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Factors Affecting Health Care Utilization for Children in Japan

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KEY WORDS

ecology, medical care, physician visit, primary care, health diary

ABBREVIATION

OR—odds ratio

Dr Ishida participated in the conception and design of the study, analysis and interpretation of data, statistical analysis, and drafting the article; Drs Ohde and Takahashi participated in the conception and design of the study, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data; Dr Deshpande participated in the interpretation of data and drafting the article; Drs Shimbo and Hinohara participated in the interpretation of data and critical revision of the article; Dr Fukui participated in the conception and design of the study, analysis and interpretation of data, and critical revision of the article. Final approval was made by all coauthors.

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WHAT'S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: In the United States, the ecology of children's medical care is similar to that of adults. Health care utilization for children varies significantly by age, race, ethnicity, income, and health insurance status.



WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: Compared with data from the United States, children in Japan more frequently visit both community physicians and hospital-based outpatient clinics. Pediatric health care utilization is influenced significantly by age but not affected by income or residence location in Japan.

abstract

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE: Studies on the ecology of medical care for children have been reported only from the United States. Our objective was to describe proportions of children receiving care in 6 types of health care utilization seeking behaviors in Japan on a monthly basis and to identify care characteristics.

METHODS: A population-weighted random sample from a nationally representative panel of households was used to estimate the number of health-related symptoms, over-the-counter medicine doses, and health care utilizations per 1000 Japanese children per month. Variations in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and residence location were also examined.

RESULTS: Based on 1286 households (3477 persons including 1024 children) surveyed, on average per 1000 children, 872 had at least 1 symptom, 335 visited a physician's office, 82 a hospital-based outpatient clinic, 21 a hospital emergency department, and 2 a university-based outpatient clinic. Two were hospitalized, and 4 received professional health care in their home. Children had 2 times more physician visits and 3 times more emergency visits than adults in Japan, and Japanese children had 2.5 times more physician visits and 11 times more hospital-based outpatient clinic visits than US children. Pediatric health care utilization is influenced significantly by age but not affected by income or residence location in Japan.

CONCLUSIONS: Compared with the data from the United States, more children in Japan visit community physicians and hospital-based outpatient clinics. Results of this study would be useful for further delineation of health care utilization of children in the context of a health care system unique to Japan. *Pediatrics* 2012;129:e113–e119

White et al¹ reported the first study on the ecology of medical care based on the population of the United States and the United Kingdom ~50 years ago. They showed that the main bulk of health service utilization occurred at physician visits (250 out of 1000 per month) with hospitalization comprising only 9 incidences out of 1000. Fukui et al² previously revealed that, compared with data in the United States, people in Japan visited community physicians and hospital-based outpatient clinics more frequently. This ecology model has been replicated over several decades,^{3–6} including from our group,^{2,7,8} with findings that were consistent with those of White et al.¹ This model has subsequently been widely used by both policy makers and educators.^{9,10}

Unlike the medical system in the United States, Japan has a universal health care system, which allows virtually free health care access to everyone including children. Per recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development data,¹¹ Japan spent considerably less money, compared with the United States, on health care in terms of total health spending per capita (US\$ 2729 vs 7538 in 2008) and percent of gross domestic product (8.1% vs 16.0% in 2008). Thus, it is speculated that health care-seeking behavior and health service utilization in Japan may be substantially different from that in the United States. However, no well-designed studies on patients' health care-seeking behavior for health-related symptoms have been conducted, although there are reports of limited sample size.^{7,12}

To date, studies on the ecology of medical care for children have been reported only from the United States.^{13,14} No similar investigation has been made for the Japanese population. The medical ecology of Japanese children's health care may be different from not only

that of Japanese adults but also that of children in the United States. Our objective for this study was to assess health care-seeking behavior of children in Japan by using a nationally representative panel of households.

METHODS

Study Design

A prospective cohort design was employed.

Sample

A nationally representative panel belonging to Japan Statistics and Research Co Ltd that comprised 210 000 households was used (Fig 1). Taking into consideration the size of the cities, towns, and villages, a population weighted random sample of 5387 households was chosen and each household was sent an offer letter with a return envelope. Of the total, 1857 agreed to participate. The sample size was readjusted demographically to 1464 households to make it nationally representative.

Data Collection

Questionnaires and diaries were used for data collection. The questionnaires were scripted to note children's baseline characteristics including family information. The diary was designed to keep a record of any health-related events, symptoms, health care-seeking behavior, and actual use of health services, along with other variables of interest. Parents or other eligible persons were asked to fill out the questionnaires and diaries for children younger than 13 years and those who could not write on their own. The advantage of health diaries includes the ability to keep a record of events continuously and consistently while minimizing recall bias.

Definitions of Variables

1. Age: 4 age groups were identified: <2 years, 2 to 5 years, 6 to 12 years, and 13 to 17 years.

2. Gender
3. Education: 3 categories were defined by the highest degree attained by the head of the household in which a child resided: high school or lower, college/vocational school, and university/graduate school.
4. Economic status: family annual income was divided into 3 categories: <5 million Japanese yen, 5 million to 7 million Japanese yen, and >7 million Japanese yen.
5. Residence location: a large city was defined as a city with a population >1 million, a medium-sized city was identified as 100 000 to 1 million, and a small city/town as <100 000 inhabitants. Residents living outside a city or town were defined as rural.
6. Number of children: the number of children in a family was divided into 3 groups: 1 child, 2 children, and ≥3 children.
7. Single-parent households were defined as family units in which a child's mother or father served as the sole caretaker; responses were classified as "yes" or "no."

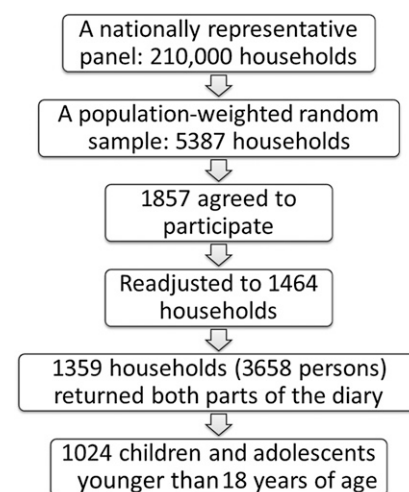


FIGURE 1

Sampling process of this study. Of 1857 households agreeing to participate, the sample size was readjusted to 1464 households to make it nationally representative. Among 3658 persons in 1359 households who returned the diary, we analyzed those of 1024 children and adolescents aged 0 and 17 years.

8. Family living together with grandparents; responses were classified as “yes” or “no”.

Ethical Considerations

After obtaining informed consent by post, health diaries (divided into 2 parts, each of 2 weeks duration), questionnaires for recording baseline data, and gift vouchers of 3000 Japanese yen (~30 US\$) per person were sent to each member of the 1464 enrolled households in September 2003. The diaries were recorded from October 1, 2003, to October 31, 2003.

A manual accompanied the health diaries to facilitate recording the required information. The diary was in the form of a softbound letter-sized book. Participants were asked to return the first part of the diary after 15 days of entries, whereas the second part was returned after completion of the study period. A weekly phone call to each enrolled family was made as a reminder. Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine, Japan.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analyses, along with confidence intervals, were performed to estimate the number of different health care-seeking behaviors per 1000 persons per month. We performed χ^2 tests or a Fisher's exact test (for any cells with expected counts <5) within categorical predictors. Dichotomous analyses indicated strong associations between each predictor variable and participation by children in 1 or more health care settings. Too few children used home care services and university hospitals to produce reliable estimates. Therefore, 4 separate logistic regression analyses were performed to derive adjusted odds ratios (ORs) of the independent association of each predictor variable. All data were analyzed

by SPSS statistical software, version 19.0 (IBM Japan Ltd, Tokyo, Japan).

RESULTS

Of 1000 children aged 0 to 17 years, on average each month, 872 had at least 1 symptom, 167 visited a physician in the community clinic office setting, 82 visited a hospital-based outpatient clinic, 20 received care in an emergency department, 4 received professional health services in their home, and 2 spent time as an inpatient in a hospital (Fig 2).

Table 1 shows the estimated proportion of children reporting clinical symptoms during a typical month. Most symptoms were significantly dependent on the age of the child. Frequency of symptoms associated with upper respiratory infections (sneezing, cough, fever) or gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhea and vomiting) was closely correlated with younger age. In contrast, frequency of symptoms associated with pain (sore throat, abdominal pain, headache, leg or toe pain, knee pain, and lumbago) was closely correlated with older age. Children in the older age group (13–17 years) showed similar patterns compared with the

adult group; 8 out of the 10 most frequent symptoms were shared between the 2 groups, with the exception of stiff neck and knee pain, which were more common in adults.

Table 2 compares the ecology of medical care for Japanese children in this study with that of adults in Japan² and children in the United States.¹³ Nearly the same proportion of Japanese children and adults reported at least 1 symptom (OR = 1.14).² The ORs of Japanese children visiting a physician's clinic or outpatient hospital clinic were 2.51 and 11.1, respectively, compared with children in the United States.¹³ The ORs associated with Japanese children taking over-the-counter medicine, visiting a physician's community clinic, outpatient hospital clinic, or being admitted to hospital were 0.76, 2.15, 3.04, and 0.25, respectively, compared with Japanese adults.²

Table 3 demonstrates the estimate for number of children receiving care in different health care settings, stratified by the child/family sociodemographic characteristics. Univariate analysis using χ^2 test or Fisher's exact test revealed that children's age, annual income of the family, education level of

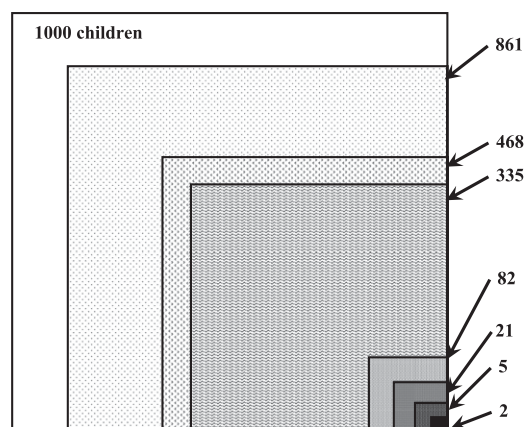


FIGURE 2

Participation in medical care in a typical month for 1000 children and adolescents aged 0 and 17 years. Boxes visually represent proportional participation categorized by type of medical care; smaller boxes do not indicate inclusive subgroups of larger boxes; 861 participants report some clinical symptoms, 468 take some medicine, 335 visit physician's office, 82 visit a hospital outpatient clinic, 21 visit an emergency clinic, 5 visit a university hospital outpatient clinic, and 2 are hospitalized.

TABLE 1 Estimated Proportion of Children Experiencing Clinical Symptoms During a Typical Month, *n* (%)

Symptoms	<2 y (<i>n</i> = 89)	2–5 y (<i>n</i> = 263)	6–12 y (<i>n</i> = 468)	13–17 y (<i>n</i> = 204)	χ^2, P	Total (<i>n</i> = 1024)	Reference (Japanese adults, <i>n</i> = 2453) ^a
Sneezing	67 (75.3)	168 (63.9)	184 (39.3)	58 (28.4)	<.0001	477 (48.6)	394 (16.1)
Cough	47 (52.8)	161 (61.2)	150 (32.1)	22 (10.8)	<.0001	380 (37.1)	338 (13.8)
Sore throat	7 (7.9)	33 (12.5)	99 (21.2)	59 (28.9)	<.0001	198 (19.3)	441 (18.0)
Fever	33 (37.1)	71 (27.0)	62 (13.2)	24 (11.8)	<.0001	190 (18.6)	166 (6.8)
Abdominal pain	1 (1.1)	30 (11.4)	73 (15.6)	43 (21.1)	<.0001	147 (14.4)	267 (10.9)
Headache	1 (1.1)	9 (3.4)	67 (14.3)	50 (24.5)	<.0001	127 (12.4)	719 (29.3)
Abrasion	7 (7.9)	30 (11.4)	54 (11.5)	5 (2.5)	.001	96 (9.4)	36 (1.5)
Leg or toe pain	1 (1.1)	6 (2.3)	53 (11.3)	25 (12.3)	<.0001	85 (8.3)	191 (7.8)
Common cold	6 (6.7)	20 (7.6)	29 (6.2)	15 (7.4)	.889	70 (6.8)	202 (8.2)
Muscle pain	0	1 (0.4)	25 (5.3)	38 (8.2)	<.0001	64 (6.3)	171 (7.0)
Bruising	9 (10.1)	11 (4.2)	37 (7.9)	6 (2.9)	.016	63 (6.2)	36 (1.5)
Itching	2 (2.2)	24 (9.1)	26 (5.6)	6 (2.9)	.014	58 (5.7)	75 (3.1)
Diarrhea	12 (13.5)	22 (8.4)	18 (3.8)	5 (2.5)	<.0001	57 (5.6)	121 (4.9)
General fatigue	1 (1.1)	6 (2.3)	25 (5.3)	14 (6.9)	.032	46 (4.5)	443 (18.1)
Dermatitis	9 (10.1)	12 (4.6)	17 (3.6)	6 (2.9)	.032	44 (4.3)	40 (1.6)
Nausea	1 (1.1)	9 (3.4)	24 (5.1)	9 (4.4)	.319	43 (4.2)	112 (4.6)
Knee pain	0	4 (1.5)	24 (5.1)	12 (5.9)	.009	40 (3.9)	206 (8.4)
Tooth pain	0	5 (1.9)	21 (4.5)	5 (2.5)	.056	31 (3.0)	112 (4.6)
Vomiting	7 (7.9)	12 (4.6)	11 (2.4)	1 (0.5)	.002	31 (3.0)	14 (0.6)
Hand or finger pain	1 (1.1)	7 (2.7)	19 (4.1)	3 (1.5)	.194	30 (2.9)	86 (3.5)
Dry skin	2 (2.2)	5 (1.9)	15 (3.2)	7 (3.4)	.696	29 (2.8)	28 (1.1)
Lumbago	0	1 (0.4)	13 (2.8)	14 (6.9)	<.0001	28 (2.7)	650 (26.5)

^a Other common symptoms in adults, *n* (%): stiff neck, 555 (22.6); stomachache, 188 (7.7); shoulder pain, 149 (6.1); and menstrual pain, 130 (6.1).

the head of household, number of children in the family, and single parenthood were significant factors in the health care-seeking behavior of children.

Table 4 shows the results of multivariate analyses. Receipt of care in physicians' community clinic was the most sensitive to various sociodemographic characteristics in the model (age, education level, number of children, and single parenthood), with the exception of annual income and residence

location. Community clinic visits were significantly more likely for younger children compared with children ≥ 13 years of age (OR = 7.32, $P < .001$ for children aged <2 years; OR = 5.66, $P < .001$ for children aged 2–4 years; OR = 2.41, $P = .001$ for children aged 6–12 years). Conversely, physicians' clinic visits were significantly less likely for children in families where the head of the household had a university or graduate school level of education

(OR = 0.55, $P = .008$), 3 or more children in the family (OR = 0.55, $P = .024$), or single parenthood (OR = 0.49, $P = .032$; Table 4, including 95% confidence intervals of ORs).

As for over-the-counter medicines, use of these medications increased with older age. Of note, children living with grandparents took less over-the-counter medicines in the multivariate model (Table 4).

Children's age was also the strongest predictor for seeking care in an emergency department (OR = 6.82) and a hospital-based outpatient clinic (OR = 3.31). Families with higher annual income tended to visit community clinics (OR = 1.19) over hospital outpatient clinics (OR = 0.43). Gender and residence location were not independently associated with variation in proportions of children receiving care in any of the health care settings investigated.

DISCUSSION

This study is the first application of the classic ecology of medical care model to Japanese children. We demonstrate that the same proportion of Japanese children as adults reported at least 1 symptom during the study period² and that a substantial proportion of children have an encounter with the health care system in a typical month. Although overall patterns appear generally

TABLE 2 Ecology of Medical Care for Japanese Children Versus Adults in Japan and children in the United States

	This Study (Children <18 y)	OR of Children in Japan Versus the United States	OR of Japanese Children Versus Adults	Children in the United States (Dovey et al ¹³)	Adults in Japan (Fukui et al ²)	Adults in the United States (Dovey et al ¹³)
Having at least 1 symptom	872 (850–892)	NA	1.14 (0.88–1.47)	NA	857 (842–871)	NA
Taking an over-the-counter medicine	468 (442–494)	NA	0.76 (0.64–0.91)	NA	536 (510–562)	NA
Visiting a physician's clinic	335 (306–365)	2.51 (2.03–3.11)	2.15 (1.75–2.64)	167 (161–174)	190 (174–206)	235 (229–241)
Visiting an emergency department	20.5 (12.7–31.2)	1.63 (0.81–3.27)	3.04 (1.29–7.19)	12.8 (11.7–13.9)	6.5 (3.4–11.3)	13.0 (12.2–13.8)
Visiting an outpatient clinic in community hospital	82 (66–101)	11.1 (5.33–23.0)	0.86 (0.63–1.17)	8.2 (7.0–9.4)	94 (81–108)	25.8 (24.0–27.6)
Visiting an outpatient clinic in a university hospital	4.9 (1.6–11.4)	NA	0.71 (0.23–2.26)	NA	6.5 (3.4–11.3)	NA
Requiring hospitalization ^a	2.0 (0.2–7.0)	0.50 (0.09–2.73)	0.25 (0.05–1.17)	3.5 (2.7–4.3)	7.6 (4.4–12.7)	13.3 (9.6–11.0)
Requiring home health care	3.9 (1.1–10.0)	2.00 (0.37–11.0)	1.34 (0.30–5.98)	2.2 (1.4–3.0)	3.3 (1.4–6.4)	17.7 (15.6–19.8)

Values are given as number per 1000 (95% confidence interval) unless otherwise stated. NA, not available.

^a Excluding hospital stays for birth.

TABLE 3 Estimates for Number of Children Per 1000 Participating in Health Care in a Typical Month by Sociodemographic Characteristics and Settings (%)

Demographic Characteristic	Taking an Over-The-Counter Medicine	Visiting a Physician's Clinic	Visiting an Emergency Department	Visiting an Outpatient Clinic in a Community Hospital	Visiting an Outpatient Clinic in a University Hospital	Requiring Hospitalization ^a
Age, y	<i>P</i> < .0001	<i>P</i> < .0001	<i>P</i> < .0001	<i>P</i> < .0001	<i>P</i> = .537	—
<2 (<i>n</i> = 89)	21 (24.7)	52 (59.6)	8 (9.0)	16 (18.0)	1 (1.1)	0
2–5 (<i>n</i> = 263)	107 (41.8)	115 (44.9)	8 (3.0)	31 (12.2)	1 (0.4)	0
6–12 (<i>n</i> = 468)	229 (50.0)	134 (29.3)	3 (0.6)	25 (5.6)	3 (0.6)	1 (0.2)
13–17 (<i>n</i> = 204)	110 (55.4)	34 (17.2)	2 (1.0)	10 (4.9)	0	1 (0.5)
Gender	<i>P</i> = .992	<i>P</i> = .554	<i>P</i> = .068	<i>P</i> = .565	<i>P</i> = .999	<i>P</i> = .999
Boy (<i>n</i> = 530)	242 (46.8)	178 (34.3)	15 (2.8)	45 (8.7)	3 (0.6)	1 (0.2)
Girl (<i>n</i> = 494)	226 (46.8)	157 (32.6)	6 (1.2)	37 (7.7)	2 (0.4)	1 (0.2)
Annual income, JPY	<i>P</i> = .597	<i>P</i> = .371	<i>P</i> = .011	<i>P</i> = .020	<i>P</i> = .458	—
<5 million (<i>n</i> = 342)	164 (46.2)	125 (35.4)	5 (1.5)	37 (10.5)	1 (0.3)	0
5–7 million (<i>n</i> = 309)	161 (50.2)	104 (32.4)	13 (4.2)	30 (9.4)	3 (1.0)	2 (0.6)
≥7 million (<i>n</i> = 314)	158 (48.4)	98 (30.3)	3 (1.0)	16 (4.8)	1 (0.3)	0
Education of head of household	<i>P</i> = .040	<i>P</i> = .031	<i>P</i> = 0.170	<i>P</i> = .853	<i>P</i> = .801	<i>P</i> = .999
High school or lower (<i>n</i> = 391)	197 (40.7)	177 (36.6)	10 (2.0)	37 (7.7)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
College/vocational school (<i>n</i> = 188)	114 (48.9)	74 (31.9)	1 (0.5)	17 (7.4)	1 (0.5)	0
University/graduate school (<i>n</i> = 228)	141 (50.0)	74 (26.3)	7 (2.6)	25 (8.8)	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)
Residence location	<i>P</i> = .416	<i>P</i> = .720	<i>P</i> = .464	<i>P</i> = .665	—	—
Large city (<i>n</i> = 94)	42 (45.7)	33 (36.2)	4 (4.3)	6 (6.4)	1 (1.1)	0
Middle city (<i>n</i> = 225)	105 (48.0)	72 (32.9)	4 (1.8)	16 (7.1)	0	0
Small town (<i>n</i> = 450)	194 (44.2)	152 (34.7)	8 (1.8)	41 (9.3)	2 (0.4)	0
Rural area (<i>n</i> = 255)	126 (50.6)	77 (31.0)	5 (2.0)	20 (7.8)	2 (0.8)	2 (0.8)
Number of children	<i>P</i> = .147	<i>P</i> = .002	<i>P</i> = .248	<i>P</i> = .087	<i>P</i> = .845	<i>P</i> = .213
1 (<i>n</i> = 165)	70 (41.2)	67 (39.4)	14 (8.5)	3 (1.8)	0	1 (0.6)
2 (<i>n</i> = 522)	266 (49.4)	188 (34.9)	51 (9.4)	16 (3.1)	3 (0.6)	0
≥3 (<i>n</i> = 283)	145 (49.8)	72 (24.7)	18 (6.0)	2 (0.7)	2 (0.7)	1 (0.4)
Single parent	<i>P</i> = .002	<i>P</i> = .914	<i>P</i> = .096	<i>P</i> = .841	<i>P</i> = .999	<i>P</i> = .999
Yes (<i>n</i> = 127)	42 (33.9)	41 (33.1)	0	11 (8.7)	0	0
No (<i>n</i> = 897)	426 (48.6)	294 (33.6)	21 (2.3)	71 (8.1)	5 (0.6)	2 (0.2)
Living with grandparents	<i>P</i> = .821	<i>P</i> = .795	<i>P</i> = .152	<i>P</i> = .134	<i>P</i> = .590	<i>P</i> = .999
Yes (<i>n</i> = 182)	92 (48.9)	60 (31.9)	1 (0.5)	10 (5.5)	0	0
No (<i>n</i> = 788)	390 (48.0)	267 (32.9)	21 (2.5)	72 (8.9)	5 (0.6)	2 (0.3)

JPY, Japanese yen.

^a Excluding hospital stays for birth.

similar for children and adults,² the proportions of each group differed significantly. Despite the same frequency of clinical symptoms,² twice as many children visited a community clinic and 3 times as many children visited emergency rooms, whereas the number requiring hospitalization was 4 times that of adults in Japan.² Compared with results from the United States,¹³ 2.5 times more Japanese children visited a community physician's office or emergency clinic, and 11 times more Japanese children visited hospital-based outpatient clinics.

As expected, age strongly affected the ecology of medical care for children. Among all children, those <2 years of age were less likely to take over-the-counter medicine and most

likely to receive care at least once in a typical month regardless of clinical setting. Children 2 to 5 years of age were more likely than those 13 to 17 years of age to receive care regardless of setting. In contrast, a smaller proportion of children aged 6 to 12 years, compared with those aged 13 to 17 years, received care in emergency departments, whereas the oldest age group comprised the least visits to both outpatient hospital-based and community clinics. These results are consistent with the previous report from the United States.¹³ Recently, pediatric professional organizations in the United States and elsewhere have recommended that over-the-counter medications, including cough and cold remedies, should not be given to infants.^{15–18} Our data suggest

that Japanese parents restrict use of over-the-counter medications for younger children, especially those younger than 2 years of age. Of note, living with grandparents was associated with significantly reduced over-the-counter medicine use. Several possible interpretations for this association may be considered; grandparents may have a lower threshold taking an ill grandchild to a clinic, or grandparents may be especially adverse to over-the-counter medicine use for children.

Multivariate regression analysis in our study confirmed that children's health care-seeking behavior is affected more substantially by age than by any other socioeconomic characteristics included in our study, a finding also consistent with previous reports from

TABLE 4 Adjusted ORs (95% Confidence Interval) for Children's Health Care Participation by Sociodemographic Characteristics and Setting

Demographic Characteristic	Taking an Over-the-Counter Medicine	Visiting a Physician's Clinic	Visiting an Emergency Department	Visiting an Outpatient Clinic in Any Hospital
Age, y				
<2	0.18 (0.09–0.36)	7.32 (3.64–14.7)	6.82 (1.22–38.1)	3.31 (1.30–8.46)
2–5	0.42 (0.26–0.69)	5.66 (3.21–9.97)	2.52 (0.47–13.4)	1.56 (0.67–3.66)
6–12	0.72 (0.46–1.11)	2.41 (1.41–4.11)	0.23 (0.02–2.58)	0.82 (0.35–1.93)
13–17	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Gender				
Boy	0.82 (0.60–1.13)	0.90 (0.64–1.26)	0.62 (0.20–1.90)	1.04 (0.60–1.79)
Girl	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Annual income of family, JPY				
<5 million	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
5–7 million	0.97 (0.65–1.46)	1.05 (0.69–1.61)	2.40 (0.66–8.74)	0.86 (0.45–1.65)
≥7 million	0.81 (0.53–1.25)	1.19 (0.76–1.87)	1.22 (0.24–6.09)	0.43 (0.19–0.96)
Education of head of household				
High school or lower	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
College/vocational school	1.40 (0.91–2.13)	0.75 (0.49–1.17)	0.19 (0.02–1.56)	1.11 (0.53–2.32)
University/graduate school	1.17 (0.77–1.77)	0.55 (0.35–0.86)	0.81 (0.25–2.67)	1.80 (0.88–3.68)
Residence location				
Large city	0.72 (0.40–1.28)	0.78 (0.42–1.43)	1.03 (0.21–5.04)	0.64 (0.22–1.88)
Middle city	0.75 (0.47–1.20)	0.85 (0.51–1.40)	0.28 (0.03–2.55)	0.88 (0.39–2.00)
Small town	0.76 (0.51–1.13)	0.89 (0.58–1.36)	0.61 (0.17–2.21)	1.05 (0.54–2.03)
Rural area	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Number of children				
1	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
2	1.26 (0.83–1.91)	0.66 (0.42–1.01)	1.95 (0.50–7.68)	1.03 (0.52–2.03)
≥3	1.42 (0.88–2.30)	0.55 (0.35–0.86)	1.06 (0.16–7.19)	0.68 (0.28–1.60)
Single parent				
Yes	0.85 (0.48–1.53)	0.49 (0.25–0.94)	—	1.78 (0.69–4.59)
No	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Living with grandparents				
Yes	0.63 (0.40–0.98)	1.06 (0.66–1.72)	0.57 (0.07–4.98)	1.31 (0.59–2.92)
No	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference

JPY, Japanese yen.

the United States.^{13,14} Of particular interest is the physicians' office setting where, adjusting for other variables, fewer children received care if they had 2 or more siblings, a single parent, or were living with a head of household with a higher level of educational attainment. No association of medical access with either annual family income or residence location was demonstrated, a fact to which the robust Japanese universal health care system might plausibly contribute.^{19–21} It is interesting to consider that the United States might also anticipate a trend toward the findings in this study if recent health reforms, in addition to promotion of the medical home concept, provide wider insurance coverage to help ensure that all children

have equitable access to appropriate health care resources.^{13,22,23}

Although Dovey et al¹³ were unable to reproduce estimates of clinical symptoms reported in the original study by White et al,¹ our study produced comparable estimated proportions of reported clinical symptoms for children. Population-based literature on children experiencing clinical symptoms is sparse and outdated. Our nationally representative study provides these estimates for children in Japan according to age group. This study revealed that frequency of symptoms associated with upper respiratory infections or gastrointestinal symptoms was closely correlated with younger age and that frequency of pain symptoms was closely correlated with older age.

This study has important strengths. First, this analysis was based on a nationally representative sample that was large enough to produce reasonably precise estimates of the true proportions of children receiving care. This is particularly helpful to generalize our findings to the Japanese pediatric population at large. Second, data were collected from the surveyed sample by using a medical diary, which minimized recall bias. Shaul et al²⁴ reported that providing both an adult and child survey to an adult could result in lower response rates. However, the response rate in our study (92.8%) was satisfactory. D'Souza-Vazirani et al²⁵ showed that mothers are a good source of information regarding children's acute health care use. Third, the summary findings are based on a single cohort.

There are, however, some limitations to our study. First, data were collected during a single month (October). Seasonal variations of disease incidence and prevalence, especially in children, could result in estimates different from the current data. October is soon after school begins in the United States and is a time of relatively high numbers of upper respiratory infections and minor illnesses that may result in a significant increase of health care utilization. In contrast, in Japan, the school year begins in April. As such, October represents a typically uneventful and calm month for children in terms of health status. Second, we did not evaluate the appropriateness of particular health care-seeking behaviors because disease outcome data related to individual children's symptoms were not collected.

CONCLUSIONS

Compared with the data from the United States, more children in Japan visit both community physicians' clinics and hospital-based outpatient clinics. The health care-seeking behavior of

children was influenced significantly by children's age but not affected by income or location of residence in Japan. Results of this study will be

useful for further delineation of health care-seeking behavior of children in the context of a health care system unique to Japan.

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Factors Affecting Health Care Utilization for Children in Japan

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