality in relation to the current research

Bourdieu understands gender ‘as both an individual act and a socially pre-structured practices' (Krais 2000, 57), what he calls “gendered and gendered habitus” (Bourdieu 1990b, 11). He further argues that male domination functions as an everyday structure and activity (Bourdieu 1977). When we try to think about masculine domination, we run the risk of relying on and following modes of thought that are themselves the product of thousands of years of masculine domination. Whether we like it or not, the analyst, male or female, is part and parcel of the object he or she is trying to grasp. This is because he or she has internalised the historical social structures of masculine domination in the form of unconscious perceptual and evaluative schemas. In other words, it is a device for revealing the archaic unconscious structures that we owe to our emergence and phylogenesis as gendered beings, and which bring to ourselves the very phenomena we are trying to elucidate (Bourdieu, 1996). The work of socialisation closes the circle by reinforcing and systematising the structuring of the experience of a world structured according to this original division. Education exercises a psychosomatic action that leads to the embodiment of sexual difference, i.e. masculine domination. One particularly important area where this psychosomatic inculcation work is applied is the embodied construction of social difference between men and women (Bourdieu, 1996). More than any other case, it shows how symbolic violence lies in the ambiguity of the habitus schema, which is at the same time gendered and gendered, beyond - or beneath - the control of consciousness and will. And it shows that masculine

domination (and more generally symbolic violence) cannot be properly understood without first discarding scholastic oppositions such as coercion and consent, external imposition and internal desire, restraint and resistance (Bourdieu, 1996).When we say that gender, race, class and other social distinctions are ‘socially constructed’, we must not forget that there are social conditions of the constructors and mechanisms of construction (Bourdieu, 1994) The fundamental asymmetries between men and women established in the social construction of kinship and marriage - the asymmetry between subject and object, agent and instrument. It is the relative autonomy of the symbolic capital economy that explains the persistence of masculine domination despite the transformation of modes of production. In other words, it is from the symbolic revolution that undermines the production and reproduction of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1996).

According to Reay, in the specific context of her research study on mothers' involvement in their children's education, ‘emotional involvement’ refers to the wide range of feelings, both positive and negative, that mothers bring to their interactions with their children and teachers in educational learning and schooling. In contrast, ‘emotional capital’ is not synonymous with emotional involvement and occupies a narrower conceptual scope. It can be understood as emotional resources that are passed on from mother to child through the process of parental involvement (Reay, 2004). Feminist research on the domestic division of labour also points out that the parent who spends the most time on childcare is the mother (Graham, 1993; Oakley, 1993) and is therefore the parent most directly involved in generating cultural capital. Parenting consists of a complex blend of practical, educational and emotional work (James, 1989; Oakley, 1993; Reay, 1998b). In the area of parental involvement in

education, the gendered nature of parental involvement in that it includes both practical and educational work (David, 1993, David et al.)

Thus, it is feminist research on the domestic division of labour which also points out that the parent who spends the most time on childcare is the mother and is therefore the parent most directly involved in generating cultural capital. This is an important point in terms of work at home and is enhanced in Japanese culture. The men are the breadwinners, and the women provide childcare. Therefore, when a mother becomes a single mother household, she is obliged to fulfil both traditional roles. That single mothers are discriminated against in the workplace and by society because just through the fact that they have been through divorce, they are expected by society to fulfil both parenting roles, that is, breadwinner. Society ruminates against them because it is not easy for single mothers to find work currently, nor is it easy for single mothers to find childcare support.

Emotional capital is generally limited to the range of emotional relationships, such as family and friends, and encompasses the emotional resources that one passes on to that one care about. According to Nowotny, emotional capital includes knowledge, contacts, relationships and access to emotionally valued skills and assets. (Nowotny, 1981: 148). Unlike capital that is theorised in non-gendered forms - cultural, economic, social and symbolic – Nowotny (ibid) considers emotional capital to be a resource that women have in greater abundance than men (Reay, 2017). Although Bourdieu did not explicitly mention emotional capital in his own writings, he emphasises the important role of mothers in emotional relationships. Writing about the practical and symbolic work of ‘generating commitment, generosity and solidarity’, Bourdieu argues that ‘this work falls particularly heavily on women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships’ (Bourdieu, 1998). Within the family,

women are found to be far more engaged in emotional labour than men, responsible for maintaining the emotional aspects of family relationships, reacting to the emotional state of others and also acting to alleviate distress (Reay, 2017).In the contemporary education market, class and gender continue to permeate attitudes and behaviours; as Beverley (1997) argues, ‘there are powerful signs of the constant emotional distress that working-class women endure on a daily basis, arising from doubt and anxiety about the class they live in (Reay, 2017).

The concept of emotional capital is useful in elucidating the confusing class and gender processes embedded in the contemporary education market. The gendered practices that constitute engagement in schooling are exemplified in the complex contradictions of ‘some capital’, which involves investment in the other rather than the self. We can also glimpse how uneven and insecure the process of individuation was for women (ibid) The process of generating emotional capital highlights the cost of mothers' constant “proximity’, while men maintain the privilege of ‘keeping their distance’. Emotional capital also reveals the class-specific complexities of parental involvement. The further feminist conundrum that middle-class mothers pursue educational advantage at the expense of their children's emotional well-being, while working-class mothers are constrained in ways that inhibit their acquisition of both emotional and cultural capital, and thus risk corrupting their children, albeit in different ways, is also becomes apparent (ibid).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus includes the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their life experiences. The habitus is shaped by an individual's position within the social structure, particularly within the family and education systems. For Bourdieu, gendered habitus refers to the ways in which individuals internalise societal norms and expectations about gender roles

which often leads to the acceptance of gender inequalities as natural or inevitable. In the context of gender, symbolic violence occurs when patriarchal norms and values are imposed on women and internalised as natural. This process of internalisation leads to the reproduction of gender inequality across generations, as women come to accept their subordinate position in society without questioning it. Reay (2017) builds on Bourdieu's theoretical framework to examine how gender inequality operates within educational settings. Reay argues that the educational system, through its reinforcement of gendered habitus and the unequal distribution of cultural capital, disadvantages and devalues working-class women This devaluation leads to lower educational outcomes and limited opportunities for women for social mobility and perpetuates gender inequalities (ibid).

In terms of this research, both Bourdieu and Reay provide a nuanced understanding of gender inequality, emphasising the importance of habitus, capital, and the social field in the reproduction of gendered power relations. Furthermore, my study looks at the processes of symbolic violence and the differential valuation of women's cultural capital through which gender inequalities are maintained.

However, it is important to consider the diversity of experiences and contexts when examining cases that support, partially support or reject Bourdieu's assumptions. While Bourdieu's theory is influential in understanding social inequalities, there are cases where his assumptions may not fully explain the complexity of a particular situation. To give some examples, with regard to support, children from single-mother households tend to have lower educational attainment and academic achievement than children from two-parent households. This supports Bourdieu's argument that differences in cultural capital led to educational disadvantage. In partial support, it is crucial to acknowledge that while cultural capital plays a role,

other factors such as economic and social capital also influence the educational outcomes of children in single-mother households. The absence of a second source of income and limited social networks can exacerbate the challenges faced by these children. Not all single-mother children suffer educational disadvantages. In some cases, despite their difficult circumstances, single mothers provide strong support for their children and access to educational resources. Such cases highlight the importance of individual agency and resilience and would challenge Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as a deterministic force.

In sum, Bourdieu's theory of capital, including cultural capital, can reveal the economic disadvantage faced by single-mother children. However, it is important to consider the multidimensional nature of disadvantage and recognise that individual circumstances can have different consequences and support, partially support or challenge Bourdieu's assumptions.

Although not all children of divorced single-parent families are poor in Japan, data show that a high proportion of them are (see Chapter 1 section1). Another possible effect of this poverty is that single-parent families tend to spend less time with their children than two-parent families. Bourdieu(1986) argues that it is very difficult for lower class pupils to succeed in the education system because the education system is predicated on the possession of cultural capital, but the point that cultural capital is familiarity with the dominant culture in a given society, in particular the ability to understand and use cultural language, means that children in single-mother families, where mothers may find it more difficult to secure time to talk to their children or to express their vocabulary, may have fewer opportunities to use their parents' cultural resources to promote their educational development.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the philosophical stance underpinning the study and provides the rationale for adopting qualitative methods approach to explore whether there might be an impact of poverty on the educational opportunities of children from single mother households in Japan. It also discusses the research design the selection of qualitative methods for data collection and any limitations to using a purely qualitative approach, recruitment of participants, and data analysis. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 Philosophical stance and methodological approach

This research explores how poverty affects the education of children in single-mother families in Japan. While most such research has been quantitative, such as (Shirahase and Raymo 2014, Oshio, Sano and Kobayashi 2009, Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017) the present study will be qualitative, focusing on interviews with single mothers, their adult children and representatives of NPOs which support them in order to hear the voices of this marginalised group.

Interpretivism is a philosophical approach to conducting research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp. 718-719). It is a philosophical stance that advocates that humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings. An interpretivist approach argues that social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena as complexity needs to be taken into account (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp. 718-719). The aim of interpretivist research is to

create new and richer understandings and interpretations of the world in which we live (Sanders, 2009). Interpretivism emphasizes that humans, unlike physical phenomena, are meaning-creators. Interpretivists study these meanings. Interpretivism argues that since humans and their social world cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena, social science research must demonstrate difference from natural science research, rather than attempting to mimic it. Since people from different cultural backgrounds make different meanings in different situations and at different times, and thus create and experience different social realities, interpretivists are critical of positivism's attempt to reduce such complexity entirely to a series of lawful generations, in which insight into human beings is lost. Conversely the goal of interpretivist research is to create new and richer understandings and interpretations of the social world and its context (Saunders 2009).

Moreover, in the current research it is important for us to be able to have a rich level of data so that we can unpick the experiences of single mother households and of those of their children. It is therefore more appropriate than quantitative methods such as questionnaires.

3.3 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of the economically disadvantaged situation of single-mother families, who are said to be amongst the poorest in Japan today, on the education of their children, based on data from interviews with representatives of NPOs that support such families and interviews with the mothers and adult children of single-mother families themselves.

There are numerous studies dealing with the poverty of single mothers in Japan. However, there are few studies from the perspective of Japanese people outside Japan looking at Japan from the outside. This study investigates the impact of poverty on the educational opportunities of single mother households and their adult children as objectively as possible, incorporating both insider and outsider perspectives - single mothers, their children and the NPOs that support them. Interviews were conducted with single mothers and their children (aged 18 and over) in Japan to compare the impact of single mothers' family environments on their children's educational outcomes and later life. Interviews with relevant NPOs were also important in order to understand the current situation and identify necessary improvement measures. By looking at the realities of single mothers and their children, who are considered to be among the poorest, it is possible to understand the challenges that are required in breaking the 'cycle of poverty' and to link this to improvement measures. The social losses caused by the 'negative cycle' in which children's talents are not utilised and they become the next generation of parents facing challenges, can lead to a decline in productivity in society as a whole, a decline in the motivation of individuals and families suffering from poverty, as well as various related disorders such as poor mental health. Ultimately, continuing to allow this problem to continue unchecked will, in turn, lead to increased social costs, such as medical and social security costs. Research to remedy this is therefore expected to have both a societal and an economic impact.

3.3.1 Research question

In order to understand the experience of the participants in this qualitative research, it is necessary to use an interpretivist approach to investigate the following research question:

How does the economic disadvantage experienced by Japanese single mother-families affect their children's educational outcomes?

3.3.2 Researcher's position

I have 27 years of teaching experience in Japanese public schools and have often felt that the economic disparity experienced by these mothers tended to manifest itself in a lack of educational opportunity for their children. Within the contemporary Japanese social structure, there are many cases of children from single-mother families facing many difficulties. For example, currently, the poverty of single mother families is said to have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, Interviewing the representatives of NPOs that actually support these families and interviewing the parents and adult children of single mother families is important in terms of objectively exploring what I have observed during my many years of teaching experience.

3.3.3 Researcher Bias

While the study is related to my personal and professional interests, these interests are consistent with a non-biased and objective authorial stance relative to the investigation. Phillips and Burbules (2000, pp. 52-55) distinguish between 1) external (extra-scientific) and internal (intrascientific) and 2) epistemologically relevant and epistemologically irrelevant values concerning impartiality and objectivity in research. They contend that the question of how any research project.

(including its focus and context) is decided comprises its external and epistemologically irrelevant values. As they explain, epistemologically relevant values are those which directly affect research findings, such as features of research design and type of data used. On the other hand,

epistemologically irrelevant values (such as the researcher ‘s personal, professional and political interests) are external to research, and these values do not necessarily contaminate the epistemological integrity and objectivity of research. In other words, selection of research work inevitably serves specific interests (e.g., personal professional interests, interests of funding bodies). But these interests can be kept external to the research and do not automatically damage its internal validity. While the line dividing internal and external, and epistemologically relevant and irrelevant, values may not be easily drawn, research which is attributed to personal professional interests, and which focuses on familiar social contexts can still avoid bias and value judgements on the part of a researcher who is determined to be as objective as possible. Indeed, rather than being a source of contamination, the personal dimension in the present study is a resource to serve the study purposes. I was able to take a 'local ‘and 'insider ‘perspective because I belong to Japan by social origin, by early education and socialisation, and by emotional attachment and loyalty.

In this context, the current research will look at the impact of economic disparities in single-mother families on the educational performance of their children in Japan, from the perspective of various stakeholders, including representatives of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), single mothers and their adult children. In an interpretivist approach, the researcher's interpretation of the data has an important influence on the contribution the data makes. Developing theories and explanations based on observations and patterns identified in the data from interviews with them, combined with the researcher's previous experiences as a schoolteacher in Japan, the study will enable exploration of how Japanese social structures, institutions and power dynamics influence the construction of social reality for this marginalised population.

It was decided that qualitative rather than quantitative research was appropriate for the current study as it would collect and interpret empirical material that is deeply related to the lives of individuals, exploring how participants came to be single mother households, the consequences of this, and whether economic disadvantage occurred and if so, how this affected their children's educational prospects from the perspective of single mothers, adult children and NPOs.

To this end, data was gathered using one-on-one interviews which is then analysed using an inductive and interpretivist approach to ensure the richness of the data is fully explored. The interviews were conducted in Japanese but are translated into English by the researcher and checked by supervisors.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative methods were selected as the most appropriate, therefore a series of qualitative, one-on-one interviews were held with representatives of NPOs and single mothers and their adult children.

3.5 METHODS

The following sections will describe the methods used to gather the data.

3.5.1 Data collection approach

Rubin and Rubin (1995) recognise that qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to listen to others as they describe their world. This in turn allows us to see how cultures are created and through them we can explore the life events and experiences of our participants. Therefore, due to the above characteristics of qualitative interviews, the researcher considered qualitative interviews as more suitable for this study to explore the events that led to single motherhood and the

events derived from them and the impact this might have had on the children in the family.

Researchers compile information from qualitative interviews to form explanations and theories based on interview details, evidence and examples. These findings are based on interactions that allow interviewees to respond, clarify and explain what they mean, and explain what is happening in the words of the people involved in the situation. Such explanations and theories are not merely of academic interest but can also have practical implications (Rubin and Rubin,1995). Semi-structured formats can be used when researchers seek more specific information. The interviewer introduces the topic and guides the discussion by asking specific questions (ibid). Semi-structured interviews are a research method in which questions are defined in advance and the life experience of the participants is delved into according to the content of their responses; if the life experience of the participants can be successfully elicited, more in-depth information can be obtained, which cannot be obtained in quantitative surveys such as questionnaires, thereby enhancing the quality of the data.

Qualitative research interviews seek to understand the world from the perspective of the subjects, to make sense of their experiences and to reveal their lived world prior to any scientific explanation. It is an approach of careful questioning and listening aimed at gaining thoroughly validated knowledge, rather than the spontaneous exchange of opinions of everyday conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). Therefore, in order to elicit content from the participants in line with the research aim, the questions were decided on in advance informed by the issues picked up from the literature review and the participants were informed of the content 48 hours in advance of the interview.

The data for the current study were collected using qualitative semi-structured interviews. The semi-structed interviews were guided by questions or themes generated by the literature review.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven NPO representatives between 12 September (2021) and 9 January 2022. This qualitative data was used to investigate the NPOs' engagement with single mother households, the problems they experience in raising their children, the impact of these problems on their children's educational experiences and opportunities, and what support they need to solve their problems.

The reason semi-structured interviews were used is that it is desirable that the participants share their direct experiences freely without over guidance which might inhibit their responses. It is also important that questions are grounded in the literature to ensure rigour. The data were collected online. The advantage of online research is that it is a safe and quick way to gather information without spending money, given the current global situation at the time of data collection was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The ability to conduct interviews with a large number of people in a short period of time reduces the time taken to collect the information. On the other hand, a disadvantage is that participants are limited to those who use the internet, which may bias the results. In addition, some households do not have a PC internet environment, and the households that can be interviewed are often those with a somewhat more stable financial situation. For this research, interviews were planned to be conducted via Zoom or Skype, but some families were interviewed using a simple application called Line. Mothers and their adult child/ren were interviewed separately. The reason for interviewing parents and children separately is that if they are interviewed together, they may not be able to say what they really

think in front of each other, which may not result in candid data. In fact, in some cases, during the course of the interviews, parents asked the researcher for their children's true feelings which for ethical reasons she was unable to share with them. Most interviews ran between 40 minutes and 1 hour. These interviews were subsequently analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews attempt to understand themes from the lived everyday world from the subject's own perspective and to obtain a description of the interviewee's life experiences with regard to the interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). This method is useful because while the same overarching questions can be asked of all three groups of participants, the semi-structured nature of the interview allows additional sub-questions to be added that are appropriate for each group. Depending on the interviewee's answers, more detailed circumstances and emotions can be explored in depth. Hence, with this method, it is possible to gather more in-depth material, depending on the interview skills of the researcher, in interviews that ask for private stories, for example how a participant became a single mother and how this affected her life afterwards. In addition, as these are academic interviews, they are highly purposeful and require a specific approach and technique. They focus on a specific topic and are conducted according to an interview guide containing suggested questions. All the interviews were recorded, and the transcripts and recordings together provided material for subsequent thematic analysis.

According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2009), interviews are advantageous in that they allow participants to tell their own stories, providing rich narratives that capture the complexity and depth of their experiences. Personal narratives provide unique

insights into the reality of individuals' lives and help researchers to explore the subjective and emotional aspects of the research topic.

Semi-structured interviews allow representatives of the NPOs to speak in their own words and to reveal areas and ideas that had not been anticipated at the start of the study. The interviews were then documented to a greater depth than would otherwise have been possible after the interviews were completed. As the NPO representatives were busy and face-to-face interviews were not desirable as they took place during the global coronavirus pandemic, one on one online interviews were chosen. Semi-structured interviews are defined as interviews in which the interviewer asks key questions and explores further information (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003). Semi-structured interviews include many broad questions on a specific topic area, and while the NPO representatives were able to take the initiative, this approach also gave the researcher the opportunity to explore and clarify answers (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

In-depth dialogue with participants allows researchers to delve deeper into the experiences, perspectives and feelings of single mothers and their children. By listening to participants, researchers can grasp the complexity and diversity of individual experiences and perspectives. They can then gain a comprehensive understanding of the economic disadvantages faced by single mothers and their children in Japan and how these challenges impact on their children's educational outcomes.

By exploring the socio-cultural factors, norms and values that influence participants' lives, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of how these contexts shape the phenomenon under study. Interviews provide opportunities for participants to share their stories and personal experiences. Hearing the real voices of single

mothers and their children provides rich, contextual information about the specific difficulties they encounter, the strategies they use and the consequences they face. Qualitative data can help reveal nuances and complexities that might be missed by quantitative research alone.

Interviews provide flexibility and adaptability in the research process. Researchers can adjust questions and follow-up probes based on participants' responses, allowing them to explore topics dynamically. This adaptability allows the researcher to delve deeper into specific aspects, seek clarification or explore unexpected insights that arise during the interview.

Researchers can modify questions and follow-up based on participants' responses. This flexibility allows for the exploration of unexpected insights, clarification of ambiguities and delving into areas requiring further exploration.

The dynamic nature of the interviews leads to a deeper understanding of the relationship between economic disadvantage and the educational outcomes of mothers and their children. Through interviews, researchers can establish a trusting and empathetic connection with participants. This engagement fosters trust and encourages participants to speak openly and honestly about their experiences. Empathetic interaction between researcher and participant can increase the depth and quality of the data collected.

Conducting interviews can provide insight into the social, cultural and economic factors specific to the Japanese context. Understanding the unique challenges faced by Japanese single-mother families can help researchers identify interventions, policy recommendations and support systems that have the potential to improve educational outcomes for children from these families.

3.5.2 Sampling

To answer this type of research question, specific information from specific groups of people is needed. Therefore, in this research, non-probabilistic, purposive sampling was used. It allowed for a richness of information to be found from a limited sample. Participants were recruited from three distinct groups - single mothers, their adult children and NPOs - to compare their stories and look for commonalities. Interviews were conducted with representatives of three organisations supporting single mothers in poverty, three NPOs supporting children's education and one NPO supporting the poor in general. Opinions were then collected on single mothers' poverty and its impact on their children's education from the various perspectives of these third sector professionals. Particular care was taken to include both large and local organisations in the interviews in order to gain an understanding of the current situation in Japan as a whole.

Single mothers were restricted to mothers who became single mothers through divorce. This is because single mothers who become single mothers due to bereavement often receive their spouse's death benefits and may not be in financial need. In addition, unmarried mothers are extremely rare in Japan (see chapter 2, p46), so they were not included in the scope of this study. Participants included not only those living in urban areas, but also single mothers living in rural areas as there are cultural differences between both regions. The children interviewed were limited to those of 18 years of age or older. This was both from an ethical point of view and because at that age, the results of education received, including potential university entrance, are clearly visible. Compulsory education type was also limited to children who had attended state schools. This is because in Japan, children who go to private schools generally come from economically well-off traditional and intact families.

Interviews with single mothers and their adult children were conducted with eight mothers and ten adult children. As far as possible, parents and children were selected from all over Japan, so that the analysis could be carried out while also including regional differences in Japan. In addition, adult children were set up so that interviews were conducted with both male and female siblings, (taking into account the proportion of men and women in the sample) and attempted to investigate whether there were differences in the way men and women in the same family perceived their upbringing in a single mother household and whether either sex had fared better in terms of accessing educational opportunity after completing the mandatory state education.

3.5.3 Recording equipment

A digital audio recorder (Olympus VN541PC) was used to record the interviews and download the recordings to a computer to aid the process of transcription and analysis. A spare battery was provided for each interview to prevent unnecessary loss of recorded data during the interview. Before starting the interviews, the equipment was tested by recording a short conversation and playing it back as a backup.

3.5.4 Reflection of the interview process

Four questions were sent to participants 48 hours in advance, but six more questions about children's education were added at the interview stage, asking about their educational experiences. The reason for this was to explore the impact of education on children in more depth, a major theme of the research, and because it was decided that it would be easier to hear the reality of the issue if participants were asked as the conversation proceeded, checking how they were doing.

3.5.5 Participant recruitment strategy

The researcher is a member of two Japanese education projects (the Future Education Council and the Japan Education Support Team). The Future Education Council is a project that aims to create a rich reality by bringing together various stakeholders towards a vision of future society, future people, and future education. Many companies, NPOs and educators participate in the project. The Japan Education Support Team was established to position education for children in Japan, which has few educational resources among developed countries, as an upfront investment in the future and to secure the necessary financial resources. Many educators, NPOs and media representatives are involved. It was therefore envisaged that all participants in the study would be recruited through these networks. Consequently, three of the six NPO representatives were directly recruited through these networks. For two others, the researcher had become aware of their activities through the literature review and contacted them through mutual acquaintances; two were recruited through the network of the researcher's acquaintances; and two were recommended by the researcher's acquaintances once again through the researcher’s professional network.

The recruitment method for the mother and child interview candidates (8 pairs) was as follows.

1) Acquaintances from the researcher's previous and current workplace (2 pairs)

2) Referrals from the researcher's acquaintances (3 pairs)

3) Mothers and their daughters who met the researcher's organisation (1 pair)

4) Referrals from representatives of NPOs interviewed (2 sets)

The participants, who were single mothers and their adult children, were basically introduced by an acquaintance of either the NPO or researcher. The reason for this was that many participants were thought to be resistant to the interview format, as well as the possibility of interviews reviving past traumas. It was also deemed necessary to ensure the psychological safety of the participants. In fact, an adult child interviewed through introduction by a trusted NPO staff member told us during the interview that it was the first time she had told people about her painful childhood experiences. In one case, only the adult child was interviewed because the mother was not in good health.

Table 1: Interview participants recruited by Group

Interview Participants (n=30)		
Single mothers	Adult children	NPO
The reason for becoming a single mother was divorce.	Over 18 years old, Completed mandatory education	Currently working with Japanese single mothers and their children
n=8*	n=10*	n=7*

*Participants continued to be recruited until saturation of the data was achieved.

Table 2: NPO participants

NPO	Main activity	Interviewee	Areas covered
N1	Learning support for children from poor families	representative	All Japan
N2	Learning support for children from poor families	representative	All Japan
N3	Learning support for children from poor families	representative	Saitama prefecture
N4	Supporting single mothers	representative	All Japan

N5	Supporting single mothers	representative	Aichi prefecture
N6	Supporting for the poor	representative	Tokyo based
N7	Expert in education administration	Representative (Former MEXT official)	All Japan

All participants were representatives or directors of a non-profit organization (NPOs) working in Japan as outlined in Table 2 above.

Questions were generated from the Literature review and comparison of the Japanese context (Chapter 1 Section 1) and included questions such as:

Figure 1: Questions for NPOs 1

Questions for Non-profit Organisation Representatives	
a)	Tell me your experience about working with single mother households?
b)	What are the problems single mother households experience in raising their children?
c)	Do these problems affect the children's educational experience and opportunities? If so, how?
d)	What kind of support does your organisation need to give to solve these problems of inequality?

In addition, the following questions were added on the day of the interview in order to explore the impact on children in depth.

Figure 2: Questions for NPOs 2

a) To what extent can single mothers be involved in their children's education?
b) How much time can single mothers devote to the family?
c) Research shows that when children reach adolescence and teenage years, this is the age at which parental involvement makes a big difference. What impact does this have on these children's attendance at school and success rates in high school entrance exams?

d) What are the negative and positive expectations of relatives and teachers towards children from such families?

e) Whether there is a difference in impact between whether the children are male or female.

3.5.5.1 Procedure for Single mothers and their adult children's interviews

To investigate mothers' and their adult children's experiences of the impact of financial hardship on the educational outcomes of living in single parent households through one-to-one interviews.

Table 3: Single mothers and adult child participants

Single mother Age	Mother's occupation	Adult children age (Interviewed)	Children's occupation	Mother's educational background	residential area
Akiko 56	City council member	Ayaka 30	Housewife (Part time worker)	Junior college	Yamagata
Noriko 55	Company director	Toru 18	Cheff	Junior college	Ehime
Yoko 48	NPO director	Ken 25	Sales company owner	High school	Tokyo
Yumiko 51	Care manager	Makoto 20	dairy farm employee	Junior college	Saitama
Keiko 48	Medical company worker	Jun 22	Part time worker	dropping out of university	Gunma
Masako 55	Unemployed due to caring for parents	Ichiro 23 Jiro 19	IT company employee University student	High school	Kanagawa

Michiko 48	temporary agency worker	Mika 19	illustrator	Junior college	Aichi
49	Unemployed due to ill health	Mihoko 20	Medical University student	High School	Aichi
Sachiko 58	Shop staff	Yuichi 29	English teacher	High school	Tokyo

Mothers and adult children were recruited as presented in Table 3 above. The criteria for inclusion were as follows.

•The reason for becoming a single mother was divorce.

•The children have partaken in the mandatory education funded by the state i.e., 'state education' in Japan

•Adult children are over 18 years old. These young people are at the age of going to university and have already experienced the mandatory education system in Japan.

•Families had access to the internet to facilitate online interviews.

•Single mothers and adult children's names are pseudonyms.

*Junior college : two year college

Interview questions were generated by the review of the literature and consideration of the current Japanese social context (chapter 1 Section 1) in respect of single mother households and included questions such as the following:

Figure 3: Questions for single mothers 1

Questions for single mothers
a) Tell me about your experience of being a single mother? b) What problems have you experienced raising your children alone? c) Did these problems affect your child's/children's academic performance, if so, how? d) What kind of support do you feel is needed to solve the problems you and your family have experienced?

Figure 4: Questions for adult children

Questions to adult children
a) Please describe what it was like for you being a child growing up in a single mother household? b) What problems, if any, did you experience? c) How did this impact upon your academic performance? d) Was any support available to you? What kind of support would have helped to alleviate these problems?

Although not listed in the questions beforehand, the following questions were added, with the interviewee's confirmation, with the intention of getting a more rigorous picture of the economic situation and a more rigorous picture of the mother-child situation. Some families did not answer the question, as some families preferred not to ask their children.

Figure 5: Questions for single mothers 2

a) Did you receive child support from your ex-husband? b) Did you allow your children to see your ex-husband?

3.5.6 Procedure for data analysis

Interviews were conducted in Japanese and recorded and then transcribed verbatim, translated from Japanese to English and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It should be noted that the researcher is a native Japanese speaker and that the English translation of the transcripts was reviewed by the supervisory team.

3.5.7 Ethics

UWL research ethics and code of practice approval was sought and granted from the Research Ethics Panel of the School of Human and Social Sciences, University of West London.

The principal investigator also referred to the guidelines for researchers provided by the University of West London. The following basic principles were followed:

“Research should not cause harm, allow harm to be inflicted, or otherwise damage the interests of any parties involved. Participation should take place in the context of a clear and unambiguous agreement between researcher and participant(s). It is required to: provide participants with written information giving explicit details of any risks and obtain written consent from them. Participants should be given clear and unambiguous information relating to the studies they will take part in. Failure to fully inform participants of any known relevant factor may make consent invalid. Researchers should allow sufficient time for participants to reflect on and consider

information before they agree to participate in the study and any consequences that may result from the study" (Research Ethics Code of Practice, 2020 p4-5) This research will also comply with the ethical guidelines and ethical code of practice for the British Education Research Association (BERA,2018).

In order to protect participants' anonymity, particularly as some of them may still live in a sensitive situation in respect of their ex-husband, pseudonyms are used to break the link between the data and identifiable groups and individuals.

Participants were sent a consent form by email in advance of the interview and asked to sign and send it back to the researcher before the interview took place. The forms sent were kept by the researcher securely.

As the research topic delves into family issues, such as divorce, and includes interviews with adult children, it is assumed that there are cases where people are still traumatised by the family break up. Therefore, when conducting interviews, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that past traumas may be triggered during the interview, which can lead to painful feelings. Therefore, it is important trusting relationships are established with participants when conducting this kind of sensitive interview. It is necessary to obtain consent in advance, use passwords to store and manage data securely and also ensure post interview participants are debriefed fully and signposted to organisations that can support them. To build trust with participants, a document stating the researcher's position and the purpose of the study was sent in advance and mediated by someone the participant trusted.

When the research brief was sent to single mothers and adult child interviewees, it included contact details and information on organisations that could be contacted

should they feel distressed for any reason after participating in this research or just simply feel they need support with any of the issues raised.

If participants had experienced distress the interview was paused, and they were given the option of whether to continue or not. As the consent form states, participants were free to withdraw their data at any time during the research process.

In the course of contacting potential interviewees, one requested that they were willing to be interviewed, but that they would prefer the interview to be recorded in note form rather than an audio recording. In such cases, in order to maintain the ethical integrity of the study, the interviews did not take place. In some cases, mothers initially agreed to be interviewed, but their children refused, in which case, once again interviews did not take place. It was imperative throughout this research that participants had confidence in the integrity of the researcher and her methods.

3.6 DATA ANAYLYSIS APPROACH

The following sections describe the data analysis approach.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for analysing qualitative data that involves searching the entire dataset to identify, analyse, and report iterative patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words, TA reveals, themes within the data. (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006: p4).

Flexibility in thematic analysis means that themes can be determined using a variety of methods at the researcher's discretion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, key words that commonly emerged from various stakeholders in interviews can be

selected and not framed. As it is possible to analyse them as themes, the researcher can genuinely engage with the data without being bound by preconceived ideas, and the possibilities for new discoveries are also expanded.

Thus, this flexibility gives a justification as to why TA is most suitable to analyse the interview data to interpret the lived experience of the participants in this research. A thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations-and ideologies-that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To analyse the qualitative data, software called NVivo was used. This is a method of analysing text in a systematic way by uploading speech transcripts and materials to a software programme for coding. The software provides a range of visualisation tools, such as word trees and word clouds, which allow the coded data to be manipulated in a variety of ways to assist in the discovery of themes. It also facilitates thorough analysis.

3.6.2 Stages of Data Analysis

The main features of the framework approach to analysing qualitative data consisted of the following six phases of reflexive thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke, 2022.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset

This involves becoming deeply familiar with the content of the data set. Specifically, it involves reading and re-reading the data (or at least listening to recordings for each data item and for the entire data set, when dealing with audio data transcripts). First,

while preparing the transcript of the first NPO representative's interview, I listened to the interview again carefully and summarised it in Japanese in the transcript, confirming what the interviewee said. The interviewee's answers to the questions were then checked by reading the transcriptions several times. The interviews were then translated into English and read again.

Phase 2: Coding

Process data sets in a detailed and systematic manner. Segments of data that are interesting, relevant or meaningful to the research question are identified and a concise, analytical and meaningful description (code labels) is applied. Coding aims to capture a single meaning or concept and the focus is specific and detailed. Reflective TA allows for coding at different levels, from very explicit or superficial meanings. Coding is not just about summarising and reducing the content, but also about recording your 'analytical take' on the data. Systematically and thoroughly code the entire data set. When you have finished, collate the code labels and aggregate the data associated with each code. First, the NPO transcripts were read, and from the responses to the questions on matters, the most frequently mentioned words were picked out and coded in NVivo. Positive and negative statements in response to these were further separated to identify the current situation and problems. As the theme of the paper was to analyse the economic disadvantage and children's learning achievement of single mothers in Japan, it was divided it into two main themes (economic disadvantage and academic achievement) and the relevant items were coded.

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

Aim to identify patterned meanings shared across the dataset. I created clusters of codes that share core ideas and concepts and are likely to provide meaningful 'answers' to research questions. This stage was originally positioned as 'searching for themes', but this term can be misleading. This process is not like excavation, where meaning is lying there, waiting to be discovered by appropriate search techniques. Rather, theme development is an active process. Themes are built by researchers based on data, research questions and their knowledge and insights. Codes usually capture specific or particular meanings. Themes that capture data and address the research question are collated against all the coded data relevant to each candidate theme. In this study, Nvivo was used to explore the relevant codes from each of the two broad themes from the interview results, which were then further coded in detail.

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes

In this study, the codes that emerged were matched to the research themes and examined to see if they answered the research.

Phase 5: Refining

Fine-tune the analysis, ensuring that each theme is clearly demarcated and built around a strong core concept or essence. Ask yourself, "How does this theme fit into my overall story about the data?" The main activity at this stage is to write a brief synopsis of each theme. The researcher will also decide on a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme. At this stage, one should still be prepared to let go of the analysis if it needs to be developed further in the refinement process.

The analysis continued, adjusting the information that was really necessary and that which was not in the research analysis.

The information obtained from the analysis was summarised by theme and code, while also incorporating quotations from relevant literature to ensure that the text is coherent.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with representatives of the NPOs that support single mothers and their children (See the table 4).

4.2 RESULTS

Figures 6 and 7 show the generation of the two main themes economic disadvantage and academic achievement from the NPO interview data. The categories and sub-themes are analysed and discuss in the sub sections that follow.

4.2.1 Economic disadvantage

The first theme that emerged from the NPO interview data was that of economic disadvantage. This comprised of two major categories; financial support and job opportunity and each of these categories was comprised of sub themes and the analysis of each of these is discussed in the following sections and are illustrated in figure 6.

4.2.1.1 Financial support

In Japan, there are two systems of financial support for single mothers: child support from divorced husbands and assistance from the government and these were both identified in the NPO interviews.

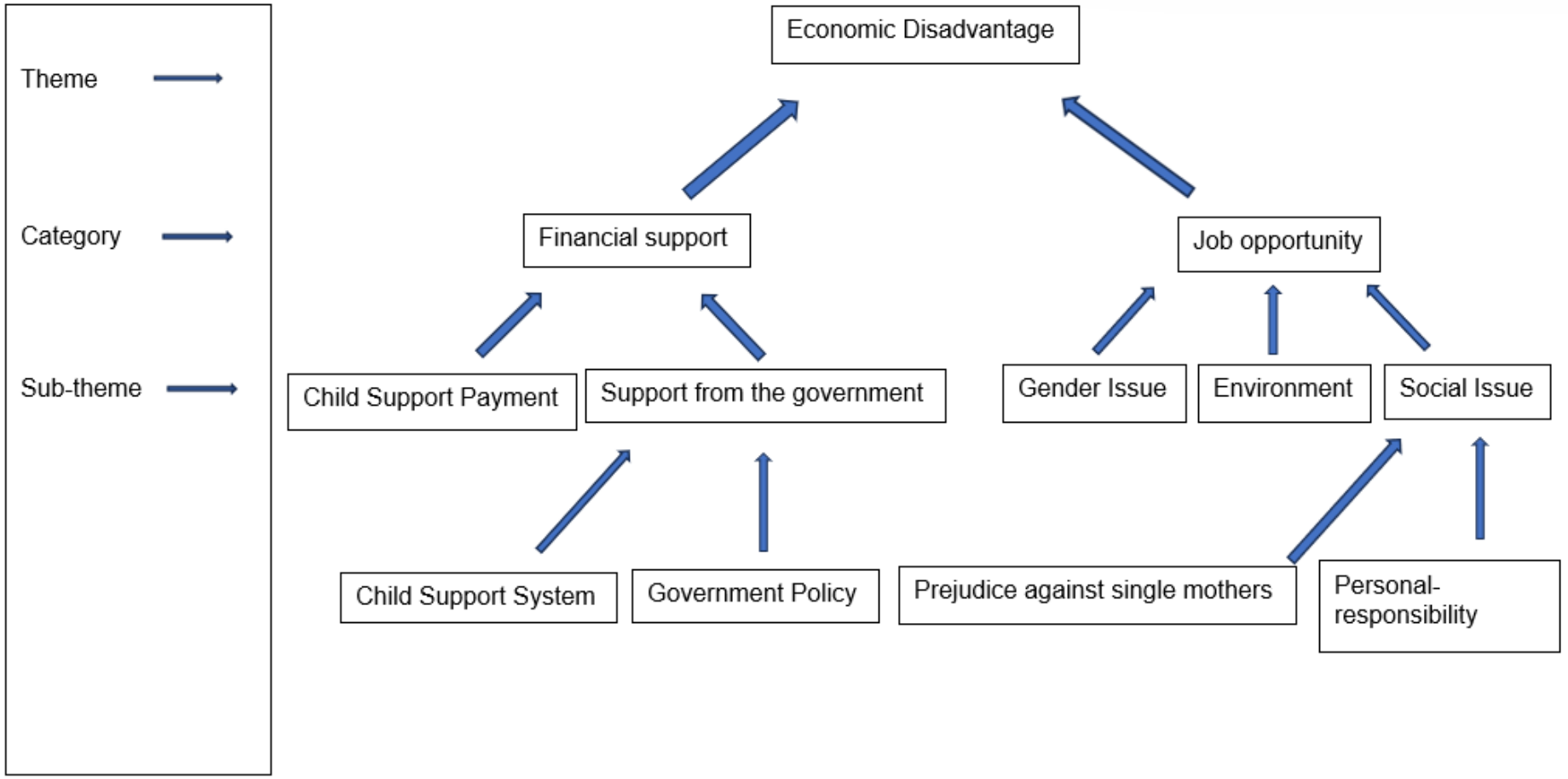
a) Child-support payments (following divorce)

One of the possible causes of poverty among single mothers in Japan is thought to be the child support paid by the ex-husband upon divorce. It is interesting to note that all three female representatives of the seven NPOs mentioned this matter.

Table 4: NPO interview themes

Theme	Category	Sub theme	Key Quote
Economic disadvantage	Financial support	Child-support payments (following divorce)	N2:59-61, 74-80
		Support from the Government	N1:29-30, N6:96-99
	Job opportunity	Gender issues (traditional)	N2:462-464,554-559, N3:118-121
		Environment (time)	N6:25-26, 28-29
		Social issues (personal responsibility etc.)	N6: 34-38, 46-51,60-66
Academic achievement	Cultural/ Social capital		N1: 136-138
	Family economic situation		N6: 69-73,73-76, N2: 120-127, N1:122-125
	Environment	Home condition	N1: 67-70
		Study support	N2:143-145, 298-303,386-393 N1:170-173
	Gender		N2: 396-401, N6: 170-172
Assistance needed	Single mothers and children		N1: 220-225, N2: 439-442
	NPOs		N1: 232-236,254-259, 296-303,37-41 N6: 238-244, N2: 493-497, N7:289-294

Figure 6:


Theme
Category
Sub-theme
Economic Disadvantage
Financial support
Job opportunity
Child Support Payment
Support from the government
Gender Issue
Environment
Social Issue
Child Support System
Government Policy
Prejudice against single mothers
Personal-responsibility

N2 is a female representative of a non-profit organisation that provides learning support to poor families. This representative has many views on the problems with the Japanese system, particularly the post-divorce child support system.

The government's response on the child support allowance explains the delays in the Japanese system as follows. It is interesting to note that only women representatives expressed these opinions.

N2 states the following in comparison with foreign countries.

> The proportion of single mothers receiving child support in Japan is very low. The amount of child support is also low (N2, lines 59-61).
>
> There is no public support system for child support in Japan, and although there is a tendency to make arrangements for child support at the time of divorce. Although 46.7% of families have made arrangements, less than 25% of those who have made arrangements receive child support. This is because the state system has not kept up, there is no collection system, no deductions from wages and no penalties for non-payment (N2, lines 74-80).

N2 also explains the link between the poverty rate of lone parent families and childcare fees and expresses displeasure at the government's inadequate response.

> We were asked to lobby for a system that would allow single parents to receive child support payments, which are the main cause of the high poverty rate among lone parents… in a very large number of cases the payment is not made within a year of the agreement (N2, lines 83-88).

N5 is a representative of an NPO that supports single mothers in a local city in Japan, but again, like N2, she responded to the issue of child support not being paid

properly, but described the current situation, which has not changed after 20 years, and her response to the government as follows:

> We started strongly supporting people to get child support because in Japan, 80% of people who only pay 20% of their child support are in arrears (N5, lines 54-56).
>
> We increased the number of staff and worked hard to help people find jobs, match them with jobs and learn skills, but 20 years on, the average number of people has not increased at all (N5, lines 59-61).

N5 also stated the following in a particularly strong tone when asked what he wanted from the government.

> Penalties for non-payment of child support should be established (N5, lines 383-384).

N4 is also supporting single mothers in the country, but she also has a different view that while she thinks non-payment of child support is a contributing factor of single mother's poverty, it is not the only reason.

The researcher asked,

> I have heard that one of the reasons for the high poverty rate among single mothers in Japan is that child support arrangements are not well agreed upon, or that even if they are agreed upon, they are not paid, so I wonder if that has something to do with it (N4, lines 179-182).

In response to,

> It's a poverty phenomenon, and rightly so. The contracting rate is 42.3%. 24.3% are paid. This is the figure for 2016, and there is a new survey in 2021, but the Ministry of Health, Labour and

> Welfare (MHLW) has been very slow, so the results of the new survey are not yet available (N4, lines183-186).
>
> Well, I would like to think it is better than that, but I don't know (N4, lines 188-189).
>
> But I don't think it's just childcare costs, one is gender inequality (N4, lines 189-190).

The words of these three female representatives indicate that gender inequality is at the root of the problem of poverty among mothers and children in Japan.

b) Support from the government

With regard to the system of financial support for single mother families, one of the government's initiatives is the childcare allowance. However, the amount is not sufficient. The interview with the NPO representative provides clues as to why this is the case from three perspectives: first, the child support system; second, government policy; and third, the redistribution undertaken by the government

b-1) Child support system

N1 is a non-profit organisation that provides learning support to poor families, and its representative is one of the members who make recommendations to the Government on policies to support poor families. He has made various comments on the current situation in Japan and the Government's policies. It is interesting to note that he focuses on the current situation of poverty amongst single-mother families in Japan and the inadequacy of government support for them.

> I think the poverty rate of single mother households is about 60%, and one out of every two mothers' lives in relative poverty and has to raise their children in a difficult economic situation. In Japan, childcare and other child-rearing support services are not

> very well provided, and there are many people who are raising children alone without anyone to consult (N1, lines 11-15).

He also states that the reason why support for single-mother families is not sufficient in Japan compared to other countries lies in Japan's unique family style.

> Family policy and social security have a history of not being discussed in a timely manner (N1, lines 25-26). So, we have imposed the so-called Showa-style family model on families, where both parents work, the father works, the mother is a housewife or part-timer, and the grandfather or grandmother is nearby (N1, lines 29-31).

N2 shared the following from her experience of living in the UK.

> In the UK, there was a law that children under the age of six should not be left alone in the house. In Japan, unfortunately, there is no such law, so even a pre-school child of six can be left alone in a flat and the mother can go to work at night. As a country, it is better to have them work than to give them welfare, so that is what happens. They say that if you leave a small child alone, he will die, and he has indeed died, but there is no punishment yet (N2, lines 95-101).

Their statements explore the reasons why the Japanese government's child support system is not adequate in the following respects.

b- 2) Government policy

N1 expresses his opinion on the delay in the Japanese Government's policy response as follows:

> I believe that other countries have made efforts to ensure that disparities in the family environment do not lead to disparities in education and the future. In the case of Japan, the timing should have started around the 1990s, but because of the

> bubble economy, I think there was a policy carelessness (N1: lines 37-41).

N6, a representative of a non-profit organisation that assists the poor in general, expressed his opinion on the lack of progress in government support as following:

> ‘Personal-responsibility theory’ and ‘family as the smallest unit theory’. Financial constraints. Governments are very reluctant to subsidise and increase public spending, which is consistent with personal responsibility. Personal-responsibility theory is compatible with it because it does not have to be paid for. As a result, funds are not invested. It is a bad spiral (N6, lines 255-259).

N6 made a further comment.

> I think it is a problem of the social structure. The area that the parents are responsible for is very large, so the available manpower is halved, which makes a difference. If there are social services, they cover the area without parental power. Including young carers. There are probably not enough social services (N6, lines 96-99).

Kashiwagi (2020) stated that there was an underlying national and cultural optimism that if Personal-responsibility and compulsory education were linked, all forms of poverty would be resolved naturally within the family unit, and the policy carelessness described by N1 may be related to this idea.

Another reason for the lack of improvement in poverty among single mothers, stated by many NPO representatives, relates to 'government redistribution'.

N4 stated the following in relation to this matter.

> In the mid-2000s the burden increased in the opposite direction (N4, line 261).

N1 also described this case in relation to the government's response as follows:

> It is an important question as to where we NPOs are going to go with this, it is a national problem, it is a poverty problem, so it is a problem that should be solved by the national government, and it is strange that the gap widens after redistribution (N1, lines 305-307).

N2 has echoed the same sentiment.

> It's really strange. What is happening in Japan today is that the working-age population is suffering more and more. In particular, the level of redistribution of cash benefits is too low. It is very difficult to gain. What is strange about Japan is that the standards are the same for families with and without children (N2, lines 493-497).

N3 has emphasised the same issue.

> I think redistribution is the most important thing. Without this, no matter how many activities you do, no matter how many services you provide, no matter how much effort you put into services such as learning support, they will fall. If you don't make sure that income redistribution is at the basis of your policies and still ensure that services are provided, you will make mistakes (N3, lines 433-438).

N7 has looked at the issue from a different perspective.

> I am not an expert on redistribution issues, but I believe that the problems are the low progressivity of income taxation, the fact that consumption tax revenues do not go to welfare but are used to redeem government bonds and to cover corporate tax cuts, the low amount of benefits such as child allowance, child support allowance, welfare, school aid and high school scholarship benefits, and the low capture rate for these (N7, line 495-497).

According to Abe (2021), the difference between pre- and post-redistribution poverty rates represents the poverty-reducing effect of government redistribution. For women, as for men, government redistribution leads to a large improvement in poverty rates among the elderly, but the improvement is smaller among working-age and children. Poverty rates worsen slightly after redistribution for those aged 0-4 and 25-29. Compared to 1985 and 2012, the poverty rate for single-mother households in 2019 was lower than in 1985 and 2012, because the poverty rate before redistribution was lower. On the other hand, the poverty rate before redistribution is to a large extent influenced by economic trends, as the poverty rate before redistribution in 2012 was higher than in 1985. It cannot be assumed that the working conditions of mothers in truly single-mother households have improved, and there are limits to the livelihood security of single-mother households through employment.

In relation to the redistribution debate, there is a need to explore the causes of the lack of effectiveness of this policy in Japan, despite its significant impact on poverty alleviation.

4.2.1.2 Job opportunity

One of the reasons why poverty among single mothers has not been resolved may be the following with regard to job opportunities.

a) Gender issue

With regard to job opportunities as a reason for single mothers' poverty, most NPO representatives said the following about the position of women in Japan.

N2, who has lived abroad, expressed the following negative views on the position of women in Japan.

> In Japan, women are at a great disadvantage and their dignity is too low, which leads to various problems. That is why there are so many problems with education in Japan, such as child poverty (N2, lines 462-464).

The following issues are raised in relation to employment support for single mothers that N2 has supported.

> They have a great desire to work, and their skills are the same as men of their generation, and they can do everything by themselves, including childcare, work and housework, so their skills are high, but their self-esteem is very low. So, when they go to job interviews, they don't see the good parts, they only see the bad parts and so on, and they don't do well at all (N2, lines 554-559).

N2 also describes the low status of women in the Japanese workplace.

> There are women who are able to work part-time and support a completely incompetent section chief, but the section chiefs and other senior managers understand the situation, but only incompetent men get promoted, leaving the women in the same position (N2, lines 585-589).

N4 is specific regarding unequal workplace conditions in Japan with regard to gender inequality.

> The first is gender inequality. Even if you work 2,000 hours for a minimum wage of about 1,050 yen, that's still about 2 million yen, so that's a problem (N4, lines 190-192)

N2 also responded to the researcher's next question as follows:

> I think it's because of women and gender, but the fact that it still exists is because of the traditional Japanese way of thinking, isn't it (N2, lines 590-591)?
>
> Yes, that's right (N2, line 592).

N2 and N4 are female representatives, but male representatives N3 and N7 also stated that women are disadvantaged due to the old structure of Japan.

> The system in which men are the main breadwinners and support the family, with the company and men working together to support the children and family, still exists in Japanese society, although it is collapsing (N3, lines 118-121).

N3 added that:

> Originally, women's work was mainly informal (N3, line 124).

N3 also discussed the link between low wages and poverty among women.

> The wages of non-regular workers in Japan are very low, and women are paid even less. It would be strange if there was no poverty (N3, lines 127-128).

It is interesting to note that although N7 was formerly in the position of head of a national educational institution, as a citizen he stated the following.

> I think there is a very strong gender gap in Japan. Women are discriminated against in employment practices (N7, lines 488-490).

N7 also stated that:

> It is still a male-dominated society. Isn't the problem that there are too few women in politics (N7, lines 493-494).

From the statements of these NPO representatives, it can be taken as a factor that the traditional Japanese view in Japan that women should stay at home and do the housework and men should earn money outside the home remains unchanged to this day, which has hindered women's employment opportunities.

b) Environment

N6 began by describing the reasons why single mothers find it difficult to raise children while working, as follows:

> There is a lack of understanding in the workplace about working in terms of raising children as a single mother (N6, lines 25-29).
>
> I think there are social barriers to raising children as a single parent (N6, lines 28-29).

N2 also specifically mentioned the difficulties involved.

> When they look for work, it becomes very difficult to get a full-time job just because they have children, and the only part-time jobs they can get are minimum-wage jobs, such as working as a cashier in a supermarket (N2, lines 63-66).
>
> You have no money and no time, or vice versa, you have no time, and you have money. But you can't have both of those things, and you are raising your child alone, you have to make decisions alone and you have to do it alone (N4, lines 20-22).

N4 describes the following reasons why unskilled single mothers find it difficult to balance work and child rearing.

> People who used to work full-time as office workers can start working from home and look after their children (N4, lines 365-366).

> Many people want to study IT and work from home. Many of the people we support want to develop their skills, work from home and become full-time employees, but for those without skills it is very difficult to consider these three things (N4, lines 371-373).

Further cases of other difficulties are described as follows:

> When I provide employment support, I find that the child has a developmental disability and needs medical care, or that the parent cannot work from 9am to 8.30am because the child has stopped attending school due to the disability. This is a very common disincentive to work or, to put it more negatively, to work (N4, lines 119-122).

Interviews with NPO officials also revealed some of the unique problems that Japanese society faces when it comes to single mothers raising children. One is prejudice against single mothers. Another is the idea of 'personal responsibility'.

> There are many people who are raising their children alone with no one to talk to about their problems, and they may not be able to ask for advice (N1, lines 16-17).

N2 describes ideas unique to Japanese society.

> If there is a Christian foundation, children are social beings and have support from their surroundings, but in Japan, parents bring up their children, and if the parents are poor, it is no use if the children are not good enough.

> In Japan, many people think that parents bring up their children and if the parents are poor, it can't be helped if the children are not good enough (N2, lines 105-110).

As these two representatives say, the uniquely Japanese view that children are to be brought up by their parents makes it difficult for society to provide support for them and is a cause of the increasing isolation of single mothers.

c) Social issue

In the course of researching poverty among single mothers, it became clear that the unique mindset of Japanese society has a significant impact. One is the prejudice against single mothers and the idea of personal responsibility.

c.1) Prejudice against single mothers

N6 is a representative of an organisation that supports the poor and is one of the members who make recommendations to the Government on isolation support. Of particular interest is his discussion of the prejudice and inequality towards single mothers that tends to occur in Japanese society, including the unique Japanese cultural perspective. N5 then expresses a similar view to that of N6, describing the current situation in Japan where single mothers lack government assistance, understanding and support, and explains the various hurdles that exist as follows:

> It is easy to be prejudiced and disadvantaged, even if it does not lead to social understanding or discrimination. The child support allowance, a system available to single mother families, requires them to submit a status report on a regular basis, but I think there is a social stigma in the system that makes people suspicious that they are not a single mother family, for example, whether they have a partner they are dating (N6, lines 34-38).

N6 also mentions discrimination against divorced women as a minority practice that deviates from traditional Japanese values.

> Discrimination, but there is a strong traditional view of family in society, including the idea that divorce is selfish, discrimination against single-parent families and women, the idea that it is normal for couples to raise their children together, and the idea that it is better for men to earn money and women to take care of the home. There is a negative tendency for single mothers to be seen as a minority, a deviation from norms and family views (N6, lines 46-51).

N5 also included the unique situation of Japan's regional cities, as following:

> There are a number of people who say that they have been hiding the fact that they are divorced from their neighbours for more than 10 years, and that they are ashamed of being divorced because they say that their parents are hiding it too (N5, lines 324-327).

The representative's words confirm that one of the reasons why poverty among single mothers is not solved is prejudice against single mothers. In particular, as N5 mentioned, in rural areas, the idea that divorce itself is a shame still persists to this day, which can be seen as an obstacle to improving the situation.

c.2) Personal-responsibility theory

N6 states that one of the problems facing single mothers in Japan is rooted in the personal-responsibility theory often discussed in Japan.

> It is selfish to be assertive or it is sometimes seen in isolation from bereavement. There is also a harsh view that the person must suffer the consequences of his or her own choices, and there is still a lack of awareness of domestic violence. We are told that we have to put

> up with it, that every family is the same, that we have worked hard for our children through such crises and that the older generation is like that. I think it has become a compounded discriminatory norm, including gender norms (N6, lines 60-66).

N2 also mentions a concept unique to Japanese society.

> In Japan the parents raise the child, and if the parents are poor, it can't be helped if the child is not good enough. In Japan, however, there are many people who think that parents bring up their children, and if the parents are poor, it can't be helped if the child fails (N2, lines 105-110).

N2 further describes the difficult situation of single mother.

> Single parents are in a miserable situation where they can't even feed their children properly because they can't work even if they wanted to because of the coronavirus pandemic. When they raise their voices, there are a lot of people who say that they should be responsible for their children because they made the decision to have them (N2, lines 112-117)

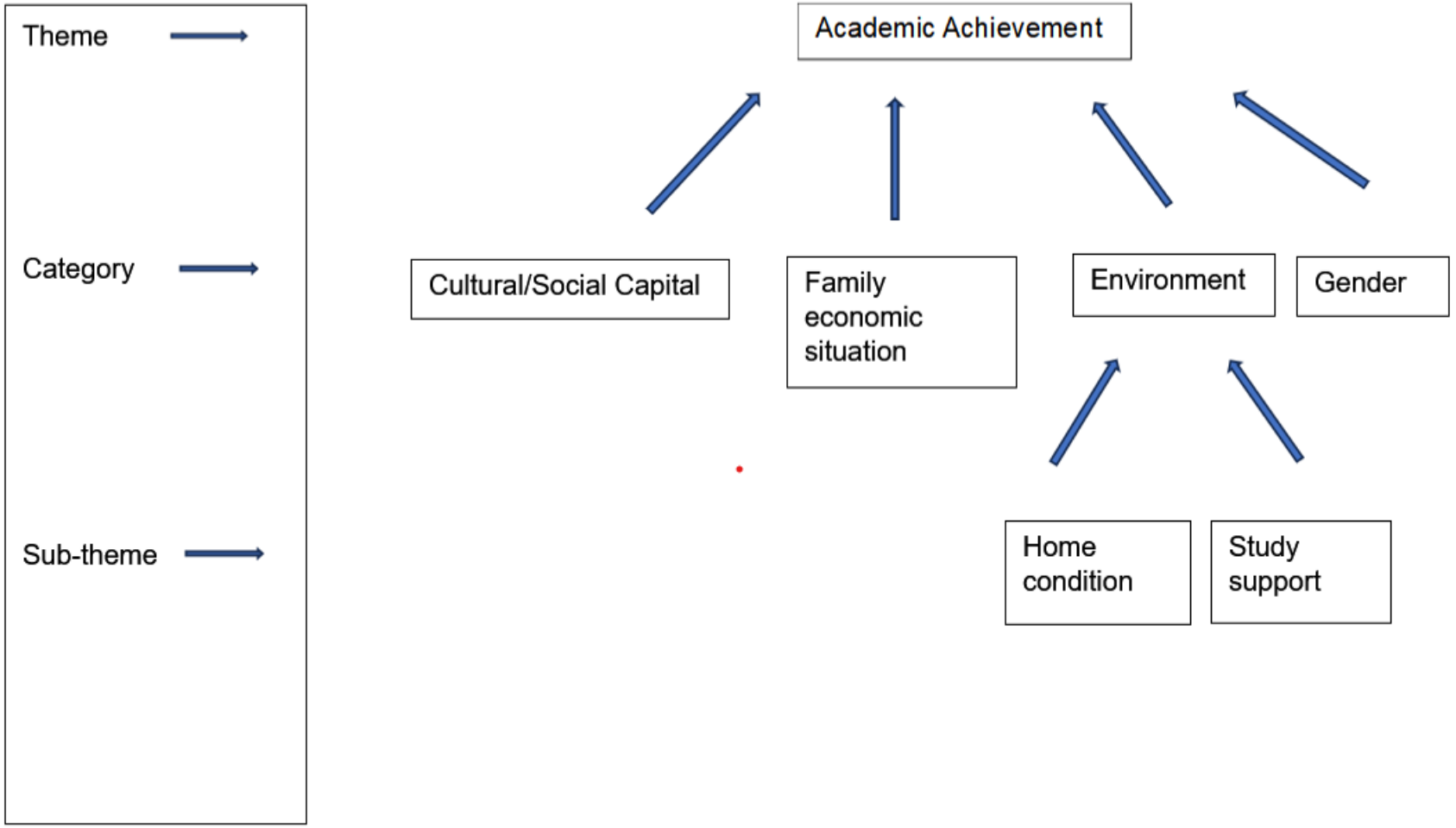
As Sakazume (2019) and Suzuki (2015) state, single mothers, despite their economic deprivation and social vulnerability, are often subject to social exclusion, shame and neglect under the term 'personal responsibility', which states that they should have had children of their own will and become single mothers, from the words of N6 also shows that this is a reality in Japan.

4.2.2 Academic achievement

The second theme that emerged from the NPO interview data was that of academic achievement. This comprised of four major categories: cultural/social capital,

financial issues, environment and gender. Environment was comprised of sub themes and the analysis of each of these is discussed in the following sections and are illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7:


Theme
Category
Sub-theme
Academic Achievement
Cultural/Social Capital
Family economic situation
Environment
Gender
Home condition
Study support

4.2.2.1 Cultural/Social capital

Based on his own experience of working with NPOs, N1 describes the negative cycle of mothers and children as follows:

> There are no parents who have graduated from a four-year university. There are those who have graduated from high school, but almost no so-called four-year university graduates (N1, lines 136-138).

N1 also added that:

> They may not have the educational background to go on to higher education or to find a job, or they may not be able to work properly, or they may have their own illnesses (N1, lines 123-125).

N5 also looked at the households he supported and stated that:

> If you look at the kind of poverty that single mothers are living in now, it's always cascading down to the children. Poverty is a chain of poverty and the way their parents work, their standard of living, the way they go to school, not all of them but a really large percentage of them have children with low education and low income and they are not able to work properly (N5, lines 138-142).

N3, in his experience as a teacher for many years, refers to children's cultural capital as communicative competence, stating that:

> Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have very little cultural capital, so they don't have a language. They don't have many languages. The system that human society has created is to bridge the gap between children born with disabilities and those born with social capital,

> such as schools and nurseries. I think this system is no longer working adequately (N3, lines 309-313).

N3 added that:

> The most common reason for dropping out of school is low academic ability. Another reason is the lack of communication skills to build relationships with others. In short, language acquisition. Not only language acquisition, but also daily conversation and everyday communication skills are very low (N3, lines 175-178).

He explained how children's poor communication skills can lead to problems.

> It's about communication between the children, for example, when relationships are broken, and they don't have the language to repair it. They don't have the ability to repair (N3, lines 215-218).

Sullivan (2007) states that education is an important mechanism of social reproduction, linking class origins to class destinations. He also states that. 'The professional classes are more successful in communicating their professional status to their children than other middle-class groups who are not highly educated.' There is continued interest in the ways in which the middle and upper classes can use their cultural resources to promote their children's educational attainment', i.e. the 'negative cycle' within the family is likely to occur.

In particular, N3's several references to the 'lack of the communication skill' as a reason for the low academic achievement of children from single-mother families may be indicative of the low cultural capital in the home.

4.2.2.2 Family economic situation

All NPO representatives acknowledged that there is an impact of economic disparities in education on children.

N6 described the impact of economic issues on education as follows:

> Economic issues can definitely affect higher education, as the amount of school fees borne by the individual is very large. The amount of tuition fees for higher education, university, etc., is very large for individuals to bear, and many single mother families are not economically affluent, so the burden of tuition fees can definitely have an impact on higher education or limit educational opportunities (N6, lines 69-73).

N5 also spoke about what she felt when she saw the families he supported.

> The lower the income, the harder it is to go to a good school. School is not everything, but there are many families in need. There was a graph that showed a clear difference in children's performance depending on their income. I really feel that the schools they attend are different depending on their income (N5, lines 155-160).

N1 is a representative of a national NPO supporting poor families to learn and N5 is a representative of a local city supporting poor families to learn, both of whom describe the impact of poverty on learning. It is particularly interesting to note that they both describe how poverty has a significant impact on children's experiences in out-of-school activities, which in turn has an impact on their academic performance.

N3 also stated that the lack of out-of-school education puts poor families at a disadvantage.

> Especially nowadays, education has gone beyond the level of just going to school, to the point where it has become a combination of extracurricular education and school education

> in Japan. In this situation, single-parent families are at a huge disadvantage (N3, lines 235-238).

N4 expressed similar thoughts.

> The cost of education is now taken for granted in Japan, but not being able to afford lessons is a big problem. There used to be an atmosphere that children didn't have to take lessons after primary school, but the situation is changing, especially in urban areas (N4, lines 35-38).

N1 stated the following about economic and educational inequalities.

> Economic disparity is an educational disparity, it's an educational disparity, it's an out-of-school educational quality, it's a disparity in experiential activities, and ultimately, I think it has a considerable impact on children's future growth and educational attainment (N1, lines 52-53, 55-57).

N6 expressed a similar view.

> Not only higher education, but also education outside of school, such as taking lessons, doing sports, music, community gatherings, club activities, and things like that within the school, etc., are all difficult, not to say that there is a lack of experience (N6, lines 73-76).

N2 representatives also mentioned the impact of out-of-school activities as well as the poor learning environment at home.

> Single mothers often come from families with very low incomes. With about half of them, 48.5%, in relative poverty, the very large education gap in Japan means that when parents' income is linked to their children's performance, the base academic performance is low to begin with. They may have low school grades. Sometimes it's because they can't

> go to cram school, or they don't have access to paid services (N2, lines 120-127).

Many cases of physical injury and poor conditions are also mentioned, as well as issues such as young carers.

> When they are in the third year of junior high school or the third year of senior high school, they may not have the educational background to go on to higher education or to find a job, or they may not be able to work properly, or they may have their own illnesses (N1, lines 122-125).

N1 added the following about the disadvantage of young carers.

> Young carers and families with mental illnesses cannot talk to their parents, so the children don't know how to talk to their mothers, and they also don't know what to do because their parents seem to be unwell all the time (N1, lines 125-128).

N6 described this problem in relation to social structures.

> It is a problem of the social structure. The area that parents are responsible for is very large, so the available manpower is halved, which makes a difference. If there are social services, they cover the area without parental power. Including young carers. There is probably not enough social stuff (N6, lines 96-99).

According to Kitayama (2011), YC (Young carer) refers to minor children whose families are in some difficulty and who are in charge of the care of younger siblings. While the children themselves are going through the unstable period of adolescence, they often become a 'carer' when their parents, grandparents or even siblings are experiencing some difficulties.

4.2.2.3 Environment

The impact of the environment of single-mother households on their children is examined from two aspects: the home and the school.

With regard to the lack of time in single mothers' homes on children's learning, several representatives stated the following:

a) Home condition

N1 described the difficult environment in single mothers' homes as follows:

> I think single mothers have to sacrifice themselves to do their chores. I think it is difficult to continue such activities and I have to sacrifice my time for them. I think it is difficult to balance self-realisation with child rearing, child independence and childcare (N1, lines 67-70).

N2 also stated that:

> Single mothers take their children to school and then go to work. This leaves little time to talk to the children or watch them study at home. The main problem is that they are so busy with work and housework to earn a living that they have no time to raise their children (N2, lines 68-72).

It also describes how many single mothers are isolated or mentally ill under difficult circumstances and the impact on their children's learning.

> Single mothers cannot talk to anyone about it, and they have to bear it alone, which I think is not good for the mental health of single mothers (N1, lines 63-65).

N2 also stated, based on the data.

> There are a huge number of people who don't have anyone to talk to about their family's difficulties. We

> did a survey asking if there was anyone they could talk to about childcare or problems with their children, and the most common answer was their parents or friends. 25% of respondents said they didn't really have anyone (N2, lines 210-215).

N2 described the data.

> 47% of the respondents are in really bad health and 40% of them feel that way all the time, like they don't get better no matter what happens, and only about 6% of them have no problems at all (N2, lines 227-230).

N3 described the difficult situation of single mothers as follows:

> Parenting is a social activity in itself, but single mothers and those in need have to raise their children in isolation due to a lack of social resources and support from others. The lack of money makes parenting the responsibility of the family and the personal world. So, parenting becomes a very difficult activity (N3, lines 59-65).

N3 further explained that:

> Especially in Japanese society, there is a lack of understanding of the socialisation of child rearing, so it is extremely difficult for Japanese mothers, especially single mothers, to raise their children in isolation in such a society (N3, lines 71-73).

N3 also spoke in relation to problems in Japanese society.

> In Japan there is a very poor ideological background for socialising the upbringing and education of children. There is no socialist experience in Japan of society

> taking responsibility for the upbringing of children as the responsibility of the family (N3, lines 77-73).

N6 also described the difficult situation of single mothers as follows:

> If it was someone they could trust, or if they had a supportive relationship, I think a lot of kids are able to do it in a positive way. If they don't have that, I think it can be a sobering and difficult situation. There can also be social discrimination. I think it is quite difficult (N6, lines 117-120).

N6 mentions cases of single mothers with mental health problems.

> Data show that more than half have mental health problems, and that single mothers are almost as likely or more likely. Many single mothers who come to us have significantly more mental health symptoms than the average single mother (N6, lines 140-142).

In difficult environments, N6 also describe abuse of children and problems with the social system.

> Mother to child abuse. Abuse from father to mother. I think there are cases of mother to child. Welfare is a social hurdle that has to be used, but there are cases where it is too late, even though the level is high enough to apply. They work hard until they are falling to pieces and generally cannot support their children (N6, lines 160-163).

He added the following:

> Mothers in single parent families also have to do a lot. It is very hard. I think this is the biggest challenge because social support is weak (N6, lines 207-208).

He also spoke of the need for social support.

> Because I think we need not only purposeful connections, but also community connections and weak counsellors with a purpose. I think it is also important that children are not isolated (N6, lines 185-187).

From the words of these representatives, it can be taken that there are many single mothers who face not only time difficulties but also mental difficulties in raising their children, and that there are situations where parents and children are isolated from society due to isolated parenting, which also affects their academic performance.

b) Study support

The NPO representative's words revealed that there are many situations in which children from single mother families feel hurt and difficulties due to the lack of understanding at school and from mindless words, and that they are often denied at home as well.

> If the school teachers don't understand the situation, they may think that there is a problem with the child, and many single parents have a very bad time at school (N2, lines 143-145).

> Children lose confidence because of a lot of negative interactions. In school, they are told 'you're stupid' and their parents say a lot of things to them. Overwhelmingly, there are more children who receive negative messages than positive ones (N1, lines 183-186).

It was also found that low academic achievement often leads to bullying, trouble and truancy.

> He has an IQ of about the level of special needs, so he doesn't fit in at school, he can't study, he has a lot of problems with friends, he is abused at home, he runs away from home, but we are supporting him just in time (N1, lines 170-173).

N2 also said the following:

> There are lots of children out of school. There will be lots of children being bullied at school (N2, lines 375-376).

The interviews also revealed that poverty prevents people from being prepared for the necessary environment for learning, leading to lower academic performance.

> About 40% of them don't have internet. It costs about 3,000 yen a month, but some of them don't have internet, and almost half of them don't even have a computer at home. In Japan, where schools are becoming more and more digitalised, the lack of internet access and a computer at home is beginning to have a huge impact on academic performance (N2, lines 298-303).

The situation was highlighted where, because of poverty, children have to give up in higher education, even if they have hopes for their children.

> Negative expectations are indeed present. I once conducted a survey of children and their parents on how far they wanted their children's final education to go, and a very high proportion of parents said, 'up to high school', while a low proportion of children said, 'up to high school'. The same proportion of children wanted to go to university or vocational school instead of high school as normal

> children. 'Some children are told by their parents that they can't go to university because they don't have enough money and they can't help it (N2, lines 386-393).

4.2.2.4 Gender

It is very interesting that representatives of all NPOs mentioned gender-based discrimination among children from single mother families. The root of this idea may be related to the male-dominated employment system in Japan.

> They value boys more. If you have an older sister and a younger brother, they say that the younger brother is going to university and the older sister is going to work after graduating from high school. Because she was told that way, if you look at a child with an older sister and a younger brother, the older sister is definitely better than the younger brother (N2, lines 396-401).

N2 further stated the reasons for this.

> There is a considerable wage gap between men and women, so even if you give girls an academic background, they may think that they won't earn money or that they won't be good earners (N2, lines 426-429).

N6 stated that gender differences were created by the relationship between mothers and daughters.

> Girls tend to feel closer to their mothers and become more co-dependent. Boys are a bit more distant, which may be the flip side of their desire to be pampered, but I think a lot of them feel they need to be independent as soon as possible (N6, lines 170-172).

It is interesting to note that the youngest NPO representative was not really aware of this as a gender difference but acknowledged that there were certain trends.

> I can't think of any trends between boys and girls, but many of the students who learn are girls. There are a lot of girls who use the service. I don't know why (N1, lines 196-198).

4.2.3 Assistance needed to solve the problem

It was interesting to note that representatives of all NPOs raised a number of issues and stressed the urgent need for support in this regard.

4.2.3.1 Assistance needed for single mothers and children

The representatives of the various NPOs support single mothers and their children with their own specialities and also have a lot of plans. While there is some flexibility because they are not government agencies, some representatives felt that they were not providing a fundamental solution.

> We need seamless support from the age of six. Comprehensive support is needed for a variety of children. Regarding early support, it is difficult for NPOs alone. Governments and schools have contacts and connections with children, so it is necessary to create local networks through public-private partnerships and to create networks of adults who can receive referrals and referrals from schools and governments (N1, lines 220-225).

N2 describes the need to use her characteristics as a female representative of a non-profit organisation that supports learning to extend support not only to learning, but also to experiential activities.

> It is very important to support children who are (of) single parents by providing them with free learning support and hands-on activities to compensate for

> their disadvantages in academic ability and various other experiences (N2, lines 439-442).

N2 has also begun to explore, from a woman's perspective, the causes that make single mothers vulnerable to poverty and support them to address them, stating:

> Single mothers are too busy with work and daily life to get the information they need. As a result, they do not improve their skills and miss out on opportunities, so we deliver the information they need now, such as information on money provided by the government. What we are planning to start in the future is to provide employment support to single mothers to increase their income, for example by improving their skills (N2, lines 445-451).

It is also interesting to note that N6, who is also a member of the government's policy review of isolation support, describes the need to build connections within society to prevent vulnerable people from becoming isolated.

> We are in a position, unlike the authorities, to be able to get in touch with a close adviser and tell them about the system and welfare services, so if there is support in the community that they want to connect with, I hope they know that our work is beneficial to them and available to them. I think it is important to have a place where they can stay connected. I also think it is important that children are not isolated. Because the town hall is not a place where they can talk casually (N6, lines 181-187).

N4 also talks about the difficult situation of single mothers.

> But basically, they have to earn money, they have no time. They have to look after the children, and they have

> to deal with their ex-husbands who don't like any visits. There are all sorts of stresses (N4, lines 166-168).

4.2.3.2 Assistance needed for NPO

It is very interesting to note that all NPOs are funded by public donations, questioning the current situation where the government leaves it to NPOs and struggling to link their activities to policy advocacy.

> We rely on donations to cover more than half of our budget. As First Penguin,[8] we need to collect donations and do it well, and eventually make it a national policy. We are doing what is in front of us well, but at the same time we are working on a model of policy advocacy, and by making policy recommendations we are trying to spread it across the country (N1, lines 232-236).

N6 described Japan's current reliance on NPOs as follows:

> It's absurd. If there is a public framework, there is no need for our activities, so a society without our activities would be better, but since institutional policy is not progressing, we can't leave it at that, so while we do it, it is not healthy unless it is done in a way that is not like that. We want to avoid that, but since they don't do it so much, we are trying our best to realise the policy as a civic activity. It is not bad that private sector activities are expanding and being valued, but it is not right that they are relied upon (N6, lines 238-244).

It is also interesting to note that N1 describes the urgent need for a national initiative, and in particular mentions the recruitment and training of human resources for this.

[8] A term used to refer respectfully to individuals and companies that act with a venture spirit.

> Abuse, truancy and child suicide are at their worst, and schools, government and existing measures alone cannot compete. On the contrary, NPOs are struggling without funds for their activities, so a national effort to properly nurture and increase the number of recipients is needed. The first thing that is needed is to secure and train human resources. I don't think it will lead to a solution unless the state seriously works on securing and fostering human resources (N1, lines 254-259).

N2 strongly commented on the current situation where the operation of the Children's Cafeteria, which provides meals to children from poor families, is not funded by the government but by NPOs and public donations.

> It's absolutely ridiculous that the government is really pushing for children's cafeterias. No, I think that's your job (N2, lines 488-489).

It is also interesting to note that N6 stated that they do not receive government subsidies in order to make policy recommendations from a neutral standpoint.

> The basis of our work is donations, and we do not receive any government aid. One of our strengths is that because of donations, we are able to work on topics that are not institutionalised and areas that are not advanced in society. Because we do not receive any grants, we are also counsellors who can make policy recommendations from a neutral position. We want to make policy recommendations, so if we can't do it because we think the grant might be cut off, that's the whole point, and that's probably what makes us unique (N6, lines 207-213).

On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that N6 mentions that the reason why the state budget is not invested is related to the ‘Personal-responsibility theory’.

> There are two reasons: the theory of Personal-responsibility and the theory of the family as the smallest unit, which is attached to the theory of personal responsibility. Fiscal constraints. The government is very reluctant to provide subsidies and public spending, because it matches personal responsibility. Personal-responsibility is a bad match because you don't have to pay for it. As a result, funds are not invested. It is a bad spiral (N6, lines 247-251).

N7, a former bureaucrat, stated that the Government had the following to say on the matter of NPOs' activities being funded by donations.

> I think the government should provide the money (N7, line 370).

However, he also expressed the following positive thoughts.

> The idea of boosting local power and borrowing power from the community is volunteer-based. If we only give money as priming, then I think it is important that people of good will in the community work spontaneously, and the government should support them from the side (N7, lines 378-381).

N2, in her capacity as a women's representative, states that traditionally, the weak position of women in Japan has been the cause of many problems.

> In Japan, women are at a huge disadvantage and their dignity is too low, which causes many problems. There are many problems with education in Japan, such as child poverty. The root of this is because women have been raising and educating their children, because their mothers have been doing it, and politicians are completely unaware of this, so I think it is important to tell these things to politicians and

> the business community so that they see it properly (N2, lines 462-464,469-474).

N1 and N2 describe the current situation in Japan, where redistribution to solve problems makes the situation even worse, as follows:

> It is an important question how far we NPOs are willing to go, because it is a problem of poverty, which should be solved by the state, and it is not right that the gap widens after redistribution, so we have to analyse it fundamentally. We need to fundamentally change the social structure that accepts needy people, especially single mothers, to the 2021 model. If we don't aim for social security and equal opportunities in education so that a single mother with three children can raise them well and send them to university, I think that in Japan, where people are said to be the only resource, we will really be unable to recover (N1, lines 296- 303).

N2 also states that:

> It's really strange. What is happening in Japan today is that people of working age are suffering more and more. The level of redistribution of benefits, mainly cash benefits, is too low. If you don't have the same level of income as welfare, such as households exempt from residential tax, you can't receive the cash benefits. It's very difficult to get even a little bit out of that (N2, line 493-497).

While many representatives of NPOs are dissatisfied with the government's policies, many negative opinions have also been heard about the Agency for Children and Families, which was created by the government as a solution to this problem. The Agency for Children and Families was created with the following objectives in mind: To put the best interests of children first, to place efforts and policies concerning

children in the middle of Japanese society, to guarantee the rights of children from the perspective of children, taking into account all the environments surrounding children, and to ensure that no child is left behind and that all children can grow up healthy and happy (MHLW2022).

It was created as a new command post to ensure the rights of the child, ‘to ensure that no child is left behind and to encourage the healthy growth of society as a whole ‘(MHLW2022).

N1 states the following with regard to national policy delays and the Agency for Children and Families.

> I believe other countries have made efforts to ensure that disparities in family circumstances do not lead to disparities in education and the future. In the case of Japan, the timing should have originally started around the 1990s, but because of the bubble economy, I think there was a policy carelessness (N1, lines 37-41).
>
> We are trying to take action through the establishment of the Agency for Children and Families and other measures while repeating major structural policy failures, but we have been very slow to take early action. I think that is causing a lot of problems related to children (N1, lines 45-48).

N7 also stated the following with regard to the Agency for Children and Families

> I do not want it. I think it is just an outgrowth of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's Department of Children and Families. When politicians pretend to be doing something, they are not doing anything in terms of policy, but they are only building a vessel to make policy. It may look like they are doing something with the creation of the Agency for Children and Families, but it does not mean that anything will change

> because of the creation of the Child and Family Agency (N7, lines 289-294).

In response to a researcher's question about what N3, who is also a member of the Advisory Group to the government on child poverty issues, could expect regarding the Agency for Children and Families, he stated:

> Well, well, it would be difficult. I don't think we can expect it (N3, line 451).

N3 added the reason for this.

> There's a split authority and the Agency for Children and Families doesn't have a team from the Ministry of Education (N3, lines 450-451).

N3 further explained.

> The most important point of poverty alleviation is left to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, and the Agency for Children and Families was originally the Children's Agency. As to why the family was included, it is said that this is also due to the influence of the Unification Church (N3, lines 455-456).

It is interesting to note that here, from N3, it is mentioned that the creation of the Agency for Children and Families was influenced by one religious' group, the former Unification Church. It also provides an explanation for this in response to the researcher's next question.

> In short, it emphasises the importance of the family, doesn't it? The old Unification society (N3, line 100-102).
>
> Of course, the family is important, of course the family and the home are important for everyone, but it is a different issue from the issue of the family having to take responsibility for the

> upbringing of children. It's an argument that the state and society don't have to take responsibility. It's an unusual idea (N3, lines 102-105).
>
> It means that we have to question the basic social contract, what is the purpose of society and the state (N3, lines 107-108)?

When asked if it was about the point that the former Unification Church made that 'everything has to be borne by the family', he said:

> I'm not an expert, so I don't know if the Unification Church had that much power, but I think it's a very interesting discussion (N3, lines 111-112).

And it is very interesting to note that N4 also mentioned the name of the former Unification Church in response to the researcher's next question.

> What do you think is still the problem with this gender gap (N4, line 199)?
>
> The Unification Church (N4, line 200).
>
> During Japan's period of rapid economic growth around the 1960s, the system of men working alongside housewives worked well. The government clung to this system for a long time and did not reform it. Even now, the policy of favouring housewives continues. We have created a society in which women are allowed to work part time. But in the areas of work and politics there is a huge gender gap (N4, lines 202-217).

The statements of these representatives express a number of negative attitudes towards the current government, and the fact that they refer to the links between certain religious organisations and the government also illustrates the relevance of the current problems in Japan and the poverty of single mothers.

Interviews with representatives of NPOs reported a lack of financial support and difficulties in job opportunities as factors contributing to poverty among single mothers. With regard to the lack of financial support, it is clear that there is a lack of government policy, such as a system for collecting child support after divorce and inadequate childcare benefits. As N2 mentioned, another reason for the lack of benefits may be related to the government's attitude of seeking voluntary efforts rather than providing financial support. The disadvantageous position in terms of work opportunities is still strongly influenced by the traditional Japanese idea that women are supposed to stay at home and do the housework, while men are supposed to work mainly outside the home. It could also be seen that the social system to support single mothers is inadequate.

With regard to academic achievement, a number of factors were considered. Firstly, the cultural and social capital inherited from parents. It is particularly interesting that N3 mentioned that the lack of communication skills due to the low level of conversation in the home also has a significant impact on academic achievement. The lack of out-of-school activities due to economic reasons was also mentioned by many NPO representatives as having a significant impact on children's academic achievement. And the family environment, including young carers, and prejudice in schools were also cited as reasons. Finally, gender differences are also interesting. Japanese society is still very male-centric, and although the government is trying to promote women's activities, it is not making much progress, and in the Japanese mindset, men are the ones who earn money, and women are often paid less than men for support work, which leads to a tendency to prioritise boys.

The next chapter will consider the interviews which were conducted with single mothers and children.

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW WITH SINGLE MOTHERS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews run with the single mother participants. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Thematic analysis. There were 8 single mother participants, and their details are presented in Table 5 below.

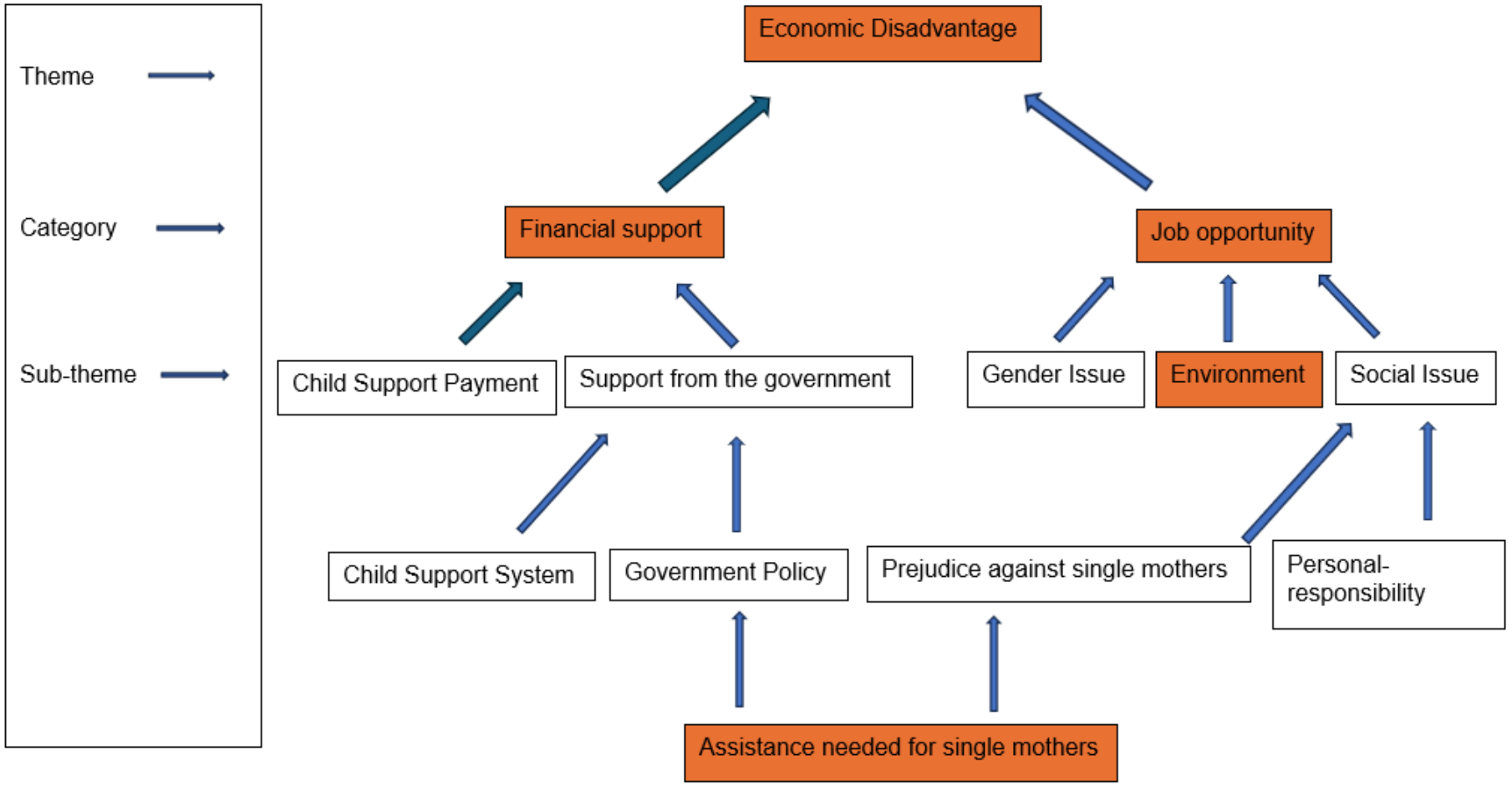
Table 5: Single Mothers demographic details

Name	Age	Occupation	Education background	Resident area
Akiko	56	City council member	Junior college	Yamagata
Noriko	55	Company director	Junior college	Ehime
Yoko	48	NPO director	High school	Tokyo
Yumiko	51	Care manager	Junior college	Saitama
Keiko	48	Medical company worker	Left university	Gunma
Masako	55	Unemployed due to caring for parents	High school	Kanagawa
Michiko	48	Temporary agency worker	Junior college	Aichi
Sachiko	58	Shop staff	High school	Tokyo

＊Junior college：two - year college

Three further themes emerged from the interviews with the single mothers, and these have been added to the themes previously revealed by the interviews with NPO are illustrated in Figure 8 (below and new themes are highlighted in orange). The themes in the following diagram are those themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews using Nvivo.

Figure 8: NPO single mother figure



5.2 RESULTS

These following sections analyse interviews with single mothers under the following themes. Economic disadvantage, children's academic achievement, social issues, safeguarding issues and support needed by single mothers.

5.2.1 Economic disadvantage

The first major theme to emerge from the single mother interview data was 'economic disadvantage'. Economic disadvantage is defined in terms of an individual's employment status, income and whether they are on a low income. This consisted of two broad categories, 'financial support' and 'employment opportunities', each of these categories being made up of subthemes (refer to fig.8). Financial support includes both financial support from the government and support from ex-spouses following divorce. Employment opportunities describe government and private support systems in employment after becoming a single mother.

5.2.1.1 Financial support

In Japan, there are two systems to financially support single mothers: child support from divorced husbands and government subsidies, both of which were identified in the interviews with NPOs (see chapter 4 Section 2). One of the main causes of poverty among single mothers in Japan is thought to be the child support paid by the ex-husband upon divorce. This is because, in many cases, child support arrangements are not adhered to and there are no particularly severe penalties for ex-husbands who default.

Of the eight single mothers interviewed, four had made arrangements for child support payment from the ex-husband. One said that the arrangement was being

honoured; three said that they had made an arrangement but that it was not being honoured, as below:

Michiko, the only interviewee who receives child support payments from her ex-husband as agreed, described the process of determining payments as follows:

> There is a fixed amount that you have to pay based on the other party's annual income, which the mediator will tell you. If the other party agrees, that's the amount. ... I am still being paid that, as it has been decided (Michiko, lines16-18, 20).

Akiko described a situation where she and her ex-husband had agreed on child support payments, which were not properly adhered to, as following:

> We couldn't get through the issues just by talking to each other, so we had a divorce by mutual consent, but my ex-husband made an arrangement that he would only pay 20,000 yen (£100) a month until our daughter turned 18: ... Child support payment came in monthly for five or six years, but nothing after that (Akiko, lines 43-46,49).

Keiko described how child support arrangements were not paid and how she gave up and gave her reasons as follows:

> Because my ex-husband doesn't want to pay, you know. I thought it would be legally protected, but it was a bit difficult to spend that time and rely on it to make a living, so I didn't get any money at all (Keiko, lines 28-30).

Noriko said that arrangements have been made but not followed, stating the amounts that have not been paid and relating the difficulty of claiming them to the inadequacies of the Japanese system, as below:

> I have 2 million yen (£10,000) accumulated now. Under Japanese law, the issue of child support is managed by the family court, so if

> you want to make a case for non-payment in the family court, you have to go to the other party's place of residence to file a court case (Noriko, lines 47-50).

Noriko lives in Ehime Prefecture and her ex-husband lives in Tokyo, but in order to go to court she had to travel to Tokyo, and she expressed her dissatisfaction with the system, saying that she had to give up on going to court because it cost her even more money when she was already in financial difficulty.

Three of the single mothers do not have child support arrangements. Two of them stated that they dared not to receive it because it meant continuing to have his interference in their lives. Masako said as following:

> I wanted to make an arrangement, but my ex-husband was not a salaried employee. There was no guarantee that I would get money from him. So, it was better to have a divorce than to have a dispute. We divorced without any arrangement (Masako, lines 18-20).

Sachiko gave the following reasons for not entering into a child support arrangement.

> There was a feeling in my mind that if we are connected by money forever, we are not disconnected, so there is no need for me to take money from him. So, I didn't have any expectations and said, 'I will refrain from doing this' (Sachiko, lines 131-133).

The interviews revealed that most of the divorced single mothers' reasons[9] for divorce were financial problems with their ex-husbands, and therefore the situation did not go smoothly with regard to child support. In addition, there are no strict penalties for failing to pay child support, and it costs even more money to dispute this in court, so the statutory arrangements often do not seem to function as a way of

[9] In Japan, there is not same statutory requirement regarding financial maintenance for children after divorce.

supporting the financial situation of divorced single mothers (see Chapter 2, p 30-32).

5.2.1.2 Lack of job opportunities for single mothers

It appears that the most difficult part of a divorce for Japanese single mothers is taking a job that provides a steady income to support the children. Reasons for this are time constraints and the attitude of the company towards women who are working while raising children. Other problems with the Japanese system have also been identified. The interviews with single mothers in the current research provided much testimony on this. Yumiko stated that the reason she decided to divorce was because she became a full-time employee.

> I guess I was 43 years old. I'm 51 now, so eight years ago. I had been working part time all my life, but when I started working full time, I decided to get a divorce. I didn't have a sufficient income, but I felt like I would be independent (Yumiko, lines 2-4).

Another factor that makes a big difference for single mothers is whether they live with their parents or not. Akiko, Michiko and Keiko appear to be better off in terms of taking up work, having raised their children while living with their parents, compared to single mothers who did not live with their parents. Akiko explained that she was in a situation where she has returned to her parents' home, so she did not need to pay for housing or other expenses. She did not work as soon as she returned to their home because her child was still small.

> About six months after the divorce, I returned to my parents' home, about six months later, I looked for a little part time job

> and managed to find one when my daughter started kindergarten.[10](Akiko, lines 62-63, 66)

She strongly agreed that if you do not have a parental family home to return to, it would be difficult to manage. Michiko, who had relatively little difficulty in taking up work, said that she had listened to her mother's advice and built-up various networks before the divorce.

> I found a job straight away. I was a board member for three years in kindergarten. When I was looking for a job, using that experience, I could assist the shop master (Manager) and do everything on the floor. (If I can do different jobs) I can be flexible with my shifts (Michiko, lines 136-139).

Based on her experience, she quickly got a job in restaurant management, but said the following about her income.

> But it was small. I worked hard for a month and worked weekends, and it was about 100,000 yen (£500) (Michiko, lines 146-147).

She then described the importance of living with her parents for her livelihood as follows:

> If I hadn't lived with my parents, I probably would have had to leave my daughter in day care and work instead of sending her to kindergarten (Michiko, lines 150-152).

She spoke of the difficulties of being a mother on her own, even if she got a job quickly, due to the low salary.

Keiko also lived with her parents, so she had some leeway when it came to choosing a job, but she also felt some limitations in working while raising her children.

[10] Kindergartens are for infants from 3 years of age to primary school age, while nurseries are for infants from 0 years of age to primary school age who lack care due to parental circumstances.

Keiko worked in a beauty salon and an aroma salon, but she describes a situation where she changed jobs because she could not take time off because the service industry had more customers on weekends and she felt uncomfortable when asking other club members' parents to pick up her children from club activities.

> No matter how much I told them it was my job and that it was fine on the surface, I could see that they were really complaining behind my back, because we were in the countryside. So, when my children were about to start junior high school, I changed to a job that gave me weekends off so I could drop them off and pick them up at weekends (Keiko, lines 54-58).

At weekends in Japanese schools, sports and other club activities are held, and parents often take their children to and from the venue. Noriko and Masako complained strongly about the difficulties of getting a divorce and taking a job. Noriko described her experience of not being able to get a job due to being the single mother of a child, although she lives in a rural area, as follows:

> There are lots of jobs. In several cases, when I told them that I was a mother and child (single mother family), they wouldn't even give me an interview (Noriko, lines 124-125).
>
> I wanted to be employed as a full-time employee, but I kept getting turned down for a number of part-time and casual jobs (Noriko, lines 130-131).

When she told the person at the job centre that she could not even get an interview because she was a mother and child (single mother family), the person at the job centre told her the situation at the time, saying that it was impossible and that she found a job as a secretary in a medical laboratory at a national university with a strong will. Noriko has eventually been able to get a good job because of her

perseverance and the support of a determined staff member, but such support does not seem to happen to every single mother. Masako's case strongly illustrates the problems with the Japanese system surrounding single mothers.

> For getting my child into daycare I have to be working to get them in. It's a contradiction for me too, because I want to work, but I want to leave my children with them. You can't work when you have children, can you? That's why I say I want to leave him in daycare, when they told me that the nursery wasn't working, I was at a loss on all sides. I was really in trouble (Masako, lines 35-39).

Masako said that in order to get her child into a nursery school, she asked her friend's company to pretend that she was working there, even though she was not actually working there, and managed to get her child into a nursery school. She complained about the Japanese system where she had to lie to get her child into a nursery school.

5.2.2 Children's academic achievement

The second theme that emerged from the single mothers' interview data was 'academic performance'. This theme comprises two broad categories: 'Family economic issues' and 'environment'. The family economic issues are summarised in terms of scholarships and statutory requirements. Environment is summarised in terms of mental health, family relationships and children's responsibilities due to the father's absence.

5.2.2.1 Family economic issues

Children's academic achievement looks at aspects of the family's economic situation in terms of scholarships and statutory requirements, as well as environmental

influences. Japan's scholarship system offers various types of financial assistance, but loan-based scholarships are the most common type of scholarship and the interest rates for repayments are not low. Because of the competition to get into a good university, additional preparation through cram schools and other means is often necessary and expensive. This is a significant financial burden for families and underlines the importance of having a strong financial foundation to access such educational opportunities.

a) Scholarship

Among the single mothers interviewed, three out of eight had used scholarships[11] to pay for their children's higher education; four had either lived with their parents or had received help from their parents to attend cram school or to pay for higher education. One said she had changed her priorities for spending money and managed to raise the funds for a cram school. Keiko said that she received a scholarship to send her eldest son to university, but he left after his third year and is now working in the manufacturing industry. She explained the reasons for this as follows:

> I think money has become tighter. My son was no longer able to work part-time. I had to pay his university fees, but I could not afford to pay private school fees due to Corona pandemic (Keiko, lines196-198).

Sachiko had received scholarships for her two sons but found out along the way that the system differed between municipalities and expressed frustration.

> I received the scholarship when I was in Tokyo... Ah, no. Tochigi, yes. When I was in Tochigi, I received a scholarship for my older

[11] In Japan, scholarships are generally a form of educational loan and need to be repaid.

> son's university, but it was interest-bearing for some reason, not interest-free. When I went to Tokyo and went to the welfare office, they told me that there was a place that would lend me an interest-free loan, and they gave me an interest-free loan, but I felt I lost a year because I had to pay interest for a year (on the first loan) (Sachiko, lines 231-236).

Masako's two sons received scholarships to go to university, but Masako had savings from before her marriage, which she used to supplement the family finances. Japanese women may save to prepare for various life events, including divorce, but this is probably more due to general economic prudence than because of divorce. However, it is interesting to note that several single mothers who saved for divorce before marriage were able to do so because the current situation in Japan does not make it likely that a full-time housewife will be able to find a good job after divorce.

Asked about the financial aspects of her post-divorce life, Masako replied.

> Yes, I had saved money when I was single. I took that into account when I divorced (Masako, line 80).

Masako said that she was ready to get divorced and that she was not so upset because she had savings from her single life. Akiko, Michiko and Noriko lived with their parents, so they did not have to worry about funding to send their children to cram school. When asked whether raising her child as a single mother had affected her child's academic performance, Akiko responded as follows:

> I don't think it has had any impact at all, but because I was able to live with my parents, my daughter was able to attend cram school if she didn't learn enough at school. So, living with my parents was a big help for me and I don't think it had much of a negative impact on my daughter (Akiko, lines 137-140).

Noriko also stated that she was in a good situation as she lived with her parents, and they were mortgage free.

> Yes, I came back to my parents' house. I was lucky because my parents owned a house, and I was able to come back to a place where they didn't have a mortgage on their house (Noriko, lines 112-114).

Yoko, who has no parental support, but has made efforts to raise money for her children's education through self-help efforts. When asked if it was the increase in income that enabled her to send her son to cram school when he was in secondary school, she said:

> It’s not so much that there's an increase, there isn't, but I changed my priorities (Yoko, lines 259-260).

Thus, she said that she addressed her own priorities for spending money by putting the cost of her child's cram school at the top of her priority list.

From the above, the impact of single mothers' economic situation on their children's education is largely influenced by whether or not they live with their parents. For families without parental support, scholarships are a major factor, but the reality of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which prevented part-time work, was also discussed, depriving children of educational opportunities.

b) Statutory requirement

In the UK, the following items must be agreed upon in order for a divorce to take place: How your property and possessions will be divided, and how the children will continue to be looked after. However, interviews with single mothers show that in Japan, divorces are often granted without these points being adhered to, which makes life difficult for single mothers and their children.

Sachiko stated that the reason she did not receive child support from her ex-husband was because she wanted to end the relationship anyway, as follows:

> There was a feeling in my mind that if we are connected by money forever, we are not disconnected, so there is no need for me to take money from him. So, I didn't have any expectations and said, 'I will refrain from doing this' (Sachiko, lines 131-133).

Keiko also gave the following reasons why she also gave up the arrangement to get money from her ex-husband.

> I was tired of spending time on that and being involved. Because my ex-husband doesn’t want to pay, you know. I thought it would be legal, and it was a bit difficult to spend that time and rely on it to make a living, so I didn't get any money at all (Keiko, lines 27-30).

Masako also gave the following reasons for leaving her ex-husband without making an arrangement with him.

> I wanted to make an arrangement, but ex-husband was not a salaried employee. There was no guarantee that I would get money from the other party. So, it was better to have a divorce than to have a dispute. We divorced without any arrangement (Masako, lines 18-20).

Yoko replied that no child support arrangements had been made and stated that she had never heard of visitation or the term child support. The reality that four out of eight mothers (50%) did not have child support arrangements in place at the time of divorce was discussed. This could be evidence that the system has not taken root in Japan (see Chapter 2, p 30-32).

5.2.2.2 Environment

The interviews revealed differences between both single mothers who lived with their parents and those who did not in the various problems related to their home environment. For single mothers who did not live with their parents, the main factor seemed to be whether they had support from people outside the family. The environmental aspects are analysed in terms of the impact upon mental health, lack of time, poor communication within the family and the impact of lack of father contact and children's feeling of responsibility.

a) Mental health impact (child and mother)

Sachiko and Yoko, who did not live with their parents, were working three jobs and getting very little sleep. Due to this situation, they said they could not ensure time to communicate with their children. Sachiko described the pain of raising a child in an environment where she had three jobs and no support from anyone as follows:

> The biggest problem was probably the children's mental health. The children had to live apart from their father because of selfishness of both parents, even though it had nothing to do with them. The children followed me without understanding anything, but I think they were under a lot of emotional strain, and even though they wanted to talk to me about various things, I was at work and couldn't talk to them at the right time or at the right place (Sachiko, lines 41-46).

Sachiko said that the divorce had forced her to move home and her sons were far away from school, which was stressful for them, as they could not play with their friends. She described the following experiences of her life in which she did not have time to spend with her children, and the pain she felt when her younger son asked her to play with him.

> I had to go to work, so I couldn't make time for them, so I was conflicted about what to do. I had to work at night at a family restaurant until midnight, and when my younger son said to me, "Why are you going to work, Mom?" When he said, I had to play with him, listen to him, play cards with him (Sachiko, lines 50-55).

She recalled the situation at the time when she could not communicate with her children and spoke about the need for support to do so.

> I guess it is a communication problem. I realised that parenting is not something you can do alone. You have to make time to spend with your children, and you have to live with them, but it would have been nice if there had been some kind of system where someone else could have made that time for you. Well, not being able to communicate was the hardest part (Sachiko, lines 62-67).

Yoko had the following to say about single mothers' tendency to isolate themselves and their children's schoolwork.

> I felt it but, in my case, it didn't bother me because of my personality. There were many who did not. I thought I don't have to live with a network through my child's friends, which is not very important. For the child and for me. That school time might be important, but I feel like I don't have to be involved because I didn't think the connection between parents, the connection between the parents of the children, has a big impact (Yoko, lines 110-115).

Asked about the support of her relatives, Yoko said:

> Only my mother supported me (Yoko, line 118).

When asked about the cooperation of relatives other than her mother, Yoko replied:

> What's the situation like? I don't know about the other families, but the grandmother who looks after the children, well, my father and mother were divorced, so... Other relatives, do they do anything for you? I don't think so. It's not like they're going to help us or anything (Yoko, lines 120-123).

Noriko stated the following about her child's academic performance.

She said that she found out that her son had ADHD when he was in the third grade of primary school, and until then she had wondered why he did not want to study and why he could not tackle his homework. She described her subsequent struggles as below:

> Every night, both I and he cried, and I kept telling him to do it, write it, read it, as if we were fighting. We were both exhausted. I wondered why he couldn't do it, and when I forced him to do it, it sometimes took him until midnight. I thought that if I kept fighting like this, he would stop doing it, so I stopped (Noriko, lines 193-196).

After a battle with her son, she stopped making him do his homework, consulted a teacher at the school and described the process of finding out that he had a learning disability as follows:

> Forcing him to do his homework. I explained it to his school teachers, but when my son was in the third grade, his homeroom teacher made him take a test, and when he took it, he was diagnosed with ADHD. So, they sent him to a rehabilitation centre and put him on medication. He took the medication (Noriko,198-201).

She spoke about her conflicts about giving her son medication and how she decided not to force him to study.

> I felt like what's the point of taking psychotropic drugs, I only gave him one or two doses and eventually he stopped taking them straight away. He stopped going to the hospital. Our family's education policy is to provide a system that allows the child to live his or her own life, but we declared that we would no longer force him to study (Noriko, lines 203-207).

She described the impact on his academic performance of deciding not to give him medication and not to force him to do his homework.

> Yes, it does have an impact. It's really like he can't write anything but Hiragana[12] anymore (Noriko, lines 210-211).

While Noriko said that her son's learning difficulties were not related to her single mother household, she described how she was unable to spend enough time with her children, and how her mother, who lived with her, was also busy and no one was able to watch him study at the time.

> Yes, it might have been because of the ADHD, but I couldn't look after him in a spontaneous way (Noriko, lines 214-215).

Noriko spoke about the difficulties of single mothers living with their parents in relation to raising their children as following:

> He wasn't taught to study because my mother was working, so it was all she could do just to cook dinner (Noriko, lines 219-220).

Noriko regrets that the reason for her children's poor academic performance was that her son had learning disabilities, saying that she was too busy to look after her son and that she could not ask her mother to do so.

[12] Hiragana (平仮名 or ひらがな) is one of three Japanese syllabary, a component of the Japanese writing system along with Katakana, Kanji, and Romaji.

b) Communication within the family

Keiko, Michiko and Noriko lived with their parents to raise their children and described the difficulties of their respective environments.

Keiko described the problems of raising children alone as follows:

> The lack of time? Also, my mother passed away about ten years ago, so I had to take care of my mother and raise my children at the same time. All of my children were involved in sports, so I had to take them to and from their sports activities because we were in the countryside. So, there were no days off, even on weekends (Keiko, lines 41-44).

And she said that the hardest part was that she did not have time to raise her children or let them play club activities, as her parents were also elderly, and she could not rely on them much. When asked whether Keiko's busy situation had affected her children's academic performance, she replied:

> I didn't help them with their homework at all. My middle son, who no longer wanted to go to cram school, asked his grandfather and grandmother to help him, but my older and younger son often went to cram school. I would have liked to see him study more when he was younger, but I didn't get to see him at all, and my mother had to take care of him for a long time (Keiko, lines 103-107).

She stated that it was a great regret that she was unable to look after them all the time but could not do so because she needed to work.

Michiko described how her daughter began to have a rough time in the third year of primary school and had a difficult time when she stopped going to school.

> When my daughter really started to get into trouble around primary school, I couldn't really handle it, so that's why. It was very difficult, and I may be exaggerating every day. Every day was hell for me (Michiko, lines 87-89).

Michiko described the situation at the time as below:

> We lived with my parents, and my father had a stroke, and he never interfered with my daughter (in relation to her studies) at all before, but suddenly he started interfering (Michiko, lines 93-94).

Michiko described how her father's change in character affected her daughter as follows:

> My father had a stroke, and from that point on, it was like his personality changed a bit, and he started to monitor Mika. He never used to say anything about her studies at all, but now it's all about whether she's done her homework all the time and whether she's doing her studies and stuff like that (Michiko, lines 96-99).

Michiko said that she was too busy with her own work to deal with the situation, which led to the following changes in Mika.

> Since then, she didn't want to stay at home because her grandfather would watch her, so she went to school, but at school, the teacher was a teacher who judged all children who didn't line up properly to be bad children, so from there, she didn't attend classes, didn't study at all, rebelled against the teacher, and if he tried to fight with her, she would fight with him. She was like that from about the third year of primary school (Michiko, lines 101-106).

Michiko was further asked about how she handled the situation, such as sending her daughter to cram school, to which she replied:

> The cram school was in the fifth year of primary school, when my father gradually came back to his original character, got down on his knees and apologised to Mika, and from then, Mika said she would go to cram school, and so she did (Michiko, lines 183-186).

The above interviews show that even when single mother lives with their parents, there are problems with their relationship. Data from the interviews show that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is not always good, with some cases of over-interference due to living together and grandparents abusing their grandchildren.

c) Lack of father/ Children's feeling of responsibility

Yumiko and Masako each described the difficulties of raising several sons by a single mother as follows. Yumiko reflected on her sons' difficult times and spoke.

> I was told by my father that I was too lenient with the children. I didn't prohibit them from doing things, but of course I did call them late at night to ask them where they were going. I was a country girl myself, so I was often surprised by what my sons did. I was also surprised when I found out they smoked, and I was surprised to get so many calls from school (Yumiko, lines 385-389).

Masako also describes the great support given by her second son's junior high school club advisor in raising her two sons as a single woman, as below:

> Mr. T who was the school club advisor at the junior high school was a big influence on my second son. Mr. T thought that it was no good if my son could only do club activities, and he and I were in agreement on that, so he had to do well in his studies and in his daily life as well. It was really

> difficult because Mr. T was the only one who could control the adolescent boy (Masako, lines 157-161).

Masako described the difficulties in raising sons as follows:

> The second son didn't see his father at all, so Mr. T was in a way a surrogate for him. I wanted someone who could restrain my second son a bit when he behaved in an unusual way, someone the second son would respect and listen to. In the case of my elder son, it was me (Masako, lines 178-181).

The interviews with Yumiko and Masako showed the difficulties that single mothers face in terms of raising their sons and the need for someone to replace the father figure.

5.2.3 Social issue

This section describes the impact of the Japanese public's view of divorce, which is appears to be unique to Japan, and the fear that children and single mothers may be discriminated against by society and live in fear of negative public opinion.

5.2.3.1 Stigma / the eye of the public

During interviews with single mothers, it became clear that the uniquely Japanese mindset is putting single mothers in an even more difficult situation. It is the idea of 'the eye of the public'.

Akiko, who lives in a provincial city, described her divorce and returning to her parents' home as following:

> The problem is that when I came back here to the countryside, I got my family's approval and said it was okay, but I was able to come back because I happened

> to be the eldest daughter, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to come back (Akiko, lines 33-36).

Noriko and Keiko, who lived and raised their children in their parents' home, describe their uncomfortable situation at the children's school.

Reflecting on her own son's school years, Noriko described the problems of raising a child on her own as below:

> When he was at nursery school. One of the girls asked me who my son’s dad was. It was the kind of question that you wouldn't expect a child to ask. It was asked so abruptly. I thought they had probably talked about that sort of thing at home, in her household. So, I don't know what kind of things they said, but I thought that they must have been rumour (Noriko, lines 102-107)

Noriko then continued as follows:

> My son sometimes plays pranks. Then, yes, I get a phone call from the father on the other side from another child’s family. He calls me angry. He yells at me that he will never let his son go to class with my son again (Noriko, lines 107-109).

Keiko also reflected on her parenting as a single mother and told the interviewer about the eyes of those around her.

> I was concerned about it. I was also stubborn in some ways, and I didn't want to be alone and be pointed at, but in the end, when there was a problem at school, I couldn't take time off work to go to school. I regret that a little bit, and I think I should have faced my children, and if anything happened to them, they would say that I was a single mother or something like that (Keiko, lines 141-145).

Yoko described her experience of discrimination against single mothers during a school PTA board member decision at her son's school as follows. PTA board members in Japan play an important role in supporting schools and promoting community involvement. The expectation for mothers in particular to actively participate in PTAs stems from traditional gender roles and social norms that prioritise mothers' involvement in their children's education. Although these expectations are gradually changing, cultural and practical barriers still affect the level of participation of single fathers.

> There was a kind of narrowness in my shoulders about not being able to be a school PTA board member officer or something like that (Yoko, lines 77-78).

When asked about her experience of people looking at her that way because she was a single mother, she replied:

When deciding on board members, and also when I'm leaving my child at a friend’s home, or when my son is visiting a friend's house and it's too late to pick up my son.

When asked about her experience of people looking at her that way because she was a single mother, she stated:

> People don't say it out loud, but they look at me and see that Yoko is a single mother. There was a single father in the same class, and he was exempted from being a board member because it's hard to raise a child with only the father. I sometimes thought that single mothers are in the same situation (Yoko, lines 88-91).

With regard to the fact that there is understanding for single fathers and not for single mothers, the following was stated.

> Other mothers seem to believe that single mothers are in the same position as them; they work and look after their children. They work and take care of the children. So, I think they think that single mothers are not the only ones who are special (Yoko, lines 98-101).

From the above interviews, it can be seen that there are 'eyes around' single mothers, which make their position even more difficult. It also seems to be a regional thing. In particular, there seems to be a tendency to be more concerned about the eyes of others on returning to the family home in rural areas than in urban areas.

5.2.4 Safeguarding issues whilst Mothers work

Single mothers who do not live with their parents, like Yoko and Sachiko, disclose a situation where they had to work many jobs to make a living. There are also safety concerns about situations where small children have to be left alone at home.

Yoko describes the situation at the time as below:

> I didn’t have the option of working full time - if I work 9 to 5, I earned less, so I worked two hourly-rate jobs during the day, part time in the morning and part time at night (Yoko, lines 47- 49).

Yoko worked from 4:00 to 6:00 in the morning and her grandmother came to stay over while the children slept, but she described how she came to live with her in the middle of the day as follows:

There was a period when she came to stay for a while, she lived with us from the middle of the school year. I think I had her stay with me from about the fourth grade of primary school of my son, because I thought I couldn't handle it anymore.

She said that she came home at six in the morning, sent her son off to school, worked again, and worked in the bar from eight to twelve at night. She said she got two or three hours of sleep every day. Sachiko also described the situation at the time as following:

> The first problem was work, because I wanted my sons to go to university, so I was wondering how I would be able to find work, how I would be able to keep working, how much I would earn, how much childcare allowance I would get, how much allowance for single parents - how much I would get! (Sachiko, lines 36-39)

Sachiko continued.

> At that time. I was the manager of a shop that sold wine and jam, and I worked there during the day until about 5pm, and then I came home and picked up my sons, and I had to do some side business (piece work) at home, and my sons helped me with the job. I worked as a waitress at a family restaurant from about 10:00 pm to 2:00 am. And that was going on for several years (Sachiko, lines 70-74).

Both Yoko and Sachiko say that they worked multiple jobs to earn a living and lived on two to three hours of sleep for years.

5.2.5 Assistance needed for single mothers

When asked in the interviews what support they needed to raise their children as single mothers, all single mothers interviewed were very enthusiastic in expressing their views. Akiko, who lives in a local city and now holds the position of female city councillor after a life of single motherhood, stated that:

> I think it is necessary to provide financial support, but I also think it is best to create an environment in which women can

> continue to work, with an established wage structure and the understanding of those around them, even though some may want to work part time (Akiko, lines 173-176).

Akiko said that if that is still not enough, support is needed and that it is difficult to bring up children alone, using various means, such as after-school centres. She then continued as follows:

> I think the problem is that there is no one who can support children coming home from school or nursery school, and later on, for women, their original jobs are not established (Akiko, lines 177-179).

Yoko works as a board member of a non-profit organisation that supports single mothers, drawing on her experience as a single mother. When asked what kind of support is needed to solve the problems of single mother households, she replied:

> Does this mean creating a society where women can get a secure work environment (Yoko, lines 241-242)?

She stated that the big problem is what to do if single mothers have to leave early because they have children, or if their children are on holiday. She also said the following.

> I think it's just a question of time and money (Yoko, line 245-246).

Yoko said that it is impossible to give money to women to work, earn a living and be the breadwinner of the family, which is necessary for women to survive in society. She then continued as below:

> The biggest problem is what to do with the children while they are working. They need a working environment, the means to earn as much money as men, and so on. Well, I

> don't think it's only support that makes them work in that way. It's also about the person's will (Yoko, lines 252-255).

Sachiko, who has two sons, works three jobs and raises her children, responded that the support she needs is as the following:

> Yes, support, well, from the state, yes. There is support in the form of money, but I am working in a situation where I don't know what the future holds for my children, about my job, I am working in a situation where I don't know what I can do. It seems to me that this person would be suitable for this kind of work. Qualification support. Is it a qualification agent that helps people to get qualifications, it would be very helpful if there was such a thing (Sachiko, lines 266-271).

She then continued to say that it is difficult for single mothers when they have to go to work and look after their children, but having a qualification would give them an advantage and a bright future. She then complained that nowadays it is good because there is an employment network, but in the past, there was no such thing, so many times she had to waste time going to the government office to register for a job and then being told when to come back again for registration. Masako, who has experienced being a single mother and not being able to leave her child at a nursery school immediately when looking for work, feels that the nursery school system should be created to make it easier for single mothers to leave their children at nurseries, but she also describes another challenge as follows:

> There is health care; it would have been nice if health care was free until the age of 18. My family was a healthy one, but my son was hospitalised for asthma. There were a lot of difficult times at home. My family is healthy, but we still had to go to the hospital (Masako, lines 252-255).

She added that Kawasaki may have been free up to primary school age, but there were cities where the system was free up to the age of 15, and she was very worried because different municipalities had different systems, and many mothers wanted it to be free up to the age of 18.

Keiko, who raised three children as a single mother in a rural area while caring for her parents, described the support she needed.

> Financial support and a state where I could more easily think about it now, but more easily leave my child with the local authority or the child. Also, there are more services that help with housework and so on. Also, there are things like children's cafeterias (子供食堂) now, but there were no children's cafeterias back then (Keiko, lines 127-130).

And she said that if such things were more available back then, she would not have had to cook when she got home late. She continued as below:

> At that time, I was working very hard, and I was worried about people's eyes on me, so I couldn't rely on the local government or such things at all… I don't know, it's not a bright image. I wish there had been a place where I could have been allowed to go, where I wouldn't be ashamed to go, and I wish the local government had been able to support me with household chores at a lower price (Keiko, lines 132-136).

Noriko, who raised a son with learning disabilities on her own, spoke about the support she needed from her own experience.

> I used to use a childcare centre, but they don't offer the kind of slow, child-focused study time. So, I wanted something like a

> big brother or big sister who could sit with them and help them with their studies (Noriko, lines 225-227).

And she is well aware that primary school children have limited time, and if she tends to work more overtime, or if she gets a full-time job and has to work more overtime, she may not be able to pick up her son before then. She couldn't ask her mother to pick him up. So, she also said that she would like to extend her hours after that and provide a place where she could leave her child in peace and in the future, she would like to use her experience to help others in need. Yumiko, who raised three sons on her own, had this to say about the support she needed.

> It is important to have a contact point for advice. I wish I had consulted with them when my child was going through a difficult time. I couldn't talk to school teachers because they seemed to complain that I was a single mother. There was nothing I could do. I thought that being a single mother meant that I was being weak, so I couldn't say anything in front of everyone (Yumiko, lines 343-347).

Based on her own children's experiences, Michiko, who works and supports parents and children who are not attending school, describes the support she needs as the following:

> It can be difficult, but I think there are a lot of people who didn't become single mothers because they wanted to. Especially nowadays, there seems to be a lot of domestic violence and so on. I would like to see an environment where it is easier for single mothers to live (Michiko, lines 303-306).

Through interviews with single mothers, a number of issues were highlighted. Firstly, problems with the government system. In particular, the lack of sanctions if child support arrangements are made at the time of divorce and not adhered to. Secondly,

the lack of support when looking for work after divorce. Thirdly, the lack of social understanding. Fourthly, being busy and not having time to communicate with their children, and the possible impact of this on their children's academic performance. It was also found that single mothers find it difficult to live because of the way other people look at them, which is also due to the peculiarities of Japanese society, where women are supposed to stay at home and raise their children, where divorced women are seen as selfish, and where divorce is seen as a taboo.

The next chapter analyses the adult children's interviews.

CHAPTER 6: INTERVIEWS WITH THE ADULT CHILDREN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with adult children.

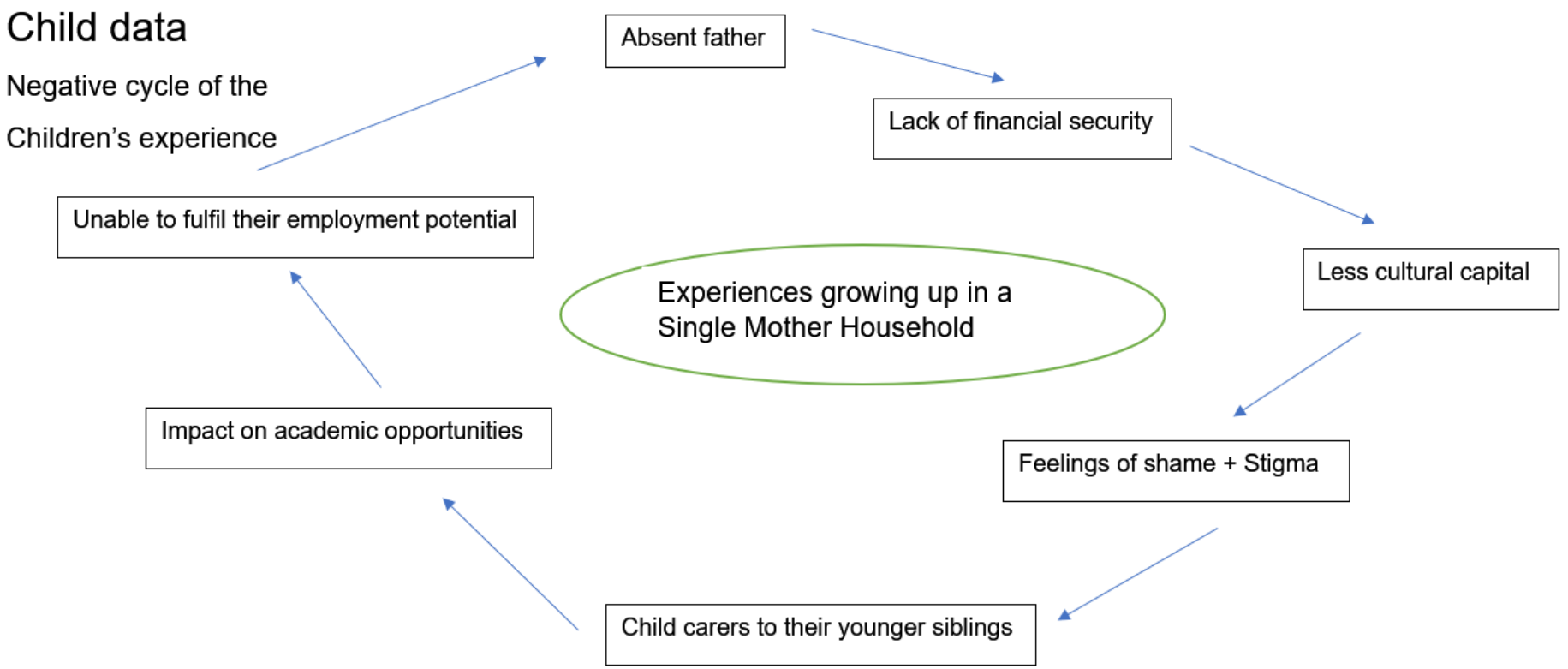
Table 6: Adult Children

Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Education	Resident area
Ayaka	F	30	Housewife (Parttime worker)	University	Yamagata
Toru	M	18	Cheff	Vocational school	Ehime
Ken	M	25	Company owner	University	Tokyo
Makoto	M	20	Dairy farm employee	University	Saitama
Jun	M	22	Unemployed		Gunma
Ichiro	M	23	IT company employee	University	Kanagawa
Jiro	M	19	University student	University	Kanagawa
Mika	F	19	Illustrator	Vocational school	Aichi
Mihoko	F	20	Medical university student	University	Aichi
Yuichi	M	29	English teacher	University	Tokyo

Single mother families. 10 adult children took part, and their demographic details are illustrated in Table 6 above.

From the interviews with children, a negative cycle surrounding children emerged as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: negative cycle of themes arising from the adult children's data



6.2 RESULTS

This chapter describes the childhood experience of the adult children interviewed who had grown up in a single-mother household. It demonstrates from the children's perspectives the problems experienced by single-mother households, highlights the assistance needed to solve problems with academic performance and because of a lack of cultural capital / social capital that children from two parent families take for granted. This was analysed from interviews with adult children.

6.2.1 Childhood experience growing up in a single-mother household

As illustrated in Figure 2, this section was analysed in terms of 'divorce stigma', 'father absence/child responsibilities' and 'loneliness'. In some cases, after the parents' divorce, child parents viewed divorce as a sin, lied to others, changed their personality and had low self-esteem. In many cases, the relationship between siblings changed after the father's absence, and in some cases, the child felt lonely because the mother was busy and had less time to communicate with them.

6.2.1.1 Stigma resulting from divorce

The following analysis demonstrates that the children interviewed have become targets of social discrimination and prejudice, and the associated negative images, due to a variety of factors stemming from the fact that their parents have divorced.

Sachiko's son, Yuichi, the younger of her two male offspring, responded as follows:

> When I was a child, about 20 years ago, my parents divorced, and I was in the fourth grade at the time…it was still taboo to be a single mother, so I had to worry about what would happen if the other children around me found out, or what my parents would do to me, so I felt like I couldn't live freely, or

> that I had to worry about what other people would think (Yuichi, lines 4 - 8).

He also stated that the change in environment had changed his personality. He moved away from his original home due to his parents' divorce, so his mother had to drive him to school before work, but he described the situation that he could not tell his friends about it as follows:

> I couldn't tell people that my mother was divorced because I didn't want them to find out so I kept lying about it, saying I was injured or something like that, and in the end, I couldn't say the truth. For two whole years, I didn't tell a single person, I just lied and lied and lied (Yuichi, lines 18 - 22).

He described how his character changed in order to honour his parents as below:

Even as a child, he felt like he couldn't admit to a taboo and (felt the need to) protect his parents' reputation from looking bad. That's why his character changed a lot, probably because of that.

> I used to be the loudest or rowdiest kid in his class, but after the divorce I became very withdrawn (Yuichi, lines 24 - 25).

Yuichi spoke about his past, when he had to keep a low profile and his personality changed because of the way he perceived that people looked at him. Ichiro, the eldest of two male siblings, describes his mother's divorce issues as following:

> For me, not being able to go out to play is the most difficult thing about being a child of a single parent family (Ichiro, lines 21-22).

He spoke about the financial handicaps he felt growing up in a single-mother family as below:

> When I think about it now, it's quite a trivial thing, but it was the entertainment part. I was allowed to play games and take lessons, but I didn't have the latest equipment that other children had, so I didn't have any problems playing or living. But in the area of games to keep up with the other kids around me, and tools to look good to the other kids, the tension was like 'there's no way I can afford anything else (Ichiro, lines 25-30).

He then stated that he felt he had no choice but to feel economically disadvantaged.

Asked about his friendships at the time, he replied:

> I didn't like that I couldn't keep up with the conversation, so I lied a lot in primary school, and I was always trying to look good. Basically, I was disliked (Ichiro, lines 32-33).

Ichiro spoke about how, when he was in primary school, his parents' divorce led him to cut ties with the people around him.

As to whether his mother knew about this, he replied:

> I think she knew that I didn't get on very well with my friends, but I didn't have any friends myself, so I didn't like it at the time, but I didn't feel the pain that is so common now (Ichiro, lines 44-46).

He then continued as below:

> I didn't like it, but I didn't feel like I didn't want to go to school in any way because I didn't have any friends or anything like that. I had the mindset that if I didn't have any

> friends, I'm fine, I'll live on my own separately, so I don't think my mother worried about me (Ichiro, lines 44-46).

Mihoko, who had a number of problems, described why she was placed with her grandparents apart from her mother as follows:

> The reason why my mother didn't live with my grandparents is that my grandparents abused my mother from a very young age, and to be honest, I was abused when I was left with them, and I didn't like it very much. But my mother was busy, so I felt like I had no choice (Mihoko, lines 33-36).

Mihoko described how her grandparents were not very close to each other, and that she was in an environment where if she sided with one of them, she would be beaten by one of them.

It is interesting to note that the children interviewed stated that they began to lie, and their friendships changed because they felt guilty about their parents' divorce. This is indicative of Japanese society, where divorce is regarded as different from the norm and can be the subject of discrimination and prejudice. It was also found that poverty due to divorce had an impact on the children's personality. As can also be seen from the Mihoko interview, the current situation of a negative cycle within the family can also be learned.

6.2.1.2 Lack of father increase children's feeling of responsibility

When interviewed about their childhood growing up in a single mother household, several answers were given in which they described changes in family relationships after the father's absence due to divorce. Masako's two sons were asked what their

childhood was like, growing up in a single-mother household, Ichiro, the eldest son, who was in first grade at the time of his parents' divorce, described his feelings.

> I always felt that because I only had one parent, I didn't have as much freedom as other families. Like financial freedom, but also time freedom. For example, what time I had to be back home, or that I had to be back home at 4pm to take care of my younger brother when other children had a curfew of 6pm. In that kind of thing. Well, I often felt a difference in freedom (Ichiro, lines 2-6).

Younger brother Jiro, who is five years younger, answered the same question as below:

> My days were pretty fulfilling, I wanted to do sports and things like that, and my mother was quite proactive and said 'yes', and I was able to enjoy myself every day (Jiro, lines 2-3)

Jiro was asked about the presence and influence of his brother and replied:

> Ah, yes. I was really grateful to have an older brother (Jiro, line 18).

He then continued as follows:

> I didn't have a father, I didn't have any other men, so he was a role model, or rather a role model for me because he was five years older than me, so I was grateful that he was there (Jiro, lines 20-22).

The youngest of three male siblings, Makoto says that his childhood was no different and he was able to lead a bright and carefree life, but when asked how his siblings fared when their mother divorced, he replied:

> Right after the divorce, I felt that my oldest brother was taking care of me (Makoto, line 55).

Asked about the changes in his brother's situation as a result of the divorce, Yuichi responded:

> I don't know if it's his character or what... My brother became my father figure and told me to study more and help my mother (Yuichi, lines 39-40).

When asked if his brother had to take his father's place in such a situation, even though they were only two years apart, and that is how his brother changed, Yuichi replied that this was true. And he said that when his brother gave him a lot of instructions, like his father, he tried to follow his brother because what his brother was saying was not wrong.

Jun, Keiko's son, who grew up as the middle child of three brothers and sisters, responded as follows:

> First of all, my siblings didn't get on very well (Jun, line 4).

Jun stated that other than that, life was normal and uneventful. He then said the following about living with his grandparents.

> My grandfather and grandparents were always there, someone was always there while my mother was away, so I wasn't very lonely (Jun, lines 8-9).

Noriko's only son Toru, who was financially well off due to living with his grandparents, responded as below:

> Well, yes. I didn't feel that I was that different from my friends around me, I didn't receive any particular comments about not having a father, I was treated normally (Toru, lines 3-5).

Asked about visits with his father, he said that he saw his father often and that in many ways he did not feel different from the rest of the family and did not see any problems. Yoko's only son, Ken, responded as follows:

> To be honest, I myself concluded that I was deceived by my mother, as she often did not tell me the truth to protect me. The period when I didn't see my father were not that long, and there were times when I did see him. We often shared special times together, like when he took me on trips abroad (Ken, lines 5-8).

He went on to say that he did not remember much of growing up in a mother-son household where he had to worry about what people thought of him or the financial difficulties.

As the above interviews show, the eldest male siblings tend to have a sense of fatherly responsibility towards their younger siblings when their father is absent due to divorce. As a result, the second son tends to grow up mentally less affected by the divorce. It can also be seen that male children who visit their father after divorce are less affected mentally by the divorce.

It is not uncommon for the eldest son to take on a father-like role in single-mother households, especially those in which the mother is the head of the household. This is particularly the case when the father is absent, so that the mother can give the eldest son the responsibility for household chores and provide emotional support. These expectations can be burdensome and may force children to grow up fast and take on adult responsibilities at a young age (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022).

6.2.1.3 Loneliness

The following section shows that children without siblings tend to feel more isolated due to divorce.

Mika, Michiko's only daughter, who lives in an urban area, responded as follows:

> When I have a single mother, I have, how should I say it, money problems, and also, when I was little, my parents didn't get to participate in class visits, they didn't get to participate in events, I was lonely, unlike other children (Mika, lines 2-4).

When asked if it was hard for her to live with her mother at the age of four and a half and see her mother working alone to raise her, she replied that her mother seemed to have a hard time, and when asked if there was a feeling in her childhood that her mother could not come to events while all her other friends' parents came, she said yes. Mika described the loneliness of growing up in a single-parent household as described above.

Mihoko, an only child with a sick mother, said:

> I don't remember because I was three years old, but I was always at my grandparents' house from a very young age. My mother had to work, so I lived with my grandmother all the time, and once my mother got sick and couldn't work, then she started to live with me, and that was from about the first or second year of junior high school (Mihoko, lines 13-17).

She stayed with her grandparents all the time, and in terms of visits with her mother, she replied:

> Oh, yes, I hardly saw her. For example, there were weekends, and on weekends I went to the house where she lived, but she was tired all the time and slept most of

> the time, so I just had dinner with her at night. I didn't do almost anything (Mihoko, lines 20-22).

These interviews revealed that feelings varied according to age and family structure at the time of divorce.

6.2.2 Problems of growing up in a single-mother household

When asked about the problems of growing up in a single-mother household, a variety of answers were given. This section analyses the analysis the data in terms of the following sub themes, people's eye, economic disadvantage and academic performance.

6.2.2.1 The eye of public

When asked about the problems single mothers' families face, three said 'the eyes of those around them'.

Ayaka, who lives in Yamagata prefecture, said the following.

> I wasn't inconvenienced in any way, but I have a single parent, and I felt like I was different from everyone around me, you know, like I was different from everyone else. I felt like I was different from everyone around me, even though I was a child. I didn't feel bad about it (Ayaka, lines 27-30).

Ayaka also added:

> At that time, there was only one other child in my class who came from a single-parent family, so people around me were very careful around me. I don't know, it wasn't so much that I felt narrowed down, but I felt a kind of dread, and even though it wasn't anything unusual for me, I had

> the feeling as a child that people around me were taking care of me (Ayaka, lines 6-10).

And even at the time when she didn't want to talk about her parents' divorce as a child because people around her cared, Ayaka described her feelings as follows:

> There was no bullying or anything like that. But I felt like I didn't want to bring it up, or that my parents or other adults didn't want to bring up the subject of being in a single parent family anyway. I felt like they could have just asked me about anything (Ayaka, lines 13-16).

Ayaka told that she was concerned that people around her were particularly cautious of the topic of divorce, although she, herself, was not really concerned about it.

Jun, who lives in Gunma Prefecture, was asked if he had any problems growing up in a single mother household and spoke:

> I would like to answer that I don't have a father because I'm from a single mother household, but it seems a bit awkward for the person who asked (Jun, lines 45-46).

Asked if he thinks people are more attentive than you think, he replied that he thinks so. Mika, who lives in Aichi Prefecture, said the following:

> I think the problem is that my mother didn't buy me the things I want. When I heard that she didn't have any money, I was a bit concerned, so I didn't really say what I wanted (Mika, lines 20-22).

When asked if her friends ever said anything to her or made her feel uncomfortable, other than feeling sad that her mother could not attend school events, she responded as below:

> Yes, there were many children who came to sports day

> with both parents. So, I was sometimes asked why my father didn't come (Mika, lines 26-28).

To which she replied that when she was in primary school, she had not been told that they were divorced, so at the time she replied that he was away on business.

As can be seen from the above interview results, it is interesting to note that children, especially those living in rural areas, mentioned the eyes of other people in their surroundings as a problem. This may be related to the Japanese tendency not to accept different things, which is particularly noticeable in rural areas where there is little influx of new people.

6.2.2.2 Economic disadvantage

Interviews with children revealed a past in which they were forced to live a difficult life due to economic disadvantage. Yuichi, like Mika, describes economic problems.

> Simply that financial aspect. My father didn't give us any financial support. My mother refused, and she was very determined to do it herself. My mother only worked part-time. She worked from 9.00 to 5.00 or 6.00 to lunchtime. Then she would come home and cook dinner and go back to work at 10pm for the night shift until 2am (Yuichi, lines 51-55).

He then continued to say that his mother was then earning 800 yen (£4) an hour and 150,000 yen (£769) a month, from which she paid rent, so she had no money and neither did he. Reflecting on the situation at the time, when his mother worked three jobs to earn a living and still had financial difficulties, Yuichi said:

> We had to save money. So, of course we had to turn off the electricity, but we also had to do things like not flush the toilet, or not use the air-conditioning or

> heating even in winter, or we experienced quite a cold winter, or something like that (Yuichi, lines 62-64).

Yuichi stated that this state of affairs lasted for about four or five years, from the age of 10 to about 15. Mihoko described the reasons why her mother did not intervene in it as follows:

> Because my mother didn't get on with her parents, so basically, my mother didn't get involved, my mother didn't come over, and she didn't want to see me at home in the first place (Mihoko, lines 69-71).

When asked about her financial situation at the time, she replied:

> My mother gave my grandparents an allowance for quite a long time so that they wouldn't have any difficulties, but I never received any pocket money, and I was fed a lot of strange food, and they didn't buy me any clothes either. My mother told me that the money she had given to my grandparents for me had been spent by them on themselves and not on me (Mihoko, lines 77-81).

Growing up in such an environment, she went through a lot, but when asked if her school and school teachers knew about it, she said she did not think they did, and when asked if she had ever told her friends about it, she replied:

> To be honest, this is the first time I have told anyone other than my mother. I have never told anyone (Mihoko, lines 89-90).

Mihoko spoke candidly about the negative cycle of abuse in her childhood and her past growing up without being able to tell anyone about it.

Ken, who now has work experience and an understanding of the Japanese social system, had this to say about the issues.

> If there were problems…in Japan it was originally characterised by men working and women taking care of the home. Because the mother takes on these two roles, the time they spend together is reduced. I think that in the end, lack of communication with parents is the root cause of the various incidents that have been publicised about single mothers/parent (Ken, lines 51-55)

He also said that he thinks the main reason is that mothers and children spend less time together. When asked if he sometimes felt lonely because of his mother's busy schedule, he said yes.

Yuichi's interviews show that he was forced to live a difficult life due to poverty and the safety concerns of staying at home alone with his brother. The interview with Mihoko also revealed that her grandparents abused her financially, emotionally and physically, indicating that poverty tends to threaten the safety of children. Ken's interviews indicated that poverty among single mothers can affect children's mental health as they are unable to communicate effectively with their parents, as well as safety issues such as staying at home alone.

6.2.2.3 Academic performance

In terms of the impact on academic performance, it is interesting to note that seven out of ten interviewees said it had no impact, while the three who said it did have an impact were highly educated.

Ayaka lived with her grandparents and was able to go to cram school without financial consequences, Ayaka said:

> Academic performance… I wasn't bullied or anything like that, so I didn't have trouble concentrating on my studies (Ayaka, lines 49, 50-51).

Ken described his primary school days when he did not do his homework as follows:

> Oh, I was scolded a lot by the teacher about why you didn't do your homework. But as for me, I was aware that homework was something that parents were there to help their child with, so I looked at other people and thought that you should at least do your own homework, so I neglected my own homework (Ken, lines 23-27).

When Ken was asked if the reason, he did not study was not because he was from a single mother's family, but rather that he stopped doing it because of his personality, he replied:

> Yes, I don't really understand the idea that you couldn't do your homework because you were from a single-mother family (Ken, lines 34-35).

The impact on academic performance is described as follows:

> To sum up, it didn't affect me too much, because I was allowed to go to cram school when I was in high school. I was able to study normally in primary and junior high school, so it didn't affect me (Ken, lines 66-68).

Yuichi, who felt that he was affected, said:

> The environment where I could study, was bad, because I lived in a very small flat. I had my own desk, but it was really cold in the winter, so I had to stay under the duvet all the time, and I couldn't go out to play because I had to move away from all my friends. My house was far away, and my mother used to drive me to school, I couldn't play with my school friends on weekends either (Yuichi, lines 72-76).

He said that because it was such a bad environment, he studied hard, and this may have affected his academic performance. When asked about cram school, he said:

> I did go to cram school. I only went in the third year of junior high school. I think I was just barely able to afford it. My mother managed somehow. Well, she had to send me to cram school. I think she managed. I think my grandparents on my mother's side also helped me a little (Yuichi, lines 80,85-87).

When asked if he often forgot to do his homework in primary school because he was from a single mother family, he replied:

> There was nothing like that. I didn't want to bother my mother, so I had to do my studies by myself. I never thought of not doing that (Yuichi, lines 90-91).

He also spoke about forgetting things as follows:

> I don't think I forgot anything. On the contrary, I became more independent, which is a good thing (Yuichi, lines 93-94).

He also said that he had somehow helped his mother, which made him more conscious of being independent with his brother, and that he was able to check and bring something to school by himself when he was asked to bring something to school.

Ichiro, who responded that it had affected him, said:

> Oh, I didn't have any friends there and I couldn't go out to play, so the only thing I could do was study, and I think that made my mother happy, which made me a bit happy. If I got a good score, my mother was happy. I studied

> with that one thought in mind, so I had no trouble at all academically (Ichiro, lines 60-63).

He continued to say that he never felt financially inconvenienced in his studies because his mother bought him everything he wanted in relation to his studies. Mihoko, who went to a public medical university, replied:

> When I was in primary school, my grades were really bad, and I was in the second to last place in the seating order according to my grades. Then, in junior high school, I started going to cram school, and after that I got good grades in junior high school, entered a good high school and continued to get good grades in high school (Mihoko, lines 104-107).

When asked about the cost of the cram school, she responded:

> My mother paid for it. I started living with my mother. She started to let me go to cram school (Mihoko, lines 109-110).

When asked if she was able to live with her mother when she was in secondary school because her mother could afford it, she replied:

> My mother bought a lot of books and other things for my education fund, and she was of the opinion that education should be paid for with as little money as possible. She gave the money that I needed to my grandparents, but it wasn't spent on me (Mihoko, lines 113-116).

Mihoko's mother gave money to her grandparents to pay for Mihoko's education, which was not used properly, Mihoko said that once she reached junior high school and started living with her mother, the money was used the way it should have been, and she could have gone to cram school.

The following is what she said about why she did not study very well in primary school but made up for it with good grades in junior high school.

> The teacher at the cram school I went to was a very good person, and even now I go to see him. I only went there occasionally (Mihoko, lines133-134).

In the above, she described the process of improving her performance.

Mika went on to say that being from a single mother family did not affect her academic performance from primary school to secondary school, as follows:

> But in junior high school, I didn't study because I simply didn't want to go, so I didn't study, but in primary school especially, yes, I studied. I think my mum worked very hard and supported me even though she had to work (Mika, lines 37-39).

She then stated that she did not feel particularly inconvenienced because her mother supported her well in terms of homework and personal belongings.

However, she spoke about how she stopped attending school in secondary school as below:

> During the maths teacher's class, I was having really bad menstrual pains. I had that chewable type of medicine that I could take without water or tea, and when I took it during class because it hurt a little bit too much, a teacher said to me, 'Are you eating candy? I had to stay in the toilet for the whole class because my stomach pain was so bad that I vomited, and the teacher asked me what I was doing and why I was skipping class. So, I was a bit scared to go there after that (Mika, lines 47-53).

It was not because she was the child of a single mother or anything like that, but through that experience, she said, it became hard for her to go to school.

When asked if she could not discuss the matter with other teachers at school, she responded as follows:

> I told my homeroom teacher and the school nurse, and when I went from primary school to junior high school, my mother wrote a letter to the teacher, which she wanted to tell them about. I don't know if they didn't look at it properly, but that's how they got angry with me (Mika, lines 56-59).

Mika then replied that her mother had written a letter to the school and was given such guidance that she was afraid to go without saying anything further.

When asked how she responded to the school's contact when she did not go to school, she stated as the following:

> Well, I didn't answer the phone, but rather, I asked my mother and grandmother to handle all the phone calls and calls to my house, so I just said that I didn't want to go anymore (Mika, lines 65-67).

She said that after that one experience she couldn't go to school anymore and only did her best to go for tests, but even there a male teacher in his mid-40s was angry with her. When asked if she had any resistance to being told what to do by men as an adolescent in a single-mother household without a father, she replied:

> I didn't get involved with any male teachers or adult men from primary school to junior high school, so maybe it was more than that. Also, he had an intimidating attitude, so I was probably scared of him (Mika, lines 97-99).

When asked whether they felt very comfortable talking to men in their forties outside school, Mika responded as below:

> Not anymore, but at the time I was afraid of being angry with men. I had never been angry with my father, so I only knew how to get angry with women, so that probably surprised me (Mika, lines 102-104).

Mika became aware that her father's absence from school was also a factor in her environment. Jun, who said that his studies had not affected him, spoke about his past, in which he had no interest in academics. When asked whether growing up in a family with a single mother had affected his academic performance, Jun responded:

> I couldn't do it from the start, so I don't think it matters if I was a child of a single mother or not (Jun, lines 52-53).

The fact that he couldn't do it from the beginning means that in primary school, for example, when asked whether he did his homework properly when he was given it, he replied that he didn't do his homework because he wasn't interested in school work. As to why he had lost interest in studying, Jun replied that he had started playing football when he was in fourth grade and was hooked on it and enjoyed doing that more than studying. Toru described a situation where he had a learning disability and his mother had given up trying to get him to do his homework.

> I felt that if my father had been around, he would have told me what to do (Toru, line 22).

And he said he started to feel it when he was in the third or fourth grade of primary school. At the time, he did not like doing his homework, but replied that he could have done it a bit more on his own if his father had been there, and when asked

whether this was because he would be told more strictly if his father was there, he replied:

> Well, I guess that's normal, or maybe that's just the way it is, I don't know (Toru, line 30).

He then answered that he thought so when asked if he was sometimes a bit spoilt if it was just his mother. As mentioned above, Toru spoke about the possible influence of his father's presence on his studies. The results of the interviews with the children show that being a single parent does not necessarily have a negative impact academically, but it is interesting to note that the absence of a father affected the female children's academic performance as they were unable to relate well to their male teachers and stopped attending school, while the boys said they were unable to do their best because of the absence of their father.

6.2.3 Assistance needed to solve the problem

When asked about the support they thought they needed growing up in a single mother household, three said they couldn't think of any; seven said their thoughts were as follows:

Jun and Ken spoke about the importance of communication.

Jun stated that:

> I didn't spend much time with my parents. I didn't spend much time with my father, or with my mother when I was a child. I would have had more time (Jun, lines 143-145).

When asked if he thought it might have been different if he had, he said he thought so. Jun said that there is no rule about meeting his father, but that he sees him three

times a year when he has the opportunity. When asked about the conversations he has with his father when he sees him, he said:

> It is a natural, casual conversation, without any normal deep stuff like how he is doing or anything (Jun, lines 154-155).

He said that he felt distant from his father, perhaps because of this, as they did not spend much time together. Ken mentioned his mother, who is currently a board member of a support group that works with single mothers, and spoke about the support he needs, saying:

> From my point of view, I think that what my mother is doing now is exactly what I need, but if there is something extra, I think that I need something else to be able to live without feeling too much stress (Ken, lines 78-79).

Ken described two reasons why he grew up without feeling stressed as follows:

> One is that I didn't mind the label of my mother being a single mother. The reason why I didn't mind is because my mother didn't mind, and on the contrary, there are families who live with that label as a very strong one (Ken, lines 81-84).

And he, himself, basically doesn't care, and he didn’t care when he looked around him at school, but he cared because he felt like his mother did care. He said from his own experience that it is important for parents to stop caring first.

He also continued as below:

> Another thing is that, in my case, there were a lot of adults around me from childhood who cared about me, played with me and got angry with me, other than my

> mother. I also had a lot of adult men in the community and a man at a bike shop who became good friends with me, so I didn't mind them. I think those two things are necessary (Ken, lines 86-90).

When asked about the link between having contact with delinquent friends in secondary school and growing up in a single-mother home, the following answer was given.

> I think it's generally a case of not being able to communicate with your parents, clashing with them, and then it gets really bad because you don't want to stay at home (Ken, lines 97-99).

He continued that in his case, there was no direct relationship between that and growing up in a single mother household, as he had a good relationship with his mother at the time and it simply became worse as an extension of the stimulation and enjoyment he had received. In terms of how poverty in single-mother households affects children's studies and education, Ichiro stated that he had never had any difficulties with his studies in his life, but that he felt that the main problem that inconveniences single-mother families is that he was unable to pay for things like buying games for financial reasons. When asked what kind of support he thought would be effective in solving this problem, he responded:

> Yes, well, it's entertainment and I think some children had parents who couldn't afford to buy them. So, at the time I didn't really think of support in particular (Ichiro, lines 83-84).

When asked if the reason he did not talk to his friends at the time was because he did not have a father at home to help him get along, he said that when his mother did not buy him games, he explained to her why he needed them, and that he had been

making presentations to his mother since primary school saying, "I want you to buy this game so I can talk about this with my friends", but was always denied, and went on to say the following on the need for a father.

> If my father had been here, he could have told me that he thinks what Ichiro is saying is right from his point of view too. My mother would always say no, no matter what I tried to explain to her, and I wanted her to listen to me, like "that's your opinion", so I wished my father had been there (Ichiro, lines 90-94).

He continued that it was probably not what his own father had imagined.

He also spoke about the scholarship from his own experience, saying:

> I think that interest-bearing scholarships should be eliminated. For example, if a person who works part-time and earns only 150,000 yen a month as a freelancer receives an interest-bearing scholarship, I think it would be very difficult for them. So, if there is no interest for such a single mother's family, interest-bearing scholarships are still not so good (Ichiro, lines145-151).

He gave the following example of a friend.

> There were friends of mine who took out interest-bearing scholarships because they were ignorant of the interest rate, and although it was probably explained to them, they didn't understand and took them out because they were told to by their parents or because they were told to by others. I think it is important (Ichiro, lines 151-155).

He further added that:

> There is one child around me who is mentally ill because of growing up in a single mother household. When I see

> such children, I hope they will improve (Ichiro, lines 157-158).

The following was also mentioned about working as a full-time employee in Japan and the low starting salary.

> Yes, even if you are a salaried worker, you have to have a university degree and do a proper job search. Even if you get a job, if you live on your own, you probably won't be able to afford to pay back the scholarship, and you won't be able to afford luxuries. I think a certain amount of luxury is necessary (Ichiro, lines161-164).

Ichiro's younger brother Jiro said that he still believes that children of single mothers and single fathers are more likely to be discriminated against, and in reality, there were girls from single father families in his primary school who felt discriminated against, as follows:

> I still remember that there was a girl who was teased. She was the kind of child who would make it public, and that's when she started, and she was teased, and it wasn't bullying, but I felt like I was being teased, so I think that's why I think there is discrimination (Jiro, lines 129-132).

The following is what Jiro had to say about why he did not dare to mention that he was from a single-mother family.

> What is your father like, what is your father's name? When I talked about that kind of thing. It would ruin the atmosphere if I told them that I didn't have a father (Jiro, lines 135-137).

When asked why he avoided such conversations, he said that he thought it would break the atmosphere and that he might be discriminated against for saying he was from a single-parent family.

Yuichi, who, like Jiro, grew up as the second son of two male brothers, responded to a question about whether he received support from anywhere or what kind of support he would have liked to receive when he was in such a situation as below:

> I did not receive any support. For example, I couldn't go to school without a car, so I had to go somewhere when I didn't have club activities because my mother had to finish work at 6pm. I think there was a bit of support from my mother's friends, like going to a friend's house and having them look after me (Yuichi, lines 200-203).

He then said that there was no support from the school or the local authority. He responded in the following way about the support he wanted.

> I don't mean that the school teachers gave me any advice, but they did. If there was an opportunity to talk about it, they could have said, "You don't have to hide it." I wish now that I had that kind of support (Yuichi, lines 207-209).

Ayaka, who lives in a rural area and is already married and raising children, was asked if she would have preferred not to have that if her surroundings were an issue, to which she replied:

> It would have been better if there wasn't, and before my child was born, I was working part time in part time manufacturing, and then when I said I was pregnant with the child. What is it? In the shape of the job, I was told that I didn't have to take time off or stop working, but I felt a silent pressure and it was hard for me to stay, so I quit.

And she's not working now, but she told me her heart that she couldn't stand the situation. She further stated that:

> When I say it's getting tougher, I mean that if I say I’m quitting for my own reasons, it's fine, as long as the

> company doesn't tell you to quit. As for the company, there is a feeling that you don't have to be told to quit by the company, which is often the case in the countryside.

She also had a bad experience with people asking her when she was planning to have another baby, and if she did, whether she was thinking of having a second baby, so it would be nice if the company was more understanding in that respect. The following comment was made about the lack of a good working environment for mothers with children.

> I don't know if it depends on the type of industry, but is it because of the company's shifts? They persistently asked me if I was leaving or not, and I was sometimes cut off from the company. There were also concerns that my work would not be finished by the time I had to pick up my children from nursery.

She then said that she and her colleagues talked about how difficult it was to balance work with the company. When asked if this meant that she would not be able to return to that workplace if she wanted to have children again, she replied:

> Yes, that's right. In the case of civil servants and other secure professions, there are places to return to even if you take maternity leave, but even if the company has decided that you can take as much time off as you want as a part-timer, I felt very strongly that the company probably doesn't want someone like that,

Mihoko, who is currently a medical student with a scholarship to pay all her tuition fees, said:

> It's something fundamental, but in the end. The cause of all this is the lack of money, isn't it? And if there was, I think the best support would be to give them money, but in the end, I

> think the best support would be to give them money, food, uniforms and many other things that they can only get with that money (Mihoko, lines 253-255).

After completing the interviews with the adult children, many felt that there was a discrepancy between their perceptions and those of their parents. It was also interesting to note that different adult children recognised they had needed different support. The necessary support mentioned from the above interviews is the presence of an adult other than the mother with whom they can communicate. In particular, there is a need for support from male adults who can act as fathers. Also, a review of the scholarship system by the government. In particular, the need for support such as lower interest rates on scholarships for single mother families. In addition, the reality that children are discriminated against because they are children of single mother families should be pointed out and eliminated. Improvement of the environment in which it is difficult to gain understanding in the workplace when trying to get married and continue working in rural areas was also mentioned. And most importantly, some participants spoke of the need for financial support.

6.2.4 Academic performance

The education and employment histories of the children interviewed show that three did not go to university (Toru, Jun and Mika). Two of them (Toru and Mika) went to vocational school and one (Jun) is a stay-at-home. Of the two who went to vocational school, Toru got a job after graduation, but it did not last long, and he is looking for another job. Ken had some interactions with fellow delinquents in secondary school, and in order to break away from that environment, he went to private school for high school, then university, and now has a job where he can make the most of his specialisation. Makoto went to a private high school, but his grades did not keep up

and he struggled to progress many times. He went to university in the dairy sector and, after graduation, is working as a live-in worker on a farm in a rural area. Ayaka stated that she graduated from a local university and studied design, but that there were no jobs in the rural areas where she could utilise her specialisation, so she had no choice but to work part-time in the manufacturing industry and got married. Growing up as the second son of two male brothers, Jiro and Yuichi both went to university on a designated sports recommendation. Jiro and Yuichi are each the second son, but both of their older brothers have both achieved good grades and have been able to smoothly enter the university of their choice on scholarships and secure stable jobs. Mihoko grew up in the poorest of circumstances, with her mother on welfare, and is now attending a local medical college to become a doctor. Interestingly, the more academically accomplished Miho and Ichiro shared a common desire to study hard, as follows. Mihoko stated that there were two very big reasons, and spoke,

> The biggest one is that my mother grew up in a similar environment, and I think she is a person with problems because she herself grew up in that kind of environment, but I was very conscious of trying to break the negative chain of events, so I think my mother gave me the opportunity to help. She is a person with problems because she herself was brought up in that kind of environment (Mihoko, lines 380-382).

She stated that ever since she was in primary school, her mother had always told her that the only way out of this was to study, which was the main reason I realised I wanted to be a doctor or lawyer. The second reason was as below:

> The second thing was that I was in a very miserable situation. Because of that situation, people said nasty

> things to me, and there were things the doctor said to me, and it was really painful, but I used it as a springboard, and if I became a doctor (Mihoko, lines 388-391).

And she said that she had worked hard all this time to make fun of those people, even though it might be an out-of-character way of thinking, if she met them in the future at a coming-of-age ceremony. Mihoko said that the difficult environment gave her the energy to look back at them in the future. Ichiro also reflected on his past, when he did not interact with those around him and concentrated on his studies, stating that having a scholarship was a disadvantage, and continued:

> I have to pay it back. That's how much debt I have to take on. Well, in that sense, I think it is a financial disadvantage. But I accept it, or rather I think it's my destiny, and now I'm here (Ichiro, lines 119-121).

He then said that he was able to repay that debt because he was working in a stable job. When asked if he thought that growing up in a family with financial difficulties had been a positive experience for him, he responded as follows:

> Yes, I think so. Maybe because I was the eldest son. I think I had the feeling from the first year of primary school that I had to take care of myself. No matter who hated me or who said bad things about me. My heart may have become negative, but it never broke. I said to myself that one day I would look back on them (Ichiro, lines 126-129)

He continued that because he was in that position, he felt he had to be strong, which he believes is something single mothers have formed in their families.

Both Mihoko and Ichiro found that the difficult environment was a springboard to inspire them and encourage them to study harder.

6.2.5 Cultural capital/ Social capital

Cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural practices that individuals acquire through socialisation and upbringing. Bourdieu argues that inequalities in cultural capital reflect inequalities in social class. Individuals from privileged backgrounds often have greater cultural capital, giving them an advantage in the education system and wider society. Social capital refers to the social networks, relationships and contacts that individuals have, which give them resources, opportunities and advantages. Bourdieu points out that individuals with valuable social networks, such as knowing influential people, can convert social capital into economic capital, further strengthening their advantage (Bourdieu, 1979,1986,2017).

Interviews with children showed that academic performance was influenced not only by child academic ability, but also by the cultural and social capital around the child. As second sons from economically poor backgrounds, Jiro and Yuichi, who entered the university of their choice through a sports recommendation, appear to have one thing in common: the existence of a community through sport and someone to be a mentor. Jiro described the importance of being able to play under a trusted advisor in his club as follows:

> For me, yes. I was able to achieve results that I was satisfied with. There were parts of me that I could teach well as a human being (Jiro, lines 44-46).

And when asked if he was able to make the most of his time because of his club activities and sports, he replied:

> Yes, that's right. The hours for sports were quite strict, and the rules were very strict. I think I learnt a lot from sports (Jiro, lines 78-79).

When asked if he thought that his encounters with respected mentors and teachers had helped to strengthen his mentality, he responded:

> Yes, I think I have grown a lot. If I hadn't met my teacher, I might have been doing other sports. Maybe I would have felt completely different (Jiro, lines 86,88-89).

Also, Yuichi stated:

> I liked club activities and did them until the summer, so I decided to go to university on a designated university recommendation. So, in order to get a designated school recommendation, I had to take the usual classes and get good grades. So that's what I was aiming for. In the end, I went to a designated university (Yuichi, lines 160-163).

Ken, who had delinquent tendencies as a student but is now out of university and setting up his own company, was asked if he felt negatively about being brought up by a single mother.

> People often ask me if I do it because I saw my mother in financial difficulties, but in that sense, it's the opposite: there were people around my mother whom I admired, who were amazing, so-called successful, and I wanted to go down that road. I just wanted to go down that path (Ken, lines 131-134).

He was then asked if being from a single-parent family was part of the reason he decided to follow this path, he said he did not think so and that he was influenced by seeing his mother working and being strong on her own.

As mentioned above, Ken spoke about how his mother's attitude and the people around him helped him not to worry about his environment.

Mihoko, whose mother and she both had abusive pasts, achieved her goal of going to medical school, despite her abusive past, and said:

> I think my mother is a problem person because she grew up in a similar environment, but I was very conscious of trying to break the negative cycle, so she had the opportunity to help me. I think she is a problem person because she herself grew up in that kind of environment (Mihoko, lines 381-384).
>
> From the time I was in primary school, she kept telling me that the only way to get out of this was to study, and I think that was a big reason why I realised I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer (Mihoko, lines 384-386).

She said her mother tried to break the negative cycle, but when asked why she thought she was made aware of this, she replied:

> In the end, my mother grew up in a difficult environment, and the steps she took to get out of it were because she didn't have the money to spend on her education like I did. So, if she had studied hard, she probably could have got a really good job. But she couldn't do that, and she became an adult without even realising that studying was important (Mihoko, lines 397-401).

She further went on to describe her mother's situation as follows:

> When she thought about how to get out of that situation, the only way was to get married, and the man she married was the president of that company before it

> collapsed. Her father-in-law, who was my grandfather, were rich, so she thought she would use that as a way to get out of the situation. But in the end, the company failed, and she failed (Mihoko, lines 401-405).

Her mother said that through it all, she realised that women had to learn too and taught her a lesson. In Japan, it is common for women to marry and stay at home while their husbands work, but for women like Mihoko to have their own education, career and a job in hand means that they are independent women. When asked what she thought about the fact that Japan is said to be lagging behind other countries in this field, she replied:

> After my mother divorced, she had to work to raise her daughter on her own, and she didn't have any education. I think it was very difficult for her, partly because she was a woman, to get that stable job. She had to work full time, and even if she worked full time and worked until her body broke down, the pay was still low (Mihoko, lines 414-417).

She then said that although it has been a long time since she was a little girl, she does not think things have changed and she wonders if the situation in Japan has improved. Mihoko's words suggest that the way of life for women in Japan until now has been more about marriage than education. It can be assumed that this cultural factor has led to the poverty of single mothers today. It is also obvious that the establishment of cultural capital is important to break the negative cycle. Another factor that enabled Mihoko to improve her poor secondary school performance was the existence of NPOs that provide learning support for children from poor families. Mihoko states that:

> The teacher at the cram school I went to was a very good person, and even now I go to see him. I only went there occasionally (Mihoko, lines 133-134).

And she said that the teacher was interesting and told her many stories, which did not directly lead to her studies, but her intellectual curiosity was greatly influenced by the person she met there, who nourished her intellectual curiosity.

She said that the NPO's learning support helped her to forge her own career path, but that she also worked as a teacher from time to time alongside it.

Through interviews with the adult children, it was found that the level of poverty is not necessarily proportional to children's academic performance. In the case of two male siblings, the eldest son acts as a father figure, which creates a sense of responsibility for him and security for his brother. The second son tends to grow up well by following his eldest brother and seeking mentoring from outside in the absence of his father. It is particularly interesting to note that both second sons did physical activities and entered university through the recommendation system. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that external support, such as study support from NPOs, like Mihoko, also shows effectiveness. Like Mika, who had been out of school due to problems in her relationship with a man about her father's age during her adolescence, and like Mihoko’s mother, who married in order to improve her social capital in order to break the negative cycle, but realised that it was something that could easily fall apart, and mother told her daughter about the importance of the cultural capital of her educational background is also interesting to note that this resulted in her daughter going on to medical school.

The following chapter will discuss the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This thesis sought to discover whether the poverty experienced by single mother households in Japan impacted upon their children's education., because it is an acknowledged fact that Japanese single mothers are poor (MHLW 2019). There were two main findings, firstly interview data with both NPO and single mothers highlighted the economic difficulties faced by single mothers and their children which supported the original hypothesis, and this will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, there was a secondary outcome revealed related to the impact of growing up in single mother households on children's emotional development and mental health and this primarily came from the adult children's data.

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings alongside the key theories that I have mentioned and research questions that I have asked in the previous three chapters, Chapter 4, 5 and 6 in relation to how far they have answered the research questions and I am going to link my findings with the theories. These will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

7.2 Economic disadvantage

The first discussion concerns issues related to the economic disadvantage that single-mother households present. Themes that emerged from the data linked to economic disadvantage included: (Lack of) government support, scholarships, government policy to solve the problems, gender issues (prejudice against women), and lack of employment opportunities after divorce.

7.2.1 Government support

Issues related to administrative support with regard to the economic disadvantage of single mother families were mentioned by all NPO representatives and single mothers. Particularly common were issues related to the child support system, including post-divorce child support. Scholarships were also mentioned by both single mothers and their adult children. Issues related to government policies, such as redistribution of government monies sourced from tax and funds made available from the Child and Families Agency (CFA hereafter), were also mentioned.

After interviewing NPO representatives and single mothers, it was revealed that the most likely factor affecting the economic disadvantage of single mothers is the statutory post-divorce child support system. Female representative N2, who has lived in the UK as well as in Japan, stated that comparatively the rate of child support in Japan is very low and the amount is low because there is no public support system for child support in Japan and although there is a tendency to make arrangements for child support at the time of divorce, the confirmed arrangement rate is less than 5%. Therefore, although 46.7% of families have made arrangements, in reality less than 25% receive child support. She stated that this is because the national system has not caught up, as there is no collection system, no deductions from wages and no penalties for fathers guilty of non-payment. In addition, N5, a female representative of a non-profit organisation that provides employment support to single mothers in rural areas, said that in Japan, 80% of those who pay only 20% of child support are in arrears, so they have started a strong campaign for obtaining child support, but even with backing for obtaining child support, there are still really very few men who pay child support, 80% of whom run off without ever paying.

Four of the single mothers interviewed said they had made child support arrangements, but only one was honoured, while the other three were not. Akiko said that she was paid for five or six years, but then her ex-husband stopped paying, while Keiko said that she gave up chasing because her ex-husband clearly did not want or intend to pay. Noriko said she tried to sue in court because the amount of non-payment reached 2 million yen, but under Japanese law she had to go to the other party's district court to file the case, which cost even more money, so she gave up on pursuing this.

Research by Miyasaka (2015) highlights significant disparities in child support arrangements that correlate with the mother's educational background, with lower educational attainment linked to lower rates of such arrangements. This finding underscores broader issues in child support, including economic and educational disparities that influence the ability to secure and pay support (see Chapter 2. p30-31). Supporting this perspective, Yoko, who has a high school degree, expressed her unawareness of the child support system, illustrating the practical truth of Miyasaka's findings.

In many countries outside Japan, couples with children are not allowed to divorce unless they have an agreement or plan for child support payments and visitation and are held strictly responsible if they fail to keep their promises. However, under the current system in Japan, there are no penalties for those who are obliged to pay (in most cases, the father) for non-payment of child support. In other words, the responsibility of fathers who are separated or non-custodial parents (in many cases) for the upbringing of their children is left unchecked. The lack of sufficient understanding of child support or financial support in child development may be one

of the reasons why the issue of child support payments is left unmonitored (Noguchi & Machida, 2017).

Interviews with NPO representatives and single mothers highlighted the fact that in Japan, post-divorce child support arrangements are not legally binding if not adhered to, and that the court system is not structured to support poor single mothers. In the UK, it is a legal requirement to pay child support, and there is a robust system of deductions from wages if this is not adhered to. It is necessary to discuss why Japan does not have such a system in place to ensure that this is observed (see Miyasaka 2015, also chapter 2 p 30-32).

7.2.2 Scholarship

Scholarships are available as a system to support economic disadvantage. Single mothers and their children pointed out some problems with scholarships.

Keiko took out a scholarship to send her eldest son to university, but he dropped out in his third year. The reason for this, she stated, was that money had become tighter. and her son had to rely on part-time work to supplement his scholarship; the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem by limiting his part-time work opportunities, which ultimately led to his dropping out. This clearly demonstrates that the economic capital of single-parent families is insecure, and scholarships cannot adequately address their financial needs.

Dropping out of university results in a significant loss of potential cultural capital. Educational attainment is a key determinant of future economic prospects. Keiko's son losing out on his university education due to financial constraints underlines the broader issue of how economic hardship can impede educational progress and future economic mobility for children from single-parent families (Inui 2012).

Sachiko had borrowed scholarships for her two sons, but found out halfway through the process that different municipalities have different interest rates for borrowing (some offer interest-bearing and others interest-free loans), and complained that she had to pay a year's worth of interest (on her first loan), so she felt she had lost a year.

Sachiko's experience points to a lack of uniformity in scholarship terms across different municipalities. The discrepancy in interest rates—some being interest-free while others are not—can lead to unexpected financial burdens, as seen when Sachiko had to pay a year's worth of interest unexpectedly. This inconsistency can cause confusion and financial strain on families already struggling economically.

Masako's two sons went to university on scholarships, but Masako's eldest son Ichiro stated in an interview that interest-bearing scholarships should be abolished. He then gave examples of friends who used interest-bearing scholarships without understanding the interest rates and said that some friends who may have been briefed, but did not understand, used them because their parents or others had advised them to. Of those who grew up in single-mother households some had become mentally ill due to anxiety about repayment.

The observations of Masako's eldest son, Ichiro, reveal the psychological toll of interest-bearing scholarships. The complexity of understanding and managing these financial products, especially for young students and their families, can lead to significant stress and anxiety about repayment. This stress is particularly pronounced in single-parent households where financial literacy may be limited, and the burden of debt repayment looms large and only one parental salary is available.

As Ichiro mentioned, the scholarship system in Japan currently faces numerous problems.

Until the mid-1990s, scholarship users accounted for about 20% of all university students; by 2012, they accounted for 52.5% of all university students. The increase in the number of scholarship users can be attributed to the increase in the proportion of students going on to four-year universities since the 1990s. The number of girls entering junior college declined, as did the number of high school graduates entering employment. Average annual earnings and household incomes of private sector workers fell sharply between 2000 and 2010. Recent changes to the scholarship system have also had a significant impact on the social situation surrounding scholarships: the 1984 amendment to the Japan Scholarship Foundation Act created interest-bearing loan scholarships. The increase in interest-bearing scholarships was spurred by the Kibo 21 Plan of April 1999, which abolished the Japan Scholarship Foundation and reorganised the Japan Student Services Organisation (JASSO) in 2004. The JASSO further reformed the scholarship system, positioning it as a 'financial business'. The scholarship system has undoubtedly contributed to the increase in the percentage of students entering four-year universities since the late 1990s. However, the expansion of the scholarship system, centred on interest-bearing scholarships, has brought with it the problem of difficulties in repaying scholarships. The student is forced to borrow a large sum of money to repay the scholarship and is also forced to repay the scholarship straight after graduation. The loan-based scholarship system has the danger of creating a 'cycle of poverty' due to the repayment of such scholarships. As the number of unmarried people and the birthrate declines due to the 'impoverishment of the young' and the difficulties of raising children become more serious, the importance of considering the introduction

of a benefit-based scholarship system is considered to be greater than ever before. There are problems with the current scholarship system that need to be improved. First, the difficulty of repaying scholarships must be resolved. Second, the system should be changed from a loan-based system to a benefit-based system. (Ouchi, 2015).

It is clear from the findings in this thesis that the current scholarship system does not pay particular attention to the poverty experienced by poor single-mother families, and that the current employment situation and salary structure in Japan does not make it equitable or a fair system for this vulnerable group to use. This point also needs to be addressed at a statutory level.

7.2.3 Is Government policy and intervention needed to solve the problems?

Among the themes that emerged from the interviews with NPOs were several questions about government policy. One is the issue of redistribution (of governmental income from taxation) and the CFA. Both can be considered government responses to ameliorate the economic disadvantage of single mother families.

The establishment of the Redistribution and CFA was a government initiative, with the express aim of solving child poverty, which was the subject of many interesting comments from NPO participants. The evidence in this thesis suggests that these are national problems and a poverty problem, and furthermore the gap widens after redistribution; N2 stated that what is happening in Japan today is that the working-age population is suffering more and more. In particular, the level of redistribution of cash benefits is too low. N3 believes that redistribution is the most important thing. Without it, no matter how many activities you do, no matter how many services you

provide, no matter how much effort you put into services such as learning support, it will fail. He maintains that if we do not make income redistribution the basis of our policies and still ensure service delivery, we will make mistakes. N7, a former bureaucrat, said he believes the problems are the low progressivity of income taxation, the fact that consumption tax revenues are used for government bond redemption and corporate tax cuts instead of going to welfare, the low amount of benefits such as child allowance, child support allowance, welfare, schooling assistance and high school scholarship benefits, and the low catch-up rate for these benefits.

Income inequality and relative poverty among the working-age population in Japan have risen to levels above the OECD average (OECD, 2019). Social expenditure as a share of GDP is growing against a background of population ageing but remains below the OECD average. and the share received by low-income households is small. As a result, the impact of social spending on inequality and poverty is weaker than in other OECD countries and insufficient to offset the deterioration in market incomes. The scope for increased social spending is constrained by the fiscal situation. Rather, reversing the trend of rising inequality and poverty requires reforms to reduce labour market dualism and to better target social spending to low-income households, especially single-parent households (Jones, 2007).

The difference in poverty rates before and after redistribution represents the poverty reduction effect of government redistribution (Abe 2021), but many NPO representatives expressed strong opinions, as described above, about the situation not improving even after the policy. There is a need to explore the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the policy despite its significant impact on poverty reduction and the data in this thesis has demonstrated this point.

Another key organisational issue mentioned by many of the NPO participants was the CFA. CFA was created as a new command post to guarantee children's rights and to ensure that no child is left behind and the healthy development of society as a whole (MHLW 2022), which includes the objective of solving child poverty, but many other problems were identified.

Murohashi (2023) analyses the following reasons why the measures of the CFA continue to be out of focus. (1) they seek too many short-term results, (2) the decision-making bodies are biased, (3) evidence-based decisions are not made, and (4) the approach is not based on children's rights (human rights). The Prime Minister's Office (2023) plan shows a weak investment perspective and many short-term measures. In addition, if the Government is serious about child and childcare measures, it needs to increase the size of the budget and broaden the range of measures. And then there is the 'bias of decision-making layers'. They do not understand the lives of ordinary people. Until now, opinions were consolidated through industry associations, but now those who belong to industry associations are a minority, even a privileged class. Additionally, ‘it is not a scientific decision-making process' in other words not evidence-based policy making, which is important not only for the accuracy of measures, but also for convincing the public. Finally, it is 'not a children's rights (human rights) based approach'. This is always an area of concern in discussions on measures to reduce fertility in Japan, but the perspective most emphasised when discussing child care measures in countries outside Japan is human rights, not fertility measures. It is for the government to develop social systems that are easy for everyone to use, so that the possibilities and options can be expanded regardless of attributes (Murohashi, 2023).

Data from the NPO participant interviews reveals that in other countries, efforts are being made to ensure that disparities in family circumstances do not lead to disparities in education and the future. However, according to N1, in the case of Japan, the timing should have originally started around the 1990s, but there was a policy carelessness, partly due to the so-called ‘bubble economy’, which led to repeated major structural policy failures, and although measures are being taken through the establishment of the CFA, early action is very slow. He stated that he believes this has led to many problems related to children.

Itoh (2000) notes that the Japanese economy in the 1990s was characterised by significant changes compared to the 1980s. The economy shifted to an extreme low-growth trend and its continued recession caused international concern among developed countries. A major cause of these difficulties clearly lies in the expansion and subsequent collapse of the huge bubbles in speculative trading of stocks and property in the late 1980s. As a result, Japanese financial institutions were saddled with huge amounts of non-performing loans, triggering a credit crunch that worsened the assets of firms and households and triggered a vicious cycle of chain bankruptcies and asset deflation.

The establishment of the CFA in Japan has been met with mixed reactions, as reflected in the statements of various experts and stakeholders.

N7, a former bureaucrat and expert on national politics, argues that the CFA is essentially a superficial move, lacking in substantive policy change. He sees the CFA as little more than a branded version of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's Department of Children and Families; according to N7, the establishment of such an agency is more about appearances than actual policy implementation. He notes that

the political manoeuvring behind these agencies is designed to make it appear as if action is being taken without bringing about real change.

N3, a member of the Government's Advisory Group on Child Poverty, feels the same way. He criticises the fragmented mandate of the CFA and the lack of a cohesive Ministry of Education team, which he believes is crucial to tackling child poverty. N3 points out that essential aspects of poverty reduction remain under the Ministry of Health and Labour, leading to fragmented and ineffective efforts. It also points out that the inclusion of 'family' in the agency's name, which was originally 'Children's Agency', was influenced by political and perhaps external factors (religious organisations).

Wider political and social dynamics have been brought into the debate over the name of the CFA and its mandate. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno denied any influence from the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly the Unification Church) (Asahi Newspaper, 2022). However, the timing and political pressure from conservative MPs suggest that there was significant external influence. Matsuno argues that the name 'General Support Organisation for Children and Families' appropriately reflects the aim of supporting child rearing within the family for the healthy growth and happiness of children. This is also in line with the Basic Policy on Children's Policy approved by the Cabinet.

The concerns raised by N7 and N3 highlight significant issues as follows:

Superficial reforms: the creation of new agencies and departments without substantive policy changes may lead to inefficiency and public scepticism. Such structural reforms require a clear and workable policy framework.

Fragmented mandate: Effective child and family support requires a coordinated approach between the various ministries, particularly education, health and welfare; it is important to enable these ministries to work cohesively under the mandate of the CFA.

Political influence: Transparency and clear rationale behind policy decisions and organisational changes are essential to maintain public confidence. Addressing the underlying political influences that affect such decision-making is necessary for genuine reform. As these interviews show, it is clear that national policies are not translating into actual measures. And, as the following data shows, it highlights the situation where most NPOs are run by public donations, with no statutory financial support from the government.

N1 and N2 highlight the heavy reliance on donations to fund learning support for children from poor families, with N1, as the 'First Penguin', taking the lead in collecting donations and advocating for these initiatives to eventually become national policy. This reflects a proactive approach, but also highlights the fragility and unsustainability of relying solely on private donations for essential services.

N2 is highly critical of the government's failure to fund children's cafeterias, leaving the responsibility to non-profit organisations and public donations. She argues that it is essentially the government's job to ensure the provision of these services, highlighting a critical gap in public welfare policy.

N6 shares similar concerns, advocating for a society where a strong public framework should be in place and non-profit organisations are not needed. N6 criticises the current government reliance on the private sector as an excuse for the

state to avoid its responsibilities. Such dependence can lead to inconsistent service delivery and a lack of long-term security for beneficiaries.

N6 and N7 touch on the cultural aspect of personal responsibility, which is deeply ingrained in Japanese society. This theory holds that people should bear the consequences of their own decisions, including whether or not to have children. This perspective is consistent with the idea that the family is the smallest unit responsible for its own welfare, which may contribute to the lack of government support.

N6 notes that this theory is often a justification for minimising public spending and being reluctant to subsidise, which can perpetuate systemic inequalities. This is particularly problematic for single mothers and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

N2 also highlighted the intersection of Personal-responsibility theory and gender norms, which exacerbates the discrimination faced by women, especially single mothers. In N2, asserting one's needs or seeking support is perceived as self-serving, leading to further stigmatisation and lack of support. This compounded discriminatory norm places an additional burden on women who are already vulnerable due to socio-economic factors.

N1 said that NPOs are struggling due to lack of funds for their activities, so a national effort is needed to properly nurture and increase the number of recipients, and what is needed is to secure and train human resources. He stated forcefully, that unless the national government seriously works to secure and train human resources, it will not lead to a solution.

It is interesting to note that N6 also extended that the basis of his activities is donations and the reason why he does not receive any assistance from the state is

because he does not receive any grants, which allows him to make policy recommendations from a neutral standpoint.

Thus, the Japanese government often relies on NPOs in its measures to combat child poverty for a number of intertwined reasons, including the following.

Resource constraints: the Government faces budget constraints and logistical challenges in tackling the diverse and pervasive nature of child poverty; NPOs are often more agile and community-focused and can complement these efforts with targeted interventions and flexible resource allocation (Lee, 2021) can help.

Limitations of policy and bureaucracy: government programmes can be slow to adapt due to bureaucratic processes and strict policy guidelines. In contrast, NPOs have the flexibility to innovate and implement new strategies more quickly to meet immediate needs (Okada, 2022).

Public-private partnerships: there is a growing trend towards public-private collaboration in Japan, with the Government encouraging collaboration with NPOs to utilise their expertise and grassroots presence. This approach is seen as a way to maximise the effectiveness of limited resources and to ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable people efficiently (Lee, 2021).

Emphasis on comprehensive support: NPOs often go beyond financial assistance to provide comprehensive support, including educational programmes, counselling and community services, which are crucial to addressing the multifaceted nature of child poverty (Lee, 2021).

Community trust and engagement: NPOs usually have strong ties and trust with local communities, which enables them to effectively identify and support families in need

of assistance. These grassroots connections are something that government agencies struggle to establish deeply or quickly (Okada, 2022).

These factors contribute to Japan's reliance on NPOs in addressing child poverty, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts between the government and the non-government sector to build a stronger support system for children in need.

While these interviews point to the inadequacy of government policy in many respects, it is also interesting to note that Japan's own theory of Personal-responsibility is discussed as the basis for this, and that several representatives mentioned the involvement of religious groups in the creation of government institutions. The difficulty in improving economic disadvantage can be seen as a problem not only for the government, but also for the traditional Japanese mindset and Japanese society.

Sai (2015) posits that the State shall guarantee all citizens a minimum standard of living appropriate to the state of poverty, and shall provide the necessary protection for the promotion of self-reliance. However, there is a current situation where the minimum standard of living is not being guaranteed by the government as it should be. According to Maeda (2022), the allowances provided by the government play a role in increasing the income of mothers by increasing their motivation to work.

The support for mothers to become financially independent is part of the activities of support groups such as NPOs. The two NPO participants I interviewed had the following to say about the role of NPOs and government support. The representative of an organisation that supports single mothers in Japan said that the staff working to support the independence and empowerment of single mothers are employed on a non-regular basis, and because their own positions are also unstable, they are

unable to provide sufficient support. She also said that in order to improve the situation, it is necessary to establish a culture of giving in Japan, as exists in Europe and the United States, and that they can only hope for donations from philanthropists. Another NPO representative stated that their organisation is focusing on initiatives aimed at empowering single mothers, and says that many single mothers have been able to increase their monthly income through taking on new challenges, and that new business opportunities have been created in collaboration with local communities and companies, and that highly motivated human resources have been developed, and that an environment for economic independence has been created by equipping them with practical skills and mindsets. In particular, support from the NPO has helped the mothers to gain more confidence and to feel more motivated to try new things, and by showing their children how to do this, the children have also come to have a higher opinion of their mothers, and this has had a positive impact on their own performance.

It is clear that NPOs and other organisations can make a difference by taking action to address the shortcomings of government policy. In Japan too, it will be important to enhance comprehensive support, such as financially-sustaining NPOs that support the independence and empowerment of single mothers, rather than relying solely on direct government policy and funding.

7.2.4 Prejudice against women

One of the most frequently asked questions in the interviews with mothers was the lack of consideration single mothers experience when looking for work, with a number of responses indicating discrimination against women. Regarding

employment opportunities as a cause of poverty among single mothers, many NPO representatives stated that this is related to the position of women in Japan.

N2 states that women are in a very disadvantaged position in Japan and that the dignity of women is too low, which causes many problems. So, this is the reason there are many problems with education in Japan, such as child poverty.

N4 then stated that the pay system for women is different compared to men, with a minimum wage of around 1,050 yen and 2,000 hours of work for around 2 million yen, and that there is gender inequality; N3 also stated that originally women's work was mainly non-regular and that the wages of non-regular workers in Japan are very low and women's wages are even lower N1 confirmed that women's wages are still very low.

N2 stated that the gender pay gap that remains in Japan is linked to the education gap between men and women. And because of the considerable wage gap between men and women, giving girls an education may be perceived as 'undeserved'' or 'unprofitable'. As a result, they state that they tend not to send their sisters who can study to university and tend to send their male siblings, even if they are less academically able, to university, and that boys tend to be more valued.

N2 and N7 stated that the reason for the different salary levels has to do with traditional Japanese attitudes and while N7 believes that there is a very strong gender gap in Japan. Women are discriminated against to a strong level in Japanese employment practices, and N7 cites the male-centric nature of the society and the lack of female parliamentarians as reasons for this.

According to the report of the World Economic Forum (2023), Europe's gender equality (76.3%) has surpassed that of North America (75%) this year, ranking first

among the eight regions. Following closely behind Europe and North America is Latin America and the Caribbean with 74.3%. The Caribbean region has a parity of 74.3%. Latin America and the Caribbean lags behind by more than five percentage points.

Eurasia and Central Asia (69%) and East Asia and the Pacific (68.8%). Sub-Saharan Africa is in sixth place (68.2%), slightly below the global weighted average score (68.3%). South Asia (63.4%) overtakes the Middle East and North Africa (62.6%), making the region the furthest region from parity in 2023 (World Economic Forum, 2023).

At 68.8%, East Asia and the Pacific has the fifth highest parity of the eight regions. Progress towards parity has been stagnant for more than a decade, with the region down 0.2 percentage points since the last time. At the regional level, New Zealand, the Philippines and Australia have the highest parity, with Australia and New Zealand also being the two economies in the region that have improved the most. On the other hand, Fiji, Myanmar and Japan are at the bottom, with Fiji, Myanmar and Timor-Leste recording the largest declines. At the current rate of progress, it will take 189 years for the region to achieve gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2023).

As you can see from the above data, traditional Japanese male-dominated attitudes have had a significant impact on the employment environment for women, contributing to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. This cultural attitude underpins many structural problems in the workforce, such as strong employment protection systems and seniority-based wage systems. These systems were historically beneficial during Japan's period of rapid economic growth but have since

created rigid employment practices that are unacceptable to women, especially those with family responsibilities.

The concept of 'regular employees' and seniority-based wages, rooted in the 'family system' of the samurai era, inherently favour men in long-term employment, while marginalising women who are more likely to interrupt their careers to raise children. This structural bias leads to a significant gender pay gap, restricting women's opportunities for career advancement and increasing their economic disadvantage (Yamaguchi,2014). Moreover, social expectations and traditional gender role divisions exacerbate these challenges. Women are often expected to prioritise family over career, which inhibits investment in education and professional development for women. As a result, many women remain in low-paid, informal employment, perpetuating economic disparities and contributing to a cycle of poverty for mothers and children (Yamaguchi,2014) particularly post-divorce.

The results of this thesis clearly demonstrate that the poverty of single mothers in Japan is a result of Japan's traditional male-dominated mindset, which creates an employment environment for Japanese women that does not improve the poverty environment, creating a situation that creates a cycle of poverty for them and their children and their children's children.

7.2.5 Job opportunity after divorce

One of the main causes of poverty among single mothers in Japan is the gender employment gap in Japan. This is largely due to the position of women in Japanese marriages. The traditional Japanese view of marriage is that the man earns the money, and the woman raises the children. As a result, many women leave work after marriage and become full-time housewives. The educational background of the

eight single mothers interviewed for this study was either a junior college or high school graduate, and none had graduated from a four-year university. Junior colleges are two-year vocational schools with a curriculum focused on the acquisition of specialised skills and knowledge, with a high proportion of female students, and many junior colleges play a role in supporting women's entry into society. However, it is common in Japan for women to have basically graduated from a four-year university in order to work on an equal footing with men. Interestingly, none of the participants employed in this research graduated from a four-year university. Even if they did find a job after graduating from a junior college, most of them left the workforce due to family reasons such as marriage or childbirth. Even if they found a job after their divorce, they often talked about their current situation of not being able to find work to support their children.

Yumiko, who had been working part-time all her life, said that although she did not earn enough to work full-time, she decided to get a divorce because she thought she could be independent.

Yumiko's decision to divorce and work part-time highlights the limited economic capital available to women who leave work after marriage to raise children. This situation often leads women into a cycle of dependency, making economic independence difficult. According to Bourdieu, (1979), economic capital is crucial for acquiring and maintaining cultural capital, such as higher education and career advancement. Yumiko's case illustrates the struggle to convert limited economic capital into sufficient cultural capital.

Despite having plenty of work, Noriko, who on several occasions was not even invited to interview when she told people that she was a single mother (mother and

child), reflects the Japanese social system that does not support mothers and children. In her case, she happened to meet a benefactor who introduced her to a good job, but this does not happen to everyone and seems to symbolise the Japanese attitude towards single mothers who find it difficult to raise a child on their own.

Noriko's difficulties with job interviews highlight the social stigma and institutional barriers faced by single mothers in Japan. This reflects Bourdieu's concept of social capital, (Bourdieu,1979) where networks and connections are crucial to accessing job opportunities. Noriko's reliance on contacts to help her find employment exemplifies the uneven distribution of social capital, where not everyone has access to useful networks.

Masako has to work to get her child into nursery school; she wants to leave her child at nursery school and look for work but cannot find work because the nursery school will not accept her; she has to ask her friend to lie to get her child into nursery school. This case strongly illustrates this. Even though there are some differences between municipalities, it is clear from the results of this interview that the system is not supportive towards women who get married, leave their jobs and raise their children.

Masako's struggle with the childcare system exposes the contradictions in Japanese policies that claim to support working mothers. The difficulty of accessing childcare without already having a job illustrates the institutional barriers that prevent women from re-entering the workforce, thus limiting their economic capital. This is in line with Bourdieu's view that institutional structures can reinforce social inequalities by limiting access to necessary resources (Boudieu,1986).

Ayaka, an adult child who is currently married and raising a child, recounts her own experience of quitting her job because she felt uncomfortable with the company's attitude towards women raising children. When she told the company that she was pregnant with a child, she said that the silent pressure on young mothers with children, which is more common in rural areas of Japan, made it difficult for her to stay and she quit. The company could not tell her to quit but put pressure on her to say she would. She also said that when she was married and working, she was asked when she was going to have a baby and if she was going to have a baby, was she thinking about a second child, which made her uncomfortable and she wanted the company to understand this. The fact that she was asked these questions to her face demonstrates the contempt Japanese companies have for women. In the UK, it is illegal to ask women such questions.

Ayaka's experiences of discrimination in the workplace and pressure to leave due to pregnancy highlight the cultural and social challenges that women face when raising children and maintaining employment. Her explicit questions about family planning reflect deep-rooted cultural biases against working mothers, which limit their career advancement and accumulation of economic capital. Bourdieu's theory (1979) suggests that these cultural attitudes are a form of symbolic violence that perpetuates gender inequality.

The situation of single mothers in Japan and the institutional challenges they face can be analysed in terms of the gender employment gap and traditional marriage roles. Traditional gender roles in marriage in Japan - where men are considered to be the breadwinners and women the carers - are a major contributor to the gender employment gap. This cultural expectation often leads to women quitting work after marriage or childbirth and becoming financially dependent on their spouse. This

traditional view is widely discussed in the literature, including the work of Brinton, (1993) and other sociologists studying gender and employment dynamics in Japan.

Additionally, educational gender inequalities exacerbate this problem. Many women only have education up to junior college, and while they can acquire specialised skills, they fall short of the opportunities offered by a four-year university degree. Research on education inequality and labour market outcomes in Japan highlights the limited career advancement opportunities for junior college graduates compared to university graduates (Tsutsui 2010).

With regard to employment issues for single mothers, economic vulnerability is cited. Single mothers, such as those interviewed, often work in part-time or low-paid jobs that are insufficient to support their families. Yumiko's experience reflects the wider problem of lack of economic independence preventing women from leaving unhappy marriages. This is consistent with findings on the economic situation of single mothers in Japan, which indicate that poverty and job insecurity are common among this group (Iwao 1994).

Secondly, there is social stigma and employment discrimination. Noriko's situation, where being a single mother makes it difficult for her to obtain stable employment, suggests the social stigma and discrimination that single mothers face in Japan. A study by the Japanese Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT 2016) discusses the prejudice against single mothers in the workforce and the lack of support measures.

Structural and institutional issues include the accessibility of childcare. Masako's case highlights institutional contradictions in Japan's childcare policy. The requirement to be employed in order to secure a place at a childcare centre creates

a dichotomous situation for many mothers. This issue is frequently cited in policy analyses and reports on Japanese childcare and labour policy, highlighting the need for more flexible and supportive childcare solutions (MHLW, 2009).

Workplace culture, discrimination and the pressure to leave due to pregnancy experienced by Ayaka highlights the gender bias that persists in Japanese corporate culture (Ikeda, 2023).

A clear comparison with the UK, where it is illegal to ask women about family planning, illustrates the disparity in legal protection against gender discrimination between Japan and other developed countries. Comparative research on employment law and gender equality provides insight into how Japanese policy lags behind that of other developed countries (Ikeda, 2023).

What emerged from findings of this thesis was Japanese society's apparent lack of understanding of the employment challenges faced by single mothers who are raising their children alone. It is also apparent that this is more the case in rural areas, with N6 firstly pointing to a lack of understanding in the workplace as the reason why it is difficult for single mothers to work and raise their children. She stated that she thinks there are social barriers to raising children as a single parent.

N2 also stated that in Japan, when looking for work, it is very difficult to find a full-time job simply because she has a child, and the only part-time jobs available are minimum wage jobs such as working as a cashier in a supermarket.

As described above, NPOs, single mothers and adult children each speak about the difficulties of working for women in Japan, with single mothers in particular speaking about the unique Japanese concept of the difficulties of working for women who went to junior college, got married, quit their jobs to raise children and then divorced.

7.3 Children's mental health

Another important theme that emerged from the data is the impact on children's mental health resulting from growing up in a single-mother household. This finding was secondary to the original hypothesis of the thesis and to some extent unexpected. Even if the children of single mother households go on to a good university, the mental scars are likely to remain with them for the rest of their lives. Sub-themes revealed included stigma as a result of their parent's divorce, the pressure they felt from the 'people's eye' (public opinion), the idea of Personal-responsibility as a social issue, the children feeling responsibility for both younger siblings and their mother particularly the responsibility of the eldest son 's position. Concerningly there were, safeguarding issues revealed – children left alone in the house without an adult so their mother could work, and poor mental health outcomes for both (Mother and Child). These factors will be discussed further in the following sub-sections.

7.3.1 Social issue (Stigma from divorce, people's eye, Personal-responsibility ideation)

The most frequently asked questions in interviews with single mothers and adult children were the stigma associated with divorce, people's eye and Personal-responsibility ideation among Japanese people.

7.3.1.1 Stigma of divorce

N6 stated that single mothers are seen as a minority in Japanese society and as deviating from norms and family values, and that traditional family values persisting, such as "divorce is selfish", "discrimination against single mothers and women", "it is normal for couples to raise children together" and "it is normal for men to earn

money and women to take care of the home". He stated that traditional family values such as 'divorce is selfish', 'discrimination against single mothers and women' and 'it is normal for men to earn money and women to keep the home' remain prevalent in Japanese society even though this is a contradiction as traditional family values should not include divorce. There exists a negative climate. Furthermore, single mothers are prone to prejudice and disadvantage in situations wherein they receive government assistance, even if this does not lead to social understanding or discrimination. Under the child support system available to single-mother families, they have to regularly submit a status report, but N6 said, "I think there is a social stigma that makes people suspect that I am not a single mother or child, for example, whether I am seeing a partner or not".

N6's comments on the social stigma surrounding government assistance for single mothers are consistent with findings in the existing literature. The requirement for regular status reports increases scrutiny and distrust and exacerbates stigma. The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT 2016) reports that these bureaucratic procedures place additional burdens on single mothers and may further entrench their disadvantaged position.

N5 spoke of the strong tendency of people to be concerned about their surroundings with regard to divorce in rural areas. 'Many people have been divorced for more than 10 years, but they hide it from the people around them' and 'parents also hide it because they are ashamed of it'.

Akiko spoke about how, including her own experience, the idea that divorce itself is shameful still persists in rural areas: 'When I came back to the countryside, I got my family's approval and they said it was okay, but I was only able to come back

because I happened to be the eldest daughter, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to come back’. She stated that she would not have been able to return otherwise.

The contrast between rural and urban experiences was another important point highlighted by participants. Akiko's account of rural attitudes towards divorce and single motherhood highlighted that traditional values are more firmly held in rural areas. This dichotomy is also supported by studies such as that of Ishii Kunz (2013). According to Ishii Kunz (2013) more conservative social norms are often found in rural areas of Japan than in urban areas.

Both Noriko and Keiko spoke in interviews about how they felt prejudiced by the way the parents around them dealt with them when they were raising their children, and Yoko also spoke about her experience of being discriminated against in favour of a single father, even in school officer decision-making situations. Interviews with single mothers revealed that in Japanese society there is a lot of coldness towards divorced women.

Thus, the discrimination and prejudice faced by single mothers is a manifestation of wider social prejudice. The discrimination and prejudice experienced by Noriko and Keiko is a manifestation of that social prejudice toward single mothers that this thesis demonstrates is prevalent in contemporary Japan

Yuichi, whose parents divorced 20 years ago, said that he could not live freely growing up because being the child of a single mother was still considered taboo, or rather he had to live in fear of what his parents and the children around him would do to him because he could not tell people that his mother had divorced, and he lived in fear that they would find out. Yuichi spoke of a past in which he could not tell the truth, kept lying and felt he had to protect his parents' reputation so that they would

not suffer, and his personality changed dramatically which indicates he was experiencing mental health issues as a child due to what he perceived society would think of his family situation.

Ichiro also said that he used to lie a lot when he was in primary school because his parents divorced, and as a result he became financially poor compared to his peers from two parent households and could not keep up with the conversation. He said that his friends did not like him.

Yuichi's and Ichiro's statements indicate that the divorce also created a great deal of prejudice among the people around them even directed toward the children, which had a significant impact on their mental health.

Yuichi and Ichiro's experiences illustrate the serious impact of social stigma on the children of single mothers. Their accounts of hiding their family environment and facing social exclusion are consistent with research on the psychological and social challenges faced by children in single-parent families. Research by Kato (2015) and others highlights the negative impact of the stigma associated with being a single mother on children's mental health and their subsequent social integration.

7.3.2 Children’s feelings of responsibility

In terms of the children's feelings of responsibility, the findings of this thesis showed that there is a tendency for the eldest son to try to take over the father's position due to divorce. Safeguarding points were also highlighted, such as children staying at home alone in the absence of their mother who was forced to work unsocial hours in order to support them financially.

7.3.2.1 Eldest child’s worries

Ichiro, the eldest son, who was in third grade at the time of his parents' divorce, said that he often felt a difference in freedom from children in families with two parents due to his parents' divorce, as he had to be home by 16:00pm to look after his younger brother, while other children had a curfew of 18:00pm.

This meant that, as the eldest son, he felt more responsible for looking after his younger siblings as a result of the absence of his father in the family.

His younger brother Jiro, who is five years younger than him, says that he was actually very grateful to have an older brother and that his brother was a role model and a help as he had no father and no other men in the family. Makoto, the youngest of three male siblings, said that immediately after his parents' divorce, he felt looked after by his oldest brother. Yuichi, the second of two male siblings, stated that his brother took his place of his father due to the divorce and told him to study more and help his mother.

It is very interesting that all respondents with male siblings stated that their eldest son became more like a father figure after the divorce. As a result, the second son tended to grow up mentally and developmentally less affected by the absence of a father.

It is not uncommon for the eldest son to take on a father-like role in single-mother households, especially those in which the mother is the head of the household. This is particularly the case when the father is absent, so that the mother can give the eldest son the responsibility for household chores and provide emotional support. These expectations can be burdensome and may force children to grow up fast and take on adult responsibilities at a young age (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022).

Interviews with single mothers and their children revealed that the absence of a father often places greater responsibilities on mothers and their children. Ichiro, the eldest child, reported that he felt he had less freedom than his peers because he had to look after his younger brother, Jiro. This sense of responsibility was shared by his older siblings, who saw Ichiro as an exemplary father figure.

While it is noteworthy that the eldest son often takes on the role of father in these families, this situation raises serious ethical issues. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises that every child has the right to a childhood free from adult responsibilities, including the right to play, rest and education (UN, 1989). Forced assumption of adult roles and responsibilities undermines these rights and can have a negative impact on children's development and well-being. All children deserve the right to have a childhood where they can be educated and free from adult responsibilities.

7.3.2.2 Safeguarding issues

N2, who has lived in the UK, commented on the current state of safeguards in Japan: in the UK, there is a law that children under the age of six cannot be left alone in the house, but unfortunately there is no such law in Japan, so even a six-year-old pre-school child can be left alone in a room in a flat by their mother so she can then go to work at night. This happens because the state would rather have them work than give them welfare. N2 said with great indignation that she was told that if small children were left alone, they would die, and indeed in some cases they did, but there was no punishment.

She then compared the UK and Japan against this background, pointing out that the UK has a Christian foundation and Japan does not, and has the idea of personal

responsibility. In other words, when there is a Christian foundation, there is greater support from those around you. Additionally, she said that in Japan, parents bring up their children, so many people think that if the parents are poor, it can't be helped if the children do not reach their educational and developmental potential in adulthood.

The findings suggest that mothers and eldest children often bear a disproportionate burden of responsibility, which can violate their right to a carefree childhood. The United Nations Covenant Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) specifies that children should be protected from work that may be dangerous, impede their education or harm their health or development (UNCRC, Article 32). This is in line with research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2022). The Foundation highlights the negative effects of placing adult responsibilities on children, such as increased stress and limited opportunities for education and personal development.

Furthermore, these responsibilities force children to mature earlier than their peers, which can lead to psychological and emotional problems. Bourdieu's concept of social relational capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is also relevant here, as the lack of an adequate support system for single mothers leads to an unequal distribution of responsibilities within the family. This may perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage and inhibit children's ability to build their own social and cultural capital.

Single mothers who do not live with their parents have to work a lot to earn a living, leaving one small child alone to look after themself whilst they work, and there are safety issues. Yoko did not have the option of working full time. She had to work from 9am to 5pm, which reduced her income, so she worked two piece-rate jobs during the day, part time in the morning and part time at night.

This meant in other words, Yoko worked from 4am to 6am, came home, took her son to school, worked again and worked in the bar from 8pm to midnight. She had her own mother move in with her, so there was someone to care for the children whilst she worked.

The findings of this thesis demonstrate that after divorce in Japan, women often have to work two or three jobs to cope financially. This means that many mothers have to work through the night to make ends meet and many are forced to leave their children home alone, which is not seen as a safeguarding issue in Japanese statutory law. So, as N2 says, there have actually been cases where children have been left home alone and their lives have been endangered.

In terms of safeguarding, there was a case in October 2023 when a draft amendment to the ordinance, which included new standards such as 'a child left at home is an abusive situation', were proposed, however, this was met with spectacular opposition from public opinion and relatives, and the LDP Saitama prefectural assembly, which had initiated the proposal, withdrew the draft itself, thus settling the issue for the time being. While neglect under the current domestic law is defined as "not feeding the child, locking the child in the house, not taking the child to hospital even if the child is seriously ill" (Law on the Prevention of Child Abuse, Article 2). The Saitama Prefectural Assembly's proposed amendment broadly defined "leaving children alone (under the third grade of primary school), taking them to and from school, playing in parks", etc., as "neglect (abuse)", and further stated that anyone who saw such behaviour must report it. The reason for the instant public outcry was that, in addition to the irrationality of the proposed amendment, which was not in line with reality, it also drew the ire of the public by attempting to deny the

personalities of many people and the parenting methods of their guardians (Muto, 2023).

Thus, in Japan, a prefectural assembly that recently attempted to amend an ordinance in terms of safeguarding met with fierce public opposition and as a result abandoned the amendment.

Muto (2023), on the other hand, writes that many Western countries define abandonment as abuse. The main reasons for this are that leaving children alone increases the risk of disasters such as earthquakes and fires, crimes by suspicious persons, electric shocks and slip and fall accidents, and that children may not be able to cope alone when such situations actually occur. When comparing Japan with other countries, it is important to bear in mind the differences in their environments. In Japan, where the security situation is good, parents are less likely to feel uncomfortable about leaving their children alone at home compared to parents in other countries (Muto, 2023).

Another reason for this difference in attitudes towards safeguarding between Japan and the Western countries may be that Japanese children tend to spend more time at home and follow their parents' instructions. To address these ethical concerns, a comprehensive approach to supporting single mothers and their children is needed. Policy interventions could include enhanced access to childcare services, financial support for single-parent households and educational programmes that ensure that children do not have to sacrifice their childhood to support their families. Such measures help uphold the rights of children as outlined in the UNCRC and promote a more equitable division of responsibilities within single-parent families.

7.4 Mental health (mothers and children)

Many NPO representatives emphasised that single mothers bear a heavy burden of juggling work, housework and childcare, without adequate support. This dual responsibility is not only an emotional burden, but also leaves little room for self-realisation; N2 highlighted that single mothers are often so occupied with earning a living that they do not have time to raise their children properly.

N1 said that single mothers cannot talk to anyone about their problems and have to face them alone, which she thinks is not good for the mental health of single mothers, while N2 shared data showing that there are very many women who have no one to talk to about family problems. She also said that 47% of respondents interviewed by single mothers said they were 'really unwell', 40% said they were 'always like that and feel like nothing will ever get better' and about 6% said they had 'no problems at all'.

This situation is supported by other studies showing that single mothers often face high levels of stress and burnout due to their multiple roles (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Isolation experienced by single mothers is also a significant issue; N1 noted that single mothers often have no one to confide in, which leads to mental health problems; the data shared by N2 also supports this, with nearly half of single mothers interviewed 'feeling really bad' and a significant proportion of mothers felt 'perpetually hopeless'. This is in line with findings from other studies highlighting the mental health challenges single mothers face due to social isolation and lack of support (Cairney et al.). The OECD provides extensive analysis on the socioeconomic conditions of single mothers. Their reports highlight how single mothers in Japan and other countries often struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities, which leads to significant stress and mental health issues. (Balestra & Tonkin, 2018)

N3 noted that parenting is a social activity in itself, but that single mothers and those in need have to raise their children in isolation due to a lack of social resources and support from others. She then attributed the difficult situation that single mothers find themselves in with respect to the lack of understanding of the socialisation of parenting in Japanese society in particular, and the very difficult situation that Japanese mothers, especially single mothers, find themselves in within such a society. N3 also points out that the ideological background for socialising childcare and education in Japan is very poor. The problem, he continued, is that Japan does not have the social experience of making childcare a family responsibility. Many children of single mothers have a positive outlook if they have a reliable partner and a supportive relationship, but otherwise the situation is difficult and challenging. He referred to the case of single mothers with mental health problems, saying that the situation is quite difficult due to social discrimination.

Single mothers' mental and time constraints inevitably affect children's academic performance; N3 notes that solitary parenting affects children's learning outcomes. Children of single mothers often have poorer academic performance than children from dual-earner families, partly due to less emotional and educational support at home (Amato, 2005). Furthermore, the lack of social resources and community support in Japanese society exacerbates this problem, making it difficult for single mothers to provide the necessary support for their children's education.

N6 stated that data shows that more than half of people living in poverty have mental health problems and that single mothers have almost the equivalent or higher levels of mental health problems. He then said that most single mothers who come to him for advice have significantly more mental health symptoms than the average single mother. N6 also said that there is evidence of mother to child abuse, father to mother

abuse, and child to mother abuse. Single mothers also have weak social support, so this is the biggest challenge, and they spoke of the need for purposeful connections, community links, counsellors and social support to ensure that children are not isolated.

N3 and N6 discussed the poor ideological and social support system in Japan for single mothers. The lack of a socialised childcare system places the entire responsibility for childcare on single mothers, which places a heavy burden on them. On the other hand, in countries with good social support systems for childcare, such as in Scandinavia, single mothers are reported to have better mental health (Heisig, 2011). As N6 mentioned, the stigma of single mothers in Japanese society leads to social discrimination and reduced access to necessary support services further complicating these challenges.

To address these issues, it is crucial to improve social support systems for single mothers. This includes providing more accessible childcare services, building community support networks and ensuring mental health services are tailored to single mothers' needs. Research has shown that strengthening community ties and building support networks can significantly alleviate the stress and isolation felt by single mothers (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002).

N1 states that single mothers are forced by circumstances to sacrifice their own time; N2 further asserts that single mothers have little time to talk to their children or watch them study at home because they have to work after sending their children to school. They state that the main problem is that they are so busy with work and housework to earn a living that they do not have time to raise their children appropriately.

Findings from this thesis also suggest that many single mothers are isolated or mentally ill in difficult circumstances and this impacts on their children's learning and mental health. N1 said that single mothers feel that they cannot talk to anyone about their difficulties and have to face them alone, which is not good for the mental health of single mothers or ultimately for their children.

There are so many people who have no one to talk to about their family difficulties. When asked if there was anyone they could talk to about childcare or child problems, N2 said that parents and friends were the most common answers, with 25% saying that there was really no one. N2 also states that in relation to the results of a recent Single Mothers' Health Questionnaire, run by the NPO for which N2 works, 47% of respondents reported being really unwell, 40% felt as if they were always that way and as if nothing would ever get better, and only around 6% had no problems at all. These findings indicate a severe mental health crisis among single mothers, which is supported by broader research on the mental health impacts of economic and social pressures on single parents (JILPT, 2018).

N1 noted that single mothers often feel isolated and unable to talk to anyone about their difficulties. N2 provided data indicating that 25% of single mothers reported having no one to talk to about childcare or family problems, and a significant proportion experienced severe mental health issues. This isolation and lack of support exacerbates their stress and mental health problems, which have been documented in the literature (see Cairney et al., 2003).

The stress and mental health issues faced by single mothers inevitably impact their children's learning and development. N1 and N2 noted that the lack of parental engagement due to time constraints and mental health issues affects children's

academic performance and social well-being. Studies have shown that children of single parents often face academic and social challenges, exacerbated by the parent's mental health struggles (Kato, 2015).

The inability of single mothers to spend quality time with their children due to work commitments is a pervasive issue. As N1 and N2 noted, single mothers often find it difficult to communicate with their children, leading to a breakdown in the parent-child relationship. This communication gap can leave children feeling neglected and unsupported, further contributing to their emotional distress (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020).

N6 believes that many children can do positively if they have someone they can trust or if they have a cooperative relationship. Without them, it would be a hard and difficult situation. There is also social discrimination; N6 has data on single mothers with mental health problems, with more than half of them having mental health problems and almost as many or more single mothers. Many single mothers who come to them say they have significantly more mental health conditions than the average mother. They work until they are breaking down and are generally unable to support their children. N6 asserts that single-parent mothers also have hard lives, and this is the biggest challenge, as social support is weak. The need for social support is not just about purposeful connections, as they also need links with the community and counsellors. N6 also stated that it is important that children are not isolated, and he emphasized the importance of social support, community connections, and counselling to help single mothers manage their responsibilities and improve their mental health. The literature supports this need, highlighting that robust social support systems are crucial for the well-being of single mothers and their children (see UN Women, 2020).

The adverse effects of single mothers' mental health issues and isolation extend to their children. N6 noted that children of single mothers are often affected academically and socially due to the stressful environment at home. Research indicates that children in single-parent households are more likely to experience academic difficulties and social isolation, partly due to the parent's mental health struggles and lack of support (Kato, 2015).

N6 also mentioned that single mothers who seek advice often exhibit significant mental health symptoms, sometimes leading to abusive situations. This underscores the urgent need for mental health support and community connections to prevent such outcomes. The OECD report on gender equality in Japan discusses the correlation between economic hardship, stress, and domestic abuse, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support systems (OECD, 2017).

From the findings of this thesis, it can be implied that there are many single mothers who are raising their children with emotional as well as time-related difficulties, and that there are situations where lone parenting isolates parents and children from society, which in turn affects the academic performance of the children.

The need for robust social support systems is a recurring theme. N6 stressed the importance of community links, counsellors, and social support to ensure that single mothers and their children do not remain isolated. This sentiment is echoed in international studies, such as those by UN Women, which highlight the critical role of social support in improving the mental health and overall well-being of single mothers (UN Women, 2020).

Sachiko stated: The biggest problem was the children's mental health, because they had to live apart from their father because of their parents' selfishness, even though

it wasn't their fault. She then stated that the children would have followed her without knowing anything about what was going on, that it would have been a huge emotional burden and that even if they had wanted to discuss things with her, she would not have been able to because she was at work and the timing and location would not have been right. Sachiko, who had to leave her home as a result of the divorce, was stressed by the fact that her sons were far away from school and could not play with their friends. She described the pain she felt when her younger son asked her to play with him in a life where she no longer had time to spend with her children and said that she was conflicted about what to do because she had to go to work and could not make time for her children. Reflecting on the situation at the time when she could not communicate with her children, she spoke of the need for support to do so. She also said that she had communication problems and realised that parenting was not something she could do alone. She stated that she had to make time to spend with her children and live with them but wished there had been a mechanism for someone else to make that time for her.

Sachiko's experience underscores the additional stress caused by geographical relocation post-divorce. Moving away from a familiar environment disrupts children's social lives, making it challenging for them to maintain friendships and engage in regular social activities. This isolation can further exacerbate feelings of loneliness and stress among children, negatively impacting their mental health and academic performance (Huurre et al., 2006).

Sachiko’s reflection on her need for better communication support highlights the importance of external assistance in facilitating effective parenting. Studies suggest that social support networks and community programmes can play a crucial role in

mitigating the challenges faced by single mothers, providing both emotional and practical assistance (Cairney et al., 2003).

The experiences shared by Sachiko and others point to a critical need for supportive mechanisms that can aid single mothers in managing their dual responsibilities of work and parenting. Programmes that provide childcare, community support, and mental health resources can significantly alleviate the burden on single mothers, enabling them to better support their children both emotionally and academically (UN Women, 2020; OECD, 2017).

With regard to the fact that single mothers tend to be isolated, Yoko said that because of her personality, she did not care much about her relationships with those around her, so she decided to live her life without giving much importance to networking through her children's friends for the sake of her children and herself. After answering that school time might be important, but that she felt she did not need to get involved because she did not think that connections with other parents and children would have a significant impact, she said that her mother was the only person who supported her, when asked about the support of her relatives.

Yoko’s experience illustrates how personal choices and personality traits can influence the degree of social isolation experienced by single mothers. Despite recognizing the potential importance of networking through her children’s friends, Yoko chose to focus on her immediate family support, primarily her mother. This decision reflects a broader trend where single mothers may prioritize close familial ties over broader social networks, potentially leading to feelings of isolation.

Noriko, whose son was in the third year of primary school when she found out he had ADHD, recalled her past struggles about his inability to study, and how she and

her son would cry every night as if they were fighting, and she kept telling him to do it, write, read, and they were both exhausted. She then wondered why her son couldn't do it and sometimes it took him until midnight to force himself to do it, but after a battle with him, she stopped making him do his homework. In some cases, like this, both mother and child become mentally exhausted.

Noriko's narrative about her struggles with her son's ADHD is a poignant example of the mental and emotional toll on both the mother and the child. The pressure to meet academic standards can lead to severe mental exhaustion, as seen in their nightly battles over homework. This situation highlights the need for better support systems for parents of children with special needs, emphasizing the emotional and psychological impact on the family unit. (OECD, 2014)

Noriko's shift from enforcing strict homework routines to focusing on her son's well-being underscores the difficult balance single mothers must strike between academic expectations and their children's mental health. This balance is crucial as excessive pressure can lead to significant stress for both mother and child, resulting in a negative feedback loop of frustration and exhaustion.

The findings also revealed that children without siblings tend to feel more alone as a result of divorce. Mika, an only daughter, said that when she was little, her parents did not come to class visits and other events, which made her feel lonely unlike other children. She responded that she had the feeling in her childhood that her mother could not come to events while all her other friends' parents would come.

The feelings of loneliness reported by Mika, who felt left out during school events due to the absence of her parents, underlines a significant emotional challenge faced

by children of single mothers. The lack of parental presence at key events can lead to feelings of isolation and neglect, impacting the child's emotional well-being.

As an only child with a sick mother, Mihoko was sent to live with her grandparents from an early age, but she has no memory of those days because her parents divorced when she was three. She lived with her grandmother all her early childhood because her mother worked, but after her mother became ill and could no longer work, she started living with her mother from around the first or second year of junior high school when her mother became ill and could no longer work. She revealed that when she lived with her grandparents, she rarely saw her mother and only went to her mother's house on weekends and ate dinner with her mother at night as her mother was often tired and was sleeping all the time.

Mihoko’s experience of being sent to live with her grandparents due to her mother's illness and work commitments illustrates the disruption and emotional distress that can result from divorce. The lack of consistent contact with her mother likely contributed to feelings of abandonment and instability.

The findings of this thesis revealed that children, like Ichiro experience societal prejudice, which can lead to personality changes and emotional stress. The stigma associated with being from a single-parent household can affect their self-esteem and social interactions.

One of the significant challenges faced by children of single mothers is the emotional burden stemming from the absence of their fathers. This separation, often viewed as a consequence of parental decisions, can lead to feelings of abandonment and stress in children. Research indicates that children in single-parent households, particularly those led by single mothers, are more susceptible to mental health

issues, including depression and anxiety, due to the absence of a father figure and the resulting emotional and financial strain (Amato, 2000; Lansford, 2009).

The interviews revealed that raising children in the difficult environment of single mothers due to divorce is emotionally challenging for the mothers, but the children also experience a lot of stress due to the change in environment. In particular, it was found that the prejudice from society has led to changes in their personalities and their eldest son feeling he must behave like a father figure to his siblings. It was also found that there was a sense of loneliness among the children.

7.5 Impact on academic performance related to economic problems

All NPO representatives acknowledged that there is an impact of economic disparities in education on children.

N6 also notes that economic issues affect higher education. Higher education and university fees are a significant personal burden, and as many mothers and children are not financially well-off, they are certain that the cost of tuition fees will affect their higher education and limit their educational opportunities. Also, looking at dependent families, the lower their income, the more difficult it is for them to go to good schools. There were graphs in N6's data household showing clear differences in children's performance according to income. They realise that the schools they attend are different depending on their income.

N1 is a representative of a national NPO that supports poor families in their learning and N5 is a representative of a local city that supports poor families in their learning, both describing the impact of poverty on learning. Of particular interest is that they state that poverty has a significant impact on children's experiences of out-of-school activities, which in turn affects their academic performance.

N3 also points out that, particularly in Japan these days, education has gone beyond the level of just going to school and has become a set of extra-curricular activities and schooling. In this context, he states that single-parent families are at a great disadvantage and that the lack of out-of-school education puts poor families at a disadvantage. N4 states that in Japan, education costs have become the norm, but lack of learning is a major problem. He states that in the past, there was an atmosphere in which students did not have to study once they left primary school, but the situation is changing, particularly in urban areas.

N1 says that economic disparity is a disparity in education, the quality of out-of-school education and experiential activities, which ultimately has a considerable impact on children's future development and educational attainment. N6 says that not only higher education but also out-of-school education such as lessons, sports, music, community gatherings, clubs and activities inside school form part of the disparity. They say that there is an impact, and a lack of experience that children from more privileged families benefit from.

As well as the impact of out-of-school activities, the interview data revealed the poor learning environment in families where single mothers are often from very low-income families. About half of them (48.5%) are in relative poverty, and if parental income is linked to children's performance in Japan, where educational inequality is high, this means that basic academic skills are low to begin with. School performance may also be low. They may not be able to go to cram school or receive paid services.

According to N1, children from single-mother families are often physically injured due to poor conditions, and by the time they reach the third year of junior high school or

high school, they may not be able to get an education for further education or employment, cannot work properly or have their own illnesses. In cases where the children are young carers or their mothers have a mental illness, the children also say that they do not know how to talk to their mother or that they do not know what to do because their mother always seems to be unwell.

N6 described the problem as a social structure where parents are in charge of too large an area and their manpower is halved. If there is a social service, it is to cover areas where parents cannot reach including young carers. He further spoke of a lack of social support.

The psychological damage that economic disadvantage is inflicting on children was described as follows. Yuichi stated that his mother refused financial support from his father and that she had raised the children as a single woman, working from morning till midnight for a low hourly wage. She stated that life was difficult and that they experienced very cold winters, with no toilet flushing or air-conditioning in winter to save money, and that such conditions lasted for about four or five years, from the age of 10 to about 15.

Mihoko also stated that when she grew up being abused by her grandparents, her mother did not intervene because she did not want to get involved, as she had also been abused by her parents. When asked if her school and schoolteachers knew about her upbringing in such an environment and everything that happened to her, she said she did not think they knew, and when asked if she had told her friends, she said that this interview was the first time she had told anyone other than her mother. Mihoko spoke candidly about the negative cycle of childhood abuse and her past growing up without being able to tell anyone.

Having gained work experience and an understanding of the Japanese social system, Ken said that Japan has always been characterised by men working and women taking care of the home. With mothers taking on these two roles, they spend less and less time together. He also stated that the various incidents involving mothers and their children that have been making headlines in the public eye are ultimately due to a lack of communication with parents, which is the root cause, and that the main reason is that mothers and children are spending less time together. She responded that she sometimes felt lonely because her mother was very busy.

Yuichi's interview shows that he was forced to live a difficult life due to poverty and fear for his personal safety being at home alone with his brother. Mihoko's interview also revealed that she had suffered financial, emotional and physical abuse from her grandparents, indicating that poverty tends to threaten children's safety. Ken's interviews showed that poverty among single mothers can affect children's mental health, not only in terms of safety issues such as staying at home alone, but also in terms of their inability to communicate well with their parents.

7.6 Family Educational Capital

Analysing the interviews in terms of parental cultural capital and economic capital, the findings suggest that there are few parents who are single mothers and have a four-year university degree. N1 stated that there are high school graduates, but very few so-called four-year university graduates, and that some of them have no further education or employment, cannot work properly or cannot work due to ill health.

N1's statement that few single mothers have a four-year university degree indicates the low level of institutionalised cultural capital. Single mothers with a high school degree suggest limited access to higher education, which correlates with Bourdieu's

idea that cultural capital is often inherited and reinforced through the family and social environment.

N5 also looked at the households she supports and said that whatever poverty single mothers are living in now, it is always linked to their children. She said that poverty is a cycle and it's not all about how parents work, their standard of living, how they go to school, but a really large proportion of children have low education and low income and are unable to reach their potential just because their parent and grandparents before them were poor themselves.

N5 suggested that there is a link between parents' poverty and children's futures which highlights the trans-generational transmission of cultural capital. Single mothers' low education and low income are likely to have similar consequences for their children, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and unachieved potential.

N3 says that in his experience as a teacher for many years, children from disadvantaged backgrounds have little cultural capital in terms of communication skills. They do not have much linguistic ability. The system created by human society is designed to bridge the gap between children in poverty and those born with social capital, such as schools and nurseries. The findings suggest that this system is no longer functioning adequately and the most common reason for dropping out of school is low academic performance. Another reason is lack of communication skills to engage with others. In other words, linguistic eloquence. They have very low communication skills in everyday speech and routine communication. And the low communicative competence of children means that when relationships break down, they do not have the language to repair them. They also state that they lack the ability to repair them.

The lack of communication skills and limited language skills among children from disadvantaged backgrounds reflects a lack of embodied cultural capital. Bourdieu suggests that these skills are generally acquired through family and childhood socialisation, and that single mothers may struggle to provide these skills due to their own lack of cultural capital and the pressures of economic hardship.

Interviews with the adult children show that academic performance is not only influenced by the child's academic ability, but also by the environment surrounding the child. In Jiro's case, he said that his club coach was like a mentor and father figure to him. He also said that meeting his teachers and mentors whom he respected greatly helped him to grow up. Yuichi also liked club activities and entered the university of his choice with a sports recommendation.

Ken, who also had delinquent tendencies during his school years, was asked if he had any negative feelings about being brought up by a single mother, and his reasons were that even though his mother was in financial difficulties, there were people around him whom he admired, amazing people and so-called successful people, and he wanted to follow their path, and that although his mother was single he was influenced positively by seeing his mother working well.

Mihoko, who achieved her goal of entering medical school despite having a past where both her mother and herself were abused, stated that her mother grew up in a similar environment and was a troubled child, but that she was very determined to break the negative cycle and had opportunities to get help from her mother. She also said that her mother kept telling her that the only way out of this was to study, which was a major reason why she wanted to become a doctor or lawyer Her mother also realised that women had to learn too and taught her this lesson.

In Japan, women are usually married and stay at home while their husbands work, but having an education, a career and a job in hand, as Mihoko did, means being an independent woman. When asked what she thought about Japan being said to be behind other countries in this area, she replied that her own mother had to work to raise her daughter alone after her divorce. Being a woman, it was very difficult to find stable work. She said she had to work full time and even though she worked until her body broke down, the pay was still low, and went on to say that she thinks the current situation in Japan surrounding single mothers has not changed since she was a child. She also mentioned that she was able to go to medical school largely because she found a good mentor through the support of NPOs.

As Mihoko's experience shows, despite her difficult upbringing and economic hardship, her story demonstrates the potential for cultural capital to be transformed into economic capital. Her mother's commitment to education as a means of escaping poverty reflects her understanding of this transformation. Mihoko's achievement in gaining access to medical school with the support of mentors and non-profit organisations, and Yuichi, Jiro and Ken's experiences, show how external support systems can strengthen cultural capital, even under unfavourable conditions.

Through these interviews, it became clear that even economically disadvantaged children from single-mother families can find a means of breaking the negative cycle, depending on the involvement of supportive adults.

Cultural capital is an important but often elusive concept when studying the reproduction of educational processes and social hierarchies. One reason for this is that a country's education system and the ways in which students are assessed in different educational transitions set the context for the mechanisms through which

embodied and objectified cultural capital operate (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015). Bourdieu depicted school as a place where symbolic violence is legitimately exercised. Education contributes to the transformation of class-based distinctions between pupils into a universally accepted logic of domination. Contrary to this, it is assumed among Japanese researchers that schools are devices for 'teaching' habitus, rather than for pupils to 'acquire' it. In other words, cultural capital is understood to mean human capital in cultural skills (Sanada, 2016). Reliance on shadow education provided in the private extracurricular education market is also common in other East Asian countries such as Taiwan and South Korea. In these settings, the additional effects of cultural capital on educational attainment and academic performance can be isolated, as many parents invest directly in extracurricular activities that strengthen human capital (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015). The type of parental investment that effectively contributes to children's academic achievement is likely to vary according to the cultural conditions and educational system of a country. A number of studies outside France have shown that cultural capital other than 'high culture' is associated with pupils' academic achievement (Buchmann 2002; De Graaf et al. 2000; DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002; Kariya et al.) This suggests that the educational environment suggests the importance of taking into account how it is structured. Cultural capital developed early in life may enhance the human capital of adolescents (Cummings 1980; James and Benjamin 1988).

Japanese students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to and engage in literary, artistic and musical activities at home than their lower status peers (Fujita et al. 1987; Miyajima and Fujita 1991; Miyajima and Tanaka 1983), which has consistently been found to be positively correlated with students' academic motivation and academic performance (Kariya et al. 2002;

Kataoka 1998; Miyajima and Tanaka 1983). Students who succeed in entering academically competitive high schools are far more likely to go on to highly ranked universities than those who fail (Kariya and Rosenbaum 1987; Nakanishi 2000; Rohlen 1983; Shimizu and Tokuda 1991). Defining 'shadow education', which includes after-school classes ('juku'), tutoring and correspondence courses, as 'educational activities outside formal schooling designed to increase students' chances of success in their career choices', shadow education is an important component of the Japanese educational environment.

There are reasons to believe that objectified cultural capital interacts with gender in the transition to higher education, one of the most important educational transitions in Japan. The percentage of women entering higher education rose from 18% to 48% between 1970 and 2003, bringing them on a par with men. However, higher education remains highly gender-disaggregated, with about one-third of female university students going on to two-year universities, compared to only 4% of male students. Women's higher education institutions, especially junior colleges, were originally established to target affluent families and to increase the cultural capital of young women. (Brinton & Yamamoto, 2015).

It is also important to note that, at least in Japan, the impact of cultural capital on academic performance is not as significant as the impact of parents' socio-economic status and students' academic performance.

Bourdieu states that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, in particular the ability to understand and use the language of education. Although the possession of cultural capital varies according to social class, the education system is based on the possession of cultural capital. This makes it very

difficult for students from lower classes to succeed in the education system (Sullivan, 2002).

Cultural capital is transmitted primarily through the family. Children acquire from their families a way of thinking, a type of temperament, a set of meanings and a quality of style. They are then given specific social values and status according to what the ruling class considers to be the most valuable cultural capital (Giroux, 1983). Essential to cultural capital, therefore, is the possibility of complex analysis of its interaction with the family environment, the schooling process and the child's educational career (Reay, 2004). The key to cultural capital is that children acquire vocabulary, modes of expression, ideas, information and forms of argumentation by listening to their parents (Sullivan, 2007). Education is an important mechanism of social reproduction, linking class origins and destinations.

In terms of cultural capital transmission, it is clear, that poor single mother families who are too busy to communicate with their children, as N3 also mentioned, are prone to communicative deficits and are at a disadvantage in terms of being able to afford shadow education such as cramming (Sullivan,2007).

7.7 Academic performance

In terms of the impact of economic handicaps on the children's academic performance, it is interesting to note that seven out of ten of the adult children interviewed said that it had no impact, whereas Ichiro, Yuichi and Mihoko, all of whom were in a difficult economic environment, went on to good universities.

What Ichiro and Mihoko in particular have in common is that they used their harsh environment as a springboard and devoted themselves to their studies in a spirit of overcoming. Their economic disadvantage affected their academic performance in terms of cram school fees and out-of-school education, but some of them did not improve their grades even after going to cram school.

The biggest factor was their motivation to study. In particular, the fact that Ichiro and Mihoko worked hard to make themselves recognised by those around them and went on to good universities was partly due to the fact that they put more effort into their studies because they did not have fulfilling friendships. In the case of Mika, who stopped attending school due to her father's absence and conflicts with male teachers of the same age, and Toru, who gave up on his studies because he did not have a good relationship with his mother, we can see cases where the absence of the father affected their academic performance.

7.8 Assistance needed to solve the problems

Representatives of various non-profit organisations have their own areas of expertise and many plans to support single mothers and their children. As they are not government agencies, they have some flexibility, but some representatives felt that this was a dilemma that could not be solved fundamentally.

N1 highlights the necessity for seamless support beginning from the age of six, emphasizing that NPOs alone cannot provide the early support required. Therefore, it is essential to create local networks through public-private partnerships and referrals from schools and government agencies. This collaboration aims to establish a network of adults who can receive and act on referrals and introductions.

N2 uses her perspective as a female NPO representative to provide not only learning support but also experiential activities. She notes that single mothers often miss out on opportunities due to a lack of information, as they are preoccupied with work and daily life. By providing necessary information, including government financial support, N2 aims to enhance their skills and future employment opportunities.

N6, a member of the Government's Isolation Support Policy Review Group, underscores the importance of government offices providing a range of schemes and welfare services. He advocates for creating a welcoming environment where vulnerable people can seek support without feeling uncomfortable. This approach aims to prevent isolation among children and ensure continuous support.

All the single mothers interviewed were keen to share their views on the support they need to raise their children as single mothers.

Akiko, a city councillor, calls for a wage system that allows part-time work and an environment fostering understanding. Yoko, an NPO director, stresses the need for a society where women can work with peace of mind and earn as much as men. Sachiko, working multiple jobs, desires state support, including qualification assistance. Masako and Keiko highlight the need for easier access to childcare and local government support systems, such as free medical care and children's cafeterias. Noriko and Yumiko emphasize the importance of extended childcare

hours and accessible support points for single mothers. Michiko calls for an environment where it is easier for single mothers to live.

Jun and Ken discuss the importance of parental presence and supportive community members. Ichiro, Jiro, and Yuichi highlight the need for non-discriminatory support from schools and local authorities. Ayaka and Mihoko address workplace discrimination and the necessity of financial support.

The thesis findings illustrate the multifaceted challenges faced by single mothers and their children. The recurring themes include the need for comprehensive, seamless support, improved access to information and resources, and systemic changes in the workplace and education system to accommodate and empower single-parent families.

After completing the interviews with adult children, many felt that there was a discrepancy between their perceptions and those of their parents. It was also interesting to note that different adult children had different perceptions of the support they needed. The necessary support identified from the above interviews was the presence of an adult other than the mother with whom they could communicate. The presence of a male substitute for the father was particularly significant. In addition, the government's scholarship system has been reviewed and support such as reduced interest rates on scholarships for single-mother families is needed. In addition, the reality that children are discriminated against for being from single mothers and children’s households should be pointed out and eliminated. Improvements to the environment in which it is difficult to gain the understanding of workplaces when trying to get married and continue working in rural areas were also

mentioned. In particular, some participants stressed the need for statutory financial support.

The research in this thesis identified specific areas where support for single mothers could be strengthened. Unlike previous studies, it emphasizes the importance of local networks, public-private partnerships, and the need for institutional reforms to create an inclusive environment for single mothers and their children. There is also a sense of the need to change the ‘personal responsibility’ concept often heard among Japanese people from the interviews to ‘enhancing social networks. Future policies should focus on these areas in order to effectively address disparities and improve the quality of life for single-parent families.

The following chapter will discuss the conclusions of this research.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The research in this thesis sought to explore the issue of whether the economic disadvantage experienced by Japanese single-mother families affects the educational outcomes of their children. To this end it, analysed interviews with representatives of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) that support single-mother families living in poverty, single-mothers and their adult children.

Two important findings emerged from the interviews. One revealed the factors that put single-mothers at an economic disadvantage, and the second, which did not relate to the a priori research question, was the damage caused to emotional health development and wellbeing through the stigma caused by being children of divorce to the adult children during their childhood and beyond.

This chapter is divided into the following six sections. Section 1: Introduction; Section 2: Overview of the situation in Japan and the rationale for the research questions. Section 3 Main conclusions on the research questions. Section 4: Limitations of the research Section 5: Implications of this research for policy and practice and its contribution to the field Section 6: Reflections.

8.2 Overview of the Japanese context and the rationale behind the research questions

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, in 2021, Japan was ranked third globally in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it also had the second-highest poverty rate among OECD G7 countries, following the USA (OECD, 2020). According to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2019), around 50% of single-parent households are in poverty, with 90% of these being single-mother

families. Therefore, this thesis had its focus on child poverty in Japan, particularly examining how economic hardships impact the education and career paths of children from single-mother households. Using qualitative methods, it explored the multifaceted effects of poverty on both mothers and their children, delving into the factors and processes that contribute to poor educational outcomes for the children of these families.

Japan's social and economic structures are often perceived as having lower poverty rates compared to other nations, which has led to a lack of in-depth research on maternal poverty (Fujiwara, 2018). Despite this perception, single-mother families face significant challenges, with limited qualitative studies analysing the direct impact of maternal poverty on children's education through interviews with the NPOs supporting these families. This is a gap that the current research aimed to address.

After Japan's 2020 education reform, children from wealthier families gained increased access to private education, further widening the gap between them and children from less financially stable households. This situation reflects Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), where social advantages are passed from parents to children, perpetuating educational and economic inequalities. Rising divorce rates and the impoverishment of single mothers and their children offer a bleak outlook for future generations. Therefore, the primary aim of this research was to highlight the plight of these families. It did this by interviewing single mothers and their children and those organisations that support them to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and to provide recommendations of how Japanese society and statutory government could support them moving forward to have equal education and employment rights and opportunities to two parent households.

Through interviews with NPO representatives and single mothers and their adult children, this research has examined the root causes of single-mother household poverty and its educational repercussions. It identifies what measures are needed to break this cycle and provide insights that can inform national policy and practice to address these disparities and presents them in this final chapter.

8.3 Main Conclusions in relation to the research questions

Drawing on analysis of the interviews with NPO representatives presented in Chapter 4, the analysis of the interviews with single-mothers in Chapter 5 and analysis of the interviews with adult children in Chapter 6, there were two salient findings that emerged. The first was the economic disadvantage surrounding single-mothers and its causes; the second was the stigma of divorce and its ongoing impact on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the adult children of single mother families.

With regard to the economic disadvantage surrounding single-mothers, the following emerged as contributing factors: government support, scholarships, government policies to solve the problems, prejudice against women and job opportunities after divorce. In addition, the mental health issues faced by adult children included the stigma and feelings of being under the public eye (negative scrutiny of society) associated with parental divorce, and the child's feeling of responsibility (eldest son's position, safeguarding). The thesis findings also revealed: mental health issues for both mothers and children, the link between academic performance related to economic problems, (lack of) cultural capital, and academic performance all of which emerged from the interview data.

8.3.1 Economic disadvantage

8.3.1.1 Government support

One of the principal causes of poverty among single-mothers in Japan is that few single-mothers receive the child support they are entitled to receive from their ex-husbands after divorce.

There are multiple reasons for single-mothers not accepting the system. They include not knowing about the system and not making arrangements; knowing about the system but not making arrangements because they want to cut ties with their ex-husband; and making arrangements but not abiding by them. Cases of ignorance of the system are said to be related to the single-mother's educational background. There are fewer problems when single-mothers have a four-year university degree, but the proportion of junior college and high school graduates is increasing. There is a concern that cases in which the mothers want to disengage from their ex-husbands may be cases in which they receive child support payments and visitation rights with their children, thus giving them the right to ‘interfere’ in the home even after the ex-husband has left the family. In fact, two of the single-mothers interviewed in this research were also single-mothers who had not made child support arrangements for this reason. ‘Joint custody', (including the resolution of non-payment of child support and visitation rights with the child), has recently become law in Japan. In reality, however, there has been much opposition to this law.

The Japanese organisation ‘Citizens Against Joint Custody after Divorce (2021)’ stated the reasons for this as follows; joint custody after divorce is not about putting 'children first'. From the Japanese perspective, the traditional joint custody system adopted in other countries was introduced based on the idea that the division of custody and care between parents should be equal. However, as a result, it became

clear that children's wishes and rights were not respected and that victims of domestic violence and their children continued to suffer and be exposed to violence, abuse and parental conflict even after divorce. Other countries are currently revising and reviewing their family laws and domestic violence prevention laws to ensure that the interests of the child are given top priority. Legislation based on wrong perceptions and information is problematic and the mistakes of other countries should not be repeated in Japan. Thus, it must be borne in mind that the government's policy of improving child support entitlements also involves various problems in view of the current situation in Japan.

As mentioned above, ‘government support’ is not as simple as it might seem, and it is not just the government's responsibility. It is also related to aspects of Japan's culture in relation to *personal responsibility(自己責任)*. In addition, in a world where government policy is affected by frequent changes in government, the people cannot rely solely on the government. In this kind of situation, it is necessary to consider the problem from a variety of perspectives.

8.3.1.2. Accessibility of Scholarships for University Education

As the results of interviews with mothers and adult children of single-mother families show, improvements are needed in the following areas. Firstly, when children from single-mother families receive scholarships, it is necessary to check the type of scholarship and its repayment conditions, and to establish a reasonable repayment plan that takes into account the child's employment situation and income prospects after graduation. Special assistance should be made available for children from single-mother families to reduce the burden of repayment, so it is necessary to check these schemes and use them if necessary. Although repayment-based scholarships

are currently the norm, benefit-based scholarships need to be expanded so that children of single-mother families can focus on their studies with peace of mind. It is important that the national government and universities increase the budgets of the national government and universities for benefit-based scholarships and to make the scholarship system more accessible to families in financial difficulty. For repayment-based scholarships, setting repayment amounts according to income or introducing a system of deferring repayment in the event of unemployment or low income would reduce the financial burden and make it easier for single-mother families to be relieved of the pressure to repay scholarships. Lack of information on the range of scholarship schemes available is another problem. Information and consultation services for single-mother families need to be strengthened so that they can receive appropriate advice on how to use scholarships and repayment plans and make the right choice.

8.3.1.3 Government policies needed to solve the problem

It is a fact that tax redistribution policies in Japan have not been effective, as stated by many NPO representatives. One of the reasons why tax redistribution has not been fully effective is that redistribution is too holistic and lacks direct support for the poor. Increased targeted support to specific groups facing poverty (e.g. single mothers and children, informal workers, the elderly) could improve poverty rates.

With regard to the Department for Children and Families (CFA), improvements are needed in the following areas. First, a clear and workable policy framework is needed to address what are often described as superficial reforms. Second, it is important that the ministries of education, health and welfare work together under the authority of the CFA, rather than the CFA alone. Finally, transparency and clear

rationale for policy decisions and organisational changes need to be clearly articulated and communicated to the public in order to maintain public trust.

In order to improve the excessive reliance on NPOs and other private organisations in poverty assistance, it is necessary to: firstly, increase the state budget allocated to direct assistance to the poor and establish a stable and sustainable support system; secondly, strengthen the functions of public institutions that directly provide necessary welfare services, such as public assistance, housing assistance and medical assistance; and thirdly, strengthen cooperation with the public administration, as NPOs and private organisations have knowledge and experience in this field and can provide more effective support. Cooperation with the public administration can also reduce the burden that NPOs have to carry alone, improve the quality and scope of support, and the administration can support NPOs and private organisations in the field of welfare. Public administration and NPOs can work together to manage projects, with the public administration providing funding and institutional design and NPOs providing field support, developing joint programmes on poverty reduction, and facilitating resource sharing and information exchange. For NPOs to provide stable poverty assistance, sustainable funding methods are necessary, and in terms of NPOs long-term survival, government support for NPO fundraising is fundamental. It is therefore, necessary, to expand the grant system for NPOs working to support poverty, provide stable funding, strengthen tax incentives for donations to NPOs and increase incentives for donors; strengthen institutional support and make support more comprehensive, rather than relying solely on NPOs and private organisations to just provide support to fill the gaps in statutory provision. To be more inclusive it is necessary to review the current social security system to ensure that the poor receive support without omissions. It is

also important to strengthen employment policies for informal workers and low-income groups to ensure stable employment and income. It is also effective for local authorities and local communities to take the lead in providing poverty support. Strengthening support at the local level can help ensure that the poor receive assistance closer to home. Local communities can work together to build networks and provide assistance to the poor and develop support programmes that are tailored to local needs and in which local people can actively participate.

In order to improve the situation of single mothers and their children, it is important to promote empowerment, rather than simply providing financial support（see chapter 2 section 2.2.7）. We should aim to create a society in which single mothers can become independent and expand the future possibilities of their children through vocational training, educational support, community building, the use of digital technology, and social awareness reform. This will help to break the cycle of poverty and make it possible to achieve a more equitable and sustainable society.

While government policies and support for NPOs are crucial, as the NPO participants disclosed (see chapter 7 section 7.2.3), it is also important to foster a more positive way of thinking and working which can lead to independence through the empowerment both of young people and single mothers.

8.3.1.4 Recommendations to reduce prejudice against women and increase employment opportunities after divorce

The following measures can be taken to improve discrimination against women in Japan, including the prevalent lack of consideration for single mothers seeking employment

a) Promoting gender equality in the workplace

In order to fundamentally eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace, it is necessary to promote gender equality within companies and organisations. This could include; eliminating gender bias in recruitment and ensuring that employees are assessed on the basis of their competence and experience. Strengthening legislation and regulations to reduce the pay gap between men and women and to achieve equal pay for equal work. Introduce an education programme on gender equality for all employees to eliminate unconscious bias.

In fact, some companies have started to tackle the issue of equal pay for equal work, such as Ito-Yokado (wholesale and retail) and the Senshu Ikeda Bank (finance) (Gig work university, 2021).

b) Enhance career support programmes for women.

Career support programmes need to be enhanced to help single mothers become financially independent. Provision of vocational training and up-skilling programmes to help women find well-paid, stable jobs is necessary. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen career development and mentoring programmes within companies so that women can be promoted to managerial and leadership positions. It is important to provide a flexible working environment so that single mothers can balance work and child rearing. Establish more hybrid working and offer a flexitime environment that allows single mothers to work while fulfilling their family responsibilities, with flexible working hours and work locations. Additionally, the child and family care leave system need to be strengthened in order to foster a workplace culture that facilitates the use of the system. Legal and policy support by the government needs to be strengthened to lay the groundwork for preventing discrimination against

women. Statutory bodies need to ensure that companies do not discriminate against women through strict application of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. Introduction of a system that requires companies to report regularly on their implementation of gender equality and conducting audits based on this would make the system more robust. It is also important to highlight the importance of gender equality through education and the media in order to change perceptions throughout society. Additionally, the concept of gender equality should be introduced from the earliest stages of schooling in order to reduce prejudice in the future workplace. Governments and non-profit organisations should work together to develop media campaigns to raise awareness of gender equality.

8.3.1.5 Recommendations to support employment of single-mothers

In order to solve the systemic contradiction of single-mothers wanting their children to enter nursery school in order to work, but not being able to do so because they are not working, the following could be considered;

Link employment support programmes provided by national and local authorities with nursery admissions, so that single mothers can use nurseries while they are looking for work. Amend the system to allow admission to childcare centres if the mother can prove that she is looking for work. This would allow them to leave their children with a childcare worker while they are not working and concentrate on their job search. Priority for admission to child care centres would be given to those participating in vocational training and skills development programmes. The current conditions for admission to childcare centres should be relaxed so that single mothers can be admitted even if they are not working, thereby eliminating inconsistencies in the system. Ensure that the ‘proof of employment’ required for admission to childcare centres is flexible enough to allow for cases where future employment is expected

(e.g. where a job offer has been made). Review the criteria for using local childcare centres and introduce a system design that facilitates access to childcare services for single mothers and their children. Furthermore, provision of more flexible childcare services in addition to conventional childcare centres would create an environment that encourages single mothers to work. Enhancement of childcare services for mothers who work shorter hours or part-time would further strengthen the childcare offer to these families It is also important to promote regional cooperation and strengthen temporary childcare and community support for single mothers who cannot get into childcare centres. It is also essential to review policies and legislation on childcare centres and legally resolve the systemic contradictions faced by single mothers. Provisions requiring ‘employment’ as a condition for admission to childcare centres should be reviewed and flexible criteria should be established. In addition, a childcare support system specifically for single mothers should be introduced so that single mothers can receive support regardless of whether they are employed or not; a new childcare model should be created in collaboration with NPOs and companies to create an environment where single mothers can leave their children with peace of mind during the preparation period for employment. For example, in cooperation with childcare facilities run by NPOs, childcare services combining flexible childcare hours and employment support will be provided, along with the expansion of on-site childcare facilities made available to single mothers living in the neighbourhood.

By implementing these measures, the systemic contradiction of single-mothers not being able to use childcare centres because they do not work can be resolved and an environment can be created where more women can become economically independent.

In response to this, one of the NPO participants interviewed said that they were not doing this at the moment, and that while it would be good if the NPOs could provide support for non-working mothers leaving children at nursery school to enable them to seek work, the issue is how to generate the funds for the administration and expertise needed to do this.

8.3.2 Stigma and its impact on mental health

8.3.2.1 Recommendations to reduce divorce stigma and its impact on adult children's mental health

A new finding in the current research, which was not hypothesised a priori, was the impact of divorce stigma on adult children and their mothers. Most parents and adult children interviewed in this research stated that the biggest problem they felt was the way others looked at them, and that this had changed their personality and friendships. This can negatively affect the social and economic capital of single mothers and their children.

Post-divorce stigma in Japan is attributed to traditional views of the family, a culture that places a high value on the eyes of others, lack of institutional support and social isolation. In other countries, particularly in Western countries where individualism is emphasised, social views on divorce differ and stigma is often less severe. Changing the attitudes of society as a whole and strengthening support systems will be crucial to solving this problem in Japan.

The stigma (social stigma) that divorce inflicts on mothers and children in Japanese society is a serious problem affecting the social and economic capital of parents and children. In order to address this, the following interventions could be made:

a) Improving social recognition.

In order to eliminate stigma, it is essential to change the perception of society as a whole. Awareness-raising activities are needed to spread the perception that divorce should not necessarily be regarded as a 'failure' or a 'shame', but rather as a choice based on individual circumstances. Through education in schools and communities, prejudice against divorce can be eliminated and a culture of understanding and empathy for the diversity and difficulties faced by divorcing families can be fostered. Through the media, it is important to introduce wider society to the real lives and positive aspects of divorced families and strive to break down negative stereotypes.

b) Building support networks for single-mother households.

It is important to strengthen support networks so that divorced mothers and children are not isolated. Counselling and support groups for divorced families should be expanded to provide emotional and psychological support. Also, provision of opportunities for interaction with others who have gone through the same experience would help reduce isolation. Work should be done with local volunteers and non-profit organisations to develop and deliver programmes to support divorcing families to avoid them becoming socially isolated.

c) Improve legislation and policy.

Legislative and policy support is needed to reduce stigma against divorcing families. Additionally, support policies (e.g. financial aid and housing assistance) should be improved to help divorcing families become financially and socially stable. This will reduce the economic insecurity caused by divorce and give the children a fair chance. Laws prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of divorce should be strengthened and severe penalties imposed on violators.

d) Review how schools deal with the education of children of single-mothers.

School policies within mandatory education settings need to be reviewed to ensure that children are not bullied or discriminated against because they are from divorced families. Anti-bullying measures in schools should be strengthened and discriminatory language and behaviour, especially towards children from divorced families, should be dealt with strictly. Introduction of material into the curriculum would ensure that all children have a proper understanding of divorce and are not prejudiced against it and those that are affected by it.

e) Improving the work environment for single-mothers.

Improving the work environment is also important to ensure that divorced mothers are not treated unfairly in the workplace. Promote flexible working arrangements to enable divorced mothers to balance work and family life. Equal employment opportunities should be legally guaranteed to ensure that divorced mothers are not treated unfavourably because of their changed marital status.

f) Strengthening public support.

Public support should be strengthened to alleviate the social and economic problems faced by divorced families. The government should provide single-mothers and divorced families with public housing and subsidies to ease their financial burden. Strengthening financial support for children's education would ensure that children of divorced families receive an adequate education.

Through these efforts, the stigma of divorce on mothers and their children would be considerably reduced, and an environment could be created in which mothers and children can lead socially just and stable lives.

8.3.2.2 Recommendations to limit the responsibility placed on children of single-mothers

The following measures can be taken to improve the tendency in divorced families for the eldest son to try to adopt the father's position and to safeguard against small children having accidents when they are left alone by their mother while she is working.

Pressure on the eldest son as a surrogate father can be an emotional burden for the child. Steps should be taken to reduce this burden. It is important that those supporting these families review the division of roles within the family and ensure that the eldest son is not given excessive responsibility. Instead support for the whole family should be emphasised, not just the mother, and cooperation promoted amongst siblings. Counselling and psychological support should be provided to the eldest son so that he is not overwhelmed by feelings of excessive responsibility. School and community counselling services could be used to help children express their feelings and distress appropriately.

It is important to strengthen safety measures to prevent accidents when mothers are away from home. Children under the age of 10 should not be left alone in the home even if the mother has to go out to work. Changes, as previously discussed in this chapter, to the access to child care will help but additionally it is important to build a system of cooperation in the community, such as asking for help from a trusted adult in the neighbourhood or creating an environment where it is easy to ask for help in an emergency. In addition, single mothers could make use of local ‘watchdog activities’ to support children's safety. For example, enforce basic safety rules such as not using dangerous items and not opening doors to strangers if and when children are alone. Strengthening of social support and policies governing this should

help reduce the challenges faced by divorcing families. Improvement and expansion of childcare services and strengthening the provision of temporary care so that single mothers can leave their children safely rather than with elderly grandparents while they are at work. This will reduce the risk of children being left home alone.

Schools and educational institutions should also strengthen their support for children of divorced families. Strengthening links with teachers and counsellors would ensure that children from divorced families receive the support they need at school. Teachers should be able to intervene early in situations where, for example, the eldest child feels compelled to take on the role of father to another sibling. Involvement of children in after-school programmes and club activities would provide them with a safe place to stay and reduce the risk of accidents while their mothers are away from home.

Such measures can reduce the emotional and physical risks that divorce poses to children and create an environment in which they can grow up healthy and safe and fulfil their potential.

8.3.2.3 Recommendations to support the mental health of single-mothers

The following measures should be taken to improve the current situation in Japan, where many single mothers are struggling with their mental health, and this has a negative impact on their children.

Improved mental health support is essential to reduce the mental health burden on mothers and children. Increasing the number of counselling services available in the community and online would make it easier for single mothers to access counselling. Telephone and online counselling services, which can be used anonymously, are particularly effective in providing support in privacy. Promoting education on mental

health so that single mothers have a proper understanding of their mental state and can deal with it at an early stage would be preventative and hopefully lead to a reduction of single mothers whose mental health breaks down. This could include organising workshops on stress coping and relaxation techniques. It is important to alleviate feelings of isolation and create an environment where single mothers can talk to someone, for example by providing a platform to facilitate interaction between single mothers in the community and online. In this way, they could connect with others in the same position and gain empathy and support. Local communities need to increase the number of activities and events in which single mothers can participate so that isolation can be prevented through interaction within their community. Financial support is also important, as financial insecurity often leads to emotional strain. Strengthening financial support for single mothers would stabilise their lives. This includes increasing child support allowances and strengthening housing support for single mothers. To help single mothers become financially independent, support is needed to help them secure stable employment by providing vocational training and re-employment assistance. It is also important to expand support services to ease the burden of childcare. Temporary childcare should be increased and made available for sudden errands or when a child is unwell, so that mothers and children can have time to refresh themselves as much as possible. To reduce the burden on single mothers who find it difficult to balance childcare and housework, make housework support services available at a low cost. Awareness-raising activities are important to eliminate social prejudice and misconceptions about single mothers and to create a safe environment for them. Conduct awareness-raising activities: campaigns through the media and educational institutions to deepen understanding of the current situation and challenges faced by

single mothers and their children. Strengthening support for single mothers and their children in schools and childcare facilities would create an environment where children can grow up without discrimination from their surroundings.

Through these measures, a social environment will be created in which single mothers and their children can, enjoy good mental health, grow up safely and flourish.

8.3.3. Reviewing the impact of economic problems on the academic performance of the children of single-mothers using Bourdieu's capital theory

An analysis of the impact of poverty on the academic performance of mothers and children based on the findings of this thesis using Bourdieu's theory suggests the following;

Firstly, there is a lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979/1986). Bourdieu states that cultural capital plays an important role in educational success (Bourdieu, 1979/1986). Maternal and child poverty is considered to be a factor that prevents children from accumulating the cultural capital they need. Economic constraints may limit children's access to books and educational materials and parental involvement in education, leading to lower educational attainment. Secondly, there is the constraint of economic capital. Bourdieu considered economic capital to be the basis for other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As the findings of this thesis illustrate, Japanese single mothers and their children often have limited access to educational opportunities due to their limited economic capital. For example, lack of access to tutoring, tutoring schools and college preparatory funds, all advantages that children from dual parent households benefit from has a direct impact on educational performance. Thirdly, there is a lack of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Single

mothers' families tend to have weaker social networks, which may contribute to lower educational support for their children. According to Bourdieu's perspective, lack of support from schools and the community further constrains opportunities for success in education (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, there is the idea of ‘symbolic violence’ in relation to the education system. Bourdieu proposed the concept of ‘symbolic violence’ which refers to the process by which the dominant culture unintentionally reproduces social inequalities through the education system (Bourdieu, 1977a). Japanese single mothers and their children facing poverty may be unconsciously excluded by an education system that holds low expectations for them based on social prejudice. This may result in low self-esteem and have a negative impact on academic performance and future career prospects.

In short, poverty among single-mother families in Japan has a serious impact on children's educational performance through the lack of cultural, economic and social capital as proposed by Bourdieu (1986). The lack of these capitals contributes to the reproduction of inequalities within the education system, making it difficult to break the cycle of poverty. Efforts should therefore be made to complement the lack of these capitals through education support programmes and policies.

Findings from the interviews in this research demonstrated that in some cases, parents and children from single-mother families, who are often isolated, were able to improve their situation and break the negative cycle with support from third parties. In other words, the research suggests the possibility of improvement through enhanced social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as ‘resources obtained through social networks and relationships possessed by individuals and groups. According to him,

social capital is made up of (1) the size of the network, (2) the quality of the resources within that network, and (3) the ability to utilise them. The cases where the situation of single-parent families improves through the support of third parties are a clear indication of the effect of increasing Bourdieu's social capital. Specifically, it functions in the following ways:

1. Expansion of networks which enable isolation to be resolved by building relationships with support groups, local communities, schools, etc.
2. Access to resources: Access to useful resources such as information on work and education, childcare support, and financial support is possible.
3. Reproduction inhibition: The intergenerational transmission of poverty and educational inequality is broken by the strengthening of social capital.

Bourdieu also discusses the relationship between social capital and ‘cultural capital’ (knowledge and skills gained through family environment and education) and ‘economic capital’ (assets and income). In order for support for single-mother households to be successful, it is important to accumulate cultural capital through education support and network building, as well as simply providing financial support. Based on this theory, we can see that in Japan, measures to support single-mother households that make use of social networks such as strengthening local communities and NPOs are effective.

In Japan, where there is a strong tendency towards self-responsibility, it will be important in the future, as in more westernised cultures such as the UK and USA, to raise awareness that children are to be nurtured by society as a whole and to achieve this it is necessary to enhance the social networks of marginalised groups.

8.4 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this research can be summarised as follows.

a) Research Methods

Whilst it might have been considered a limitation to use only one research method as opposed to mixed methods, the researcher felt that little new would be gained from running a questionnaire. There have been various questionnaires run on this topic (see Kidsdoor, 2024) however these did not provide the depth and richness of data that the current research has been able to achieve. By tapping into the lived experience of the single mothers and their adult children interviewed the research has had the privilege of being told information that previously the participants had never shared. This demonstrates the level of trust invested in this research by the participants who have allowed me to share their stories.

b) Access to participants and diversity of the sample

The range of the sample was balanced as consideration was given to selecting a broad representation of NPOs in terms of expertise, region, gender and age group. There were, however, many difficulties in recruiting single-mothers and adult children to participate, including because of the content of the research. The current research aimed to include the voices of single-mothers from various regions of Japan, but it was difficult to obtain cooperation from NPOs that support single-mothers at the participant recruitment stage. With regard to participants with adult children, this paper tried to take into account the gender ratio and also tried to recruit participants with siblings of both sexes, but some participants cancelled their participation at the last minute. One of the reasons for the difficulty in obtaining cooperation was that many of the participants did not have enough time in their lives to take part they were

too busy trying to make a living however meagre for their families. In this sense, many of the participants interviewed were in a relatively comfortable position compared to the vast majority of Japanese single mother families. This fact in itself could be considered a limitation of the current research and is something that future research should address.

c) Ethical considerations

When contacting single-mothers and adult child participants, care was taken not to damage their self-esteem in terms of language, including when describing the content of the current research. In particular, as the content was also related to past traumas in their lives, care also had to be taken to ensure that questions, methods and data were handled in a non-personally identifiable manner. Consideration was also given to the fact that in some cases, such as in the home environment (where there were no PCs), it was not possible to conduct the interviews in the way originally planned.

During the analysis phase, care was taken to ensure that the researcher's own expectations and assumptions did not influence the interpretation and analysis of the results. Special attention was also paid during the translation phase, as the topic of the research is uniquely Japanese and words that may seem normal to Japanese people may be perceived in a differently nuanced way by the non-Japanese reader.

8.5 Implications for policy and practice and contribution to the field

The research in this thesis is focused upon individual interviews with representatives of NPOs, single mothers and their adult children. The literature review revealed that a child's socio-economic background may have some impact on academic achievement and that there are differences in academic achievement depending on

the social and cultural environment of the family in which the child was born and raised, and the research findings of this thesis add support for this view. However, novel findings of this research revealed that growing up in a single-mother home due to parental divorce exposes both parents and children to a variety of stigmas, which negatively affect the child's mental health and wellbeing throughout their development, which in turn affects their academic performance. Children from single-mother families are less likely to receive educational support such as tutoring or private tutoring due to financial constraints, which may negatively affect their academic performance. However, it could be argued that if both parents in a two-parent household work long hours, a lack of learning support at home may also contribute to lower academic performance. According to surveys conducted by various local authorities, children from single-mother households tend to achieve lower grades the more difficult their economic situation is (Kidsdoor, 2024). Children of single mother households are at higher risk of negative mental health effects due to economic hardship and stress in the home. For example, studies have shown that poverty and economic insecurity are associated with lower self-esteem, depression and increased stress symptoms in children (Cassells & Evans, 2014). Lack of support and isolation within families can also have a serious impact on children's mental health, although no studies have been found in Japan that have interviewed or analysed adult children on a national scale and this is a consideration for future research.

Thus, the findings of this thesis revealed the multifaceted challenges faced by children from single-mother families and emphasise the need for support. Children's academic performance and mental health have a significant impact on their future life and social success, so comprehensive support measures are needed.

a) Implications of the thesis findings for government policy

1. improving the system and the role of government

Interviews with NPO representatives in this research, in particular, also revealed the country's over-dependence on NPOs. In Japan, poverty among single-mother families has attracted attention as a social problem, but direct government support is inadequate and there continues to be a strong dependence on private organisations such as NPOs. The following points can be made about this current situation

The government needs to be more proactive in strengthening its support for single-mother families and develop a system of cooperation with NPOs. For example, the government could provide stable funding to NPOs and take support measures to ensure that their activities are sustainable. Alongside the expansion of public support, policies are also needed to address the diverse needs faced by single-mother families. While reliance on these NPOs is increasing, there are also resource limitations on the part of the NPOs, and some say that the role of the government is essential for sustainable support.

Thus, NPOs play a major role in addressing the issue of poverty among single-mother families in Japan, and the government continues to be dependent on their support. The research also makes it clear that more comprehensive policies and stronger support are needed to eliminate this structure of dependency on non-statutory support.

There are limits to relying on the government (see Chapter 2 section 1), and as the NPO participants stated (see chapter7 section 2), it seems that there is a need for a change in awareness, with the public also supporting NPOs by raising awareness of the importance of donations.

In order to comprehensively improve the poverty problem of single mothers in Japan without relying solely on government policy, the following approaches could be considered. Improvements could be made by strengthening the role of companies, expanding private sector support, and making use of local communities and social capital. For example, promoting flexible working styles such as introducing telecommuting, shorter working hours, and flexible working hours to create an environment that is easier for single mothers to work in, and providing skills training such as reskilling and upskilling in collaboration with companies. Companies offering scholarships and childcare support systems, such as the introduction of systems to subsidise the education costs of employees' children, and employment and career support provided by companies. Also, the use of crowdfunding to widely solicit funds for single mother support, and NPO support as part of corporate CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities. Fundraising through NPOs, companies and individual donations, such as companies cooperating with single mother support NPOs to provide funding and dispatch volunteers. Utilising microfinance to establish small-scale loan systems for single mothers, and providing support for starting businesses and educational expenses. Promoting a ‘cooperative assistance’ model, in which neighbourhood residents and single mothers support each other (e.g. joint childcare, meal provision, job introductions). Utilising local community spaces: Utilising public facilities and cafes to hold free or low-cost study support and exchange events.

Expansion of volunteer programmes: Strengthening of mutual support networks in the community, such as systems where students and senior citizens support single-mother households (e.g. study support for children, housework assistance).

'Terakoya' style [13]study support: Provision of places where children can study for free or at low cost after school, and empowerment programmes for children, such as how to reduce the learning gap. Introduction of a mentoring system where university students and working adults support children from single-mother households, and provide career advice and support. Introducing financial literacy and self-reliance support programmes that provide single mothers with courses where they can learn skills in areas such as saving, investing and household management. Promoting the use of crowdsourcing to help single mothers start online businesses or work from home, and supporting them in setting up their own businesses or taking on side jobs. By combining these initiatives, it will be possible to comprehensively improve the poverty issues facing single mothers at the corporate, NPO, community and individual levels, without having to rely on government support.

2. Implications for increasing financial support

Much research has called for increased financial support for single-mother families. For example, it has been proposed to improve child support allowances and public assistance (see Chapter 2 section 1). Another important suggestion is to strengthen support directly related to daily life, such as housing support and subsidies for medical expenses (see Chapter 2 section 1).

3. Implications for strengthening support for education

This thesis has proposed that learning support is enhanced so that children of single-mother families can receive an adequate education. Specifically, this could include after-school learning support programmes, the dispatch of tutors and the expansion

[13] Terakoya were educational institutions that taught reading, writing and arithmetic in the Edo period, and the term refers to the modern style of individual instruction.

of scholarship programmes. Particular emphasis is placed on measures aimed at improving high school and university enrolment rates from this marginalised group.

4. Implications for the development of social infrastructure

As part of the social infrastructure, the development of an environment in which single-mothers can work with peace of mind is also recommended. For example, it is proposed to improve day-care centres and ensure flexible working hours. This is expected to make it easier for mothers to earn a stable income and, as a result, have a positive impact on their children's education.

b) NPOs

In Japan, public support for single-mother families is limited, and NPOs fill the gaps by providing assistance. The main forms of public support are child support allowances and public assistance, but in many cases, this is not enough to maintain an adequate standard of living. NPOs therefore support the lives of single-mother families by providing a wide range of services, such as food support, learning support and employment assistance. The government's reliance on NPOs means that the quality and scope of support depends on the resources of the region and the organisations themselves. This creates the risk of disparities between regions and the NPOs themselves may find it difficult to provide ongoing support due to lack of funding or staff. Another problem is that NPOs are often dependent on donations and volunteers, which makes them vulnerable to economic and social conditions. Therefore, the findings of this thesis suggest that going forward the government should either provide statutory bodies to support single mothers and their families or ensure robust statutory funding streams for the continued work of the NPOs engaged with these families.

c) Implications for Single-Mother Families

By focusing on single-mothers' poverty and its impact on their children, the difficult situation of single-mothers will be socially recognised through dissemination of the findings of this thesis, and it is hoped they will feel less isolated and ashamed. As the current research reflects the voices of NPO representatives, their voices provide material to expand social awareness and improve self-esteem. Through the findings of this research, the support needs of single-mothers have been identified and clarified, which it is hoped will lead to the future strengthening of the guidelines for support groups and government agencies to provide more appropriate support. Mothers may be more motivated to access support systems knowing that the problems they face are understood by society.

The findings of this research demonstrated the lack of statutory educational support by identifying the negative impact of poverty on children's educational performance in single-mother families. This it is hoped may lead educational institutions and support groups to provide special support measures for children from single-mother families. For example, it is hoped that provision of scholarships and subsidised classes will be expanded to compensate for the financial handicaps of being in a single mother household.

The real voices heard through the interviews provide a better understanding of the mental burdens and pressures that children from single-mother families face even once they become adults. It is hoped that the findings of this thesis will contribute to the development of programmes to provide mental health support for these children throughout their childhood and into early adulthood and facilitate the creation of an environment in which all children are free from such psychological burdens.

As this research highlights the difficult situation of single-mother families, pressure on policy makers should increase and social and economic support for single-mothers should be enhanced. For example, it is expected that systems for childcare and re-employment support will be improved, and financial support will be strengthened.

Some positives to result from this research could be that;

1. The research findings may also serve to strengthen support in communities as the problems of single-mother families are more widely understood. Single-mothers may form support networks within their communities by linking them with other single mothers and supporters.

2. Through the examples of single-mothers and adult children in the research who have overcome difficulties and achieved success hope and encouragement will be provided to other single-mother families. This may help mothers and children to develop a positive outlook on their own situation and encourage personal growth.

3. Social prejudice against single-mother families will be reduced by recognising the need to support these children to succeed in their education and careers. This may lead to greater social acceptance and educational opportunities for mothers and their children.

Thus, the research in this thesis may promote greater social awareness of specific support measures and improved educational opportunities for mothers and children from single-mother families, which may positively impact their quality of life and future prospects. In particular, it is expected to improve their economic and educational stability by highlighting the need for effective statutory and non-statutory

support to break the vicious cycle of poverty faced by single-mothers and their families.

d) Academic impact - national and international

In Japan, it is slowly being recognised that single-mothers have a serious poverty problem and that this has an impact on their children's academic performance and future social mobility. By providing data based on realistic experiences through interviews with NPO representatives, single-mothers and adult children, it is hoped that the issues highlighted in the findings of this thesis will trigger an in-depth academic examination and further research.

It is hoped that the dissemination of the current research could be cited in academic papers and policy reports as material for highlighting the urgent need for support for children from single-mother households to Japanese policymakers and educators. It would also contribute to policy recommendations that promote equal educational opportunities for all children.

International comparisons and understanding of Japan's unique situation

It is envisaged that the data from the interviews conducted with single-mothers and their adult children in the current research, will contribute to research on international single-motherhood support. Through comparisons with other countries, the weaknesses of Japan's family support system will become clear, and this thesis will provide an important resource for communicating the current situation of single-mothers in Japan to the international academic community. This research could provide a unique case on the issue of single-motherhood in Japan which can be used to inform the international research community It will also provide material for

incorporating successful examples of family policy in other countries and pointing the way towards reform in Japan.

Findings in this thesis on the impact of single-mother poverty on children's education will contribute to the broader academic debate on gender and socio-economic disparities. In particular, the topic of women's economic vulnerability and its impact on children which is an issue that has received much attention in gender and welfare research (McLanahan & Kelly, 2006). This thesis has provided new data highlighting the importance of the need for single-mother support in research on inter-generational poverty issues from both a gender perspective and on the impact of welfare policies and has the potential to deepen research in these areas.

The findings of this thesis on the contemporary situation and challenges of single-mothers receiving support in Japan can provide valuable information for policy makers. Research based on the voices of those actually affected could influence specific proposals for improving single-motherhood support measures, as well as the revision of laws to promote equal opportunities in education. When governments and local authorities are considering support measures for families living in poverty, this research could provide a useful reference which contributes to more effective policy-making.

Research dealing with the impact of single-mother families on the educational performance of their children provides important insights into the lack of research regarding educational inequalities. In particular, it provides empirical evidence on the impact of economic background on academic performance in the debate on poverty and inequalities in educational opportunity. This research it is hoped will inform future education policy and other research aimed at reducing educational inequalities and

will contribute to raising awareness of education system reform. As such, it is envisaged that the research will shed light on the challenges faced by single-mothers and their children in Japan from multiple perspectives and as such has the potential to have an important impact in the academic and policy arenas, both nationally and internationally in this field.

Previously, Wakayama University ran a survey which proposed the expansion of child support allowances and the establishment of a comprehensive support system to solve the complex problems faced by single-mothers (Kanekawa, 2012). The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare report (MHLW, 2019) called for the development of support programmes specifically for single-mother families. In particular, it points to the need for long-term support to ensure children's educational opportunities and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Thus, while Japanese universities and government agencies may make policy recommendations, it is difficult to find studies conducted at universities outside of Japan and analysed from a more global perspective.

e) Theoretical impact

This research explored the issue of poverty and children's educational outcomes for single-mother families in Japan through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986). This has many implications for Japanese society. In particular, it shows how Bourdieu's concepts of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘social capital’, which originated from his observations in Algeria and have been applied in France and Western countries, are both relevant to and rooted in the social and cultural context of the problems of educational inequality and poverty faced by single-mother families in contemporary Japan, as follows:

First, in terms of elucidating cultural capital and educational inequalities, we examine the impact of cultural capital on educational performance based on Bourdieu's theory. In single-mother families, children have less access to the resources they need for education due to economic constraints and lack of cultural capital. The current research has clearly demonstrated how this cultural capital gap affects educational outcomes in Japan through the life experiences of Japanese single mothers and their adult children. This serves to highlight the importance of supporting mothers and children in Japan's education system and family policy and encourage policy reforms to correct inequalities in educational opportunities.

Secondly, in terms of structural understanding of gender inequality, the systemic problems of gender inequality faced by Japanese single mothers and their adult children can be highlighted through Bourdieu's concept of ‘symbolic violence’. In particular, it will become clear that the economically and socially vulnerable position of single mothers’ functions as a mechanism for reproducing systemic inequalities. This current research, therefore, serves to deepen our understanding of the structural drivers of gender inequality in Japan and promotes changes in societal attitudes towards policy approaches. This could lead to more effective support for single-mother families in particular.

Thirdly, in educational inequality due to lack of social and economic capital, Bourdieu points out that a lack of social and economic capital maintains and reinforces inequality between classes (Bourdieu, 1977a). As single-mother families in Japan currently face economic insecurity and social isolation, the research in this thesis has clearly shown how this affects children's educational outcomes Furthermore, it deepens our understanding of the role of social capital in Japan and highlights the need for stronger social networks and community support for single-mother families.

This may facilitate policy recommendations to provide a better educational environment for single-mother families.

Finally, in promoting policy reform through empirical evidence, this research provides concrete evidence based on real experiences through interviews. This will highlight to policy makers the realities of the problems faced by single-mother families and provide them with material to promote effective reform of family and education policies in Japan. The research provides an empirical basis for improving support measures for single-mother families in Japan and has the potential to trigger change at the policy level. Thus, this research provides important implications for social, educational and gender policies in Japan by clarifying the relationship between maternal and child poverty and children's education in Japan, and by exploring the structural background of Bourdieu's theory in the contemporary Japanese context. As such it is a valuable and significant piece of research that opens up the possibility for concrete measures to prevent the reproduction of social inequalities to be discussed and for support for single-mother families to be strengthened.

f) Future research directions

Future directions and expectations for this research include

Although this research focused on single-mother families in Japan, future comparative research with other countries would be beneficial: applying Bourdieu's theory and comparing how issues relating to educational inequalities among single-mother families differ in different countries' social and cultural contexts could provide further suggestions for policy improvement in Japan by comparing how issues relating to educational inequalities for single-mother families differ in each country's social and cultural context. International comparisons can reveal successful and

unsuccessful examples of the support provided to single-mother families in different countries and help reveal models that can be successfully applied to new policy in Japan.

This research can move towards translating research findings into concrete policy recommendations. Based on the interview results, it is important to make concrete recommendations regarding educational support measures for single-mother families and the establishment of social support networks. In particular, the research is expected to contribute towards reforms in the areas of education policy, childcare support and re-employment support.

It is hoped that the research will provide practical insights for policy makers and non-profit organisations and facilitate the strengthening of support programmes targeted at single-mother families.

Further exploration should be done of Bourdieu's concepts such as ‘cultural capital’ and ‘symbolic violence’ and how single-mother families support their children's education within social and cultural constraints. Particular focus could be given to how children from single-mother families can accumulate cultural capital and achieve social mobility in the future and break the negative cycle of intergenerational poverty currently triggered by divorce in Japan. This direction is expected to deepen research on social mobility in single-mother families and enrich the academic debate on educational support and the reduction of gender inequalities.

Based on the empirical data from the interviews, research on the emotional and psychological impacts on mothers and children in single-mother families can be advanced. From Bourdieu's symbolic violence perspective, how these impacts work in single-mother families can be elucidated. Research on psychological impacts will

lead to the strengthening of mental health support and counselling services, and specific interventions to improve the quality of life of single-mother families.

It would also be beneficial to develop the research into action research in collaboration with the NPO representatives and single-mothers who were the interviewees. By working with them on actual support activities and examining their effectiveness, practical solutions can be sought. Action research is expected to encourage change on the ground and research findings will directly contribute to improving the lives of single-mother families. More importantly, by including single-mothers themselves in the research process they will be empowered to find solutions to the challenges they face scaffolded by the relevant support agencies (NPOs and statutory bodies).

Thus, future directions for this research could include international comparative research, embodiment of policy recommendations, further application of Bourdieusian theory, exploration of emotional and psychological influences, and expansion into action research. These directions are expected to be an important step towards better understanding of the support measures and social understanding of single-mother families, and towards the correction of educational inequalities and improvement of gender inequalities in Japanese society.

8.6 Reflections

The most difficult part of this research was contacting NPO representatives who were willing to cooperate with the research. I asked for an interview with the representative through an acquaintance, but it still took some time to get official approval. I also tried to get the organisation to introduce me to single-mothers and adult children who would be interviewed, but I was unable to obtain cooperation from

larger NPOs. This itself illustrates the difficulty of such research in Japan, as McAvoy (Director of The One left behind) said he had noticed that Japanese people are much more reluctant to show their suffering and embarrassed to ask for help than people in other countries, and that this is preventing them from solving this problem. He reaffirmed that this was preventing the problem from being resolved (Ishibushi, 2023). The single-mothers interviewed this time were either direct acquaintances or were introduced by someone they knew. Of his work McAvoy said: ‘This film could never have been made by a Japanese person. I didn't make any attempt to discover what was considered ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’ in Japan, but from an outsider's point of view it is not so at all (Ishibushi, 2023). This is also true for the current research and the reason for this is that many NPO representatives were also involved in national policy, but there were many occasions when they criticised the Japanese government's policies, and many single-mothers came to me with the hope that their voices would be reflected in the policies. They also spoke openly about the painful past they had experienced. After completing this research, it became clear that one of the reasons for the lack of progress in improving this problem is not only the government's response, but also the Japanese people's awareness. I believe that the underlying idea that single-mothers are poor because they are ‘responsible for their own poverty’ and that divorce is taboo among the Japanese is a factor that has prevented this problem from becoming visible. I also felt that a change in the Japanese people's awareness is necessary to achieve a fundamental solution.

For this thesis, I was awarded a scholarship from the Sasakawa Foundation in the UK for two consecutive years, and a John Crump Scholarship from the British Association for Japanese Studies. This suggests that the UK organisations recognised the importance of this thesis. I was also asked to give a presentation to

British Embassy staff in Japan in June 2024, which I did, and I received more questions than I expected. I think this shows the high level of interest from overseas organisations in this research.

Furthermore, it is sincerely hoped that the results of this research will lead to subsequent research and policies, such as those in the contribution, and to steps such as the establishment of a global charity to support single-mothers and children from poor families across countries.

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APPENDIX A

Consent form for mothers and child/ren（母親と子どもの同意書）

Title of Study: Do the financial disadvantages experienced by single-mother households in Japan negatively affect their children's educational outcomes? An exploratory qualitative study

（研究の題名 日本の母子家庭が経験する経済的不利は、子どもの教育成果に悪影響を及ぼすか？探索的質的研究）

Name of researcher: Hitomi Imamura （研究者名：今村仁美）

I have been informed about the nature of this study and willingly consent to take part in it. I understand that I will not be identifiable in any conversation, documents, publications or talk related to the research. I consent for the interview to be recorded and quotations from it to be lined in this thesis and academic publications.

私は、この研究の内容について説明を受け、喜んで研究に参加することに同意します。私は、この研究に関連する会話、文書、出版物、講演において、私が特定されないことを理解します。私は、インタビューが録音され、そこから引用された内容が本論文および学術出版物に並ぶことに同意します。

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am over 18 years of age.

私は、いつでもこの研究から脱退することができることを理解しています。

私は 18 歳以上です。

Name （お名前）

_____

Signed （ご署名）

_____

Date （日付）

_____

There should be two signed copies, one for a participant, one for the researcher.

参加者用と研究者用にそれぞれ 1 部ずつ、合計 2 部の署名が必要です。

If you have any queries about the research, either before or after participating in the interview, please feel free to the researcher:

インタビューに参加する前でも参加した後でも、研究に関して何か疑問があれば、

研究者にお気軽にお問い合わせください。

Hitomi Imamura (21453768@student.uwl.ac.uk)

Or her principal supervisor (または主指導教員)

Professor Maddie Ohl (Maddie.ohl@uwl.ac.uk)

APPENDIX B

Consent form for representatives of NGO/NPO（NGO/NPO 代表者の同意書）

Title of Study: Do the financial disadvantages experienced by single-mother households in Japan negatively affect their children's educational outcomes? An exploratory qualitative study

（研究の題名 日本の母子家庭が経験する経済的不利は、子どもの教育成果に悪影響を及ぼすか？探索的質的研究）

Name of researcher: Hitomi Imamura （研究者名：今村仁美）

I have been informed about the nature of this study and willingly consent to take part in it. I understand that I will not be identifiable in any conversation, documents, publications or talk related to the research. I consent for the interview to be recorded and quotations from it to be lined in this thesis and academic publications.

私は、この研究の内容について説明を受け、喜んで研究に参加することに同意します。私は、この研究に関連する会話、文書、出版物、講演において、私が特定されないことを理解します。私は、インタビューが録音され、そこから引用された内容が本論文および学術出版物に並ぶことに同意します。

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am over 18 years of age.

私は、いつでもこの研究から脱退することができることを理解しています。

私は 18 歳以上です。

Name （お名前）

_____

Signed （ご署名）

_____

Date （日付）

_____

There should be two signed copies, one for a participant, one for the researcher.

参加者用と研究者用にそれぞれ 1 部ずつ、合計 2 部の署名が必要です。

If you have any queries about the research, either before or after participating in the interview, please feel free to the researcher:

インタビューに参加する前でも参加した後でも、研究に関して何か疑問があれば、研究者にお気軽にお問い合わせください。

Hitomi Imamura (21453768@student.uwl.ac.uk)

Or her principal supervisor (または主指導教員)

Professor Maddie Ohl (Maddie.ohl@uwl.ac.uk)

Interview Transcripts

Please note that the transcripts have not been included in the thesis to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. However, a copy of the transcripts can be made available to examiners on request.