

Low Fertility and Work-Life Balance Policies and Their Prospects in Korea: An International Comparison with OECD Countries

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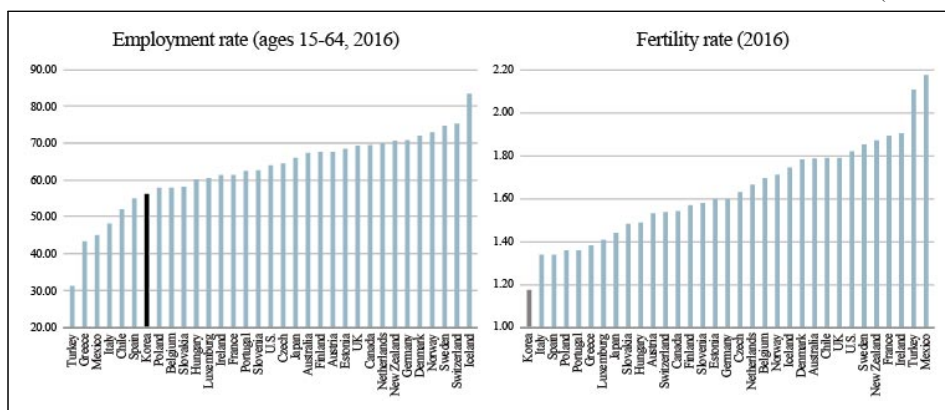
Introduction

The employment rate of women (aged 15 to 64) in Korea stands at 56.1% in 2016, which is the seventh lowest among OECD member countries following Turkey, Greece, Mexico, Italy, Chile and Spain. On the other hand, the female employment rate of major OECD member countries mostly exceeds 60% (left graph in [Figure 1]). Meanwhile, the total fertility rate² of Korea stands at 1.17 in 2016. This figure is the lowest among OECD member nations and much lower than that of Italy (1.34), a country with the second lowest total fertility rate (right graph in [Figure 1]). According to a comparison of the two graphs, both the employment rate and birth rate are low in Korea, while Turkey and Mexico have a low employment rate but a high fertility rate of more than 2.1, indicating that employment and fertility rates are inversely related in these two countries. Also, many countries, including Sweden, Switzerland and New Zealand, see both high female employment rates and high birth rates.

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² The total fertility rate (TFR) is an indicator of the average number of children that a woman would have over her lifetime. The TFR is the sum of the age specific fertility rates (ASFRs) and a representative measure of the level of fertility.

(Unit: %)



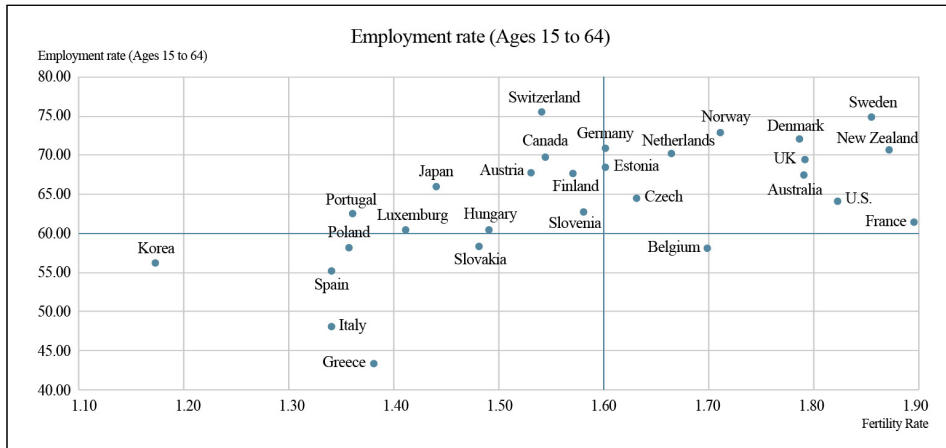
Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

[Figure 1] An international comparison of employment rates (left) and total fertility rates (right) (2016)

The relationship between employment and fertility rates is as specified in [Figure 2]. OECD countries which have an employment rate of at least 70% and a fertility rate of over 1.6 include New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany. Among countries with an employment rate of 60 to 69% and a birth rate of over 1.6, are France, the U.S., the UK, Australia, the Czech Republic, and Estonia. On the other hand, OECD members which have an employment rate of over 60% and a fertility rate of fewer than 1.6 included Switzerland, Canada, Finland, Austria, Japan, Hungary, Portugal, etc. As for Korea, both the employment rate and birth rate are low, showing that the country does not follow the general trend. Moreover, the fertility rate of Korea is far lower than that of Spain, Italy and Greece, which have lower employment rates than Korea.

In this analysis, countries are selected which have an employment rate of over 60% and a fertility rate of over 1.6 to compare these countries with Korea in terms of the features of employment and birth rates, childcare leave and family policies, and systems for balancing work and family. Countries that satisfy such requirements include northern European countries (Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark), continental European nations (the UK, France, Germany and the Czech Republic), the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. In comparing the countries with each other, it is necessary to carefully analyze them, taking account of differences in the labor market structure, each country's distinct characteristics, social environments, and different population composition. Based on the results of the analysis, I will grasp the current status of Korea and seek suggestions for the nation's policy directions.

(Unit: %)



Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

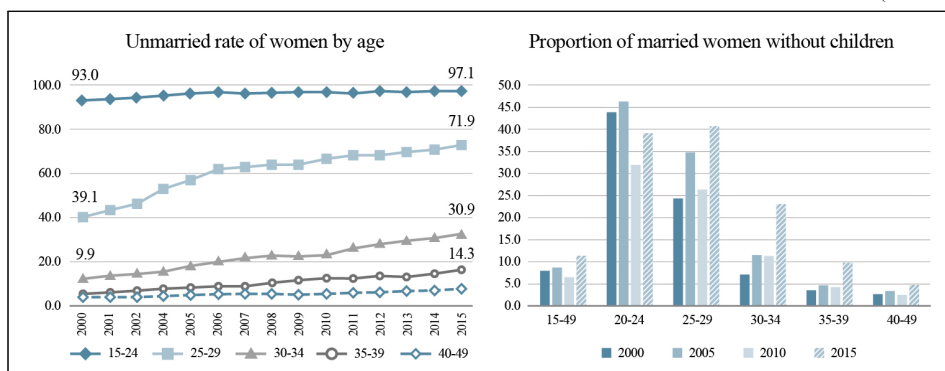
[Figure 2] Relationship between employment rates and fertility rates of OECD countries (2016)

Children and Women's Labor

In studying women's work, it is impossible to separate children from women's labor, and the female employment rate in particular is closely related to the fertility rate. As for Korea, the nation's total fertility rate has sharply declined from 4.5 births per fertile woman in the 1970s to 1.57 births in 1990 and afterwards, it has gradually decreased, reaching a record low of 1.17 in 2016. Such a rapid decrease in the birth rate has been caused largely by two phenomena: an increase in the unmarried rate and the number of married households without children. As the two phenomena occur simultaneously, the total fertility rate is on the decrease.

Regarding the unmarried rate of women by age (left graph in [Figure 3]), the unmarried rate of women aged 25 to 29 sharply increased from 39.1% in 2000 to 71.9% in 2015. During the same period, the proportions of unmarried women aged 30 to 34 and those aged 35 to 39 rapidly increased from 9.9% to 30.9% and from 3.6% to 14.3%, respectively. As to married women, the proportion of married women aged 15 to 49 who did not have children (right graph in [Figure 3]) rose from 7.9% in 2000 to 11.2% in 2015. In particular, the proportion of married women aged 25 to 29 without children approximately doubled from 24.4% in 2000 to 40.8% in 2015, and those aged 30 to 35 without children more than tripled from 6.9% to 22.9% in the same period. Also, the proportion of married women aged 35 to 39 without children rose from 3.5% in 2000 to 9.8% in 2015, displaying that the proportion of women who had children after getting married sharply declined during the period.

(Unit: %)



Note: The unmarried rates are based on the original data of the Economically Active Population Survey for each year. The data on the proportion of married women without children is based on the Population Census. Source: Statistics Korea, KOSIS.

[Figure 3] Rate of unmarried women (left) and proportion of married women without children (right) by age

An increase in the unmarried rate and the number of married households without children led to a decrease in the average number of children as a whole. On the other hand, the number of households with two or more children, among married households with children, has risen or has decreased at a slower pace in some age group since 2010. According to the results of the Population Census (2000 to 2015), the proportion of households with one child still increased slowly, but such a tendency changed among households with two children and those with three or more children. Table 1 shows that the proportion of households with two children fell by 3.5%p from 63.3% in 2005 to 59.8% in 2010, but decreased 1.4%p between 2010 and 2015, indicating that the proportion was dropping at a slower pace. Particularly among women in their 20s, for whom the unmarried rate increased fast, the proportion of married women with two or more children rose, showing that married women in their 20s gave birth to at least two children. As for women in their 30s who got married late and therefore had the first baby late, the proportion of households with one child steadily increased. However, the proportion of households with two children or those with at least three children, which decreased fast in the past, has fallen at a slower pace recently.

In sum, the number of women who do not marry or do not have children even if they get married increases significantly compared to the past, but the proportion of households with two or more children, among married women, rises instead. It can be said that this phenomenon leads to polarization in childbirth.

<Table 1> Proportion of married women's children

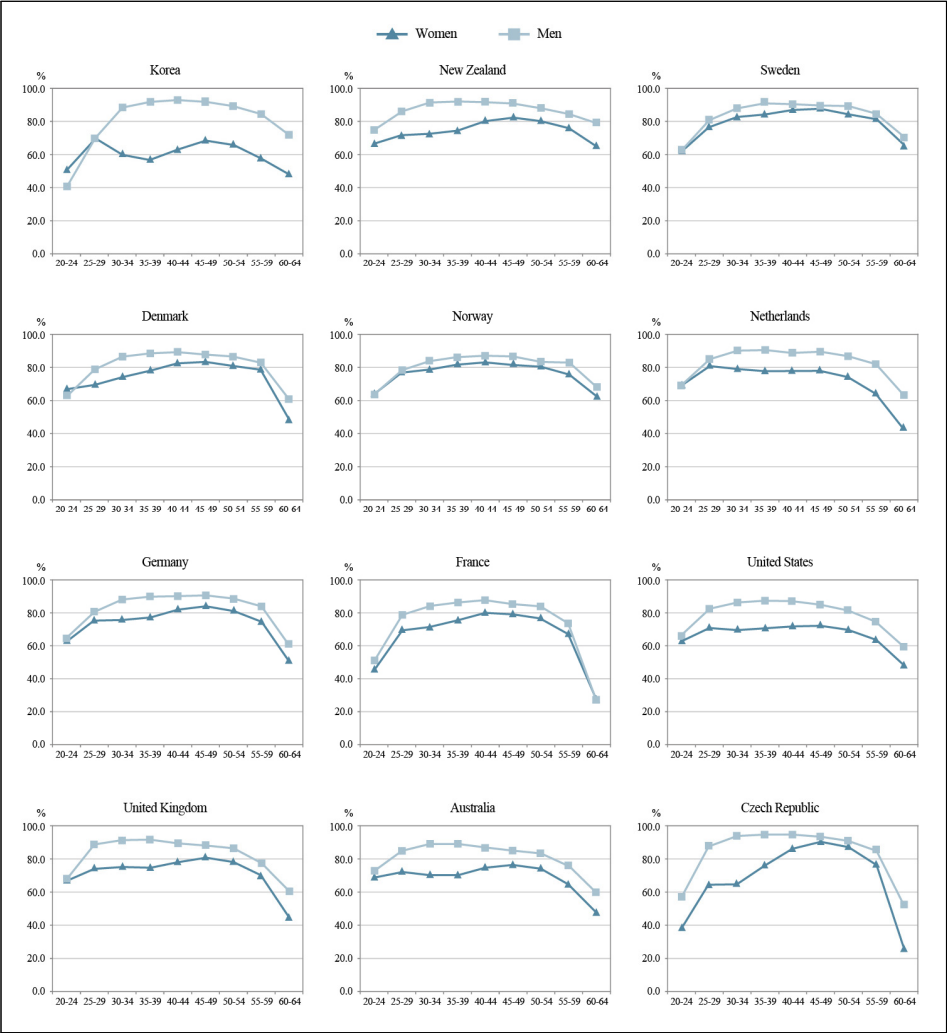
(Unit: %)

		Age 15~49					
			20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-49
2000	1 child	22.7	76.5	56.1	26.0	16.1	13.3
	2 children	61.1	21.3	40.3	65.1	70.4	60.9
	3 or more children	16.2	1.6	3.4	8.9	13.4	25.7
2005	1 child	23.8	78.1	62.1	35.2	18.1	16.1
	2 children	63.3	20.2	34.4	57.3	68.7	67.5
	3 or more children	12.9	1.2	3.1	7.3	13.1	16.4
2010	1 child	27.9	78.1	69.2	47.4	26.9	17.3
	2 children	59.8	20.3	27.3	46.0	61.7	67.2
	3 or more children	12.2	1.6	3.5	6.7	11.3	15.5
2015	1 child	29.6	76.1	65.6	50.3	31.6	21.3
	2 children	58.4	22.0	30.5	42.6	56.5	64.9
	3 or more children	12.0	2.0	3.9	7.1	11.9	13.8

Source: Statistics Korea, Population Census, KOSIS

The biggest difference between Korea and key OECD member countries with high birth rates and high female employment rates is found in an M-shaped curve for the nation's female employment rate which indicates the lowest employment rate of women at ages 35 to 39 in 2016. As Korean women have children later in life due to late marriage, they tend to raise young children at an older age. As a result, the age group experiencing the most substantial career interruption due to childbirth has shifted from ages 25 to 34 to ages 35 to 44. This shift has caused a typical M curve for the female employment rate, which is most distinct in Korea, to move upwards. The employment rate of Korean women aged 35 to 39 experiencing the lowest employment rate is 56.3%, which is 10.9%p lower than the average of OECD members and more than 20%p lower than the female employment rates of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden. Moreover, this figure represents a very low employment rate equivalent to the employment rates of France, Germany, the U.S. the UK, etc. in the late 1970s to the early 1980s.

(Unit: %)

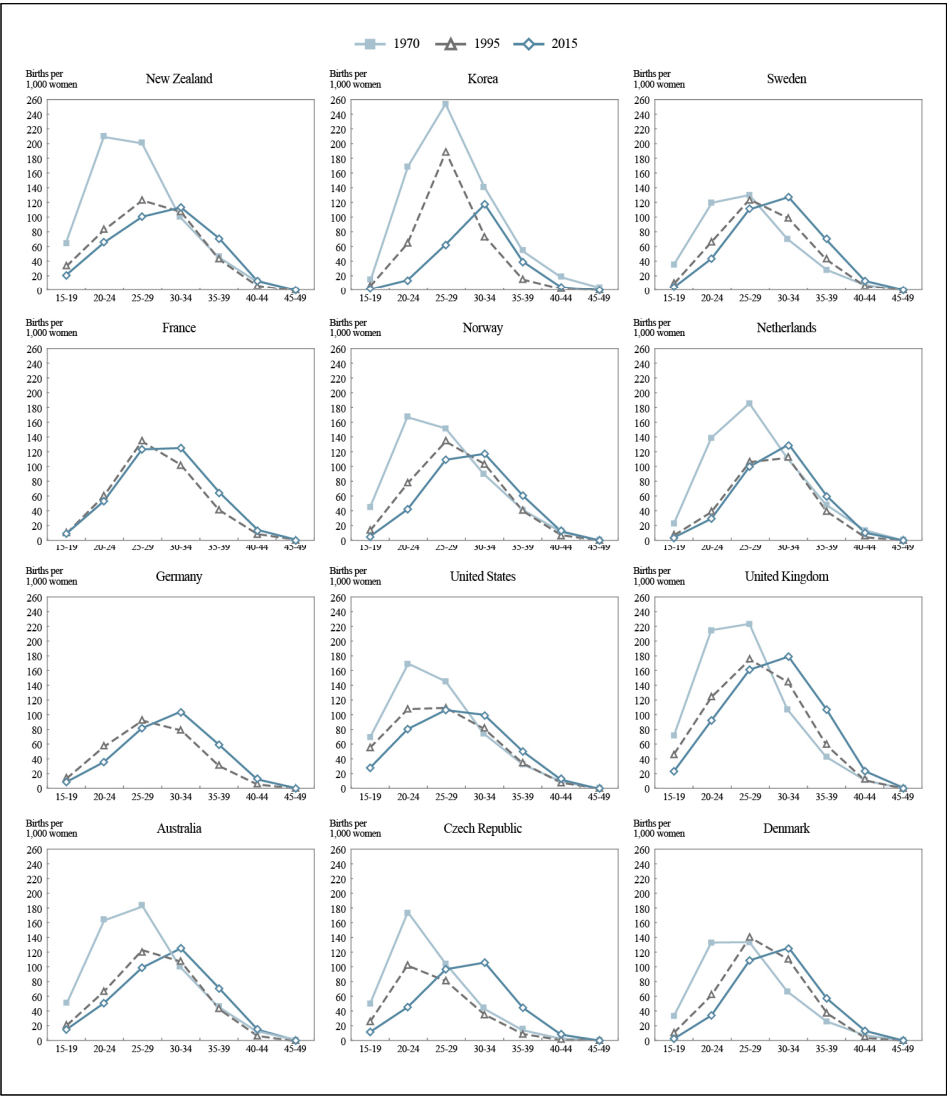


Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

[Figure 4] Trends in employment rates of major OECD countries by gender and by age group (2016)

Meanwhile, [Figure 5] shows changes in the fertility rates for 5-year age groups. In most OECD member nations, women delayed childbearing between 1970 and 1995. Today, the fertility rate of women in their 20s become much lower than in 1970, and that of women aged 20 to 29 in particular mostly declined between 1970 and 1995. In other words, many countries, including Korea, have experienced a decrease in the birth rate of women in their 20s since 1995. On the other hand, some countries currently witness a higher fertility rate of women in the age groups of 30 to 34 and 35 to 39 than in 1970. Particularly in Australia, Denmark, New Zealand and the UK, the birth rate of women aged 30 to 34 has increased to a level higher than that of the other age groups. Also, most of the nations compared show a similar fertility rate graph from 1995 to 2015, whereas Korea experiences a substantial decrease in the birth rate during the same period. It can be said that there are largely two differences between Korea and the countries compared. One is that no big change occurred in Korea between 1995 and 2015 unlike in such countries. The other is that the gentler the curve of the fertility rate graph by age group, the higher the fertility rate in such nations, but a triangle-shaped curve is found in Korea. This is in sharp contrast to the countries compared which have high fertility rates in the age groups of 25 to 29 and 35 to 39, displaying a gentle U-shaped curve. In other words, the key to the low birth rate in Korea lies in the fact that childbirth concentrates on a particular age group.

In sum, the biggest reason why both the fertility rate and female employment rate are consistently low in Korea is that the nation has a structure making it hard for working women to have children and take care of them. In the nation's social structure, women seem to remain unmarried, do not have children to remain in the labor market, or have children at a particular age. That is because they have difficulty working and raising children at the same time. In a social structure in which dual-income households are common, it is necessary to understand the current state of Korea by examining other countries' leave systems, childcare policies, and flexibility in working time.



Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

[Figure 5] Trends in fertility rates of major OECD countries by age group (1970, 1995, 2015)

Comparison of Leave Systems and Childcare Policies

This analysis compares Korea's childbirth-related leave and childcare leave available to parents after childbirth with other OECD nations'. As to childcare leave, the criteria and period for providing parental leave and pay are key elements of such leave system. In some cases, a specified period of childcare leave is guaranteed for the mother and father combined, while the period is used by either the mother or father in other cases. Therefore, the details of childcare leave actually used may vary depending on the cases. Also, parental leave pay differs depending on fixed payment or income-proportional payment and thus, it is inappropriate to make an absolute comparison. However, because it is useful to measure the degree of improvement of various relevant systems in the countries compared, a comparative analysis has been conducted.

This researcher has compared the countries' childbirth-related leave, periods for childcare leave, and income replacement rates. The results show that Korea's childcare leave system is well-organized and highly improved and that the country has a well-maintained system on childbirth-related leave and paternity leave for fathers. The period for childbirth-related leave in Korea is 90 days (12.9 weeks), which is approximately 6 to 26 weeks shorter than that of other countries compared. However, the period for childcare leave in the country is 52 weeks, which is not short compared with other OECD countries. In addition, the period for childbirth-related leave for fathers in Korea is slightly shorter than that of the countries compared, but the period for paternity leave is very long compared with nations without such leave system (the UK, the Czech Republic, Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland and the U.S.), France (26 weeks), Germany (8.7 weeks) and Sweden (12.9 weeks).

Nevertheless, Korea's income replacement rate is rather lower than other countries'. More specifically, the nation's income replacement rate for childbirth-related leave stands at 79.5%, which is not considerably lower than that of the countries compared. However, the country's income replacement rate for childcare leave stands at 28.5%, which is below that of the Czech Republic (43.4%), Denmark (53.6%), Germany (65.0%) and Sweden (57.7%). Moreover, the nation's income replacement rate for paternity leave is rather low at 32.3%.

<Table 2> Comparison of childbirth-related leave and childcare leave for mothers and fathers, and income replacement rates

(Unit: period (weeks), replacement rate (%))

	Mother				Father		
	Childbirth-related leave		Maternity leave		Childbirth-related leave	Paternity leave(care leave)	Income replacement rate (%)
	Period (weeks)	Income replacement rate (%)	Maternity leave(care leave)	Income replacement rate (%)			
Korea	12.9	79.5	52.0	28.5	0.6	52.0	32.8
UK	39.0	30.9	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	20.2
Czech	28.0	62.6	82.0	43.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Australia	18.0	42.3	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	42.3
Denmark	18.0	53.6	32.0	53.6	2.0	0.0	53.6
New Zealand	18.0	42.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
France	16.0	94.2	26.0	14.5	2.0	26.0	20.1
Netherlands	16.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	100.0
Germany	14.0	100.0	44.0	65.0	0.0	8.7	65.0
Switzerland	14.0	56.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sweden	12.9	77.6	42.9	57.7	1.4	12.9	76.0
U.S.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

To determine how many persons have actually used parental leave, the researcher has compared the number of paid childcare leave takers who are registered in administrative statistics. Table 3 shows the number of childcare leave takers per 100 births registered in administrative statistics. In Korea, the number of parents who actually used parental leave is very small compared with other OECD countries, and the number is small for both men and women in the nation. In Sweden, the number of women who use childcare leave for every 100 children born is 366.6 and that of men is 299.5. This means that Swedish parents take parental leave multiple times for one child. In Korea, 16.8 mothers use maternity leave and only 0.8 fathers take paternity leave, which is very small. Although Korea has a good childcare leave system comparable to other countries' as stated above, the fact that a relatively small number of parents take childcare leave presents many implications for the nation. In particular, the proportion of men among Korean recipients of childcare leave is a mere 4.5%, while about one quarter of men receive such benefits in Germany and Denmark with high employment rates and a half of Swedish men do so. These comparison results indicate that Korea's childcare leave system concentrates relatively on women.

<Table 3> Number of paid childcare leave takers registered in administrative statistics (2013)

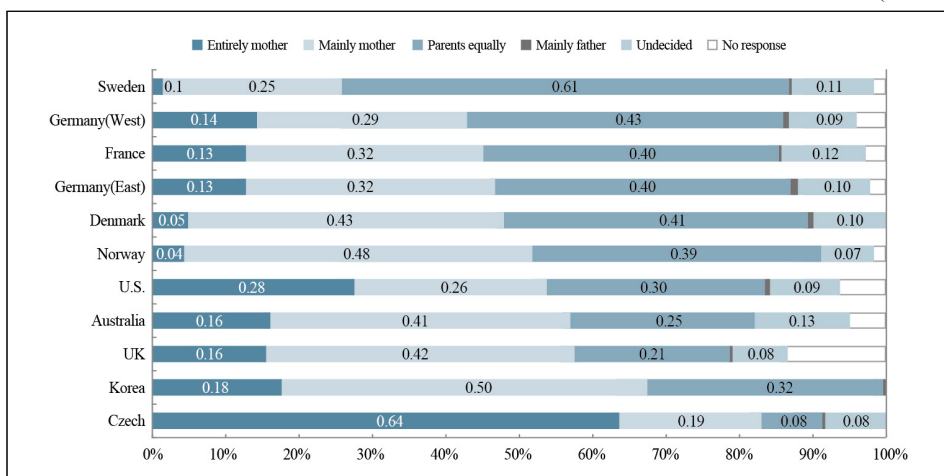
	Proportion of men among recipients of childcare leave (%)	Number of childcare leave takers per 100 children born	
		Women	Men
Korea	4.5	16.8	0.8
Australia	0.5	54.2	0.3
France	3.5	61.9	2.2
Germany	24.9	96.3	31.9
Denmark	24.1	140.1	44.4
Czech	1.8	269.4	4.9
Sweden	45.0	366.6	299.5

Note: The statistics on Korea address only users of statutory paid childcare leave in the private sector. Also, the statistics cover only beneficiaries of statutory childcare leave pay in cases of Australia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany and Sweden, and beneficiaries of CLCA (Complement delibéré d'activité) in cases of France.

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

Meanwhile, to determine the degree of gender equality in childcare, the researcher examined social recognition of childcare by asking the question, “If you are a full-time dual-earner couple, and both of you have similar job situation and both of you can take paid leave, then who will take parental leave if a child is born?” The result shows that Korean respondents hold more traditional attitudes toward gender roles than respondents of the other OECD countries, and that the respondents generally say that women rather than men should take parental leave. Also, while about 68% of the respondents in Korea state that entirely or mainly the mother should use parental leave, which is the second highest after the Czech Republic, less than 50% of the respondents in Sweden, Germany, France, Denmark and Norway say so. By contrast, the proportion of respondents saying that the mother and father should use parental leave equally is overwhelmingly high in Sweden at 61%, followed by Germany (43% for West Germany and 40% for East Germany), France (40%) and Norway (39%). And in Korea, the proportion is only 32%.

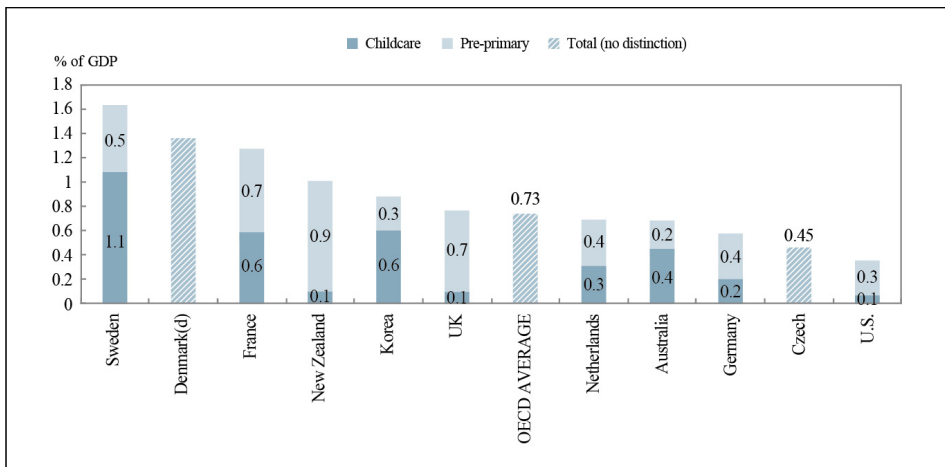
(Unit: %)



Source: OECD, OECD Family Database, International Social Survey Programme 2012

[Figure 6] Who will take childcare leave in a full-time dual-income household?

Regarding the ratio of official childcare spending for 0-5 year olds to GDP in OECD countries, Sweden spends the biggest amount at 1.6%, followed by Denmark at 1.35%, France at 1.3%, New Zealand at 1.0%, and Korea at 0.9%. The share of Korea's childcare spending is close to 0.73%, the average childcare cost spent by OECD members. In particular, Korea spends relatively higher childcare expenses for 0-2 year olds than other OECD nations.



Note: 1) 'Childcare' includes childcare and care services mainly for 0-2 year olds, and 'pre-primary' refers to childcare for 3-5 year olds. The expenses spent mean money paid to relevant childcare centers, kindergartens, etc.

2) Because mainly local governments support childcare services in some countries, the data on federal states, such as the U.S., are not captured in the OECD social expenditure data.

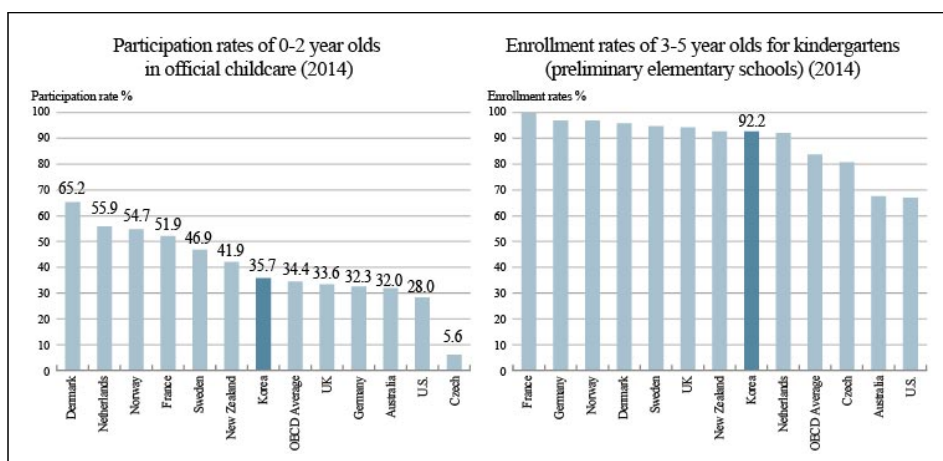
3) The data on Denmark and the Czech Republic are not age-specific.

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

[Figure 7] Ratio of official childcare spending for 0-5 year olds to GDP (2014)

The method of caring for preschool age children is largely divided into two. One is to use an official paid childcare provider (care providers, kindergartens, etc.) in which the children are enrolled, and the other is to use an unofficial unpaid childcare (grandparents, relatives, neighbors, etc.).

According to the participation rates of 0-2 year olds in official childcare providers in [Figure 7], Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and France have a participation rate of more than 50% and New Zealand, 40%. As for Korea, the participation rate stands at 35.7%, which is close to the average rate of OECD members but falls below the rates of such countries compared. On the other hand, the participation rates of 3-5 year olds in official childcare providers are high as a whole, except for the U.S., Australia and the Czech Republic. Korea has a participation rate of over 90%, which is similar to the participation rates of the nations compared.



Note: As to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the figures represent children enrolled in childcare providers and those who attend daycare centers operated by local authorities. The numbers also include both children attending non-profit childcare providers (Denmark) which receive government subsidies and children attending public and private kindergartens (Norway). As to New Zealand, the figures include only children who use either licensed center-based or home-based childcare services, and exclude those who receive unlicensed childcare services regardless of whether they are paid or unpaid. As to Australia and Korea, only licensed childcare providers are included. Also, enrollment-based services have been taken into account for Germany, and only children living together with their mother have been considered for the U.S. In addition, the figures cover regularly organized childcare services (childcare centers, nurseries, and Head Start), family childcare, and services provided by people other than relatives (around the house where a child lives).

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

[Figure 8] Participation rates of 0-2 year olds and 3-5 year olds in official childcare providers (2014)

Among northern European countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden rely more on official child care, whereas Germany and the Netherlands which are representative patriarchal welfare states have a very high proportion of unofficial childcare. According to Table 4, married women bear a heavier burden of childcare and housework in the Netherlands, and the participation rate for unofficial childcare is high in the country due to its system requiring schoolchildren/preschool children to have lunch at home. That is because the hours of participation in unofficial childcare per week are short. Also, the UK, the U.S. and Australia, which spend less on childcare, have a high proportion of unofficial childcare. As to Korea (2009), the proportion of unofficial childcare is lower than the OECD average but similar to that of Anglo-American countries, indicating that a high proportion of parents rely on their children's grandparents for childcare for children under age 5.

Overall, Korea has a well-maintained system on childbirth-related leave and parental leave. Nonetheless, the proportion of parents actually using such leave is not high,

and mostly women rather than men take such leave and provide childcare. Moreover, the ratio of government spending on childcare to GDP in Korea is lower than that of the OECD countries compared. In particular, the ratio of official childcare for 0-2 year olds is considerably low compared with such countries, making it necessary to broaden official childcare support for children in this age group.

<Table 4> Proportion of children using unofficial childcare facilities per week and the average number of weeks used by age group (2014)

(Unit: %, period (weeks))

	Proportion of children using unofficial childcare			Hours of unofficial childcare used per week		
	0-2 year olds	3-5 year olds	6-12 year olds	0-2 year olds	3-5 year olds	6-12 year olds
Korea	27.70	23.60	14.80	-	-	-
Denmark	0.00	0.00	0.74	-	-	-
Sweden	0.27	0.42	1.70	-	-	-
Norway	5.17	3.38	4.56	-	-	-
France	17.36	19.26	12.17	16.33	10.07	10.35
OECD Average	30.61	33.00	23.65	16.89	12.36	10.95
Australia	30.83	29.28	25.58	-	-	-
UK	33.84	39.12	36.92	15.67	13.56	15.50
U.S.	35.98	29.14	27.49
Czech	36.88	48.02	32.35	8.73	10.69	9.99
Netherlands	56.11	47.97	31.86	11.56	7.15	4.78

Note: 1) The definition of unofficial childcare varies from country to country, but unofficial childcare in this analysis generally means unpaid childcare provided by children's grandparents, relatives, their friends, or by neighbors.

2) The data for 2009 were used for Korea and the data for 2011 were used for the U.S.

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database

Comparison of Flexibility in Working Time³

A representative system to revitalize the labor market, flexibility in working time makes it possible to balance work and life through adjustment of working hours. Flexibility in working time is largely divided into flex-time work; flexible work arrangements (alternative work schedule); working time account (annual cumulative working hours), etc. According to a survey of European companies (2013), more than 90% of the companies surveyed provide flexibility in working time, and in the

³ This Section includes some contents cited or paraphrased from Chung Sung-Mi (2015), A Comparative Analysis of the Characteristics of Labor Markets by Gender between Korea and Countries with an Employment Rate of Over 70%, Monthly Labor Review, December 2015, pp.95-97.

UK, 80% of enterprises offer the system. Also, the biggest proportion of companies, which have introduced flexibility in working time, are implementing flex-time work while simultaneously offering flexible work arrangements (alternative work schedule). Over 70% of businesses in Denmark and Sweden and more than 60% of those in Germany and the Netherlands do so. On the other hand, the proportion of enterprises offering flex-time work only is rather low at less than 10%, except for those in the UK. By and large, businesses in Europe implement various relevant systems enabling employees to work flexibly.

<Table 5> Proportion of companies offering flexibility in working time (2013)

(Unit: %)

	Proportion of companies offering flexibility in working time	Flex-time work+ alternative work schedule (or flexible work arrangements)	Alternative work schedule (or flexible work arrangements)	Flex-time work only
Denmark	97.0	76.9	10.5	9.5
Sweden	94.8	74.2	13.5	7.1
Germany	94.5	62.0	29.0	3.5
Netherlands	93.8	66.5	19.6	7.7
UK	80.1	46.8	11.1	22.2

Source: OECD, OECD Family Database; European Working Conditions Survey, 2013.

With respect to Korea, OECD comparative statistics contain no data on the country's flexibility in working time. Nonetheless, a brief examination of the country's situation is possible because relevant items were newly included in the Additional Survey to the Economically Active Population Survey conducted in August 2015. According to an analysis of the survey, 4.6% of wage workers in Korea utilize flexibility in working time, which is substantially lower than that of OECD countries compared. In conducting the analysis, however, it is required to consider the fact that flexibility in working time is not yet revitalized in Korea. Also, consideration should be given to the fact that in the survey, questions have been raised not about whether or not such a system exists in their companies but about whether the workers currently use the system. Of the workers who use flexibility in working time, the highest proportion of them adopt flex-time work (41.9%), followed by alternative work schedule (33.3%) and flexible work arrangements (26.4%). In addition, the proportion of home-based and remote working accounts for 7.2%. Of the workers who do not utilize flexibility in working time, the proportion of those who wish to use the system is rather high at 36.9%. Among them, men take up 35.1% and women, 39.1%, showing that the proportion of women is slightly higher than that of men. As to the types of flexibility in working time the workers want to use, alternative work schedule accounts for the largest proportion (41.3%), while flexible work arrangements, flex-time work, and shorter working hours take up a similar proportion.

<Table 6> Utilization of flexibility in working time, and its types workers wish to use (2015)
(Unit: %, 1,000 persons)

	Whether flexibility in working time is used	Shorter working hours	Flex-time work	Alternative work schedule	Working from home/remote working	Flexible work arrangements	Other
Use of flexibility in working time	896 (4.6)	0.4	41.9	33.3	7.2	26.4	12.2
Workers wishing to utilize flexibility in working time among those who do not use the system	6,791 (36.9)	21.2	29.2	41.3	8.0	27.3	6.7

Note: In August 2015, the number of wage workers was 19,312,000, and that of workers who did not use flexibility in working time was 18,416,000.

Source: Statistics Korea, Additional Survey to the Economically Active Population Survey, August 2015

Conclusion

To facilitate women's participation in the labor market, Korea has made every endeavor to reorganize and improve relevant systems in earnest since 2000. In particular, the country implemented free childcare in 2012, introduced child allowances in 2018 and more recently, expanded flexibility in working time. By doing so, the country has supported the socialization of childcare, work-life balance, etc. in earnest. However, although Korea never falls behind OECD countries with high employment and fertility rates in relation to childbirth-related leave, parental leave, etc., the proportion of parents actually using such leaves is still low in the country and the systems are used primarily by women. Moreover, the social perception that women alone should raise their children is more prevalent in Korea than in the OECD countries compared. And government spending on childcare is still low in the nation. The proportion of official childcare for infants is also lower in Korea than in the countries compared, while the proportion of unofficial childcare is high. As for flexibility in working time, which is a representative system for balancing work and life, Korea is still at the initial stage compared with the countries. Therefore, it seems necessary to make working hours flexible and to improve inflexible organizational culture.

According to a comparison of Korea and OECD members with high employment and fertility rates, career interruptions of women in their 30s are the main cause for the low employment rate and low birth rate of women in Korea. Particularly Korean women aged 35 to 44 have babies at an older age due to getting married late or other reasons, and thus, the age group for raising young children has changed. As a result, the employment rate of this age group has stagnated for the past two decades, career break of women in such age group has increased most significantly, and the

fertility rate has decreased considerably. Without resolving the phenomenon in which the fertility rate is high only in a particular age group, it may be impracticable to solve the problem of a low birth rate. Above all, policies to prevent career interruptions of those in their 30s are urgently required. However, the biggest problem is that the proportion of persons using relevant systems in Korea is far lower than in the OECD countries compared, although the nation does not fall behind such countries in terms of institutional improvement. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance both the quality and quantity of official childcare, while seeking more effective measures to prevent career breaks, such as adopting flexible working hours, resolving long working hour practices, facilitating equal parental leave, implementing the Affirmative Action (AA), and changing corporate culture.