

Private Supplementary Education as Parenting Outsourcing (and Great Equalizer)?

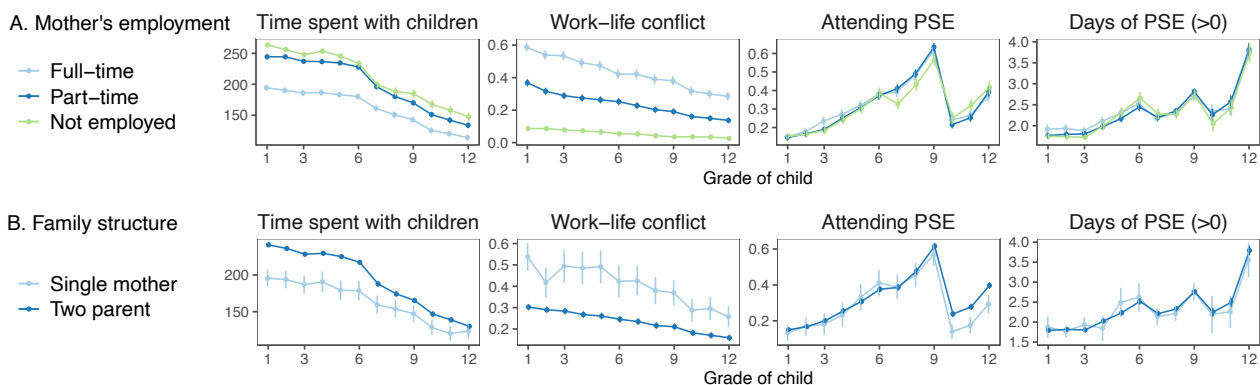
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In many rich countries, mothers manage two competing expectations: economic contribution and intensive parenting. On the one hand, mother’s full-time employment after childbearing has been increasingly normative, although policies have not adequately addressed conflicts in balancing work and family, leading to the stalled trend in women’s labor force participation, motherhood wage penalty, and mother’s worse mental health. On the other hand, reflecting the growing importance of college education for labor market outcomes, parental involvement with children’s education has also increased, especially among advantaged families, for whom a college education is a critical way to transmit their advantage to the next generation.

In the growing demand for economic contribution and intensive parenting, one option for working mothers is outsourcing. For instance, in some countries including the United States, households with working mothers use nanny services to address their work-family conflict. Meanwhile, parents, especially full-time working mothers, may still need an outsourcing option even after their child enters a school.

This study proposes that private supplementary education (PSE) can be conceptualized as one of such outsourcing options. Being considered “shadow education,” scholars have often discussed PSE as a source that may exacerbate inequality, as advantaged families are more likely to use such services. This study provides one alternative view. Specifically, I argue that PSE can be used as a substitute for spending time with children among working mothers, especially those without any family members who can provide support, such as single mothers. I focus on the Japanese case, where a mother’s labor force participation is much higher than in the United States, the mother’s role in parenting has been emphasized, and most single mothers work full-time under the weak welfare regime. In such contexts, working mothers may use PSE strategically to address their work-family conflict. If these services are used as substitutes, PSE may perhaps mitigate worse child developmental outcomes stemming from less time spent with children.

This study uses the Japanese Longitudinal Study of Children and Parents, a nationally representative longitudinal survey of school-aged children and their parents conducted by the Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute and University of Tokyo. Preliminary results below show that full-time working mothers or single mothers spend less time with their children and report more work-life conflict than their counterparts. Interestingly, there is no difference in the PSE use while the gap by family structure increases after high school attendance. These results suggest that some mothers may use PSE strategically to address work-like conflict. In the presentation, I will discuss these results in more detail and examine whether the use of PSR contributes to equalizing opportunities among disadvantaged children.



Data source: Japanese Longitudinal Study of Children and Parents. Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Time is measured by minutes.

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