

Work and Childbearing Choice of Married Women in Japan: the Effect of Labor Practices

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The paper aims to analyze the changes in work and childbearing behavior, the effect of educational attainment, occupation, firm size, household characteristics, and attitude towards marriage in present Japan. Data used is 7370 samples from the *Eleventh Japanese National Fertility Survey* conducted by National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in 1997 for married women aged up to 49 years old. Despite the Equal Employment Opportunity Law Between Sex implemented in 1986 and the Child Care Leave Law implemented in 1992, more than 70 percent of females retire to become housewives after the birth of their first child. The percentage is even on the increase for the younger generation unlike the case of many western countries. Females eventually re-enter the labor market, but those with higher educational attainment are less likely to return. The purpose of the paper is to examine whether the increase in withdrawal from the labor market following child birth is demand lead, more preferred by women themselves, or is forced by labor practices and difficulties in adjusting work hours.

A large wage gap exists between regular workers and atypical workers including part-time workers in Japan. The work hours are long for the regular workers, and the entry to the regular work position is easiest for the newly graduated, and is more difficult for the middle-aged and the aged. Because of such labor market conditions, options following marriage and childbirth becomes more of a discrete choice between regular employment, atypical employment and full-time housekeeping, rather than a work hour choice under given market wage rate as in the standard labor supply model.

First, attitude towards marriage between age group was compared by factor analysis. It showed that attitude and values towards marriage differed between generations. The increase in withdrawal from labor market of the younger generation did not conform to this new marriage attitude that place more emphasis on individual attainment.

Second, individual's choice among continuation of regular work, work change to atypical work and withdrawal from work as full-time housekeeping was estimated using multinomial logit model for the period following marriage and also for the period following the birth of first child. While higher wage for women increased continued labor participation after marriage, it did not necessarily do so after the childbirth. Factors encouraging participation after childbirth were additional help within household (extended family), individualistic attitude towards marriage, and one's own mothers work history. Though higher wage did not increase participation after childbirth, if one was to participate, low-wage atypical labor was less likely to be selected. The opportunity cost of quitting their job, however, had some effect on childbirth delay as shown by the Weibull regression analysis. Thus, the recent increase in the withdrawal of women from the labor market after the first childbirth can be explained in most part by the enhanced work opportunities in regular employment for women and by difficulties in adjusting work hours, rather than by changes in preferences of the younger generation.