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The Care Work and the Care Workers in South Korea:
Some Policy Issues on the Institutionalization of the Care Workers

Prepared for
The Conference on Social Security for Domestic Workers

Hyunjoo Min, Ph.D.

Korean Women's Development Institute
Bulkwang-dong 1-363, Eunpyoung-gu
Seoul, Korea

E-Mail: newrules@kwdimail.re.kr

Abstract

This study aims to offer the policy-related programs that make better the jobs in the social service sectors—mainly, carework— in Korea. The expansion of the social service in a country is closely related to the increase in the labor force participation rates among women. In those countries where women's economic activity rates are over 60%, the private and public systems to provide social service are well established. However, most jobs in the social service sector in Korea are “bad jobs” that are characterized as low wages, long and irregular work hours and the exclusion from the social insurances. This study consists of three major parts: first, this study conducts the survey on the work conditions and the needs for job stability among women careworkers including those tending the sick, those caring for babies at home, and housemaids. Secondly, this study reviews the current 「The Labor Standard Act」 and investigates the way in which informal care workers can be institutionalized into the formal labor market and get benefited from the social insurance system. And finally, this study suggests the programs that offer official on-the-job trainings and the policy that institutionalizes the formal certificate for careworks. By institutionalizing the careworkers and establishing formal training programs and certificate system, it is expected to provide more women workers with better jobs and to improve the quality of the social service in Korea.

Women's labor force participation has several implications for the women's welfare as well as women's achievement in the labor market. First, the economic activities enable women to be economically independent and to keep away from the poverty over the life course. Second, women's labor force participation can increase family income in the situation where employment stability continues to decrease and, at the same time can enhance women's relative power over the resources in the family. Third, women tend to be regarded as the important labor resource to make up the shortage of the labor that the very fertility and aging society will cause in the near future.

The employment in the social service sector is one of the policy-oriented strategies to increase women's labor force participation in Korea as well as in other industrialized societies. During the periods of the economic development, most industrialized western countries experienced the large increase in the labor market participation rates among women, particularly in the social service sector. The development of the social service sector enables more women to enter the labor market by offering various care services in the home, such as childcare, sick-persons care, and household chores. Women do not have to stay at home in order to take care of young child(ren) or sick family members if care services at home are available. Further, the development of the social service sector can offer more jobs for women who have low levels of skills and experiences in the labor market.

However, it is necessary to examine the characteristics of the jobs in the social service sector in terms of the job quality. In Korea, the expansion of the jobs in the social service sector has successfully been achieved, but most jobs in the social service sector are evaluated as "poor jobs." The average wages of those jobs are estimated about 60% of the average wages of all the industries. Further, most workers in those jobs have long, irregular work hours. More importantly, most workers have neither social insurance on the job nor official labor contract. Such issues on the social service jobs highlight the importance of policy intervention to continuously increase the employment in the social service sector. It is necessary to upgrade the quality of the service and differentiate the types of the service depending on the consumer's needs. Otherwise the demand of the service cannot help but decrease because the middle or upper-middle classes will not be satisfied with the quality of the service and turn to the service in the private service sector. At the same time, the job quality should be improved to secure stable labor supply.

This paper aims to introduce the recent policy-driven efforts to increase the jobs for women in the social service sector and to improve the quality of those jobs in Korea. This paper is based on the research that was done in the Korean Women's Development in 2007 and 2008, titled as 「Job Creation in the Social Service Sector in Korea I」 and 「Job Creation in the Social Service Sector in Korea II」. The research focused primarily on the jobs of housekeeping, sick-persons care, and babysitting in the home and examined the policy intervention as to how to institutionalize social service jobs to meet the consumer's needs and at the same time to continuously increase the quality and quantity of the jobs.

Further, this paper will discuss the possibility of institutionalization for home-based careworkers. Since home-based care service jobs in Korea tend to be in the informal labor market, those workers are excluded from the governmental regulation. Thus this paper will review the current policies to regulate home-based care workers and examine whether those workers can be institutionalized in Korea.

This research proposes two research questions. First, are those jobs in the home-based care service sector really women-friendly? The major reason that the government and the researchers are interested in the domestic care jobs is that caring service sector plays a role of expanding the jobs for women. Second, this research explores what policy can improve the quality of the jobs. To answer these questions, I conducted the survey on 3,000 of home-based care workers in Korea in 2007 regarding the work conditions and policy needs.

The major findings from the survey on the domestic careworkers are as follows. First, those jobs tend to offer opportunities for women who have low levels of skills and trainings. Most of the women who have worked on domestic care jobs finished middle school. But some of babysitters and sick-persons caregivers finished senior high school or college. Average ages of those women are mid forty and have no or little work experience before entering the domestic care service sector. Regarding to the question of how many households care workers visit, about 93% of babysitters and about 94% of housekeepers work only for one household. Regarding to hourly wages, housekeepers earn about \$5 per hour and babysitters earn about \$4.5 per hour on average while sick-person carers earn about \$3 per hour. Looking at the weekly work hours, babysitters work about 46hours per week and housekeepers work about 31hours per week while sick-person carers work about 108hours per week.

To investigate the possibility of the institutionalization on the domestic care workers, first this study analyzed whether domestic care workers are willing to participate in training programs. About 48.5% of sick-person carers are willing to enter formal training programs and about 46.5% of babysitters are in favor of getting more training on the job while only 29.3% of housekeepers would like to get training on the job. In analyzing the attitudes towards the institutionalization on the workers, sick-person carers exhibit the most positive attitude toward the institutionalization.

In conclusion, this study suggests some policies to institutionalize the domestic care work and workers in Korea. First it is necessary to build up some legislation to apply social insurance for the care workers. In order for this purpose, we need to consider revising the current 『Labor Standard Act』 and rearrange the supplementary 『Labor Standard Act』 to consider the home-based care workers as standard workers. Secondly, we can also consider rearranging the employment relationships similar to the existing employment relationships. For instance, we can formalize the relationship between employers and employees by building social enterprise for the home-based care workers. Finally, it is necessary to specialize the care workers by formalizing regular training programs and linking formal training to the certification system. By doing so, it may be possible to secure stable supply and demand system in the market and improve the work condition of the domestic workers, such as minimum wage and work hours control.