

WOMEN'S WORK-LIFE CONFLICT

Abstract

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The labor force participation rate of married Japanese women aged 25 to 34 in 2016 was about 59.2%. On the other hand, the participation rate of single Japanese women aged 25–29 who continuing to work after graduation was 91.1% in 2016 (Cabinet Office 2015). The Cabinet Office reports that in 2016, the most common reason for quitting was pregnancy; the rates were 29.0% for full-time workers and 41.2% for part-time workers. This suggests that Japanese women are somewhat conflicted between work and home life. This conflict is said to mainly come from Japanese-style employment practices such as long working hours, and the fact that much time is spent on household management, especially childcare.

Under these conditions, the aim of this dissertation was to explore the work–life conflict by empirically examining the following three points. First, regarding the intergenerational linkage between women and their mother’s employment, the mother’s employment has a negative impact on the daughter’s perception of the gender division of household labor, and has a positive impact on employment. Second, as for the Japanese phenomenon called “first grade shock,” that is, when the mothers’ time constraints become tighter because of the sudden reduction of childcare support from the government and because of the increased demands on parenting when their children

enter the first grade, the share of mothers' employment as part-time workers increases and shows consistent evidence of women's perceptions of work-life conflicts, equal share of housework, emotional distress, and their concerns about their children's lives—all of which support the existence of "first grade shock." Finally, regarding the prevalence of long working hours and women's occupational choices, the prevalence of long working hours and overwork negatively affects women's occupational choices, regardless of their marital status, level of education, and existence of child. Furthermore, the adoption of 40-hour workweek system in Korea is positively associated with the share of married women in that industry-occupation.

Policy implications from these findings are the need to give proper guidance to women before pregnancy or childbirth, or to hold a workshop for them with other women of relatively close age who have already experienced childbirth and childcare; the need for longer operating hours for after-school childcare programs, and proper mentoring or guidance regarding their children's first year in school; and the need to ease poor working conditions such as the long working hours, promote flexibility, and adopt a 40-hour workweek system in Korea—all of which would be attractive for Japanese women.