

# Work-related Attitudes of Non-regular and Regular Workers in Korea: Exploring Distributive Justice as a Mediator\*

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*Raising the timely issue of the non-regular workforce in South Korea, this article examined the degree and intensity of commitment of non-regular workers (contingent and part-time workers) to their job and organization. The results showed that both contingent and part-time workers were less committed to the organization and job than regular workers. This article showed that work status affected the individual, by influencing subjective stratum and his or her perception of distributive justice, which in turn had an impact on organizational commitment and job involvement. Finally, the article stressed that non-regular workers did not constitute a homogeneous group and that, consequently, part-time workers should be treated as distinct from other types of non-regular workers. The sociological implications of the non-regular workforce were discussed.*

**Keywords:** *contingent worker, distributive justice, Korea, non-regular worker, part-time employment, subjective stratum*

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\*This paper was supported by research funds for newly appointed professors of Chonbuk National University in 2015.

## Introduction

Since the late-1990s when the Korean economy faced financial crisis, the problem of the non-regular workforce has become one of the most controversial issues in Korean society. 'Non-regular workers' are all workers who are not in full-time work on an established, long term contract, so it includes part time workers, workers on short term contracts, and other workers whose employment is contingent upon circumstances in the organizational environment.

During the campaign period for National Assembly elections in April 2012, both the ruling party and the major opposition party proposed optimistic solutions for the improvement of the working conditions of non-regular workers. Saenuri Party (2012), which is the ruling party, published its plan to reduce the number of non-regular workers and to remove discrimination against them. The party promised to introduce a policy that would improve wage differentials between non-regular and regular workers who carry out similar jobs in the same workplace. Similarly, the Democratic United Party (2012), then the major opposition party, proposed a conversion of non-regular workers to regular status, arguing that the conversion would have to be initiated in the public sector and large firms.

In March 2015, Statistics Korea (2015a) reported that the number of non-regular workers reached six million, constituting 32 per cent of all employees. Non-regular workers have to work in unstable, lower-paid jobs in poor working conditions without proper fringe benefits or membership of the major insurance schemes. Non-regular workers were reported to earn only 56% of regular workers' monthly wages (Korea Labor Institute 2014). However, the conditions for workers vary according to the size of the firm that employs them. Some non-regular workers in large firms are better off than regular workers in small and medium-sized firms with respect to wages and working conditions. In practice, over 70% of non-regular workers work in small firms with fewer than 30 employees (Keum 2012).

Most previous studies on non-regular workers in Korea have dealt with such topics as wage differentials between regular and non-regular workers (e.g., Ahn 2001; Kim and Park 2006; Lee and Kim 2009), job satisfaction (Kim 2007; Park and Nho 2002), organizational commitment and job involvement (Koo 2005; Lee and Lee 2005), organizational citizenship behavior (Kwon 2006; Park and Kwon 2004), and unionization and the labor movement (Cho 2011; Jung 2003).

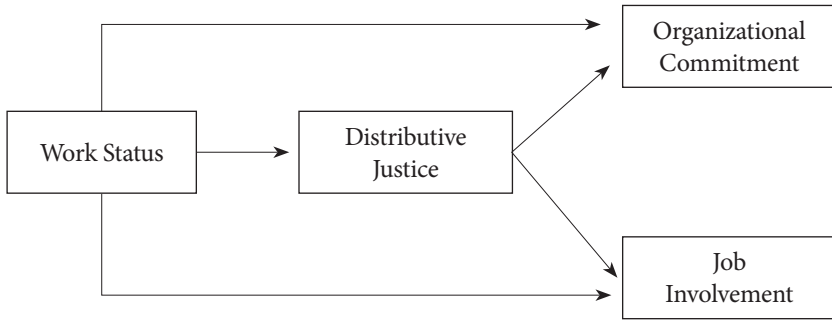


FIG. 1.—Research model

The issue of the non-regular workforce has been approached at three different levels; i.e., firm, labor market and societal levels. At firm level, the management faces challenges of how to make non-regular workers more committed to the organization and thus, to reduce their turnover and intention to leave (Davis-Blake, Broschak and George 2003; Martin and Hafer 1995). At labor market level, a division or segmentation between standard employment relations and non-standard work arrangements has been widely discussed (Cho and Lee 2015; Hudson 2007; Kalleberg 2003; Lee 2007; Song 2012). At societal level, the existence of a massive non-regular workforce in the labor market became a source of social conflict and political instability, as clearly shown in the Korean case (Chun 2009; Lee and Frenkel 2004). Labor unions have been fully engaged in trying to untie this Gordian knot. Internal differentiation and cleavages of the working class have attracted attention from students of social stratification. This article focuses on individual employees at firm, but also discusses the implications for labor market segmentation and socio-politics where appropriate.

This article has three purposes. First, it examines the extent and intensity of non-regular workers' commitment to their organization and their job. Second, it explores how distributive justice mediates the relationship between work status and organizational commitment and job involvement. Third, it examines whether contingent, part-time and non-standard workers, as sub-groups of non-regular workers, exhibit different patterns in their work-related attitudes. Our research model is presented in Figure 1.

## Literature Review

### *Work Status and Work Commitment*

In research into organizational behaviour, work-related attitudes, such as work commitment, have been widely studied as key variables explaining task performance, turnover and organizational citizenship behaviour (Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Morrow 1983). Among those attitudes, organizational commitment and job involvement were the most frequently discussed attitudinal variables. Organizational commitment and job involvement have been treated as the antecedents, correlates or consequences of other work-related variables (Bateman and Strasser 1984; Blau 1987; Curry et al. 1986; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Steers 1977).

Organizational commitment subsumes a member's desire to remain in the organization, willingness to exert effort for the organization and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization (Mowday, Steers and Porter 1979; Porter, Crampon and Smith 1976). On the other hand, job involvement refers to the degree of a worker's engagement in daily work. Lodahl and Kejner (1965, p. 24) defined job involvement as 'the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work, or the importance of work in his total self-image'.

Morrow (1983, p. 486), who identified five forms of work commitment including organizational commitment and job involvement, argued that 'these concepts are partially redundant and insufficiently distinct to warrant continued separation'. Notwithstanding that argument, a high level of job involvement does not necessarily guarantee a high level of commitment to the organization. For this reason, organizational commitment and job involvement have been treated as separate constructs despite a moderately high correlation between the two. The interaction of job involvement and organizational commitment predicted organizational behaviours such as absenteeism and turnover (Blau 1986; Blau and Boal 1989).

Although organizational commitment was often conceptualized as the three-component construct consisting of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990, 1996; Meyer et al. 2002), this article focuses on affective commitment. Affective commitment refers to 'an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization' (Allen and Meyer 1990, p. 1). Previous research on organizational commitment in the Korean case also

focused on affective commitment for various reasons, including the fact that affective commitment has better construct validity than continuance commitment and normative commitment (Chang 2002; Ko, Price and Mueller 1997; Koo 2005).

Previous research on non-regular workers has mostly focused on part-time workers as opposed to full-time workers (Conway and Briner 2002; Jackofsky and Peters 1987; McGinnis and Morrow 1990; Miller and Terborg 1979; Stamper and Van Dyne 2001; Steffy and Jones 1990; Thorsteinson 2003; Walsh 1999). However, research on job related attitudes of part-timers compared with full-time workers produced inconsistent results. While some studies reported that part-time employees are less involved and less satisfied than full-time employees, others reported the opposite. Still others indicated that there is no significant difference between the two groups on job related attitudes (Thorsteinson 2003). Part-time workers may not fully devote themselves to working and the number of work hours varies by individual, depending on how willingly they have become part-time workers and job availability. Thus, we need to examine part-time workers as a subcategory as distinct from other non-regular workers (MOEL 2010). Overall, earlier studies found that non-regular workers show less commitment to the organization and job than regular workers (Seong, Hong and Park 2012). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses.

*H1a:* Non-regular workers will be less committed to the organization than regular workers.

*H1b:* Non-regular workers will be less involved in the job than regular workers.

#### *Distributive Justice as a Mediator in the Relationship between Work Status and Work Commitment*

In the organizational behaviour literature, distributive justice has been treated as one dimension of 'organizational justice' in a broader sense (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt et al. 2001; Greenberg 1987, 1990; Loi, Hang-Yue and Foley 2006). Approaches to justice have been diverse. There has been wide discussion of distributive justice (Adams 1965; Homans 1974) and procedural justice (Folger and Greenberg 1985; Leventhal 1980; Thibaut and Walker 1975). Organizational justice, i.e., justice in organizational settings, can be divided into two types of perceptions of fairness: 'the fairness of outcome distributions or allocations' and 'the fairness of the procedures

used to determine outcome distributions or allocations' (Colquitt et al. 2001, p. 425). In other words, distributive justice in organizations refers to 'the ends achieved' while procedural justice focuses on 'the means used to acquire those ends'. The present study is limited to distributive justice as a consequence of work status and to distributive justice as an antecedent of organizational commitment and job involvement. The research questions in this study are how workers who have different work status perceive the justice or injustice of work-related rewards they receive from the organization, and to what extent such perceptions of fairness or unfairness affect organizational outcomes.

With respect to perceived fairness in the workplace, some scholars argued that part-time workers do not always feel a higher level of deprivation and unfairness than regular workers, particularly among female workers (Seong et al. 2012; Seto, Morimoto and Maruyama 2006). This argument can be based on equity theory (Adams 1965) and the theory of distributive justice (Homans 1974). According to Homans, distributive justice occurs when one feels that one receives the amount of reward one expected as compared to the reward others receive. It is assumed that 'the condition of distributive justice in exchange is one in which Person's rewards are in line with his contributions relative to the rewards and contributions of Other (Homans 1974, p. 266). When the ratio of one's outcomes to one's inputs is equal to the ratio of others', one may feel distributive justice. On the other hand, if one's ratio is lower than others' ratio, one may experience distributive injustice. Part-time workers may or may not perceive their outcomes (wages and rewards) as compared to their inputs (contributions) are about right in comparison with contingent and regular workers.

The direct and indirect effects of distributive justice on organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment and job involvement were studied using models that include mediating or moderating variables (e.g., Chang 2002). The responses to injustice may appear in the form of frustration, anger, grievance and even hostility toward others who are believed to be the beneficiaries of the injustice. Within the boundary of the organization they belong to or the job they are engaged in, the responses are expressed as the degree of organizational commitment and job engagement. However, grievances derived from perceived injustice are sometimes directed toward the distributive system itself at the societal level. If non-regular workers, particularly contingent workers, feel that they are not given opportunities for secure long-term contracts and job stability, this could be a source of political conflict and social unrest (see Shin 2013).

The issues of non-regular workers in Korea were not limited to a single organization, but became critical to the political agenda to alleviate confrontation between management and labor at the national level. When they assess distributive justice, people tend to compare themselves with others whom they believe are similar to themselves in certain aspects rather than with those who are dissimilar. If non-regular workers feel unfairly rewarded in relation to their efforts and performance, as well as their educational level, expertise and job experience, when compared with regular workers on the same assembly line or in the same workplace, they are less likely to commit themselves fully to the organization and will be less involved in their job. Such lack of devotion to the workplace lowers their performance and productivity. Thus, we predict the following hypotheses:

*H2a:* Distributive justice will mediate the relationship between work status and organizational commitment in such a way that non-regular workers will report a lower level of distributive justice than regular workers and the lower distributive justice will reduce the degree of organizational commitment.

*H2b:* Distributive justice will mediate the relationship between work status and job involvement in such a way that non-regular workers will report a lower level of distributive justice than regular workers and the lower distributive justice will reduce the degree of job involvement.

### *Does Non-regular Workforce Constitute a Homogeneous Group?*

Non-regular workers are classified into three categories: contingent workers, part-time workers and non-standard workers. Contingent workers include both fixed-term contract workers and temporary workers without fixed-term contracts. Part-time workers normally work less than 36 hours per week. Non-standard workers include agency/subcontract workers, independent contract workers, daily workers, and workers who work mostly at home (KNSO 2012). Part-time workers are, by definition, non-regular workers whether they choose to work part-time or have that status forced upon them, but full-time workers could be either regular or non-regular. In a society where the proportion of part-time workers is relatively low and other types of non-regular workers predominate, we need to examine the differences between regular standard workers and 'full-time' contingent workers in their attitudes to work and to their organization.

The issue of non-regular workers in Korea has mostly focused on agency and in-house subcontracted workers. A survey carried out by Ministry of

Employment and Labor (MOEL 2010) with firms of 300 and more employees revealed that 41.2% used workers who were working on subcontracts. Labor unions have been more concerned about agency or subcontracted workers. Theoretically, agency workers belong to another company that subcontracts workers to meet the needs of the primary contracting company. Those workers are dispatched to the latter company and work on the same assembly line as regular employees of the primary company. In February 2012, the Supreme Court of Korea ruled against Hyundai Motor Company, South Korea's largest automaker, after a more than seven year controversy that in-house subcontract workers who have been employed for more than two years should be recognized as regular workers. The primary company, however, took the view that workers of subcontractors are not non-regular workers of the company, but are regular workers of the subcontractors.

The number of part-time workers in Korea was estimated at around 2.1 million people, which constitute 11.1% of total employment in 2015, up from 7.8% in 2007 (Statistics Korea 2015a). Part-time work is not very widespread, even though there has been a rising trend in Korea, lower than most major OECD countries. According to OECD statistics, Switzerland (36.0%) and the Netherlands (35.9%) have the highest percentage of part-time workers, followed by Australia (30.6%), Germany (27.1%), UK (26.2%), Japan (22.7%), US (18.9%) and France (18.8%). The average percentage in OECD countries was 20.0% (OECD 2015).

Part-time workers are more often women, or younger workers or older workers. These groups may choose part-time status voluntarily. Women in particular, who have to combine child-rearing with work, tend to change their working status from full-time to part-time temporarily during the period when they are raising children and resume their full-time status after a certain period of time. According to a survey of the economically active population conducted in March 2015 (Statistics Korea 2015b), 47.6% of part-timers were voluntary.

Recent research suggested that part-time workers should not be regarded as an undifferentiated homogeneous group (Senter and Martin 2007; Walsh 1999). Variation among part-time workers may be greater than differences between full-time and part-time workers (Barling and Gallagher 1996). Walsh (1999) highlighted diversity in the part-time workforce, reporting that a substantial number of female part-time workers were satisfied with their current employment status, but there was still a significant minority who wanted to change their work arrangements to full-time status. The level of organizational commitment among part-time workers depends



on their perceptions of relative equity, namely their perception of their treatment relative to full-time workers, not on their non-regular status itself (Tansky, Gallagher and Wetzel 1997). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H3:** Part-time workers perceive a lower level of distributive injustice than contingent workers. The lower level of distributive injustice will lead to higher levels of organizational commitment and job involvement.

## Data and Methods

### *Data*

For this study, we utilized data from the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) implemented by the Survey Research Center (SRC) of Sungkyunkwan University in 2009 (SRC 2009). This university is a member institution of International Social Survey Program (ISSP) representing Korea, and thus questionnaire items used in KGSS were jointly developed with other institutions of 48 countries. In this nationwide survey, the sample was drawn from males and females who were aged 18 or above by multi-stage area probability sampling. The target sample size was 2,500, but the number of the usable sample was reduced to 1,599 by the process of data cleaning. For the purpose of this research, only contingent/non-standard (hereafter contingent) and part-time workers were selected as non-regular workers together with regular workers.<sup>1</sup> The final sample size was reduced to 657 (only employees). Of 657 respondents, 34.7% were engaged in services, 21.9% in manufacturing, 16.7% in wholesale and retail trade, 7.0% in finance, insurance and real estate, 6.7% in public administration, 5.6% in construction, 5.5% in transportation and communications, and 1.8% in other industries.

### *Measures*

*Organizational commitment* was measured by 3 items adapted from Marsden, Kalleberg and Cook (1993). The sample items were: 'I am willing to work

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<sup>1</sup> The total of 1,599 respondents consists of 657 employees (41.1%), 306 self-employed (19.1%) and 635 unemployed or economically inactive people (39.7%).

harder than I have to in order to help this organization succeed', 'I am proud to be working for this organization' and 'I would turn down another job for more pay in order to stay with this organization'. Responses to these statements were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .69.

*Job involvement* was also measured with a 3-item scale modified from the items developed by Kanungo (1982). The items were: 'I am willing to develop my career in the current job', 'My current job is ideal for me to commit myself to for life' and 'If I started my career over again, I would choose my current job'. Responses to these statements were also measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The reliability coefficient was .81.

To measure the degree of *distributive justice*, we used a modified version of the questions originally used in the work of Price and Mueller (1986). The questions were: 'How fair or unfair do you feel the rewards you receive from your workplace are in terms of intelligence, educational achievement, skill, effort, job tenure, performance, responsibility and stress?' The responses for each of the eight criteria were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 ('very unfair') to 5 ('very fair'). The alpha coefficient of this scale was .92.

*Age* was measured by years of age. *Gender* was coded 1 for males and 0 for females. *Education* was measured by years of schooling. *Monthly earnings* were measured in millions of won. *Job tenure* was measured by years of working in their current workplace.

The *subjective stratum* is the level in society that the individual perceives himself or herself to be in, using 10 to indicate the highest stratum of Korean society and 1 to indicate the lowest stratum in Korean society. To measure *subjective stratum* we used the following item: 'Suppose that 1 indicates the lowest stratum and 10 the highest stratum in Korean society. Please tell us the number that represents the stratum that you belong to.' The scale ranges from 1 to 10.

*Work status* was coded 1 for regular workers and 0 for non-regular workers. To examine the difference between contingent and part-time workers within the category of non-regular workers as compared with regular workers, we created separate dummy variables for *contingent worker* and *part-time worker*, respectively. *Part-time worker* was coded 1 for part-time workers and 0 for regular and contingent workers, and similarly for *contingent worker*.

**TABLE 1**  
**MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES BY**  
**WORK STATUS**

Variables	Regular Workers	Non-regular Workers	
		Contingent	Part-time
Age (years)	39.1 (9.0)	41.1 (12.6)	37.4 (13.0)
Gender (male=1/female=0)	.65 (.48)	.48 (.50)	.34 (.48)
Education (years)	14.5 (2.8)	12.0 (4.1)	11.7 (4.0)
Earnings (in 10,000 won)	272.6 (141.4)	126.0 (67.7)	114.2 (116.6)
Family Income (in 10,000 won)	474.3 (289.5)	307.9 (205.0)	349.1 (349.7)
Job Tenure (years)	8.1 (8.0)	3.2 (4.9)	2.6 (4.7)
N	465	63	129

NOTE.—Standard deviations are parentheses.

## Results

### *Preliminary observation*

Means and standard deviations of demographic and socio-economic variables by work status are presented in Table 1. Average age was highest for contingent workers and lowest for part-time workers. Females were more strongly represented among part-time and contingent workers than among regular workers. In our sample, two-thirds of part-time workers were women while the same percentage of regular workers was men. Regular workers had the longest period in school of the three groups. Contingent workers earned only 46% of the regular workers' wages, and part-time workers earned even less (42%). However, as far as total family income is concerned, the families of part-timers had a higher income than the families of contingent workers, which implies that part-time workers may not be the main breadwinner in the family but play a supplementary role in earning a living. As to job tenure, regular workers worked a much longer period at the current workplace than non-regular workers.

Work commitment in a broader sense has been regarded as being composed of various sub-dimensions, including organizational commitment and job involvement. To test the distinctiveness of the constructs of organizational commitment and job involvement, we carried out confirmatory factor analysis for these two scales. The result showed that two separate scales are more appropriate than treating them as a single scale. The

two-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 197.68$ ,  $df = 8$ ; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; RMR = .023) improved the fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 336.66$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ) over a one-factor model combining organizational commitment and job involvement as a single factor ( $\chi^2 = 534.34$ ,  $df = 9$ ; CFI = .90; TLI = .84; RMR = .032).

Because the data used in this study were collected using a cross-sectional research designs, we may have to check whether correlations between constructs were contaminated by the presence of common method variance (CMV). To avoid common method bias, Lindell and Whiney (2001) suggested partial correlation procedures, introducing a method variance marker variable which is supposed to have no theoretical relationship with criterion or predictor variables.

In this article, 'perceptions of group conflict' (M) was chosen as the marker variable that is theoretically irrelevant to organizational commitment (Y) and job involvement (Z) as the criterion variables. The perceptions of group conflict were measured using four 4-point items. The question was 'What do you think about group conflict between the rich and the poor?', and the responses were from (1) 'none' to (4) 'very serious'. The alpha coefficient for this scale was .66. The correlations between the marker and criterion variables were not statistically significant ( $r = .05$ ,  $r = .02$ , respectively). Distributive justice (X) as the theoretically relevant predictor had a statistically significant correlation with the criterion variables ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while group conflict, as the theoretically unrelated predictor, had no significant correlation with the criterion variables. Partial correlation coefficients between the predictor and the criterion variables controlling the CMV ( $r_{YX.M} = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r_{ZX.M} = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that CMV did not inflate the true correlation in a significant way.

### *Work Status as an Antecedent of Organizational Commitment and Job Involvement*

The zero-order correlation coefficient between work status and organizational commitment was .08 ( $p < .05$ ) and that between work status and job involvement was .17 ( $p < .001$ ) (see Table A-1 in Appendix). Overall, non-regular workers were less committed to the organization and their job than regular workers.

However, there was no significant difference in organizational commitment between regular and non-regular workers after controlling for demographics, socio-economic status (SES) and subjective stratum ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ; Model 3 of Table 2). As far as job involvement was concerned,

TABLE 2  
REGRESSION ANALYSES OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND JOB COMMITMENT ON INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (N= 657)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables											
	Distributive Justice				Organizational Commitment				Job Involvement			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8				
<i>Demographics</i>												
Age	-03	-03	.12**	.13**	.14**	.10*	.10*	.11*				
Gender	-.11**	-.11**	-.06	-.05	-.01	-.14**	-.14**	-.12**				
SES												
Education	-.07	-.07	-.05	-.05	-.02	.11*	.11*	.13**				
Earnings	.22***	.22***	.11*	.10*	.03	.05	.05	.00				
Tenure	-.02	-.03	.16**	.16**	.17***	.10+	.10+	.11*				
<i>Self-identified Stratum</i>												
Subjective stratum	.14**	.14**	.11*	.11*	.06	.04	.04	.01				
<i>Work Status</i>												
Regular worker	-.11**		-.01			.11*						
Contingent worker		.05		-.03	-.05		-.06	-.07+				
Part-time worker		.11*		.03	-.00		-.10*	-.13**				
<i>Mediator</i>												
Distributive justice					.34***			.23***				
R squared	.06	.06	.11	.11	.22	.09	.09	.14				

NOTE.—Standardised regression coefficients are reported. Gender is coded as 1 for males and 0 for females. Contingent worker and part-time worker are both dummy variables with regular worker as a reference.  
+p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

regular workers were more committed to their job than non-regular workers ( $\beta = .11$ ; Model 6 of Table 2). Particularly, part-time workers were less committed to the job they performed than regular and contingent workers, controlling for age, gender, education, earnings, job tenure and subjective stratum ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Model 7). Therefore, Hypothesis 1B was supported, but Hypothesis 1A was not.

### *Work Status as an Antecedent of Distributive Justice*

The zero-order correlation coefficient between work status and distributive justice was  $-.03$  ( $p = \text{n.s.}$ ), which indicated that there was no statistical difference in perceived distributive justice between regular and non-regular workers (Table A-1 in Appendix). However, holding demographics, SES and self-identified stratum constant, regular workers were more likely to report a lower level of distributive justice than non-regular workers, contrary to our expectation ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Model 1 of Table 2). Here, earnings and subjective stratum may play the role of 'suppressor variables'. The term 'suppressor variables' refers to test factors which lead to the absence of a relationship by cancelling out, reducing or concealing the true relationship between two variables (Rosenberg 1968). Thus, the absence of correlation between work status and distributive justice may be due to the intervention of third variables such as earnings and subjective stratum, which positively affect distributive justice. These intervening variables were positively associated with work status. In the absence of these intervening variables, regular workers had a higher level of distributive injustice than non-regular workers.

According to Rosenberg (1968), the weakness or absence of the relationship brought about by the presence of suppressor variables does not necessarily indicate that the theory is defective or wrong. He stated that 'the theory may be sound, and the data, if properly analyzed, may support it' (Rosenberg 1968, p.85). If we divide non-regular status into two groups, using the dummies for contingent and part-time workers, part-time workers reported a higher level of distributive justice than regular and contingent workers, after controlling demographics, SES and self-identified stratum ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but no statistical difference was found between regular and contingent workers in predicting distributive justice (Model 2 of Table 2). In Models 1 and 2, the partial regression coefficient of gender was  $-.11$  ( $p < .01$ ), which indicated that male workers were more likely to perceive distributive injustice than females, all other things being equal. Female workers may feel a

lower degree of relative deprivation than males because they have different reference groups.

#### *Distributive Justice as a Mediator*

Distributive justice affected both organizational commitment and job involvement significantly, holding constant the other variables under consideration ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = .23, p < .001$ , respectively, Model 5 and Model 8 of Table 2). As shown above, work status did not seem to lead to significantly increased perception of distributive justice without considering controls, and thus, distributive justice must be carefully examined as a mediator in the relationships between work status and organizational commitment and job involvement. Since work status was strongly associated with gender, education, earnings, job tenure and subjective stratum, we should also explore intermediaries connecting work status and distributive justice.

#### *Modified Model: Subjective Stratum as an Intermediary between Work Status and Distributive Justice*

To examine the role of an intermediary between work status and distributive justice, we introduced the subjective stratum, measured on a 10-point scale, as described above. The mean score of subjective stratum was 4.5 (SD = 1.6). The mean of part-time workers was 4.0 and of contingent workers 4.1, both of which were statistically significantly different from 5.0 for regular workers. To examine the difference in the score by work status, we carried out regression analysis, taking subjective stratum as the dependent variable and the two work status dummy variables, contingent worker and part-time worker, as independent variables. These two variables had negative coefficients that were statistically significant at 0.1% level ( $\beta = -.16, -.24$ , respectively; Step 1 in Table A-2), which indicated that both contingent and part-time workers placed themselves in a lower position on the stratification ladder of Korean society than regular workers. However, when we control for demographic and socio-economic variables, the partial regression coefficients that predict the subjective stratum to which contingent workers and part-time workers belong are reduced to a non-significant level, since education and earnings are highly associated with subjective stratum (Step 2).

Results of the modified model are presented in Figure 2. Only significant paths were included, together with their coefficients. The model explained

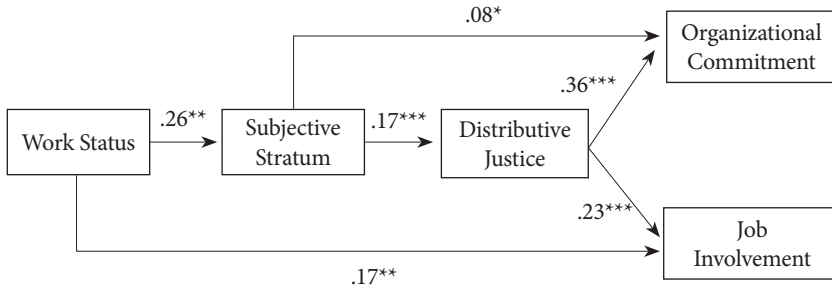


FIG. 2.—Revised Model: The Mediating Role of Subjective Stratum and Distributive Justice in the Relationship between Work Status and Organizational Commitment and Job Involvement

that work status affected subjective stratum which led to perceptions of distributive justice, which in turn led to organizational commitment and job involvement. Thus, Hypotheses 2A and 2B were both not supported as they were, but the effect of work status on distributive justice mediated by subjective stratum leads to both organizational commitment and job involvement. Even though work status led to organizational commitment and job involvement through subjective stratum and distributive justice, the direct path of work status to job involvement was also found significant at the 0.1% level. And the direct path of subjective stratum to organizational commitment was also significant at the 5% level.

### *Heterogeneity of the Non-regular Workforce*

Results from Model 2 of Table 2 indicated that part-time workers feel higher levels of distributive justice than contingent workers and regular workers, after controlling for demographics, SES and subjective stratum ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ). However, when perceptions of distributive justice and other controls were introduced as predictors of the two work-related attitude variables, part-time workers were seen to be no different from regular and contingent workers in predicting organizational commitment (Models 4 and 5), and lower degrees of job involvement than regular workers (Models 7 and 8). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported.



## Discussion

Results showed that work status affected subjective stratum which led to perceptions of distributive justice. The degree of perceived distributive justice positively influenced both organizational commitment and job involvement. Despite controlling for mediating variables, work status directly influenced job involvement, which indicated that regular workers were more likely to be involved in their current job than non-regular workers. But work status led to organizational commitment only indirectly through subjective stratum and distributive justice.

In Table 2, age turned out to be a major variable in explaining the degree of organizational commitment and job involvement. Older employees were more likely to devote themselves to the organization and the job they were engaged in. Except for this, organizational commitment and job involvement were predicted by different variables. Female workers were more engaged in their job than males, whereas no gender difference was found in predicting organizational commitment. Earnings were important for employees' commitment to the organization, but they were not significantly related to job involvement. Regular workers were more involved in their work than both contingent and part-time workers. Distributive justice, however, strongly affected both organizational commitment and job involvement.

The results implied that only education and earnings affected self-identified stratum, controlling for other variables including work status variables. The lower scores of contingent and part-time workers on the scale of subjective stratum than regular workers were explained by other socio-economic variables rather than work status *per se*. In fact, the lower levels of the educational achievement and earnings of non-regular workers led to lower subjective status. From this finding we can infer that if workers received more education and/or higher earnings, they may identify themselves with a higher status regardless of whether they were regular, contingent or part-time workers.

### *Sociological Implications of Non-regular Workers*

Internal differentiation or heterogeneity among workers has attracted much attention from students of stratification. Since the 1970s, a theory of labor market segmentation emerged, which identified differentiated segments of the labor market, in contrast with the views of neo-classical theory

(Doeringer and Piore 1971; Gordon, Edwards and Reich 1982; Kalleberg 2003; Keizer 2008; Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973). Reich et al. (1973, p. 359) defined labor market segmentation as 'the historical process whereby political-economic forces encourage the division of the labor market into separate submarkets, or segments, distinguished by different labor market characteristics and behavioral rules'. They suggested that these labor market conditions were the outcome of certain segmentation processes. The processes included segmentation into primary and secondary markets, segmentation into independent and subordinate jobs within the primary sector, segmentation by race and segmentation by sex. The secondary market, as opposed to the primary market, is characterized by low wages, unstable working conditions, high turnover and few career ladders. Jobs in the secondary market are predominantly filled by women, youths and minority workers. In this line of reasoning, scholars often attempted to explain the issue of the non-regular workforce in Korea in the framework of the theory of labor market segmentation (Bosch and Charest 2008; Lee and Frenkel 2004).

From a class perspective, class theorists were concerned with the issue of solidarity and/or exclusion between workers having different interests in the labor market (Cho 2008; Jung 2003). Based on a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with members of the Public Transportation Federation, Cho (2008) found that there is a class cleavage between regular and non-regular workers in Korea. Regular workers tend to agree that there should be improved job stability and working conditions for non-regular workers, but they believe it is only acceptable on the condition that their own interests are not threatened by the existence of non-regular workers.

The exclusion of non-regular workers, particularly in-house subcontract workers, by regular employees can be explained by the theory of social closure (Parkin 1974, 1979). Following Weber (1968), Parkin (1974, p. 3) defined the concept of social closure as 'the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible'. According to Parkin (1974), the predominant form of social closure in all stratified systems was a strategy of exclusion that restricts access to valued resources to a limited circle of eligible people. Confronting their exclusion from the dominant group, the excluded group also attempts to secure collective closure by means of solidarity.

## Conclusion

Those who make political and governmental decisions in Korea have considered various policy options to solve the problem of non-regular workers in such a way as to reduce the wage gap between regular and non-regular workers, and to convert their status to 'regular'. Non-regular workers are obviously underprivileged, but it is hard to say that they constitute an enclave segregated from the mainstream society. There is no evidence of a caste-like demarcation, segregating non-regular workers from regular workers in Korean society, since the disadvantages of the former do not coincide with ethnic, racial or religious differences.

Non-regular workers are more likely to fall into the category of working poor, because of their low wages, but the labor market includes a wide range of young people who have never had an opportunity to be employed. The labor market is not simply divided into segments by a regular / non-regular line. It is quite common to find college graduates among non-regular workers and high school graduates among regular workers. For example, a substantial number of school teachers at all levels are hired on a short-term contract basis, with no guarantee that their contract will be renewed, or that they will have permanent employment. By reducing wage differentials between regular and non-regular workers and by raising the opportunities for workers to move from non-regular to regular status, it may be possible to enhance the productivity and commitment of non-regular workers in the workplace and alleviate their dissatisfaction with job instability.

Finally, it may be necessary to take a close look at 'voluntary' part-time workers, who are less likely to be the main breadwinner in their household and who want to balance work and family commitments for various reasons including child care, leisure and self-development. These workers should not be treated simply as the category of 'non-regular', but should be regarded as a separate category, distinct from other types of non-regular workers.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Despite the contributions that this study makes to the literature on organizational behaviour and labor markets, it has some limitations. First, this study was limited by the data, in the sense that data were public data that had previously been collected for other purposes. This meant that the key variables measured were not fully tailored to the purposes of the present

study, because the data set had to cover diverse issues concerning social inequality in a single nationwide survey. Second, the data were drawn from a nationwide sample, which has both advantages and disadvantages. Subjects in the majority of studies on work-related attitudes and behaviour were limited to a certain occupation (e.g., teachers, nurses, or government officials), or a single organization, so that they were more homogeneous in many respects. Data collected from a single firm would make it possible to draw detailed pictures and incorporate firm-related variables. Third, this study was based on cross-sectional data which makes it difficult to infer causality between constructs. Although we confirmed the absence of serious biases that might be derived from self-reported data, the research design in future studies could include measuring key constructs by different methods and over extended periods of time to improve the inference of causal relationships. Fourth, as the study was based on practices that are unique to Korea, further research is needed to check the generalizability of the conclusions to other contexts, in both advanced and less-developed economies.

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Appendix: Table A-1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Work status (1=regular)	.71	.45									
2. Age (years)	39.8	11.7	.02								
3. Gender (male=1)	.48	.50	.24***	-.04							
4. Education (years)	13.7	3.4	.36***	-.27***	.19***						
5. Earnings (10,000won)	240.4	188.9	.44***	.08*	.32***	.40***					
6. Tenure (years)	6.6	7.6	.32***	.46***	.25***	.14***	.49***				
7. Subjective stratum	4.5	1.6	.26***	-.12***	.08**	.43***	.43***	.23***			
8. Organizational commitment	10.4	2.4	.08*	.23***	.03	.01	.20***	.27***	.15***		
9. Job involvement	9.4	2.9	.17***	.14**	-.04	.13**	.16***	.20***	.14***	.59***	
10. Distributive justice	26.2	6.1	-.03	.02	-.05	.03	.15***	.03	.15***	.37***	.24***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Appendix: Table A-2: Regression Analyses of Subjective Stratum on Work Status and Socioeconomic Variables

(N=657, Unit: %)

Independent Variables	Step 1	Step 2
Contingent worker		-.02
Part-time worker		-.03
Age	-.16***	.01
Gender	-.24***	-.05
Education		.30***
Earnings		.31***
R Squared	.07	.26

NOTE.—Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

Self-identified stratum ranges from 1(bottom) to 10 (top).

\*\*\*p <.001.

