



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Women's experiences of Balancing Work and Family Care in South Korea: Continuity and Change

Sung, S. (2019). Women's experiences of Balancing Work and Family Care in South Korea: Continuity and Change. In M. Najafizadeh, & L. Lindsey (Eds.), *Women of Asia: Globalization, Development and Gender Equity* (pp. 98-110). Routledge.

Published in:

Women of Asia: Globalization, Development and Gender Equity

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

© 2018 Routledge.

This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Chapter 7

Women's Experiences of Balancing Work and Family in South Korea: Continuity and Change

Sirin Sung

Introduction

Work-family balance issues became prominent from the late 1980s onward in Korea (also referred to as South Korea) with rapid economic development and women's increasing participation in the labor market. Recent policy developments have supported women to balance paid and unpaid work and to encourage men's involvement in childcare. Nevertheless, gendered patterns in the division of household labor have not greatly improved in practice, as women continue to spend more time on unpaid work than men do (Joo *et al.* 2016), despite their increasing involvement in paid work. Traditional views on gender roles seem to persist in the Korean family, as unpaid care-work is mainly considered to be women's work.

Gendered patterns in the division of household labor are not peculiar to Korean society, as they have been found among all thirty-five Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries as well as in other countries (OECD 2016f). However, Korean women balancing work and family life may encounter more pressure due to their responsibility for their parents-in-law. Married women's responsibility for their parents-in-law is strongly associated with the traditional views of gender roles in Confucian patriarchy, which clearly

defines the role of women in the family (Lee, S. 2005). Confucian patriarchal traditions may not be as strong as in the past, as a result of relatively recent socioeconomic and demographic changes. However, the notion of care-work and household tasks as women's work has not changed significantly, as married women in paid employment continue to take more responsibility for unpaid work (domestic/care-work) than men do (Sung 2013). Given this context, this chapter will examine the impact of gender role ideology on women's experience of balancing work and family-life in Korea. It will also explore the influence of Confucian culture on women's experience of the unequal sharing of domestic work and care-work between men and women within the Korean family.

Women balancing paid and unpaid work

Korea has achieved rapid economic development following the industrialization era of the 1960s. Recently, this rapid economic development has been accompanied by particular socioeconomic and demographic changes, such as the increasing participation of women in the labor market, higher educational attainment, an aging population, and low fertility rates. Women's participation in the labor market has gradually increased since the 1960s in Korea, from 34 percent in 1965 (Sung 2003) to 53 percent in 2017 (Statistics Korea 2017). Educational attainment for women has considerably improved, with similar numbers of women and men completing university degrees: 63 percent of women and men aged 25 to 34 completed tertiary education (OECD 2012). However, the significant improvements in educational attainment have not yet fully translated into enhanced labor market outcomes, as the female labor force participation rate is lower than the OECD average of 58 percent (OECD 2016a).

In addition, there have been rapid demographic changes, including an aging population and a low fertility rate. Life expectancy at birth has gradually increased in Korea; for women, it has reached 85 years compared to the OECD average of 83 years (OECD 2015). Also, a sharp decline in fertility from 4.5 in 1970 to 1.2 in 2013 (OECD 2016d) suggests that there is a need for a further improvement in work-family balance policies in Korea. Moreover, there have been cultural changes in attitudes towards gender roles; a longitudinal survey on gender and family shows that the proportion of men doing housework 2 or 3 times a week has slightly increased, from 9 percent in 2007 to 15 percent in 2014 (Joo *et al.* 2016).

Despite these recent changes, married women in paid employment continue to encounter difficulties and inequalities in both the workplace and the home. For instance, the gender pay gap in median earnings of full-time employees in Korea is the highest (37 percent) among the OECD countries, and significantly higher than the OECD average of 15 percent (OECD, 2016b). Women continue to spend more hours in unpaid work (domestic/care work) than men in Korea; women spend 208 minutes per day on average doing unpaid work, while men spend only 47 minutes per day (Kim, Y. R. 2015). According to the OECD Family Database (2016f), while women spend more time on care-work relative to men in all countries, gender differences are particularly acute in Korea, as women spend 4 to 6 times more time on care-work than men. This indicates that men's involvement in unpaid work has not kept pace with the increasing level of women's participation in paid work.

Moreover, the organizational culture of long working hours can also be an obstacle to men's involvement in unpaid work in the Korean family. The OECD (2016a) economic surveys show that annual working hours in Korea were 17 percent longer than the OECD average in 2014. Although the standard working hours per week in Korea was reduced from 44 hours in

2000 to 40 by 2011, employees working in small firms with fewer than five employees are not included in the standard workweek scheme. Furthermore, overtime hours (12 hours per week) and additional hours during the weekends, which can add up to a total of 68 hours per week, also are not included.

Along with a culture of long working hours, the traditional notion of care-work as woman's work persists in the Korean family. Therefore, married women in paid employment may encounter difficulties in reconciling paid and unpaid work, as women are the primary providers of both child and elder care for family members. Korean women, living in a transitional period where tradition and change co-exist, may encounter a contradiction between traditional gender roles and the ideal of gender equality. For instance, women's involvement in paid work is a reflection of the recent changes, whereas their primary responsibility for domestic/care-work is closely associated with their traditional gender roles (Sung 2014). Therefore, women's experiences of balancing work and care and how they perceive the gender division of labor in the Korean family is a crucial issue to explore.

Gender role ideology and Confucian culture

Gender role ideology is conceptualized as “a set of attitudes about the appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women in a given society” (Lucas-Thomson and Goldberg 2015). Concerned mainly with how individuals identify themselves with regard to gender roles (Greenstein 1996), such ideologies range from the traditional to the egalitarian. Traditional ideologies clearly distinguish between male and female work and care roles, while egalitarian ideologies support the idea of a more equal sharing of work and care between women and men (Hoschild 1989; Rajadhyasksha *et al.* 2015). Gender ideology has been considered an

important contributor to individuals' attitudes about how they balance work and family, as it is associated with a range of gender-relevant behaviors, such as marriage, division of household labor, educational attainment, and labor force participation (Davis and Greenstein 2009). According to Qian and Sayer (2016), men are more likely to endorse traditional gender roles than women, and women are more likely to show disagreement with the traditional ideas in East Asia, including Korea. Also, a gender hierarchy and traditional gender roles seem to persist in East Asia, together with the Confucian cultural heritage and patriarchal family structures, which may lead to difficulties for married women who combine work and family responsibilities.

The impact of the Confucian patriarchal system is particularly evident when examining the role of women as care givers within the Korean family. Despite women's increasing participation in paid work, childcare is primarily considered to be mothers' work, as the traditional notion of married women's role as "good wives and wise mothers" still prevails (Choi 1994). Regarding elder care, the Confucian cultural value of filial piety retains great importance in East Asia, although the tradition has become less prevalent (Schwartz *et al.* 2010). Confucian patriarchy dictates that for a married woman, filial piety towards her husband's parents is more important than her obligations to her own parents (Lee, S. 2005). Therefore, married women involved in paid work often carry a double burden of work and care (Sung 2014).

The issue of care has been central to feminist debate, as it is mainly women who do care-work (Graham 1991). The feminist scholar, Tronto suggests that the moral implications of giving care are an important aspect in human life. In the ethics of care, responsibility is a central moral category, which can have "different meanings depending upon one's perceived gender

roles, family status and culture” (Tronto 1993:133). Regarding the practice of care and gender roles, the allocation of care responsibilities becomes a crucial issue when a certain group of people are allowed to avoid responsibility. Tronto (2011) describes this phenomenon as “privileged irresponsibility,” as exemplified by the household division of labor. For instance, in the traditional breadwinner model, the husband may be excused from daily housework and caring responsibilities because he has fulfilled his duty by bringing income into the household. As Tronto (2011:167) suggests, this notion has implications from “both a moral perspective as a way of shirking responsibility by claiming that one’s own responsibility lies in some other area, and from a political perspective as a kind of power through which one is able to force others to accept responsibilities”.

In the Korean family, husbands are often granted a “pass” from domestic/care-work, which means that they are not expected to engage in domestic/care-work because they are considered to be the main financial provider for the family. The gendered practice of care responsibilities can even be found in dual-earner families where the traditional breadwinner model does not apply. Gender role ideology comes into play here. That is, because care-work is considered to be women’s work, the husband can be exempt from this duty. In Confucian patriarchy, the husband’s exemption from responsibility for domestic/care-work is often related to the traditional gender ideology of his parents, as household tasks have traditionally been performed by daughters-in-law. Parents-in-law often are found to interfere in the division of household labor between husband and wife in Korean families.

Policy context: Work-family balance policies in Korea

The Korean government established the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2000 to improve gender equality and to achieve gender mainstreaming in policy and society. Equal opportunity legislation, which was originally introduced in 1987, developed into the Equal Employment and Support of Work-Family Balance Act in 2007, in recognition of the importance of work-family balance for working parents (Sung 2014). In particular, the recent reforms of work-family balance policies in 2014 and 2016 led to a significant improvement in childcare-related leave, such as maternity, paternity, and parental leave. Maternity leave became more generous in terms of pay, providing 100 percent of income replacement for 60 days; Employment Insurance covers the remaining 30 days up to 1,350,000 Won (\$1191) (MOEL, 2016). Unpaid paternity leave (3 days) has evolved into paid leave; fathers are now entitled to 3 to 5 days of paternity leave, but they are paid for only three days.

Furthermore, parents with children under eight years of age can now take up to one year of parental leave (up to three years for employees in the public sector). Previously, parental leave was referred to as “childcare leave” in Korea, but the term was changed to “parental childcare leave” in 2014 to emphasize the father’s role in childcare (MOLEG, 2014). In fact, the importance of fathers’ involvement in childcare has been the center of attention in the reformed policy (MOLEG 2016). For example, a “daddy months” program was introduced to encourage fathers to take parental leave. Like Sweden’s “daddy quota” policy, “daddy months” enable fathers to take parental leave immediately after mothers take leaves. Although limited to 1,500,000 Won (\$1323) per month, fathers taking “daddy months” are entitled to 100 percent income replacement of their monthly wage for three months (KWDI, 2016a). In spite of these developments, however, low uptake by fathers (6 percent) in these programs indicates that traditional conceptions of gender roles remain largely unchanged (KWDI, 2016b).

Also, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care in Korea (0.8 percent) is significantly lower than in Nordic countries, although it is slightly above the OECD average (0.7 percent) (OECD 2016e). In particular, public spending on pre-primary education is considerably lower than in the UK and some European countries, including Sweden and Norway (OECD, 2016e). Therefore, lack of publicly funded childcare amplifies reliance on informal care and adds to the pressure imposed upon dual-earner families in balancing work and family. The informal childcare rate for 0 to 2-year-olds in Korea is particularly high (28%) in comparison with Nordic countries (e.g. Sweden 0.27 %) (OECD 2016c).

The official family care leave program was introduced in Korea in 2007 and was revised in 2012 as part of the reform of work-family balance policies. This type of leave serves mainly to enable an employee to take unpaid leave when a family member or dependent needs care due to illness, an accident, or old age. The family member may be a spouse, child, parent, or parent-in-law (Park 2016). Employees can take up to 90 days per year, but the period of leave must be at least 30 days each time (Choi *et al.* 2014). Although this leave was first introduced in 2007, take-up rates have been particularly low. According to the survey on the effectiveness of work-family balance policies undertaken by the Ministry of Employment and Labor (Kim, Y. O. 2015), only 1.2 persons on average used the *family care leave program*, whereas most employees took *annual leave* when they needed time off to care for a family member. Only about 30 percent of employees were aware that such *family care leave* was available (Park *et al.* 2016). Low take-up rates seem to be associated with a lack of awareness and anxiety about financial loss, given that family care leave is unpaid (Park 2016). Flexibility regarding the length of leave (e.g. allowing short-term absences of less than 30 days if needed) might encourage employees to make more use of the leave.

Since the 1990s, the Korean population has been aging (Statistics Korea 2011), with the result that elder care policies have become a crucial concern for the government. The introduction of long-term care (LTC) insurance in 2008 led to a significant improvement in elder care policy, in that it recognized care as a societal as well as a familial responsibility (Kim 2016). That said, LTC insurance was developed mainly in response to urgent socioeconomic pressures, such as low fertility rates, unemployment, and a lack of care services, rather than for the purpose of the socialization of care (Kim 2016). “Maintaining the family system” remains central to the 2015 reformed policy for elder care, and the significance of “the enhancement of the spirit of respect for the elderly and filial piety” is still highlighted (MOLEG 2017: Chapter 3, Article 1). Evidently, elder care policy in Korea is still focused on family responsibility for care, as it continues to give prominence to the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

Research Methods

To examine issues related to work/family responsibilities, qualitative research methods were selected to explore women’s experiences and beliefs regarding traditional gender roles and their effects on the ability of women to balance work and family. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggest, qualitative research is useful in examining experiences of the *constraints of everyday life*. To give more flexibility to participants and to allow people to give their own opinions and experiences, semi-structured interviews were carried out with thirty married women in paid employment in Seoul, Korea, in 2014. The interviewees, who were aged between 19 and 60, were recruited, selected and drawn equally from the public and private sectors. Although the level of income varied between the low-middle to upper-middle income range, most participants were from the middle-income group. The interview topics focused primarily on women’s experience of balancing work and family responsibilities, including the

division of household tasks (e.g. domestic work, childcare, and elder care) between the women themselves and their husbands. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the chapter to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Women's experiences of balancing work and family responsibilities: The impact of gender role ideology and Confucian culture

Korean women's experiences related to the division of household labor were explored by examining how unpaid household work/care-work is shared between the respondents and their husbands. More specifically, this section focuses on the accounts of these employed women and how they perceive the sharing of household work. The extent to which gender role ideology has influenced the ways in which unpaid work is shared between men and women is also examined, in addition to whether Confucian culture has an impact on the unequal sharing of unpaid work between them.

Domestic work: Unequal sharing of housework between men and women

All respondents stated that domestic work is not equally shared between their husbands and themselves and these women take more responsibility for doing housework than do their husbands, despite the women's involvement in paid work. None of the respondents seemed to perceive that the household labor can be equally divided between their husbands and themselves. Thus, no egalitarian trend was found from the interviews regarding gender roles. However, in some cases, respondents did mention that their husbands helped with dishwashing and laundry occasionally, indicating some degree of change in the traditional view of gender roles. Although this change was far from the egalitarian level of equal sharing

of housework, it is a clear indication of a cultural shift in Korean family life, however slow. Furthermore, respondents tended to use the expression “*my husband helps me with housework*” when they talked about how this work is shared in their home, suggesting that housework continues to be perceived as primarily the woman’s responsibility with which husbands sometimes assist.

When asked why they do more housework than their husbands, about two-thirds of the respondents stated that the reason is closely associated with the traditional culture of gender roles in Korea. Only one respondent said that she had traditional views on gender roles herself, stating that “*for men work is more important than doing unpaid work at home.*” Others suggested that the primary reason is that their husbands and parents-in-law have traditional ideas on gender roles. They also cited the wider influence of traditional culture on Korean society. This experience is exemplified by Yumi, a 40-year-old mother of three young children, who talked about how her husband responds when she asks him to share household tasks:

My husband never helped me with housework. He is a bit traditional and patriarchal.

He would say, “How can a man do this kind of things”. He’d say, “It’s a woman’s job.”

A college graduate working for a private company, Yumi lived with her parents-in-law for five years at the beginning of her marriage, an arrangement which she felt obligated to accept as her mother-in-law had particularly requested it. She found the experience of co-residence with her parents-in-law rather stressful, as they had traditional ideas on gender roles similar to those of her husband.

Roughly half of the respondents said that the traditional ideas of their parents-in-law had influenced the unequal sharing of housework between them and their husbands. For example, Sumi, a 40-year-old with three young children, said her parents-in-law often made remarks about why men should not engage in domestic work, which they saw as mainly a woman's responsibility:

My mother-in-law said, "Men should not enter the kitchen. In the past, it was only the male servant who entered the kitchen. My son should not be treated as a servant."

Sumi also said that her husband had tried to help her with housework a few times but that his mother had not allowed him to do so: *"I cannot help you as my mother doesn't like it,"* he told her. Sumi also described the difference between her own mother and her mother-in-law when they visit her house. While her mother would do most of the housework out of concern that Sumi might be too tired after work, her mother-in-law would want Sumi to do the housework after she came back from work. Her husband, by contrast, would not be expected to do anything after work.

Further, in some cases, respondents mentioned that Confucian traditional culture influenced wider society as well as their parents-in-law. Susie, a 38-year-old civil servant, described how traditional Korean culture affected her work performance, because wives are expected to do housework. She described herself as a highly educated woman with a postgraduate degree, and yet she still believed that she must conform to her traditional gender role, as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law at home.

In Korean traditional culture, a wife has to cook for her husband, so marriage affected my work somehow. My parents-in-law have strong Confucian traditional views. My mother-in-law told me that “it’s a woman’s job, daughter-in-law’s job in particular.” So I do all the housework when I visit my parents-in-law during the weekends or celebration days [e.g. New Year’s Day, Autumn Festival].

In turn, Susie hires a domestic helper who comes two or three times a week to help her with her own housework. Nevertheless, she found it difficult to cope with both paid work and housework, as making sure that the house is clean and that family meals are well prepared is considered to be mainly her responsibility. Lee’s (2002) study of middle-class Chinese families in Hong Kong also found that having a domestic helper does not necessarily release working mothers from their family responsibilities, as they often have to supervise the domestic helper. Moreover, wives often are blamed when the domestic helper does not perform well, as this is considered evidence that they lack supervisory and organizational skills. In a few cases, mothers-in-law had refused to hire a domestic helper although they could afford to do so. Bini, for example, explained the difficulties she experienced in combining paid work and her responsibilities at home, as her mother-in-law did not want to hire a domestic helper.

I have been living with my parents-in-law for ten years as my husband is the eldest son. I want to hire a domestic helper, but my mother-in-law doesn’t like the idea. So I end up doing most of the housework after I come back from work.

From the interviews, none of the participants in this study perceived housework to be equally shared between their husbands and themselves. Thus, there was no egalitarian way of sharing

of household labor. Moreover, roughly half of the respondents indicated that their husbands either did less housework than they did or were reluctant to perform any housework because their parents-in-law held traditional ideas about gender roles. This finding is also consistent with the examination of the reasons as to why women take more responsibility for childcare.

Childcare: Why women do more than men

As with their experience of unequal sharing of domestic work, all respondents also indicated that they took more responsibility for childcare than did their husbands. Further, more than half of the respondents stated that this is because their parents-in-law and/or their husbands adhere to traditional ideas on gender roles. However, there was a difference between the respondents' perception of the share of domestic work and of childcare. While only one respondent stated that she adheres to traditional views of gender roles regarding domestic work, nearly half of the respondents expressed a certain degree of agreement with traditional views on gender roles and motherhood-ideology as they pertain to childcare. For example, Jimin, a 38-year-old teacher, described childcare as something that mothers naturally do better than fathers, highlighting the biological differences between men and women.

I think it's just natural. I am the mother. I breastfed my daughter and biologically men and women are different. My husband is a good father...but I do more childcare. My children also look for me [not my husband] when they are unwell or in need of something.

According to Lee (2002), in Hong Kong it is widely believed that women are better at caring for children than men. Men are also more likely to engage in recreational tasks with children

rather than adopt a caring role. This was also evident in this study: respondents often made comments, such as “*My husband is good at entertaining children,*” that emphasized his role in recreational activities or in outdoor sporting activities with children.

Importantly, for Korean women, childcare is considered to be the first priority among other household tasks, and women assume more responsibility for childcare despite their involvement in paid work. As some respondents emphasized, many working mothers regard looking after their children to be more important than doing well in their career. Indeed, feeling guilty about not being a good mother was highlighted by some of those interviewed, for whom not being able to pay enough attention to their children was their main concern, as they were not being able to spend more time with their children due to their responsibilities in their paid work.

While some respondents emphasized the traditional notions of the mother’s role in childcare, a few others suggested more practical reasons for why they are deemed to be more responsible for childcare than their husbands. For them, having husbands who worked long hours in inflexible work settings was the main reason why they spent more time on childcare than their husbands. As one respondent, Sunhee, explained:

My husband’s job is not flexible. Also [he works] long hours. His colleagues mostly have wives who are not in paid work. Therefore, his colleagues would not understand why he needs to take time off for childcare/family reasons, instead of [his] wife.

Sunhee works as a civil servant in the public sector. Consequently, she is likely to work more regular hours from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm than her husband and finds it easier to take time off

work for family emergencies. However, it is crucial to note the impact that the organizational culture of her husband's workplace has on how the couple organizes their childcare responsibilities, particularly in relation to taking time off for family reasons. Sunhee's experience provides evidence that in dual-earner families, the traditional gender role ideology of the husband's colleagues and the organizational culture of his workplace can affect the ways in which individuals organize/manage childcare within their households.

As in the case of domestic work, more than one-half of respondents said that the traditional views of their husbands and parents-in-law explained why they were more responsible for childcare than their husbands. For example, Gina, a 52-year-old headteacher of a pre-school, stated that she took more responsibility for childcare when her children were young because her husband held strong traditional views on gender roles.

My husband is very traditional, so he said it's not a man's job to look after children.

He only focused on his work...did nothing for childcare.

Gabi, a 42-year-old pre-school teacher who lived with her parents-in-law for six years immediately after her marriage, described similar difficulties in sharing childcare with her husband. From her point of view, her husband did not help her with childcare because her parents-in-law would not like the idea of men doing care-work. In fact, her father-in-law asked her to quit her job to focus on housework and childcare. She did not work for the six years while she lived with her parents-in-law, but instead looked after her two young children and her mother-in-law, who had health problems. At one point, she also looked after her husband's brother's two children, as he was divorced and his former wife did not want to be responsible for the children.

My parents-in-law told me to quit my job after marriage. For three years I had to look after my mother-in-law who had cancer, as well as my young children. My husband's brother got divorced at that time, so I also had to look after his two children for three years. It was very hard for me. I felt like I was their servant. My parents-in-law did not like the idea of my husband doing childcare.

Gabi's experience demonstrates the level of interference by parents-in-law in decisions made by Korean couples regarding the sharing of housework and care responsibilities. Their ability to excuse their adult sons from such activities places greater pressure on their daughters-in-law to take more responsibility for housework and childcare, similar to the Tronto's (1993) idea of 'privileged irresponsibility'. To understand Korean family relationships, it is important to examine the power dynamics between the daughter-in-law and parents-in-law as well as the relationship between husbands and wives. Indeed, the relationship between husbands and wives can often be affected by the interference of parents-in-law in the Confucian patriarchal family (Sung 2003).

Elder care and Confucian culture: Gender ideology

All those interviewed for this study stated that they took more responsibility for their parents-in-law than their own parents, in terms of both financial support and care. To follow up, respondents were asked to explain why they did so and whether or not they perceived this as fair. Being the eldest daughter-in-law or the only daughter-in-law was one of the important reasons they gave. According to Confucian tradition, married women are obligated to be more responsible for their parents-in-law than for their own parents (Sung 2014). Therefore, in the

Korean family, it is often the daughter-in-law who takes on the responsibility for looking after her parents-in-law in their old age rather than the parents-in-law's own daughters. Sons are considered to be the main provider for their parents in old age financially, while daughters-in-law traditionally perform a care-giving role. When there is more than one son, the eldest takes primary responsibility for his parents in their old age (Lee, J. 2005). Bomi, a 41-year-old accountant, explained the importance of being the eldest daughter-in-law in a Korean family.

I have done much more for my parents-in-law. I give more financial support to them than to my own parents. I visit them more often and regularly. My husband is the eldest son and that means a lot to my parents-in-law. My husband often says, "I am the eldest son, so should be responsible for my parents." In Korea, being an eldest son and daughter-in-law is a big responsibility.

Although Bomi found it difficult to communicate with her mother-in-law, who adheres to traditional views on gender roles, she too accepted traditional views as they pertained to responsibility of a daughter-in-law. For instance, she described how annoyed she was that her own brothers' wives did not do enough housework and that her mother was helping them: *"It should be their responsibility as daughters-in-law to do housework, not my mother's, especially when they are housewives."* Despite her belief that she was being unfair to her own parents, Bomi felt more responsibility towards her parents-in-law. This view was mitigated somewhat by her belief that her brothers would look after her parents, as it is the social custom in Korea for sons to be responsible for older parents.

While some other respondents, such as Minju, who had stated that *"It's my obligation to live with my parents-in-law if they get older or sick,"* also subscribed to traditional views on gender

roles in relation to elder care, about two-thirds of respondents said that they took more responsibility for their parents-in-law not because they held a traditional view of their role as daughters-in-law but rather because their husbands and parents-in-law held traditional views of gender roles. Thus, primarily, they perceived their husbands and parents-in-law as having been influenced by traditional culture and its customs, which affected their role as daughters-in-law. Duna explained this well:

My parents-in-law are too traditional. They think a daughter-in-law has to be responsible for parents-in-law. I disagree with this idea but it is just how it is done, traditional custom in Korea.

Interestingly, whether they held traditional views on gender roles or not, virtually all respondents stated that it was unfair that they were more responsible for their parents-in-law than for their own parents. Although they were aware of the unfairness of the custom, especially in light of recent social and policy changes, most of them made comments such as “it is just part of tradition in Korea” and “it’s easier to follow the custom and conform to the tradition.” As Sunju, a 41-year-old a nursery assistant, explained:

My father passed away, so my mother does memorial service for him every year. But I can’t attend it, as it is the same day as the memorial service of my grandparents-in-law. My parents-in-law told me that it is my duty to be there as a granddaughter-in-law.

According to the Confucian tradition, adult children should show respect to their deceased parents by carrying out memorial services every year. Demonstrating respect for deceased

parents and ancestors is part of the Confucian tradition of ancestor worship, as filial piety is one of the most important Confucian virtues (Schwartz *et al.* 2010). In Sunju's case, her parents-in-law perceived her responsibility towards her grandparent-in-law as taking priority over her duty to attend the memorial service for her own father.

Indeed, the Confucian tradition of respecting one's parents and ancestors persists in contemporary Korean society, albeit to a lesser degree than in the past (also see Schwartz *et al.* 2006). And at times, it is practiced in different ways, depending on particular religious beliefs and on family tradition. For example, one respondent described how her parent-in-laws, who are Christian, still hold the memorial service for their deceased parents in their church, although it is performed differently from the Confucian practice. They normally invite a clergyman to pray for the deceased parents/grandparents, rather than following the Confucian tradition of ancestor worship.

In contrast, several respondents explained their attempts to challenge the tradition by giving financial support to both their parents-in-law and their own parents, and by visiting the latter regularly. However, they found it difficult to continue giving the same level of support to both parties, as their income and time was limited. Nevertheless, their efforts reflect a cultural transition in Korean society in that women are increasingly aware of the inequality that they encounter in terms of gender roles.

Conclusion

Korea has undergone numerous socioeconomic, demographic, and policy changes, including the increasing number of women in the labor market, longer life-expectancy, lower fertility

rates, and the development of equal opportunity legislation. As a result of increased female participation in the labor market, work-family balance issues have come to the fore, leading to the development of policies designed to promote work-family balance, such as maternity, paternity, and parental leave. These policies have been reformed several times and have become more egalitarian (Sung, 2014). However, such policies need further development to encourage an equal sharing of domestic work and care-work between men and women. Despite the recent development of policies related to paternity and parental leave, the participation rate for men is still low, and paternity leave policies, in particular, require improvement in terms of pay and duration. In addition, childcare policies must be developed to meet the needs of working mothers, to reduce the heavy reliance on informal care, and to increase the number of publicly funded childcare institutions.

Along with these changes, gendered patterns in the division of household labor must be challenged, as traditional conceptions of gender roles persist in the Korean family. Because domestic work and care are still regarded as women's work, men are often exempt from family responsibilities, thereby making it more difficult for Korean women to reconcile paid and unpaid work. The evidence from the interviews clearly indicates that women continue to assume more responsibility for domestic work, childcare, and elder care and that they do so because of the traditional views of gender held by their husbands and parents-in-laws. In particular, elder-care responsibilities are strongly related to *Confucian patriarchal views*, as married women continue to take more responsibility for their parents-in-law than for their own parents. Further, findings from the interviews indicate that *traditional gender-role ideology* significantly influences Korean women's experiences of balancing work and family, with unpaid work continuing to be shared *unequally* between men and women. The impact of Confucian traditions on gender roles is particularly notable in relation to elder-care, given

married women's presumed responsibility for their parents-in-law. In the end, this signifies the importance of cultural change in the wider society as well as in individual/family life, as the gendered division of household labor remains relatively unchanged despite policy developments intended to foster greater sharing of family responsibilities.

It is also important to note that women in this study continued to take more responsibility for their parents-in-law than for their own parents, even though most believed that doing so was unfair. This reflects the difficulties encountered by Korean women living in the transition between tradition and change (Sung 2014). In the midst of the transition, women themselves often face a contradiction between traditional views of gender roles and gender equality (Sung 2013) and experience uncertainty about the path to follow. Therefore, along with policy developments, cultural shifts in traditional ideas on gender roles are necessary in order to achieve an equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between Korean men and women.

References

- Choi, Elizabeth. 1994. "Status of the Family and Motherhood for Korean Women." pp 189-205 in *Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and Change*, edited by J. Gelb and M. L. Palley. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Choi, In-Hee, Young-Ran Kim, Aarm Lee, and Shina Park. 2014. *Supporting Family Care for Older People*. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Davis, Shannon N., and Theodore N. Greenstein. 2009. "Gender Ideology: Components, Predictors, and Consequences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:87-105.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1998. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. London: Sage.

- Graham, Hilary. 1991. "The Concept of Caring in Feminist Research: The Case of Domestic Service." *Sociology* 25(1):61-78.
- Greenstein, Theodore N. 1996. "Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labour: Interactive Effects of Wives' and Husbands' Gender Ideologies." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58(3):585-595.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.
- Joo, Jae-Seon, Yu-Kyung Mun, Young-Ran Kim, Young-Taek Kim, Ki-Taek Jeon, Chi-Sun Song, Jin-Young Han, Keun-Tae Kim, Ki-Soo Eun and Jin-Sook Lee. 2016. *Gender and Family Household Panel Survey 2016*. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Kim, Hee-Kang. 2016. "Is Long-term Care Insurance in South Korea a Socialising Care Policy?" *Critical Social Policy* 36(4):630-48.
- Kim, Young-Ran. 2015. *Indicators of Women's Social Status: Balancing Work and Family*. KWDI Issue Brief. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Kim, Young-Ok. 2015. *Survey on Work-family Balance Issues and Policies*. Seoul: The Ministry of Employment and Labour.
- KWDI. (Korean Women's Development Institute). 2016a. "Work-family Balance Policy". *KWDI Policy Recipe for Gender Equality* Vol.1:1-8. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- KWDI. (Korean Women's Development Institute). 2016b. "Equal Participation and Responsibility: Reviewing Gender and Care". *KWDI Brief* No.40:1-8. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Lee, Jae-Kyung. 2005. "Neo-Familism and Women: The Modern Transformation of the Korean Family." pp 155-176 in *Women's Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea*, edited by P. Chang and E. Kim. Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press.

- Lee, Sang Wha. 2005. "Patriarchy and Confucianism: Feminist Critical Readings of Culture, Power and Subject." pp 67-116 in *Women's Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea*, edited by P. Chang and E. Kim. Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press.
- Lee, William K. M. 2002. "Gender Ideology and the Domestic Division of Labour in Middle-class Chinese Families in Hong Kong." *Gender, Place and Culture* 9(3):245-60.
- Lucas-Thompson, Rachel G., and Wendy A. Goldberg. 2015. "Gender Ideology and Work-Family Plans of the Next Generation." pp 3-19 in *Gender and the Work-Family Experience: An Intersection of Two Domains*, edited by M. J. Mills. New York: Springer.
- MOEL. (Ministry of Employment and Labour). 2016. *Maternity Leave and Benefits*. Seoul: Ministry of Employment and Labour.
- MOLEG. (Ministry of Government Legislation). 2014. *Reformed Law of Equal Opportunities and Work-Family Balance Support*. Seoul: Ministry of Government Legislation.
- MOLEG. (Ministry of Government Legislation). 2016. *Reformed Law of Equal Opportunities and Work-Family Balance Support*. Seoul: Ministry of Government Legislation.
- MOLEG. (Ministry of Government Legislation). 2017. *Welfare Provision for the Elderly*. Seoul: Ministry of Government Legislation. Retrieved August 8, 2017 (<http://www.law.go.kr/lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=188084#0000>)
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2012. *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now (Korea)*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2015. *Health at Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016a. *OECD Economic Surveys: Korea 2016*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016b. "Gender Pay Gaps for Full-time Workers and Earnings Differentials by Educational Attainment." *OECD Family Database*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016c. "Informal Childcare Arrangements." *OECD Family Database*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016d. "Fertility" in *OECD Factbook 2015-2016: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016e. "Public Spending on Childcare and Early Education." *OECD Family Database*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016f. "Time-Use for Work, Care and Other Day-to-Day Activities." *OECD Family Database*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Park, Sun-Young. 2016. *Low Fertility and Aging Population: Legislation to Support Family Care*. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Park, Sun-Young, Bok-Soon Park, Hyojin Song, Jeong-Hae Kim, Soo-Kyung Park and Myoung-A Kim. 2016. *A Study on the Effectiveness of Gender and Family Law/Policies: Analysis of Family Care Leave in Korea*. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Qian, Yue and Liana C. Sayer. 2016. "Division of Labor, Gender Ideology, and Marital Satisfaction in East Asia." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78(2): 383-400.
- Rajadhyaksha, Ujvala, Karen Korabik, and Zeynep Aycan. 2015. "Gender, Gender-Role Ideology and the Work-Family Interface: A Cross-Cultural Analysis." pp 99-117 in *Gender and the Work-Family Experience: An Intersection of Two Domains*, edited by M. J. Mills. New York: Springer.

- Schwarz, Beate, Gisela Trommsdorff, Uichol Kim and Young-shin Park. 2006. "Intergenerational Support: Psychological and Cultural Analyses of Korean and German Women." *Current Sociology* 54(2):315-40.
- Schwarz, Beate, Gisela Trommsdorff, Gang Zheng, and Shaohua Shi. 2010. "Reciprocity in Intergenerational Support: A Comparison of Chinese and German Adult Daughters." *Journal of Family Issues* 31(2):234-56.
- Statistics Korea. 2011. *The Proportion of the Elderly in Korea*. Seoul: Statistics Korea.
- Statistics Korea. 2017. *Employment Trends in June 2017*. Statistics Korea. Retrieved August 8, 2017 (http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/2/3/2/index.board).
- Sung, Sirin. 2003. "Women Reconciling Paid and Unpaid work in a Confucian Welfare State: The Case of South Korea." *Social Policy and Administration* 37(4): 342-60.
- Sung, Sirin. 2013. "Gender and Welfare States in East Asia: Women between Tradition and Equality." pp 266-287 in *Handbook on East Asian Social Policy*, edited by M. Izuhara. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Sung, Sirin. 2014. "Work-Family Balance Issues and Policies in South Korea: Towards an Egalitarian Regime?" pp 29-48 in *Gender and Welfare States in East Asia*, edited by S. Sung and G. Pascall. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tronto, Joan. C. 1993. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York: Routledge.
- Tronto, Joan. C. 2011. "A Feminist Democratic Ethics of Care and Global Care Workers: Citizenship and Responsibility." pp 162-177 in *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*, edited by R. Mahan and F. Robinson. Vancouver: UBC Press.