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## **Jobs for Mothers: Married Women's Labor Force Reentry and Part-Time, Temporary Employment in Japan<sup>1</sup>**

**Wei-hsin Yu<sup>2</sup>**

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*This paper explains the increase in middle-aged women reentering the labor force in Japan and their concentration in part-time or temporary employment. Existing explanations attribute women's concentration in part-time employment too narrowly to supply or demand factors. In Japan, both the labor supply of middle-aged women and the demand for part-time workers have increased, but these conditions channel middle-aged women into part-time or temporary employment only when systematic barriers obstruct their access to full-time jobs. Because it plays an important role in women's employment decisions, the rigidity of standard, full-time employment needs greater attention in studies of nonstandard, atypical types of work.*

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**KEY WORDS:** part-time and temporary employment; gender stratification; rigidity of standard employment; labor force reentry.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sociological research has paid increasing attention to so-called nonstandard, atypical, or contingent jobs (Appelbaum, 1987; Kalleberg, 2000; Parker, 1998; Tilly, 1996). Within the category of nonstandard work arrangements, part-time employment has been the dominant form, and it has increased most rapidly of all types of nonstandard, employment, particularly in advanced industrial countries (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997; Houseman and Osawa, 1995; Smith *et al.*, 1998). The continuous expansion of the share

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of Association for Asian Studies, Washington DC.

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of part-time workers in the labor force in advanced economies makes part-time employment an important topic to study (e.g., Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995; Tilly, 1996).

The growth of part-time employment across advanced economies corresponds to a great extent to the increase in female labor force participation in nonagricultural sectors (Blossfeld, 1997; Hakim, 1997; Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995). The matching of women, in particular married women, to part-time employment attracts much attention from both economists and sociologists (e.g., Ermisch and Wright, 1993; Folk and Beller, 1993; Miller, 1993; Nagase, 1997; Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995). In view of evidence that part-timers are likely to obtain lower wage returns to individual qualifications than full-timers (Kalleberg, 2000), the feminization of part-time jobs generally indicates increasing gender inequality. Thus, explaining women's concentration in part-time work enhances our understandings of gender stratification.

This study, using the case of Japan, searches for a further understanding of married women's apparent restriction to part-time employment. It has been well-documented that Japan, among developed countries, has a relatively high proportion of women in nonstandard work arrangements, in particular part-time employment (Brinton, 1993; Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995). What makes the Japanese case particularly puzzling is that older married women, rather than mothers with young children, constitute the majority of part-timers in the society. As the following section will show, the Japanese case presents empirical challenges to several existing theories on married women's concentration in part-time work. This study aims to solve this empirical puzzle by factoring the characteristics of standard employment into the equation. I argue that structural barriers embedded in the standard employment system play a critical role in pushing new types of participants in the labor market—married women who reenter the labor force in the case of Japan—into nonstandard employment. By solving this empirical puzzle, this study develops a general explanation of women's employment options over the life cycle.

Although most studies addressed and discussed in this paper, and in particular the studies on Western countries, consider only part-time employment, I combine part-time and all kinds of temporary jobs into one category for the Japanese case. I do so because (1) these types of employment indeed share certain features of nonstandard employment status; (2) the survey data and various government-generated statistical reports used in this study coded part-time and some types of temporary employment together; and most importantly, (3) the definitions of nonstandard employment in Japan are so fluid that the classification based on the designated status would not be very meaningful. There are several ways of designating part-time and

temporary workers in Japan, including *pato* or *arubaito*, *rinjikoyo*, *haken*, *keiyaku*, *shokutaku*, and so forth. Although each category listed above has slightly different implications for forms of work,<sup>3</sup> lines drawn between the categories are somewhat obscure, and uses of the terms vary from employer to employer (Houseman and Osawa, 1995, 1998; JIL, 1991). Moreover, part-time employment in Japan often refers to the status of a job rather than the amount of time spent working, so using “hours on the job” would not necessarily help distinguish part-time from temporary employment. There is great variation among part-time workers with respect to hours spent at work (JIL, 1991), and a good proportion of those classified as part-timers by their employers work as much as their regular, full-time counterparts (Houseman and Osawa, 1995; Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998).

Combining part-time and temporary workers as a research category does not mean that there are no differences between the two groups. Rather, this research intends to acknowledge shared features of part-time and temporary employment such as instability and low return on individual qualifications despite the heterogeneity among the incumbents (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998). Nevertheless, it is important to note that among married female workers in Japan the number of temporary workers (i.e., *rinjikoyo*, *haken*, *keiyaku*, and *shokutaku* workers) is far smaller than the number of part-timers (i.e., *pato* or *arubaito* workers) (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; JIL, 1991). In view of this proportion, I argue that it is not inappropriate to compare this study with previous ones on women and part-time employment. A later section defining variables for the statistical analysis present more discussion on the similarities and differences between part-time and temporary workers in Japan.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND EMPIRICAL CHALLENGES

Prior research has adopted several approaches to explain married women’s concentration in part-time and nonstandard employment. The family cycle arguments focus on women’s need to resolve family-work conflicts

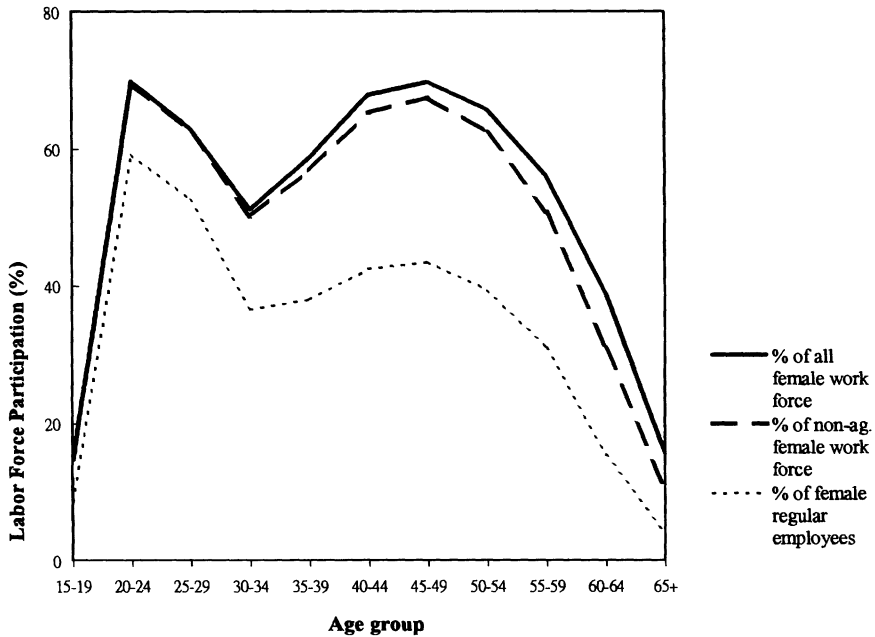
<sup>3</sup>In general, *pato* refers to part-time employment, although it does not necessarily require fewer work hours than full-time employment. An *arubaito* job is a part-time and side job to the job holder, who is likely to have a primary devotion to study or a full-time job. Hence, students who work part-time are usually considered a *rubaito* workers, rather than *pato* workers. *Rinjikoyo* literally means temporary employment, and the work terms and duration can vary to a great extent. *Haken*, *keiyaku*, or *shokutaku* workers are mostly hired from a dispatching agency for temporary help. The hours and job content of *haken*, *keiyaku*, and *shokutaku* jobs are usually quite close to those of full-time employees’ work, but the former are under fixed, short-term contracts and likely to be exempt from firm subsidies and fringe benefits. Among all these types of work, *pato* is the dominant form of employment for nonregular (nonfull-time) employees.

and demonstrate that women's life cycles and domestic responsibilities greatly effect their movement into part-time employment (Drobnic *et al.*, 1999; Folk and Beller, 1993; Miller, 1993; Mincer, 1985; Moen, 1985; Perry, 1988, 1990; Walsh, 1999). Requiring fewer work hours and providing more flexibility than full-time employment, part-time employment is argued to be attractive to those managing child rearing and employment at the same time. Also emphasizing labor supply conditions, Hakim (1995, 1996) argues that a good number of married women work part-time because they prioritize nonmarket activities. This group of arguments implies that part-time employment is a transitional form of work and women will move back to full-time employment once the demand for childcare or their orientation toward nonmarket activities changes. This type of explanation to some extent assumes that women can move between part-time and full-time employment at no cost.

The Japanese case renders empirical challenges to this group of theories. The family cycle argument does not explain Japanese women's movement between full-time and part-time employment as well as it does in Western countries. Japanese women rarely move back to full-time employment after life cycle stage changes. To illustrate this, I show the percentage of women in regular, full-time employee status in contrast to the percentage of all female workers by age group in 1995 (Fig. 1). A large proportion of older working women in Japan were not regular, full-time employees. The results are striking when we compare women in their 30s with women in their 40s, two groups that were likely to be in different phases in the family cycle and have different family responsibilities. There was only a small increase in the percentage of women in standard, full-time employment between these two age groups despite a much greater proportion of women in the labor force in their 40s.

In fact, older women constitute the majority of part-timers in Japan. According to Houseman and Osawa (1995), 70.4% of women in *pato* employment (the dominant type of part-time employment status) in 1992 were over 40 years. Nagase's research reports an even more peculiar finding (1997). Her multinomial logit results indicate that among working women with preschool children, full-time employment is more common than part-time employment (Table IV, p. 38). These empirical results indicate that women's labor supply over different stages of the family life cycle alone is insufficient to explain Japanese women's employment patterns.

One may argue that married women in Japan remain in part-time employment after the early stage of child rearing because they prioritize nonmarket activities. This is accurate perhaps for some Japanese women. Nonetheless, work hours of part-time employment are not necessarily short or flexible in Japan (Houseman and Osawa, 1998). In addition, reported statistics of the Employment Security Bureau suggest that there are many



**Fig. 1.** Percentages of female workers, nonagricultural female workers, and nonagricultural regular employees in the female population by age group, 1995. *Source:* Statistics Bureau, Management and Coordination Agency, Japan, *Annual Report on the Labour Force Survey*, 2, 1995.

involuntary part-timers. For example, the total number of new applicants for part-time jobs throughout the year of 1995 was 13,300, while 114,120 part-time job placements were arranged by all public job-matching services during the same year. The number of part-time jobs available largely outnumbered applicants. The numbers suggest that many part-time job placements were made without applicants wanting a part-time job in the first place.

Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Labour of Japan (1995), more than 70% of full-time jobs for women are managerial, professional, and clerical, while almost two-thirds of part-time and temporary jobs are in manufacturing, sales, and service occupations; these require more manual labor and have low occupational status. The low status of part-time and temporary jobs in Japan makes it unlikely that older women, who are not tightly restrained by domestic responsibility, would actually prefer part-time or temporary work to full-time, regular employment.

The apparent existence of involuntary part-timers makes labor demand explanations more plausible. This type of explanation emphasizes employers' interests in using part-time or temporary labor to increase staffing

flexibility as well as reduce labor costs (Houseman and Abraham, 1993; Houseman and Osawa, 1995, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990; Tilly, 1996). It suggests that the growth of women in part-time employment in developed countries results from the fact that employers have intentionally chosen more part-time labor at the expense of full-time employment.

Despite a drastic increase in Japan in the demand for part-time or temporary work over the last two decades (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Houseman and Osawa, 1998; Lincoln and Nakata, 1997; Yu, 1999), this type of explanation still does not explain why older married women are the ones filling the increasing part-time positions. The increasing demand for part-time workers has not affected all demographic groups equally. According to *Hataraku josei no jijo* (The Situation of Working Women) prepared by the Ministry of Labour in 1995, about 95% of *pato* (part-time) workers are women. Male nonregular employees are mostly *arubaito* workers, who by definition have a main job elsewhere or are still students. Furthermore, among male *pato* workers, the dominant group comprises workers over 60 years (Houseman and Osawa, 1995, 1998). The statistics indicate that men work part-time only before they leave school and start their “real jobs,” or after they are forced to retire from regular, full-time employment, while part-time jobs are still predominately “women’s jobs.” Therefore, the increasing demand for part-time and temporary workers is not met even in part by the more expensive labor force of male workers. The level of demand in nonstandard employment alone is not sufficient to explain this fact.

Several other studies explain women’s concentration in part-time employment by examining state policies and their effects on married women’s employment. For example, comparative studies show that countries with beneficial family policies penalize part-time employment less and therefore encourage more married women to work part-time (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997; Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990). However, Rosenfeld and Birkelund, acknowledged that the considerable proportion of part-timers among female workers in Japan cannot be explained by beneficial family policies or a sizable public sector (1995).

Other related studies show that patriarchal states that perpetuate the male-breadwinner model drive married women into nonstandard types of employment as a way to secure the traditional “gender contract” while facilitating women’s labor force participation (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Gottfried and O’Reilly, 2000; Pyle, 1990). This type of argument suggests that the Japanese state plays an essential role in women’s employment options by, instead of alleviating the penalty of part-time work, discouraging married women’s career opportunities in the standard employment system through social policies (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Gottfried and

O'Reilly, 2000). While previous studies have discussed many structural constraints that are important in understanding the Japanese case, they provide little analysis of how women react to the identified institutional constraints and what triggers their movement into nonstandard employment. In particular, because older married women are the ones crowding into part-time employment, prior research does not explain why the impact of institutional barriers on women's employment seems to differ for women in different life cycle stages.

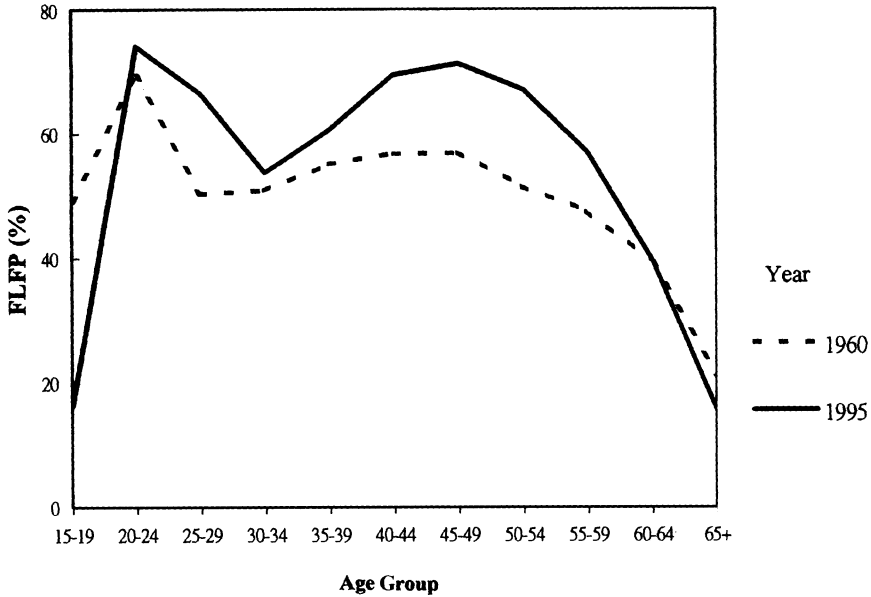
### **EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK AND THE CONTEXT**

The case of Japan calls for an alternative explanation of why married women fill part-time and temporary employment. While neither denying employers' interest in a flexible and cheap labor force nor neglecting factors that affect married women's labor supply, I argue that a proper explanation must take into account the context in which the alternative of the standard, full-time employment is quite inaccessible for new demographic groups in the labor market.

I develop my theoretical framework by following the perspective frequently used to assess formal and informal economic activities. Studies on the "informal economy" (Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Portes, 1994; Portes and Sassen-Koob, 1987) often include contingent, nonregular jobs. It has been argued that the persistence of informal employment is a response to overly rigid formal employment. Much employment activity is formal because employers are constrained by legal institutions and common practices. The cost of formality becomes high when there are numerous rules and regulations to follow. In a highly regulated economy, the cost of entering formal employment is particularly high for new groups of participants such as married women and immigrants because the established practices in the formal economy are not designed to accommodate their needs or appreciate their qualifications. As a result, new participants have to adopt less formal but more flexible forms of work, that is, nonstandard or contingent work (DeSoto, 1989; Piore and Sabel, 1984; Portes and Benton, 1984).

I expect to show that explanations focusing on the rigidity of formal economies can be extended to explain married women's concentration in part-time and temporary employment in Japan. I argue that part-time and temporary employment tends to absorb newcomers in the labor market primarily when the standard, full-time employment system creates barriers and constraints against new demographic groups in the labor force. The macrolevel statistics in Japan support the assertion that middle-aged married women who return to the labor force after the early stage of child rearing have constituted the majority of new demographic groups in the labor force.





**Fig. 2.** Changes in female labor force participation by age group. *Source:* Ministry of Labour, Japan, *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, 1960 and 1995.

The proportion of middle-aged women in the labor force has increased drastically from 1960 to 1995 (Fig. 2), a result of the drastically declining fertility rate, increasing educational attainment, and prolonged life expectancy of women (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000; Kelly, 1993; Yu, 1999). While the labor force participation among women younger than age 30 has increased as well, to a large extent this change reflects the fact that Japanese women nowadays marry later and are more likely to withdraw from the labor force upon childbearing instead of marriage (Yamaguchi, 1997). Thus, this increase signifies an extension of labor force participation of an existing group, rather than a new source of labor supply. As Japan has been reluctant to accept immigrants (Douglass and Roberts, 2000), middle-aged married women have become the dominant group of new participants in the labor force over the past several decades.

Following the theoretical approach emphasizing the rigidity of formal economies, the increasing supply of middle-aged women and the growing demand for part-time workers mesh only when the formal, full-time employment system sets high barriers that block new participants from entering the labor force. The rigidity of the standard employment system in Japan results from the fact that many employment practices are strictly designed for the

“usual” labor force—that is, men before the mandatory retirement age and young, single women—and by definition are incompatible with the needs of others. For example, the “permanent employment” system and its associated practices (Cheng and Kalleberg, 1997; Kaneko *et al.*, 1996; Lincoln and Nakata, 1997; Van Wolferen, 1988; Vogel, 1979), as I will discuss below, are tailored for continuous service without work interruption and become barriers that block the less usual work force such as labor force reenterers.

Two conventional recruitment practices make standard, full-time employment in Japan not as accessible for middle-aged married women as in other industrial societies. First, strong ties between schools and firms exist (Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1989), which send students directly to firms after graduation. Most firms prefer fresh graduates, rather than experienced workers (Ishida, 1993). Large firms in particular recruit regular, full-time employees only once a year, at the time of graduation. This recruitment practice is based on the belief that new graduates are the most suitable for on-the-job, firm-specific training; the latter is essential to the standard Japanese employment system featuring long-term employment and a seniority-based promotion and wage system (Cole, 1971; Crawcour, 1978; Koike, 1987).

Second, even though recruitment practices are looser among small- to medium-sized firms, it is common for small-firm employers to set upper age limits for recruitment. According to a survey (*Gyokyo to Koyo ni Kansuru Anketo Chosa* [Business Situation and Employment Survey]) done in 1996 on small- to medium-sized employers by a job advertisement company in Tokyo, AIDEM, more than half of the employers surveyed set upper age limits when they recruited regular, full-time employees. Most Japanese firms set upper age limits because the seniority-based wage system often is essentially an age-based system; full-time, regular employees are assumed to be men and single women whose seniority is highly correlated with age. According to the Ministry of Labour (1995), age rather than work experience, qualifications, education, ability, or previous job positions, was the second most important determinant for the wage of a midcareer person—that is, a person who has prior work experience elsewhere before entering the job—across all sizes of firms, and was less important only than a “balance with the wages of those who have been serving.” Employers cannot maintain this age-based reward system without jeopardizing the balance between age and existing employees’ wages if the labor force reenters with relatively long work interruptions. Therefore, upper age limits for new employees help avoid confusing the system. As a result, upper age limits automatically exclude many women who intend to go back into the labor force after child rearing.

Furthermore, assuming the labor force to be constituted by men and single women, Japanese firms adopt a familism ideology and demand high

devotion from their “family members,” that is, regular, full-time employees. Such high devotion in practice becomes long work hours despite legal restrictions (Roberts, 1996; Yu, 2001). Although female full-time employees in general spend less time on overtime work and after-hours *tsukiai* (informal social functions, which are customary among coworkers as a way of reinforcing social ties) than their male counterparts (Brinton, 1993; Ogasawara, 1998), a moderate demand of after-hours time is sufficient to make full-time employment incompatible with married women’s responsibilities since most of them have an overworked husband who rarely contributes to housework or child rearing. Thus, the normalization of overtime work in the standard employment system forms another barrier to full-time employment of married women.

Finally, while common employment practices in the economy actively deter married women from entering standard employment, state policies make nonstandard employment more appealing (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Gottfried and O’Reilly, 2000). The income tax system provides a good example. The Japanese tax system is actually in favor of two-earner families, given that the individual, rather than the household, is the unit to file tax (Feldstein and Feenberg, 1996; Ishii, 1993). However, the tax system also provides a relatively high tax threshold, which makes part-time jobs seem tax-free and hence appealing (Ishii, 1993; Shoven, 1989; Wakisaka and Bae, 1998). One individual in 1995 would be free from income tax if he or she earns 1,030,000 yen or less. Based on the average hourly pay for women reported by the Ministry of Labour in the same year, this amount would mean 22–30 h of work a week, depending on the geographical area, industry, and enterprise scale. With the addition of “special allowances for spouses” in 1987, husbands with wives who earn less than 700,000 yen a year receive twice the spousal deduction, while husbands of wives who earn up to 1,410,000 annually can still receive tax deductions of various amounts.<sup>4</sup> This addition of tax regulations further encourages part-time wives to extend their hours at part-time jobs, even though long hours of work do not change their overall status to full-time.

Another common practice among Japanese firms further enhances the impact of the existing income tax system. Firms are obligated to pay for the health and pension (*nenkin*) insurance of an employee as well as his or her dependents. A part-time working wife is entitled to the same dependent benefits as long as her income is under the tax threshold (earning under 1,030,000 yen in 1995) because her husband’s firm considers her and wives

<sup>4</sup> Although the regulation applies to both spouses, the frequent use of *okusan* or *tsuma* (both mean wife) or “husband’s tax burden” in the materials prepared by the Tax Bureau (e.g., Ministry of Finance, 1996) make it quite clear that the government expects wives to be the ones who take part-time jobs and would affect their husbands’ income tax deductions.

who are full-time homemakers both financially dependent. In addition, many firms, in particular large ones, provide family subsidies (*kazoku teate*) to male employees with financially dependent wives. Therefore, when a married woman's earnings are over the tax threshold, she has to bear the opportunity cost of losing the family subsidy and health as well as the pension insurance premium from her husband's employer. This company policy significantly increases the cost of taking a full-time job for married women.

The discussion above suggests that the standard employment system in Japan could play a critical role in matching new sources of labor supply to nonstandard employment. Conventional recruitment practices and time demands in the standard employment system have been intentionally designed to support the existing labor force, men and single women, rendering standard employment too rigid to accommodate middle-aged married women reentering the labor force. Meanwhile, tax regulations and family subsidy programs provide inducements to consider part-time employment as an appealing alternative. These inducements further enhance the relative cost for married women reentering full-time employment.

In summary, this study focuses on the rigidity of the formal economy in explaining the concentration of newcomers in the "informal economy," and suggests that nonstandard employment is likely to absorb an emerging group of labor force participants primarily when the standard type of employment is extremely inaccessible to newcomers. This perspective explains why only a small proportion of married women are able to reenter full-time, regular employment after their domestic responsibilities decline.

In this section, I have reviewed macrolevel trends of the changing labor supply of married women and discussed barriers and constraints embedded in the standard employment system. While the discussion at the macrolevel indicates this theoretical framework emphasizing the rigidity of standard employment is applicable to the case of Japan, the validity of the explanation will be examined by individual-level analysis in the remainder of this paper. The statistical analysis will compare types of employment among women who withdrew from the job labor upon marriage or childbearing with those who did not, and test the hypotheses stated in the following section.

## HYPOTHESES

This section lists predictions concerning married women's work trajectories that often contain moves in and out of the labor force and across standard and nonstandard types of employment. These predictions are derived from the theory that an overly rigid standard employment system causes the absorption of the increasing supply of middle-aged married women who reenter the labor force into nonstandard employment.

*Hypothesis 1.* Throughout women's work trajectories, there is a greater outflow from standard employment to nonstandard employment than the inflow to standard employment.

The theory predicts that there are higher barriers to standard employment than nonstandard employment. Therefore, except for the first job entry in an individual's work trajectory, entering full-time, regular employment is generally more difficult than entering nonstandard employment. As a result, when we examine individual work trajectories, we should find greater outward movement from standard to nonstandard employment than the movement in the opposite direction.

*Hypothesis 2.* Mothers with preschool children are not more likely to become part-timers than married women without preschool children, after controlling for other individual characteristics; the absence of preschool children does not increase a married woman's relative chance of obtaining full-time over part-time or temporary employment.

This hypothesis is based on the assumption that part-time and temporary employment is the destination for labor force reenterers in response to the exclusionary standard employment system rather than a transitional position used to cope with extra-high family demand. As the theory predicts difficulty of reentering full-time, regular employment for married women, working part-time while a preschool child is present does not gain one credibility in the labor market or ease later reentry into the standard employment system. Therefore, married women with preschool children are expected to find part-time or temporary work not worth taking because of the relatively low return on their time (Houseman and Osawa, 1998; Yu, 1999). By the same token, the difficulty of reentering full-time, regular employment for married women implies that the absence of preschool children does not increase the relative probability of obtaining full-time to part-time work for a married woman.

*Hypothesis 3.* Job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing, which means a woman falls into the group of married, female job seekers if the job withdrawal does not lead to permanent absence from the labor force, increases the odds of entering part-time or temporary employment for women.

*Hypothesis 4.* The type of job withdrawal described in Hypothesis 3, however, does not have a positive effect on married women's nonparticipation in the labor force.

The theory predicts that standard employment is particularly inaccessible for new participants in the labor force, who are married women in

the Japanese case. A married woman who has quit her job upon marriage or childbearing would be viewed as one of this group if she ever seeks another job. Thus, the proposed theory predicts such job withdrawal has a significant and positive effect on one's current status being part-time or temporary employment even after controlling for both individual qualifications and possible discrimination against aged workers. Nevertheless since the increase in labor force reentry among married women is a key element in explaining the matching of middle-aged married women to non-standard employment in Japan, job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing would not predict married women's nonparticipation in the labor force later on.

## DATA

Data for the individual-level analysis are from part A of the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey (SSM) in Japan.<sup>5</sup> Carried out in 1995, the SSM survey consists of a nationally representative sample of men and women 20–70 years. Part A of the survey includes questions with respect to individuals' work histories. For the purpose of this paper, I include only women who had ever married and worked in the multinomial logit models. I also exclude married women younger than 25 and over 60 because being married before age 25 or staying at work after age 60 are both unusual (age 60 is the compulsory retirement age in most Japanese firms).

Moreover, I conducted in-depth personal interviews with 32 married working women between 35 and 50 years in the Tokyo metropolitan area in 1997, which helped me develop the theoretical framework in the early stage of this study. In this paper, I present a few interview notes as further illustrations for quantitative results. The interviewees were found through snowball sampling. The initial contacts were made through friends and acquaintances of mine in Tokyo. After each interview, I would ask the interviewee to introduce her acquaintances who were married, currently working, and within the given age range. The interviewees are almost equally distributed across employment status, including full-time employment, self-employment, family enterprise employment, part-time or temporary employment, and home-based piecework. Most of them had some experience switching employment types. About one-half of them had had some experience with part-time or temporary jobs. In addition, I visited six very large, well-known Japanese firms that had their headquarters in Tokyo. At each firm I interviewed one

<sup>5</sup>I would like to thank Professor Mary Brinton and the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey Committee for permission to use a portion of the 1995 SSM data for my doctoral dissertation research.

to several managerial-level personnel or firm-based union representatives, depending on accessibility. I was introduced to these firms and day-care centers by personal connections.

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics from the SSM data confirm that the cost of reentering full-time employment is likely to be very high for married women in Japan. I calculate job changes between full-time and all other types of employment, including self-employment, part-time employment, temporary employment, and family enterprise work, for the female sample between ages 25 and 60 (Table I). It is much more common for a woman to move from full-time, regular employment to other employment than in the opposite direction, and the statement is valid for women of all ages. For example, 47.6% of women between ages 35 and 44 have moved from full-time employment to the other types of employment, while only 8.6% of them have employment changes in the opposite direction. Among women of ages 45–54, the number of women who have moved from standard to other employment is four times larger than the percent of women who have gone in the opposite direction.

The descriptive statistics in Table I support Hypothesis 1 that women are more likely to experience movement outward from standard to nonstandard employment rather than movement inward to standard employment from all other types of employment through their life cycles. This indicates that the cost of labor force reentry into standard and nonstandard employment is not the same for women, and that job shifting across standard and nonstandard employment is made at a cost. Therefore, in addition to individual needs and family cycles, there are structural constraints that restrict one's choice of standard or nonstandard employment.

**Table I.** Types of Job Movement Experienced by Japanese Women Across Age Groups

	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–60	All ages
Never changed jobs	44.6	29.4	21.8	28.8	29.4
Never changed employment status	17.7	21.8	25.9	25.3	23.0
Regular, full-time to other employment	28.0	40.3	42.4	30.1	37.2
Other employment to regular, full-time employment	3.4	1.3	4.1	4.1	3.1
Have moved both directions	6.3	7.3	5.9	11.6	7.3
Total	100.0	100.1	100.1	99.9	100.0

Source: SSM survey, part A, 1995.

Note. All values are percentages. Some columns do not add up to 100.0 because of rounding errors. Those who had no work experience are excluded from the sample.

## MULTINOMIAL LOGIT ANALYSIS

The purpose of the individual-level analysis is to show the level of difficulty married women experience, regardless of the length of work interruption, when entering or reentering full-time, standard employment. I use multinomial logit models to compare current work status (including *not* participating in the labor force) of married women who have left a job upon marriage or childbearing with the status of those who did not, controlling for the age of entering current status, to test whether labor force reentry after marriage decreases a woman's chance of full-time, standard employment.

### Models and Variables

The dependent variable for the multinomial models is the *type of labor force participation* versus nonparticipation. This variable includes four categories: standard, full-time employment, part-time or temporary employment, independent work status, and nonparticipation in the labor force. Independent workers include all types of employment status that do not presume the standard employer–employee relationship, such as self-employment, home-based piecework (*naishoku* or *kanai rodo*), and family enterprise work. I use full-time employment as the baseline category for the models in order to contrast job movement into full-time versus part-time and temporary employment.

The categorization of the dependent variable is based on the place of work, presence of employers, terms of employment contracts (including both explicit and implicit ones), provision of fringe benefits, and standardization of work conditions. Unlike home-based pieceworkers or family enterprise workers, part-time or temporary employees work away from home and have employers or supervisors present in the workplace. Thus they experience an employer–employee relationship that is somewhat similar to that of regular, full-time employees. However, part-time and temporary employment is characterized by the existence of explicit, fixed, short-term work contracts that do not guarantee renewal at the end of a short period. This distinction is particularly crucial in the Japanese economy where termination of regular, full-time employment is quite difficult (Houseman and Osawa, 1998; Koike, 1987). Furthermore, being *hiseikishain* (nonregular employees), part-time and temporary workers do not expect to receive, and often do not receive, health and unemployment insurance, union membership, firm subsidies, bonuses, promotions, *nenko* (seniority) based wage increases, or *taishokukin* (a lump sum payment at labor force withdrawal or retirement), while most *seishain* (regular, full-time employees) take all the above for



granted (Houseman and Osawa, 1995; JIL, 1991). Finally, the arrangements for part-time or temporary work are only occasionally regulated by existing rules, which make this type of employment unstable and insecure. My interviews with personnel offices or labor unions in large companies indicate that the policies regarding part-time or temporary jobs sometimes vary even within the same company.

In addition to the theoretical concerns stated above, the 1995 SSM data do not permit a finer distinction between part-time employment that actually requires fewer hours than full-time employment and temporary employment. First, the SSM survey did not ask about the time spent on work despite the questions on work status, which indicates that the SSM committee considered one's designated employment status to be a better indicator of work conditions than the exact number of work hours. Second, the SSM survey combined part-time and temporary workers in one category with the exception of *haken* workers, temporary workers dispatched by temporary service agencies. Although it is possible to separately consider dispatched temporary workers, who are treated somewhat differently from part-time and other types of temporary workers, the number of this type of workers among married women is quite small as this type of workers is younger on average (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998). In fact, there are only three cases in the sample of married women aged 25–60 in the SSM data, so it is not reasonable to categorize them separately.

With respect to independent variables, the first group estimates one's "human capital" (Becker, 1964) and examines the effects of individual assets on labor force participation. *Education* and *years of work experience* make up one's human capital in the labor market. There are four levels of educational attainment: lower or equal to junior high school, senior high school, junior college (2 years) or tertiary-level vocational school, and university or above. Except for the lowest level, I measure education by the school level that respondents reported they graduated from, since dropping out of school is uncommon and diplomas or degrees are the essential part of one's credentials in Japan (Dore, 1976; Ishida, 1993). Length of work experience is measured by years reported to be in the labor force. If one had started and left a job within the same year, I assumed the length of work experience to be 0.5 year. I use the logarithm of work experience in order to reduce the possible impact of extreme cases.

The second set of variables represents forces within the household that drive married women to or away from the labor force as well as a certain type of employment. A dummy variable for the *presence of any preschool children* (i.e., children under age six) indicates respondents' responsibility for child rearing. *Family type*, nuclear or extended, represents the availability of child-care from members other than husbands, although an extended family may

also require more domestic work and financial resources. Nuclear families are those that contain no more than parents and single children; others are categorized as extended families. *Husband's employment status* sometimes affects married women's labor force participation. I make a distinction for self-employed husbands because they increase a woman's chance to be a family enterprise worker (Brinton *et al.*, 1995).

Furthermore, having a substantial amount of household income independent from one's own earnings may decrease one's willingness to work. Hence, I use the *logarithm of husband's annual earnings* as an independent variable in the models. To include as many cases as possible, I assign the value zero to those whose husbands have no earnings and those who report that they do not know their husbands' earnings. I also include a dummy variable for *reporting not knowing husband's earnings* to adjust for any bias caused by assigning zero as the husband's earnings to this group.

Some scholars argue that women have a different commitment to family vis-à-vis work, and their beliefs in gender roles affect their employment decisions (Bielby, 1992; Hakim, 1996). Therefore, I include *one's attitudes toward gender roles* in the models. The index of gender attitudes is estimated by factor analysis based on six questions regarding whether one agrees with the traditional gender division of labor. The SSM survey asked female respondents to report the extent to which they agreed with each of the following statements: (1) men should work outside and women should be responsible for the family; (2) male and female children must be raised in different ways; (3) women are better at housework and childrearing than are men; (4) the work of full-time housewives means much to the society; (5) women should value their own work lives and careers highly, too; and (6) full-time housewives enjoy their lives more and are happier than are women working outside the home. Results from factor analysis assign a value between -2.0 and 1.6 to each respondent, as the gender attitude index. The sample mean of the index is zero. The greater the value the more a respondent disagreed with the traditional gender division of labor, which assumes men's roles as breadwinners and women's roles as housekeepers. In order not to fully exclude those who refused to answer or claimed not to understand the questions, I assign the value zero to them as the gender attitude value, while I added a dummy variable, *gender attitude unknown*, to control for the any possible distortion.

Finally, I control for *age* and *urban residence*. A woman's age to some extent corresponds to her life cycle stage. I categorize age into four groups: 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, and 55-60 years. Urbanization is expected to provide more nonfarm job opportunities, that is, opportunities to be employed by firms. I create a dummy variable using data from the question asking where one started the first job, assuming that those who started in

urban areas were likely to spend their whole work lives in urban areas. There is no information about where one was at the survey time. The SSM survey codes locations according to the categorization made by the government in 1983: large cities (population over 1,000,000), ordinary cities (population between 40,000 and 1,000,000), and all others (population fewer than 40,000). I consider those who started their first job in the former two types of locations to be urban residents.

The above variables constitute the reduced model. To test the hypotheses, we must distinguish the current status of labor force participation by whether the status was obtained before or after marriage. Hence, I add two variables, *job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing* and *age of entering current status*, in the full model. Job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing is a dummy variable that distinguishes those women who left the labor force within a year of marrying as well as those who left their jobs within a year of the first childbearing. This group of women, if they appeared in the labor force at the survey time, would have experienced discrimination against married women in job searches if there were any. I also include age of entering current status because older job seekers are likely to be considered less productive and therefore have to take less regular jobs. This variable helps clarify whether there are still barriers to standard employment against married women in addition to possible barriers against aged worker. I categorize this variable into five groups: under 25 years, 25–34 years, 35–44 years, 45–54 years, and 55–60 years. Table II reports descriptive statistics for all independent variables.

## Results

The multinomial logit results for current work status demonstrate some differences in determinants for employment status (Table III). For example, both reduced and full models show that the more educational attainment a married woman has, the more likely she is in full-time employment as opposed to not working or part-time employment. According to the coefficients in the full model, a woman with senior high school education is twice as likely to become a full-time rather than part-time worker, and a junior college graduate is twice as likely to work full-time than senior high school graduate. A woman with university degree would be three times more likely to work full-time than part-time compared to her counterparts who attend junior college only. Nonetheless, the difference between full-time employed women and independent female workers in educational attainment is not clear. Similarly, the coefficients indicate that a woman with lengthy work experience is as likely to participate in the labor force as an independent

Table II. Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables

	Ever-married, ever-working women
Education	
University or more	6.9
Junior college/tertiary vocational school	12.0
Senior high school	58.3
Junior high school or less	22.8
Average years of work experience	16.1
Preschool children present	
Yes	22.8
No	77.2
Family type	
Nuclear family	67.8
Extended family	32.2
Self-employed husband	
Yes	14.8
No	85.2
Average of husband's income (in Japanese yen)	5,922,835
Don't know husband's income	
Yes	14.4
No	85.6
Average value of gender attitude	-0.009
Gender attitude unknown	
Yes	14.7
No	85.3
Urban residence	
Yes	75.0
No	25.0
Age group	
55-60	15.1
45-54	35.2
35-44	31.4
25-34	18.3
Ever quit a job upon marriage/childbearing	52.9
Age of entering current status	
<25	29.7
25-34	31.7
35-44	23.1
45-54	13.3
55-60	2.2

Source: 1995 SSM survey, part A, Japan.

Note. Values other than averages are percentages.

worker or a full-time employee, but not as likely as a part-timer or nonjob holder. The coefficient of logged work experience in the full model indicates each unit of it contributes to three times more likelihood for a woman to be a full-time rather than part-time employee. These results show that those who have more human capital are more likely to be in full-time or independent work status than part-time employment or nonparticipation. This is not surprising since inferior qualifications have often been considered the reasons why certain workers held contingent or irregular jobs (Portes, 1994).

**Table III.** Coefficients From the Multinomial Logit Models for Married Women's Employment

	Reduced model			Full model		
	No job	Part-time/ temporary employees	Nonemployee workers	No job	Part-time/ temporary employees	Nonemployee workers
<b>Education</b>						
University or more	-2.46*** (0.55)	-2.53*** (0.56)	0.13 (0.52)	-2.59*** (0.56)	-2.54*** (0.59)	0.16 (0.54)
Junior college/ vocational school	-1.50*** (0.45)	-1.34** (0.44)	0.29 (0.46)	-1.70** (0.49)	-1.39** (0.47)	0.16 (0.48)
Senior high school	-1.14*** (0.33)	-0.76** (0.30)	-0.19 (0.33)	-1.27*** (0.35)	-0.67* (0.31)	-0.29 (0.34)
Junior high school or less	—	—	—	—	—	—
Logged work experience	-2.66*** (0.24)	-0.95*** (0.23)	0.94** (0.34)	-2.55*** (0.25)	-1.04*** (0.25)	0.56† (0.34)
Preschool children present	1.55*** (0.35)	-0.69† (0.38)	0.42 (0.41)	1.22** (0.37)	-0.49 (0.41)	0.40 (0.41)
<b>Family type</b>						
Nuclear family	0.80** (0.25)	1.04*** (0.23)	0.04 (0.25)	0.73** (0.26)	0.95*** (0.25)	0.10 (0.26)
Extended family	—	—	—	—	—	—
Husband self-employed	0.00 (0.39)	-0.43 (0.38)	1.88*** (0.31)	0.22 (0.42)	-0.38 (0.40)	1.65*** (0.32)
Logged husband's income	0.19** (0.07)	0.17** (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.17* (0.08)	0.24*** (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)
Don't know husband's income	1.51** (0.54)	1.53*** (0.46)	0.55 (0.50)	1.28* (0.57)	2.07*** (0.49)	0.48 (0.51)
Gender attitude	-0.83*** (0.17)	-0.44** (0.16)	-1.05*** (0.18)	-0.78*** (0.18)	-0.41* (0.17)	-0.97*** (0.19)
Gender attitude unknown	-0.06 (0.34)	0.07 (0.32)	0.16 (0.35)	-0.08 (0.36)	0.18 (0.33)	0.13 (0.35)
Urban residence	0.76** (0.26)	0.89*** (0.25)	0.58* (0.27)	0.70* (0.28)	0.83** (0.26)	0.68* (0.28)
<b>Age group</b>						
55-60	3.12*** (0.57)	0.60 (0.56)	0.39 (0.67)	2.53*** (0.65)	-0.68 (0.66)	1.35† (0.72)
45-54	1.83*** (0.46)	0.32 (0.45)	0.01 (0.57)	1.78*** (0.52)	-0.30 (0.52)	-0.86 (0.60)
35-44	0.93* (0.37)	0.18 (0.39)	0.09 (0.47)	0.97* (0.40)	0.00 (0.44)	0.58 (0.49)
25-34	—	—	—	—	—	—
Job withdrawal upon marriage/childbearing	—	—	—	-1.65*** (0.30)	1.51*** (0.34)	0.78* (0.31)
<b>Age of entering current status</b>						
<25	—	—	—	—	—	—
25-34	—	—	—	1.33*** (0.35)	0.60 (0.38)	-0.46 (0.34)
35-44	—	—	—	0.65 (0.42)	0.44 (0.40)	-1.46*** (0.39)
45-54	—	—	—	2.12*** (0.52)	1.70*** (0.49)	-1.25* (0.49)
55-60	—	—	—	3.86** (1.33)	3.50** (1.29)	-0.75 (1.41)
Intercept	4.26*** (0.86)	1.10 (0.83)	-4.37*** (1.12)	4.33*** (0.92)	-0.52 (0.92)	3.68** (1.15)
Log likelihood		-885.33			-774.14	
Number of cases		927			927	

Source: 1995 SSM survey, part A, Japan.

Note. Full-time employment is the baseline category for both models. Numbers in parentheses are SEs.

†  $p < 0.1$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In addition to education and work experience, other variables such as a nuclear family, greater husband's income, an urban residence, and relatively traditional gender attitudes all contribute to a married woman's participation in part-time employment rather than full-time employment. It is worth noting that even though gender attitudes have significant effects on the type of employment for married women, part-time employment is not associated with the most conservative gender attitudes among working women. Rather, conservative gender attitudes increase the odds to 1.75 times more for a married woman to participate in the labor force as an independent worker than a part-time, temporary worker, based on the coefficients in the full model.

The signs of the coefficients for most independent variables that represent the supply side are similar for nonparticipation and part-time participation in comparison to full-time employment, except for the presence of preschool children. While it is not surprising that those who had preschool children were very likely not to participate in the labor force at all, it is somewhat unusual that the effect of the presence of preschool children in the reduced model on part-time labor force participation is negative, given full-time participation as the baseline of comparison. This indicates, as hypothesized, that women with young children do not prefer part-time or temporary employment to full-time employment. Moreover, the relative odds for married women participating in full-time to part-time or temporary employment does not increase with the absence of preschool children. Nonetheless, the negative sign of this effect leads to a suspicious conclusion: having preschool children encourages one to choose full-time rather than part-time employment. As I noted earlier, a similar result was also reported in Nagase's research (1997:38), which used a different data set, but she did not provide an explanation. Why do we find such a puzzling result?

To explain this, we have to bear in mind that a woman's current participation in the labor force could be caused by job reentry after previous withdrawal or staying with a job obtained before marriage. I hypothesize that full-time, standard employment is too rigid for married women to return to. Many of those who were employed full-time when the survey was done had perhaps never left their premarital full-time jobs. They appear in the labor force as a result of retaining a job rather than reentering a job. The retaining group by definition would work through child rearing while the reentering group is more likely to reenter after children reach school ages. Hence, we find a higher proportion of women with preschool children in full-time work than part-time work because the retaining group is likely to retain a full-time job while the reentering group is likely to reenter a part-time job.

The full model, with the variable of job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing, is designed to distinguish reentry into employment from remaining employed. The signs and magnitudes for all coefficients in the full

model do not change much from the reduced model, although the effect of having preschool children becomes smaller and statistically insignificant on married women's participation in part-time employment in contrast to full-time or temporary employment. As hypothesized, job withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing has a very strong and positive effect on women's participation in part-time employment. To be specific, women who have had such an experience are 4.5 times more likely to be in part-time or temporary than full-time employment. This suggests that there are indeed barriers to entering full-time employment for married women. The effect of this variable on nonparticipation versus full-time employment is also consistent with what I have predicted: negative and strong. Women who had labor force withdrawal upon marriage or childbearing are five more times likely to participate in full-time employment than remain jobless. Thus, labor force reentry among women who quit their premarital jobs is very common.

The full model also shows that the timing of entering a job affects the type of job that one ends up taking. Entering a job after age 45 is greatly associated with participating in part-time employment for women. For example, married women entering current status between ages 45 and 54 are 3.5 times more likely to be in part-time or temporary employment, as opposed to full-time employment, than women doing so between ages 35 and 44, and the odds become even greater for women entering current status after age 55. However, the fact that the effect of job withdrawal upon marriage and childbearing on part-time employment remains strong after the timing of job entry is controlled indicates that age discrimination is not the only reason married women, as job seekers, are excluded from full-time jobs.

## DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis supports the argument that part-time or temporary employment in Japan is not the means for women to *remain* in the labor force during child rearing, nor does it serve as a bridge to full-time employment later. Rather, part-time and temporary employment is a common destination for older married women who *reenter* the labor force. Results from the multinomial logit models show that the probability of being recruited as full-time employees is much smaller than as part-time or temporary employees for married women of all ages. Nonetheless, part-time and temporary work eventually becomes older women's work because married women who reenter the labor force are likely to do so after their children reach school ages. The analysis also supports the proposition that the difficulty of reentering standard employment requires most married women to remain in part-time or temporary employment in later stages of their family

cycles. Therefore, the concentration of middle-aged married women in non-standard employment in Japan is best explained as a mismatch between oversupplied older married women and overly rigid full-time employment.

During my personal interviews, this mechanism of matching married women to part-time and temporary employment is supported by individual stories. For example, I asked all women working part-time whether they considered finding a full-time job. Many of them, in particular the older ones, had the same reaction. They laughed and said: “This is not about what I want to do—I simply can’t. There are upper age limits (*nenrei seigen*)!” In addition, labor force reentering experiences of many married women whom I interviewed provide good illustrations of my argument. The following is one of them, from a 35-year-old married woman who worked part-time in a family-owned dental clinic

When I first went back to work (after giving birth), I tried to find a full-time job. I had obtained my license for denture making then, so I tried to find a job in those medium-sized firms that made dental materials. I told every employer during my job interviews that I could only work until seven o’clock in the evening, because I needed to be home by then to cook dinner and take care of my kids. I told them that I didn’t mind getting less pay but I couldn’t to do overtime work. The firm I went to said yes to me. So I started to work there. Then right after I went to work, I found it impossible for me to stay away from overtime work. I wanted to leave by seven, but they always kept me late. There was so much work to do. I went to tell the employer that I couldn’t stay that late, and he was really upset and said it was my responsibility. He expected me to finish my job as a worker, no matter how late it took me. I was angry and told him that he lied to me about the work condition. I only worked there for a month and I quit. Then I thought: that’s it. Full-time jobs don’t work. I would have to do overtime work anyway—they always lie about it. So I didn’t try to look for full-time jobs any more.

This woman had an additional part-time job, from midnight to 6 o’clock in the morning, to make *bento* (box lunches) for convenience stores nearby. The two part-time jobs added up to 11 h of her everyday life. She explained that she had to take two part-time jobs because part-time jobs did not pay well enough to support her family, since her husband was self-employed and had suffered greatly from the economic recession. It was obvious to me she would prefer to take one full-time job rather than two part-time jobs if a full-time job allowed for less overtime work at night.

The experience of another interviewee’s labor force reentry also supports the hypothesis that the barriers to regular, full-time employment are high for married women. She was 45 years old and had a university degree and relatively continuous work experience. She told me what happened when she looked for a full-time job shortly after having left the premarital job

I went to a Belgian bank in Tokyo for a job interview. The middle-level manager, who was a Japanese middle-aged man, kept asking me questions about my family, how I was going to take care of my kids since they were too young to be at school, whether



I had anybody to help me if my kids got sick, etc. He went on and on. Finally, the top-level manager, a foreign man, who was also interviewing me, stopped the Japanese man and said: "Well, since she is here to apply for the job, she must have solved all these family issues." I almost laughed. That was really funny.

In contrast, becoming a part-timer is relatively easy for married women. Ethnographic studies have shown the differential treatment of part-time and full-time female workers (Roberson, 1998; Roberts, 1994). I found similar results in the field research. Part-time employment is frequently offered with the words "*shufu* (housewives) are welcome" in its advertisements. Some employers even put extra efforts to attract mothers to part-time work. When I visited an enterprise union for a large textile firm, which regularly hires part-time workers in many of its factories, a male official in the union proudly spoke to me about what the firm had done for female workers

In our factories in Chiba, we have childcare centers for part-timers. So those mothers can bring their children to work and put them in the day care. I think it is rare in Japan . . . No, we don't provide any day-care service for regular employees. Full-time employees don't need it.

The above comment is interesting particularly in the way that this union official denies the need for childcare for full-time workers while acknowledging it for part-timers. This attitude is consistent with my argument that standard employment in Japan has been designed for men and single women, who do not have the need for childcare. It further supports the proposition that we need to take into account the exclusionary characteristics of full-time employment in order to explain the matching of middle-aged married women to nonstandard employment.

One may challenge this explanation by arguing that married women are prone to part-time or temporary employment upon labor force reentry because they receive financial support from their husbands and they have a greater desire for time flexibility. However, the analysis in the previous section showed that, regardless of gender attitudes, once a woman left the job obtained before marriage, her destination for labor force reentry is very likely to be part-time, temporary employment, rather than full-time employment. Hence, I argue that even though gender attitudes indeed influence women's employment decisions, they do not explain why the destination of married women's labor force reentry is disproportionately part-time or temporary employment. The following statement from a 50-year-old woman who worked part time in a post office illustrates that a woman's orientation to work may not be the only concern

I wish I could work longer hours. My husband was sent to a branch in another area and my son moved to school. Now I live by myself and have a lot of time to work. But, see, my husband gets 1,500,000 yen annually as the family subsidy. If my income is under 900,000 yen a year—I think it is 900,000 yen now—I don't need to pay tax

and my husband would receive the subsidy because I don't have any taxable income. So if I earn 900,000 yen a year, we got 2,400,000 yen in total. But if I work more and earn 1,000,000 yen annually, he will get no subsidy and I need to pay tax, too. I will finally get much less. In order to make it worth it, I will need to work twice the amount of time and earn more than 2,400,000 yen a year, after tax. But it's not easy to find a good job like that.

Without understanding the structural constraints that drive married women in Japan away from standard, full-time employment, we cannot explain their concentration in nonstandard employment. An increasing number of studies pay attention to and examine nonstandard employment as a separate category. Surprisingly, the characteristics of full-time employment are hardly discussed in this group of studies. Studies on women's part-time employment tend to emphasize the importance of relative wage offers (e.g., Ermisch and Wright, 1993), relative work hours and flexibility (e.g., Addabbo, 1997; Burchell *et al.*, 1997), and family or life cycle effects (e.g., Coutrot *et al.*, 1997; Dex, 1987; Perry, 1988). All these factors create an impression that women are *pulled* into part-time employment, rather than *pushed* to part-time employment by a rigidly defined formal employment system. This paper, however, calls attention to the importance of standard employment characteristics while studying nonstandard forms of employment.

## CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the relationship between married women and nonstandard employment in Japan; neither labor supply nor labor demand alone explains this relationship sufficiently. Alternatively, this study demonstrates that requirements for full-time, regular employees can become barriers for new groups in the job market when they are designed specifically for exclusive participating groups, namely, men and single women in the case of Japan. As discussed, certain standard employment practices in Japan, such as upper age limits for recruitment and time demands for full-time jobs, were not established for the purpose of discriminating against a given group, but they de facto discourage new demographic groups to enter full-time employment. As a result, nonstandard types of work have absorbed an increasing number of middle-aged women who are looking for opportunities to reenter the labor force. This study has shown that the high proportion of married women, in particular older married women, in part-time and temporary employment, results from the fact the formal employment system is reluctant to adjust to a group who rarely appeared in the paid labor force until recently. Thus, using the example of Japan, this study reveals the shortcomings of neglecting the role of the formal employment structure in explaining married women and nonstandard employment.

This study has two implications for issues on gender inequality. First, the interaction of structural barriers and gender differences in work trajectories through the life cycle increases the gap in earnings and occupational prestige between men and women as they age. As the number of nonstandard jobs continues to grow in developed countries, gender segregation by occupation is no longer the only type of segregation that contributes to gender inequality in the workplace. Men and women become increasingly segregated by type of employment in many societies. This study demonstrates that gender segregation by type of employment becomes more severe in societies where the cost of reentering standard employment is much higher than nonstandard employment; this is so because women on average experience more work interruptions than their male counterparts do.

The second implication concerns legal changes that are made to enhance gender equality. This study has revealed a critical flaw of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) in Japan that has not been discussed in prior research. The EEOA was passed in 1985 and revised in 1997. Several studies show that the EEOA did not provide enforcement measures and led to little change to enhance gender equality in the workplace (Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Lam, 1993; Shire and Ota, 1997). Nonetheless, even if the EEOA were fully effective, it would not change the increase in married women in nonstandard employment. Overall, married women's employment is caused by retention in the labor force through marriage and childbearing or labor force reentry at a later date. This study shows that the reentering group tends to find standard employment extremely inaccessible in Japan. The EEOA never took into account the institutional barriers reentering women encounter, and therefore would only have covered the interests of the uninterrupted group at best. While requiring employers to treat men and women equally upon recruitment, the EEOA does not acknowledge that single and married women could also be treated differently. As a result, there is no restriction against collecting information on marital status or setting upper age limits. This is probably why statistics show that the percentage of part-time employment among female workers continues to increase since the passage of the EEOA (Hanami, 2000). Legal reform concerning equal employment opportunities of men and women has to understand the heterogeneity of female workers and pay extra attention to institutional barriers upon married women's labor force reentry.

The final note of this study concerns the recent economic recession in Japan. Will the rise of middle-aged married women in nonstandard employment continue in view of the common belief that the Japanese employment system will change because of the bursting of the bubble economy and worsening financial problems? Some changes in the standard employment practices may occur, but it is unlikely that the economic recession will reduce the

barriers to standard employment discussed in the paper, given the shrinking labor demand for standard, regular employment. Rather, the decrease of labor demand may further exclude less essential groups, such as older men and single women, from the regular labor force. In fact, part-time employment has been one of the solutions to economic difficulty that has perpetuated the existing system for the formal labor force (Lincoln and Nakata, 1997). As the data in this study are all from mid-90s, we can conclude that married women's concentration in irregular, nonstandard jobs has not yet been affected by the economic recession. Furthermore, because the changes in women's life cycles remain, and a decrease of men's income is foreseeable because of economic stagnation, married women are likely to become even more eager to reenter the labor force. As a result, we can expect, unfortunately, an ever-increasing number of married women in irregular jobs in Japan, regardless of experience, qualification, or need.

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