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The Development of a Feeding Coparenting Scale for Japanese Parents of Fifth- and Sixth-Grade Elementary School Children

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Abstract

Aim: Recently, the role of feeding coparenting has gained attention in the child eating research field. The Feeding Coparenting Scale (FCS), a measure of how caregivers interact with their partners when feeding their children was developed in the United States in 2019. However, there is no valid and reliable measure to assess feeding coparenting among caregivers of school-aged children in Japan. Therefore, this study aimed to develop a Japanese version of the FCS (FCS-J) questionnaire for caregivers with school-aged children. **Methods:** This was a web-based cross-sectional survey completed by caregivers of children aged 10 - 12 years. A preliminary survey using interviews and a web-based survey was conducted and found that the translated items of the FCS into Japanese were understandable to Japanese people. The developed survey was administered to parents of children at an elementary school. The reliability of the survey was assessed using both test-retest reliability and internal consistency analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was used to test construct validity, and known population validity was examined in relation to attributes, marital satisfaction, and feeding tasks. **Results:** Findings with 135 parents of school-aged children showed good internal reliability and validity of the FCS-J. The mean score for the overall FCS-J score was 46.2 (SD = 6.2), with Cronbach's α of 0.72. For the subscales, Cronbach's α ranged from 0.75 to 0.79. In sum, the present study's results support the three-factor structure of the FCS in Japanese caregivers in Japan. **Conclusions:** The developed FCS-J was found to have a certain degree of reliability and validity. In this study, a Japanese version of the FCS-J was developed.

Keywords

Child, Coparenting, Parents, Feeding Coparenting

1. Introduction

Dietary habits established in childhood persist into adulthood [1]. Thus, the importance of instilling healthy eating habits from a young age is increasingly recognized from the perspective of lifetime health [1]. Shared family mealtimes reduce the risk of developing childhood obesity and eating disorders [2] [3], and children's behaviors during mealtimes provide insight into their health status [4]. Female caregivers, typically mothers, are individuals who are responsible in food parenting [5]. However, there are limited studies that investigate the role of both parents in food parenting [5]. During the school-age period, higher coparenting support and parental home involvement were associated with improvement in the child's academic, social and psychological development, suggesting that when caregivers cooperate, it is beneficial for children's overall development [6].

Additionally, school-age period is an important time for establishing dietary habits [7]. Parents serve as a model for their children's eating patterns [8] through parental dietary behaviors [9]. Nonetheless, few studies have examined the role of parents of school-age children on how mothers and fathers divide their responsibility on food parenting during meals. A recent review showed that, greater paternal involvement and cooperation during mealtimes were associated with lower incidences of truancy and delinquency among children [5].

Coparenting refers to the interactions between parents within the context of raising children, and this concept can also be extended to the home food environment [10]. Coparenting is defined as a shared activity undertaken by adults responsible for the care and upbringing of children [11], and the concept of "feeding coparenting" combines food parenting and coparenting [10]. The Feeding Coparenting Scale (FCS) developed by Tan *et al.* captures how parents of pre-school-age children coparent around child feeding [12]. While research on feeding coparenting is gaining attention [12], to the best of our knowledge, there are currently no established valid and, reliable scales for assessing coparenting related to child feeding during the school-age period in Japanese. Having a Japanese version of Feeding Coparenting Scale (FCS) is crucial, as it would allow researchers to gain a deeper insight in the associations between parental role and children's health within school health settings. The present study aimed to investigate the psychometric properties, related factor structure, reliability, and validity of the FCS-Japanese version (FCS-J).

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted between June and December, 2022, and its aim was to measure the reliability and validity of the FCS-J.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

The present study was approved by the Osaka University Hospital Research

Ethics Committee (Approval No. 21537). Given ethical considerations for children, the information was distributed to everyone. After the survey was collected, the exclusion criteria were applied. Participants were provided a written explanation of the research objectives and methods and relevant ethical considerations, consent to participate was deemed to have been given if the participant read the instructions and completed the questionnaire. The following explanation was provided to the parents in writing:

Participation in this research is entirely based on your free will; even if you refuse participation, you will have no disadvantage in terms of the future school life of your children; no personally identifiable information will be made public under any circumstance, because data obtained from your responses and interviews will be statistically processed by computer, and information obtained in this research will not be used for any purpose other than the research objectives. Given ethical considerations regarding the children, this will be distributed to everyone. After the survey is collected, the exclusion criteria will be applied.

Online survey responses were anonymous, and connections between parents and other parents were managed using numbers randomly assigned by researchers or entered by the participants themselves so that individuals could not be identified.

2.3. Participation Criteria

The survey was initially distributed to all parents at a public elementary school in Japan. The participants were parents of fifth- and sixth-grade children attending the school. Parents who were unmarried or had no spouse/partner due to divorce or bereavement at the time of the survey and parental figures other than biological mothers and fathers were excluded after collection of the completed surveys.

2.4. Procedures in Developing the Feeding Coparenting Scale—Japanese Version

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the FCS translated into Japanese retained the content validity and clarity of the original FCS. Once the content validity of the FCS was confirmed, data from parents of fifth- and sixth-grade children were collected to complete the finalized version of the FCS-J. Test-retest reliability was also examined.

2.5. Pilot Study

Authorization to translate the FCS into Japanese was obtained from the original author in April 2021. Two of the present researchers translated the original FCS into Japanese, and the suitability of question item content for Japanese parents was discussed. After revising the wording, Version 1 of the survey was created and sent to the original author. After further revision, back translation from Japanese to English was performed by a bilingual Japanese-English translator

unfamiliar with the original FCS, and Version 2 of the survey was created. Using Version 2, an initial pilot study was conducted from October to November, 2021, with 11 parents raising elementary school children recruited by snowball sampling. After responding anonymously to the survey, participants underwent 10 to 20-min semi-structured interviews to examine content validity. Survey response time was 1 to 5 min. The survey items were analyzed based on data obtained from the pilot study. The meanings of Items 7-11 "Food Education" were widely considered difficult to understand; therefore, in consultation with the original author, this was revised to "from preparing to serving children's meals" in the Japanese version. The original author also approved adding a footnote explaining that "from preparing to serving children's meals" refers to the series of tasks from grocery shopping, meal preparation, cooking food, monitoring of eating, and washing the dishes. Following content revision, Version 3 of the survey was sent to the original author for checking and final approval and then designated as the final version. Using Version 3, a second pilot study was conducted from April to May, 2022, with 10 parents raising elementary school children recruited by snowball sampling. After responding anonymously to the online survey, participants underwent semi-structured interviews of 10 to 20 min to examine content validity. The layout clarity and user-friendliness of the online survey were confirmed.

2.6. Final Version of the Survey

Parents with fifth- and sixth-grade elementary school children in Japan completed the final version of the online survey from June to July 2022. Participants reported their age, sex, relationship to their child, child's age, child's sex, number of children, number of household members, marital status, employment status, highest level of education, and current satisfaction with their economic situation. For test-retest, parents of elementary school children were recruited using snowball sampling and asked to complete the survey again two weeks later. A reminder notification was sent two weeks after distribution of the initial survey participation request.

2.7. Scales

2.7.1. Feeding Coparenting Scale

The FCS focuses on measuring and assessing parental coparenting around child feeding [12]. After developing an item pool including 16 items and surveying 307 parents, Tan *et al.* dropped three items with factor loadings of ≤0.4, resulting in a 13-item survey. Although two of the remaining 13 items also had factor loadings below the cutoff, they were retained because they included important child feeding content pertaining to "working together on" and "managing" children's meal preparation with a spouse/partner. The reliability alpha coefficient of the 13 items was 0.78, confirming scale reliability and validity. Three subscales were generated reflecting Shared Views, Active Engagement, and Solo Parenting

around child feeding. Shared Views represents how closely a parent's positive views of child feeding align with those of their spouse/partner and includes five items, such as "My spouse/partner and I both see family mealtime as important". Active Engagement represents behaviors such as actual discussion and cooperation between parents around child feeding and includes four items, such as "In my household, my spouse/partner and I frequently discuss how we manage feeding tasks". Solo Parenting represents how much a parent perceives that they perform more child feeding tasks than their spouse/partner, excluding the elements of "shared" thinking and discussion about child feeding between parents, and includes four items, such as "I am responsible for all feeding tasks in my family". All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Total scores range from 13 to 65 points, with higher scores representing higher levels of coparenting.

2.7.2. Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Schumm *et al.*'s Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) [13]—Japanese version [14] was used to measure parents' levels of satisfaction in their marital relationship. This three-item scale includes items such as "How satisfied are you with your marriage?" and is reported on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Extremely Dissatisfied to Extremely Satisfied, with higher scores representing higher marital satisfaction.

2.8. Feeding Tasks

In the original scale, Feeding Tasks included five items, such as meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking, and parents were asked to specify how much they perceived each parent to contribute to each item from 0% to 100%, with a higher number indicating a greater contribution [12]. The present participants were likewise asked about their contributions from 0% to 100% for the five corresponding items of "Thinking about meal planning", "Going grocery shopping", "Preparing meals", "Cooking", and "Serving meals to children" of the Japanese version.

2.9. Analyses

Statistical analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 28. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the means and standard deviations of the demographic variables. Item analysis was performed using the mean and standard deviation calculated for each item, and ceiling and floor effects and normality were examined. Item and item-total correlation analyses were also performed. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

In the pilot study, content validity and cultural equivalence were investigated based on post-survey interviews regarding question item content. In the present survey, a Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value ≥ 0.7 was used as a standard indicating the sampling to be adequate for factor analysis [15]. To confirm factor validity, factor structure was examined by exploratory factor analysis using the

principal factor method with promax rotation. Bartlett's sphericity test was used to test for the presence of inter-variable correlations. The KMS was used to assess convergent validity based on Spearman's correlation coefficient for the association of the KMS with FCS total and subscale item scores. It was hypothesized that higher FCS scores are associated with higher KMS scores. Criterion-related validity was assessed based on Spearman's correlation coefficients regarding the associations of FCS total and subscale item scores with Feeding Tasks. It was hypothesized that the higher the FCS scores, the more the correlation with Feeding Tasks scores is negative for Active Engagement and positive for Solo Parenting subscale items.

Reliability based on internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale, subscales, and factors extracted by exploratory factor analysis. Test-retest was performed and assessed using the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC). An ICC ≥ 0.7 was used as the standard for good reliability [16].

3. Results

3.1. Participants

Responses were received from 155 of the 472 parents (collection rate, 32.9%). Parents who had one or more missing values for the FCS question items were excluded, and a final total of 135 participants were included in the analysis. For test-retest, responses 10 participants were included in the analysis. The participants' characteristics are shown in **Table 1**.

Descriptive statistics for each item are shown in **Table 2**. Only Item 11 showed a ceiling effect, whereas no items showed a floor effect. The Item-Total correlation range was $r = 0.356$ - 0.541, and the Item-Subitem correlation range was $r = 0.632$ - 0.897.

Total and subscale scores for the FCS-J are shown in **Table 3**.

3.2. Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the total 13-item scale and primary, secondary, and tertiary factors were $\alpha = 0.72$ and $\alpha = 0.76$, $\alpha = 0.75$, and $\alpha = 0.79$, respectively. Test-retest Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.75$, and a significant correlation was observed between the present survey and test-retest ($r = 0.87$ [$p < 0.001$]). The ICC between the present survey and test-retest were 0.88 for the total scale and 0.71 - 0.93 for each subscale item, demonstrating reliability.

3.3. Validity

The present KMO value was 0.737, demonstrating adequate sample validity, and Bartlett's sphericity test showed χ^2 (78) = 610.393 ($p < 0.001$), confirming good fit on factor analysis. For factor validity, the factor structure was confirmed with exploratory factor analysis (**Table 4**). Principal factor analysis with promax rotation performed on all 13 items identified three factors with eigenvalues ≥1. In

order to examine convergent validity, correlations with the three KMS items were investigated (Table 5).

Regarding criterion-related validity, the mean scores for the five Feeding Tasks items were 75.58 - 77.81. The correlations of the FCS-J total score with the Feeding Tasks subscale scores and each item are shown in Table 5.

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

		N = 135		
		n (%)		
		Mean	±	SD
Parent N = 135	Mother	108		(80.0)
	Father	27		(20.0)
Age (years) N = 134		44.3	±	4.2
Economic satisfaction N = 135	Not satisfied at all	5		(3.7)
	Not very satisfied	5		(3.7)
	Not satisfied	18		(13.3)
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25		(18.5)
	Somewhat satisfied	40		(29.6)
	satisfied	37		(27.4)
	Very satisfied	5		(3.7)
Child grade level N = 133	5th grade	64		(48.1)
	6th grade	69		(51.9)
Child age N = 133	10 years old	41		(30.8)
	11 years old	73		(54.9)
	12 years old	19		(14.3)
Child sex N = 131	Male	71		(53.0)
	Female	60		(44.8)
Employment status N = 134	Regular employment	47		(35.1)
	Part-time	49		(36.6)
	Self-employed	3		(2.2)
	Unemployed	28		(20.9)
	Other	7		(5.2)
Education level N = 135	Junior high school	2		(1.5)
	High school	16		(11.9)
	Junior college	33		(24.4)
	Vocational school	19		(14.1)
	University	59		(43.7)
	Graduate school	6		(4.4)

Table 2. FCS-J.

					N = 135	
					Item correlation	
	Average	±	SD	(range)	All items	Subitem
Total	46.24	±	6.2	(13 - 65)		
Shared Views	20.02	±	2.7	(5 - 25)	0.635**	
q1	3.72	±	0.8	(1 - 5)	0.356**	0.632**
q2	4.19	±	0.7	(1 - 5)	0.485**	0.805**
q3	4.31	±	0.6	(1 - 5)	0.492**	0.730**
q4	4.14	±	0.7	(1 - 5)	0.468**	0.781**
q5	3.67	±	0.7	(1 - 5)	0.496**	0.637**
Active Engagement	12.23	±	3.3	(5 - 20)	0.614**	
q6	2.81	±	1.0	(1 - 5)	0.537**	0.716**
q7	2.76	±	1.3	(1 - 5)	0.467**	0.821**
q8	3.31	±	1.0	(1 - 5)	0.455**	0.804**
q9	3.35	±	1.0	(1 - 5)	0.452**	0.699**
Solo Parenting	14.0	±	3.7	(5 - 20)	0.626**	
q10	4.07	±	0.9	(1 - 5)	0.469**	0.643**
q11	3.84	±	1.2	(1 - 5)	0.406**	0.674**
q12	3.11	±	1.4	(1 - 5)	0.530**	0.897**
q13	2.96	±	1.2	(1 - 5)	0.541**	0.857**

**$p < 0.01$.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for each FCS-J scale and item.

		Total			Mother			Father		
	Range	Mean	±	SD	Mean	±	SD	Mean	±	SD
Total score (13 - 65)	30.0 - 63.0	46.2	±	6.2	47.1	±	6.1	43.0	±	5.5
Subscale										
[Shared Views] (5 - 25)	13 - 25.0	20.0	±	2.7	20.2	±	2.6	19.2	±	2.7
[Active Engagement] (4 - 16)	4 - 20.0	12.2	±	3.3	12.0	±	3.4	13.1	±	2.5
[Solo Parenting] (4 - 16)	4 - 20.0	14.0	±	3.7	14.9	±	3.2	10.6	±	3.4

4. Discussion

The present study investigated the psychometric properties and related factor structure of the FCS-J for parents of fifth- and sixth-grade elementary school children, confirming scale reliability and validity. Factor analysis demonstrated that the FCS-J has the same three-factor structure as the original FCS: Shared Views, Active Engagement, and Solo Parenting. Similar to the original FCS survey, the FCS-J consisted of 13 items, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was 0.72, showing equivalent reliability [12].

Table 4. FCS-J exploratory factor analysis.

					N = 135
			Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
[Shared Views]					
q	2	My spouse/partner and I both see family mealtime as important.	0.805	−0.087	0.069
q	4	My spouse/partner and I both see family mealtimes as a time to spend quality time together.	0.756	−0.056	0.046
q	3	My spouse/partner and I both see family mealtimes as a time to feed our child healthy food.	0.671	0.116	−0.062
q	1	My spouse/partner and I tend to agree on the brands of food we buy.	0.453	0.061	−0.075
q	5	My spouse/partner and I handle child eating behavior (e.g., picky eating, snacking) similarly.	0.453	0.085	0.183
[Solo Parenting]					
q	12	I enjoy cooking and am good at cooking, so I cook more than my spouse/partner does.	−0.057	0.895	0.037
q	13	I enjoy meal planning, so I plan meals more than my spouse/partner does.	−0.139	0.882	0.166
q	10	I am responsible for all feeding tasks in my family.	0.191	0.539	−0.059
q	11	I manage feeding tasks because my schedule is more flexible than my spouse/partner.	0.246	0.489	−0.251
[Active Engagement]					
q	8	It is important for me to be involved in feeding tasks with my spouse/partner.	0.006	−0.098	0.769
q	7	In my household, both my spouse/partner and I work together to manage feeding tasks.	−0.007	−0.027	0.702
q	9	Having a spouse/partner to manage feeding tasks is important to me.	−0.054	0.121	0.581
q	6	In my household, my spouse/partner and I frequently discuss how we manage feeding tasks.	0.214	0.034	0.546
		Eigenvalue	2.842	2.170	1.338
		Contribution rate	21.862	16.692	10.293
		Cumulative contribution rate	21.862	38.554	48.847
		Correlation between factors (first factor)	1.0000		
		(Second factor)	0.120	1.0000	
		(Third factor)	0.269	−0.048	1.0000

Goodness-of-fit test: chi-square (610.393) degrees of freedom (78) $p < 0.0001$, Total score (13 items, $\alpha = 0.72$).

Table 5. Concurrent correlations between the FCS-J and related measures.

	Total		Shared Views		Active Engagement		Solo Parenting	
Relationship satisfaction	0.220	*	0.376	**	0.206	*	−0.024	
Marital satisfaction	0.160		0.331	**	0.164		−0.047	
Satisfaction with husband (wife)	0.231	**	0.416	**	0.211	*	0.007	
Satisfaction with wife (husband)	0.246	**	0.376	**	0.226	**	−0.031	
Feeding tasks	0.204	*	0.156		−0.345	**	0.539	**
Meal planning	0.161		0.084		−0.337	**	0.518	**
Grocery shopping	0.211	*	0.104		−0.236	**	0.463	**
Meal preparation	0.175	*	0.131		−0.337	**	0.504	**
Cooking	0.216	*	0.138		−0.309	**	0.543	**
Child feeding	0.253	**	0.217	*	−0.257	**	0.493	**

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

Regarding the ceiling effect for Item 11, "My schedule is more flexible than that of my spouse/partner; therefore, I manage feeding tasks", response bias likely arose due to the tendency for parents to believe in the importance of "planning" around child feeding [17].

Regarding convergent validity, correlations were observed for parents' KMS total score with FCS-J total score, Shared Views, and Active Engagement, but not with Solo Parenting. Regarding the correlations between the three KMS items and the FCS-J subscale items, a correlation was observed with all three KMS items for Shared Views, but not for Solo Parenting. The social interactions during family mealtimes provide opportunities for parents to monitor their child's development and to deepen bonds among all family members [18]. This may explain why greater sharing of opinions around child feeding was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Previous studies have also shown that levels of marital satisfaction correlate highly with Shared Views, but are either negatively or not correlated with Solo Parenting [12]. Family meals involve gatherings of multiple individuals; therefore, adjustments need to be made for children and individual preferences [19], suggesting that the higher the general level of relationship satisfaction, the easier it is for spouses/partners to share opinions.

Regarding criterion-related validity, correlations for parents' mean scores for Feeding Tasks and FCS-J total scores were expected to be negative with Active Engagement and positive for Solo Parenting, verifying our hypothesis. When parents rated their own level of contribution to feeding tasks as high, there was actually little discussion or cooperation between spouses/partners around child feeding, suggesting a tendency for individual participants to feel they were more involved in meal preparation than their spouses/partners. Investigation of each Feeding Tasks subscale item showed high correlations among Meal Planning, Meal Preparation, and Cooking. In Japan, the parent who prepares the meals of school-age children tends to be the mother [20]. Even outside Japan, family meal preparation and responsibility are mostly shouldered by the mother [21]. However, healthy family eating is more likely with cooperation of and support from both parents, rather than one person taking sole responsibility for child feeding [12].

The FCS-J was developed for the first time in Japan in Japanese, and this contributes to it being available to caregivers in the field of school health in Japan, who are responsible for the management of children's diets. The FCS-J developed in this study could potentially be used by health professionals and school authorities to provide health guidance addressing the health functioning of late school-aged children and their families, particularly with regard to nutrition education at home.

5. Limitations and Perspectives

The limitations of the present study include the possibility of bias, since the majority of the participants were mothers, and Japanese mothers prepare the meals

of school-age children [20]. This was a single-institution survey, which may also have generated bias. The present FCS-J enables understanding of Feeding Coparenting between parents in the household. In the future, the FCS-J can be used to explore factors related to Feeding Coparenting around family feeding, thereby contributing to increased health in the home food environment.

6. Conclusion

The present study confirmed the reliability and validity of the FCS-J for parents of fifth- and sixth-grade elementary school children. The FCS can be used to measure Feeding Coparenting of parents in Japan.

Data and Code Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, M.Y., upon reasonable request.

Studies in Humans

This research involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the University of Osaka Institutional Review Board. All participants provided informed consent before participating.

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Authors' Contributions

M.Y. and A.Y. designed the study. M.Y., T.K., and Y.N. collected the data. C.T. aided with the development tools and interpretation of the results. M.Y. wrote the manuscript with support from T.K., Y.N., and A.Y. A.Y. supervised the project. All authors reviewed drafts of the manuscript and approved the final report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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