

Relationship between working adults' perceptions of unreasonableness in the workplace and parents' parenting attitudes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative research based on the free descriptive answers to “When do you feel mentally hard in your daily work and private life?” on working people in employment (1824 persons), and to clarify categorized distribution of mental difficulty in living from the analysis results. As a result, mental difficulty in work-related matters and human relationships accounted totally for about half (48%) of all respondents. On the other hand, 26% of the respondents answered “not feeling difficulty, nothing in particular, and no answer.” It was noted that 45 of the 352 respondents for “mental difficulty relating to a workplace problem” described the word “unreasonableness,” logistic regression analysis was conducted on the relationship between the presence or absence of unreasonable feeling and the parenting attitude of their parents. The results revealed that those with “overprotective” parenting attitude is more likely to report “unreasonableness” than those with “ruthless” parenting attitude, suggested that differences in parenting attitude may some influence way of employees' feeling of unreasonableness in the workplace.

Introduction

The cause of “difficulty in living” varies from person to person. Then, what exactly makes you mentally difficult and what is the cause of the difficulty in living for working people in employment? Kanamori and Hiruta (2022) revealed from a survey of working people that family problems by their so-called toxic parents or family members tend to affect their overall professional lives more negatively. In particular, a very high odds ratio of 4.594 at 0.1% of statistical significance level was shown for the item “I sometimes have difficulty in living.” In the same way, Kanamori and Hiruta (2023) previously conducted logistic regression analysis of the same subjects' data as this research with four categories of the parenting attitudes (refer to Table 1) according to combination of two scales with dichotomy of stronger and weaker; [Sense of being loved/supported by parents] and [Sense of being intervened/interfered by parents], which obtained from the results of the factor analysis. The results implied that, the group with [Stronger sense of being loved/supported] and [Weaker sense of being intervened/interfered] showed the most positive relation to human relationship building and career development. Conversely, the group with [Weaker sense of being loved/supported] and [Stronger sense of being inter-

vened/interfered] showed the most negative relation. It was suggested that working people who were still affected by the parenting attitude such as verbal abuse or over-interference tend to have difficulty in living. Parenting attitudes have such a long-term influence on the lives of their children. However, what kind of mental difficulty in living they actually have not been so far specifically clarified. Therefore, the purpose of the study for this article is to conduct a qualitative research based on the free descriptive answers to a question about “mental difficulty in daily life” that was simultaneously on the participants of Kanamori and Hiruta's (2023) study, and to clarify the content and the difficulty of living in the study.

Method

This survey was conducted in February 2022 via a web-based questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Work.” The subjects were “working people in employment” ranging from 20 to 65 years old, assigned to 32 categories in total, according to gender (male and female), four age categories (20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s or older), two educational background categories (high school graduate and college graduates), and two employment status categories (regular and non-regular employment) with an equal number (n=57) of respondents

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being assigned to each of the 32 categories. Valid responses were obtained from 1824 respondents in total, 912 males and 912 females. This survey was conducted with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Nagoya University Research Center of Health, Physical Fitness and Sports (Approved on January 17, 2022, Approval No. 21-08.)

For this paper, the first study analyzed free descriptive answers to the question “When do you feel mentally hard in your daily work and private life?” using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (VERBI, Inc.) In this study, categories were determined and classified by performing “generative coding, in which the researcher assigns codes freely in an exploratory manner while reading the records” (Otani, 2017.) While category determination and response validation require repeated rework, MAXQDA has the advantage of making this rework easy.

Next, in conducting the second study, attention was paid to the fact that 45 of the 352 respondents described the word “unreasonableness” themselves in the group of respondents for “workplace problem” related to work in (1) of the first study. Logistic regression analysis was used to clarify the

relationship between those who described the word “unreasonableness” and the parenting attitudes which they had received from their parents by mid-teens (Kanamori and Hiruta, 2023).

Result

(1) First study

1-1 Generation of 9 categories [Figure 1]

For the question, “When do you feel mentally hard in your daily work and private life? Please tell us specifically,” 1824 working people in employment were asked to provide “free descriptive answers” about their daily work and private lives. As a result of the qualitative research using MAXQDA, the free descriptive answers were able to be coded and categorized into nine categories, as follows. The coding details and examples of actual responses (each number with “#” in parentheses indicate a respondent’s ID number) are shown below.

(i) Work environment, organizational issues, unreasonableness, superior and subordinate, employment status (352 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on work-related “workplace

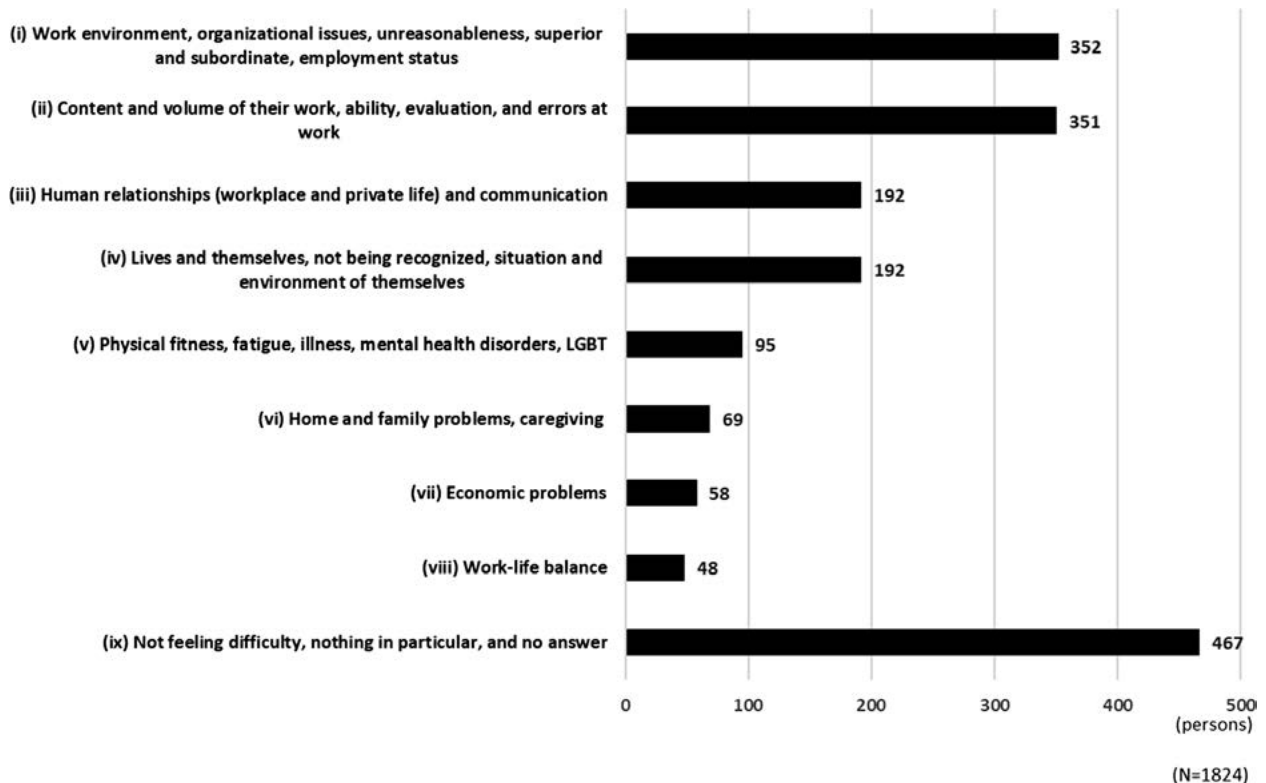


Figure 1: Classification based on responses to the question, “When do you feel mentally hard in your daily work and private life?”

problem.” Specific responses were as follows: Seeing my superior behaving in a way that they do not consider others (#64); A lot of overtime work is hard to bear (#1754); Receiving power harassment from my superior or being forced to work even during breaks (#1533); Unreasonable orders from my superior (#85); My superior’s mood affects work progress (#370); Feeling that no matter how hard I work, I have no chance to be recognized because of being a non-regular employee (#284), and so on. The responses are about the work environment, organizational management issues, unreasonable orders from superiors, relationships between superior and subordinate, and dissatisfaction with the treatment as non-regular employee. In this item, it was noteworthy that 45 of the 352 respondents wrote the word “unreasonableness” in their answers.

(ii) Content and volume of their work, ability, evaluation, and errors at work (351 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on “personal problems” related to work. Specific responses were as follows: Being asked to do something beyond my ability or experience (#1638); Having a work quota that I think unachievable (#929); Being denied the content of my work (#1410); Sudden trouble (#1623); Receiving low evaluations from superior (#1815); Making a mistake at work (#1490), and so on. The responses are about the content and volume of work, ability, evaluation, and errors at work.

(iii) Human relationships (workplace and private life) and communication (192 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on human relationships. Specific responses were as follows: Being bothered by the relationships around me (#168); Feeling a lot of stress when I fail in human relationships (#392); Getting easily upset when someone behave in an unpleasant way toward me (#1355); Not being able to communicate well (#406), and so on. Ninety five respondents described the words “human relationships,” 9 described “inter-personal relationships,” and 13 described “communication.” The rest of the respondents included specific descriptions on human relations, such as there being someone in the workplace that they dislike or have a hard time with. This item was mentioned by the largest number of respondents as a single item, demonstrating that many working people feel mental difficulty in human relationships in their daily work and private lives.

(iv) Lives and themselves, not being recognized, situation and environment of themselves (192 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on anxiety in their own lives and things that are not going well, and so on. Specific

responses were as follows: Feeling vaguely anxious about the future (#1579); Feeling lonely (#658); Things not going as expected (#1513); Not being needed by others (#861); Feeling of not being recognized (#463), and so on. The responses are about future anxiety and loneliness about their lives and themselves, and feeling of not being recognized by others.

(v) Physical fitness, fatigue, illness, mental health disorders, LGBT (95 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on physical and mental illness, fatigue, etc. Specific responses were as follows: Physically having a hard time (#674); Treatment for breast cancer (#364); Not feeling well after suffering from heart disease (#206); Having a mental disorder (#307); Unsuccessful infertility treatment makes me frustrated and distressed (#375); Being a sexual minority and having no one to confide in (#22), and so on. The responses are about illness, mental health disorders, and fatigue accumulation.

(vi) Home and family problems, caregiving (69 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on home and family problems. Responses were as follows: Family members do not do as I wish (#283); Family members arguing with each other (#1665); Stressful cohabitation with parents-in-law (#487); Illness of a child (#218); Feeling emotional pain every day from my grandmother with dementia (#642); caring for parents (#73), and so on. The responses are about problems between family members and within the home.

(vii) Economic problems (58 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on economic problems. Responses were as follows: Having a very hard time mentally because of lack of financial capacity (#698); Feeling mentally hard because of many financial difficulties (#965); Hating this life every month because of not doing well financially (#1450); Currently having a hard time with a significant reduction in income due to decreased work due to Covid-19 pandemic (#1764), and so on. The responses are about economic deprivation, including multiple responses on covid-induced hardship in their lives since the survey was conducted during the covid pandemic.

(viii) Work-life balance (48 respondents)

This is a group of respondents on work and home life balance. Responses were as follows: Mentally and physically hard to do most of child-rearing and housework alone while working (#783); Hard to balance child-rearing, housework, and work (#538); Feeling strong stress at work after pregnancy and childbirth (#1542), and so on. The responses are about difficulty in balancing work, housework, and child-rearing.

(ix) Not feeling difficulty, nothing in particular, and no answer (467 respondents)

This is a group of respondents who answered “I do not feel mentally hard in daily life.” Responses were as follows: I don’t feel particularly hard (#393); I rarely feel mentally hard (#1002); My work is going well (#955); Despite some minor problems, nothing stresses me out that much because I am healthy fortunately, I like my job, my human relationships are good, and my family is healthy and relatively close (#1167); When the work volume, responsibility, and load become excessive, I find it hard, but I feel that my volume of work, responsibilities, and workload are too much for me, but when I overcome it, I think my competence has increased (#346), and so on. They responded that they did not feel mentally hard, and there were also some positive comments that viewed the current situation favorably.

1-2 Reclassification of categories [Figure 2]

The categories determined by “generative coding” [Figure 1] were again summarized by content, and shown along with their percentages. The research results on the free descriptive answers on “mental difficulty” in their daily work and private life revealed that responses on work-related matters and human relationships (at work and in private life) accounted

for about the half of them, while about one-quarter of the respondents did not complain of any mental difficulty. Matters related to themselves, family, economic problems, and work-life balance accounted for the remaining about one-quarter of the responses. It can be said that about half of the working people in employment feel mental difficulty in work-related matters and human relationships.

(2) Second study [Table 1]

MAXQDA, which has a search function, was used to search for the word “unreasonableness” that caught the authors’ attention during the coding process. The results revealed that 45 of the 352 respondents to “(i) Work environment, organizational issues, unreasonableness, superior and subordinate, employment status” described the word unreasonableness themselves. Then, logistic regression analysis was conducted to clarify the relationship between the employees’ complaint of “unreasonableness” due to emotional pain over work-related “workplace problems” and the parenting attitude which they had experienced. The 45 respondents who responded “unreasonableness” were classified as the “Applicable group,” and the remaining 1779 respondents excluded the applicable group from the whole were classified as the “Non-applicable group.” The “Non-applicable group”

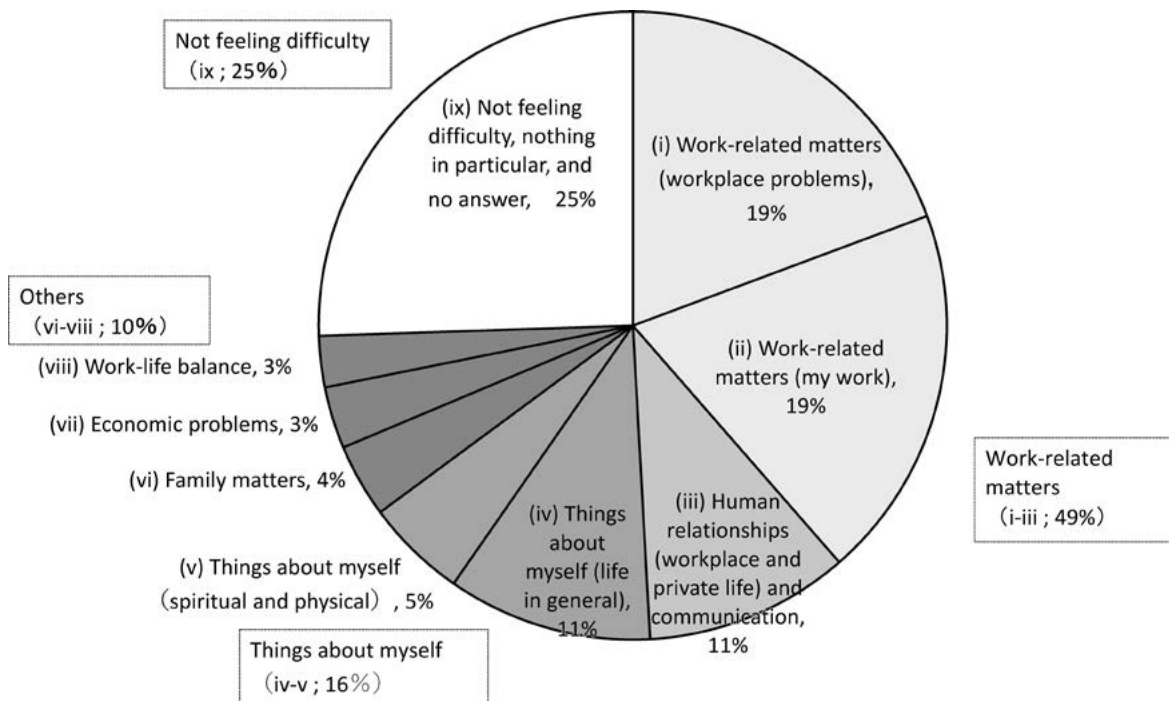


Figure 2: Description of mental hardship (N=1824)

Table 1. Relationship between those who described their work-related “unreasonable” situation and their parents’ nurturing attitudes (Logistic regression analysis) N=1824.

	Classification about parenting attitudes [‡]			
	Group (i)	Group (ii)	Group (iii)	Criterion group
First coding (Combination of two scales about perception of parenting attitudes received by mid-teens)	[Stronger sense of being loved/supported] and [Weaker sense of being intervened/interfered] (n=1013) 55.5%	[Stronger sense of being loved/supported] and [Stronger sense of being intervened/interfered] (n=173) 9.5%	[Weaker sense of being loved/supported] and [Weaker sense of being intervened/interfered] (n=257) 14.1%	[Weaker sense of being loved/supported] and [Stronger sense of being intervened/interfered] (n=381) 20.9%
Second coding (Characteristics of parenting attitudes)	More Affectionate and Less interventional	More Affectionate and More Interventional	Less Affectionate and Less interventional	Less affectionate and More Interventional
Third coding (Type of parenting attitudes)	Watchful	Overprotective	Indifferent	Ruthless
Complaining about “unreasonableness” in the workplace: Odds ratio (95% confidence interval)	2.541 (0.870–7.416)	3.903* (1.111–13.707)	2.653 (0.764–9.226)	1

† ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.

‡ Partially modified from the original table in Kanamori and Hiruta (2023).

and “Applicable group” were coded as 0 and 1, respectively, and were used as independent variables. As the dependent variable, the “Four categories of Parenting Attitudes” (refer to Table 1) classified by Kanamori and Hiruta (2023) was used. In this analysis, the criterion group was changed to the group with “Weaker sense of being loved/supported” and “Stronger sense of being intervened/interfered.” Variables related to the following attributes were used as control variables. They were: gender (criterion: female), four age categories (criterion: age 50+), employment status (criterion: non-regular employment), marital status (criterion: never married), child status (criterion: no children), educational background (criterion: high school graduate), and six categories of personal annual income (in ascending order). Logistic regression analysis was conducted with these control and dependent variables as forced inputs. The statistical significance levels for the analysis of the dependent variables were set at 5%, 1%, and 0.1%, and the calculated adjusted odds ratios are shown in Table 1.

The analysis showed that those with the parenting attitude of Group (ii) “Overprotective” had a significantly higher odds ratio of 3.903 at the 5% level than the criterion group “Ruthless.” That is, with regard to work-related “workplace problems” such as work environment, organizational issues, unreasonableness, superior and subordinate, and employment status, the group having “overprotective” parents was more likely to claim “unreasonableness” than the group having parents with a “ruthless” attitude. Although not significant, the odds ratios for the Group (i) “Watchful” and the Group

(iii) “Indifferent” also showed relatively high odds ratios of around 2.6, compared to the criterion group “Ruthless.” This suggested that these three groups tended to complain more strongly about the “unreasonableness” at work than the criterion group.

Discussion

This section discusses the “unreasonableness” that was described by 45 of the 352 respondents who belongs to the Category (i) Work environment, organizational issues, unreasonableness, superior and subordinate, employment status among the work-related matters in Figure 1. Examples of specific responses on unreasonableness in the “workplace problems” were as follows: Unreasonable comments given by the superior (#147); Being blamed at work even though it is not my fault (#234); being unreasonably reprimanded (#312); Being told something unreasonable by superior or coworker (#1373), and so on. Unreasonableness is largely affected by the relationship with the superior, and is something that is irrational and not agreeable.

Logistic regression analysis of the relationship between those who described these work-related “unreasonableness” and the parenting attitudes (Table 1) showed that, compared to the criterion group who had received “ruthless” parenting attitudes, the other three groups (“Overprotective,” “Watchful,” and “Indifferent”) were more likely to complain of “unreasonableness” of the work.

While “Ruthless,” “Overprotective,” and “Indifferent” all fall into the category of toxic parenting, “Watchful” is not.

Thus, the results in Table 1 suggest that complaints of “unreasonableness” related to work problems may be influenced by the presence or absence of experience with toxic parenting and by different types of toxic parenting. In particular, those who had received overprotective parenting, in which the parents were affectionate and interventional, may be more sensitive to absurdity and unreasonableness in the workplace.

Both in the workplace superior-subordinate relationship and parent-child relationship, it is difficult to freely choose your partner, and relationship building with others, such as hierarchical relationships and compatibility with oneself, become a source of worry. Whether or not a person is able to successfully build relationships in the workplace, including with superiors, affects their evaluation and motivation. So, companies frequently provide training on human relationship building and social skills. Considering the results of this study, however, as well as such techniques, it may be necessary to address issues by reflecting on what kind of parenting attitudes you had received from your parents and under what kind of environment you have formed latent habits of thought, or “mindsets” (Dweck, 2006).

Kanamori and Hiruta (2022) revealed that working people who have experienced family problems by the so-called toxic parents or family members tend to lead their overall professional lives more negatively. This is certainly true as an overall trend, but, as shown in the present results, this does not mean that parents with a strongly toxic parental element negatively affect all events of their grown-up child. Kanamori and Hiruta (2023) implied that, with regard to the “parents' attitudes of prioritizing public image and vanity” which is generally considered a requirement for “toxic parent,” depending on the degree, the impact on children working as adults can be positive or negative. Thus, the requirements for a “toxic parent” cannot be defined in a simple and unambiguous manner, but are assumed to interact in a complex manner with various factors such as the child's characteristics and the mindset acquired through the environment, etc. If these complex and diverse factors can be analyzed, further elucidation

of detoxification methods for toxic parents can be expected.

Conclusion

First, a qualitative research of the free descriptive answers of working people in employment revealed that work-related matters and human relationships (at work and in private life) accounted for totally about the half of the responses on “mental difficulty” in their daily work and private life. Meanwhile about a quarter of the respondents did not complain of any mental difficulty.

Next, it was noted that 45 of those categorized as “(i) Work environment, organizational issues, unreasonableness, superior and subordinate, employment status (352 respondents)” described the word “unreasonableness” themselves, and the relationship between the presence or absence of complaint of “unreasonableness” and the parenting attitudes which they had experienced was examined using logistic regression analysis. The results revealed that the group having “overprotective” parents in the parenting attitude had a stronger tendency to complain of “unreasonableness” than the group having parents with a “ruthless” attitude. This suggested that different types of toxic parents may have some influence. Further in-depth studies on the requirements and influence of toxic parents are needed.

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