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Occupational Changes around Childbirth in Japan

Junko Nishimura

Meisei University

Japan used to show a greater gap between employment rate of mothers with older children and that of mothers with infants. However, more and more young mothers are in the labor force, with short interruption right after the childbirth, and the gap between employment rates of mothers with older and younger children is getting smaller.

This paper examines how Japanese mothers connect their career before and after childbirth. Previous studies on mother's reentry to the labor market mostly focused on whether they come back to the labor force or not; whether mothers continue to be in the same occupation, or the same employment status, and what are the driving forces about occupational change and continuity around the time of childbirth, are issues to be explored.

Using Japanese Panel Survey of Consumers (JPSC), this paper presents how women's occupational and employment status continuity around the first childbirth are affected by the length of time out of work, human capital, and the use of parental leave. The results from discrete-time, competing risk models show that longer time out decrease the chance that women return to the same occupation in regular employment, but increase the possibility of returning to the non-regular position with different occupation from they had before childbirth. Women with higher education are more likely to return to the same occupation in regular employment, compared to those with lower education; but the effect of higher educational attainment is cancelled out when the use of parental leave is considered. The use of parental leave upon their first childbirth is only effective for those who return to the same occupation in regular employment, and it shows even negative effect on returning to the non-regular position. This implies that parental leave system is disproportionately applied to highly-educated, regularly employed women, and it has not benefitted women with non-regular employment, that has considerably increased over the last twenty years.