

**How Wives View Their Husbands' Working Hours:
An Analysis of the Results of a Questionnaire Surveying Wives about Their
Husbands' Working Hours
Summary**

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Objective of the Study

This summary resulted from a piece of research undertaken as part of the JILPT project research into “Survey Research on the Way of Establishing Working Conditions towards Response to Diversification of Employment Formats and Realization of Work-Life Balance,” and represents one of the sub-themes of this research, namely, the “Questionnaire Survey into Working Hours (wives’ survey)” (hereinafter referred to as the “wives’ survey”). The summary includes an analysis of these survey results, as well as an outline of the policy implications resulting from that.

The “wives’ survey” was implemented separately as a sub-theme to the project noted above, alongside the “Questionnaire Survey of Working Hours” (hereinafter referred to as the “main survey (into working hours)”), and took as its scope the wives of male regular employees covered by the main survey.

When considering the issues surrounding working hours, obviously the perspectives of the worker and the employing (utilizing) company are important, but from the point of view of work-life balance, the perspective of family life is also equally important. The main survey (into working hours) was centered on the former, while the wives’ survey was based on the latter. As working hours can have a wide range of impacts on family

life, the wives' survey had as its primary approach an understanding of how husbands' working hours actually impacted on family life from the perspective of their wives. It is not to be hoped that a single survey can respond sufficiently to this sort of issue, but the survey categories in this case were designed to establish how wives perceive the (long) working hours of their husbands, including from the perspective of health, and the extent to which the length of husbands' working hours impacts the life plans (including employment) and satisfaction levels of their wives, among other things.

Men working long hours can impact not only their own health, but also the efficiency of their company. In addition, the phenomenon has a range of impacts on a man's home life, which is the basis for his working life. Acknowledging this, along with the fact that his working hours also have an impact on the lifestyle of his life partner (his wife), is the first step in heading towards solving the various problems often cited as arising from long working hours.

Outline of Study Results

1. Types of problems arising from husbands working long hours

Firstly, the author would like to categorize the types of problems associated with men's (husbands') "long working hours." It is thought to be possible to categorize the problems associated with "long working hours" into two aspects, as long as they are legitimate in terms of labor contracts or labor legislation, – "impact on production" (in other words, "work"-related) and "impact on the labor reproduction" (in other words, "life"-related) issues¹ (see Fig. 1).

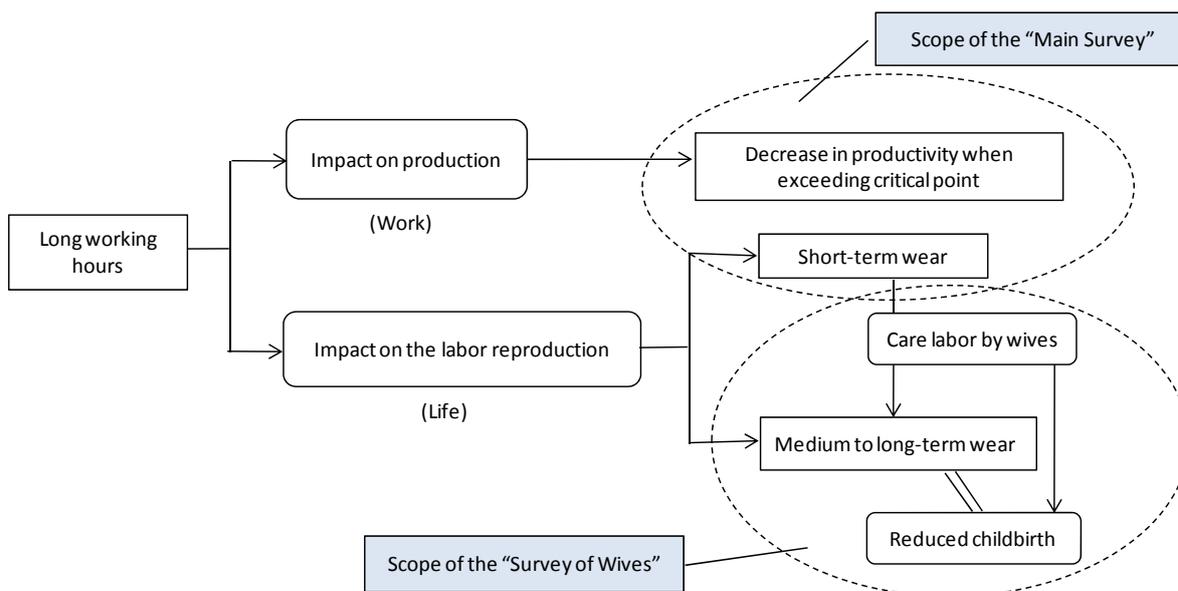
"Impact on production" includes the possibility that problems may occur relating mainly to efficiency and capacity in production activities, and the issue of whether working (or forcing people to work) long hours is in fact the most efficient way of implementing the production activity in question. A typical example is the fact that working significantly "long hours" can cause a reduction in efficiency (including the incidence of problems caused by carelessness). It is difficult to acquire appropriate data on this topic, however, and therefore difficult to verify these assumptions. In general,

¹ "Labor-reproduction" is virtually the same as the concept termed "reproduction," in relation to gender roles within sociology. It is a word that could be replaced with a term such as "refreshment." It does not, however, refer merely to an individual relieving his or her own tiredness, but rather includes the concept of developing the labor force within the next generation. For this reason, the term "labor-reproduction" is considered most appropriate here.

when business is good, working hours tend to become longer, and when business is bad they tend to become shorter. In addition to this, since people subject to “long working hours” tend to be consolidated in certain sectors or groups, it is difficult to obtain data only from those people subject to long working hours.

The other type of problems – those categorized as “impact on the labor reproduction,” – can be further broken down into “short-term wear” and “medium to long-term wear.” “Short-term wear” is a situation where people have to begin their next day’s work without being able to fully recover from the exhaustion of the long working hours they have just completed and this buildup of tiredness leads to a gradual reduction in work capacity. The person working – in this case the husband – suffers exhaustion and reduced morale, and maybe depression or melancholy. On the other hand, “medium to long-term wear” is a situation where long working hours result in preventing workers from maintaining or improving their vocational capabilities, as well as eventually preventing them from training or cultivating human resources in the next generation, which will eventually replace them as their work capacity declines due to aging, senility or even death. Furthermore, as an “impact on the labor reproduction,” we should also look at the fact that wives themselves may be prevented from entering the type of employment they want.

Figure 1 Categorization of the problems of long working hours among husbands



When categorizing issues in this way, the “work” aspect, and the aspect of “short-term wear in the labor reproduction,” which is related directly and closely to issues with the working person himself, are included within the scope of the main survey (into working hours), constituting part of a different area of research. Therefore, they are compiled into a separate report.

On the other hand, the scope of this report is the “life” aspect including the role of the wife in relation to the “short-term wear” of work capacity within her husband, its impact on the employment activities of wives themselves, and the medium to long-term wear on work capacity as expressed in impact on childrearing, as seen through an analysis of the thoughts, hopes and satisfaction levels of wives. The role of wives in relation to the “short-term wear” of husbands’ work capacity requires additional explanation at this point. In order to be refreshed and compensate for the short-term wear of work capacity, which has been built up through day after day of work, it is not sufficient for husbands merely to take rest. They also need to get proper nutrition, look after their hygiene through bathing, etc., and be able to gain psychological peace through the provision of an appropriate environment. A range of physical arrangements and services are required to ensure that this happens, but if husbands’ working hours are extremely long, they are not only unable to spend the time organizing these things for themselves, but they may also suffer a loss of desire to actively participate for themselves in activities that would compensate or restore their spent work capacity². As a result, it is possible that they demand more of this sort of care than is usual from their wives. If a wife’s activities, which are designed to compensate or refresh the spent work capacity within her husband, are referred to as “care labor,” it may be considered that the burden of “care labor” on such wives is heavier than that on those whose husbands do not work long hours³.

This wives’ survey was therefore designed based on the problem definitions given above, and analysis carried out accordingly. The following indicator data was used, in the main, to comply with the categorization of issues. It is important to remember that

² The lifestyle of these husbands is symbolized by the three words, “bath,” “meal,” and “bed,” all of which are supposed to be prepared by their wives.

³ It is thought that this “care labor” is linked in many areas to the “unpaid work” or “emotional labor” discussed by some social scientists. The “care labor” done by wives in order to compensate or refresh their husbands’ spent work capacity, however, which is the issue here, is without doubt carried out by women, whereas “unpaid work” or “emotional labor” are, of course, not limited to women.

these are based on responses from wives, and therefore are not necessarily indicators of the actual “state of affairs.”

- (1) As the main indicator of husbands’ working hours, the time between them leaving the house and returning home on a normal working day (departure time to return time) was used. In addition, the regularity (or otherwise) of the time they return home, work done on holidays or weekends, and work brought home were also defined as “irregular work patterns.”
- (2) Indicators were defined for the state of health and depression, etc., relating to “short-term wear” in husbands’ work capacity.
- (3) In relation to “care labor” by wives, indicators were defined as whether or not they wish that their husbands would spend less time at work, and whether or not the division of housework with their husbands, envisaged by them at the time they married, had been achieved.
- (4) In terms of understanding the impact on wives’ own employment behavior, the indicator was defined as whether or not wives’ image of their working lives they had at the time they married, in particular, whether their wish to continue working had been realized or not.
- (5) In terms of medium to long-term wear on work capacity, the indicator was defined as whether or not the couples had been able to have the number of children wives had hoped for when they first married.
- (6) In relation to the indicators above, the survey asked wives questions relating to their level of satisfaction with their lives as a whole and seven aspects of their lives.

While relationships to other categories were also considered, analysis was performed of how indicators (2) to (6) above related to indicator (1). The results of this analysis were organized, with attention given to the nature of the “stories” they tell.

2. Findings of analysis (i. to x.)

(1) The extent of problems caused by husbands’ working hours, as seen by wives

i. The problem of long working hours may only be a problem for some, but it is an extensive problem involving a range of people.

The time spent by husbands at work was considered to be “just right as it is at the moment” by just over half (54.8%) of the wives surveyed. One third of wives (33.0%), however, said that they “wished their husbands worked shorter hours.”

This shows that we must be aware of the fact that the problem of long working hours is a problem for some, but not all, people. At the same time, the fact that a third of wives wished for shorter working hours indicates the widespread impact of this problem⁴.

A relatively high proportion of wives of men in mid-level management positions (26.2% of general employees as opposed to 37.1% of mid-level managers) wished their husbands worked “shorter hours.” This indicates that the problem is a significant one among core employees playing important roles within companies, and should not be ignored by companies.

(2) Factors behind wives expressing a wish for their husbands to “work shorter hours”

The majority (71.0%) of wives wished their husbands “worked shorter hours” for the reason that “he works too hard,” followed by the reasons that they “would like him to spend more time with the family” (51.3%), and not a few wives said that they “would like him to share more of the burden of childrearing” (15.7%) or that they “would like him to do more housework” (11.3%). This can also be seen from an analysis of the factors behind the responses, which gave the following results.

ii. Wives wishing for their husbands “to work shorter hours” are impacted not only by their husbands’ long but also irregular working hours.

The proportion of wives responding that they wished for “shorter hours” and the proportion responding that they were “just right at the moment” were reversed when the hours worked (between leaving the house and returning home) went over 13 hours per day, at which point the former became the majority. This could be said to be the maximum that wives were prepared to accept as a social norm. Wives whose husbands returned to the home at irregular hours were also more likely to express a wish that their husbands “worked shorter hours.”

⁴ The author believes that if a problem is observed among 5% of a whole group then it is significant enough to be considered a “social problem,” and as such one third means that this problem is more than sufficiently significant. The phrase “5% of a whole group” does not necessarily indicate 5% of the overall population. The “group” equates to the people who are equal or similar under a particular policy of system. If 5% or more of such a group has the same category of problem, it indicates that the policy or the systems need to be revised or reformed, and that there is a need for the issue to be given serious consideration. A fairly large number of people are required, however, to constitute such a “group.”

iii. Concerns for the state of husbands' health as a result of long working hours was a factor in wives expressing a wish that their husbands "worked shorter hours"

As a husband's working hours get longer, the proportion of wives concerned for their husbands' health increases in an accelerated way. It is suspected that no small number of husbands who are observed to be in poor health by their wives are in a depression.

iv. Some wives express a wish that their husbands "worked shorter hours" because they would like them to participate more in housework or family responsibilities (mainly to do with childrearing or childcare).

For example, in couples with children in nursery school, a higher proportion of wives express a wish that their husbands "worked shorter hours," even though their husbands' working hours are the same as those for other categories.

(3) Husbands' working hours as an obstructive factor in the realization of ideals held by wives at the time they got married

Wives have a range of ideal images in regard to their new lives when they get married, but for many, these are not realized. There are many factors involved, and among them are the long and irregular working hours of their husbands. Analysis relating to husbands' working hours can be organized as follows.

v. A major factor for wives in not achieving their image of husbands sharing housework is the irregular hours at which husbands return home.

Of the wives who held the ideal that their husbands would participate in housework when they got married, the proportion of those who responded that they had "realized" the ideal was relatively low (45.1% responding that they had realized their ideal in regard to "cooperation/sharing of tasks between husband and wife," while 74.6% of the wives with the image of them (the wives) doing all the tasks responded that they had "realized" the image.) Factors behind this include the fact that the husbands return to the house at irregular hours each day, and that there is a high frequency of irregular work patterns, including going to work at weekends and on holidays.

vi. There is a certain amount of correlation between wives not achieving the number of children they would have liked, and the husband's working hours

26.6% of wives who had an ideal number of children in mind when they got married said that the actual number of children they had (or were likely to have) was fewer than their ideal. Almost a quarter of these wives (23.6%) said that their husbands' working hours had a correlation with the fewer number of children than they would have liked. Analysis results also showed a certain correlation with husbands' current length of working hours.

vii. Husbands' non-participation in housework was a significant factor in wives not being able to continue their careers as they would have wished

The largest proportion, around half (50.8%), of wives said that their own career ideal at the point when they got married involved "leaving work for a while, but returning to work again once the children are old enough." Meanwhile, 18.1% of wives said that they had hoped to continue work after marriage, but of these, almost four tenths (38.7%) stated that this ideal "had not been, or was unlikely to be realized." Analysis results showed that factors causing this non-realization included the irregular hours at which husbands returned home, which also correlate with, as in v. above, the lack of cooperation from husbands in housework.

(4) Impact on wives' satisfaction levels

Overall, wives expressed satisfaction with their lifestyles, but the factors described above are in general responsible for lowering their levels of satisfaction. There are many, diverse factors affecting the level of satisfaction, and the followings are analysis results relating to husbands' working hours.

viii. There was a particularly low level of satisfaction among wives regarding their husbands' sense of concern for their own health

A low level of satisfaction with their "husband's sense of concern for his own health" was seen extensively across all age groups. When husbands' working hours went above a certain level (13 hours between leaving and returning home), the average score for satisfaction level in this area went into negative figures.

ix. Wives expressing a wish that their husbands "worked shorter hours" and wives who had not realized the ideals they held when they got married had both relatively low levels of satisfaction

Wives who wished that their husbands "worked shorter hours," wives who had not realized the ideals they held when they got married in regard to the division of

housework, wives who wished to continue work but were unable to do so, and wives who had not managed to have as many children as they would have liked had a low level of satisfaction compared to those not in any of these categories. This can be seen as a reflection of the fact that these factors lower the satisfaction felt by wives in their own purpose of life.

x. The low level of satisfaction among wives with their lives has a direct impact on the negative image of their post-retirement years

The low level of satisfaction among wives with their lives is a strong factor in the negative image of their future years after their husbands have retired from work.

(5) “Stories” that emerge from these results

From the analysis results given above, we can read the following “stories.”

It is true that the problem of long working hours is not a universal problem. It could be said to be only a problem for some, but it involves a wide range of people at present, and the group mainly affected by the need to work long hours is also the group that constitutes the competitive edge within a company. As such, this is the group in regard to whom companies really should take measures under a principle of “work hard, but rest properly.”

On the other hand, it is important to understand and have an awareness of the fact that the long working hours of husbands are not only the problem of the workers themselves, but also extend to the people around them – particularly their wives, who are impacted in a range of ways. The group experiencing this impact most strongly tends to be women who are relatively highly educated, and who entered marriage with an assumption that their husbands would share the housework, that they would continue to work, and that they would be able to have children. It is hoped that these wives will be an important source of labor for both companies and economic society of our country as a whole.

The reality is, however, many women are unable to realize these hopes and ideals. There are many factors behind the situation, but husbands’ long working hours are certainly one of them. A husband’s long working hours lead to him being unable to play the role anticipated by his wife in either housework or other family responsibilities. Rather, his long working hours result in him needing care from his wife in many cases. Wives are unable to simply ignore their husbands in

these cases, and as a result, they are unable to have the number of children they want, or unable to maintain their own careers. They are almost certainly forced to give up at least one of these. Furthermore, as their children get old enough for school, and even pass on to junior high and senior high schools, their husbands simply get busier, as they get moved into (middle) management, becoming less and less able to give their time to their families, and resulting in their wives bearing all the burden of family responsibility.

This situation has a negative impact on the level of satisfaction among wives. In particular, a significant proportion of wives today feel that their careers are connected with a purpose or motivation in their own life, and even if they are relatively satisfied with their lifestyles, they may not feel a great sense of fulfillment in their lives overall.

Furthermore, such underlying dissatisfaction in wives might lead to them having a negative image about their old age with “trouble,” “endurance” or “insecurity.” Once their husbands, who rarely took the time to care for their families, retire, these wives are surely likely to consider them bitterly.

We cannot say from these survey results that these “stories” apply to so many cases, but they apply to a certain proportion. These issues are not just a problem of levels of satisfaction among individuals. They not only indicate the inability of economic society to fully utilize the abilities of capable women, in spite of a great social cost spent on their development, but also become one of the factors in the issue of declining birth rates, which has been identified as a significant problem in recent years. The problem of long working hours is a problem or an issue for society as a whole, which requires a social response.

3. Policy implications

Initially, it is important that husbands are aware, and take appropriate measures to deal with, the fact that their long working hours are having an impact on their wives (and families)⁵. Even if husbands do become aware of this, however, and despite the fact that their wives and even they themselves may have a desire to

⁵ This should at least, eliminate the thought that “I don’t have anything to do except work”. This is just like in the Japanese proverb “the darkest place is under the candlestick” – as well as being an excuse for not taking on the “troublesome” responsibilities of family life.

shorten their working hours, if it is not practically possible to achieve this, then a social response is required. Here, the author would like to focus on the directions required of any policy response to this situation, based on the results of analysis stated above.

i. Shortening of regular working hours and consecutive days off – the “optimal combination”

After all, a policy response to long working hours means, in some form, shortening the amount of time spent at work. There are broadly two ways to shorten working hours: to shorten ordinary working hours or to lengthen consecutive days off.

When asked about this in the survey, as shown in Fig. 2, wives' responses were divided into 3 large groups (A-C). Out of wives who wished that their husbands would work shorter hours (group A), the largest proportion - 44.0% - said they would prefer “shorter regular working hours and consecutive days off just as they are now,” followed by 38.9% who said that they would prefer “shorter regular hours and more consecutive days off.” Altogether, this means that over 80% of the wives of this group would like to see their husbands work shorter regular working hours. At the same time, in terms of consecutive days off, a total of 49.3% of them would like to see their husbands having longer consecutive days off. Furthermore, 19.0% of wives who felt that their husbands' working hours were “just right” as they were (group C) stated that they would like to see them get more consecutive days off. In addition, even among wives who wished their husbands would work “longer hours” (group B), almost four tenths (38.6%) felt that they would prefer them to have more consecutive days off in return for working longer hours.

Wives' views of their husbands' working hours are closely connected to the hours worked on a daily basis. In other words, the longer a husband works on a day-to-day basis, the higher the proportion of wives wishing that their husbands would “work shorter hours” (Fig. 3). At the same time, whether or not their husbands had taken consecutive days off during the past year was also a factor. A relatively high proportion of wives whose husbands had not taken any consecutive days off responded that they wished their husbands would take “more consecutive days off” (Fig. 4).

In this way, wives tend to be divided into those wishing that their husbands would “work shorter regular hours” and those wishing they would take “more consecutive days off,” depending on the circumstances in which they find themselves. It is to be hoped that an “optimal combination” of “regular working hours” and more “consecutive days off,” will be realized with due considerations to diversity of individual situations.

Figure 2 Wives' wishes regarding the length of their husbands' working hours, and the type of working hours

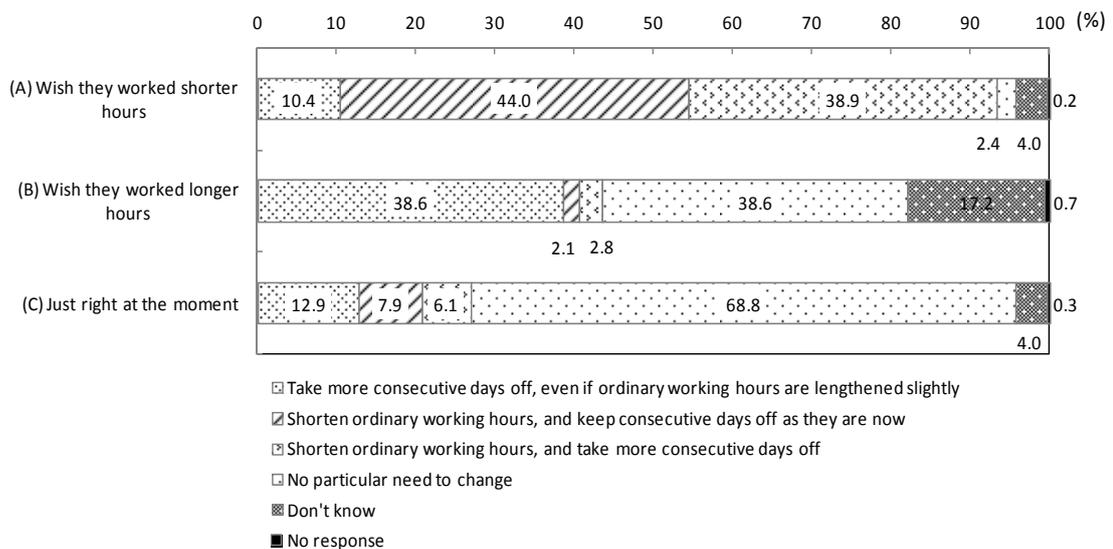


Figure 3 Wives' desired method of shortening hours, depending by husbands' working hours (time from leaving to returning home)

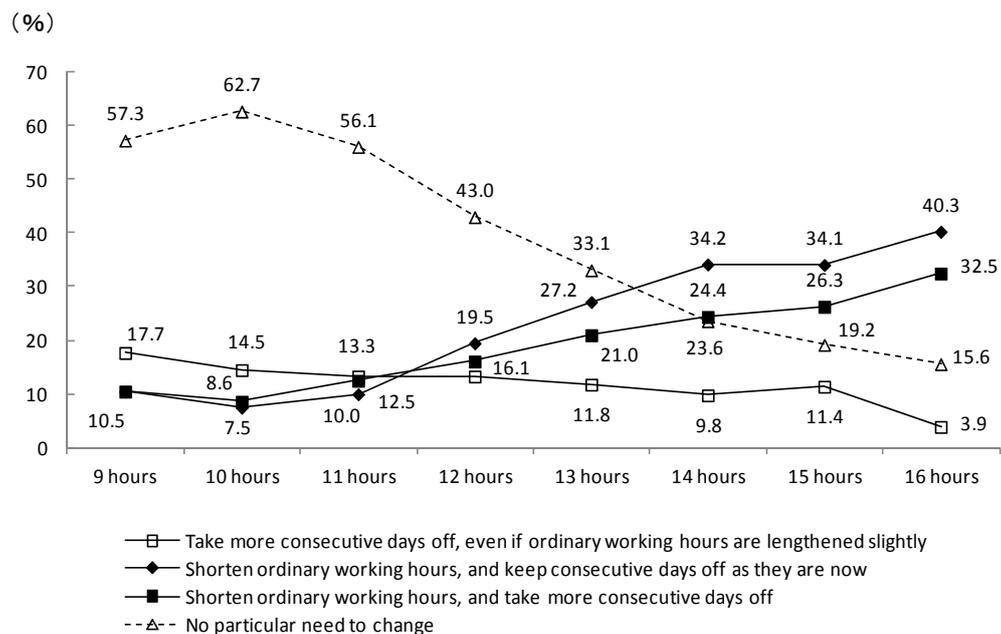
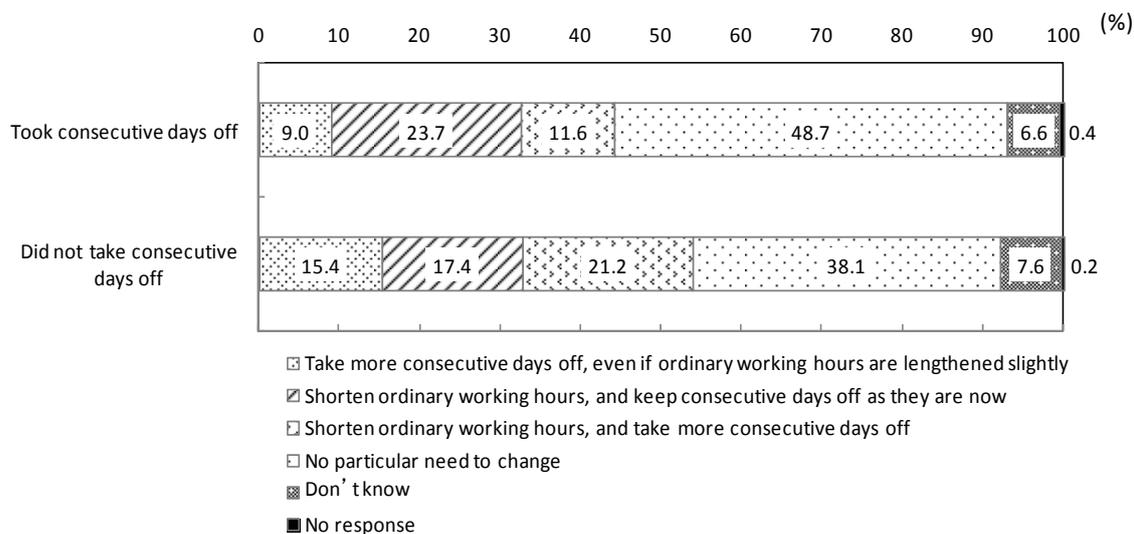


Figure 4 Whether or not husbands took consecutive days off within the last 1 year, and wives' wishes regarding the type of working hours



ii. Another option : establishing system of rest hours between shifts

Placing an upper limit on working hours is considered the most important method that could be implemented as policy to respond to long working hours. At the same time, it is worth considering the introduction of legislation relating to “rest hours” to Japanese law, as seen in the labor laws of the European continent such as France and Germany⁶. This regulates that the minimum rest time between 2 shifts (completing work on one day and starting it again the next day) should not be less than certain consecutive hours (11 hours in France and Germany).

This reminds us that the proportion of wives wishing that their husband “worked shorter hours” and the proportion saying that their working hours are “just right” were reversed at the point at which husbands’ working hours (time from leaving home to returning home) increases above 13 hours. $24 - 13 = 11$ hours. It could be said that roughly 11 hours of rest is the amount required to achieve a work-life balance. It is important to note that 11 hours in this case may not be entirely equivalent to the European definition of “rest time” considering the difference of commuting time. However, in Japan, too, 11 hours of rest should probably be the starting point for debate.

⁶ As an aside, legal codes in Russia also allow for this.

iii. Improving the regularity of the time husbands return home

This research has made it clear that when a husband returns to the home at irregular hours each day, it has a range of impacts on his family. Irregularity in the time a husband returns home is seen regardless of whether he works under an ordinary system of scheduled working hours, or under a variable system of flextime or discretionary working hours.

From the perspective of wives (and family life), it is clearly required that the operation of working hour systems and overtime should be reviewed, among other measures, in order to regularize the time that their husbands return home. The introduction of “no-overtime days”, or systems that prohibit work after a certain time (“core rest time”) are measures that could be considered. In addition to this, measures should be considered to allow employees (husbands) who have specific family responsibilities such as picking up children from nursery to leave work at the fixed time on certain days of the week, with the option to take work home as necessary.

There are many other measures that could be considered aside from the above, but in any case, the point is to establish principle of “work hard, rest properly.” In addition to this, husbands are required to undertake their share of family responsibilities, and pay more consideration to their wives’ life plans.