

**Women's Ways of Working and Job Continuation  
at the Stage of Childbirth/childcare  
—the Problems of Supporting the Continuation Process and Building  
Workplaces that Encourage Women to Continue Working—**

**Summary**

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**Study Period**

Fiscal 2007 to 2011

**Objectives of Study**

Since the enforcement of the Childcare Leave Act in 1992 the number of women who take childcare leave has increased. Still, many women quit their jobs during maternity or childbirth period even today. In order to elucidate the factors behind this situation, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training has been conducting the “Study on Policy Effect of Job Continuity” as a sub-theme of the research project, “Survey Research on the Way of Establishing Working Conditions towards Response to Diversification of Employment Formats and Realization of Work-Life Balance” which is being conducted from FY 2007 to FY 2011. This report is an interim report of the above-mentioned study as of FY 2009.

In this report, we were able to derive the following implications from the results of hearing surveys to explain why the number of cases of job continuation did not increase even though the number of people taking childcare leave did increase.

First, there is the possibility that job continuation, which was the original purpose of the act, is neglected and childcare leave itself has become the purpose. The results of the study have shown cases of companies that are preoccupied with the enhancement of childcare leave systems. One such example is a case where a company's childcare leave system exceeded the required legal standards, but women resigned due to insufficient support after returning to work. Another possibility is that the number of women who motivated to continue working at the stage of childbirth/childcare has not increased. A working format that encourages one woman to continue working does not necessarily

encourage another woman to continue working as well. A challenging job can become a burden after childbirth. The results of the study indicate the importance of managing employment in a way that takes into account women's opinions and requests in order to motivate women with diverse and changing perceptions to continue working, and the importance to create role models and mentorship programs to help women strike a balance between work and childcare in order to tackle challenges that companies are unaware of and allow employees to encourage one another to continue working.

Although there are costs involved in providing support for the balancing of work and childcare, the resignation of women poses a greater disadvantage to companies. Quite a few companies, while considering women an important asset, do not realize that they are managing employment in such a fashion that does not encourage women to continue working. It can be construed that creating an opportunity for companies to realize that such employment management is a disadvantage for their competitiveness will make it possible to promote effective support.

The results of the analysis from which we derived the above-mentioned findings will be explained below.

## **Summary of Study Results**

### **1. Outline of the Analysis Results**

We analyzed the results of the study, mainly consisting of surveys targeting individuals and companies, and investigated the problems of increasing job continuation. The results of the analysis can be summarized as below.

(1) Many women go through maternity and childbirth uncertain as to whether they will be able to continue working, regardless of the advantages or disadvantages. Quite a few non-regular employees such as part-time workers, contract workers and temporary workers recognize there are no maternity leave, let alone childcare leave. On the other hand, childcare leave is widely recognized among regular employees, but they resign due to factors other than those related to childcare leave, such as the fact that their working hours, after returning to work, do not fit their hours of childcare services. In order to provide effective support for the balancing of work and childcare, it is important to establish a system that provides comprehensive support for working women from the time of their pregnancy and childbirth to the time after returning to work, and to provide organized information and guidance on procedures to employees, without being preoccupied with the availability of individual systems to provide support for the balancing of work and childcare.

- (2) As part of the support during the childcare period after returning to work, there is a strong need for shortened working hours, especially among employees with shorter hours of childcare services. However, even if one has a job for which shorter working hours are possible, it is difficult to leave the workplace early, where long working hours are the norm. It is also difficult to complete jobs that are intended for long working hours by working shorter hours. To make smooth use of the system, it is essential to rectify the situation of long working hours from the two aspects of creating an atmosphere in which employees can comfortably leave the workplace early and reviewing how work is performed.
- (3) The expansion of job responsibilities is a basic measure for encouraging women to continue working. However, it is crucial to manage employment in a way that considers women's opinions and requests in order to encourage diverse women to continue working, including those who do not want broader job responsibilities. It is also necessary to create role models and mentorship programs to help women strike a balance between work and childcare and invigorate the communication among employees in order to tackle challenges that companies are not aware of and build workplaces in which employees can encourage one another to continue working.
- (4) Companies that previously had not been actively providing support for the balancing of work and childcare have come to institute a policy to utilize women in the long term from the standpoint of increasing their competitiveness, after recognizing that they had not effectively utilized talented women in the past. In order for more companies to tackle the challenges described above from (1) to (3), it is vital to promote communication between labor and management, and the provision of external advice and information. This would provide an opportunity for companies to realize that the utilization of women in the long term would be an advantage for the enhancement of their competitiveness.

## **2. Summary of Chapters**

### **Chapter 1: the Problems of Providing Support for Job continuation at the stage of childbirth/childcare— Based on Cases Derived from the Individual Survey —**

Based on cases derived from the survey on individuals, we investigated the challenges in providing support for job continuation. The key points are listed below:

- (1) Many women go through maternity and childcare uncertain as to whether they will be able to continue working.
- (2) It will be problematic for women to continue working if their working hours after returning to work do not fit their childcare hours.

- (3) Women's physical conditions during pregnancy vary from one person to another, but it is difficult for their colleagues to understand their situation.
- (4) The desired way of balancing work with childcare not only differs among woman, but it also changes in the individual.
- (5) Many of the women working for companies that do not have clear policies to utilize women in the long term resign.

**Chapter 2: the Problems of Companies' Support for the Employees at the Stage of  
Childbirth/ Childcare— Focusing on Childcare Leave and Efforts for Action Plans  
Pursuant to the Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising  
Next-Generation Children —**

Based on cases derived from the survey on companies, we investigated the challenges in providing support for the employees at the stage of childbirth/childcare. The key points are listed below.

- (1) Companies that realize the disadvantages posed to corporate management by the resignation of women or companies with management principles or industry policies of utilizing women in the long term are making active efforts to provide support for the balancing of work and childcare.
- (2) There are companies that already have systems in place to support the balancing of work and childcare which exceed the required legal standards. Even these companies are beginning to engage in support that takes into consideration the reality of their employees' childbirth/childcare and work by reviewing the modality of support for the balancing of work and childcare after hearing opinions from female employees, who are the concerned party.
- (3) There are some cases in which small- and medium-sized companies are providing flexible support without being bound by fixed systems. However, companies without systems would be forced to respond to individual employees in an impromptu manner, which would impose a heavier burden on labor management.
- (4) Even those small- and medium-sized companies that find it difficult to establish systems to support the balance of work and childcare or develop their own operational know-how are able to provide effective support for such a balance when they receive external advice and information.

### **Chapter 3: the Problems of Providing Support for Job continuation from the Perspective of Working Hours— Focusing on Shorter Working Hours —**

We investigated the challenges in providing support for job continuation at the stage of childbirth/childcare from the perspective of working hours, with a focus on systems of shorter working hours. The key points are listed below.

- (1) In order to create an atmosphere in which users of systems of shorter working hours can leave the workplace early, it is important to rectify the situation of long working hours for employees, including those that are not going through childcare, from the perspective of reforming the norms of the workplace.
- (2) In order to reform the norms of the workplace that generate long working hours, it is important to reform the awareness of managerial staff and provide incentives for the reduction of overtime work, such as the introduction of an assessment system in which long working hours are not considered a plus.
- (3) At workplaces where the nature of the work leads to long working hours, it is difficult to work shorter hours. In order for women to flexibly choose between shorter working hours and full-time working hours according to their circumstances with regard to work and childcare, it is important to reduce the overtime work of full-time employees by streamlining operations.
- (4) In streamlining operations, it is important to review how work that causes long working hours is performed in concrete terms, by such means as the thorough management of schedules, the reduction of unnecessary operations and the rectification of situations where employees stay past working hours only to linger over work.

### **Chapter 4: Women's Job Responsibility and Their Job continuation**

#### **— Based on Cases Derived from the Survey on Companies —**

We analyzed cases concerning efforts made by companies to promote women's contributions with a focus on expanding their job responsibilities, and investigated the problems of employment management to encourage women to continue working. The key points are listed below:

- (1) Companies that have realized the fact that they had not effectively utilized talented women by recognizing a possible crisis in management are beginning to institute a policy to utilize women in the long term from the viewpoint of enhancing their own competitiveness.
- (2) The expansion of job responsibilities is a basic measure for encouraging women to continue working. However, the desired level of contribution differs among women. In

order to increase the number of women who motivated to continue working at the stage of childbirth/childcare, it is important to manage employment in such a way that makes diverse women want to continue working, including women who do not wish to work in the same way as men.

- (3) In order to realize the above, it is necessary to establish working formats and systems to support the balance of work and childcare that consider women's opinions and requests.

### **Chapter 5: Job continuation and Communication at Workplaces**

With a focus on communication, we investigated the problems of building workplaces that encourage women to continue working during the period of childbirth/childcare. The challenges indicated in the results are listed below.

- (1) In order to understand with certainty the diverse needs of women, it is important to establish a system for hearing the opinions of employees and providing consultations, in addition to daily communication at workplaces.
- (2) Even if companies have little awareness of the issue of utilizing women, it becomes possible to promote the effective support for the balancing of work and childcare if labor unions gather the opinions of women and make requests to companies.
- (3) In order to build workplaces that can deal with the diverse challenges of job continuation, it is important to create role models and mentorship programs to help women strike a balance between work and childcare and build workplaces in which women can encourage one another to continue working.

### **3. Overview of Hearing Surveys on Childbirth/Childcare and Work**

#### **(1) Purpose**

The surveys were conducted in order to clarify the challenges in building workplaces that enable women to continue working at the stage of childbirth/childcare, and providing support for the balancing of work and childcare. The items that were surveyed include the following: regarding companies, their status regarding the implementation of support for the balancing of work and childcare, management of working hours, and their efforts for equal opportunities and promotion of contributions by women; regarding individual female employees, their working formats before and after childbirth, their status of utilization of support for the balancing of work and childcare that they receive from employers as well as childcare services, the way they share housework and childcare with their families, and their awareness on work and childcare.

## (2) Surveyed companies and individuals

(a) Survey on companies: Ten companies that hire five or more regular employees were surveyed.

Table 1 List of companies survey

Category	Number of employees	Type of business	Whether employees have taken childcare leave in the past	System of shorter working hours	Action Plans Pursuant to the Next Generation Act
A	Over 20,000	Manufacturing	Yes	○	◎
B	5,221	Finance and insurance (banking)	Yes	○	◎
C	2,312	Finance and insurance (banking)	Yes	×	◎
D	961	Real estate (development and management of retail stores)	Yes	○	◎
E	217	Manufacturing (printing)	Yes	○	○
F	120	Information and telecommunication	Yes	○	○
G	60	Service (pest control)	Yes	△	×
H	48	Wholesale and retail (trading)	Yes	○	○
I	22	Manufacturing (printing)	Yes	△	○
J	17	Information and telecommunication (software development)	Yes	●	○

System of shorter working hours: ○ there are user(s) of the system, ● there are no users although there is a system, △ there is no system but there are employee(s) short-time working hours, × no systems or users.

Action Plans Pursuant to the Next Generation Act: ◎ the company has obtained the next generation accreditation mark “Kurumin,” ○ the company has an action plan, × the company does not have an action plan.

(Four companies with over 300 employees, two companies with between 101 and 300 employees, four companies with 100 or less employees).

## (b) Survey on individuals:

i) Four female employees who are working for the companies described in a) above and have continued working at the stage of childbirth/childcare were surveyed.

ii) Fifteen women who have pre-school aged children and have experience of being employed before the birth of their first child were surveyed.

## (c) Survey on related organizations:

i) One labor union (labor union of a company D surveyed in above (a)) was surveyed.

ii) One employers' association (Hiroshima Prefecture Small- and Medium- Sized Companies Association) was surveyed.

iii) One administrative agency (Labour and Welfare Division, Commerce, Industries and Labour Bureau of the Government of Hiroshima Prefecture) was surveyed.

Table 2 List of individual survey

Label	Age	Number of children	Year(s) of childbirth	Living with parents	Status of continued employment	Employer at the time of being employed				
						Type of business	Size of company	Employment format	Type of job	Childcare leave
a	39	2	1998 and 2001	No	Continued up till now	Bank (Company C)	Large	Regular employee	Clerical work (finance loan)	○ (for both children)
b	34	1	2007	No	Continued up till now	Information service (Company F)	Medium	Regular employee	Specialized or technical work (information technical expert)	○
c	34	1	2006	Yes	Continued up till now	Pest control (Company G)	Small	Regular employee	Specialized or technical work (internal information system management)	△
d	29	1	2007	No	Continued up till now	Printing (Company I)	Small	Regular employee	Sales (store staff)	○
e	33	1	2008	No	Continued up till now	Publishing	Small	Regular employee	Specialized or technical work (editor)	○
f	28	1	2007	No	Changed jobs during childcare leave	Traveler service	Large	Regular employee	Service (check-in staff)	○
g	35	1	2006	No	Resigned after marriage before pregnancy	Traveler service	Large	Regular employee	Service (check-in staff)	●
h	39	2	2005 and 2008	No	Resigned after returning to work after birth of first child	Human resources service	Small	Regular employee	Sales (service contract)	○
i	33	1	2006	No	Resigned upon getting married	Information and telecommunication	Small	Regular employee	Specialized or technical work (information technical expert)	●
j	38	1	2007	No	Resigned during pregnancy	Manufacturing (apparel)	Large	Regular Employee	Sales (sales promotion)	●
k	35	2	2002 and 2004	No	Resigned during pregnancy with first child	Trading	Large	Regular Employee	Clerical work (clerk)	●
l	27	1	2008	No	Resigned during pregnancy	Credit loan	Large	Regular employee	Clerical work (secretary)	●
m	35	1	2007	No	Resigned after marriage before pregnancy	Hospital	Large	Chief resident	Specialized or technical work (pediatrician)	—
n	36	1	2007	No	Continued up till now	Lights and sound	Small	Temporary worker	Service (lights and sound)	×
o	29	1	2006	No	Employment discontinued due to pregnancy with second child (currently pregnant with second child)	Nursing care business	Large	Part-time worker	Service (nursing care)	×
p	32	1	2006	Yes	Employment discontinued due to pregnancy	Nursing care business	Small	Limited-term contracting worker	Service (nursing care)	×
q	38	1	2007	No	Resigned on the occasion of pregnancy	Labor dispatch service	Large	Dispatched worker	Clerical work (clerk)	×
r	30	0	2009 (Planned)	No	Continued up till now (currently pregnant with first child)	Labor dispatch service	Large	Dispatched worker	Clerical work (accounting)	○ (Planned)
s	30	1	2007	No	Resigned due to inability to return to work after childcare leave	Labor dispatch service	Large	Dispatched worker	Specialized or technical work (interpreter)	○

\* Size of company: “Large” indicates a company with over 300 employees; “medium” indicates a company with between 101 and 300 employees; “small” indicates a company with 100 or less employees.

\* All the dispatched workers are registration-type at dispatching companies.

\* Childcare leave: ○ indicates that there is a system and the individual used the system, ● indicates that there is a system but the individual has not used the system, △ indicates that there is no system but the individual took childcare leave, × indicates that there is no system and the individual did not take childcare leave, — indicates that the details are unclear.

(3) Survey method

For all surveys on companies, individuals and related organizations, the individual interview method was used.

(4) Survey period

June 5 to December 17, 2009

(5) Survey results

i) Survey on companies

Based on the information found in informational magazines, press reports and on the Internet, we individually requested the companies to take part in the survey among other things. The details of the companies that cooperated in the survey are found in Table 1.

ii) Survey on individuals

The individuals that were surveyed in the survey on employees (above (b) i)) were introduced by the companies that cooperated in the survey. The individuals that were surveyed in the survey on non-employees (above (b) ii) were introduced by private organizations that provide support for childcare and support for women who are in the period of childcare in finding employment, or the acquaintances of survey takers. The details of the 19 women who are in the period of maternity and childcare who cooperated in the survey are found in Table 2.