

# Support of Work-Family Balance and Women's Careers

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## I. Introduction

In Japan, various policies have been implemented since the 1990s in support of a work-family balance. These policies were triggered by societal concerns regarding the declining birthrate. Notably, various requirements were posed upon corporations including the mandatory introduction of a child care leave system. However, while society needs family friendly policies, corporations have little necessity to modify their employment management system to resolve the dwindling birthrate. One might also argue their need to commit to work-family support policies regardless of the birthrate.

Corporations implement policies beyond their legal obligation when it is meaningful for them to do so. Potential direct advantages for corporations include a secure and stable workforce and a strong morale and commitment from their employees. On the other hand, how do work-family support policies affect workers?

This paper first reviews legislative policies in support of a work-family balance and subsequently clarifies their status of enforcement by corporations, concluding with a discussion of the relationship between work-family support policies and women's careers. Do more women remain working in companies with family-friendly policies and does that contribute to the improvement of women's employment? Particularly, since post 1990s' work-family measures focused on balancing work and child rearing, and also since pregnancy and child care are major grounds for women's career break, this paper analyzes the status of such policies and changes in women's careers by focusing primarily on support for a balance of work and child care.

## II. Development of Work-Family Support Policies in Japan

### 1. Changes in Policies

#### (1) As a Policy for Supporting Women's Continuous Careers

In Japan, the gender gap has been demonstrated in various situations in the workplace, as indicated by field of employment, promotion, and wage level.

The main reason for this is the difference in the average years of employment between men and women. In the system followed by many Japanese corporations, a vital role is played by the number of years one is employed with a company. Therefore, the shorter period of employment for women was a major drawback to their career development. Women tend to work fewer years than men due to more substantial family obligations such as bearing and raising children. This attitude of gender role is particularly strong in Japan as compared to other industrialized nations.

Therefore, work-family support policies were defined as “the wheels of a vehicle” with equal employment measures to resolve the gender gap in the workplace. Legal stipulation on child care leave was included in the Working Women Welfare Law enforced in 1972, and similar regulations followed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1986. These acts state that employers must endeavor to provide child care arrangements for their female employees including child care leave when necessary. Since the objective was women’s continued employment, female workers were regarded as the target of the child care leave system.

Some private corporations introduced a child care leave system before the enforcement of the Act on Child Care Leave in 1992. Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation was the first private company to introduce a child care leave system in the 1960s, which subsequently led to its introduction in other companies, mainly large-scale corporations. Around the time the Equal Employment Opportunity Act took effect, more corporations were voluntarily introducing the system as part of efforts to develop an environment that would facilitate the retention of female workers and capitalize on their abilities.

## **(2) As a Policy of Work-Family Balance for Both Males and Females**

The declining birthrate in Japan boosted the promotion of work-family support policies. In 1989, the total fertility rate indicated 1.57, falling below the lowest figure recorded in 1966 (1.58). It was dubbed the “1.57 shock,” and Japanese society has been facing a declining birthrate ever since. Various measures were proposed to resolve the decline, amongst which the work-family support policy was considered a vital pillar. The idea behind this is, if we do not support women to balance work, child-bearing and rearing with an assumption that they will continue to work, then they would ultimately be forced to choose between work and family, and the birthrate would continue to decline.

In 1992, amid heightened concerns vis-à-vis the rapidly declining birthrate, the Act on Child Care Leave took effect for both male and female workers. This act not only supports continuous work for women, but also applies to men as a work-family balance support system for any workers with family obligations. Both male and female workers received the right to apply for child care leave. Also, employers were required to provide flexible work style such as shorter working hours for employees with child care obligations.

Subsequent improvements were made to the system from 1995 on, including a provision for income security during child care leave. Also, in answer to the nursing dilemma of an aging society, a family care leave system became compulsory and a revised act was enforced in 1999 entitled the Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave. After the first “Angel Plan” was established in 1994, community-based local child care services improved in pursuit of superior policies for a work-family balance.

### **(3) Enforcement of the Act on Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation**

Furthermore, in a separate framework from the Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave, the Act on Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation was enforced in April 2005. This act stipulates that corporations with 301 or more employees are obligated to develop action plans to support the development of the next generation in their companies, and corporations with 300 or less employees are asked to endeavor to develop such plans. This act includes government accreditation of companies achieving certain results via adherence to the action plans. To receive such accreditation, at least one male employee must take child care leave, and 70% or more women with children must take child care leave during the planning period of the employees' action plan. In this way, a corporation's voluntary commitment is encouraged via a government accreditation system.

## **2. Implementation Status of Work-Family Support Policies and Their Effect**

Let us look at the current status of work-family support policies in corporations.

Currently, 61.6% of companies (hereafter defined as those with five or

more employees) have implemented a child care leave system, and 55.6% have family care leave system. This indicates the presence of many companies in non-compliance with legalized regulations. The ratio of companies introducing measures such as shorter working hours remains at 41.6%, 70% or more of which limit the age of applicable children to those under three years of age. Exploitation of such a system is thus extremely limited for those with children of three years and older.

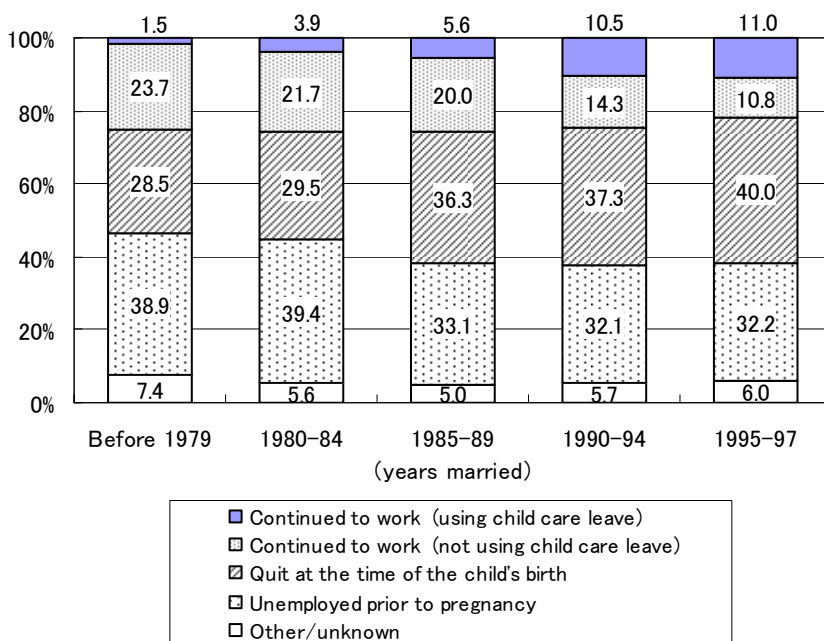
In a traditional Japanese employment system, the basic household model depicts a working husband and stay-at-home wife who is unemployed and cares for the children. This image remains strong throughout Japanese society, and very few women continue working after childbirth despite an improvement in work-family support policies.

As a result of the First Longitudinal Survey of Babies in the 21st Century conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2001, 73.5% of women who gave birth to their first child were working one year prior to the birth, 67.4% of whom ceased working sometime thereafter. After six months following the birth, the ratio of working mothers including those self-employed was 24.6%, only 17.8% of whom were working full-time (excluding part-time). According to the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, of those women whose youngest child is three years old or younger, only roughly 30% of them are employed, thus indicating that the remaining 70% of them are not. Among these women, however, the percentage of those with a desire to work is fairly significant. This is particularly true among those whose youngest child is still quite young.

Figure 1 shows the employment status of women before and after the birth of their children. The ratio of those using the child care leave system has increased, but still remains at a low 10%. The data may appear to suggest that women who once continued working without taking child care leave are now able to continue working by taking advantage of the system, but in reality, since the number of women unemployed prior to becoming pregnant has decreased, the tendency to quit working at the time of pregnancy has actually increased.<sup>1</sup> Abe (2005b) pointed out that women who utilize the child care

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<sup>1</sup> Abe (2005a) created pseudo-panel data by using the Employment Status Survey by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. As a result, he warned that marriage, giving birth and raising children have a strong effect

**Figure 1. The employment status of women before and after childbirth**

Source: *White Paper on the National Lifestyle Fiscal Year 2005* by the Cabinet Office (created based on the *Japanese National Fertility Survey* by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research [2002]).

Notes: 1 The target of the survey was 4,647 wives out of first-time married couples who had been married five years or more and had their first child within the first five years of marriage.

2 Employment status of the wives before and after the birth of their first child by years married.

Employment status of women before and after childbirth is designated as follows:

Continued to work (using child care leave): worked before becoming pregnant with the first child—used child care leave—worked when the child reached one year of age

Continued to work (not using child care leave): worked before becoming pregnant with the first child—did not use child care leave—worked when the child reached one year of age

Quit at the time of child's birth: worked before becoming pregnant with the first child—did not work when the child reached one year of age

Unemployed prior to pregnancy: did not work prior to becoming pregnant with the first child—did not work when the child reached one year of age

on employment behaviors among younger generation women, particularly college graduates, and could potentially result in a declining marriage and birthrate.

leave system are unevenly distributed; they have high academic backgrounds and high wages. A similar situation was reported by the OECD (2001). It is, therefore, difficult to claim that family-friendly policies such as the child care leave system contribute extensively to the improvement of women's employment. The effect of work-family support policies on a woman's choice to continue working during child-bearing and rearing remains, for all intents and purposes, vastly limited.

### **III. Analysis of the Effect of Work-Family Support Policies on Women's Career**

#### **1. Work-Family Support Policies and Women's Careers**

How do work-family support policies affect a woman's career? British and American studies have suggested that family friendly policies have promoted the stability and retention of employees.<sup>2</sup>

Higuchi (1994), Morita and Kaneko (1998), Shigeno and Okusa (1998), and Higuchi and Abe (1999) have concluded that companies with child care leave systems have a higher retention rate of female employees. Yamaguchi (2005) acknowledged that the child care leave system greatly contributes to maintaining the birthrate among married working women, and the improvement of such a system could be very effective in resolving the declining birthrate. For those women aspiring to work after having children, whether or not a good work-family policy is in place is a vital criterion when selecting an employer.

On the other hand, since the child care leave system is primarily used by women, it has been indicated that women's employment costs could increase, which would result in a negative effect on the hiring of female employees. Wakisaka (2001) suggested that in companies with less than 30 employees, a child care leave system could limit the hiring of women. According to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (2005), the higher the company's percentage of workers utilizing child care leave, the lower their ratio of female employment and hiring as well as their ratio of female managers. This indicates that the utilization of child care leave and the employment of female workers raising children are potential burdens on corporations. On the other hand, a workplace with a high ratio of child care leave users also enjoys extended

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Takeishi (2006b) for various international references.

continuous employment of female workers.

Implementing work-family support policies contributes to the retention of female employees and is thus expected to resolve the gender gap in terms of years of continuous employment. On the other hand, work-family support policies oblige corporations to bear the cost of raising the employees' children. Thus, since the majority of workers currently using the system are female, there is a discrepancy in employment costs for male and female employees, thereby possibly creating a gender gap.

## **2. Framework for Analysis and Data Used for Analysis**

Based on the current status as described above and on existing studies, the effects of introducing and implementing work-family support policies on women's careers will be examined through analysis of data from different corporations. Specifically, this analysis examines the relationships between the introduction/operation of work-family support policies and the employment and retention of female workers.<sup>3</sup>

First, let us clarify the definition of work-family support policies in order to establish a framework for analysis. The work-family support policies analyzed in this paper are defined as measures to support the balance of work and child care (partially including care for the elderly/sick). As far as these policies are concerned, previous studies have stated that in addition to the system's introduction, it is imperative that employees understand the system and recognize that it can be utilized (Staines and Galinsky 1992; Eaton 2003). Therefore, this study uses indicators to illustrate not only the system's introduction, but also the development of a corporate environment to encourage its utilization.<sup>4</sup>

There is another vital factor for measuring the effectiveness of work-family support policies. Currently, family-friendly policies are strongly related to capitalizing on woman's abilities, such as retention in the workplace. Implementing only work-family support policies and disregarding equal employment measures hinders the opportunity to utilize woman's abilities, and

<sup>3</sup> This paper includes only a summary of the results. Refer to the detailed results by Takeishi (2006a).

<sup>4</sup> Actual usage can be used in lieu of environmental development; however, since the survey data does not include figures indicating actual usage, the status of environmental development is used to develop indicators.

**Table 1. Distribution of introduction of work-family support policies**

	Number of companies	Ratio (%)
Work-family support policies L (No)	272	59.8
Work-family support policies H (Yes)	183	40.2
Total	455	100.0

could result in a highly restricted career development path, such as a “mommy track (limited career course for mothers).” Thus, it is important to include not only work-family support policies, but also measures promoting a woman’s abilities, in other words promoting equal employment policies.<sup>5</sup>

Data used in this study was analyzed results of the Survey on the Relationship between a Corporations’ Employment of Women and Business Achievements<sup>6</sup> by the Japan Institute of Workers’ Evolution.<sup>7</sup> The survey was conducted in January and February 2003 and included 3347 listed or OTC corporations. From among these corporations, 455 valid responses were received (valid response rate: 13.6%).

The following three indicators were created to facilitate analysis based on the above framework: 1) introduction of work-family support policies, 2) development of a corporate environment using work-family support policies, and 3) implementation status of equal opportunity policies.

### **(1) “Introduction of Work-Family Support Policies” Indicator**

As for the introduction of work-family support policies, if a company offers either a child care/family care leave system above and beyond the act, or runs an in-house child care facility in lieu of the former, then it is categorized as “work-family support policies (yes)” (Table 1).

- Offering a child care/family care leave system that goes above and beyond the act (companies introduced: 39.3%)
- Offering an in-house child care facility (companies introduced: 2.9%)

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Wakisaka (2001) for a study analyzing the relationship between equal employment and family-friendly policies.

<sup>6</sup> This analysis uses the results of survey analyses conducted at the Study Group of Work-Life Balance and Corporate Performance by the author with the NLI Research Institute. Refer to the NLI Research Institute (2005) for details.

<sup>7</sup> Takeishi (2006b) addresses the same issue as indicated in this paper using different data, and achieves results similar to those found in the analysis of this study.



**Table 2. Distribution of development of the corporate environment for the utilization of work-family support policies**

	Number of companies	Ratio (%)
Development of the corporate environment L (Low)	240	53.5
Development of the corporate environment H (High)	209	46.5
Total	449	100.0

### **(2) “Development of a Corporate Environment for the Utilization of Work-Family Support Policies” Indicator**

The status of environmental development for the utilization of work-family support policies was evaluated on four levels using the five items shown below (total 20 points). Setting the average (12.17) as a standard, 12 points or less is defined as “development of the corporate environment low” and 13 or more is defined as “development of the corporate environment high” (Table 2).

- Providing information for a smooth return to work after child care/family care leave
- Training for a smooth return to work after child care/family care leave
- Creating an ambience in which employees feel comfortable taking child care/family care leave
- Consulting for life plan for long-term employment
- Raising awareness among employees to generate a feeling of customariness regarding a female employee continuing to work after having children

### **(3) “Implementation Status of Equal Opportunity Policies” Indicator**

The following eight items were used to assess the status of implementing equal opportunity policies and were evaluated on four different levels (total 32 points). The average (19.34) was set as the standard, and those who scored 19 or less were defined as “equal opportunity policies low,” and those who scored 20 or more were defined as “equal opportunity policies high” (Table 3).

- Training management and interviewers in equal hiring practices
- Creating manuals describing fair selection of men and women
- Planning for workers to take on the challenges of new jobs
- Securing educational/training opportunities for new job responsibilities

**Table 3. Distribution of the implementation status of equal opportunity policies**

	Number of companies	Ratio (%)
Equal opportunity policies L (Low)	225	49.7
Equal opportunity policies H (High)	228	50.3
Total	453	100.0

**Table 4. Distribution of eight patterns combining the three fields**

Work-family support policies	Development of environment	Equal opportunity policies	Combination	Number of companies	Ratio (%)
H	H	H	H-H-H	74	16.5
		L	H-H-L	25	5.6
	L	H	H-L-H	28	6.2
		L	H-L-L	56	12.5
L	H	H	L-H-H	68	15.1
		L	L-H-L	42	9.4
	L	H	L-L-H	58	12.9
		L	L-L-L	98	21.8
Total				449	100.0

- Encouraging female employees to participate in educational opportunities such as various training courses
- Encouraging female employees to take exams for promotions
- Training management and employees to eliminate the idea of a division of role between men and women
- Guiding management to eliminate gender discrimination when assigning work to men and women

#### (4) Combination of Three Indicators

The following eight patterns were established as shown in Table 4 by combining two levels of high and low for each of the three fields: 1) work-family support policies, 2) development of the corporate environment, and 3) equal opportunity policies.

### 3. Influence on Women's Employment

How does the development of work-family and equal employment policies effect women's employment? Figure 2 shows the average "ratio of women among regular employees" and "ratio of women among new graduates hired in

environment” (significant at the 5% level) and “equal opportunity policies” (significant at the 1% level), the ratio is high, but the opposite is true of the “work-family support policies” indicator. Of the eight patterns, L-H-H has the highest ratio, with H-H-H and H-H-L being high as well. H-L-L indicates the lowest ratio. Companies implementing a combination of “development of the corporate environment” and “equal opportunity policies” indicators are active in hiring new female graduates, but those promoting only work-family support policies and ignoring the corporate environment or implementing equal opportunity policies are not actively hiring women. Companies that introduce work-family support policies, as described later, have a good retention rate of female workers. Therefore, even though the ratio of new graduates hired is low, the good retention rate results in a high ratio of females. At the same time, work-family support policies have an effect on the cost of employing women. Therefore, companies doing little above and beyond their commitment may be limiting their hiring of women.

In order to quantitatively analyze work-family support policies, development of the corporate environment and the status of female employment, a multi-regression analysis was conducted with the “ratio of women among regular employees (%)” and the “ratio of women among new graduates hired in the past three years (%)” as objective variables. The results were comparable to the above analysis (Results of the analysis are abbreviated).

#### **4. Influence on the Retention of Female Workers**

Needless to say, work-family support policies are measures to support women to continue working during child bearing and child care period. The significance of such policies as a retention measure is high for corporations in need of raising their retention rate. A number of studies have suggested that work-family support policies have a positive effect on employee retention (Gray 2002; Batt and Valcour 2003). If employers improve work-family support policies, women aspiring to have long-term careers may start applying for them. Meanwhile, implementing work-family support policies elicits a higher commitment from current employees, thereby increasing the retention ratio (Scandula and Lankau 1997; Eaton 2003).

In this section, the retention ratio of female workers is analyzed using the “average employment period for women.” The results are indicated in Figure 3.

**Figure 2. Comparison chart: Average ratios of women among regular employees and new graduates**



the past three years” classified by the above types of corporations.

First, the “ratio of women among regular employees” is related to “work-family support policies” and “development of the corporate environment” indicators (significant at the 10% level), but not significantly related to the “equal opportunity policies” indicator. Analysis of the eight patterns showed a high “ratio of women among regular employees” in H-H-H and H-H-L groups, indicating that the connection to work-family support policies is higher than to equal opportunity policies. In the H-L-L group, the ratio of women is not high, demonstrating that not only the introduction of a system, but also improving the corporate environment to facilitate the use thereof strengthens the relationship between work-family support policies and the ratio of women.

The reason for a high ratio of women is: first, the ratio of hired women is high, and second, the retention of female workers is high despite a ratio of hired females similar to that of other companies.

When we look at the “ratio of women among new graduates hired in the past three years,” in groups with high indicators in “development of the corporate

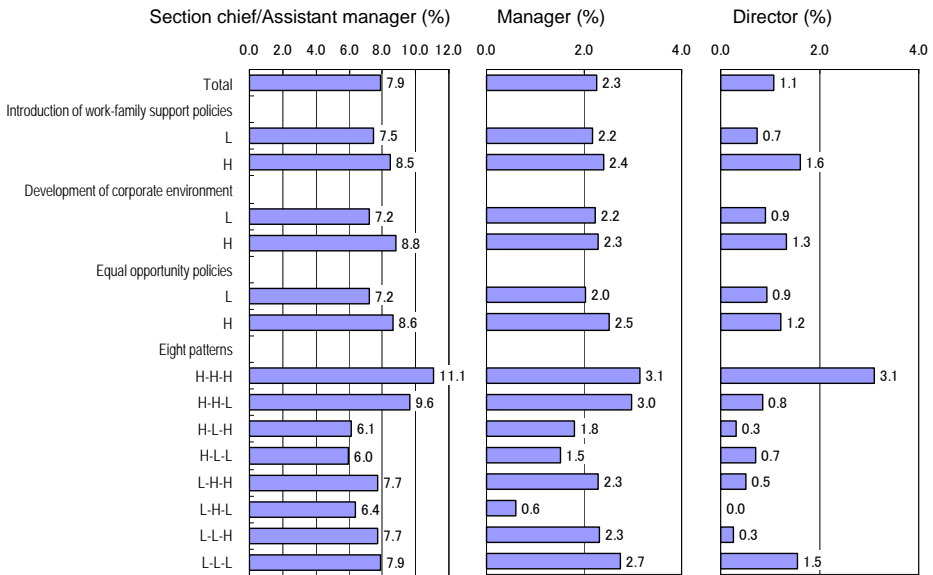
**Figure 3. Comparison chart: Average employment period for women**

The average employment period for women is longer in corporations with higher “work-family support policies” (significant at the 10% level), “development of the corporate environment,” and “equal opportunity policies” indicators than those with lower figures. Among the eight patterns, H-H-H has the longest employment period, followed by H-H-L. In general, there is a strong link to introducing work-family support policies. Results of the quantitative analysis show a significant positive coefficient (at the 10% level) in the H-H-L pattern, indicating that improving work-family support policies has an effect on retention (Results of the analysis are abbreviated).

### 5. Influence on the Promotion of Women

If the retention rate for women in companies rises, one can expect to see an increase in the number of women promoted to management position. Analysis of the promotion of female workers by ratio of those in management positions demonstrates that the rate of promotion to section chief/assistant manager, manager, and director respectively is high in companies with high indicators in work-family support policies, development of the corporate environment and equal opportunity policies. Among the eight patterns, the H-H-H group has a

**Figure 4. Comparison chart: Average ratio of women in management positions**



remarkably high ratio of women in management positions, particularly for the position of director (Figure 4). On the other hand, the L-L-L group has high ratio of companies with no females in management positions (63.3%). This indicates that work-family support policies promote a higher retention rate for female workers, while improving equal opportunity policies encourages the promotion of female workers to management positions.

According to results of a multiple regression analysis using the ratio of women in a section chief/assistant manager position (%) as the objective variable, the H-H-H group showed a significantly positive coefficient. Since there are many companies with no female managers or directors, logit analysis was conducted by setting the presence of female managers or directors as an objective variable. As a result, the H-H-H group showed a significant coefficient at the 5% level (Results of the analysis are abbreviated).

## 6. Summary of Data Analysis

The aforementioned results of the data analysis indicate that a corporation's implementation of work-family support policies contributes to a longer employment period for female workers, and when implemented alongside with

equal opportunity policies, it encourages promotions for women. As for a work-family balance, for women to continue working it is imperative that in addition to introducing a system, an environment to facilitate its ease of use is also developed. By implementing these measures, the retention rate for women rises, improving the ratio of women in the workforce and thereby promoting women's employment.

The data also calls attention to an effect on the hiring of women. The "work-family support policies" indicator and the ratio of women among new hired graduates may be inversely related. Previous studies indicated that the implementation of work-family support policies adversely affects women's employment, since use of the system is unevenly distributed; women tend to utilize it more. This study shows that corporations only introducing of work-family support policies may limit their hiring of women. On the other hand, corporations carrying out measures to promote utilization of the system and those working to capitalize on women's abilities rather than implementing work-family support policies as a formality, show no negative effect on the hiring of women. With work-family support policies having a positive effect on female employees, such as improving the retention rate and securing human resources, women's abilities will be further capitalized upon and more women will be promoted to management positions.

#### **IV. Challenges of Work-Family Support Policies**

Since the 1990s, despite the development of intensive policies supporting a work-family balance, women's careers have yet to undergo major change. The dwindling birthrate is another trend yet to see any change.

However, by introducing work-family support policies, promoting their use, and implementing equal employment for men and women, the retention rate for women and their promotion to management positions will improve. If more companies implement these measures comprehensively, the potential for women to capitalize on their abilities would rise. The problem is that, currently, so few companies do so.

The challenge of implementing work-family support policies is their misconception as "measures for women" or "measures for women with small children." Below are some issues that may stem from such a narrow interpretation of work-family support.

First, companies not seeking to capitalize on the abilities of female employees consider work-family support policies meaningless. In a workplace with few female employees with small children and many women who quit for child bearing and child care purposes, work-family support policies may be perceived as unimportant. This is one of the reasons for the major gap among companies in their commitment to supporting a work-family balance.

Second, since the majority of workers taking advantage of the measures are women, it is perceived that employment costs for female workers are significantly higher than for their male counterpart, a factor also substantiated by the data analysis. If only women are utilizing the child care leave and shorter work hour systems, then their cost as a workforce surpasses that of men. Therefore, improving work-family support policies may lead to a decrease in demand for women in the workforce. Also, taking into consideration a woman's child care responsibilities and exempting them from overwork and transfer, their promotions and raises are often limited. If a "mommy track" or separate career path for working mothers develops, it will not meet workers' needs even if a balance between work and child care becomes attainable.

Also, since work-family support policies were initially established for those employees trying to balance work and raise small children, utilization of the system is currently very limited. Therefore, those who take advantage of it do so with a sense of discomfort, and creating a work-family balance is not recognized as a common issue among employees in the workplace.

Policies for balancing work and child care should not be limited to working mothers, and should apply to a wider audience. The concept that men have little need for a work-family balance and the philosophy that stay-at-home mothers should have the sole responsibility of raising their children were both assumptions held at the introduction and implementation of the system. This is, in all likelihood, the major reason why the anticipated effect of work-family support policies was not achieved. Furthermore, child rearing is not limited to small children, but a long-term process. This "long-term" point of view will become vital to achieving support for a work-family balance.

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