

Report on Changes in Women's Working Environments Before and After the Spread of the New Coronavirus Infection in Japan: A Case Study

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1. Introduction

Japan has been taking measures to prevent new-type coronavirus infection by promoting vaccination, testing, and therapeutic drugs, and by further strengthening the flow from detection to early treatment. However, on January 27, 2023, the Infectious Diseases Subcommittee of the Health and Welfare Science Council of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare summarized that new coronavirus infection (COVID-19) should be placed in the category of category 5 infectious diseases because it is not considered a condition that meets the private right restriction under the Infectious Diseases Control Law, and on May 8, it was changed to category 5 infectious diseases. The status was changed to a category 5 infectious disease on May 8, 2011). 1) In line with this change, workers have been changing their working environment from telecommuting, etc., which had been introduced since FY 2020, the year of the coronary disaster, but nothing has been done to clarify the actual situation. In this study, the authors clarified the actual situation for working women.

2. Method

Research period

From November 2022 to July 2023

Subject

Interviews and case studies by industrial health nurses of Company A with more than 300 employees

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted after obtaining approval from the ethics committee of Wayo Women's University.

3. Results

Case 1

Female in her 50s, sales manager, married

She had been working at home remotely for three years. She did not feel inconvenienced by working from home. Rather, she felt mentally and financially comfortable because she did not have to

commute or ride crowded trains, she had more time to do housework, and she did not have to pay for her clothes. However, she was feeling strong stress because the company had asked her to come to work full time from April. Therefore, she had a remote meeting with her supervisor, and is now gradually increasing the number of times she comes to work, starting with once a week.

Case 2

40s female, sales representative, married, with children

She had been working at home remotely for 3 years. Since her child was in the early grades of elementary school, she was able to spend more time with her child and do housework at home, which helped her to work more efficiently. She was feeling strong stress from the company's request that she come to work full time from April. Therefore, she met with her supervisor remotely and decided to come to work once a week to monitor the progress of her childcare, and to increase the number of times she came to work to see how things progressed.

Case 3

30s female, sales representative, married, with children

She had been working at home remotely for 3 years. Since her child was in daycare, she was able to spend more time with her child and do household chores while working from home, which helped her to work more efficiently. She was feeling strong stress from the company's request that she come to work full time from April. Therefore, after a remote meeting with her supervisor, she decided to work remotely for the time being to see how things progressed, rather than coming to work and working shorter hours.

4. Considerations

In Japan, since the Law for the Promotion of the Utilization of Women came into effect in 2008, companies are required to monitor the status of women's activities, analyze issues, set numerical targets, and formulate and announce action plans²⁾. However, as far as the authors have surveyed and commissioned, nothing has clarified the actual situation. In particular, there is no comparison

of changes in the working environment before and after the spread of corona infection. This time, the actual situation was surveyed among employees at companies with 300 or more employees.

More than 90% of Japanese working women do their own housework. Now, when asked, "To what extent do you feel burdened by housework?", 22% said "considerably burdened" and 53% said "somewhat burdened," for a total of 75%, or up to 3 out of 4 people, felt that housework was a burden³). By gender, 71.4% of men and 54.2% of women reported a 0.1-point increase and 0.7-point increase, respectively. The average labor force participation rate for the 15-64 age group in 2022 was 80.6%, up 0.5 points from the previous year⁴).

This case study clearly shows that the burden of household chores is significant. The "Law Concerning the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave" (1991), the "Law Concerning the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave," and the "Law Concerning the Welfare of Employers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave" (1991), by providing measures to be taken by employers concerning working hours to facilitate the raising of children and the caring for family members and by providing support measures for workers, etc. who are taking care of children or caring for family members. The purpose of the Act is to promote the welfare of workers who are raising children or caring for fam-

ily members by encouraging them to continue employment and find new employment, thereby helping them to balance their work and family lives, and thereby contributing to economic and social development.²) In all three of the cases, consideration was given to the Act. All three cases in this study are considered to have taken this law into consideration and to have taken the working women's welfare into further consideration.

This study suggests that, as restrictions on social activities are eased for the work patterns of women workers of child-rearing age, it is desirable to consider work efficiency and effectiveness and to select flexible work patterns that can cope with the situation, rather than reverting to pre-corona activities. The establishment of a future work system that takes advantage of the mutual benefits of remote work from home and work from home may have an impact on the health and life support of women workers of child-rearing generation.

References

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