
Introduction

Combining Work and Family Care

Although the various research that has addressed the difficulties of balancing work and family life over the years has generally focused on issues related to raising children, increasing attention is being given to the task of caring for older people as an important family responsibility as developed countries grapple with declining birthrates and aging populations. Among such countries, Japan is experiencing population aging at a particularly rapid pace. Japan's rate of population aging—namely, the percentage of people aged 65 or over among the total population—is currently the highest in the world, at over 25%. In that sense, Japan is at the “forefront” of super-aging society. In the past, the Japanese government has looked to other countries such as the US and European nations as guides in formulating its policies, but in the field of policies related to older people, Japan may be facing issues that are yet to arise in other countries. This edition was compiled on the basis of the concept that a publication of articles which grasp the development of such issues has the potential to be a valuable source of information for researchers and policymakers in other countries.

The first article in this edition, “Current Situation and Problems of Legislation on Long-Term Care in Japan's Super-Aging Society” by Kimiyoshi Inamori, investigates issues concerning policies to support caregiving for older people in Japan from the perspective of both the long-term care insurance system and the system of caregiver leave. While the long-term care insurance system, which was first implemented in 2000, may try to provide sufficient benefits for older people who require long-term care, this system alone does not in fact necessarily always meet all of their care needs. Family caregiving is therefore required to complement long-term care insurance services. As the system of caregiver leave established in the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act was created to allow people with family members requiring care to take time to prepare and arrange a system for that care to be provided, income guarantees for workers on caregiver leave are provided in the form of caregiver leave benefits from the employment insurance system. However, noting that the percentage of workers who actually take caregiver leave is extremely low, Inamori suggests that to assist workers in balancing work with family care it is more important to develop schemes related to ways of working, such as short working hour systems or limits on overtime work. The issues raised in this article such as the need to increase the take up rate of caregiver leave and develop the system through measures for reduced working hours and limitations on overtime work, are key points that have been addressed in the amendments to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act that will take effect in 2017. The revised act makes caregiver leave easier to use by allowing caregivers to take the 93 days of leave in three segments. It has also increased the minimum period during which employers are obliged to provide measures such as short working hours and other such schemes for re-

ducing working hours, etc. (also including flextime, pushing the time of starting or finishing work forward or backward, and subsidizing the costs of long-term care), which allow caregivers to balance daily caregiving responsibilities with work, from the current 93 days to three years. The Act also guarantees workers the right to restrictions on overtime working hours until the end of caregiving.

In “Family Care Leave and Job Quitting Due to Caregiving: Focus on the Need for Long-Term Leave,” I investigate the potential effects of these amendments to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act, as well as identifying new issues that require further examination. Based on the results of analysis of data on workers who are employed when caregiving begins, the article reveals that (i) the greater the need to take caregiver leave, the less likely working caregivers are to remain continuously employed at the same enterprise from the beginning to the end of the caregiving period, but the need for caregiver leave can be alleviated through the use of long-term care services, (ii) regardless of the degree of need to take caregiver leave, workers who work six hours or less per day are more likely to remain continuously employed at the same enterprise than those who work over eight hours a day, and (iii) those who care for their own parents have a greater need for caregiver leave than those who care for the parents of a spouse, but regardless of the necessity for caregiver leave, among workers who provide care alone without assistance from their families, and workers who care for relatives with severe dementia, there is a low likelihood of continuous employment at the same enterprise. In other words, it can be said that a factor behind the low numbers of people taking caregiver leave is the increase in the use of services offered through long-term care insurance. However, social changes such as the increase in people caring for their own biological parents and the rise in people who care for relatives alone without other family members to assist them suggest the possibility that in the future there will continue to be an increase in the number of people leaving their employment due to caregiving responsibilities. The analysis results indicate that in order to curb this increase, in addition to the caregiver leave system, it is also important to develop systems such as short working hours and limitations on overtime hours. In this sense, the recent amendments to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act are suited to addressing the current circumstances under which people leave employment to provide care. At the same time, as the current framework was developed with the necessity for physical care that arises in the case of cerebrovascular diseases and other such conditions in mind, it may not cover social measures to support care for dementia, and this article also highlights the importance of such measures as an issue that will require more extensive consideration in the future.

Since the amendments that took effect in 2010, the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act has prescribed the obligation of enterprises to provide not only long-term caregiver leave but also “time off for caregivers” that can be taken in one-day units, and with the introduction of the 2017 amendments caregivers will be able to take this time off in half-day units. Mayumi Nishimoto’s “Choices of Leave When Caring for Family Members: What Is the Best System for Balancing Family Care with Employment?” investigates the

necessity of not only leave that can be taken on a long-term basis, but also a flexible time-off system like time off for caregivers. The results of the analysis reveal the following five points. Firstly, when the main caregiver ratio is higher, the likelihood of taking caregiver leave increases, and absenteeism is particularly likely. Secondly, leave is more likely to be taken when the spouse works longer hours, especially when the spouse's employment format precludes the control of those working hours. The likelihood of absenteeism is also higher if the spouse is a regular employee, and the likelihood of taking annual leave increases more or less significantly when the spouse is a regular employee or non-regular employee, or when there is no spouse. Thirdly, the likelihood that leave will be taken rises in cases where the person requiring care is admitted to a general hospital or geriatric hospital and in such cases caregiver leave and annual leave are particularly likely to be taken. Fourthly, absenteeism is more likely to occur when the caregiver has a lower annual income. Fifthly, absenteeism is also more prone to occur if the person is not a regular employee. In other words, this indicates that depending on the environment of family caregiving, there is also a demand not only for caregiving leave that can be taken on a long-term basis, but also time off that caregivers can take in single-day units.

As is also indicated in the aforementioned articles, balancing work and caregiving is shaped by various environmental factors, such as social services and support from enterprises, as well as the factors highlighted by Nishimoto in relation to family environment. In "Frameworks for Balancing Work and Long-Term Care Duties, and Support Needed from Enterprises," Yoko Yajima focusses on the correlations between these various fields, pursuing quantitative analysis based on the hypothesis that the quality of the balance of work and care ("subjective sense that balance is achieved, and preservation of a feeling that work is rewarding") differs depending on the frameworks and circumstances surrounding the balance of work and care. In doing so she looks at these "frameworks and circumstances surrounding the balance of work and care" from the five perspectives of attributes of the caregiver, attributes of the care recipient, the relationship between these two people and the role the caregiver plays, the long-term care framework (including the use of long-term care services, and cooperation from other family members), and the caregiver's work style or format (flexible work schedules and utilization of leave, etc.). The results of this analysis reveal that while caring for an elderly relative appears at first glance to place caregivers in circumstances that are more complex and diverse than those faced when raising children, if factors such as the attributes of the care recipient, the relationship between the caregiver and care recipient, and the long-term care framework are controlled, the types of support that employees seek from enterprises with regard to working styles and formats entail "curtailing excessively long working hours," "creating an environment in which time off can be taken flexibly and support programs can be utilized with ease," and "supervisors' consideration for employees' circumstances," and there is hardly any difference between these forms of support and the type of work environment required for employees raising children to achieve work-life balance. However, given that if the care "framework" required for bal-

ancing work and long-term care duties is not in place, support related to work style and format from enterprises will not function effectively, Yajima highlights that it is therefore important that enterprises do not merely offer such support in terms of work styles and formats, but also encourage caregivers, who often try to handle duties directly by themselves, to focus on the “management of care services and division of duties,” that is, using long-term care services and other such support effectively and dividing duties among family members.

The final article in this journal, “Current Issues regarding Family Caregiving and Gender Equality in Japan: Male Caregivers and the Interplay between Caregiving and Masculinities” by Mao Saito, examines the problems faced by family caregivers in Japan from the perspective of gender. More specifically, Saito focuses on the increasing numbers of male caregivers in Japan, and investigates what significance the increase in male caregivers may have for the achievement of gender equality in family caregiving, in light of the actual conditions of caregiving by male caregivers. Contemporary family caregiving is inseparable from the gender relationship between men as the breadwinners and women as the caregivers. At the same time, in Japan as in other countries, changes in family structures are leading to a growing number of situations in which men must take on caregiving roles. As men take on caregiving roles, they are forced to confront their own masculinities, and by looking at the difficulties faced by male caregivers, this article demonstrates that care and masculinities are not simply conflicting aspects of men’s identities.

In discourse on “welfare regimes,” Japan is considered to be a conservative regime in which the family takes the key role in providing care. However, as family sizes decline along with decreases in birth rates, it is becoming difficult to rely on families to provide care, and efforts have been made to supplement family care by socializing caregiving through the development of public long-term care services and company-based support for balancing work and caregiving. Countries with social democratic regimes in which the government typically provides substantial policies for supporting elderly people and liberal regimes characterized by small government models may find that the onset of super-aging society necessitates some kinds of changes to their frameworks. We hope that this edition provides useful insights to readers who are aware of such issues.

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