

# Factors affecting female workers' perceived discrimination in the workplace: an analysis using the Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Family

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## Abstract

An increasing number of South Korean women are participating in economic activities and married women are not excluded from this trend. Women's labor participation has considerable implications not only on a personal level, but also for organizational productivity and national competitiveness. While institutional and environmental efforts continue to be extended in an attempt to promote gender equality in the South Korean labor market, a great number of women continue to experience discrimination in terms of employment opportunities as well as in training, human resource management, work deployment, promotion, wage, retirement age, resignation, and dismissal.

Against this backdrop, this research attempts to identify the factors affecting women's perceived discrimination in the labor market. Distinct from previous studies that separately discuss personal, organizational, and policy factors, this empirical project assumes a comprehensive approach spanning all the three factors, which respectively correspond to microscopic, mid-range scale, and macroscopic dimensions. In particular, it classifies time into the periods before and after employment as a means to identify the discrete impacts of each factor. Nationally representative Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Family (KLoWF) data were used for analysis.

According to the findings of the analysis, the structural and practical aspects of organizational factors including company size and organization type were related to female workers' perceived discrimination both at the point of and after employment. Company size was more influential

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than organization type. For factors affecting perceived post-employment discrimination, organization type, company size, and job satisfaction were statistically significant among the organizational factors, while childbirth leave, childcare leave, and the existence of workplace childcare facilities demonstrated significance among policy factors. The degree of influence was greatest with company size, followed by childcare leave, organization type, childbirth leave, workplace childcare facility, and job satisfaction. Unlike the findings of previous studies, childbirth leave and workplace childcare facility exhibited a negative impact on female workers' perceived discrimination.

**Keywords:** Women's labor participation, Perceived discrimination, KLoWF, Company size, Organization type, Job satisfaction, Childbirth leave, Childcare leave, Workplace childcare facilities

## I. Research questions and goals

It is argued that in the 21st century national competitiveness hinges upon maximizing the use of female human resources. European nations with high economic participation by women are striving to provide sufficient institutional support for women's further advancement in society. According to studies on the relationship between the use of female resources and national development (Forsythe et al, 2000; Sin Dong-gyun, 2006; Seong Ji-mi, 2007; Kim Nan-ju and Kwon Tae-hee, 2009), national GDP is positively aligned with women's economic participation. Furthermore, studies have proven that a higher proportion of female managers has a positive relation with total shareholder return ratio, sales volume, and return on investment (ROI), suggesting a positive correlation between the use of female resources and a company's competitiveness (Catalyst, 2004; McKinsey & Company, 2007; Lee Ju-hee, 2003; Kim Jong-suk et al., 2008; Kim Tae-hong et al., 2009). To summarize, female human resources play a critical role in promoting both corporate productivity and national competitiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's economic participation rates of major OECD countries are presented in the table below. South Korea is ranked among the bottom of the 32 OECD countries (Source: 2012 OECD Employment Outlook; Statistics Korea)

Country	2011	2010	2009
South Korea	54.9%	54.5%	53.9%
Japan	63.0%	63.2%	62.9%
United States	67.8%	68.4%	69.0%
OECD average	61.8%	61.8%	61.5%

Despite continued growth in the number of economically active women in South Korea, it is still insufficient compared to both that found in other major OECD countries<sup>1</sup> and to the number of male workers<sup>2</sup>. South Korean women exit the labor market sooner and change employers more frequently than do men (Min Hyeon-ju and Lim Hee-jeong, 2009). The rate of South Korean women's economic participation (54.9%)<sup>3</sup> is significantly low compared to other OECD member nations. Notably, the rate plunges from 66.2% in the 25-29 age bracket to 52.9% in the 30-34 age bracket<sup>4</sup>, implying vulnerability on the part of women to career disruption stemming from marriage and motherhood at the time when they are economically most active (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2011). This also suggests that women's economic participation can be considerably promoted by resolving the gender gap in economic activities in the age group of people in their 30s. In this regard, continuous attention and investment directed at the identification and removal of barriers for economic participation by married women is important in promoting the use of female resources in the labor market.

A 2011 Statistics Korea survey<sup>5</sup> points out that social prejudice and practice (20.2%) and discriminatory work conditions (11.6%) remain as impediments to women's economic participation. According to a 2012 women's policy-demands survey conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 75.5% of respondents indicated gender discrimination as a major social concern and the elimination of employment discrimination (38.8%) turned out to be the area of highest policy demand in terms of women's jobs. Diverse forms of gender discrimination exist in the workplace<sup>6</sup> that discourage women from labor market participation (Yu Gyeong-hee, 2003; Shin Cheol-u and Jin Seon-yeong, 2004; Ahn Se-yeon and Kim Hyo-seon, 2009).

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2 South Korea's overall economic participation rate stands at 61.1%, with women at 49.7% and men at 73.1%.

Country	2011	2010	2009
Men	73.1%	73.0%	73.1%
Women	49.2%	49.4%	49.7%
Total	61.1%	61.0%	60.8%

3 The rate as measured by the OECD is slightly higher than that from Statistics Korea because the former is calculated based on the population in the 15-65 age bracket while the latter draws on the population aged 15 years old or older. According to Statistics Korea, the country's economic participation rate of women was 49.2% in 2009, 49.4% in 2010, and 49.7% in 2011.

4 The rate rises to 64.2% in the 45-49 age bracket, creating an M-shaped curve (Source: Ministry of Gender Equality and Family).

5 According to a 2011 Statistics Korea survey, obstacles to women's employment include burden of childcare (48.8%), social prejudice and practices (20.2%), and unequal work conditions (11.6%).

6 A national survey of equal employment (2008) also notes that 53.9% of respondents report a serious level of workplace discrimination.

Obstacles at the entrance to the labor market, unfairness in training and promotion opportunities, prejudices against women, issues of work-family balance, and anti-discrimination policy that is only nominal are typically related to the discrimination faced by female workers (Kwak Seon-hwa, 2007). This suggests that women experience both explicit and implicit discrimination before and after entering the labor force. These obstacles, which discourage women from the active pursuit of and continuous engagement in economic activities, are presumed to fetter the country's sustainable development (Kim Tae-hong et al., 2009). In this context, female workers' perceived discrimination in the workplace needs to be highlighted and measures should be taken to reduce, if not eliminate, the negative practices directed against them.

The resolution of the issue of discrimination means eradicating all types of unreasonable discrimination, including not simply manifest discriminatory practices, but also discrimination as perceived by workers. While previous studies on discrimination against female workers proved that women experience a significant level of discrimination in terms of employment and work conditions (Je Gal-don and Song Geon-seop, 2000; Choi Chang-gon, 2003; Hong Mi-yeong, 2004; Park Su-gyeong, 2006), little attention has been focused on female workers' perceived discrimination (Yim Jeong-jun, 2010). However, it stands as an important issue given the potential for a gap between actual discriminatory practices and perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination in the workplace can have a negative impact on female workers' job satisfaction, reward satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation to work. This can in turn lead to reduced organizational productivity and efficiency and eventually to significant financial loss (Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Ensher et. al., 2001; Shin Cheol-u and Jin Seon-yeong, 2004; Seo Cheol-hyeon and Lee Jong-nam, 2006; Jeong Jae-myeong, 2010a, 2010b; Lee Eun-su, 2011). In this regard, the government and private enterprises will need to pursue a range of efforts to reduce female workers' perceived discrimination in order to promote their labor market participation and motivation to work. In addition, it is necessary to identify what impacts such perceived discrimination and the differences in the level of influence between those factors.

This research takes a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to examine and weigh the different influences of personal, organizational, and policy factors (Won Suk-yeon, 2012). In order to overcome the limitations of previous studies, in particular their small sample size, this research makes use of reliable nationwide KLoWF data. Finally, it will provide policy suggestions to create an environment promoting the more active and sustainable use of female human resources.

## **II. Theoretical background**

### **1. Discrimination and the importance of perceived discrimination**

#### **1) Definition of discrimination**

Discrimination can be described as the prejudicial treatment of persons belonging to a certain group or as actions/behaviors that result in consequences unfavorable to them (Kim Hye-suk, 1999; Je Gal-don, 1999; Kwon Seon-jin, 2008). While discrimination occurs in a variety of forms and places, diverse types of discrimination and prejudicial practices remain in the labor market despite the implementation of an anti-discrimination act and a number of labor-related laws prohibiting discriminatory practices (The 7th Korea Labor and Income Panel Survey, 2004; Ahn Ju-yeop et al., 2007). In particular, simply because of their gender, women in the labor market are treated differently than are men in regard to training, employment, and income. Economic activities are essential to ensure women's independence, survival, and social participation. The issue of discrimination against women in the labor market is of grave importance in this regard.

In relation to this issue, the concept of gender discrimination needs first to be reviewed. Gender discrimination refers to a socially ingrained prejudice or discriminatory practices against a certain sex based on physiological and physical characteristics (Schneider, 1981; Yu Gyeong-hee, 2003; Choi Il-seop and Choi Seong-jae, 2003; Park Hye-yeong and Jeong Jae-myeong, 2009). Gender discrimination in the workplace first occurred when women entered the labor market, which had historically been considered a male domain. The male-oriented values existing in the mainstream labor market work against women (Won Suk-yeon and Lee Dong-seon, 2012a). Discrimination against women takes place not only before but also after employment in terms of promotion, work deployment, wage, fringe benefits, professional development, resignation, and layoff (Yu Gyeong-jun, 2001; Kwak Seon-hwa, 2007). Gender discrimination has caused a great deal of disadvantage and inequity to women in most societies, especially in the workplace.

#### **2) Definition of perceived discrimination**

Gender discrimination in the workplace can be divided between objective and subjective discrimination. Objective discrimination is manifested in the form of derogatory remarks against women, exclusion from important positions, and disadvantages in the reshuffling of personnel. Subjective discrimination includes both a sense of discrimination experienced as a result of the existence of objective discrimination and prejudicial attitudes against women (Je

Gal-don, 1999). This research examines the latter.

Perceived discrimination refers to the feeling of being treated unfairly as a result of belonging to a certain group (Mirage, 1994; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Cho Gwang-ja, 2010). According to relative deprivation theory, perceived discrimination is a type of relative deprivation which is felt when an individual compares his/her situation to that of others, and it depends upon the subject of comparison. Researchers examining relative group deprivation include as perceived discrimination the individual belief that one's group is discriminated against even if the person himself/herself is not (Cho Gwang-ja, 2010). Shin Cheol-u and Jin Seon-yeong (2004) defined perceived discrimination in the labor market as the degree of discrimination sensed by female workers in employment, deployment, promotion, performance evaluation, and wage. In this research, perceived discrimination is defined as a subjective perception of unfair treatment that female wage workers experience in the labor market.

While discrimination against women is a prevalent phenomenon across society, this research will be limited to women's perceived discrimination in the labor market. Based on the previous literature, female workers' perceived discrimination will be investigated in two stages: discrimination at the point of employment (pre-employment discrimination) and workplace discrimination in regards to work assignment, promotion, and wage (post-employment discrimination).

## **2. Perspectives of perceived discrimination**

The theoretical background of this research includes relative deprivation theory, social identity theory, and equity theory, all of which offer useful perspectives for understanding the psychological factors that determine perceived discrimination. These three theoretical perspectives are discussed below in greater detail.

First, relative deprivation is a state of mind caused when someone who experiences a sense of deprivation compares himself/herself with others who do not experience such a feeling (Davis, 1959; requoted from Han Deok-ung, 2004). Townsend (1979) suggests that the sense of relative deprivation needs to be examined through three dimensions: objective deprivation, customary or normative deprivation, and individual subjective or group deprivation (Kim Geum-mi and Han Yeong-seok, 2008). Objective deprivation refers a lack in the basic needs of human life; customary or normative deprivation refers to a deprivation falling below a limit commonly acknowledged by the society in question; and individual subjective or group deprivation is deprivation felt in reference to other groups or individuals (Han Min, 2003). This research is

related to an individual's suffering of subjective or group deprivation. Perceived deprivation is a kind of relative deprivation felt when one is compared to others, and it varies depending on the reference of comparison. Zanna et al. (1986) report that women tend to perceive their social status as inferior when the reference group is men rather than women. This implies that a sense of relative deprivation is likely to affect women's gender equality behaviors as well (Kim Geum-mi and Han Yeong-seok, 2008). Relative deprivation is perceived when one believes that his/her needs are not being served equally to the reference group and it is assumed to affect the perceived discrimination of women, who are subject to unfair treatment in relative terms (Jeong Su-jin and Ko Jong-sik, 2010).

Second, social identity theory, which argues for intragroup-intergroup categorization, is useful in identifying discrimination and predicting related behaviors (Ahn Sang-su and Kim Geum-mi, 2010). According to this theory, people tend to divide themselves and others into groups based on demographic characteristics and establish social identity by categorizing themselves within a certain group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; requoted from Ensher et al., 2001). After doing so, they perceive discrimination when they believe that they are treated unfairly simply because they belong to a particular group (Mirage, 1994; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). If this theory is applied to gender relations, intergroup degradation occurs to those of the other sex in order to increase their sense of self-identity based on their gender identity (Ahn Sang-su and Kim Geum-mi, 2010). This research attempts to explain how women perceive discrimination from the surrounding environment, noting that factors such as group norms and social support can affect intentions delivered in the form of attitudes while socio-structural factors such as status, legitimacy, and stability all affect attitudes and intentions through gender identity (Kim Geum-mi and Han Yeong-seok, 2008).

Third, equity theory by Adams (1965) describes how people value a reasonable reward for their contributions based on a human desire to pursue equity and fairness in interpersonal relationships (requoted from Jeong Su-jin and Ko Jong-sik, 2010). According to Adams, satisfaction is determined by the balance of perceived proportions between the inputs brought to a job and the outcomes that an individual receives. In order to explain the perceived discrimination of those applying for job openings or promotion based on equity theory, Harris et al. (2004) suggests a holistic equity theory to argue that people feel discriminated against when, by holistically considering both distributive fairness and procedural fairness, they determine that an organization's decision is unjust (Cho Gwang-ja, 2010). Here, distributive fairness is judged based on impartiality and needs and procedural fairness based on the feasibility of execution of control, feasibility of feedback on the decision, and the quality of interpersonal communication (Cho Gwang-ja, 2010). While equity theory presupposes social comparisons, it is the contrast between the ratio of one's own contributions to outcomes compared to those of others rather than the

absolute ratio of contributions to reward as in relative deprivation theory that plays a critical role in the perception of fairness. Therefore, people expect their ratio to be equal to that of others based on comparisons with reference groups (Jeong Su-jin and Ko Jong-sik, 2010).

As discussed above, theories on perceived discrimination provide explanations regarding the definition of perceived discrimination and the situations in which discrimination is likely to be perceived. According to these theories, discrimination is sensed based on comparisons with others, social expectations, and fairness values (Cho Gwang-ja, 2010).

### **3. Factors affecting perceived discrimination**

As to factors affecting perceived discrimination, some researchers find the root of gender gaps in the labor market to lie in personal characteristics related to labor supply (Seong Ji-mi, 2007; Shin Gwang-yeong, 2011).

Other researchers discuss the issue from an organizational point of view. Using company panel data compiled by the Korea Labor Institute, Shin Dong-gyun (2006) investigated the influences of company size, presence of labor unions, and availability of flexible working arrangements in order to verify the existence of gender discrimination in relation to wages and employment. Seong Ji-mi (2007) examined the impact of company size, company age, number of work hours, and maternity protection system on discrimination in employment, promotion, and training opportunities. Ahn Sang-su and Kim Geum-mi (2010) analyzed organization-related variables and demographic variables in relation to the degree of gender equality in the workplace and presumed that the degree of gender equality rises among companies with a greater proportion of female workers, larger companies, and public companies. These studies discussed the issue of discrimination in terms of the aspects of individuals and organization or organization and policy.

Some studies have reviewed related policy aspects. Recognizing the importance of the effective use of female resources, OECD countries including South Korea have been pursuing a diverse range of policy efforts in order to expand economic opportunities for women. According to the OECD (2002), work-family balance policy is designed to reduce the childcare burden on workers with children by supporting married workers in their efforts to find equilibrium between their work and family lives and to allow female workers to additionally concentrate on their work by reducing gender inequality in the labor market (Shin Gwang-yeong, 2011). Given the implications of work-family balance policy in relation to women's labor market participation, it is necessary to review the impact of the policy on female workers' perception of discrimination.



Some researchers have analyzed gender wage gap and welfare policy indices comprised of the length of paid maternity leave, public childcare facility enrollment rate, and proportion of welfare budget in order to determine that welfare policies do reduce the gender wage gap to a certain extent (Gupta & Smith, 2002; Mandel & Semyonov, 2003; Requoted from Ryu Yeon-gyu, 2009). Jaumatt (2003) argued that among work-family balance policies it is childcare subsidies, length of paid childcare leave, and proportion of part-time work that have a positive impact on women's labor market participation. Ryu Yeon-gyu (2009) empirically demonstrated that family service expenditures and childcare leave did increase gender equality in terms of women's employment and the wage balance between men and women. However, Mandel and Semyonov (2005) asserted that the protection of female workers based on family policies lowers women's wages through gender-based occupational segregation and employers' statistical discrimination (Ryu Yeon-gyu, 2009). As shown above, the relationship between work-family balance policy and gender wage gap remains a subject of debate. Also, while these empirical studies analyzed the impact of maternity leave and the tax system on women's employment, they failed to identify the relationship between these components and women's employment.

In summary, studies on factors affecting perceived discrimination have investigated personal aspects (Kim Jae-gi, 2004; Seo Cheol-hyeon and Lee Jong-nam, 2006), organizational and policy aspects (Meyers et al., 1999; Jaumatt, 2003; Mandel & Semyonov, 2003; Kim Eun-ji, 2008; Hong Seung-a et al., 2008; Ryu Yeon-gyu, 2009; Won Suk-yeon and Lee Dong-seon, 2012a, 2012b) or individual-organization aspects (Ahn Sang-su and Kim Geum-mi, 2010; Lim Jeong-jun, 2010; Cho Gwang-ja, 2010), organization-policy aspects (Shin Dong-gyun, 2006; Seong Ji-mi, 2007), and individual-policy aspects. Given that discrimination is a socio-structural problem (Jeon Ji-hye, 2009), however, it is assumed that the influential factors affecting women's perceived discrimination are multilayered and complex. Furthermore, there will be not only microscopic and personal elements, but also macroscopic and socio-structural elements (Ahn Mi-yeong and Kim Hye-suk, 2003; Park Su-gyeong, 2006). In this regard, it is necessary to holistically consider from the microscopic through the macroscopic aspects in order to identify what influences women's perceived workplace discrimination in more practical and accurate terms (Won Suk-yeon, 2012). To reach that goal, this research investigates personal (microscopic), organizational (mid-range), and policy (macroscopic) elements in relation to the issue.

III. Empirical research

1. Research model and hypotheses

Based on the findings of previous literature, this research constructed a research model as illustrated in Figure 1 regarding the factors influencing female workers’ perceived discrimination.

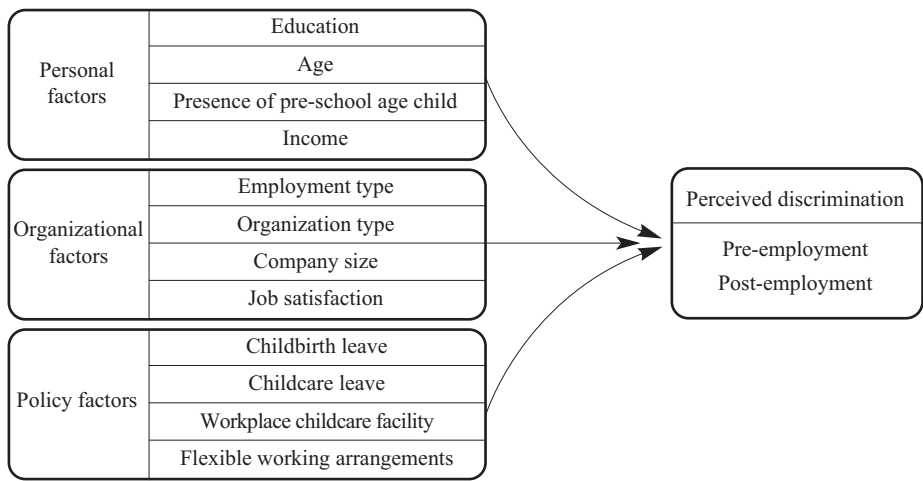


Figure 1. Research model

The research questions based on this model are the following: what are the factors affecting women’s perceived discrimination in the labor market? How influential is each factor?

Table 1 presents the hypotheses of this research constructed based on previous studies and the research model.

Table 1. Research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1	Personal factors will affect perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	Expected direction
1-1	The lower the educational attainment, the greater will be the perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	(-)
1-2	The greater the age, the greater will be the perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	(+)
1-3	Those with pre-school age children will experience greater perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	(+)
1-4	The lower the income, the greater will be the perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	(-)

Hypothesis 2	Personal factors will affect perceived discrimination after employment.	Expected direction
2-1	The lower the educational attainment, the greater will be the perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
2-2	The lower the age, the greater will be the perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
2-3	Those with pre-school age children will experience greater perceived discrimination after employment.	(+)
2-4	The lower the income, the greater will be the perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
Hypothesis 3	Organizational factors will affect perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	Expected direction
3-1	Perceived discrimination will be greater with irregular positions.	(+)
3-2	Perceived discrimination will be greater with private-sector jobs.	(+)
3-3	The larger the company, the lower will be the perceived discrimination.	(-)
3-4	Job satisfaction will not affect perceived discrimination at the point of employment.	(•)
Hypothesis 4	Organizational factors will affect perceived discrimination after employment.	Expected direction
4-1	Irregular workers will have lower perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
4-1	Workers in the private sector will have greater perceived discrimination after employment.	(+)
4-3	The larger the company, the lower will be the perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
4-4	The lower the job satisfaction, the greater will be the perceived discrimination after employment.	(-)
Hypothesis 5	Organizational factors will affect perceived discrimination after employment.	Expected direction
5-1	When childbirth leave is unavailable, perceived discrimination at the point of employment will be greater.	(+)
5-2	When childcare leave is unavailable, perceived discrimination at the point of employment will be greater.	(+)
5-3	When workplace childcare service is unavailable, perceived discrimination at the point of employment will be greater.	(+)
5-4	When flexible working arrangements are unavailable, perceived discrimination at the point of employment will be greater.	(+)
Hypothesis 6	Organizational factors will affect perceived discrimination after employment.	Expected direction
6-1	When childbirth leave is unavailable, perceived discrimination after employment will be greater.	(+)
6-2	When childcare leave is unavailable, perceived discrimination after employment will be greater.	(+)
6-3	When workplace childcare service is unavailable, perceived discrimination after employment will be greater.	(+)
6-4	When flexible working arrangements are unavailable, perceived discrimination after employment will be greater.	(+)

In examining personal factors including education, age, the presence of pre-school age children, and income, it was assumed that those with lower educational attainment will feel greater discrimination at the point of employment due to their limited eligibility for application to positions. The more highly educated were presumed to perceive less discrimination in the workplace since the quality of their position is likely to be higher compared to that of those less educated. Older women were thought to be likely to perceive greater discrimination at the point of employment due to social discrimination and prejudices. Following employment, younger women were presumed to report greater perceived discrimination due to their relatively low level of human capital. Married women with pre-school age children were expected to feel more discriminated against as they struggled to establish a balance between their work and family lives. The lower an individual's income, the greater the perceived discrimination was thought to be both at the point of and after employment, as the low-income group is more likely to experience actual discrimination than are its counterparts.

Next come organizational factors. It was assumed that irregular workers would undergo a greater sense of discrimination at the point of employment since they are likely to experience discrimination as a result of their limited qualifications for job application. However, their perceived discrimination should be lower after employment, due to low personal expectations for their status based on their employment contract. In terms of organization type, those in the private sector were projected to complain of greater perceived discrimination after employment since public companies were believed to more strictly apply and abide by the labor conditions stipulated by law. Larger companies were believed to respond more sensitively to societal pressure due to their higher visibility. Therefore, those who work at larger companies were expected to feel less discrimination (Cho Gwang-ja, 2010). When it comes to job satisfaction, this research defines it as the degree of positivity of an individual toward his/her work. For this reason, it was assumed to have no impact on perceived discrimination at the point of employment. From the viewpoint of organizational psychology, job satisfaction is determined based on a number of factors, including job-related stress and the perceived appropriateness of wages received relative to their work. In this regard, it was expected that greater job satisfaction would heighten organizational commitment and reduce perceived discrimination.

As to policy factors, workers at companies with work-family balance support are likely to feel more considered, believing that their organization places importance on their health and values (Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001; Lee Min-u et al., 2008; Ahn Eun-jeong et al., 2010). Provision of support for work-family balance will instill into employees the notion that the company values its workers and their families and appears likely to motivate employees to reciprocate toward the organization's success (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Ahn Eun-jeong et al., 2010). Hence, by allowing female workers to feel aided and become more committed to the organization, the

presence of work-family balance support will help reduce perceived discrimination both at the point of and after employment.

## 2. Variables

Based on the theoretical discussion, the dependent variable for this research was defined as wage workers' perceived discrimination in the workplace. Perceived discrimination was examined in terms of four components: at the point of employment, at the point of promotion, in terms of wages, and in work deployment. They were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from very much so to relatively, relatively not, and not at all. Four points were assigned to "Very much so" (feel discrimination) and one point to "Not at all" (does not feel discrimination). Perceived discrimination in those four regards was measured for the point of employment and after employment. A reliability analysis was conducted with three questions on perceived discrimination regarding promotion, wages, and work deployment after employment. Its Cronbach's alpha was .901.

The independent variables in this research include personal, organizational, and policy factors. First, personal factors include education, age, presence of pre-school age children, and income. Education was divided into four categories: high school educated or below, college educated, university educated, and graduate school educated. Age was classified as 20s or younger, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s or older. The pre-school age children variable was operationalized by reference to those who marked "Do not have a child aged 6 years old or younger" to a question asking about the degree of satisfaction with a husband's involvement in childcare. Income, which was defined as total annual income for the period spanning January through December in 2009, was categorized into five groups: less than 30 million won; 30 million-39.9 million won; 40 million-49.9 million won; 50 million-59.9 million won; and 60 million won or above.

Second, organizational factors include employment type, organization type, company size, and job satisfaction. Employment type was divided between regular and irregular workers, and organization type into public and private organizations. Public organizations include central and local governments, public corporations, and schools. Private organizations include private companies (including one-person enterprises) and multinational companies. Company size was segmented into five categories: less than 10 employees; 10-29 employees; 30-99 employees; 100-299 employees; and 300 employees or more. Job satisfaction was reverse coded with "Very unsatisfied" given one point and "Very satisfied" five points. The higher the score, the greater was the job satisfaction.

Third, policy factors were measured based on the availability of work-family balance support. Sub-categories include childbirth leave, childcare leave, workplace childcare facilities, and flexible working arrangements. This work-family balance support variable was operationally defined to result in two dummy variables of “Yes” and “No” (including “Don’t know”) in response to a question asking about whether the company provides work-family balance support.

### **3. Research methods**

The goal of this research is to empirically identify the factors influencing married female workers’ perceived workplace discrimination and the unique degree of influence of each factor. The following describes the research methods.

First, it used the KWDI’s third KLoWF data set, which is verified in terms of the representativeness and validity of the sample as a panel survey of the nationwide female population. The KLoWF data are useful in that they provide information on women’s economic participation and household status together with policy-related data on work-family balance and family-friendly social environments. The third KLoWF was conducted with a total of 11,234 women aged between 19-64 years old over the period from August 2010 to February 2011. This research analyzed the responses of 1,448 married female wage workers who provided answers to questions on household status and on the influence of work-family balance support.

Second, survey questions corresponding to dependent and independent variables were selected. Independent variables were identified in terms of personal, organizational, and policy aspects by operationally defining the classified variables of the KLoWF data.

In order to examine the differences between groups, a t-test was performed regarding the presence of pre-school age children, employment type, and organization type. One-way ANOVA was used for continuous variables including age, income, education, and company size.

Fourth, a regression analysis was performed aimed at determining the degree and direction of influence of each factor. There was no multicollinearity issue between dependent variables, with VIF standing at 10 or less. SPSS 18 was used for the analysis.

IV. Empirical analysis and discussion

1. Sample characteristics

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the sample identified through a descriptive analysis of variables.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Variable		Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)
Education	High school educated or below	903	62.4
	College (2 yrs) educated	208	14.4
	University (4 yrs) educated	283	19.5
	Graduate school educated	53	3.7
	Total	1,447	100.0
Age	20s or younger	47	3.3
	30s	488	33.7
	40s	556	38.4
	50s	258	17.8
	60s or older	99	6.8
	Total	1,448	100.0
Presence of pre-school age children	No	717	49.7
	Yes	725	50.3
	Total	1,442	100.0
Income	Less than 30 million won	383	26.8
	30 million-39.9 million won	342	23.9
	40 million-49.9 million won	254	17.8
	50 million-59.9 million won	148	10.4
	60 million or more	301	21.1
	Total	1,428	100.0
Employment type	Regular position	579	40.3
	Irregular position	859	59.7
	Total	1,438	100.0
Organization type	Public	409	28.8
	Private	1,013	71.2
	Total	1,422	100.0

Variable		Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)
Company size	Less than 10 employees	661	46.0
	10-29 employees	312	21.7
	30-99 employees	299	20.8
	100-299 employees	75	5.2
	300 employees or more	91	6.3
	Total	1,438	100.0

\* Missing values for each variable were excluded.

As to educational attainment, 903 persons (62.4%) were high school educated or below, 283 persons (19.5%) university educated, 208 persons (14.4%) college educated, and 53 persons (3.7%) graduate school educated. The most prevalent age group was those in their 40s with 556 persons (38.4%), followed by the 30s with 488 persons (33.7%), 50s with 258 persons (17.8%), 60s or older with 99 persons (6.8%), and 20s or younger with 47 persons (3.3%). A total of 725 women (50.3%) had pre-school age children and 717 women (49.7%) had no children in that age group. In terms of income, less than 30 million won was most prevalent with 26.8%, followed by 30 million-39.9 million won. A further income group containing a significant proportion was 60 million won or more (21.1%).

Next are respondents' work-related characteristics. For employment type, there were 579 regular workers (40.3%) and 859 irregular workers (59.7%). Also, 409 women (28.8%) were working in the public sector while 1,013 women (71.2%) were employed in the private sector. In terms of company size, 661 women (46.0%) were working at companies with less than ten employees, 312 (21.7%) at companies with 10-29 employees, 299 (20.8%) at companies with 30-99 employees, 91 (6.3%) at companies with 300 employees or more, and 75 (5.2%) at companies with 100-299 employees.

## 2. Differences between groups

Prior to analyzing the factors affecting married working women's perceived discrimination in the workplace, an attempt was made to investigate how the dissimilarities between different groups of women are related to perceived discrimination.

As shown in Table 3, no statistical significance was identified in the differences in perceived discrimination at the point of and after employment in regards to variables including pre-school age children and employment type. However, women showed significant differences in their post-employment perceived discrimination between public organizations and private



**Table 3. Dissimilarities in perceived discrimination between groups (t-test)**

Variable			Perceived discrimination at the point of employment	Perceived discrimination after employment
Presence of pre-school age children	Yes	N=724	1.93	1.81
	No	N=717	1.90	1.82
t-value			-.834	.312
Employment type	Regular	N=579	1.91	1.83
	Irregular	N=858	1.92	1.80
t-value			-.410	.873
Organization type	Public	N=409	1.89	1.74
	Private	N=1012	1.93	1.85
t-value			-1.000	-2.851**

Significance level: t<.1, \*<.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

organizations, with the latter (1.85) rated at a greater level of discrimination than are the former (1.74). This verifies with statistical significance the hypothesis that women working in the public sector will experience less discrimination than do their peers in the private sector, since public organizations must abide by legally-binding labor conditions more strictly than do private companies. (Yang Geon-mo et al., 2007).

**Table 4. Differences in perceived discrimination between groups (ANOVA)**

		Perceived discrimination at the point of employment	Perceived discrimination after employment
Age	20s or younger	1.87	1.74
	30s	1.88	1.80
	40s	1.95	1.83
	50s	1.91	1.83
	60s or older	1.94	1.83
F-value		.680	.408
Income	Less than 30 million won	1.89	1.76
	30 million-39.9 million won	1.93	1.86
	40 million-49.9 million won	1.91	1.86
	50 million-59.9 million won	1.83	1.78
	60 million or more	2.00	1.82
F-value		1.786	1.557

		Perceived discrimination at the point of employment	Perceived discrimination after employment
Education	High school educated or less	1.92	1.83
	College educated	1.89	1.81
	University educated	1.92	1.80
	Graduate school educated	1.98	1.66
<b>F-value</b>		.214	1.297
Company size	Less than 10 employees	1.87 a)	1.76 a)
	10-29 employees	1.94 ab)	1.85 a)
	30-99 employees	1.89 a)	1.80 a)
	100-299 employees	2.07 ab)	1.93 ab)
	300 employees or more	2.15 b)	2.05 b)
<b>F-value</b>		4.237**	5.155***

Significance level:  $t < .1$ ,  $* < .05$ ,  $** < .01$ ,  $*** < .001$ , post-hoc analysis (turkey test)

Table 4 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA on the dissimilarities between different groups in terms of age, income, education, and company size. No statistical significance was found with age, income, and education. In regards to company size, however, women expressed a significantly greater degree of perceived discrimination at the point of employment when working at companies with 300 employees or more than at companies with less than ten employees and those with 30-99 employees. As to post-employment perceived discrimination, those working at companies with 300 employees or more felt more discriminated against than did those at smaller companies. This result can be attributed to the fact that people experience a sense of either deprivation or achievement not based on the absolute level of their deprivation, but rather upon comparison with a particular reference (Jeong Su-jin and Ko Jong-sik, 2010). Workers at larger organizations are more likely to feel a greater sense of deprivation than those at smaller organizations due to having a greater number of references with which to compare themselves.

### 3. Regression analysis

Table 5 presents the results of a regression analysis conducted to identify the factors affecting female workers' perceived discrimination in the workplace.

**Table 5. Results of regression analysis**

Independent variable		Perceived discrimination at the point of employment			Perceived discrimination after employment		
		Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	t	Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	t
	Constant	1.598		<b>8.072***</b>	1.744		<b>9.706***</b>
Personal factors	Education	.007	.009	.260	-.023	-.033	-.981
	Age	.031	.041	1.350	.024	.034	1.151
	Presence of pre-school age children <sup>a)</sup>	.046	.032	1.163	.006	.005	.171
	Income	.022	.045	1.445	.021	.047	1.521
Organizational factors	Employment type <sup>a)</sup>	.061	.042	1.325	-.013	-.010	-.322
	Organization type <sup>a)</sup>	.114	.072	<b>2.288*</b>	.141	.098	<b>3.132**</b>
	Company size	.062	.104	<b>3.424**</b>	.069	.127	<b>4.213***</b>
	Job satisfaction	-.022	-.023	-.805	-.056	-.064	<b>-2.227*</b>
Policy factors	Childbirth leave <sup>b)</sup>	-.113	-.068	-1.154	-.147	-.097	<b>-1.655<sup>t</sup></b>
	Childcare leave	.103	.059	.966	.196	.122	<b>2.034*</b>
	Workplace childcare facility	-.091	-.031	-.957	-.182	-.067	<b>-2.121*</b>
	Flexible working arrangements	.058	.015	.495	.068	.019	.642
R <sup>2</sup>		.018			.033		
Modified R <sup>2</sup>		.009			.025		
F value		<b>2.075*</b>			<b>3.949***</b>		

Significance level: t<.1, \*<.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

a) Dummy variables:

- Existence of pre-school age children: no (0); yes (1)
- Employment type: regular (0); irregular (1)
- Organization type: public (0); private (1)

b) Perceived discrimination is greater when childbirth leave is provided.

### **1) Perceived discrimination at the point of employment**

In terms of organizational factors affecting perceived discrimination at the point of employment, only organization type and company size showed significant influence. Company size was more influential than was organization type.

First, female workers felt more discriminated against by larger companies, contradicting hypothesis 3-3 that perceived discrimination would be lower with larger companies. Compared to small companies, larger companies are more capable in terms of execution of strategies and provision of resources and are better positioned to attract talented workers through higher wages and greater benefits (Lee Min-u et al., 2008). However, in reality women face a barrier and perceive discrimination due to their male-oriented employment practices. According to Shin Dong-gyun (2006), when all other conditions are equal, larger companies prefer to employ male workers over female workers. In consequence, women are likely to perceive discrimination.

Second, women feel more discriminated against at private organizations than they do at public organizations. This is partly because public organizations observe the labor conditions as set out by law more strictly than do private companies, reducing the relative level of discrimination. Public organizations are more restricted than are private organizations in their ability to flexibly manage their workforce. They are also obligated to provide equal opportunities to all citizens regardless of their gender, age, education, and other personal characteristics. Therefore, women experience less discrimination and their self-rated discrimination is accordingly lower compared to their experience with private companies (Yang Geon-mo et al., 2007).

Finally, job satisfaction and policy factors had no impact on perceived discrimination at the point of employment. Regarding job satisfaction, this is because the nature of a projected job cannot be known or experienced prior to employment. In relation to policy factors, it was presumed that awareness of work-family balance support at the company would affect perceived discrimination at the point of employment by fueling a positive attitude toward the company. However, this assumption was dismissed.

### **2) Perceived discrimination after employment**

Organization type, company size, and job satisfaction were all statistically significant among organizational factors, and childbirth leave, childcare leave, and workplace childcare facilities showed significance among policy factors. The degree of influence was greatest with company size, followed by childcare leave, organization type, childbirth leave, workplace childcare

facilities, and job satisfaction.

Regarding organization type, married female workers reported a greater degree of discrimination at private companies than at public companies. As explained above, public organizations keep in place a stricter equality-ensuring system in terms of promotion, wage, and work deployment than do private organizations, resulting in a less discriminatory work environment. This might be due in part to the fact that public organizations are more widely regulated and more exposed to market pressures than are private organizations. Also, employees at public organizations tend to be better aware of not only their obligations to the organization, but also of the organization's obligations to its employees. They believe that they will be ensured job stability and promotion opportunities in return for their commitment to the organization (Muchinsky, translated by Yu Tae-yong, 2012). Their perception of discrimination is lower relative to their counterparts at private companies as they believe they are receiving appropriate rewards for their contributions to the organization.

Second, women working at larger companies feel more discriminated against than do their peers at smaller companies. This finding fails to verify hypothesis 4-3 and also differs from the results of previous studies that found that discrimination in employment and promotion is lower at larger companies than at small companies (Seong Ji-mi, 2007; Ahn Ju-yeop et al., 2007). This can be explained based on three regards. First, relative deprivation theory states that perceived discrimination is a sense of relative deprivation experienced when one believes oneself to be receiving less compared to a reference group (Jeong Su-jin and Ko Jong-sik, 2010). In this context, individuals can feel more deprived at larger organizations as they compare themselves with other intragroup members who experience better career outcomes (Han Deok-ung and Jang Eun-yeong, 2007). Second, in large organizations the reward from the organization appears insufficient relative to the level of competition required within and without the organization, as well as to the workload that the employees must shoulder. Employees believe the organization to be not fulfilling its responsibilities (Jeong Yeon-gil, 2012) and feel discriminated against in the belief that they are being treated unfairly compared to what they deserve (Ahn Mi-yeong and Kim Hye-suk, 2003). The third aspect is related to personal expectations. People may expect less discrimination at larger companies as larger companies tend to follow legal obligations more faithfully due to their high visibility, be more embracing toward female workers, and feature a diverse range of employee benefits when compared to their smaller counterparts. Consequently, there may be a gap between objective discrimination and subjective discrimination.

Last, female workers reported greater discrimination when their job satisfaction was low. Job satisfaction, which is related to a number of elements including the perceived appropriateness

of wages and work-related stress, affects individual feelings (Hong Yong-gi, 2010). Job satisfaction increases commitment toward the organization, and when such organizational commitment goes down perceived discrimination rises (Kim Geum-mi and Han Yeong-seok, 2002). Higher job satisfaction is closely associated with a greater appreciation of wages and organizational commitment, which in turn serves to lower perceived discrimination.

Next are policy factors. As opposed to hypothesis 6-1, perceived discrimination was greater at organizations offering childbirth leave than at those not so doing. This suggests that policy interventions that limit work-family balance to a matter for female workers and provide relevant support only to them may trigger negative consequences among women, the opposite of its intended goals (Won Suk-yeon and Lee Dong-seon, 2012b). In other words, childbirth leave, which is designed to promote gender equality, results in increased perceived discrimination among female workers.

Second, the existence of workplace childcare facilities was associated with greater perceived discrimination than was the non-existence of such facilities. Previous studies have argued that the provision of workplace childcare facilities through which the state or employers share in the childcare responsibilities of workers makes a positive contribution to female workers' efforts toward work-family balance and increases the likelihood of women's economic participation (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1992; Gustafsson, 1995; Hong Seung-a et al., 2009; Won Suk-yeon, 2012). The results of this current research imply that rather than expanding their opportunities, in reality the policy creates further inequality by imposing upon women financial responsibilities in addition to a care burden (Won Suk-yeon, 2005).

Third, childcare leave turned out to have a positive impact on women's perceived discrimination, as was assumed in the hypothesis of this research. The provision of childcare leave is known to be conducive to gender equality by promoting women's economic participation and reducing the gender wage gap in the labor market (Ruhm, 1998; Jaumatt, 2003; Lee Gyu-yong et al., 2004; Ryu Yeon-gyu, 2009). While maternity and paternity leaves are short-term forms of leave focused on childbirth, childcare leave or parental leave is a long-term furlough that allows parents to provide care to their children while remaining employed (Hong Seung-a, 2008; Won Suk-yeon and Lee Dong-seon, 2012b). Hence, the implementation of childcare leave, which is one of the most proactive approaches to work-family balance support on the part of a company, is recognized as a signal of the company's respect and care for employee values, and therefore lowers female workers' perceived discrimination.

Finally, the availability of flexible working arrangements, which was expected to reduce working women's perceived discrimination by diminishing gender inequality within both the

labor market and the family (Yoon Hong-sik, 2006), was not significantly related to women's perceived discrimination. The total amount and distribution of work hours are closely associated with the health, family life, and social life of workers in general, but especially with those of female workers who bear a greater burden of dual labor than do men (Hwang Mi-ra, 2010). This result, opposite to the hypothesis, may be due to the fact that there are few companies yet to offer flexible working arrangements that are appropriately tailored to the needs of users and/or the fact that workers remain unaware of their existence (Kang U-ran et al., 2006; Kim In-seon and Lee Dong-myeong, 2009).

## V. Conclusions and policy implications

The findings of this research are as follows. According to the regression analysis of factors affecting married working women's perceived discrimination at the point of employment, only organization type and company size were statistically significant among the organizational factors examined. Comparing these two factors, the former proved more influential than the latter. In terms of perceived discrimination after employment, organization type, company size, and job satisfaction showed statistically significant consequences among organizational factors, while childbirth leave, childcare leave, and the existence of workplace childcare facilities proved to be significant among policy factors. The degree of influence was greatest with company size, followed by childcare leave, organization type, childbirth leave, workplace childcare facility, and job satisfaction.

The following are the policy implications based on the results of this research.

First, the statistical significance of organizational and policy factors suggests that the roles of companies and governments are important in the lowering of female workers' perceived discrimination in the workplace in an effort to promote the use of female human resources in the labor market. In relation to organizational factors, company size and organization type in particular were closely linked to perceived discrimination both pre- and post-employment. It is noteworthy that female workers' perceived discrimination is greater in the private sector and at larger companies, demonstrating that organizational environmental characteristics play a greater role in women's perceived workplace discrimination than do personal characteristics. This necessitates reinforced regulations and supervision related to discriminatory practices based on organization type and size.

Second, job satisfaction had a significantly positive impact on perceived discrimination after employment. In general, South Korean companies are not especially committed to strategic

investment in female resources and in the implementation of relevant policies (Lim In-suk, 2003). In addition, they tend to feel that the underutilization of female resources stems from female workers' personal components, such as brief period of work, lack of professionalism, and family responsibilities. As established by this research, however, the positive correlation between job satisfaction and perceived workplace discrimination shows that job satisfaction features important implications for female workers. In this sense, it appears necessary to introduce measures for the promotion of female worker's job satisfaction in order to reduce their perceived discrimination and promote the more effective use of talented female resources. Such measures may include the improvement of both work-related facilities and institutional aspects, as well as an increase in equity in work deployment and promotion. Furthermore, these measures will lead to an increase in the quality of female human resources and in corporate productivity as well.

Third, it is noteworthy that work-family balance support, including childbirth leave, workplace childcare facilities, and flexible working arrangements with the exception of childcare leave, are not positively correlated with working women's perceived discrimination. Rather, it appears that childbirth leave and workplace childcare facilities actually widen the gender gap in the labor market. This contrasts with the positive influence of childcare leave, which is available to both male and female workers. This result implies that when work-family balance is defined as purely a women's issue, it is likely to create a separation between policy intentions and actual outcomes, failing to effectively reduce gender inequality in the labor market (Won Suk-yeon and Lee Dong-seon, 2012b). Therefore, proper systems should be designed that are able to effectively lower women's perceived workplace discrimination and expand their labor market participation.

Considering that increasing women's economic participation is one of the major agenda items in the country's efforts to boost its competitiveness, it is critical to identify how to welcome more women into the labor market. In particular, policy efforts able to allow women to live up to their potential without undergoing discrimination in social and economic contexts should be made as a means to maximize both the utility of female human resources and national competitiveness. While some policies and institutions designed to encourage women's economic participation and career continuance are indeed in place, research on individual perceptions of their effects is important given that each system creates a unique impact on individual people (Jang Su-jeong et al., 2009). In this regard, this research presents the significance of measures catering to the needs of individuals and organizations in relation to the elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace and provides an important basis for efforts to narrow the gap between policy intentions and outcomes. The findings of this research serve as basic data both for companies that desire to create a more women-friendly work environment and for governments engaged in policy establishment.



## **VI. Limitations of this research and remaining questions**

The limitations of this research are the following.

The first is related to the limitations found in the KLoWF data. While the KLoWF is an important nationwide survey investigating working women's perceived discrimination in the workplace, the scope of analysis in this research was restricted to the existing data. Hence, a careful approach was required in the process of analysis and the interpretation of results. Due to the broad-but-shallow nature of the survey questions, it was difficult to configure the data in a way so as to produce more detailed results. In addition, as the respondents were asked to answer three different surveys (regarding their households, the respondent herself, and jobs), there were a number of missing values. In addition, certain negative statements may have provoked the possibility of confused answers, making the construction of more specific questions necessary for more in-depth research.

Second, as the survey respondents were limited to women, this research fails to examine the perception of discrimination against women on the part of management or male workers. This appears to be another area that requires further research to provide more practical policy suggestions.

Third, this research demonstrated that personal factors were not significantly relevant to perceived discrimination, both at the point of and after employment. Although efforts were made to minimize limitations by determining variables based on theoretical discussion and the selection of corresponding questions, survey questions could not be reconstructed so as to suitably serve the purposes of the research.

Given that similar work-family balance support programs may have unique impacts on different individuals, research on individual perceptions is essential for policy development (Pfau-Effinger, 1998; Pocock, 2003; Jang Su-jeong et al., 2009). It is further necessary to follow the trend of changing perceptions by group in order to craft fitting policies taking into account the changing needs and expectations of individuals in accordance with specific socio-cultural environments.

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