

## 《Article》

# The Impact of Work on Family: Sources of Family Life Strain among Japanese Women in Post Child-Care Stage

NISHIMURA, Junko

## Abstract

This article focuses on role overload in family life, and looks at the work-related causes of women's family role overload in post child-care stage in Japan. Analysis of National Family Research of Japan 1998 (NFRJ98) shows that work hour and life course pattern significantly relate women's family role overload. The longer the work hour, the higher the family role overload. Those who work full-time after re-entering the labor force show higher family role overload than those who work continuously or those who work part-time after re-entering. In addition, Among women who work full-time after re-entering the labor force, those who engage in professional/technical work and manual work show higher family role overload. These results show that work-related factors influence family life, and that quitting work at marriage or child-birth has detrimental impact on the relationship between work and family life thereafter.

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of sociology of stress, role strain refers to hardships, challenges, and conflicts or other problems that people come to experience as they engage over time in normal social roles (Pearlin, 1983). This article focuses on role overload in family life, and looks at the causes of women's role overload in post child-care stage in Japan.

I focused on post child-care stage because many married Japanese women today

are working, therefore, there is a great possibility that they are experiencing family life strain. Many Japanese women quit their jobs when they get married, or when they have children, and re-enter the labor force when their children get their school age (Kokuritsu Shakaihosho Jinnkoumonndai Kenkyujo, 2003). In the economic recession during the late 1990s, the cost of living increased, so the number of working married women has been growing. In this situation it gets even more important to understand how these women deal with

their multiple roles.

It can be easily imagined that family life overload depends on the situation of family life, such as amount of housework or support in housework/child-care. However, the situation of family life is not the only factor which influences family life strain. It might also be influenced by work. This article examines how work influence family role overload<sup>1</sup>.

### WORK FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE FAMILY LIFE

This article examines three hypotheses about work factors which influence family life. I will explain those three referring to related previous researches.

#### *Time constraint by work*

The first hypothesis looks at the time spent at work and family life strain. This hypothesis assumes that long work hours generate family role overload, because time for family life falls short.

Previous research which supports this hypothesis states that long work hours relate to higher conflict between work and family (Frone, et al., 1997; Grzywacz, et al., 2002; Gutek, et al., 1991). Other research shows that it is not the work hours which have a detrimental effect on family life, but rather the scheduling flexibility (Wallace, 1999) or the quality of work (Barnett, 1998). Barnett (1998) points out that long work hours do not necessarily have bad effect on family life. That is because jobs with long hours tend to be

"good" jobs, with high pay, good benefits, and more substantively complex work than are jobs with reduced hours. For the sake of understanding effect of work hour per se, other aspects of work should be controlled.

Previous researches suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Time constraint by work will generate family role overload.

#### *Job Autonomy*

The second hypothesis is concerned with job characteristics, namely, job autonomy. Job autonomy refers to "the working individual's potential control over his tasks and his conduct during the working day (Karasek, 1979)", or "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out (Hackman, et al., 1976)." Since this characteristic assign flexibility to workers, it enables them to change the level of commitment to work suitable for family situation. Therefore, it would relate to lower family role overload.

Previous research on U.S. women have revealed that high autonomy on the job is related to decreased work and family conflict (Greenhaus, et al., 1989), and distress (Lennon, et al., 1992). In addition, it is related to an increased sense of happiness (Loscocco, et al., 1990). These findings lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: High autonomy on the job will be associated with lower family role overload.

*Life Course patterns*

The first two hypotheses concern time and job autonomy. The third one focuses on women's life course patterns. Life course patterns here refer to work change, especially if women quit their jobs at marriage or childbirth.

This hypothesis anticipates that a change in work status accompanies a total change of the rhythms of one's life. This increases managing the housework, and maintaining relationships with people both inside and outside of the family. The necessity to deal with those changes can generate family role overload.

Welch, et al. (1977) and Wethington, et al. (1989) look at how work change affects women's health. Welch, et al. (1977) reported that women who are no longer employed were less healthy than housewives who had never been employed, and that women who recently took a full time job were less healthy than those who have been employed full time for longer than a year. Wethington, et al. (1989) found that increasing/decreasing working hours over the study period had statistically significant effect on women's psychological distress only when larger shifts in working hours occurred.

This previous research implies that adaptation to changes in working hours and working status generate psychological and

physical burden, and the larger shifts cause detrimental effects on health. Elaborating on those results regarding women during post child-care stage, one can anticipate that 1) re-entering the labor force after the child-care period may cause women's family role overload, and 2) when work hours after re-entering the labor force are long, there is greater family role overload. Previous research had only concerned work time change when considering work change. However, work change should be examined in the light of content of work. Considering job autonomy, re-entering the work area which is low in autonomy would end up generating family role overload. Therefore, I set the third hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3: "Re-entering the labor force after childrearing will be associated with higher family role overload, and when work hours after re-entering the labor force are long, or re-entering the work area which is low in autonomy especially apt to generate family role overload."

**METHODS**

*Data and sample*

NFRJ98 (National Family Research of Japan 1998) is used for analysis. NFRJ98 was conducted by the Japan Association of Family Sociology in January, 1999. Data of married women who have at least a co-resident child who is younger than 19 years old, and whose youngest child is between 7 to 19 years old, and who do not take care

of any older family members or relatives is analyzed. In order to consider work related factors such as time constraint of work and job autonomy, I only focus on women who were working at the time of the interview (n=436).

*Variables*

Variables used in this analysis are shown in Table 1.

The dependent variable is role overload in family life. In the questionnaire it is stated "(During the past month) how often have you experienced the feeling that your burden in the family is too heavy?" Respondents are asked to choose one of four answers: 1. often 2. sometimes 3. rarely 4. never.

Operationalization of independent variables are as follows. Time constraint by work is measured by work hours per week. It is important to consider flexibility of work hours to measure time constraint of work. But because of the restriction of variables contained in the data, this article only examines effects of work hours.

I use type of occupation as an indicator of job autonomy. Job autonomy is often measured by the actual job situations. However, since those measurements differ with each research, and are not well established yet, and because the relationship between the type of occupation and job autonomy can be demonstrated logically and empirically, I use type of occupation as an indicator of job autonomy.

Previous research showed that professional/ technical work is high in autonomy. Wright, et al. (1982) sets the category of "semiautonomous employees" who have substantial control over the direction of their activity within production, and yet are dispossessed of the means of production in the class structure of capitalist society. They mention professional workers as typical component of this category. Murao (2003) states that "power of decision making in the workplace" is high in professional/ managerial work, low in blue collar work, and intermediate in clerical and sales work. The concept of power of decision making in the workplace is composed

Table 1. DESCRIPTIONS OF VARIABLES USED IN ANALYSIS

Variables	
Family role overload	Mean 2.27 SD 1.05
Work hours per week	Mean 2155.97 SD 873.12
Occupation	Professional/technical/managerial (n=76), Clerical (n=109), Sales (n=143), Manual (n=92)
Life course	Working continuously (n=90), Full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force (n=59), Part-time employee after re-entry to the labor force (n=168)
Years of education	Mean 12.79 SD 1.67
Husband's Income	Mean 607.89 SD 273.15

of items which measure autonomy, power of supervision, and power of decision making. It includes details related to job autonomy which is used in the analysis of this article. It is anticipated that level of autonomy of work is highest in professional/ technical (and managerial) work, lowest in manual work, and clerical/ sales work are in between.

Variable which represents life course patterns was constructed by using items of experience of quitting job because of marriage, childbirth, or child-care, and current employment status. "Life course" is a variable which has 3 categories: "working continuously", "full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force", "part-time employee after re-entry to the labor force". From the point of degree of shift, it is anticipated that role overload is apt to occur in this order: full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force, working continuously, part-time employee after re-entry to the labor force. I will examine the interaction effect of life course and type of occupation to see if the occurrence of role overload is different by occupation after re-entered the labor force. It is predicted that when women work full-time after re-entering the labor force and engage in manual work which has low autonomy, role overload will be generated. In order not to complicate the analysis, I will exclude those who are self-employed when I consider life course patterns.

Two control variables are used: length of education and husbands' income.

### *Analytical procedures*

The Generalized Linear Model (GLM) which contains work hours, occupation, and life course as independent variable is applied. Main effects of each independent variable are examined to test the hypotheses. When life course is considered, interaction effect of life course and type of occupation is examined.

### ANALYSIS

Table 2 shows the results of GLM on "feeling of burden in the family". In Model 1 to 3, each independent variable is examined one by one in addition to the control variables. Model 4 inspects the interaction effect of life course and occupation, and Model 5 examines all those variables together.

In Model 1 work hours show significant effect. Adjusted mean values are 2.00 for "less than 25 hours", 2.21 for "25 -35 hours", 2.37 for "35-48 hours", 2.60 for "over 48 hours". The longer the work hour, the higher the family role overload. In Model 2, effect of occupation is not significant. Effect of life course is significant in Model 3. Adjusted mean values are 2.22 for "working continuously", 2.56 for "full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force", 2.19 for "part-time employee after re-entry to the labor force." Differences between "working continuously" and "full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force" are significant in 10% level, and differences between "full-time employee after re-entry to the labor force" and "part-time

Table 2. COEFFECIENTS FOR GLM PREDICTING FAMILY ROLE OVERLOAD

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	df	F	$\eta^2$	df	F	$\eta^2$	df	F	$\eta^2$
Education	1	0.62	0.00	1	0.02	0.00	1	0.09	0.00
Husband's Income	1	0.31	0.00	1	0.00	0.00	1	0.56	0.00
Work hours	3	5.28**	0.04						
Occupation				3	1.14	0.01			
Life course							2	2.61 <sup>+</sup>	0.02
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04			0.10			0.02		
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.03			0.00			0.01		
n	393			381			290		

	Model 4			Model 5		
	df	F	$\eta^2$	df	F	$\eta^2$
Education	1	0.02	0.00	1	0.16	0.00
Husband's Income	1	0.10	0.00	1	1.32	0.01
Work hours				3	4.46**	0.05
Occupation	3	0.25	0.00	3	0.09	0.00
Life course	2	3.00 <sup>+</sup>	0.02	2	2.82 <sup>+</sup>	0.02
Occupation × Life course	6	2.12 <sup>+</sup>	0.04	6	1.68	0.04
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07			0.11		
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.02			0.06		
n	288			287		

<sup>+</sup>p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

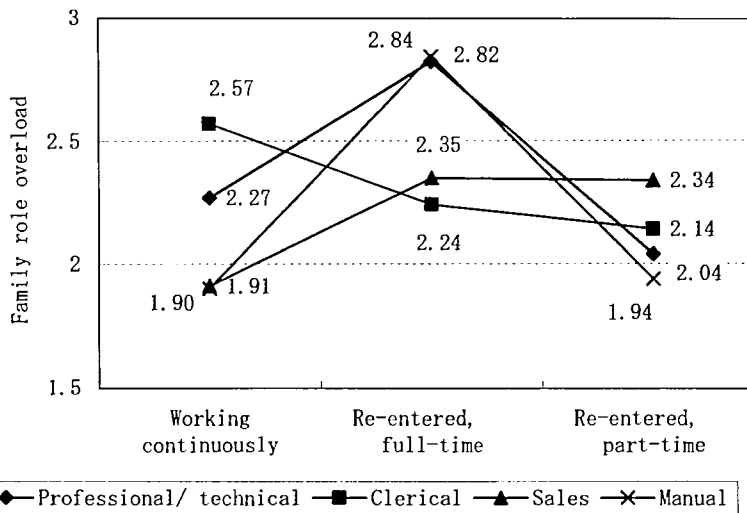


Figure 1. Interaction of type of occupation on the relationship between life course and family role overload

employee after re-entry to the labor force” are significant at 5% level<sup>2</sup>. When I focus on interaction term between life course and occupation in Model 4, it is significant at 10% level. Figure 1 shows the interaction effect of life course and occupation.

Figure 1 shows that family role overload is different by life course patterns. This distinction is especially clear in professional/ technical work and manual work. Among those in these occupations, women who work continuously regardless of marriage or childrearing, and who work part time after re-entering the labor force show lower role overload, while those who work full-time after re-entering the labor force show higher role overload. On the other hand, those who engage in clerical or sales work do not show significant difference in family role overload by life course<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, Model 5 of Table 2 examines all the independent variables, control variables, and interaction term. Only the effects of work hours and life course are significant, and the interaction effect of occupation and life course are insignificant. Among the three factors examined in this article, work hours and life course have significant effects when other variables are controlled.

## DISCUSSION

Considering the results of the analysis, I will examine three hypotheses discussed previously.

The first hypothesis, “Time constraint by work generates role overload in family

life” is supported. When effect of work time constraint is examined by work hour, the result was that the longer the work hour, the higher the family role overload. This relationship is still significant when occupation is considered simultaneously in the model. Therefore, time constraint of work generates family role overload independent of job autonomy.

Then, the second hypothesis, “high autonomy on the job will be associated with lower family role overload” is not supported. Family role overload is not significantly different by occupation. Previous research in the U.S. found significant relationship between job autonomy and women’s psychological state. However, these results cannot be applied to Japanese women. The reason is probably due to Japanese women’s relatively low level of job autonomy compared to U.S. women. In Japan, the proportion of women in managerial position gets lower as the post gets higher (Koseiroudousho Koyoukinnto Jidokateikyoku Koyokinntoseisakuka, 2002). In addition, Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is low compared to other advanced nations (Naikakufu Danjokyodosankakyoku, 2002). These differences in opportunity structure might make the result different in Japanese and U.S. women.

The third hypothesis, “re-entering the labor force after childrearing will be associated with higher family role overload, and when work hours after re-entering the labor force are long, or re-entering the work area which is low in autonomy especially apt to

generate family role overload" is partly supported and needs to be corrected in some part. Those who work full-time after re-entering the labor force show higher family role overload than those who work continuously or those who work part-time after re-entering. Even though significant difference is not found between "part-time employee after re-entering the labor force" and "working continuously", results of analysis substantially support the hypothesis. Working full time after re-entering the labor force is assumed to accompany drastic changes in family life such as time management in running a home. Family members might demand their wife/mother the same degree of attention to housework as before if she started to work. Necessity to manage these situations might relate to higher family role overload for women who work full-time after re-entry to the labor force.

In addition, family role overload of women who work full-time after re-entering the labor force is different by occupation, even though this tendency is not very robust. Among women who work full-time after re-entering the labor force, those who engage in professional/technical work and manual work show higher family role overload. Higher family role overload of women doing manual work can be explained by low autonomy of work. On the other hand, higher family role overload of women at professional/technical work needs to be explained from a different perspective. Though it is beyond the scope of this article to determine the mechanism precisely,

other aspects of the job, such as the complexity of work, might be associated with higher family role overload of women engaged in professional/technical work.

Further investigation is needed to determine what aspects of professional/technical and manual work elevate family role overload for those who are employed full time after re-entering the labor force. However, analysis of this article has clearly revealed that quitting a job because of marriage or childrearing makes family life burdensome for those who engage in professional/technical and manual work during the post child-care stage. And those occupations occupy considerable proportions among women's full-time employment in post child-care stage. There is a research on labor force participation of women in post child-care stage which shows the proportion of women who do manual work after re-entering the labor force is second-largest to clerical work (Nihon Rodo Kennkyuukiko, 1993). Manual work is one of those small number of occupations which women in post child-care stage can get in as full-time workers. The result obtained in this article means that it is very difficult to balance work and family if women re-enter the labor force as full-time workers in post child-care stage. Because of the economic recession since the late 1990s, women's full-time employment has been increasing in importance for household economy. However, it can easily generate family role overload.

Finally I will point out the limitations



of this analysis, and summarize the results. One of the limitations is operationalization of variables. I use work hour as an indicator of time constraint by work. However, it is not enough. When time constraint of work is operationalized, some other aspects of work should be considered, such as flexibility of work. I use type of occupation as an indicator of job autonomy, but characteristics of work should be measured more concretely. The reason the main effect of occupation did not attain statistical significance might be due to the interplay of the effects of other characteristics of work. Further analysis is needed concerning about what aspect of job characteristics has influence on family life.

Life course variable should be defined in more detail. First, change in content of work should be taken into account. It is well known that in Japan the labor force of young and middle-aged women is segmented, and women's structure of employment opportunity is much different between young and middle-aged. That is, the proportion of clerical work is relatively high in young age, and in middle years opportunities of employment in clerical work shrinks, and instead, the proportion of manual work increases. Higher family role overload of women in manual work who re-enter the labor force as full-time workers might be associated with these disconnections of career<sup>4</sup>.

Another direction for future research is to examine the experiences of interruption of work and re-entering the labor force in detail. Life course variable used in this

article was limited to employment status after re-entering the labor force. However, women's life course with regard to marriage, childbirth and child-care is more diverse. Length of interruption by marriage and child-care might be an important aspect when considering adaptation in family life after re-entering the labor force. Time after re-entering the labor force, timing of re-entering, and behaviors of other family members are other factors which might influence women's family role overload.

In spite of these limitations, the results of this paper shows that work-related factors influence family life, and that quitting work at marriage or child-birth have detrimental impact on the relationship between work and family life thereafter. Previous research on Japanese women in child-care stage states that women quit full-time work when social supports are not available, and those behaviors decrease family role strain (Inaba, 1999). However, when I consider the results of this paper, when women quit work to take care of their children, it generates family life strain later in life. Quitting at child-care stage may result in reduced strain temporarily; however, it would not be advantageous in longer term. If more and more women have to work due to the higher cost of living, it should be well noticed that re-entering the labor force cost them psychologically.

#### NOTES

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1998 (NFRJ98) conducted by the National Family Research committee of Japan Society of Family Sociology, and the Social Science Japan Data Archive.

1. Nishimura (2004) is one of those research which examined effects of family situations on women's family role overload.

2. Among 90 women of "working continuously", 21 are part-time employees. Since there are only a few women in "working continuously" category who is employed part-time in the sample, I made "working continuously" category to include both women who are employed full-time and part-time at the time of interview. When I break "working continuously" category into two by current employment status, and analyzed with GLM, adjusted mean values of family role overload for each category were as follows: 2.28 for those who work continuously and are employed full-time, 2.02 for those who work continuously and are employed part-time, 2.56 for those who work full-time after re-entering, 2.19 for those who work part-time after re-entering. Although the difference between those who work continuously and are employed full-time and those who work full-time after re-entering becomes statistically insignificant, there are difference in some degrees between those categories.

3. When I divide the sample by occupation, and analyzed with ANOVA about the differences in mean of family role overload by life course, those who engage in

clerical and sales work did not show statistically significant differences in family role overload by life course, while those who engage in professional/ technical work and manual work showed significant difference. (Professional/ technical work:  $F=2.62$ ,  $p<.10$ ; manual work:  $F=3.80$ ,  $p<.05$ )

4. I analyzed by cross tabulation on correspondence between respondents' first and current occupations. The table (not shown in this paper) showed that among those who engage in manual work at the time of the interview, 41.3% of them engaged in the same occupation as their first occupation. This figure is rather small, compared to those who engage in professional/ technical work and clerical work at the time of the interview. Among those who are at professional/ technical work at the time of the interview, 69.7% of them engaged in the same occupation at the first time they took job, and 74.3% for clerical workers. And most of (66.7%) women who moved from other occupation and are currently at manual work were from clerical work. In addition, among women doing manual work and working full-time after re-entering the labor force, I compared means of family role overload between women whose first and current occupation are the same ( $n=6$ ) and different ( $n=11$ ). There was not statistically significant difference in family role overload in those two categories. However, since this analysis was done with very small

sample, and correspondence between first and current occupation does not necessarily mean that the individual has gained experience in the same occupation, it can not be concluded whether disconnection of career of women working full-time after re-entering, engaged in manual work has any impact on their family role overload. It should be examined further in future research.

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(にしむら じゅんこ、本学科専任講師)