

## **A Study on the Workplace Adaptation of Middle-aged (Re-)employed Female Workers**

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The purpose of this study is to analyze the job adjustment situation of middle-aged women who are (re-)entering the labor market after a long break of job career and may be experiencing conflicts in the process of their settlement in the new workplace. Most of previous studies about female labor market have focused on the causes and the impact of ‘career interruptions’ of female workers pointing out the social and personal problems caused by the withdrawal of married female workers due to burden of housekeeping and child-raising. However, another important issue except preventing such withdrawal of female workers is how to encourage the return or new entrance of middle-aged female workers who are out of the labor market for a while and to help them smoothly settling down in new working environments. In this respect, this study was conducted to gather basic information on workplace adaptation status of middle-aged (re-)employed women. Based on that information, several policy proposals were suggested as the ways of improving the labor market adaptation process of middle-aged female workers.

### **1. Main Findings**

#### 1) Research design

The research in this study is based on the Workplace Adjustment Theory that provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between the workplace environments and the job satisfaction of workers. To get concrete information about job adjustment situation of middle-aged (re-)employed women, surveys for individual re-employed women and companies hiring this kind of

workers were conducted in October 2012. Individual women surveyed were limited to those who are 35-55 years old, regardless of the presence or absence of past work experience. The surveyed companies were those currently hiring or having experience in hiring these workers. Total number of collected sample was 356 female individuals and 141 companies. In addition to surveys, Focus Group Interviews for middle aged women were undertaken to derive concrete policy suggestions.

## 2) Key findings

With regards to the findings from surveys, the degree of overall job satisfaction of (re-)employed female workers appeared as three points based on a five-point scale with relatively higher level of dissatisfaction in terms of wage, employment stability and corporate welfare system. When comparing the working environments of current and previous jobs, large share of respondents were found to be working in the jobs with little relationship with previous jobs in terms of industry, occupation and major job duties. Also, many of them found to have moved down the career ladder in a sense that their current jobs are with relatively disadvantaged conditions in terms of wage, job position and employment contract conditions.

Questions about workplace adaptation status were surveyed in order to measure the frequency of the experience for the specific workplace conflict situations. Survey results showed that approximately 30% of employed women have experienced the conflict situation. This means that significant number of middle-aged (re-)employed female workers is exposed to workplace maladjusted situation. Such situation also appeared to some extent to affect the intention to leave current jobs. Regarding the causes of such maladjustment, most of middle-aged (re-)employed women attributed them to the problems of companies' institutional arrangement, co-workers or their boss. Around 63% of respondents said that the request for changing company system as an effort to address such situation had no impact.

To examine the effects of the attribute of the employment and personal circumstances to maladjustment situation, several statistical analysis were conducted. The results show that those with college certificates, married and with children under 12 years old have higher probability of maladjustment. Moreover, higher household income significantly reduce that probability

implying that those with less economic burden are able to choose jobs which relatively well suit their personal characteristics and family condition.

About the impacts of maladjustment situation to the intention of turnover, maladjustment situation appeared as significantly positive meaning that higher maladjustment leads to higher instability of employment situation of (re-)employed female workers. This result strongly indicates the necessity of improving the adjustment situation of female workers and to this end more comprehensive and multi-facet study as well.

Finally, from the survey results on companies, it was found that employers have quite different understanding about adjustment situation of (re-)entered female workers. Firstly they are found to be generally satisfied with the performance of these workers and in particular, showed relatively higher level of satisfaction with regards to the commitment and responsibility of them. However, they showed perception that conflictual situation of them occurs with higher level of frequency ascribing the main cause of such higher probability of conflicts to personal problems of individual workers instead of any problem of co-workers or company's institutional arrangements. Such difference leads to the difference in the perception about the ways of addressing such maladjustment situation. While individual workers stress the necessity of changing company's institutional arrangement, employers are quite negative about such necessity while emphasizing the aspect of personal characteristics as main cause of such maladjustment.

## **2. Policy Implications**

As for activities necessary to support the smooth return of middle-aged female workers to work, following suggestions can be made as follows. As for activities for companies, there should be efforts to reform the internal grievance system in companies for female workers towards female-friendly system recognizing the gap between the perceptions of employers and workers about the causes and impacts of maladjustment. Secondly, the recognition of corporate CEO and HR personnel has to be changed. Such changes also need to be accompanied with corresponding changes of the process of recruitment, placement, training, promotion and compensation. To induce such changes,

gender-sensitive training for HR personnel can be organized as a concrete activity. Thirdly, more efforts need to be invested in changes of the corporate culture and institutions towards family-friendly companies. To this end, special consulting programs can be organized to provide practical advices to companies in association with the government support.

As for activities for middle-aged female workers, there should be external consultancy service targeted for those female workers who are experiencing maladjustment situation. For effective provision of such service, some leading measures are required. For example, rich qualitative case study on maladjustment situation should be carried out in order to draw better understanding about various aspects of such situation and suitable solutions for specific maladjustment situation. Based on enriched information, development of case manuals and training programs for counselors can be organized.