

Difficulties Faced by Working Mothers and Potential Solutions to these Problems: A Survey of Nursing Personnel in a Korean Teaching Hospital

Kim, Young Mee¹ · Kim, Min Young²

¹Nursing Director, Seoul National University Hospital, Seoul

²Student, Ewha Womans University, Spatial Design and Double Major in Professional English, Seoul, Korea

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to identify difficulties that working mothers face and solutions to the identified problems. **Methods:** The study design was a cross-sectional, descriptive survey. A survey with 8 items rated on a 5-point scale (1~5) and 5 open-ended questions was administered to 48 married nurses and nurse aides working in 5 nursing units of a teaching hospital in South Korea in April 2013. **Results:** The score of satisfaction with childrearing patterns (mean=3.31±0.79) was higher than that of satisfaction with spousal support (mean=3.08±0.85). The score of working mother's turnover intention (mean=2.40±1.03) was lowest among the 8 items, but partners did not want their wives to quit work (mean=3.60±1.22). Satisfaction with company employment benefits for childrearing (mean=2.90±0.72) had the lowest score among the 4 satisfaction types analyzed. The turnover intention and satisfactions with childrearing ($r=-.51, p<.001$), spousal support ($r=-.43, p=.002$), supervisor's support ($r=-.36, p=.013$), and company benefits ($r=-.37, p=.009$) showed significant negative correlations. **Conclusion:** According to these results, familial support for childrearing is highly correlated with employed mothers' turnover intention. So improvement of familial support for childrearing will reduce married nurses' turnover intention. In addition, well-organized nursery facilities are recommended for enabling working mothers to continue their careers. Furthermore, more family-friendly welfare policies such as a flextime systems or compulsory paternity leave should be reinforced in the workplace.

Key Words: Working women, Nurses, Child rearing, Support, Turnover intention

INTRODUCTION

Many working mothers in South Korea undergo difficulties in reconciling work and domestic responsibilities. Numerous married women have entered the paid workforce since the 1980s in South Korea, yet they still face gender discrimination in both the labor market and at home.¹⁾ Because of male-dominated Confucian traditions, Korean working mothers are still expected to carry heavy burdens of disproportionate family responsibilities, although they are working outside the home as well.²⁾

Working mothers' multiple roles greatly affect their psychological status. If working mothers become stressed

because of their multiple roles and overloaded domestic labors, they may suffer from "aggression, envy, shame, guilt, and work-family conflict."³⁾ As a result, many working mothers must leave their jobs in order to focus on domestic responsibilities, including childcare. However, female resource can positively affect not only organizations' productivity, but also national competitiveness.⁴⁾ Thus, if female wage earners continue to suffer from work-home conflicts, their performance and organizational commitments may be significantly decreased, which could potentially lead to organizations' depreciated productivity and efficiency. In this context, because of the difficulties they have to face as working mothers,

Corresponding author: Kim, Young Mee

Seoul National University Hospital, 101 Daehak-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul 110-744, Korea.
Tel: +82-2-2072-7410, Fax: +82-2-2072-7649, E-mail: seoulymkim@hanmail.net

Received September 27, 2013 / Revised October 12, 2013 / Accepted October 13, 2013

many married women in paid jobs are more likely to avoid having a child, which could ultimately undermine South Korea's position in the competitive global market. In order to promote childbirth, practical welfare policies should be established that would allow working mothers to better manage their work and domestic responsibilities after the birth of their children.

Therefore, it is imperative to conduct research that can provide more specific and exact causes of working mothers' problems in Korean society and suggest more realistic and satisfying solutions to the problems. Working mothers' difficulties can potentially affect nurses, because generally nursing is a female-dominated profession.⁵⁾

The purpose of this study was to explore difficulties that working mothers with families face and pose possible solutions to these problems.

METHODS

1. Research Design

A cross-sectional descriptive survey was used in this study.

2. Subjects and Procedure

Participants were 48 married female staff nurses and nursing assistants working at 5 nursing units of a teaching hospital in South Korea in April 2013. Participants were selected according to the following criteria: (1) they were not nurse managers; and (2) they had children who were under 18 years old. Subject participation in this study was voluntary. The participants were informed that they were free to complete the entire questionnaire, or withdraw from the study at any time. To assure maximum confidentiality, no marks were placed on answer sheets.

Fifty questionnaires available for this study were distributed to 3 outpatient units and 2 inpatient units, and 48 sealed envelopes containing these questionnaires were collected within two weeks.

3. Measurement

The questionnaire contained both fixed and open-ended response formats in this study.

The questionnaire included 8 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) to assess working mothers' satisfaction and experiences

at home and in the workplace. The questionnaire consisted of items assessing satisfaction with current child-rearing patterns, spousal support, supervisor's support, company welfare, spousal desire for his wife's turnover, working mother's turnover intention, gender discrimination, and anxiety about performance appraisal. In addition, if participants were dissatisfied with their quality of life, 5 open-ended questions were asked about which factors should be improved. Four items of this tool (satisfactions with current childrearing patterns, spousal support, supervisor's support, and working mother's turnover intention) were adapted from the tool used by Kim,⁵⁾ and another 4 items (partner's desire for wife's turnover, gender discrimination, company welfare, and anxiety about performance appraisal) were developed by us. The content validity of the tool was substantiated by an education professor and a nursing director. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was .74 (Cronbach's α).

4. Analysis

SPSS/WIN 19 program was used to conduct all statistical analyses (percentages, means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients). A *p*-value of less than 5% was considered significant.

RESULTS

1. Demographics

The average age of respondents was 38.7 years and their highest education level was a bachelor's degree (85.4%). All respondents worked full-time and 58.3% of them earned 3-million won a year. Most respondents (68.8%) had two children. In terms of alternative childcare practices, 31 (64.5%) of the 48 participants relied on their parents (children's grandparents) for childcare, 14 (29%) of 48 participants used two types of alternative childcare (Table 1).

2. Satisfaction and Experiences of Working Mothers

Regarding satisfaction with current childrearing pattern, "neutral" was most reported (56%) and "somewhat satisfied" was next (29%). Regarding satisfaction with spousal support, "neutral" was most reported (54%), followed by "somewhat satisfied"(23%). The score of satisfaction with current childrearing pattern (mean=3.31 \pm 0.78) was higher than that of satisfaction with spousal

support (mean=3.08±0.85). Regarding partner's desire for his wife's turnover, 46% of the respondents disagreed with "my partner wants me to quit my job due to responsibilities at home"(mean=3.60±1.22). However, 46% of the respondents agreed with "I have wanted to quit my job because of difficulties in reconciling work and domestic responsibilities." This turnover intention score (mean=2.40±1.03) was the lowest among the 8 items.

Regarding gender discrimination, 58% of respondents

disagreed with "I have experienced gender discrimination in terms of wage or promotion process" and 23% responded "neutral" The mean score of gender discrimination (3.75±0.81) had the highest score of all 8 items.

In terms of participants' satisfaction with their supervisors' and co-workers' support toward childrearing (mean=3.15±0.65), "neutral" was the most frequent answer (63%), followed by "somewhat satisfied"(27%).

Regarding participants' satisfaction with company welfare policy for childrearing, "neutral" was the most frequent answer (54%), followed by "somewhat dissatisfied"(25%). Satisfaction with company welfare for childrearing (mean=2.90±0.72) had the lowest score among the 4 satisfaction scores.

Additionally, 52% of the respondents disagreed with "I feel anxiety about low performance appraisal or job security after maternity leave"(mean=3.52±0.97; Table 2).

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants (N=48)

Characteristics	Categories	n (%)
Age (year)	< 30	0 (0.0)
	30~39	28 (58.3)
	40~49	17 (35.4)
	≥ 50	3 (6.3)
	Mean: 38.7	
Education	High school	4 (8.3)
	Bachelor's degree	41 (85.4)
	Master's degree	3 (6.3)
Employment condition	Temporary	0 (0.0)
	Permanent	48 (100.0)
Salary (10,000 won)	100~199	1 (2.1)
	200~299	13 (27.1)
	300~399	28 (58.3)
	400~499	5 (10.4)
	≥ 500	1 (2.1)
Number of children	1	13 (27.1)
	2	33 (68.8)
	3	2 (4.2)
Alternative childcare*	Only nursery facilities	11 (22.9)
	Nursery facilities and school	12 (25.0)
	Grandparents	31 (64.5)
	Relatives & siblings	3 (6.2)
	Only schools	6 (12.5)
	Other	5 (10.4)

*Multiple choices were allowed.

3. Correlations between Research Variables

Turnover intention was significantly negatively correlated with satisfaction with childrearing ($r=-.51, p<.001$), spousal support ($r=-.43, p=.002$), supervisor's support ($r=-.36, p=.013$), and company welfare ($r=-.37, p=.009$). However, there were no significant correlations of turnover intention with the number of children ($r=-.07, p=.655$) or anxiety about low performance appraisal ($r=-.26, p=.075$; Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess the difficulties that working mothers with families face and pose potential solutions to these problems. All respondents worked full-time and 58% earned 3~4 million won a year. All participants had secure positions, and earned much more than the national average, according to a study

Table 2. Satisfactions and Experiences

(N=48)

Categories	Item	M±SD
Home	Are you satisfied with your current childrearing patterns? *	3.31±0.78
	Are you satisfied with your spouse's support for domestic labor, including childrearing? *	3.08±0.85
	Sometimes I feel that my partner wants me to quit my job due to domestic responsibilities.	3.60±1.22
	I have wanted to quit my job because of difficulties reconciling work and home responsibility.	2.40±1.03
Workplace	Have you ever experienced gender discrimination in terms of wage or promotion process?	3.75±0.81
	Are you satisfied with employers' and co-workers' support toward your childrearing? *	3.15±0.65
	Are you satisfied with child caring welfare of your company? *	2.90±0.72
	I feel anxiety about low performance appraisal or job security after maternity leave.	3.52±0.97

*Reverse scored.

Table 3. Correlations between Variables

(N=48)

Variables	Turnover	Child	Rearing pattern	Spousal support	Supervisor support	Welfare	Anxiety
	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)
Turnover	1						
Children	-.07 (.656)	1					
Rearing pattern	-.51 (< .001)	.13 (.380)	1				
Spousal support	-.43 (.002)	-.05 (.721)	.38 (.008)	1			
Supervisor support	-.36 (.013)	-.03 (.866)	.16 (.276)	.06 (.712)	1		
Welfare	-.37 (.009)	-.12 (.406)	.10 (.510)	.36 (.011)	.40 (.005)	1	
Anxiety	.26 (.075)	.25 (.094)	-.32 (.028)	-.26 (.077)	-.05 (.758)	-.32 (.025)	1

Turnover=turnover intention; Children=number of children; Rearing=satisfaction with current childrearing pattern; Spousal support=satisfaction with spousal support; Supervisor support=satisfaction with supervisors' and co-workers' supports; Welfare=satisfaction with company welfare policy; Anxiety=anxiety about low performance appraisal.

conducted in 2012 year that 47.7% of Korean women work part-time,⁶⁾ and the average monthly income for Korean women was around 2 million won.⁷⁾

1. Korean Working Mothers' Difficulties at Home

Regarding alternative childcare, most participants (64.5%) responded that their parents (i.e., the children's grandparents) took care of their children. This suggests that older parents are most preferable caregivers among dual-earner families, because they are usually unpaid and are more time-flexible than other sources of complementary childcare.⁸⁾ Fourteen (29%) of 48 participants responded that they used two types of alternative childcare. This implies that working mothers require multiple forms of childcare in order to compensate for their absence during the day. This result supports a previous study that states that because of the Confucian female role, Korean working mothers are still forced to fully devote time to family commitments, no matter their paid work outside of the home.¹⁾

Regarding satisfaction with current childrearing pattern, "neutral" was the most frequent answer (56%), followed by "somewhat satisfied"(29%). However, many participants said that they feel guilty for not having enough time with their children, especially when their children are sick.

When it comes to satisfaction with spousal support, "neutral" was again the most frequent answer (54%), also followed by "somewhat satisfied"(23%). The mean score of satisfaction with spousal support (3.08 ± 0.85) was lower than that of satisfaction with current childrearing pattern (3.31 ± 0.78). Furthermore, many res-

pondents said that they require more spousal support, particularly regarding childrearing. Specifically, some participants responded that they want their partners to consider domestic responsibilities as duties and not just as something they help with wives' tasks. However, the majority of participants had no strong opinions on this topic or showed moderate satisfaction with their partners' support. These results are different from previous studies, which indicated that because of Confucian gender ideologies, men are breadwinners and women are domestic managers. Thus, Korean men are reluctant to spend time addressing domestic responsibilities, preferring to let women do the majority of care activities.⁹⁾ The difference seen between ours and previous studies may be attributable to the fact that men currently share domestic labor more than they did in the past-perhaps because they want to lighten their employed wives' dual burdens, compounded with the weakening Confucian traditions in South Korea, which makes it more acceptable for them to offer aid in domestic responsibilities. This result emphasizes that spousal support is highly desirable for working mothers, as it allows them to juggle their careers with their housework. Furthermore, spousal support includes equal division of labor at home and implies that husbands have greater respect for their employed wives.¹⁰⁾

Surprisingly, most respondents (46%) disagreed with "my partner wants me to quit my job due to domestic responsibilities." This result also may also be interpreted by the idea that Confucianism ideology, a woman's correct place is home, has gradually faded out in Korea.

Ironically, 46% of the respondents agreed with "I have wanted to quit my job because of the difficulty in recon-

cing work and house responsibility." In other words, although most partners did not want their wives to quit their job due to household responsibilities (mean=3.60 ± 1.22), most working mothers did want to quit their job to help reconcile their work and household responsibilities"(mean=2.40 ± 1.03).

Working mothers' turnover intentions may indicate that Korean working mothers are faced with a dilemma in balancing their career success and household responsibilities, and, primarily, leave the workplace because of marriage or having a child.¹⁾

2. Korean Working Mothers' Difficulties at the Workplace

In terms of difficulties related to work environment, 58% of respondents disagreed with "I have experienced gender discrimination in terms of wage or promotion process," and 23% of them responded "neutral,," This is perhaps because of the nursing field being a female-dominated workplace. In terms of satisfaction with supervisors' and co-workers' support toward childrearing, 63 % responded with "neutral" and 27 % reported "somewhat satisfied." It is possible that most of the participants felt uncomfortable about expressing dissatisfaction with their supervisors' and other co-workers' attitudes toward childrearing, or that they did not think critically about them. However, in the short-answer questions, many participants said that they require greater understanding from their co-workers' about the difficulties faced by working mothers. Interestingly, some participants said that their fellow workers were considerate of working mothers' hardships, perhaps because nursing is a female-dominated field. Perhaps this distinctive characteristic of their field explains the difference between our results and those of an existing study, which stated that in male-centered Korean companies, working mothers rarely get support from colleagues and are often subordinate to male employees.¹⁾

However, satisfaction with company welfare for child-rearing (mean=2.90 ± 0.72) had the lowest score among the 4 satisfaction scores. This result also supports the results of previous studies that because of a lack of practical and effective family-friendly welfare policies, most Korean working mothers have dual burdens imposed by work and household tasks.²⁾ It is also helpful to remember that the Swedish welfare regime has actively intervened to provide maternity protection for substantial expenses (which employers must cover), such as paid maternity and paternity leave, by increasing their treas-

ury charge.¹¹⁾ It may be beneficial if Korean authorities received suggestions from the exemplary maternity protection policies in Sweden.¹²⁾

Interestingly, most respondents disagreed with the item: "I feel anxiety about low performance appraisal or job security after maternity leave." This is again perhaps because of the nursing field being a female-dominated workplace, which suggests that participants would not experience the same level of concern about using maternity leave as would mothers who work for male-dominated or gender-balanced workplaces. This finding does not support the results of a previous asserting that the Confucian tradition of separating men and women creates gender inequalities in the workplace, making it harder for working mothers to obtain benefits from welfare policies.¹⁾

3. Correlations between Turnover Intention and Satisfaction

Our study also showed correlations between a number of satisfaction scores and Korean working mothers' turnover intentions, which no doubt result from juggling between work and domestic responsibilities. According to the results, the most predictive factors of turnover intention are, in the following order, satisfaction with current childrearing patterns, spousal support, company's welfare policy, and supervisors' and co-workers' attitude toward childrearing. This is the same as Lee's result that parenting stress of nurses showed a significant positive correlation with turnover intention ($r=.41, p < .001$).¹³⁾

Satisfaction with current childrearing patterns had a strong negative correlation with participants' turnover intentions ($r=-.51, p < .001$). This result suggests that because employed women may easily feel guilt due to their absence when raising children, their low satisfaction with childrearing can result in them leaving the workplace. Thus, reliable and high-quality childcare facilities supported by the government or private companies are strongly needed.

Satisfaction with spousal supports ($r=-.43, p=.002$) also had a strong negative correlation with turnover intention. This means that if spousal support were low, working mothers would be more likely to quit their jobs. This result supports the idea that spousal support is more effective for relieving working mothers' stress from child-rearing than is any other support.⁵⁾ Thus, proportionate allocations of household tasks between men and women are recommended in order to prevent working mothers

from leaving paid employment.

Participants' satisfaction with their company's welfare policy had a significant correlation with turnover intention ($r = -.37, p = .009$). This implies that well-organized maternity welfare might reduce the turnover intentions among working mothers.

Supervisors' and co-workers' supportive attitudes toward childrearing also had a significant negative correlation with turnover intention ($r = -.36, p = .013$). This result indicates that fellow workers' positive attitudes may decrease levels of work-home conflicts among working mothers.

Anxiety about low performance appraisal and job security showed no significant correlation with turnover intention ($r = -.26, p = .075$). Therefore, a family-friendly atmosphere in the workplace might enable working mothers to continue their work after having a child.

4. Justification

Because all of our survey questions accurately reflected our research questions—in other words, factors related to domestic problems and occupational difficulties—we consider each question valid and the internal consistency of the questionnaire reliable. In addition, because our survey questions were divided into survey (quantitative) and short-answer questions (qualitative), our study offers both objectivity and an in-depth understanding of the studied issues.

5. Limitations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not obtained for this study. However, the researcher explained to the participants about the protection of personal information and guarantee of secrecy related to this survey, and obtained their informed consent. Indeed, most subjects were willing to participate in this study. In addition, having only 48 subjects may limit the generalizability of our survey compared with other surveys; even so, we noted statistically significant correlations between variables, and our data may be useful for personnel management.

The participants of the survey may be limited because the nurses who took part hold higher education degrees and are professionals with relatively high income, which means that most participants were upper-middle class. Thus, results of this research will not be able to represent Korean working mothers in all social classes. In order to improve the generalizability of the results, further

research should broaden the research population, including a greater variety of occupational clusters.

6. Further Research

Because survey participants' profession is a female-dominated field, our study cannot be representative of Korean working mothers in all work environments, particularly male-dominated or gender-balanced workplaces where the Confucian traditions are still influential. Therefore, in future studies, more generalized survey populations are recommended to enhance the accuracy of our research.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on what factors contribute to work-family conflicts, which can lead to discontinuity in the labor market, in married women with families, and how these women's problems can be alleviated. Keep in mind, however, that our results are primarily based on research participants' opinions.

According to these results, familial support for childrearing is highly correlated with employed mothers' turnover intention. So improvement of familial support for childrearing will reduce married nurses' turnover intention. In addition, in terms of childrearing, governmental welfare policies should provide improved and reliable nurseries to promote working mothers' active participation in the labor market. To be specific, 24-hour nursing facilities are needed for working mothers to allow them to balance work and household duties, because employees are sometimes required to work overtime at night. However, currently, nursery facilities in South Korea close rather early, so picking up children on time is impossible for many working mothers.

REFERENCES

1. Won SY. Working mothers in the Korean gender welfare regime: patriarchal triangle of the state-family-workplace [dissertation]. Nottingham: University of Nottingham; 2003.
2. Won SY. Gendered working-time arrangements and their policy implications: Korean experiences. *Time & Society*. 2012;21(3):285-307.
3. Tracy LS. The exploration of the working mother's plight through psychoanalytic, feminist, and intersubjective approaches [dissertation]. San Diego: Alliant International University; 2002.
4. Lee IW, Kang IS, Cho YS. A study on women workforce de-

- velopment and the determinants on women employment: Based on the business survey in seoul metropolitan area. *Korea Local Adm Rev.* 2010;24(4):363-92.
5. Kim MN. Guilt in raising children, separation anxiety, and turnover intentions of nurses. [dissertation]. Seoul: Ewha Womans University; 2013.
 6. [Policy Briefing] [Internet]. Seoul: Ministry of Gender Equality & Family; c2013. [2013 Women' life through statistics]; 2013 June 27 [cited 2013 June 30]. Available from: http://www.korea.kr/policy/pressReleaseView.do?newsId=155904324&call_from=extlink.
 7. Lee HM. [An era of ten million women workers]. Available from: <http://media.daum.net/society/others/newsview?newsid=20130701201807576>.
 8. Wheelock J, Jones K. 'Grandparents are the next best thing': informal child care for working parents in urban britain. *J Social Policy.* 2002;31(03):441-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047279402006657>.
 9. Craig L. Does father care mean fathers share?: a comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender & Society.* 2006;20(2):259-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243205285212>.
 10. Cho YJ. Study on the mediating effect of problem-focused coping and depression in the relations of social support and work-family conflict/enhancement among Korean working mothers [dissertation]. Seoul: Ewha Womans University; 2012.
 11. Park BR. A study on the characteristics and influential factors of maternity protection policy in Sweden [dissertation]. Seoul: Ewha Womans University; 2003.
 12. Kim YJ. Comparative study of motherhood protection policy in terms of "historical institutionalism": the cases of Korea and Sweden [dissertation]. Seoul: Sogang University; 2007.
 13. Lee JS. The relationship of parenting stress, social support, and turnover intention of nurses. [dissertation]. Daegu Keimyung University; 2012.