

Significance of Home-based Work in the Child-Rearing Period

Summary

Contributing Authors (order of writing)

Takayuki Kantani Senior Researcher, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training

Kazufumi Sakai Assistant Fellow, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training

Research Period

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Research Objective (Verification of Three Hypotheses and the Issue of Time Management)

In this survey research, we examined the meaning of, and issues related to, home-based work during the child-rearing period (roughly up to the age when the child is in the lower grades in elementary school). Measures for supporting workers to balance work and childcare include the childcare leave system based on the Law Concerning the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave, measures for shorter working hours, family-care leave and other measures. These measures can be divided into two categories: (1) measures to promote "taking leave, shortening or not extending the working hours " as needed during child-rearing period, and (2) measures to "enable workers to work during the child-rearing period in an equivalent way or close to the way they worked before their childbirth" according to the needs or the requests of workers (Table 1). The former type of measures include childcare leave, family-care leave, shorter working hours and exemption from overtime work, while the latter includes flex-time system, early/late working hours and other measures offering flexibility.

Table 1. Categories of Support Measures to Balance Work and Family Care during the Child-Rearing Period

	Take leave, shorten or not extend working hours		Equivalent or similar way of working as before the childbirth
	Leave	Shorten working hours - Set upper limit	Flexible working style
Support measures to balance work and family care	- Child-care leave - Family-care leave (Use of paid holidays)	- Shorter working hours - Exemption from overtime work	- Flextime system - late starting/early closing time of work - Home-based work

In this paper, we overviewed the system of home-based work and other measures in the surveyed companies (Chapter 1), as well as the actual situations of home-based work during the child-rearing period (Chapter 2). Then we see home-based work during the child-rearing period as one of the abovementioned support measures to balance work and family care, and place it as an alternative that allows workers to reduce the use of leave/holidays and prevents working hours from being shortened based on the outsourcing of childcare. Based on these viewpoints, we examined the first hypothesis: (1) whether or not the home-based work has the effect of shortening the child-care leave when requested (Chapter 3). We also examined the second hypothesis to verify whether or not it has (2) the effect of enabling workers to work full-time or similar hours including overtime work or to work for hours similar to full-time when required, as well as the effect of reducing holidays that might be taken otherwise due to child-care (Chapter 4). Then, we examined men's use of child-care leave, the importance of which is often pointed out and which is not easily promoted. We did this in order to discuss the third hypothesis to see whether or not (3) home-based work functions partially as an alternative or the second best solution to this problem (Chapter 5). In connection with the possibility of a full-time job described in the second hypothesis, we also examined (4) actual situations and issues related to working hour management for home-based work during the child-rearing period (Chapter 6). Finally, we stated our conclusion and policy implications, proposing further research topics (Chapter 7).

Method and Subjects of the Survey

We define "home-based work" as "work at home for all or part of the working hours using information and telecommunication equipment, as an established system or in a form that is acknowledged by the employer under the employment contract with the employer" (but excluding cases in which workers work at home at the discretion of their supervisor or the workers themselves for practical reasons, since this observation is

only intended to examine support measures to balance work and family care during the child-rearing period). The "Practice" of home-based work is divided to "Complete-type" and "Partial-type" and the Partial-type practice is further divided to "Daily" and "Hourly" work (Table 2).

Table 2. Practice of Home-based Work

	Description	
Complete-type	- Works at home all day for more than half of the working days on a weekly or monthly basis (for example, going to the office only once a week).	
Partial-type	- Works at home all day on business days for less than half of a week or month (for example, 1 or 2 days in a week or 1 or 2 days in a month), or works regularly or irregularly for part of the working day of a business day or on holidays.	
	Daily	- Works at home all day on a business day.
	Hourly	- Works at home for a few hours before/after going to the office or on holidays.

This survey was conducted using e-mail and interviews for the case studies. E-mail was used for the first case study in 2004 and 2005, and interviews were conducted for the rest of the survey in 2005. As a result, the subjects include six people from six companies with whom we had direct contact and nine people from two companies whose information was given to us indirectly by the companies and workers with whom we had direct contact.

Table 3. Categories of Companies and Workers on the Survey

Year	Company	Worker		Practice	Contact
		Women	Men		
2004	Company A	Ms B, c and d		Partial-type or Complete-type	E-mail
	Company E	Ms f	Mr. g	Daily or Hourly Partial-type	
	(Company h)	Ms I		Daily or Hourly Partial-type and Complete-type	
2005	Company J		Mr. k	Daily Partial-type	Interview
	Company L	Ms M, N and p	Mr. o	Hourly Partial-type	
	Company Q	Ms r and s		Complete-type	
	(Company t)	Ms U	Mr. V	Daily Partial-type	
	Company W			Daily Partial-type	

Note:

- 1) No information was provided from the companies in parenthesis.
- 2) Information was given by the company for the persons written in lower-case.

Outline of the Survey Results

The practice of home-based work was analyzed in relation to support measures to

balance work and family care that "enable workers to work in an equivalent or similar way as they worked before the birth of their child" if requested during the child-rearing period (up to the age when the child is in the lower grades in elementary school). The analysis reached the following conclusions: (1) home-based work has the effect of shortening the length of child-care leave when requested; (2) it enables workers to work full-time or close to full-time including overtime work hours when required, and it has the effect of reducing leave time that may otherwise be required for childcare; and (3) home-based work could be an alternative or the second best solution to the problem of men's taking of childcare leave. The choice of home-based work may not be made often in practice, but its availability is important as an alternative way to work.

In connection with time management, in order for workers in the child-rearing period to benefit from flexible ways of working such as working at home and at the same time to prevent them from overworking, one possible way is to allow them to set their own working days and working hours, based on a predetermined number of working hours (or overtime hours within a limit), making sufficient adjustments for work volume, requiring workers to limit their working hours with a certain flexibility, and obliging them to report their work hours to their supervisor.

Outline of Chapters

1. Research Objective, Method and Subjects of the Survey (in relation to Chapter 1)

See above (p1 and 2)

2. Actual State of Home-based Work during the Child-Rearing Period (in relation to Chapter 2)

(1) Industry and job category for home-based work

Including cases that are not related to child-rearing, the practice of home-based work is strongly related to IT-related industries and job categories, and this trend seems to have been further expanding in recent years.

(2) Practice of home-based work

Not many women engage in full-time home-based work during the child-rearing period. It is limited to those who have long commutes, those who are not able to commute or those who have a child who suffers from an illness over a long period of time. Daily partial-type home-based work, characteristic of women, is used for the occasions such as in the event of a sudden illness or vaccination for their children to balance work and child/family care without causing inconvenience to their workplace. For men, it is

also used to cope with a busy schedule, to collaborate in child-rearing or as the second best solution to taking child-care leave.

The practice of hourly partial-type home-based work, in the case of women, is used not only for a short period of time in the event of a sudden illness in their children but also for long-term hospitalization and care. It is also used in combination with the short-hour work or flextime system. Furthermore, it is used to maintain the same working hours or close to the same working hours as other regular employees as long as is possible during the child-rearing period. For men, the practice of hourly partial-type home-based work can be a burden, but there are cases in which they combine the practice with the flextime system to achieve full-time work.

(3) Necessity of outsourcing child-care

In practice, it is difficult to work at home when children (small children in particular) are present. When engaged in a project work, workers may need to talk to other members of the project team or with their customers, and it is not possible or appropriate to work at home every day. These workers may come home late, and extended child-care services, for example, are required for them. Also, elementary schools finish earlier than nursery schools, and child-care services are strongly needed for children going to elementary school.

3. Effect of Shortening Child-care Leave (in relation to Chapter 3)

There is a group of companies and individuals that have shortened the period of child-care leave for women who are able to work at home after childbirth, while there is another group that does not show this trend. The practice of home-based work, even when it is available, does not always shorten the period of child-care leave, due to many factors including the thinking of individuals and the atmosphere of the company that they work for. Demand for this is expected to grow more in future, and, for those who wish and need the practice of home-based work, there should be an alternative in place to shorten the period of child-care leave (thus reducing the loss of income and career and professional expertise) and to quickly go back to work, particularly in IT-related industries that are associated with rapid technological changes.

4. Effect of Full-Time Work (in relation to Chapter 4)

The practice of work at home during the child-rearing period varies greatly as follows (Table 4): (1) workers are enabled to work full-time when home-based work system is

used even alone among other support measures for balancing work and family care; (2) the home-based work system is often used in combination with other support measures for balancing work and family care, and, for example the use of flextime system enhances flexibility in working style and enables workers to work full-time; (3) when used with the short-hour working system, although there is a tendency to work within the statutory working hours (or within the scheduled working hours of full-time workers), workers often work overtime or close to full-time; (4) partial-type home-based workers, in particular hourly, tend to perform overtime work, including cases in which the short-hour work system is also used in parallel; (5) when used in combination with flextime and other home-based work measures, some workers do not work overtime if a "division/change of working hours" is applied; and (6) workers are allowed to work at home without taking paid leave or family-care leave when their children have sudden fevers, etc.

5. Effect of Alternative Solutions to Child-care Leave for Men (in relation to Chapter 5)

Although it is difficult for men to take child-care leave due to the need for income or due to a career orientation, as well as because of the need of companies for resources, there are cases in which the selection of home-based working in combination with flextime or other measures provides an effective equivalent to child-care leave. Also when partial-type (daily and hourly) home-based working measures are selected without any other measure, some effects equivalent to child-care leave are observed. Discretionary work, flextime and shift work also provide flexibility for men, promoting men's participation in child-care, and these show even greater effects in particular when working hours are staggered between husband and wife.

Table 4. Home-based Work and Other Measures, Combination of Measures and Overtime Work

	Complete-type	Daily Partial-type	Hourly Partial-type
Other measures not taken	Ms l of Company h (2) Ms r of Company Q Ms s of Company Q	Ms l of Company h (1) Mr. k of Company J Mr. V of Company t	Mr. g of Company E Ms H of Company L (1)
Early/late working hours	Ms B of Company A		
Discretionary work system	Ms D of Company A		
Flextime system		Ms f of Company E Mr. o of Company L	Ms N of Company L (2) Ms M of Company L (1)
Short-hour work		Ms U of Company t Mr. p of Company L	Ms M of Company L (2) Ms C of Company A

Note:

- 1) The shaded subjects perform overtime work when required during home-based working (daily/hourly) not for reasons of adjusting work volume.
- 2) “(1)” and “(2)” after the name and company indicate those who changed the measures from time to time.

6. Situation and Issues related to Managing Working Time (in relation to Chapter 6)

(1) Application procedures for home-based work and time (work) management in reality

In most cases, home-based work system requires advance application, approval and submission of a report after the work, for procedures and time (work) management.

(2) Application of de facto working hour system and its issues

The “de facto working hour” system for work performed outside the workplace can be applied to manage working time for home-based work performed intermittently in order to handle needs generated during the child-rearing period such as the sudden illness of a child. However, among the systems introduced for this purpose, there are cases where all work is considered as full-time work from the viewpoint of welfare in practice under the principle of limited days and thorough performance-base pay system. Therefore, there are still many issues in relation to direct application of the de facto working hour system to home-based work.

(3) Situation of and issues related to overtime work

The following points were observed in connection with overtime work (including work at night and on holidays) for home-based work during the child-rearing period. (1) When a company presents its policies or the management or supervisor makes adjustment to work volume (except in combination with short-hour work), workers are able to work full-time, and they tend not to work overtime. (2) In cases using a combination of short-hour work and home-based work, workers can leave the office in time to pick up their children from nursery school, go home and work after taking care of the children. Then they tend to work late until midnight, and some of them find it uncomfortable to take midnight pay allowances because they are not actually working more than the scheduled working hours. (In short-hour work, similar conditions occur when workers receive a holiday work pay allowance after working at home during weekends.) (3) Working overtime hours in addition to regular full-time work is often observed in those with children in lower elementary school grades. They cannot leave their children alone at night, and hiring baby sitters through the evening is too expensive. Therefore these workers appreciate the system that allows them to work at home with the same

conditions as they work in the office. Some others, for instance in cases where both husband and wife work, use the system not only for child-care but also to allow them the flexibility to work at night to finish work on time and to then take a half-day's vacation so the husband and wife can take time to relax.

7. Policy Implications and Future Challenges (in relation to Chapter 7)

In this report we are not suggesting that workers should shorten their period of child-care leave, not take family-care leave, or work fulltime without taking the option of short-hour work. Workers have diverse needs in terms of the way they work during the child-rearing period, and we believe that the availability of alternatives and a variety of working styles that meet their needs would enable workers, including career-oriented women, to work and rear their children at the same time and promote men's participation in child-care.

Of course not all workers place a priority on achieving good work performance during the child-rearing period, and not all are in a situation that allows them to focus on business. Therefore, when looking at support measures to balance work and family care and enable workers to work full-time rearing children, what is important is not how many workers are actually engaged in home-based work during this period, but rather how many workers are provided with such an option (in terms of selectability).

At the same time, measures are required to ensure that no disparity is generated in personnel evaluations between those who work longer hours and those who do not due to the selection of certain working styles during the child-rearing period. For example, such disadvantages should be eliminated for those who work limited hours, such as in the system of short-hour work.

(1) Expanding work-style choices and promoting combinations of styles

Due to career orientation and income concerns, some workers (IT-related professionals) seem to wish to shorten the child-rearing period, to increase their working hours while rearing their children and to work if necessary even on days when their children become suddenly sick. For such workers, a wide range of alternatives should be made available to provide them with a flexible way of working (including flexible work locations.)

a. Addition of home-based working to the "Measures to Shorten Working Hours, etc." and promoting combinations of measures

In addition to the measure to improve flexibility in working hours (flextime, etc.),

home-based work should be reviewed as one of the alternative measures to improve flexibility in work locations. At the same time, it is also important to require the introduction of "multiple measures" to diversify alternatives and promote combinations of measures.

b. Extension of application to workers with children in the lower grades of elementary school

Due to deteriorating public safety and insufficient after-school care center for school children, parents are more worried and burdened when their children go to elementary school than nursing school, and this makes it difficult for them to work. It is necessary to extend the provision of the "Measures to Shorten Working Hours, etc.," which is not legally binding but only required to make an effort to introduce the system, to apply to at least workers with children in the "lower grades of elementary school," and to make this a legal obligation.

(2) Changing the way men work

When enhancing measures to support balancing work and family care such as home-based work, if only women use these measures, there will be no change to the way of thinking that "Child-care = Women's role."

a. Home-based work as an alternative to child-care leave

For men to participate in child-care, not only child-care leave but also a variety of other alternatives would be effective. In particular, male workers will enjoy the beneficial effects of home-based work in balancing work and child-care while not reducing working hours, since they are relatively more motivated by income.

b. Promoting staggered working hours with a working wife

In addition to home-based work, discretionary work and flextime system also allow for staggered working hours between a husband and wife, enabling men to participate in child-care. To reduce the burden of work and family care on working mothers, selection of working style should be planned at the unit of husband and wife.

(3) Time management for home-based work

The basic issue of time management for home-based work during the child-rearing period concerns consistency between appropriate working hours and work flexibility.

a. Adjusting work volume to prevent overburdening workers

When choosing full-time home-based working style, the volume of work should be adjusted in consultation with the worker's supervisor and colleagues in order to prevent

overtime work also on normal workdays (for short-hour work, work hours that exceed the scheduled working hours for a full-time job).

b. Calculation of working hours: importance of advance notice and post facto reporting rather than de facto working hours

Since the system of de facto working hours outside the workplace is also applied to home-based work under certain conditions, the complexity of time management for home-based work is relaxed to some degree. However, as home-based work requires self-control and efficiency, particularly during the child-rearing period, the usual method of advance notice and post facto reporting also seems appropriate for time management of home-based work in order to enhance the self-control of workers.

c. Establishing the Use of "Substitute working hours system" (tentative name)

A combination of short-hour work and home-based work after leaving the office or work on holidays enables workers to work hours similar to full time while taking care of their children. While the "actual" working hours of the short-hour workers may be shorter than the scheduled working hours of a full-time regular worker, there are cases where holiday work or night work may be applied to some part of their work.

As a way to deal with short-hour workers when they work on Saturday or Sunday at home, it may be a measure to deem their working hours as overtime on a regular business day, by establishing a new system of "Substitute working hours system (tentative name)," based on the rules of interpretation on "Substitute day off" system.

d. Reviewing regulations on working days and working hours

When working on weekends, it is sometimes more convenient to divide the work on both Saturday and Sunday. When working at home after leaving the office, workers often wait until their children go to bed and work after 10 pm, which is to be considered night work.

Considering the following conditions: (1) working at home at the worker's discretion, (2) less restrictions to working at home, and (3) no commuting involved (for the weekend), it would be meaningful to consider the system where workers working at home during the child-rearing period set (allocate/change) their own working days and working hours within the scheduled working hours of a full-time worker (or within a certain limit of overtime working hours). Such a system should be applied not only to short-hour workers but also to full-time workers.

e. Basic concept for proposals

For workers in the child-rearing period to benefit from flexible work-styles such as home-based working and at the same time to prevent them from overworking, some of the possible measures include to allow them to set their own working days and working

hours, based on the scheduled working hours (or overtime hours within a limit), making sufficient adjustment of work volume, requiring workers to perform self-control on their working hours with a certain flexibility, and obliging them to report their work record to their supervisors.

f. Correlation to the "New Autonomous Working Hour System" proposal

It is possible that the new working hour system proposed in "*Research Report on New Working Hours System*" (2006) made by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare does not include the possibility of home-based working on days when they do not normally go to the office. As for the treatment of night work and work on legal holidays, some ideas of the proposal are similar to but some are different from those suggested in this report.

In any case, home-based work demonstrates one of the directions of the basic changes taking place with white-collar workers as information technology advances. We hope our suggestions can be examined in relation to not only home-based working style during the child-rearing period but also in connection with regulations on working hours for white-collar workers in general.

(4) Promoting outsourced child-care

To work full-time using home-based work, improvement of the environment for outsourced child-care is necessary.

a. Organizing and enhancing nursery schools and "Ensuring nursery school standards"

Some subjects in this survey pointed out that the quality of nursery schools has deteriorated because the schools were busy ensuring the number of children, and they spoke of the need to at least maintain the current quality level and not to let it deteriorate any further. According to the survey conducted in 2004 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, nationwide accredited nursery schools had a total of 61,000 children above their capacity, with an enrollment rate of 103 percent. Sixty percent of the facilities had an enrollment rate above 100 percent, indicating that facilities are lacking.

b. Reorganizing after-school day-care centers

In the survey, two women, with children who started going to elementary school in 2005, urged the extension of the opening hours of after-school day-care centers, which open at 9 o'clock in the morning during the summer holiday (children usually go to school around 8 during the school term) and close at 6 o'clock in the evening. There was a case in which an employee was "unable to use an after-school day-care center for elementary school children and had difficulties working when their children started

elementary school." Eventually home-based work on a trial basis was introduced for this particular worker. Increasing the number of after-school day-care centers for elementary school children and extending their hours is an urgent issue.

(5) Further research challenges

In this research study, we observed diversification in the practice of home-based work during the child-rearing period, and we also saw some cases of its use in combination with other support measures for balancing work and family care. In future, it will be necessary to study as many cases as possible and to understand these situations in more detail in order to identify and examine effective measures.

To promote men's participation in child-care and to reduce the burden on women in supporting both work and family care, this research study indicates the importance of different combinations of work-styles between a husband and wife (in particular, the importance of staggered work hour). However, more examinations to identify actual conditions and effective solutions are required.

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