

Report

Support for Maintaining Balance between Work and Childrearing

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Abstract

Recently, the way in which women work has finally started changing. For about 20 years following the enactment of the Child Care Leave Act in 1991, little change occurred in the situation surrounding women's employment and childrearing: Approximately 60 percent of women who had worked before childbirth left their job afterward. However, the amendment to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act in 2009 required companies to offer shorter working hours to workers taking care of a child less than three years old, which has made it possible for women, especially those who are regular employees, to continue their employment. Managing personnel who have time constraints is a new challenge for many companies. Workplace supervisors must have considerable management skills in order to utilize the skills of those who have returned to work after taking childcare leave and are working under time constraints. Many supervisors, however, have little such experience and are struggling to figure out how they can support returning employees. With an increasingly diverse workforce, companies need to reform their management methods so that all their employees can work with motivation and perform well. At the same time, returning employees who work under time constraints need to actively examine their careers while engaging in discussion with their families and supervisors. Supporting workers in maintaining balance between work and childrearing can lead to acceptance of people who have various needs in terms of ways of working, whose number is expected to increase. Providing this support will become an increasingly important issue against a backdrop of significant changes in the work environment and changes in the values of workers

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The original report is available at https://www.murc.jp/report/rc/journal/quarterly/2017_04/.

More information on us at <https://www.murc.jp/corporate/virtual/diversity/>.

1. Introduction

A growing number of women are taking childcare leave, returning to work, and continuing working while facing time constraints and other issues (hereinafter, "returning employees"). For more than 20 years, against a backdrop of significant changes in the work environment, workers' values, and the associated legal requirements, companies have expanded their programs for helping returning employees maintain balance between work and childrearing. Recent years have seen the fruits of such efforts: returning employees, especially those who are regular employees, have been able to successfully continue their employment.

Now that the idea of opportunity for working women has expanded from maintaining work-childcare balance to include realizing their full potential, it is not enough for companies to simply introduce a program for supporting work-childcare balance, and the question has become how they can effectively administer such programs and encourage returning employees to perform to their full potential. This paper summarizes and analyzes issues concerning programs for supporting work-childcare balance and discusses important points for companies to heed in encouraging returning employees to play an active role at their workplace.

2. Amendments to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act and Returning Employees' Continued Employment

Thirty-one years have passed since the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act¹ in 1986, and 26 years have passed since the enactment of the Childcare Leave Act in 1991.^{1,2} Through several amendments over the years, the government has expanded support for workers to maintain balance between work and childrearing (Figure 1, Table 1). Despite the expanding support, there was little change in the situation surrounding women's employment and childrearing for twenty-some years: Approximately 60 percent of women who had worked before childbirth left their job afterward. However, things have finally started to change in recent years. According to a survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, the percentage of women who continued their employment by taking childcare leave substantially rose to 28.3 percent from 5.7 percent observed in the 1985-89 period (Figure 2). (The proportion of the same women to women who were employed before giving birth to their first child rose to 39.2 percent from 9.3 percent.) In particular, the increase between the 2005-09 period and the 2010-14 period is remarkable. Figure 3 shows the same variable for different types of employees. The percentage of female regular employees who continued their employment by taking childcare leave significantly increased from 40.4 percent in 1985-89 to 69.1 percent in 2010-14.

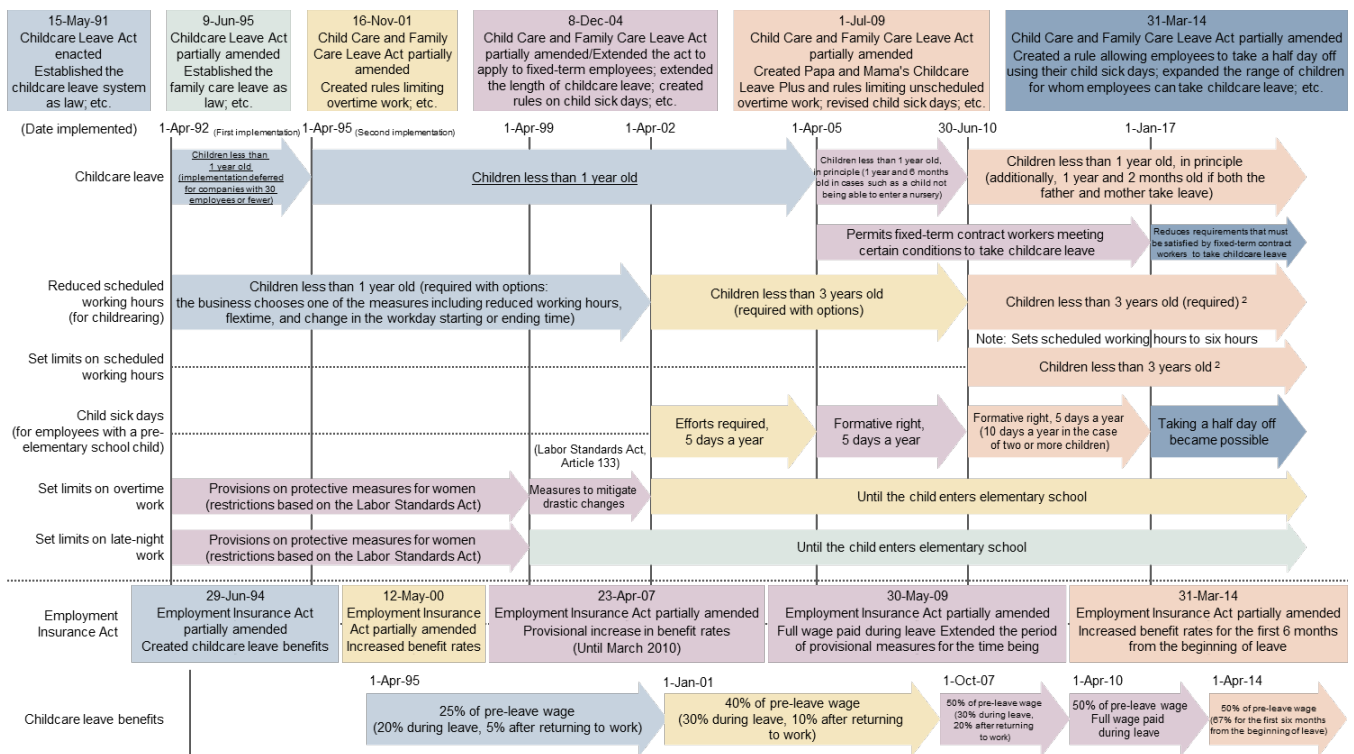
The ways in which women work started to change, in part due to the 2009 amendment to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act requiring companies to implement a reduced working hours program for employees raising a child less than 3 years of age.³ Yajima (2014) discusses support to prevent women from quitting their jobs due to pregnancy and childbirth through mandatory reduced working hour programs.

Even though the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act gives employees the right to utilize a childcare leave program, quite a few pregnant women quit their jobs without doing so. This can be attributed to the problem that even though childcare leave is available, these women give up on the idea of continuing their employment, expecting that they will return to the long working hours that they experienced before their pregnancy. In some cases, female regular employees expected, at the time of marriage, continued employment to be difficult after

childbirth and therefore changed jobs or became contract employees or temporary workers. For many women after childbirth, their preferred way of working involves shorter working hours or full-time work without overtime. Since women can now choose these ways of working while remaining at their companies as regular employees, they have a greater incentive to return to work after taking childcare leave, instead of quitting their jobs due to marriage or pregnancy.⁴

A number of major companies, companies in industries where many women work, and companies with positions mainly filled by women have implemented programs to support work-childcare balance that go beyond what is required by laws in order to gain productive human resources, reduce hiring cost or training cost, prevent knowledgeable and skilled workers from quitting their jobs, and produce positive public relations. Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting has increasingly been consulted by companies that have observed that few women quitting their jobs due to pregnancy or childbirth; these companies want to switch to a personnel system that operates based on the assumption that women will work for a long time.

Figure 1: Amendments to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act



Note: 1. The analysis considers first-time married couples whose first child was aged 1 year or older but under 15 years at the time of the survey. Data from the 12th to 15th surveys are combined (12,719 couples). The change in employment status considered here refers to the difference between the wife's employment status at the time of learning of her pregnancy and her employment status when the child became 1 year old
 2. The arrow in the graph was drawn by the author

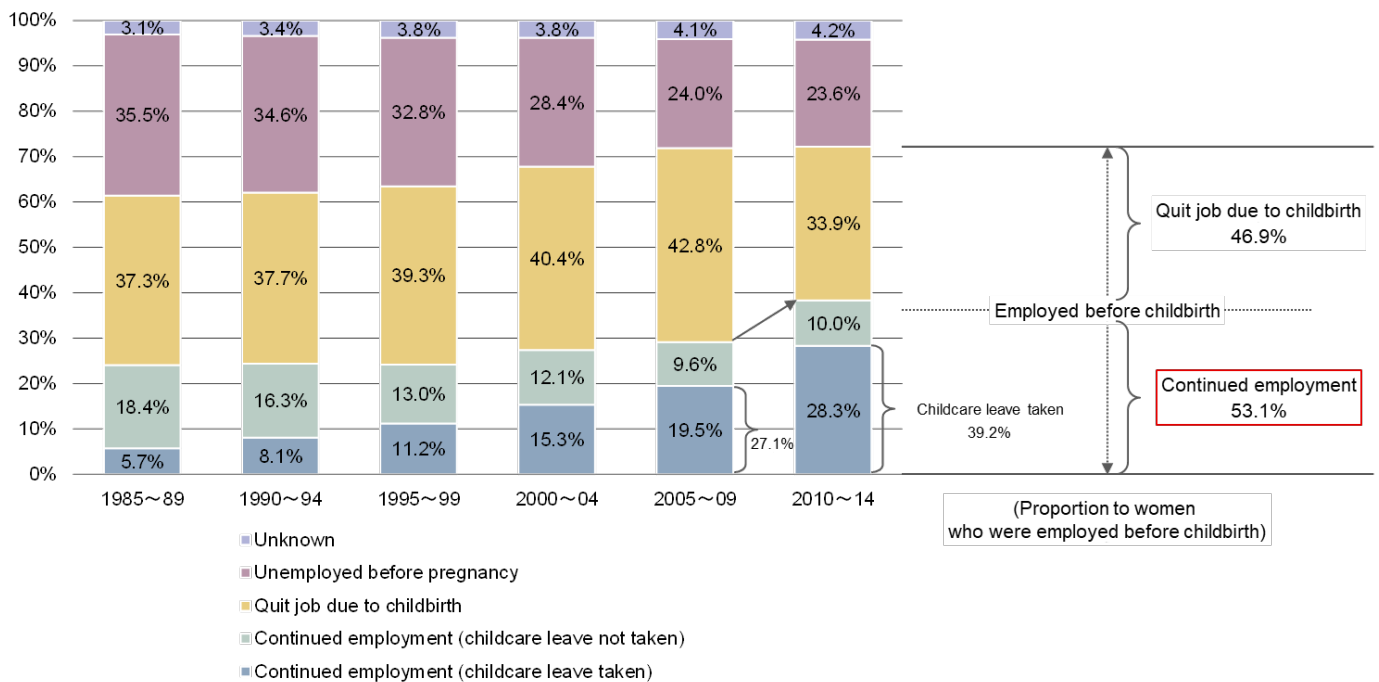
Source: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Reference material 1 (data on the proportion of women who continued their employment around the time of the birth of their first child, p. 3) distributed during the 39th meeting of the Committee for Cooperatively Promoting and Evaluating Work-Life Balance.

Table1: Summary of programs for supporting work-childcare balance

①	Childcare leave	An employee can take a leave of absence to raise a child (until the day before the child's first birthday; in principle, once per child).
②	Reduced working hour program (Reduction of scheduled working hours)	After making a request, an employee raising a child aged less than 3 years can have shorter working hours (6 hours a day).
③	Exemption from unscheduled overtime work	After making a request, an employee raising a child aged less than 3 years becomes exempt from overtime work.
④	Child sick days	After making a request, an employee raising a preschool age child can take a day (or days) off to take care of a sick child (five days per year per child).
⑤	Limitation of overtime work	After an employee raising a preschool age child makes a request, certain limits are set on the employee's overtime work.
⑥	Limitation of late-night work	After an employee raising a preschool age child makes a request, limits are set for the employee's late-night work (i.e., work performed between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.).
⑦	Other measures for supporting work-childcare balance	Businesses must make efforts to implement one of the following: (1) flextime, (2) staggered working hours, and (3) creation and operation of an in-house day-care facility, or a similar measure for employees' convenience.
⑧	Considerations given regarding transfer	Businesses are asked to give certain considerations with regard to transfer of an employee who is raising a child.
⑨	Prohibition of disadvantageous treatment	Businesses must not take actions that are disadvantageous to employees, including hiring, in response to their requesting for or benefiting from one or more of the first six programs.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. (August 2017).An Outline of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act.

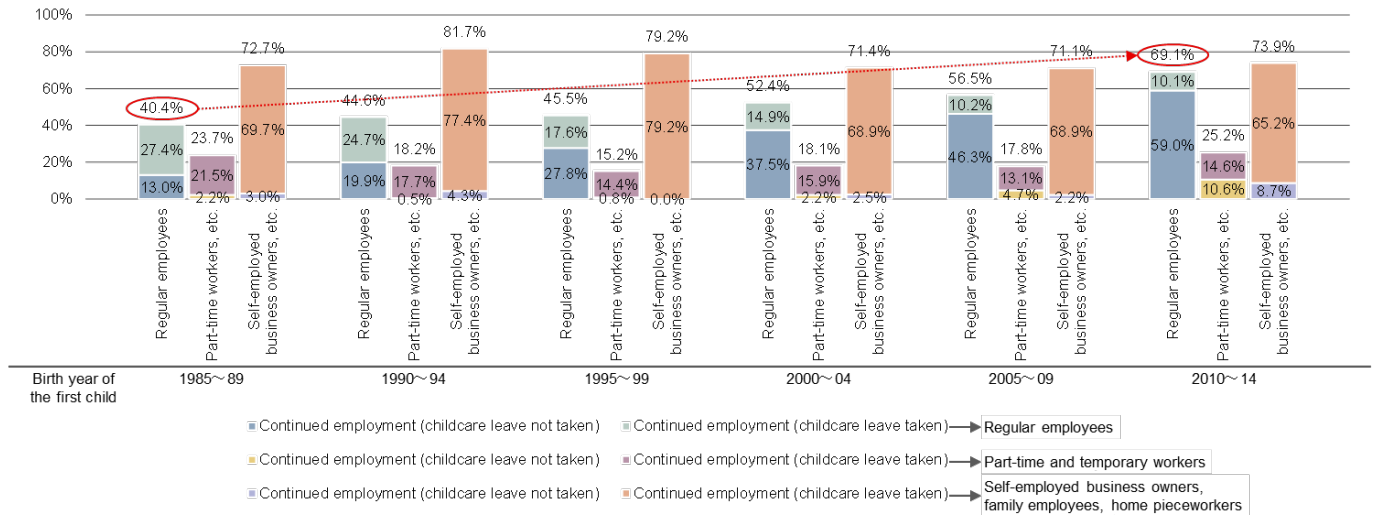
Figure 2:Employment situations for women around the time of the birth of their first child (with focus on those who were employed before the birth)



Notes: 1. The analysis considers first-time married couples whose first child was aged 1 year or older but under 15 years at the time of the survey. Data from the 12th to 15th surveys are combined (12,719 couples). The change in employment status considered here refers to the difference between the wife's employment status at the time of learning of her pregnancy and her employment status when the child became 1 year old
 2. The arrow in the graph was drawn by the author

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Reference material 1 (data on the proportion of women who continued their employment around the time of the birth of their first child, p. 3) distributed during the 39th meeting of the Committee for Cooperatively Promoting and Evaluating Work-Life Balance.

Figure 3: Change in the wife's employment status around the time of the birth of the first child (for different birth years, by employment type). Proportion of women who had been employed before childbirth and continued their employment



- Notes:
- The graph is based on National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. (2016). Dai 15 kai shussei doukou kihon chosa (fufu chosa) [The 15th Basic Survey on Birth Trends (Couples Survey)]
 - The graph shows data on first-time married couples whose first child was aged 1 year or older but under 15 years at the time of the survey
 - Employment status around the time of childbirth
 - Continued employment (childcare leave taken): employed at the time of learning of pregnancy --> childcare leave taken --> employed when the child becomes 1 year old
 - Continued employment (childcare leave not taken): employed at the time of knowing pregnancy --> childcare leave not taken --> employed when the child becomes 1 year old
 - The pre-childbirth employment status is the status at the time of learning of the wife's pregnancy. In the survey, it is selected by the respondent from multiple options. Also, part-time and temporary workers include part-timers, side-job workers, temporary workers, and various (full-time, etc.) fixed-term contract workers
 - According to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act, fixed-term employees who can take childcare leave must satisfy the following conditions:
 - They have been continuously employed by the same employer for 1 year or more
 - They are expected to continue being employed after the child's first birthday
 - It is not definite not only that will the labor contract have been expired two days before the child's second birthday, but also that the contract will not be renewed
 - The arrow in the graph was drawn by the author

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Reference material 1 (data on the proportion of women who continue working around the time of the birth of the first child, p. 4) distributed during the 39th meeting of the Committee for Cooperatively Promoting and Evaluating Work-Life Balance.

3. Supporting Work-Childcare Balance

As programs for supporting work-childcare balance have been expanded, more and more women have returned to work. At the same time, however, returning employees often have concerns and anxieties about issues such as the gap in their career created by their childcare leave, time constraints, and the possibility that they may suddenly need to take a day off due to their child's unexpected illness.

Both returning employees and their superiors are anxious. Returning employees who face many issues as they work according to a restricted schedule (e.g., shorter working hours) express concerns that they feel bad because they may have to take a day off on short notice due to their child's illness. Another concern is that they

cannot easily work as they used to do. Their superiors, on the other hand, worry that they cannot assign important tasks to returning employees, and that friction will arise in workplace relations as workload of other employees increases (see Table 2). These concerns imply that the presence of returning employees with time constraints in a traditional workplace—where employees have been assumed to work full-time and overtime—causes confusion, and that returning employees are often blamed for it because they are regarded by some as having low motivation. Such blame, however, does nothing to fundamentally solve the issues. Although the position and perspectives of returning employees are different from those of the employer, it is an important issue for both sides whether returning employees can be motivated to work and continue to perform to their potential. Supervisors need to not only understand the situation that returning employees face, but also talk about childrearing and other private issues without hesitation if they seem to interfere with returning employees' work. Also, returning employees need to voice their struggles, talk with their superiors, colleagues, family members, and others, and make relevant proposals, instead of disregarding their career development and giving up playing an active role in the workplace.

Table 2: Issuer involving ways of working that employees face in maintain work childcare balance

Issues for returning employees	Issues for employers
- Time constraints	- Job assignment
- Constraints related to job experience	- Goal setting and employee evaluation
- Workplace personal relationships (with superiors, colleagues, etc.)	- Interpersonal relationships between returning employees and other employees
- Medium- to long-term career development	- Communication with returning employees
- Maintaining motivation for work	- Excessive consideration given to returning employees
- Sharing responsibilities with the husband while utilizing a shorter hours program, etc.	- Support for returning employees' career development

Source: by author

Another serious problem relevant to companies' personnel management is "maternity harassment," that is, disadvantageous treatment such as firing, contract termination, and demotion that female employees face because of their pregnancy, childbirth, childcare leave, and other reasons. Among the reports of possible violations of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act that were made in FY 2016 to prefectural labor bureau departments in charge of employment conditions and equality, 34.9 percent (7,344 reports) were related to disadvantageous treatment attributed to employees' marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. (Article 9) or harassment related to pregnancy, childbirth, etc. (Article 11, Section 2), and the percentage of these reports is as high as that of reports of sexual harassment (see Table 3). If a company is sued for maternity harassment, it is possible that the company must pay a settlement, damages, or compensation. In such a case, the company's corporate image will suffer immeasurable damage.

Table 3: Subjects of consultations related to the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and the number of consultations

	FY 2016
Gender discrimination (in recruitment, hiring, job assignment, promotion, training, indirect discrimination, etc.) (relevant to Articles 5 to 8)	1,281 (6.1%)
Disadvantageous treatment attributed to employees' marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. (relevant to Article 9)	5,933 (28.2%)
Harassment related to pregnancy, childbirth, etc. (relevant to Article 11, Section 2)	1,411 (6.7%)
Sexual harassment (relevant to Article 11)	7,526 (35.8%)
Management of support for mothers' health (relevant to Articles 12 and 13)	2,755 (13.1%)
Other (positive action, etc.)	2,144 (10.2%)
Total	21,050 (100.0%)

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Heisei 28 nendo todofuken rodokyoku koyo kankyo kinto bu (shitsu) deno hou shikou jokyo [FY 2016 State of Implementation of Law by the Departments (Offices) of the Prefectural Labor Bureaus in Charge of Employment Conditions and Equality]. p. 4. Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Heisei 28 nendo todofuken rodokyoku koyo kankyo kinto bu (shitsu) deno hou shikou jokyo [FY 2016 State of Implementation of Law by the Departments (Offices) of the Prefectural Labor Bureaus in Charge of Employment Conditions and Equality]. p. 4.

The Child Care and Family Care Leave Act, as amended in January 2017, newly required businesses to take measures to prevent maternity harassment and "paternity harassment," namely, harassment committed by supervisors and colleagues for reasons such as pregnancy, childbirth, childcare leave, and family care leave. Companies therefore need to not only create an environment where returning employees can continue to work comfortably, but also take measures to eliminate the causes of their concerns.

4. Important Points in Encouraging Returning Employees to Perform to Their Full Potential

Devising various ways in which returning employees work while raising a child and providing various career paths are important factors that can determine whether or not they can successfully perform their work during their childrearing period and become the type of employee who contributes to the company in the medium to long run.

4.1 Creating a System to Support Employees before and after Their Return to Work

Workplace supervisors need proper management skills to enable returning employees to perform to their full potential. However, many superiors lack relevant experience and are not sure how they can support returning employees. An effective measure to support such superiors and returning employees is to introduce a mechanism that facilitates communication among the personnel department, returning employees, and their superiors, starting before the employees take childcare leave and continuing until about a year after the return. With such a mechanism, it is expected that the personnel department and superiors can understand returning employees' circumstances, eliminate their concerns about returning to work, and boost their motivation for work.

Many progressive companies have organized training seminars for both returning employees and their superiors. Managing time-constrained workers is a new issue for many companies. It is therefore meaningful not only to make relevant corporate policies and approaches widely known among their employees, but also to create

opportunities to examine issues faced by returning employees and their superiors.

The following sections show examples of such training programs and discuss important issues to be considered in the programs (see Examples 1 and 2).

4.2 Training for Employees Who Return to Work after Childcare Leave

Training sessions for returning employees provide opportunities for them to examine and share information about the challenges and responses they face, so that they can actively perform their work while maintaining work-childcare balance without being completely dependent on support programs. It is important for companies to encourage returning employees to contemplate how they will perform to their full potential, taking their constraints as a given, instead of contemplating how these employees used to be before childbirth. It is also important for these employees to gain necessary skills and devise ways to increase their productivity. It is effective to provide opportunities for returning employees to consider, from a medium- to long-term perspective, how they want to personally grow and how they should engage in their work to achieve such goals. At the same time, returning employees need to actively examine their own career by involving their superiors and family members.

Companies can effectively help returning employees examine their career from a medium- to long-term perspective by teaching them how to create a career plan sheet or by sharing the experiences of those who have been maintaining work-childcare balance. In some cases, especially during the first year after returning to work, employees desperately try to maintain balance between work and unaccustomed childrearing and they worry about things, lacking a positive attitude. Helping returning employees connect with other returning employees prompts them to share information and knowledge, which subsequently enables them to discover a breakthrough, become enthusiastic about their work, and find it satisfying.

Training programs for returning employees also need to encourage them to reexamine the role at home, where women often take care of most of housework and childrearing. Not many couples discuss their future careers when they get married. Returning to work without such discussion tends to make it unclear how housework and childrearing responsibilities are shared. Returning employees often say that they have unconsciously given priority to their husband's career. Encouraging couples to make time to reconsider their careers will eventually put an end to childrearing as a one-person operation and will help women to play an active role in the workplace.⁵ This is an era in which individuals and companies should together contemplate the ways of working that are suited to the fact that it is normal for both the husband and wife to work.

Example 1: Training program for employees who return to work after taking childcare leave
- Ways of working after the return: programs and issues

One may face many issues as one works according to a limited schedule, including shorter working hours. What should one may do in order to actively perform your work while maintaining work-childcare balance without being completely dependent on support programs. We will share information on relevant issues and appropriate measures through

- Time management for maintaining work-childcare balance

One may will learn key points in time management as a skill for efficiently working within a given time frame.

- Experiences of senior colleagues who maintain work-childcare balance

Sharing of information on creative actions for work-childcare balance taken by senior colleagues, who are a little more experienced, and sharing of their vision for their future career can reduce your anxieties and increase one motivation. Also, one self-awareness increases by exposing yourself to various values.

- Networking

Relationships among returning employees are important for maintaining work-childcare balance in the future. Working mother can gain motivation through information exchanges and be encouraged by the presence of colleagues.

- Career development: basic approaches and planning

After returning to work, one tend to become so busy with the work at hand and other responsibilities that it becomes difficult to contemplate your future career. However, thinking about your career from a medium- to long-term perspective, including how you will work after your child grows beyond a certain point, can change the way in which you engage in the work at hand. After learning about basic approaches to a professional career through lectures, you will actually create a plan for yourself.

Source: Training seminars for returning employees and for their superiors organized at Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting.

4.3 Training for Managers Who Support Returning Employees after Childcare Leave

In training sessions for the supervisors of returning employees, it is important to deepen these managers' understanding of support for maintaining work-childcare balance by providing information on the company's programs and rules concerning childcare leave (including rules on salaries and employee evaluations) and information on practices such as disadvantageous treatment of employees who have used programs specified in the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act. The greater the efforts of companies to support employees' work-childcare balance, the more often they change their programs and administrative procedures to go beyond what is required by law. However, managers often manage returning employees without properly understanding programs for supporting work-childcare balance. Companies therefore must make sure managers have up-to-date information through training programs and other efforts.

Many managers also cannot understand returning employees' opinions and issues concerning their work. It is important for companies to share information on the situations of returning employees—information on issues that they raise at training seminars and their responses to the issues. By showing supervisors how to motivate their subordinates to properly build a career and how to convey their expectations about the performance of their subordinates, companies can then present approaches and know-how concerning the management of returning

employees and encourage supervisors to support returning employees' career development. Also, training sessions for managers provide opportunities to exchange opinions with other managers and reflect on various aspects of their management of returning employees, such as the amount and quality of communication, efficiency in managing an entire division, and their own preconceptions.

Example 2: Training program for managers on supporting employees who return to work after taking childcare leave

- Compliance in connection with employees returning to work after taking childcare leave: laws to follow and risks to avoid

The amended Child Care and Family Care Leave Act that was implemented in January 2017 required businesses to take measures to prevent the so-called "maternity harassment" and "paternity harassment" committed by supervisors and colleagues. If one do not understand the law well, they may make questionable comments or take problematic actions. They also may not be able to utilize returning employees because of excessive anxieties about unknown elements. Through the training program, managers can gain an appropriate understanding of relevant laws and rules from the standpoint of compliance.

- Issues involving job assignment, goal setting, and employee evaluation

If there are employees working according to a restricted schedule, including shorter working hours, managers need to devise various measures. After they learn, through lectures, basic approaches to the main issues, namely, job assignment, goal setting, and personnel evaluation, we will discuss actual issues arising in the workplace.

- Returning employees' career development: what you can do as managers and your expectations of your subordinates

Devising various ways in which returning employees work while raising a child and presenting various career paths are important factors that can determine whether they can successfully perform their work during their childrearing period and become employees who contribute to the company in the medium to long run. Through lectures based on survey data and discussions among the participants, we will consider how managers can motivate their subordinates to properly build a career and how they should convey their expectations about the performance of their subordinates.

Source: Training seminars for returning employees and for their superiors organized at Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting.

4.4 Important Points for Managing Returning Employees

- Do not blindly assume that inability to work overtime means lack of motivation

In many cases, the difference between returning employees working under a reduced working hour program and returning employees working full-time does not have anything to do with their abilities or willingness to work, but rather arises from family situations, such as whether they have cooperative parents living nearby and whether their husbands is cooperative. Managers therefore should not only encourage individual employees, including time-constrained employees, to perform to their full potential, but also reexamine the ways in which work gets done at the workplace as a whole.

- Considerations for employees in the first year after returning to work

The first year after employees return to work is time when their children do not have a strong immune system

and often get infectious diseases at their nursery. Some women who will become new mothers worry how long such a situation will last. Providing supervisors with some background information enables them to tell returning employees to engage in the current work while keeping an eye on the future, and as a result, the employees may feel at ease. Although situations are different from one child to the next, starting in the second year after employees return to work, their children tend to get sick less frequently. Supervisors' considerate actions that enable employees to return to work without worry gradually builds trust between them and make the process of returning to work a smooth one.

- Guiding employees with positive expectations

Returning employees perform to their full potential and become highly motivated if they are guided by superiors who have positive expectations about both returning employees and other employees. Supervisors should not dismiss the ability of returning employees who seek to maintain work-childcare balance. Instead, they should recognize that returning employees' personal growth and work performance are important to the company and tell this to returning employees.

5. Conclusion

With an increasingly diverse workforce, managers urgently need to reform their management methods so that all their subordinates can work with motivation and perform well. It is therefore important for companies to highly regard and produce supervisors who can respond to situational changes and positively accept workplace diversity.

Support measures that encourage returning employees to play an active role in the workplace make it possible for companies to accept people who have various needs in terms of their ways of working and whose number is expected to rise.

Endnotes

1. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act refers to *Koyo no bunya ni okeru danjo no kinto na kikai oyobi taigu no kakuho tou ni kansuru horitsu* (the Act on Securing Equal Opportunity and Equal Treatment for Men and Women in the Area of Employment).
2. The Childcare Leave Act refers to *Ikuji kyugyo tou ni kansuru horitsu* (the Act on Childcare Leave and Relevant Issues). The law was amended in 1995 and was renamed as *Ikuji kyugyo kaigo kyugyo tou ikuji matawa kazoku kaigo wo okonau rodosha no fukushi ni kansuru horitsu* (the Act on Childcare Leave, Family Care Leave, and Other Welfare Measures for Workers Raising a Child or Caring for a Family Member, or, for short, the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act).
3. The law was amended in 2009 and was implemented in 2010. However, some provisions were put into effect in 2012 for businesses that normally employed 100 employees or fewer.
4. Yajima, Y. (2014). *Josei no noryoku hakki wo kano to suru work-life balance shien no arikata* [Support for work-life balance that enables women to perform to their potential]. in H. Sato & M. Takeishi (Eds.), *Work-life balance shien no kadai: jinzai tayoka jidai ni okeru kigyo no taio* [Issues in supporting work-life balance: measures taken by companies in the age of growing labor force diversity] (pp. 65-66). Tokyo, Japan: University of Tokyo Press.
5. "One-person operation" in childrearing ("*wan ope ikuji*" in Japanese) refers to one person's sole responsibility for income-generating work, housework, and childrearing, which arises due to reasons such as the spouse's job transfer without accompanying family members.

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