

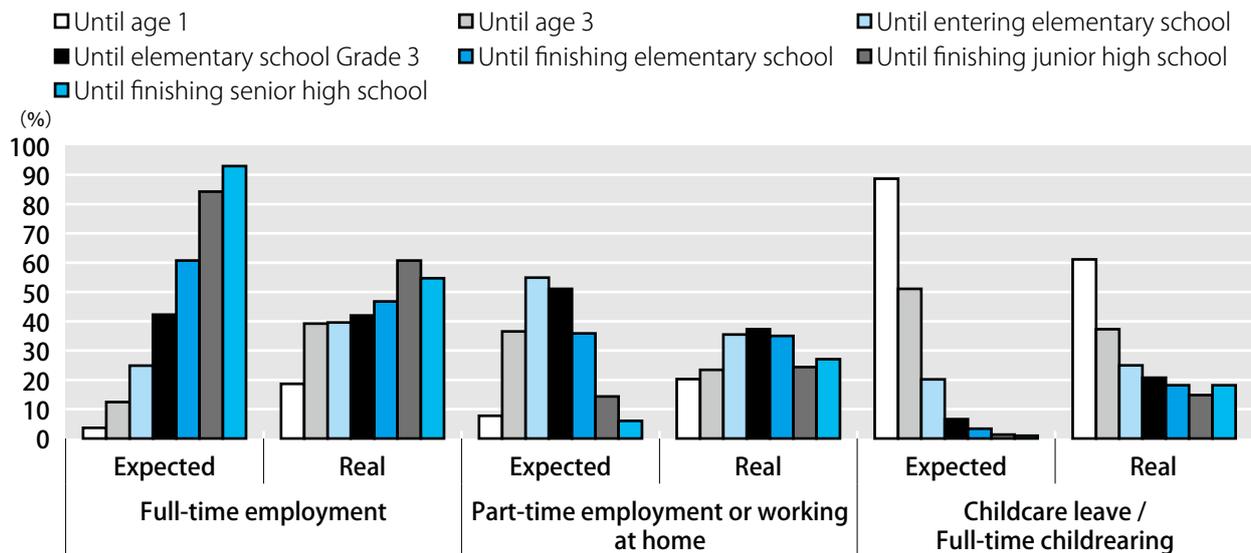
# Childrearing Women's Work in Japan: The Expectation-Reality Gap

## 1. Introduction

In working situations during the childrearing phase, a mismatch between expectation and reality is a problem that faces women in any country, albeit with some differences of degree. A recent survey has revealed that this mismatch appears with particular

clarity in Japan. According to the *National Survey of Households with Children* (NSHC) conducted by JILPT in 2014, the real working situation does not match the expected one for about half of Japanese women. As shown in Figure VII-1, the ratio of women who have expectations of “childcare leave” or “full-time childrearing” is in a negative linear relationship

**Figure VII-1 Women's Working Situations at Different Ages of Their Children: Expectation and Reality**



	Full-time employment		Part-time employment or working at home		Childcare leave / Full-time childrearing		Expectation meets with reality
	Expected	Real	Expected	Real	Expected	Real	
Until age 1	3.6	18.6	7.8	20.3	88.7	61.1	52.4
Until age 3	12.4	39.2	36.5	23.5	51.1	37.3	42.1
Until entering elementary school	24.9	39.6	54.9	35.5	20.2	24.9	50.4
Until elementary school Grade 3	42.3	42.0	51.1	37.3	6.6	20.7	49.3
Until finishing elementary school	60.8	46.8	35.9	35.0	3.4	18.2	41.1
Until finishing junior high school	84.3	60.7	14.4	24.4	1.4	14.9	50.3
Until finishing senior high school	93.0	54.7	6.0	27.1	1.0	18.2	38.9

Source: JILPT “NSHC 2014.”

Note: The “expected working situation” is the result of responses from all women.

The “real working situation” is the result of responses from women who are raising children in each respective age group.

with the age of the child.<sup>1</sup> This ratio reaches about 90% during the period until the child's first birthday, but decreases sharply to 6.6% in the period between entering school and Grade 3 of elementary school. Conversely, the ratio of women with expectations of "full-time employment" rises linearly with the increasing age of the child, with more than 90% of women expecting "full-time employment" during the period from the child graduating from junior high school to finishing senior high school. However, the real working situation does not change so significantly with the age of the child. Whether the youngest child is in the upper grades of elementary school, at junior high school or at senior high school, the ratio of women in "childcare leave or full-time childrearing" has barely decreased at around 20%, while the ratio of those in "full-time employment" has also not increased much. In other words, many Japanese women are in a position of having to work at a time when they want to concentrate all their energy on childrearing, but conversely, spend an excessive amount of leisure time out of work when they want to

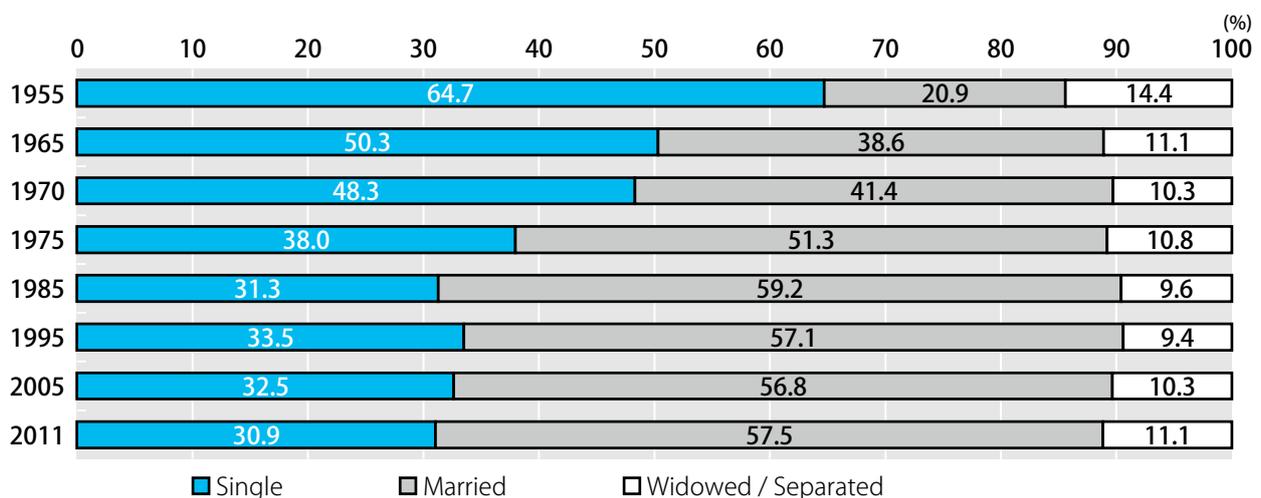
work full time.

## 2. Formation of Awareness in the Expected Working Situation

### (1) Historical background

In the USA, UK and other major developed nations, there was a universally sharp increase in married female waged workers between the 1950s and the 1980s (Goldin 1990). Changes in the macro social and economic environments are thought to have played a significant part in increasing women's employment during this period. In particular, a decrease in the average number of births, the spread of energy-saving home appliances, the increasing entry of women into higher education, the shrinking gender wage gap, a thriving labor demand accompanying high economic growth, the expansion of service industries that favor women's skills, and changes in national awareness of women's employment were all important elements that promoted women's employment (Eswaran 2014, Rani 2006).

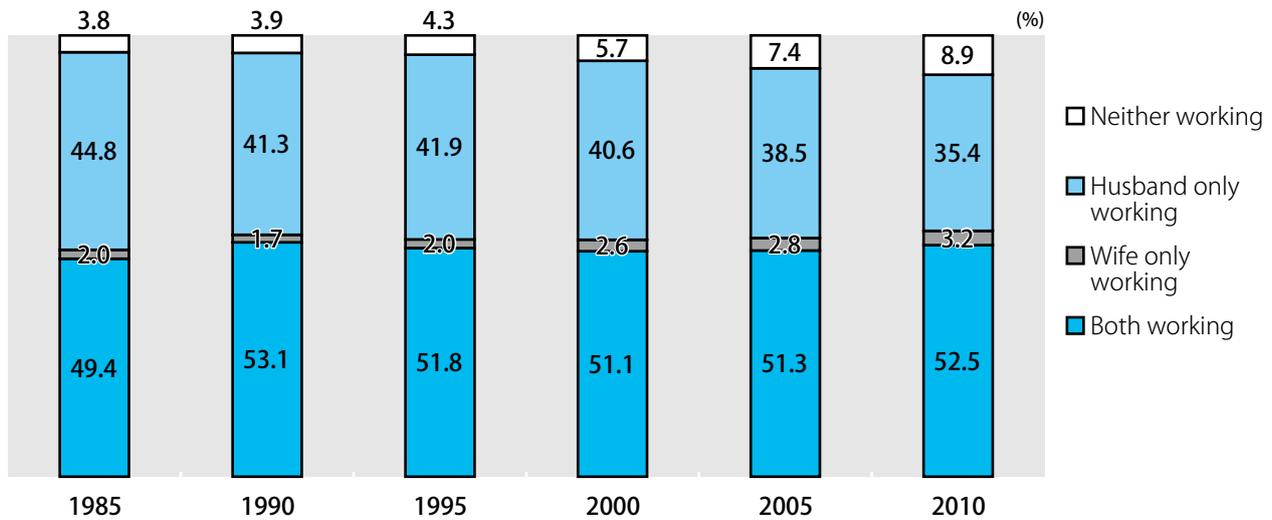
**Figure VII-2 Trends in the Component Ratio of Female Employees by Marital Status (1955-2011) (non-agricultural industries)**



Source: Figures for 1955 are from the *National Census* conducted by the Prime Minister's Office. Other figures are from the *Labour Force Survey* conducted by the Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC).

<sup>1</sup> Unless specifically mentioned, "child" will refer to persons below the age of 18 in this paper. The "real working situation" is the result of responses from women who are raising children in each respective age group.

**Figure VII-3 Employment Status of Married Couples in Families with Children**



Source: Compiled by the author from MHLW, *Actual Situation of Working Women in 2011* (Table 23). Original data are taken from Statistics Bureau, MIC "Special Survey of the Labour Force Survey."

In Japan, too, the number of married women in employment continued to increase from the 1950s onwards, until they outnumbered unmarried women in employment for the first time in 1975. The ratio of married women to all women in employment peaked at 59% in around 1985, a full 38 points higher than three decades earlier in 1955 (Figure VII-2).

Since the 1990s, however, this trend has been halted as the labor force participation of married women has reached a plateau. The brisk increase in married female employees seen up to the 1980s also suddenly stopped from the 1990s onwards. After peaking at 59% in 1985, the ratio of married women to all women in employment first fell slightly thereafter, then stagnated at around 57% from 1990 to the 2010s (Figure VII-2). This stagnating trend can also be confirmed from the employment status of married couples in families with children. As Figure VII-3 shows, the ratio of households with working wives was on the increase until the 1980s, but hardly changed at all in the two decades from 1990 to 2010.

## (2) Identity awareness of women

The plateau phenomenon in the labor force participation of married women not only affects Japan, but is widely found in the USA and other OECD nations (Eswaran 2014). In Japan, particularly, the phenomenon of stagnating workplace advancement by married women has occurred despite a series of laws aiming to increase the number of nurseries and deregulate the conditions for establishment, enhance nursery services including holiday childcare and convalescent child daycare, and improve the employment environment for women, all of which gathered speed from the 1990s onwards.<sup>2</sup>

It has been pointed out that the consolidation and conservatization of identity awareness by women themselves represent the underlying causes of this puzzle (Akerlof and Kranton 2010). Fortin (2005) found, on analyzing the employment behavior of women in 25 OECD countries since the 1990s, that the likelihood of finding employment is inversely proportional to women's favorable opinion of the

2 The main laws in this respect are the "Equal Employment Opportunity Act" (1986 onwards), which prohibits gender discrimination in employment, the "Child Care and Family Care Leave Act" (1992 onwards), which guarantees the right to paid childcare leave, and the "Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children," which requires companies and local authorities to draw up detailed plans for childrearing support (2004 onwards).

traditional identity awareness<sup>3</sup> imposed on them. More specifically, there is thought to be a chain effect whereby women find greater self-fulfillment and happiness at home than at work, this leads to an acceptance of traditional identity awareness, and this in turn affects actual employment behavior.

According to several international comparative surveys, Japanese women have a manifestly stronger tendency to accept their traditional identity than do women in other developed nations. One representative example is the “International Awareness Survey on Declining Birth Rates 2005” conducted by the Cabinet Office, targeting men and women aged 20-49 in five countries (Japan, South Korea, USA, France and Sweden). According to this survey, the combined ratio of responses either agreeing or somewhat agreeing with the rationale that “The husband should work outside the home, the wife should look after the home” was 11.6% in Sweden, 25.2% in France and 47.3% in the USA, but 60.3% in Japan (Yamaya 2011).

The Japanese awareness of gender-specific role division is not only strongly rooted through 400 years of history from the days of the Edo shogunate, but has also continued unchanged to the present day as a result of postwar economic and educational policies.

Makino (2014) goes further to suggest that this in itself has created the strong awareness of traditional identity among women. According to Iversen and Rosenbluth (2010), on the other hand, the large gender gap in the employment market and high barriers to divorce are in themselves mainly responsible for conservatizing the identity awareness of Japanese women. Women have a stronger tendency to accept traditional maternal roles when they have difficulty in finding quality employment opportunities in the external labor market. Meanwhile, the presence of high barriers to divorce means that women can reassuredly devote themselves to housework and childrearing activity, leading to a strengthening of traditional identity awareness.

### (3) Burdens of housework and childcare

One sign of a deeply rooted traditional identity awareness is a heavy bias toward the wife in burdens of housework and childcare. Compared to other countries, the participation of Japanese husbands in housework and childcare is extremely limited (Cabinet Office, “Gender Equality White Paper,” 2011). The average time spent by husbands per day on housework and childcare is about one hour in Japan but three times more in the USA (3.13 hours). The total

**Table VII-4 Average Housework Time Per Day by Wives and Husbands**

		2012			2014		
		Wife (mins.)	Husband (mins.)	Husband 0 mins. (%)	Wife (mins.)	Husband (mins.)	Husband 0 mins. (%)
Overall		214	22	40.6	210	25	36.5
By marital status	Married	223	21	41.0	218	24	36.7
	Wife's income higher than husband's	159	36	26.2	173	38	30.5
	Single	146	112	—	143	124	—
By wife's employment situation	Not in employment	267	14	49.9	265	20	41.6
	Regular employee	156	33	26.0	159	34	27.4
	Part-time worker	207	20	38.9	203	21	38.0
	Dispatched worker, etc.	205	23	45.1	191	28	33.3

Source: JILPT “NSHC 2012, 2014”

Note: The average housework time per day (i.e. time spent on cooking, laundry and cleaning) is the total housework time on weekdays and weekends divided by seven, based on a five-day working week. The husband's housework time is based on responses by the wife.

3 This refers specifically to the rationale that “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women” or “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.”

time spent on housework and childcare by couples is just over five hours in both Japan and the USA. In Japan, therefore, the relatively short time spent by husbands on housework is offset by more time spent by wives on housework and childcare (4.24 hours per day).<sup>4</sup>

Another characteristic feature is that housework time by Japanese husbands does not change significantly whatever the wife's employment format. According to NSHC 2014, the average time spent by husbands on cooking, laundry and cleaning is 34 minutes per day if the wife is a "regular employee." This is only 14 minutes longer, at most, than in cases where the wife is a "dispatched worker, contract employee, etc." (28 minutes), a "part-time worker" (21 minutes), or "not in employment" (20 minutes). The ratio of husbands who do no cooking, laundry or cleaning chores at all is as high as 27.4% in homes where the wife is a regular employee (Table VII-4).

In Japan, there used to be a high proportion of three-generation households, in which active support from the grandparents would lighten the burden of housework and childcare on the wife. Numerous empirical studies have shown that cohabiting with grandparents increases the wife's likelihood of finding employment (Maeda 1998, Sasaki 2002, Ogawa and Ermisch 1996). However, the proportion of three-generation households has continued to fall in recent years, decreasing by 11 points over the two decades from 1985 to 2005 (36.0%→15.4%).<sup>5</sup> With the growing tendency to postpone childbearing and the increasing longevity of the older generation, moreover, grandparents are becoming physically unable to assist with childcare even if all three generations live together. Furthermore, the current generation of Japanese grandparents, born after the war, have a strong tendency to seek self-realization, and are often loath to look after their grandchildren even if they have sufficient reserves of time and energy.

Besides this, another reason why Japanese wives

face a heavy burden of housework and childcare is that they demand a high level of rigor in cleaning and cooking. As a result, outsourcing of housework is less advanced than in other countries. For example, according to an Internet survey conducted by the household goods manufacturer P&G with married women in their 20s to 50s who have children (2009), the ratio of women who do both cooking and washing up "at least three times a day" is as high as 55.5% in Japan, more than twice the ratio among American women (26.0%). Also, while the use of hired housekeepers (including live-in maids) has spread mainly among the affluent classes in China, Hong Kong and other Asian countries, very few childrearing households in Japan use such housekeeping services. Even in affluent households with an annual income of 12.26 million yen or more (based on a standard 4-person household), only 5.8% of all households have used housekeeping services over the past one or two years (JILPT 2014).

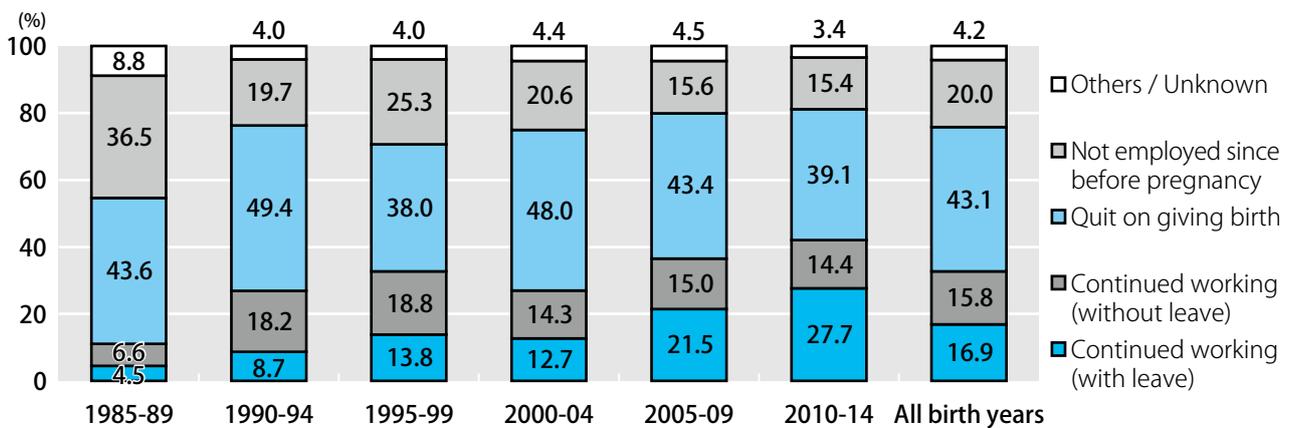
The reality that the wife undertakes the majority of housework and childcare reinforces the correlation between women's working situations and the age of their children. Since the burden of housework and childcare for the wife is heavier when the age of the child is lower, the age of the child becomes an important indicator for measuring the size of this burden. As stated above, the burden of housework and childcare cannot be passed on to other family members (husbands, grandparents) or to the external market. This creates a schematic composition whereby the wife has expectations of "childcare leave" or "full-time childrearing" during the period when the burden is heavy (when the children are small), but the ratio of women who expect "full-time employment" should naturally rise when the burden is lighter (when the children are older).

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4 Figures on housework time (including childcare time) by Japanese and American husbands are taken from the MIC "Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities" (2006) and the "American Time-Use Survey Summary" by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006).

5 Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC "National Census."

**Figure VII-5 Changes in Women's Employment between Pregnancy/before Giving Birth and 1 year after Birth**



	Birth year of 1st child						
	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	All birth years
Continued working (with leave)	4.5	8.7	13.8	12.7	21.5	27.7	16.9
Continued working (without leave)	6.6	18.2	18.8	14.3	15.0	14.4	15.8
Quit on giving birth	43.6	49.4	38.0	48.0	43.4	39.1	43.1
Not employed since before pregnancy	36.5	19.7	25.3	20.6	15.6	15.4	20.0
Others / Unknown	8.8	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.5	3.4	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	32	162	505	520	421	261	1,902

Source: JILPT "NSHC 2014."

Note: In the survey, women were asked their employment status at three stages, namely "Immediately before pregnancy was confirmed" (t1), "3 months after giving birth" (t2) and "1 year after giving birth" (t3). The definition of each option is shown below.

"Continued working": Employed in each of periods t1-t3 (including childcare leave).

"Quit on giving birth": Employed in period t1, but left employment in period t2 or t3.

"Not employed since before pregnancy": Already not in employment in period t1.

"With leave" means that childcare leave was used during the period from 3 months before giving birth until 1 year after giving birth.

### 3. The Gap between Expectation and Reality

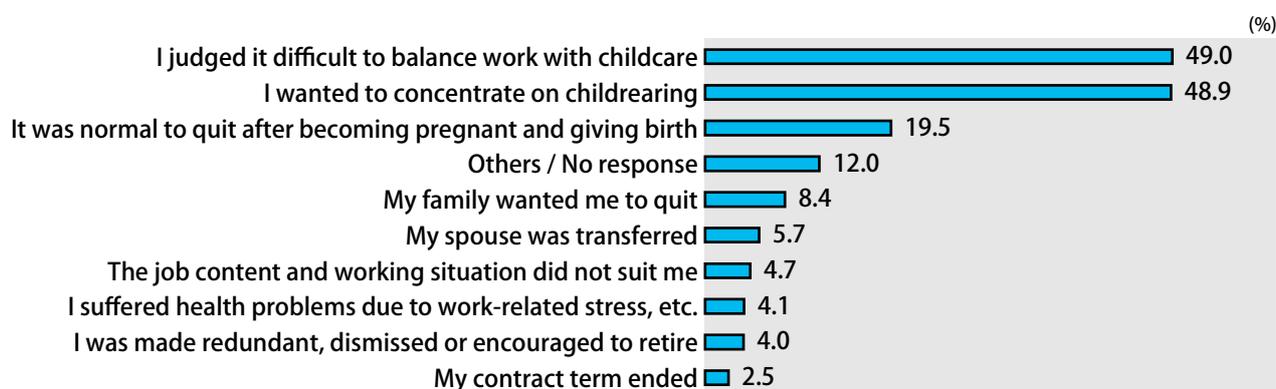
#### (1) The working situations of women when their children are small

While the ratio of women with expectations of "childcare leave" or "full-time childrearing" reaches about 90% during the period until the child's first birthday, how does this compare to reality?

In fact, 63.1% of Japanese women had left the labor market, either before their first pregnancy and

childbirth or within one year after giving birth. Of these, 20.0% were already not in employment before the pregnancy was confirmed, and the remaining 43.1% had quit their jobs within one year after giving birth (Figure VII-5). On the other hand, 32.7% of women "Continued working" before and after their pregnancy and childbirth. Of these, women who continued to work while using childcare leave accounted for 16.9% of the whole. In other words, around 90% of women are thought to be placed in a situation in which, sooner or later, they opt for either "childcare

**Figure VII-6 Reason for Quitting before and after the 1st Pregnancy and Childbirth  
(multiple choice of up to 3 responses)**



Source: JILPT “NSHC 2014.”

leave” (16.9%) or “full-time childrearing” (63.1%) for at least a few months until the child’s first birthday.

Relative to the time when the child was born, the ratio of “childbirth leavers” (women who quit their jobs within one year after giving birth) has decreased as the childbirth year has become more recent. Instead, the ratio of women who continue to work while using “childcare leave” has increased. In the case of women who gave birth in 2010-2014, for example, the ratio of “childbirth leavers” had fallen to 39.1%, but the ratio of those who continued working while using childcare leave reached 27.7%. Women who responded that they had “Quit their jobs” in the period between when the first pregnancy was confirmed and the 3rd year after giving birth accounted for around half of the total. When asked why they had quit, the ratios of those who answered “I judged it difficult to balance work with childcare” and “I wanted to concentrate on childrearing” were high, as expected, each accounting for around 50%.

## (2) The age of the child and women’s working situations

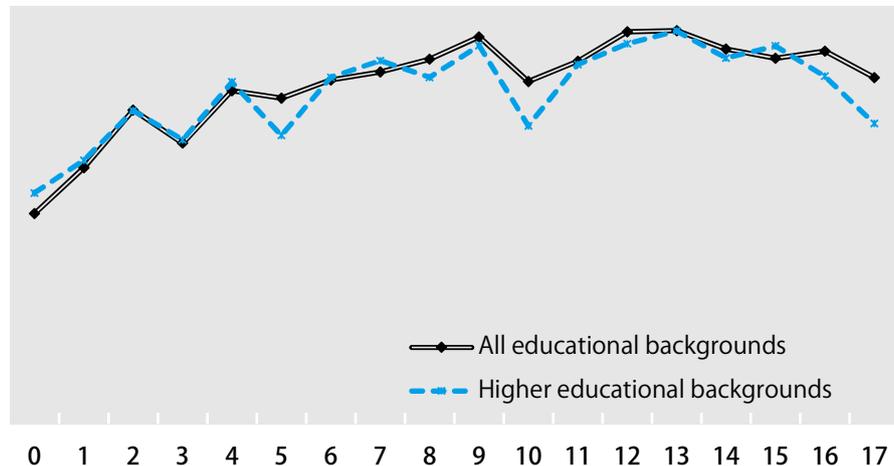
The tendency for the employment rate of Japanese women to rise with the increasing age of their children is most pronounced when the children are between the ages of 0 and 9. The employment rate of women with children aged 0 to 3, for example, trends at around 50%.<sup>6</sup> When the child reaches the age of 4, the rate increases to nearly 70%. When the child reaches the age of 10 (upper grades of elementary school), moreover, the employment rate rises to the 80% range.

After the child’s 10th birthday, however, the linear relationship between the employment rate of women and the age of the child disappears. By this time, some 20% of women are permanently out of employment regardless of the child’s increasing age. The same is true for more highly educated women graduating from junior colleges, colleges of technology or higher, where a rising trend in the employment rate cannot be discerned after the child reaches the age of 10. Rather, the employment rate of more highly educated women with children aged 16 and 17 falls to 74.9% and 64.7%, respectively, even lower than that

<sup>6</sup> In Japan, there has long been a “3-year-old myth” whereby, if a mother does not concentrate on childrearing (e.g. by working) when raising an infant less than 3 years old, the child’s future development will be adversely affected. Meanwhile, there is a shortage of nursery services for infants aged 0-3, particularly in the cities.

**Figure VII-7 Employment Rates of Women by Age of Youngest Child**

	All educational backgrounds	Higher educational backgrounds
0	45.3	49.8
1	55.2	56.8
2	67.6	67.5
3	60.5	61.2
4	71.8	73.7
5	70.2	62.1
6	74.1	74.7
7	75.8	78.3
8	78.6	74.6
9	83.4	81.5
10	73.7	64.2
11	78.1	77.4
12	84.4	81.9
13	84.7	84.6
14	80.7	78.8
15	78.8	81.4
16	80.3	74.9
17	74.6	64.7
All	71.9	70.1



Source: JILPT "NSHC 2014"

Note: "Higher education" means graduation from a junior college, college of technology or 4-year university.

of less highly educated women raising children in the same age group.

### (3) Deterioration of employment conditions after returning to work

A fall in employment conditions after returning to work provides one of the reasons why the employment rate of women does not rise in line with their expectations even when their children are older.

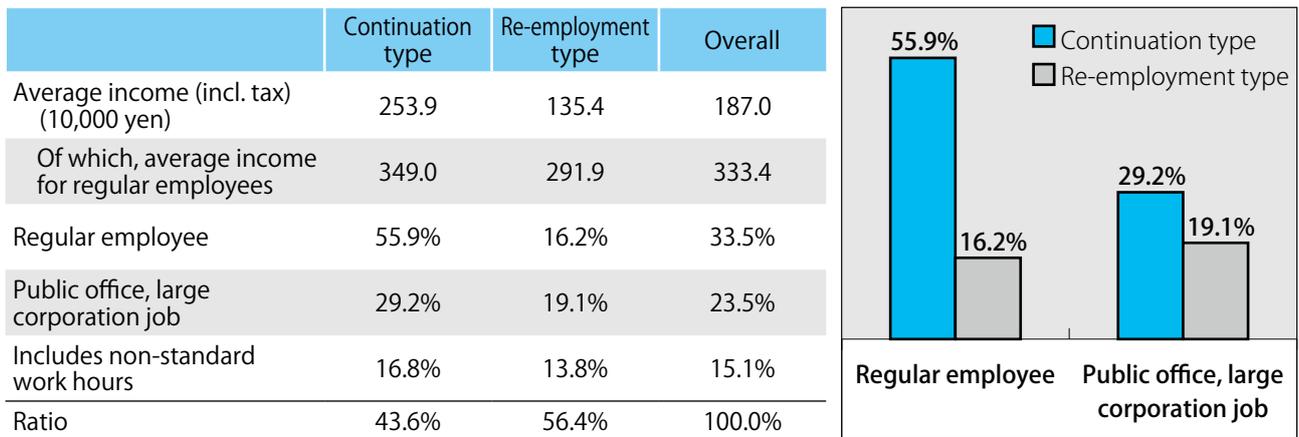
In Japan, where there is a strongly entrenched employment practice of recruiting regular employees through "mass hiring of new graduates," very few jobs with favorable conditions are available to women who return to work. In many cases, their only options are sales or customer service jobs in the retail, catering or hotel industries, or menial work in the medical, health care and welfare industry. While these jobs are often advertised for mid-career hiring or part-time workers, most of them offer these women poorer

employment conditions than their first job after graduation, in that they not only come with low hourly pay but are also offered by small and medium enterprises providing few fringe benefits.

If we now divide the professional career courses of working women until now into two categories, namely (1) those who have generally remained in employment, known as the "continuation group," and (2) those who have temporarily left employment but have now returned to work, known as the "re-employment group," we find that the employment conditions of the latter are clearly worse (Figure VII-8). Compared to the "re-employment group," the "continuation group" includes a higher proportion of regular employees (55.9% vs. 16.2%), more who work for large corporations (29.2% vs. 19.1%), and a higher average income (2,539,000 yen vs. 1,354,000 yen).

The higher the educational background and the greater the motivation for women to work, the

**Figure VII-8 Women's Employment Conditions by Professional Career Course**



Source: JILPT "NSHC 2014"

Notes: (1) Aggregated results for women in employment.

(2) Continuation type: Respondents who have generally continued working since graduating, and still remain in employment.

Re-employment type: Respondents who temporarily left employment but have now returned to work.

"Overall" includes samples with unknown professional career course.

greater the fall in employment conditions when re-employed compared to when first employed after graduating. As a result, these women are highly likely to be out of work as they cannot find a job that meets their expectations, even if they wish to be reinstated in full time work. According to a survey of women from higher educational backgrounds by Iwata and Osawa (2015), women who showed strong work motivation when graduating, saying that they "want to keep working all my life," do not necessarily have a high rate of first job continuation. The authors point out that, due to the gap between expectation and reality, it is, if anything, women with higher work motivation who tend to give up their careers. Therefore, many of the women who remain out of work even after their children have reached the age of 10 are thought to be those from higher educational backgrounds who cannot find suitable work owing to a fall in employment conditions. The thought that "Even if I want to work, I can't easily find a job that meets my wishes" appears particularly strong among women from higher educational backgrounds. According to another survey, about 40% of women in regular employment who quit their jobs after the birth of their first child

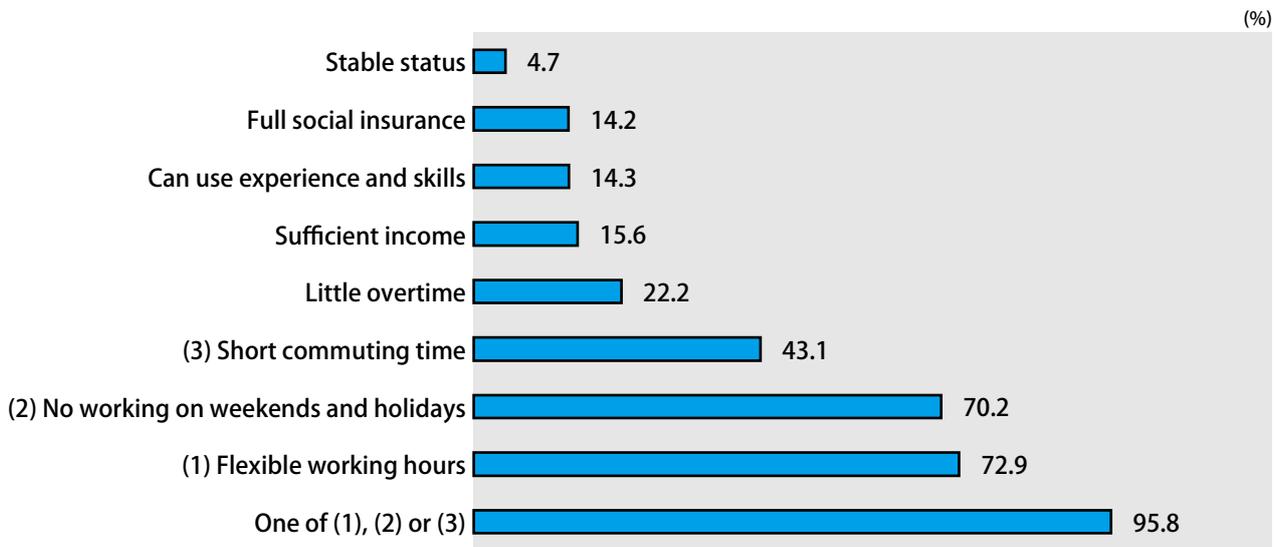
eventually regret their decision to leave.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Labor Market Practices Responsible for the Expectation-Reality Gap

##### (1) The problem of working hours: the "All-or-Nothing" choice

Japanese employment practices are modeled on the basis of a male worker married to a full-time housewife. The company provides lifelong employment and seniority-based pay, in exchange for which male employees provide the company with a "flexible" working situation that suits the company's convenience, consisting of long working hours, unannounced overtime, working on holidays, business trips, and transfers (Yashiro 2009). In this way, the company makes effective use of a limited number of regular employees, thereby reducing hiring and dismissals to a minimum. According to data aggregated by Kuroda (2010) using the "Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities" by the Statistics Bureau, MIC, weekly working hours by full-time employees have actually increased from 46.7 hours in 1976 to 50.1 hours in 2006, in contrast to a sustained decline in working hours by employed persons as a whole.

7 Source: Nihon Keizai Shimbun, July 2, 2016, p.37: "Troubled path to full-time reinstatement after giving birth."

**Figure VII-9 Conditions Prioritized When Taking a Job**

Source: JILPT "NSHC 2014."

Notes: Aggregation targeted women who are currently out of work. Multiple choice of up to 3 responses.

On the other hand, what makes this working situation possible is the culture of gender-specific role division, whereby women take care of all housework and childcare (Kawaguchi 2008). And because women undertake the majority of housework and childcare, they cannot work "flexibly" in line with a company's demands in the same way as men do. If we look at the conditions prioritized by childrearing women when they take a job, we find that working hours are prized far more highly than income or using skills (Figure VII-9). When taking up employment, women place priority on employment conditions connected with working hours, namely "Flexible working hours" (72.9%), "No working at weekends and holidays" (70.2%), and "Short commuting time" (43.1%).

Women who are significantly limited in terms of working hours cannot provide companies with a "flexible" working situation, and therefore tend to be excluded from core operations and management candidacy. And if they return to work after taking childcare leave, many women are reportedly placed on the "Mummy track" (course designed for mothers), given work in which they cannot draw on their knowledge and experience, and are forced into positions that offer no prospects of promotion (Zhou 2014). This leads to a constant stream of women who quit their

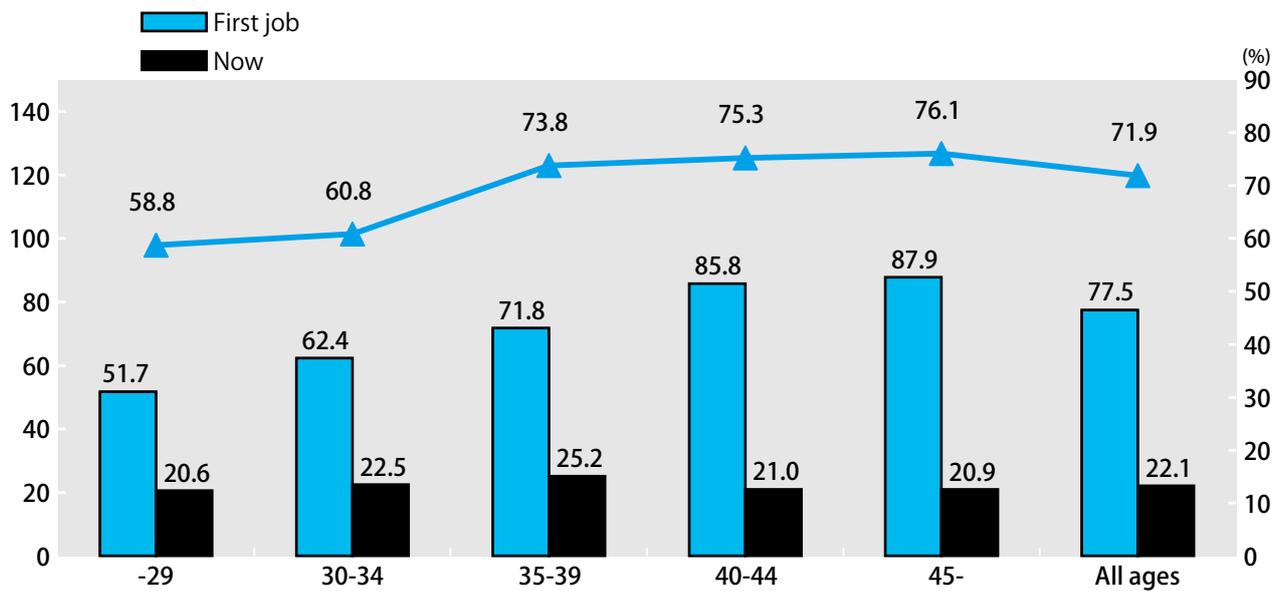
jobs despite having taken childcare leave.

In one sense, Japanese women are forced into a choice between "All-or-Nothing." They either choose jobs with good employment conditions in "All" aspects despite their dislike for long working hours and working on holidays, or jobs in which working hours are flexible to a degree but the employment conditions are "Nothing." The tendency for Japanese married women to avoid long working hours, even if suffering some financial disadvantage, is said to be stronger compared to women in other countries (Zhou 2013a). For that reason, women appear to choose jobs with "Nothing" rather than "All."

## (2) OJT-orientation and mass graduate hiring practice: A narrow path to regular employment

In Japan, there is a huge employment gap between regular and non-regular employees. In a variety of employment conditions ranging from wages and fringe benefits to job security, vocational training and placement promotion, the treatment of regular employees is generally superior to that of non-regular employees. Moreover, Japanese companies have long favored on-the-job training (OJT), and they engage in the practice of hiring new graduates en masse as

**Figure VII-10 Ratios of Women as Regular Employees, by Age Group: First Job vs Now**



Source: JILPT "NSHC 2014."

Note: Aggregation targets include women with no experience of working and women currently not in employment.

regular employees every April (when the new financial and school year begins). Therefore, few regular employees are hired in mid-career, meaning in turn that, once a person quits a job as a regular employee, it is very difficult to find new employment as a regular employee.

As shown in Figure VII-10, women in all age groups have a high ratio of regular employment in the first job after graduation. And although the ratio is lower as the age group becomes younger, the regular employment ratio in the first job exceeds 50% in all age groups. On the other hand, the current ratio of regular employment is only in the 20% range in all age groups. In the case of women in their 40s, in particular, the regular employment ratio in the first job is nearly 90% but the current regular employment ratio is only 21% in both segments. This result suggests that most women who quit their first job as regular employees have not returned to their previous status as regular employees.

## 5. To Eliminate the Expectation-Reality Gap

Among Japanese women, there are very many human resources from a higher educational background that are not being utilized in the labor market. As of 2011, the ratio of women aged 25-49 who have a junior college, university or higher educational background was 53% in Japan, more than 10 points higher than in the USA (32%) (Zhou 2013b). Under normal circumstances, it should be easier for these Japanese women from higher educational backgrounds to make career advancement choices than it is for American women. In reality, however, Japanese women have a higher ratio of job quitting in the childrearing phase and longer blank periods than American women do.

In addition to the strong traditional identity awareness of Japanese women, the labor practices of Japanese companies that have normalized long working hours, working on holidays, etc., make it even harder for Japanese women who take responsibility for all housework and childcare to continue working. Moreover, the fact that it is extremely difficult to return to regular employment once a blank has been formed in the professional record could also be described as a major

characteristic of Japan's labor market. Very many women are out of work because they cannot accept the fall in employment conditions from the first job when re-employed and cannot find work that suits their conditions, even when working full time. In this way, a massive gap arises between the expectations and reality of women in relation to their working situations.

In that case, is there any way of bridging the expectation-reality gap? Put simply, the gap should shrink if either "the expectation were brought closer to the reality" or "the reality were brought closer to the expectation."

To "bring the expectation closer to the reality," it will be necessary to reform the traditional awareness of gender role division, change the habit whereby the burden of housework and childcare weighs too heavily on the wife, and increase participation by husbands in housework and childcare. Although it is very difficult for policy to interfere with the awareness and choices of individuals, a number of initiatives – such as fostering women's career awareness in school education, the government's "Ikumen" campaign, and measures to promote taking of childcare leave by men – have been launched in succession.

To "bring reality closer to expectation," meanwhile, reforms of the labor market will be essential. Specifically, an environment should be developed in which women who have career blank periods may re-enter the labor market for regular employees. Increasing the framework for hiring in mid-career, expanding the "housewife intern" system being introduced by some companies, and enhancing reinstatement support programs by the government could all be regarded as effective policies to this end.

Besides this, it is also important to increase work where both the burden and rewards for labor are at a "medium" level, as well as the "All-or-Nothing" dichotomy. In Japan, regular employees whose working hours, place of work and others are contractually limited in advance ("restricted regular employees") are currently the subject of attention as providing work at a "medium" level. The development of this rule was proposed by the Industrial Competitiveness Conference under the Abe administration, while the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare also announced "Matters

to Note in Connection with Employment Management" concerning restricted regular employees in 2014.

In this way, both public and private sectors need to make various efforts in order to reduce the expectation-reality gap in women's working situations. An environment that provides satisfactory working opportunities for women who cannot find work, despite wanting to, is gradually being developed. Future moves in this direction will be worthy of attention.

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#### (Attachment)

JILPT “National Survey of Households with Children”:  
Outline of the National Survey of Households with Children (NSHC)

The survey targets 4,000 households with children below the age of 18 (2,000 two-parent households and 2,000 single parent households) throughout Japan. The target households (sample) were selected from the Basic Resident Register using the stratified two-stage random sampling method, and specialist surveyors visited each household to deliver and collect questionnaires. The surveyors orally requested that the questionnaire respondent should be the mother of the child or children, in principle. As a rule, respondents were asked to describe the situation prevailing as of November 1st in each survey (the survey reference date).

The valid sample size of actually collected responses was

2,218 questionnaires in the 1st survey (2011) (valid response rate 55%), 2,201 in the 2nd survey (2012) (valid response rate 55%) and 2,197 in the 3rd survey (2014) (valid response rate 55%). For details of the method used and results of each survey, see JILPT (2012, 2013, 2015).

In the aggregation for this paper, a reproduction multiple was determined using the ratio of the population size and valid response rate for each block and household type, and weight back aggregation was performed using this multiple.