

A Study of Employer-Supported Childcare and Women Employment

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ABSTRACT

Despite the high academic level of Korean women, the rate of female employment remains low among OECD countries. One of the main reasons for this low female employment rate is career interruption due to childcare. Thus, various measures are proposed to reduce the career interruption of female employees, and this study focused on the employer-supported childcare among these measures. The Opinions from employers and employees are collected through surveys on the employer-supported childcare programs for the revitalization of the female employment rate. In addition, the opinions on how to promote the employer-supported childcare program are investigated through expert interviews. From the survey results, we find that both employers and employees agree that the employer-supported childcare program would be helpful to maintain and create women employment. Also, we report the suggestions of expert interview that tax-benefit and joint program are the solutions for small-size and private companies to install the employer-supported childcare program. This study is expected to contribute to the labor market and academia by suggesting the importance of the employer-supported childcare program for activating the women employment.

Key Words : Employer-Supported Childcare, Women Employment, Female Labor Force, Tax Benefit

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I. Introduction

The low women’s labor force participation has recently come to the fore as a serious social issue in many countries. Especially, Statistics Korea reports that the women’s labor force participation rate is very low among OECD countries. Table 1 presents the women’s labor force participation rate in 2010. The women’s labor force participation rate in Korea is only 53.1% and the rate is much lower than OECD average of 59.6%.

〈Table 1〉 The Participation rate of women’s labor force in 2010

Countries	Ranking	Women’s Labor Force Participation rate
Iceland	1st	77.3%
Norway	2nd	73.4%
Switzerland	3rd	73.2%
OECD Average	-	59.6%
Korea	26th	53.1%

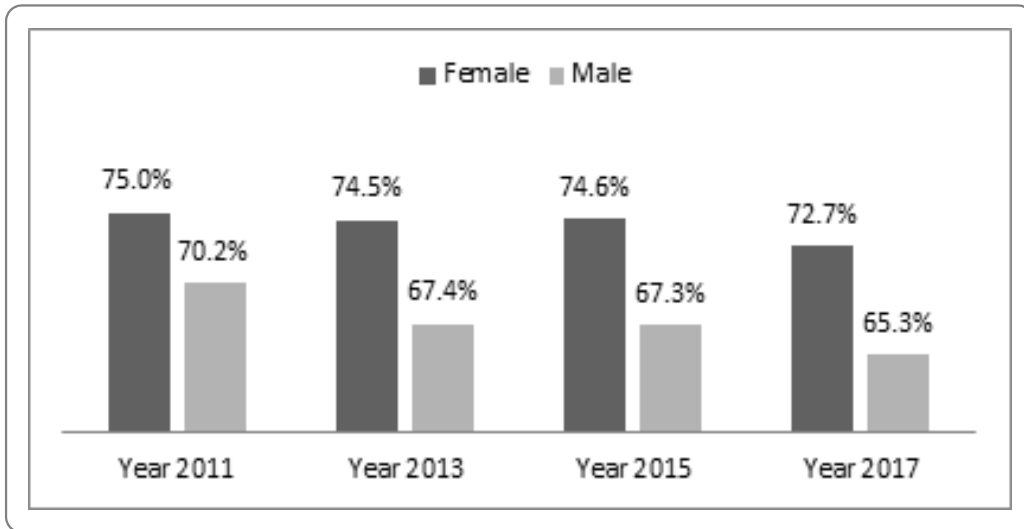
Note : OECD Family Database

According to Korean Women’s Development Institute, most Korean women recently have a higher education than their Korean men (Korean Women’s Development Institute, 2019), and Figure 1 shows that women’s college entrance rate has been higher than that of men since 2011.

Korea provides a well-developed education system for women, but nevertheless women’s ranking in labor force participation is still at the bottom of the OECD country list. The low female participation implies that Korean elite female labor forces are not effectively utilized. Many Korean studies argue that the great obstacle which causes the low women’s labor force participation is from childrearing (Lee, 2015; Gong, 2019; Kim and Kang, 2015).

Recently, the gender inequality in childrearing in Korea is gradually reducing. However, after having a baby, most families still choose a traditional childcare decision, a working dad and a housewife, because the number of childcare facilities are quite short, sometimes the distance between workplace and the

[Figure 1] The College Entrance Rate of Female and Male High School Students



childcare facilities is not close, or the women's salary is not enough to afford the childcare facilities (Lee, 2015). In order to support the employees, many Korean companies provide family support programs such as maternity leave, flexible working hour, and employer-supported childcare currently. Especially, the employer-supported childcare program receives a great attention from local communities as the most effective way to increase women's labor force participation rate (Gong, 2019; Kim and Kang, 2015). This study focuses on the employer-supported childcare program and analyzes how effectively the employer-supported childcare program works for the female labor force participation. In addition, this study provides expert suggestions for vitalizing the employer-supported childcare program.

From the survey analysis, this study finds that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful to reduce the turnover of women employment. Women employees can save their time for dropping off their young children to the childcare facilities and they have more freedom from childrearing by the employer-supported childcare program. The next finding is that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful to recruit new elite female labor force. Many elite women with young children consider the benefit of childcare program

an important factor in choosing a company. Therefore, the companies with the employer-supported childcare program can recruit new elite female employees easily than the companies without the childcare program. However, practically small-size and private companies may be not affordable to provide the employer-supported childcare program. The experts of childcare suggest that tax benefits and joint program for the small-size and private companies would be the solutions to install the employer-supported childcare program.

The remainder of this paper is as follows. In section 2, prior studies are reviewed. In section 3, research methodology are described and in section 4, results and discussion are presented. Finally, in section 5, conclusions from the findings are drawn.

II. Literature Review

Internationally, women studies play an important role for supporting women's rights and their social status. Especially, many researchers focus on the level of women education and women employment as indicators how well a country supports the women empowerment. The recent literature about the women's labor force are as follows. Le (2009) investigates the female role change in a patriarchal society in Vietnam. The study selects a traditional craft village as the dataset of a patriarchal society and observes the change of female labor force participation under social development. The study find that women participate in many types of occupations as social modernized even in the patriarchal society in Vietnam, and argues that women can have more powerful voice in the family group as they work for supporting their families. Noreen and Awan (2011) studies the influence of women education on women's social status using Pakistan data. They examine the barriers and obstacles of women education, and report that the women are excluded from education due to the traditional gender role of childrearing. The study find that women education is able to enhance women's social status in Pakistan, and it implies that women education can help them to have more career opportunities over the traditional gender role of the reproduction. Idris et al.

(2014) investigates Federal Land Development Authority in Malaysia for investigating the motivational factors which affect female labor force participation. They find that women's desire for success is the key factor that encourages them to operate their business activity. The study suggests that self-control and psychological support for women are important to increase female labor force participation. Othman and Othman (2015) documents the condition of gender equality in Malaysia. They mention that women's career success depends on how they manage their multiple roles as a wife, mother, and employee, and gender discrimination against women is existed in the workplace. The study finds that the discrimination level is greater in the upper level management position and lesser in the lower level jobs, and argues that Malaysia government needs to monitor the discrimination practices continuously and makes several commitments to prevent gender discrimination against women.

The above prior literature implies that women empowerment is significantly related to women employment and it also stresses the importance of magnifying the female labor force participation. However, childrearing is still belong to mostly women's role and it is the biggest barrier to prevent the female labor force participation. Goldberg et al. (1989) reports that the female labor force participation rate is increased by 73% between 1950 and 1980 in the United States but childrearing is the most pressing issue faced by women employees. The study reports that the employer-supported benefits and policies can enable working parents to coordinate both their employment and childrearing. They find that the working parents are willing to change their jobs to the workplace with employer-supported childcare program, and therefore the employer-supported childcare program helps to increase employee's job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Brown (1992) studies the importance of the employer-supported childcare in the United States. The study explains that more women with young children will enter the workforce as change of demographic patterns. However, the women employees have a difficulty of finding suitable childcare facilities at an affordable expenses and it makes them less effective on the working and leads high women employee turnover. Eventually, the study stresses the high demands of the employer supported childcare program for retaining the women employment.

Prior studies on female employment in Korea also emphasizes the importance of the employer-supported childcare program. In 2012, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's survey suggests expanding childcare program as a policy that should be implemented first for both men and women, and Park (2013) proposes setting up the employed-supported childcare program as a measure to enhance employment rates for highly educated women. Kim (2005) reports that female workers experience positive changes in their psychological stability, improved work efficiency and increased productivity by using the employer-supported childcare program, and Lee et al. (2018) suggests the empirical evidence that parents using high-level employer-supported childcare services are more satisfied with their marriage.

To sum up, the prior studies suggest that the employer-supported childcare program can help out the employed parents from the pressure of childrearing and is one of the effective methods to increase the female labor force participation (Gong, 2019; Park, 2013; Kim, 2005; Kim and Kang, 2015). Korea is one of well-developed country in Asia and the level of gender discrimination against women is on the relatively low among eastern countries. However, Korean female labor force participation is very low among other OECD listed countries. In this unique setting of Korea, this study reports the effectiveness of the employer-supported childcare program and gives the suggestions how to vitalize the employer-supported childcare program.

III. Research Methods

This study carries out the questionnaire surveys and the expert interview for investigating the effectiveness of the employer-supported childcare program for women employment in Korea. The questionnaire surveys about the employer-supported childcare program are distributed to both employer side participants and employee side participants. The questionnaire surveys are performed for two months through door-to-door, mailing, and e-mailing. In the total employer sample, 8.6% of total companies offer the employers-supported childcare program

for their employees. Specifically, 18.8% of big-size companies and 17.6% of mid-size companies provide the employers-supported childcare program. However, only 4.2% of small-size companies offer the program for their employees.

Table 2 provides the sample distributions of employer side data. There are 264 corporation data and 44 private company data among total 308 employer side responses. Most prior studies focus on big-size corporation data only but this study includes small-size and private companies in the total data. In this study, we divide the companies with more than 10 trillion Korean won in total assets into big-size companies, those with more than 500 billion Korean won and less than 10 trillion Korean won in total assets into mid-size companies, and those with less than 500 billion Korean won in total assets into small-size companies.

〈Table 2〉 Sample Distributions of Employers by Company Types

Classification	Number of Employers	% of Total
Big-size Companies	17	5.5
Mid-size Companies	25	8.1
Small-size Companies	196	63.7
Financial Companies	5	1.6
Foreign Companies	4	1.3
Government & Public Organization	10	3.2
Educational & Research Institutions	3	1.0
Private Firms	44	14.3
Others	4	1.3
Total	308	100.0

Note : Big-size companies (Total assets exceeding 10 trillion Korean won), Mid-size companies (Total assets of over 500 billion Korean won and less than 10 trillion Korean won), Small-size companies (Total asset less than 500 billion Korean won).

In this study, we collect total 525 employee data. Table 3 provides the sample distributions of employees by sex and marriage. The ratio of male to female is approximately 23% to 77%, and the ratio of single to married is approximately 61% to 39%.

〈Table 3〉 Sample Distributions of Employees by Sex and Marriage

Classification		Number of Employees	% of Total
Sex	Male	120	22.9
	Female	405	77.1
	Total	525	100.0
Marriage	Single	321	61.1
	Married	204	38.9
	Total	525	100.0

Additionally, Table 4 reports the sample distributions of employees by company types and year of work experience. Employees working for big-size companies and med-size companies account for 20.7 percent and 12.4 percent of the total samples respectively, while those working for small-size companies account for 39.0 percent of the total sample, showing the highest percentage from total responses. 47.9 percent of total employees have a working experience of more than one year and less than seven years, of which 18.8 percent have a working experience of more than one year and less than three years.

〈Table 4〉 Sample Distributions of Employees by Company Types and Year of Work Experience

Classification		Number of Employees	% of Total
Company Types	Big-size Companies	109	20.7
	Mid-size Companies	65	12.4
	Small-size Companies	205	39.0
	Financial Companies	19	3.7
	Foreign Companies	25	4.7
	Government & Public Organization	34	6.5
	Educational & Research Institutions	41	7.9
	Private Firms	18	3.5
	Others	8	1.6
	Total	525	100.0

Classification		Number of Employees	% of Total
Year of Work Experience	None	92	17.6
	Less than 1 yr.	47	9.0
	More than 1 yr. & less than 3 yrs.	99	18.8
	More than 3 yrs. & less than 5 yrs.	65	12.3
	More than 5 yrs. & less than 7 yrs.	88	16.8
	More than 7 yrs. & less than 10 yrs.	59	11.2
	More than 10 yrs. & less than 15 yrs.	53	10.0
	More than 15 yrs. & less than 20 yrs.	15	2.9
	More than 20 yrs.	7	1.4
	Total	525	100.0

Note : Big-size companies (Total assets exceeding 10 trillion Korean won), Mid-size companies (Total assets of over 500 billion Korean won and less than 10 trillion Korean won), Small-size companies (Total asset less than 500 billion Korean won).

Table 5 shows the distribution of employees by employment status. 20.4% of employee side respondents are job-seekers who are not hired yet, and 79.6% are already employed. There are two types of employee positions in Korea: regular workers and irregular workers. Irregular workers are employees whose contractual duration is generally less than one year and they do not receive the benefits for regular workers such as a retirement grant and bonus. Irregular workers may have different view about the employer-supported childcare program from regular workers because generally they have fewer benefits than regular workers in Korea. Therefore, the questionnaire surveys are organized to sort employees into regular workers and irregular workers.

〈Table 5〉 The Distributions of Employees by Employment Status

Employee Types			% of Total Respondents	
Employment Status	Employed Workers	Regular	91.5	79.6
		Irregular	8.5	
	Job Seekers		20.4	
	Total		100.0	

IV. Results and Discussion

Our results of this study are provided and discussed in the following three sub-sections from two questionnaire surveys and one expert interview. This study asks respondents the obstacles of women employment through the questionnaire surveys. Many respondents answer that a lack of childcare facilities is the major obstacle of women employment and they also mention that many childcare facilities are too expensive. Additionally, many women who are economically active speak that the long distance from their workplace to childcare facilities makes them to give up their professional career. Throughout the above responses, the employer-supported childcare program can be a solution to retain and create the women employment.

1. The Effect of Employer-supported Childcare Program on the Retaining Women Employment

In this study, we divide the respondents into employee side and employer side, and define the details of employee side and employer side. Employee side includes employees and job-seekers, and employer side includes CEOs, directors, and managers. Specific definition of employee side and employer side is presented in table 6.

〈Table 6〉 Definition of employee side and employer side

Participants		Definition
Employee side	Employees	Those who currently employed in a company
	Job-seekers	Those who are not yet employed and who are preparing for employment
Employer side	CEOs	Those classified as CEOs of companies
	Directors	Executives of a company other than CEOs
	Managers	Those in mid-to low-level manager position in a company

Table 7 reports the result of the effect of employer-supported childcare program on the retaining women employment. In the table 6, both employee side respondents (87.1%: the total ratio of very helpful and quite helpful) and employer side respondents (83.7%: the total ratio of very helpful and quite helpful) agree that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful for retaining women employment. This suggests that the employer-supported childcare program can help to reduce the turnover of women’s labor force.

The most advantage of the program is the time saving from the short distance between workplace and childcare facilities. Employees can save their time for dropping off their children to the childcare facilities and have less stress from pickup time after the work. For the reasons, employers believe that their employees can more focus on their jobs and then the employee efficiency is improved from the employer-supported childcare program.

〈Table 7〉 The Effect of Employer-Supported Childcare Program on the Retaining Women Employment

Question: Is the Employer-Supported Childcare Program Helpful for Retaining Women Employment?					
Response of Participants	Employee side		Employer side		
	Employee	Job-seeker	CEO	Director	Manager
Very helpful	34.6%	27.3%	25.2%	17.3%	19.6%
Quiet helpful	52.5%	64.2%	58.5%	53.9%	59.8%
Less helpful	9.7%	4.7%	4.9%	11.5%	14.7%
Never helpful	3.2%	3.8%	11.4%	17.3%	5.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

2. The Effect of the Employer-supported Childcare Program on the Recruiting New Elite Female Labor force

Table 8 provides the result of the effect of employer-supported childcare program on the recruiting new elite female labor force. In the table 8, both employee side respondents (70.3%: the total ratio of very helpful and quite helpful

from employees) and employer side respondents (65.6%: the total ratio of very helpful and quite helpful from CEOs) generally agree that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful for hiring new elite female labor force.

〈Table 8〉 The Effect of Employer-Supported Childcare Program on the Recruiting New Elite Female Labor Force

Question: Is the Employer-Supported Childcare Program Helpful for Recruiting New Elite Female Labor Force?

Response of Participants	Employee side		Employer side		
	Employee	Job-seeker	CEO	Director	Manager
Very helpful	27.5%	27.6%	21.6%	11.5%	17.0%
Quiet helpful	42.8%	39.1%	44.0%	40.4%	34.0%
Less helpful	23.4%	27.6%	20.8%	23.1%	35.0%
Never helpful	6.3%	5.7%	13.6%	25.0%	14.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Additionally, in the workplace where providing the employer-supported childcare program at present, 73.1% of employees and 77.3% of CEOs respond that the childcare program brings positive influences on women’s job creation. This implies that the childcare program is one of important factors when the elite women consider their job selection. Generally, big-size and mid-size firms are able to provide the employer-supported childcare program for their employees. However, it is difficult to afford the childcare program under the circumstance of small-size firms or private companies.

In this case, they can operate the joint employer-supported childcare program: two or more small firms in a nearby area operate the childcare facilities jointly. Then, they can share the benefits from the childcare program and reduce the maintenance expenses for the operation. 94.7% of respondents from the companies with the employer-supported childcare program agree that the joint employer-supported childcare program will be helpful for hiring new elite female labor force while 61.4% of respondents from the companies without the childcare program agree that. It suggests that social supports for small-size or private

companies are needed to operate the joint employer-supported childcare program in future.

3. The Expert Interview

We have expert interview to professors of early childhood education and senior researchers at Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, about the employer-supported childcare program. The experts give the opinion that the installation of the employer-supported childcare facilities can prevent the dropout of female labor force from the childrearing pressure, and it can also create additional job positions for maintaining childcare facilities. They argue that in order for the employer-supported childcare program to become more active, installation requirements need to be eased and the characteristics of employees in different industries should be considered.

However, they explain that 88% of total workforce in Korea work at small-size or private companies, which are difficult to maintain childcare facilities. As a solution to encourage the small-sizes and private companies, the experts suggest the tax benefits for the companies. They propose the plan to jointly set up the employer-supported childcare program for the reduction of the companies' operational cost burden as an another solution.

V. Conclusion

The female labor force participation rate in Korea is very low among OECD countries, and the low women employment has recently come to the fore as a serious social issue. In this circumstance, the employer-supported childcare program is suggested as the effective solution for this social issue.

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the employer-supported childcare program using questionnaire surveys and expert interview. Because employers and employees may have different view about the employer-supported childcare program, we divide the survey respondents into employee side and employer side.

We define that employee side are employees and job-seekers, and employer side are CEOs, directors, and managers.

From the survey analysis, we find the following results. First, both employee side and employer side respond that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful to reduce the turnover of women employment. Next, both employee side and employer side respond that the employer-supported childcare program is helpful to recruit new elite female labor force. Through the survey analysis, we conclude that the views of employees and the employers on the employer-supported childcare program are very similar and positive.

From the expert interview, we figure out that practically small-size and private companies are not affordable to maintain the employer-supported childcare program in Korea. For the small-size and private companies, the experts suggest tax benefits and joint program for installing the employer-supported childcare program.

However, this study has the following limitation. Because it is difficult to collect the women's turnover data from employers and the satisfaction information of employer-supported childcare program from employees, we could not perform empirical tests on the association between employer-supported childcare program and women employment. Also, since more than 60 percent of employers are small-size companies, our results may not generalize the opinions of companies of all sizes.

Nevertheless, this study contributes to supplementing the literature of women employment by investigating the effectiveness of the employer-supported childcare program. Specifically, the results of this study provide insight into the importance of the employer-supported childcare program as the most effective solution for the expanding female labor force participation and recruiting new elite female labor in Korea.

Lastly, we plan to collect empirical data on employer-supported childcare program, and discuss detailed tax benefits with childcare policymakers for future research. In future research, we expect to be able to study the effects of more specific employer-supported childcare program.

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직장어린이집과 여성고용에 관한 연구

이창섭* · 허광복**

요약

우리나라 여성의 학업수준은 높은 편임에도 불구하고 여성고용율은 OECD국가 중 낮은 순위를 유지하고 있다. 이러한 낮은 여성고용율에 대한 주요 원인 중 하나는 육아돌봄으로 인한 경력중단이다. 이에, 여성인력의 경력중단을 줄이기 위한 여러 가지 방안이 제시되고 있으며, 본 연구에서는 이러한 방안 중 직장어린이집 프로그램에 초점을 맞췄다. 여성고용율 활성화를 위한 직장어린이집 프로그램에 대하여 고용인(기업)과 피고용인(근로자)의 의견을 각각 설문조사를 통해 수집하였다. 또한, 전문가 인터뷰를 통해 직장어린이집 활성화 방안에 대한 의견을 조사하였다. 설문조사 결과, 고용인과 피고용인 모두 직장어린이집이 여성인력의 고용 유지 및 고용 창출에 도움을 줄 수 있을 것이라고 응답하였다. 전문가 면담에서는 소형 또는 개인 기업의 경우, 직장어린이집 프로그램을 갖추는 것에 대한 현실적인 어려움이 있기 때문에 이들 기업을 위한 조세혜택 및 직장어린이집 공동설치의 필요성을 설명하였다. 본 연구는 직장어린이집 제도를 통해 여성인력의 고용 유지 및 고용 창출에 대한 방안을 제시함으로써 국내 노동시장과 학계에 기여할 것으로 기대된다.

핵심 주제어 : 직장어린이집, 여성고용, 여성노동력, 직장보육서비스

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