

## **Does an apple fall far from the tree?**

The parental influence on young people's attitude towards job and future professional career development in South Korea

### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the influence of cultural value and attitude of parents on young people's mind settings towards job and household work. Especially, it looks at the role of Confucian patriarchal gender expectation in female workforces and their future professional career development in South Korea.

Young Korean college students in age of around 23 are asked about their family background, such as endorsement of Confucian believe in the everyday life and parents' job career, and the relation to their parents. Based on the answers, hypotheses of different theories about women's career development and behaviour are tested.

Key Words: South Korea, Female Workforce Participation, Cultural View, Quantitative Method

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## **Objective**

The high gender pay gap and low female labour/economic participation are noticeable phenomena in Korea. The gender pay gap is the largest among OECD countries in 2016 (OECD, 2018), on average, a Korean female worker earns only 64.7% of a Korean man's wage, a woman without an upper secondary education receives 62% of the average salary of a man with comparably education level and a woman with a tertiary degree receives 67% of the salary of a similarly educated man in 2017 (Statista, 2018). Albeit, the university enrolment figure of female students has surpassed that of male students since 2009 and it remained higher with 72.7% than their male counterparts (65.3%) in 2017 (Korea Statics, 2018). The Economist's (2018) "Glass-Ceiling Index", which combined the data from several institutions, ranked Korea as the worst country for working women with 29 points behind Japan on the list.

The Korean Government introduced since 2009 diverse supporting schemes for women/mothers with a "career-break" due to pregnancy, giving birth, child care or taking care of family members or who never had the chance to pursue their job career to attract them to the labour market. And the scope of the acts has been continuously extended further, last in 2017, to cover more situations or rather improve conditions which women are facing in vast working areas.

## **Motivation**

Many developed countries are experiencing a decrease in the number of young people who are entering the labour market due to an aging population/a drop of fertility rate so that utilising the untapped potential of highly educated women is a taxing challenge. The Korean government has just started to take many radical changes to tackle this problem, however, despite all supporting schemes, the low rate of female workforce participation in the Korean labour market persists. Therefore, many questions arise what suitable support for Korean society look like. Additionally, the current situation, where many different attempts are tested, offers a favourable condition to explore the effect of institutional and also social efforts on female workforces in Korea.

## **Research gap/Literature review**

The impact of economic development and education on female workforces has been discussed by numerous scholars. The labour market participation of women initially decreases and then increases with the development level of a country because of the changes in market opportunities, social barriers against women and women's education levels (U-Shape pattern) (Durand, 1975; Boserup, 1989; Goldin, 1994; Horton, 1996; Tam, 2011). However, the trend of female workforce participation in rich countries is not always the same. The rate stagnates in some countries from a certain level due to particular reasons (Mammen and Paxson, 2000).

Female workforce participation depends on various factors such as culture (Patimo, 2015), history, religion (Uysal and Guner, 2014), social norms, demography (Bettio and Villa, 1998; Engelhardt and Prskawetz, 2004) and political and social policies (Jaumotte, 2003; Del Boca and Locatelli, 2006). Therefore, a contextualised view may help to better understand a certain country's development in female workforce participation and also people's behaviour, which causes this development (Welter, 2010).

Currently, studies about female labour market participation often focus on MENA (Middle East and North Africa) (e.g. Karshenas and Moghadam, 2001; O'Sullivan et al., 2011; Hayo, and Caris, 2013), highlighting the influences of religion (e.g. Syed, 2010; Sherkat, 2017). Other studies about this topic in Asian countries are related with fertility (e.g. Bloom et al., 2009; Mishra and Smyth, 2010; Bick, 2016) but not about women's mind-settings and not particularly in a specific country or culture. It is barely explored what Korean women's particular attitude towards working are and how their working environments and conditions look like.

The studies that are dealing with female participation in the economy often give the findings of their studies as cultural reasons such as patriarchy or lack of/not appropriate institutional policies like child care (Compton and Pollak, 2014) or parental leave (Kluve and Tamm, 2013). However, they are not going further and do not explore why these results, e.g. patriarchal culture, deficit in policies or legislations, are still not changing or persisting in certain countries, i.e. the roots of the reasons are not often investigated.

Korea has a long tradition which is shaped mainly by Confucianism. It means the Confucian ethics play still an important role in the society and influences people's social value thus their behaviour (Kim and Kim, 2010). It means Korean society is more collective, family oriented, male-dominated and authoritative than others (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Kim and Cho, 2018). The effect of the Confucian value is noticeably in people's view on female workforces. Women are traditionally not considered as the "bread winners" or the head of family, therefore women's attitudes towards jobs are influenced by this cultural expectation so people do not take women's job as serious as men's. Thus, it is commonly expected that women stay home and take care of domestic matters or, if they have a job, then quit after marriage or giving birth.

### **Key research questions and aim**

Some studies suggest that stereotypes, role expectation (Greene, Han and Marlow, 2011) and beliefs of parents (Rittenour and Colaner, 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014; McGinn et al., 2015) influence women's propensity toward future career choices. Thus the adult daughters of employed or self-employed mothers are more likely to make better job careers in the future. Also people's behaviour is strongly influenced by their surroundings, thus, they adopt others' behaviour, which is accepted as a social value within the community, to be accepted (Bandura, 1989).

The systematic literature review of scientific papers and statistical reports showed that not just insufficient social support, such as child care or career training, is to blame for lower female participation in the Korean economy but also cultural values and traditional views on the female workforce participation as other studies found out. In this study, the reason of persistence of these cultural values and views will be explored.

Many advanced economies had a traditional patriarchal culture, which put women in a subordinate role, so that they had discriminatory policies for women in the past, for example, women in Switzerland gained the right to vote in 1971 and women in Germany were not allowed to go to work without their husband's permission until 1977. This culture changed when women gained better access to education, thus, in the labour market and in politics as well. The question is why it does not happen in Korea even though the number of

women with higher education level outnumbered that of men already long ago. Korean women have referred to child care as the biggest obstacle for their career, however, even 7 years after the government introduced the free child care scheme for 0-5 year-old children, nothing really has changed. Yet, it is extremely doubtful whether it was the main reason of the lower female participation rate in Korean economy. This supports the theory of the traditional culture as the stronger reason. To answer this question, this study will explore whether the traditional gender role still exists among the young generation and if the transfer of culture and gender role expectation is still persistent as well as the incompatibility of institutional woman rights to socially acted rights/internalised view in everyday life in Korea.

## **Method**

Young people's internalised view on gender role/expectation will be identified and how and from whom this is transferred to them (parental and cultural influences) by using a survey with a questionnaire among around 23-year-old college students<sup>1</sup> in different cities of South Korea.

Research questions:

- » Young Koreans view on gender role (expectation)
- » (Potential) Female labour forces' attitude towards jobs in South Korea
- » Value/Meaning of jobs for woman in South Korea
- » The role of cultural tradition/inheritance, especially Confucian patriarchal influences, among young Koreans

Hypotheses:

- H1 Young Koreans, who have a working mother, value women's paid jobs more
- H2 Young male Koreans with a working mother are more likely to take part in household work (adopting parents' behaviour)
- H3 Young women with working mother tend to aspire a job career in the future
- H4 Young Koreans reflect the parents' values and adopt them

## **Contribution/Novelty**

Nowadays, women are highly educated and willing to participate in the labour market in developed countries. Therefore, it is a huge loss for a country's economy if it fails to utilise this enormous potential. This study will help to know where the roots of the Korean problems lie and give a deep insight into the matters regarding lower female labour market participation.

In a bigger context, the study will also be useful for other developing countries with similar culture, i.e. China, Vietnam, to be better prepared for the problems to come. Additionally, Japan is suffering from the same phenomenon and the prime minister Abe is trying many different actions since he is in his office. This study possibly helps to find the roots of the phenomenon in Japan as well.

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<sup>1</sup> The college enrolment rate among young people in South Korea was 67.8% in 2019. It means far more than half of young people are visiting college, therefore, this population is suitable to carry out the survey

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