

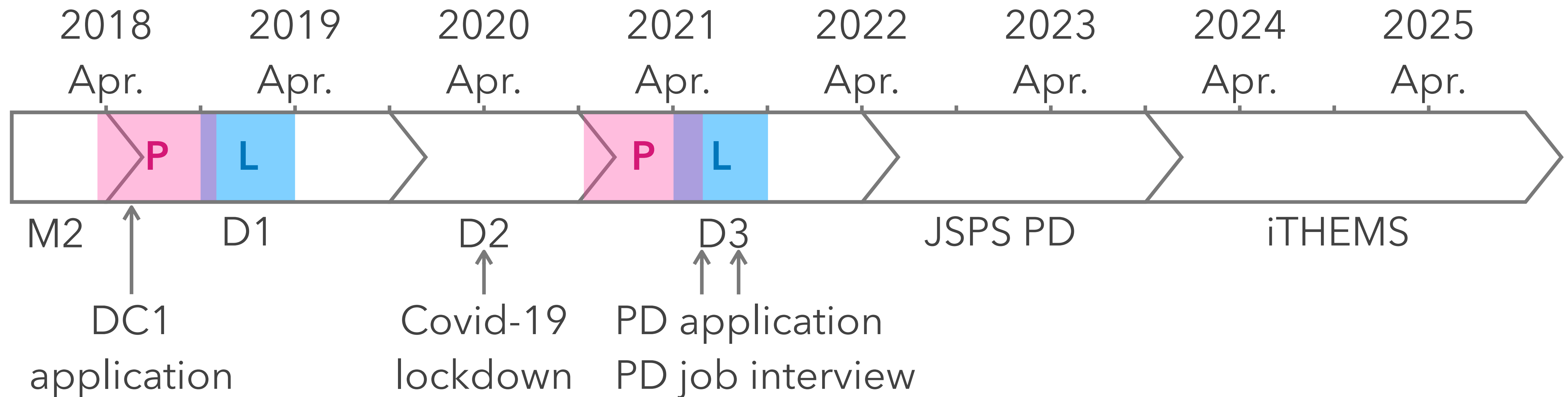
Balancing Research and Parenthood: From Pregnancy to Parenting a School-Aged Child



Misako Tatsuuma (Research Scientist, iTHEMS)

My Personal History

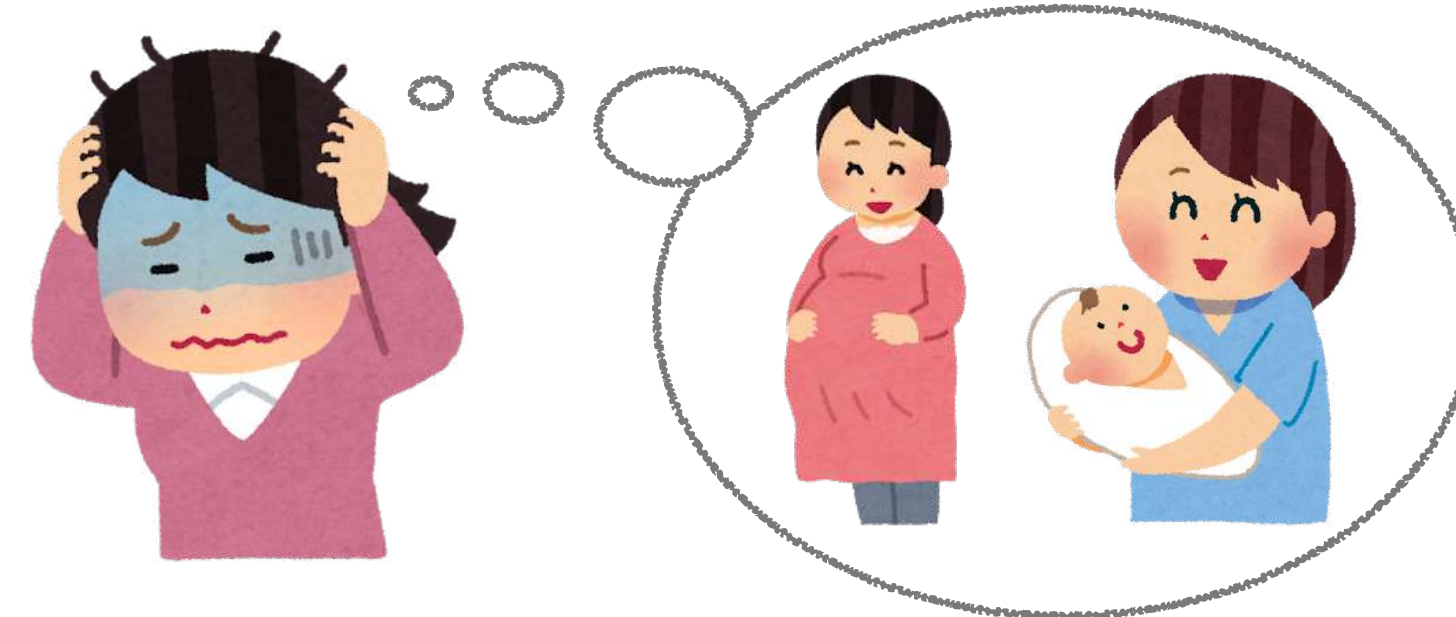
- Research fields: planet formation theory (astronomy)
- Children: a 6-year-old boy (first grade of elementary school),
& a 4-year-old girl (daycare)



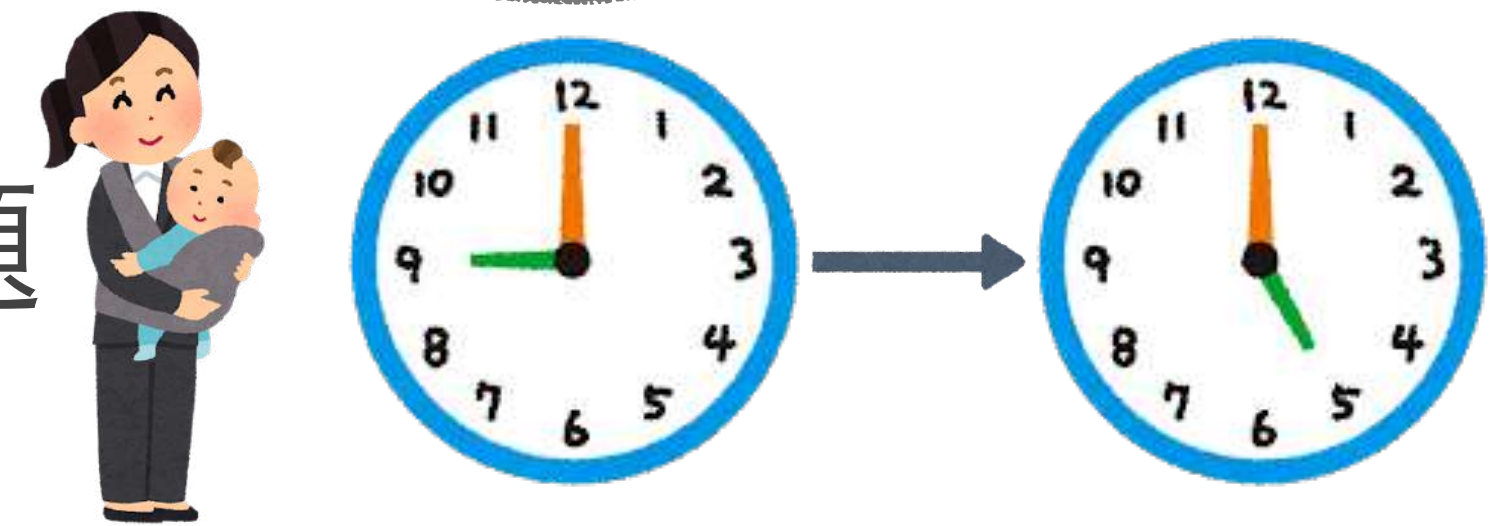
P: Pregnancy **L:** Leave of absence

Four Main Barriers to Balancing Research & Parenting

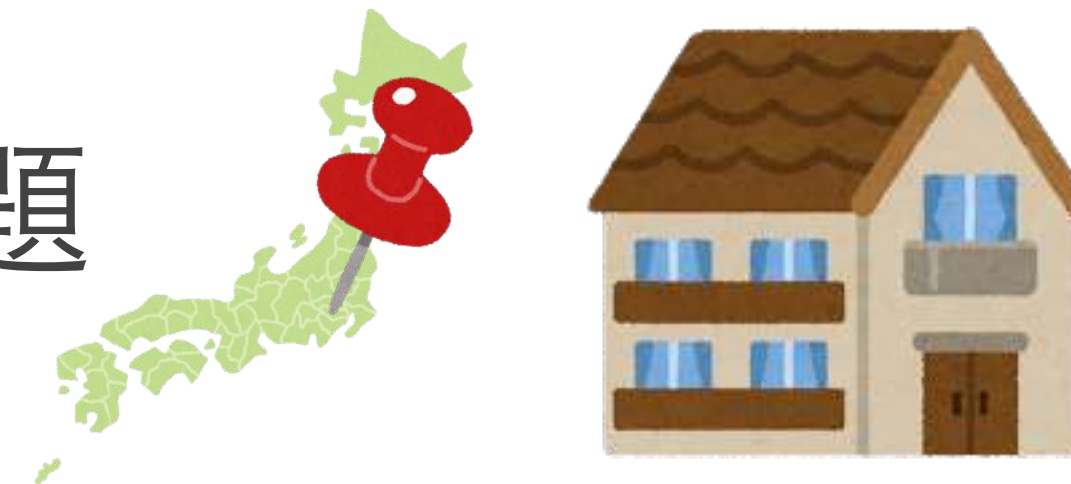
- The Timing Dilemma いつ産む問題



- The 9-to-5 Barrier in Academia 9時5時問題



- The Immobility Trap 居住地ピン留め問題



- The School-Age Barriers 小1の壁 (小4の壁)



The Timing Dilemma いつ産む問題

When is the “right time” to have a child?

- Student: financial issues, limited daycare access
- Postdoc: short-term contracts, frequent relocations
- Tenure: responsibilities like teaching, mentoring, and committees



Pregnancy is unpredictable

- Timing is not fully a choice
- Other issues like premature birth (早産)



Body never fully returns to “pre-pregnancy” condition

- Example: “mom brain”, physical symptoms like hemorrhoids (痔)

How to Balance Research and Pregnancy

During Pregnancy

- Morning sickness (つわり)
 - Physical strain: always tired, sometimes requiring bed rest
- **Remote work and online conferences helped me greatly**



I was hospitalized for about a week
due to severe morning sickness

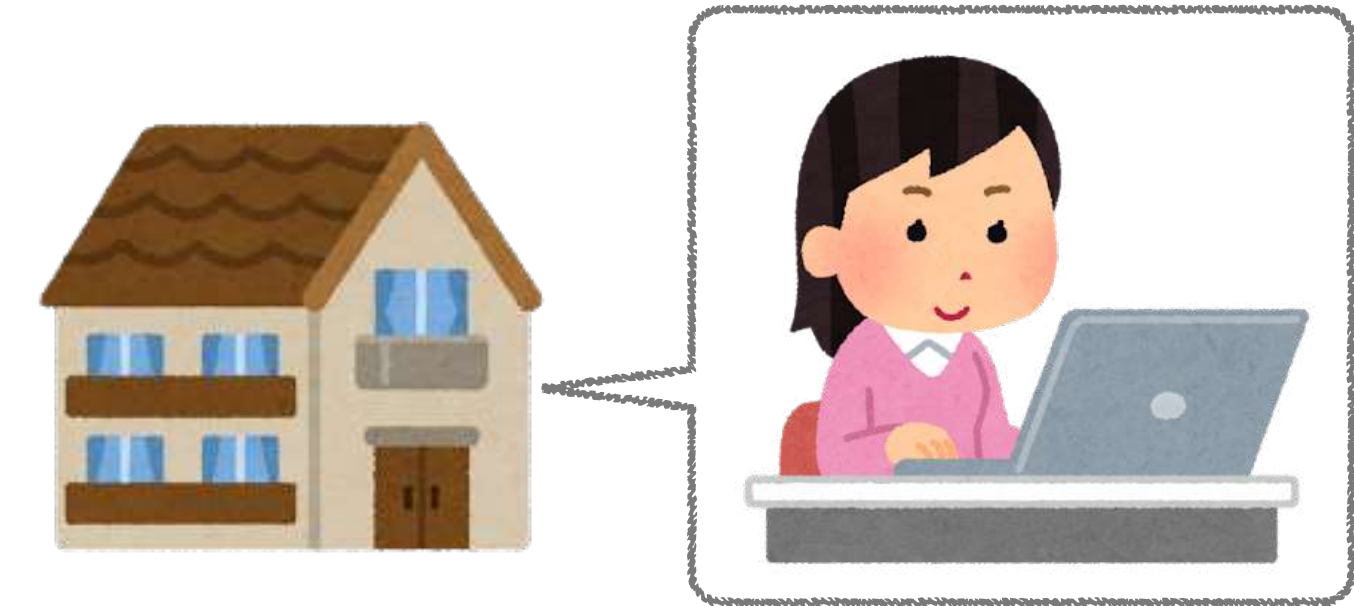
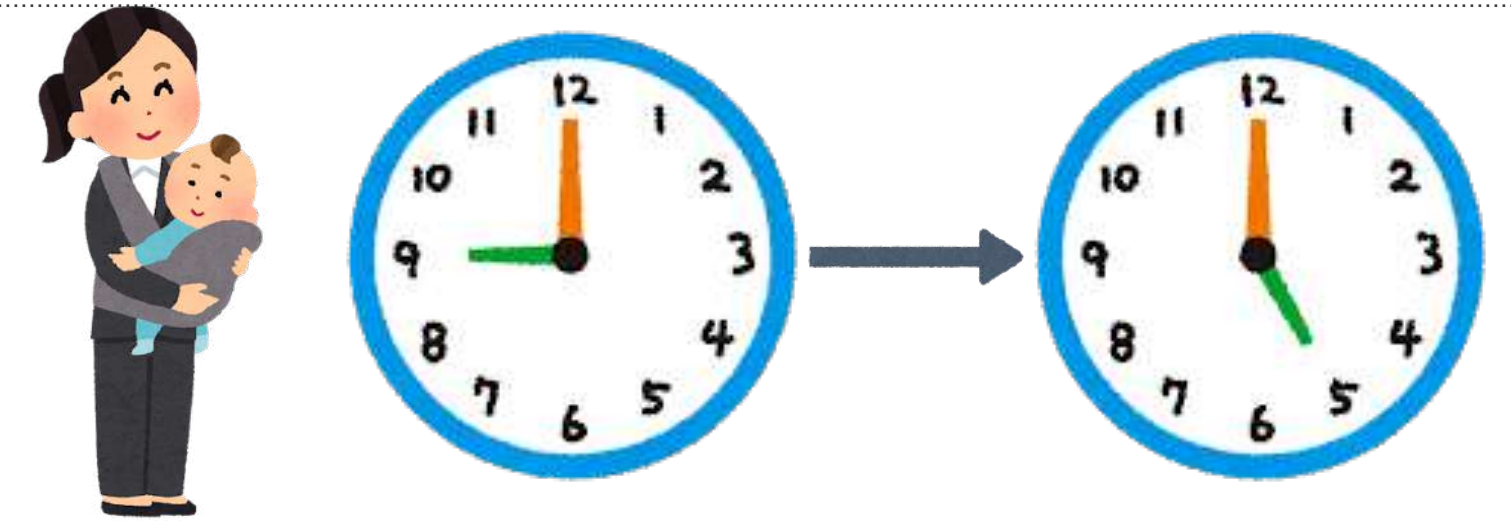
In the last month of pregnancy, even basic
childcare became physically exhausting

The 9-to-5 Barrier in Academia 9時5時問題

Childcare issues ≠ just women's issues

- Flex-time ≠ free time
- Productivity drops, but work still judged by output
 - Only "official" leave is counted

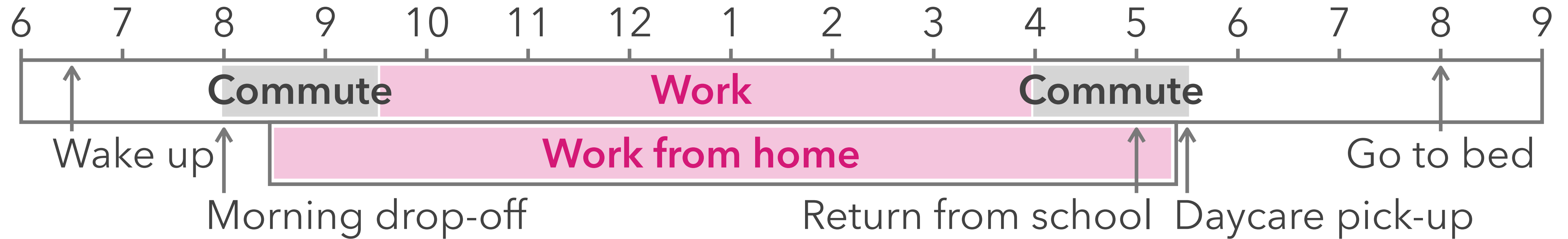
→ Remote work reduces commuting time



Other barriers

- Frequent daycare absences (sick child → sometimes half a month!)
- Research support systems often useless for theorist
- COVID: 2-month daycare closure / voluntary stay-home requests

The 9-to-5 Barrier in Academia 9時5時問題

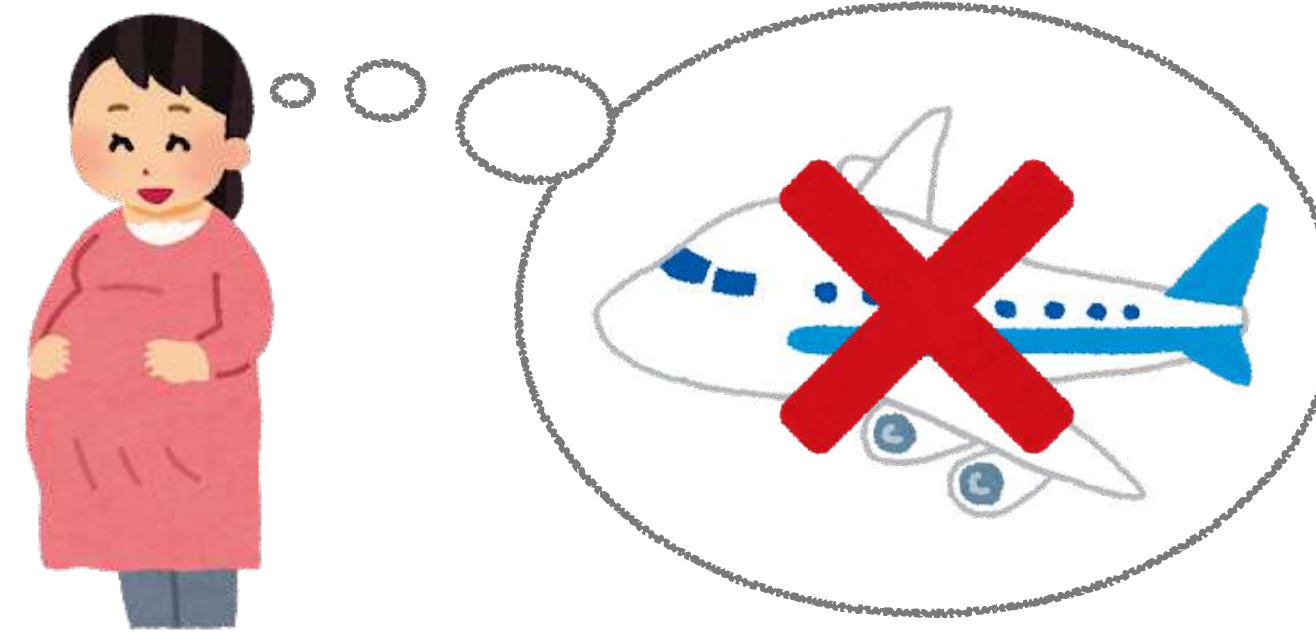


- For me, it's the **10-to-4 barrier**.
- Thanks to remote work, it finally becomes the 9-to-5 barrier.
- Time after the kids go to bed is not for work, but for **rest**.
- I can't do research on **weekends**.

Business Trips are Hard

During Pregnancy

- Air travel may be restricted



With Children

- On-site childcare (託児所) is not always reliable
- Traveling with children is physically difficult
- Sudden illness → Plans can be canceled



Without Children

- Breastfeeding (母乳育児) issues: health risks for mothers

→ Online conferences are lifelines



The Immobility Trap 居住地ピン留め問題

Why moving (引っ越し) isn't easy anymore?

- New city = new daycare
 - Long waitlists (待機児童), adaptation (慣らし保育) again?
- Lose parent-child community networks
- Don't want to limit education / activities (習い事) for child

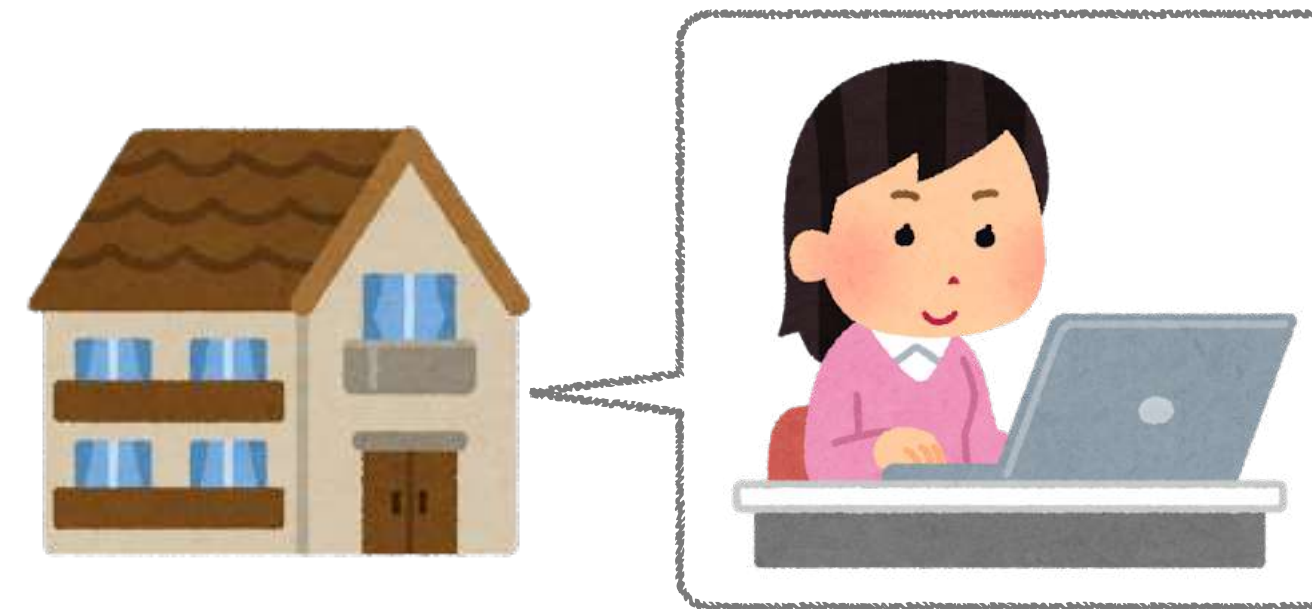


The School-Age Barriers 小1の壁 (小4の壁)

- School starts late → parents can't leave early
- Kids can't go to/from school alone
- Parent-teacher meetings (保護者会) = weekday daytime
- After-school care (学童) ends at grade 4 (in some areas)



→ Remote work is essential



Summary

- Four Main Barriers to Balancing Research & Parenting

- The Timing Dilemma いつ産む問題

- No solutions!

- The 9-to-5 Barrier in Academia 9時5時問題

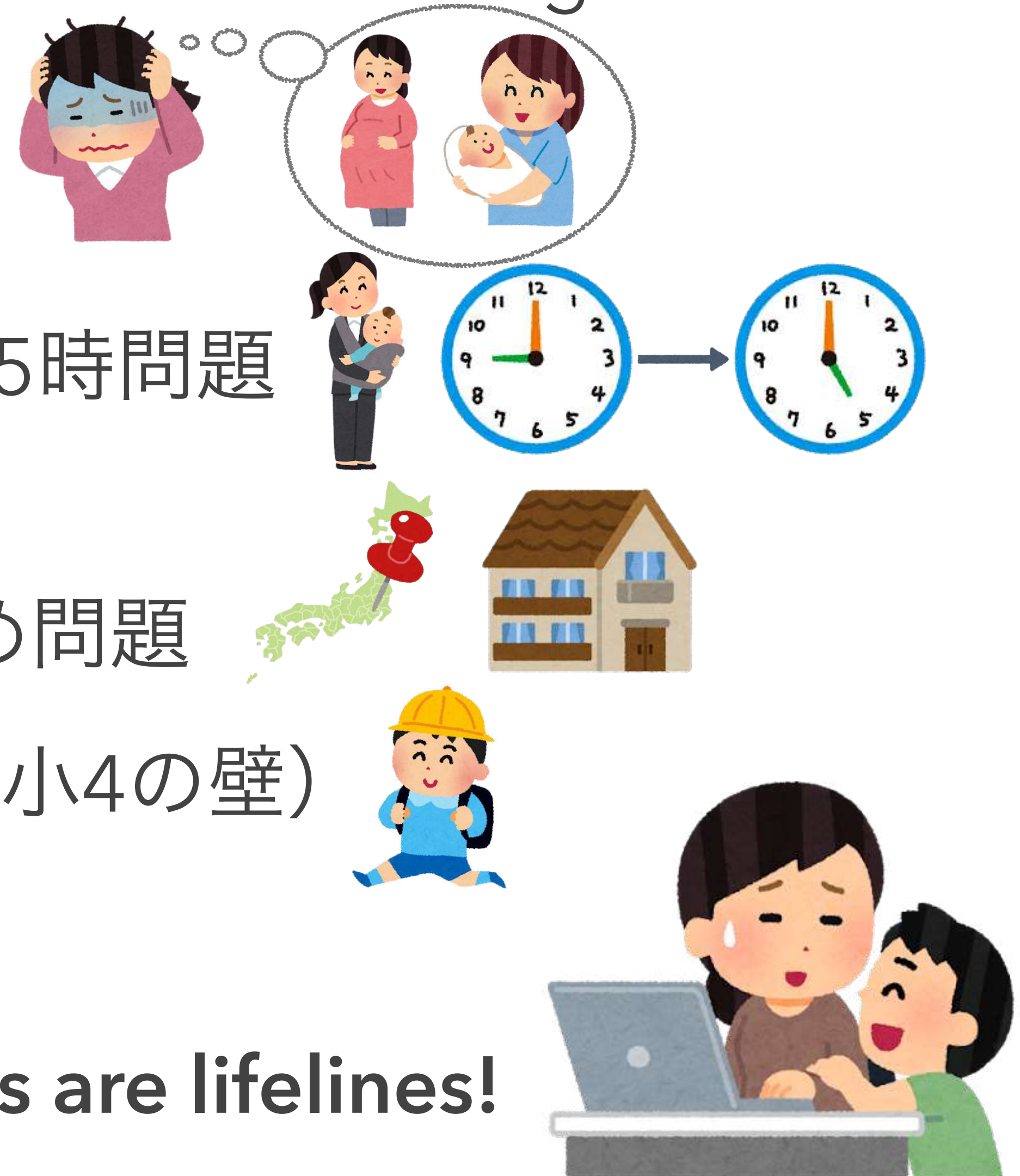
- Business trips are hard

- The Immobility Trap 居住地ピン留め問題

- The School-Age Barriers 小1の壁（小4の壁）

- Take-home message:

Remote work and online conferences are lifelines!



Recommended Book (Japanese)



- Personal stories of parenting, caregiving, and illness
- Covers topics like adoption, medical care for children, and care for one's partner
- Includes expert views on care work, low payment, and gender issues
- Highlights how “life” in work-life balance means different things:
 - For some, it's personal well-being
 - For others, it's family care

Young Researcher Awards Considering Childcare

竜門賞

本会会員で募集翌年の3月末日において40歳未満であり、流体力学の発展に寄与した論文を査読のある雑誌に発表し、独創性と将来性に富むと認められる個人に授与する。

なお、出産・育児により研究に専念できない期間がある場合、一子につき1ないし2年延長する。その延長期間は、産休・育休取得などその期間が定量的に算定できるものに基づき、それら休職期間が一回の出産につき通算8週間以上であれば2年、8週間未満であれば1年とする。対象とする休職期間は、延長期間を考慮しない場合に最後の応募資格を有する年度の7月末日までに開始したものとする。

- Extended eligibility for researchers with childcare career breaks.
- Example (Japan Society of Fluid Mechanics):
 - Extension of 1-2 years per child based on length of leave (≥ 8 weeks \rightarrow 2 years, < 8 weeks \rightarrow 1 year).

<https://www.nagare.or.jp/prize/ryumon.html>