

## A Year After COVID-19 - Changes and Prospects for Women's Work and Care ②

# Changes in Work and Care since COVID-19 and Improvements Needed in Care Policies

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- The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) issues a series of special briefs to reflect on women's lives that have changed since the spread of COVID-19 and predict how the crisis, which has yet to end, will change the status of gender inequality in our society in the future. This brief, which is the second part of the series, diagnoses the changes in work and care experienced by women with children since the COVID-19 outbreak and suggests policy implications for achieving a sustainable gender-equal society during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ① Policy issues for addressing the changes in women's employment and job crisis after COVID-19
- ② Changes in work and care since COVID-19 and improvements needed in care policies

| Category          | Detail   |
|-------------------|--|
| Sample population | Among women aged 20-59 (international age) nationwide, those who were wage earners at the time of the survey, or those who were unemployed at the time of the survey but had worked as wage earners at some point between March and November, 2020 |
| Sample size       | 3,007 people   |
| Sampling method   | Proportional distribution by age group according to wage earner population composition ratio (Based on the data from the Economically Active Population Survey of the Statistics Korea published in October 2020)                                  |
| Sampling error    | 95% confidence level $\pm 1.8\%p$  |
| Survey method     | Online survey using the Internet - CAWI (Computer Aided Web Interview)   |
| Survey period     | November 26 ~ December 11, 2020  |
| Surveyed by       | Hankook Research Co., Ltd.   |

## Changes in jobs during the COVID-19 crisis for female workers who have children

- Among women with children of elementary school age or younger, 21.3% left their employment during the COVID-19 crisis (March ~ November 2020) and among them, at least three out of four (76.0%) were found to have remained unemployed until early December 2020 <Table 1>.

<Table 1> Changes in jobs during COVID-19 for all women who participated in the survey and women with children of elementary school age or younger

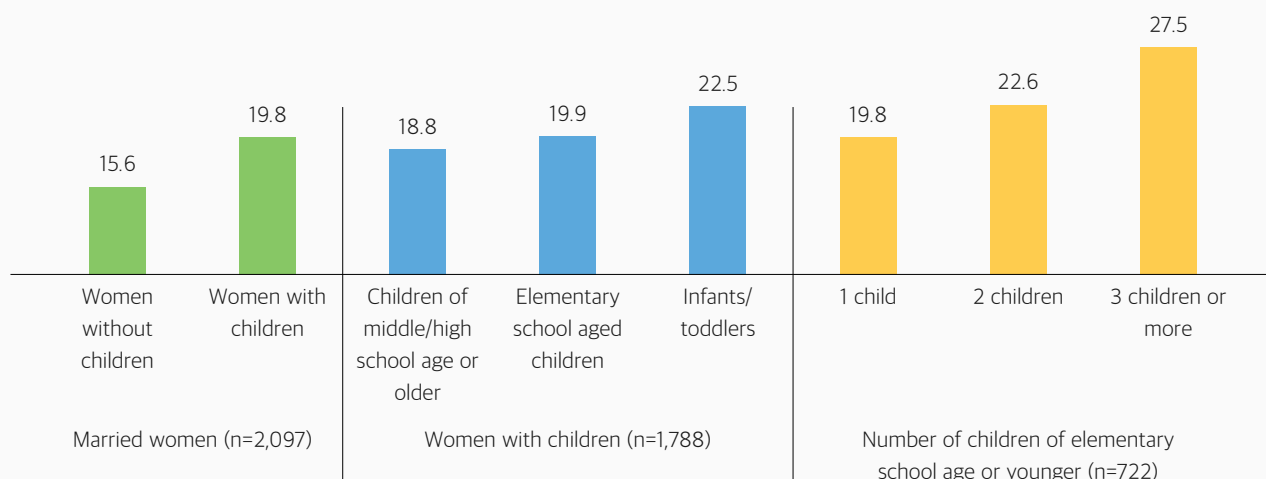
(Unit: People, %)

| Category  | Became unemployed and remained unemployed | Re-employed after losing employment | Obtained employment after COVID-19 | Remained employed throughout COVID-19 |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| All women who participated in the survey (N=3,007)  | 412(13.7%)                                | 217(7.2%)                           | 472(15.7%)                         | 1,906(63.4%)                          |
| Women with children of elementary school age or younger (N=722)   | <b>117(16.2%)</b>                         | 37(5.1%)                            | 112(15.5%)                         | 456(63.2%)                            |
| ※ Proportion of those who left employment during COVID-19<br>- 20.9% of all women surveyed<br>- 21.3% of women with children of elementary age or younger |   |                                     |                                    |                                       |

- Women were more likely to leave their employment during COVID-19 if they had younger last-born children and more children of elementary school age or younger compared to others. The most important factor compelling women with children to leave their jobs was found to be the issue with care during COVID-19.
  - Women were more likely to leave employment during COVID-19 if they had children (19.8% with children, 15.6% without children), had younger children (22.5% with infants/toddlers, 19.9% with elementary school aged children, 18.8% with middle/high school aged children), or had more children (19.8% with one child, 22.6% with two children, 27.5% with three or more children) [Figure 1].
  - Women with younger children were more likely to quit their jobs due to care. About 7 out of 10 women with infants/toddlers cited care as the reason for leaving employment [Figure 2].

**[Figure 1] Women who left their employment during COVID-19**

(Unit: %)

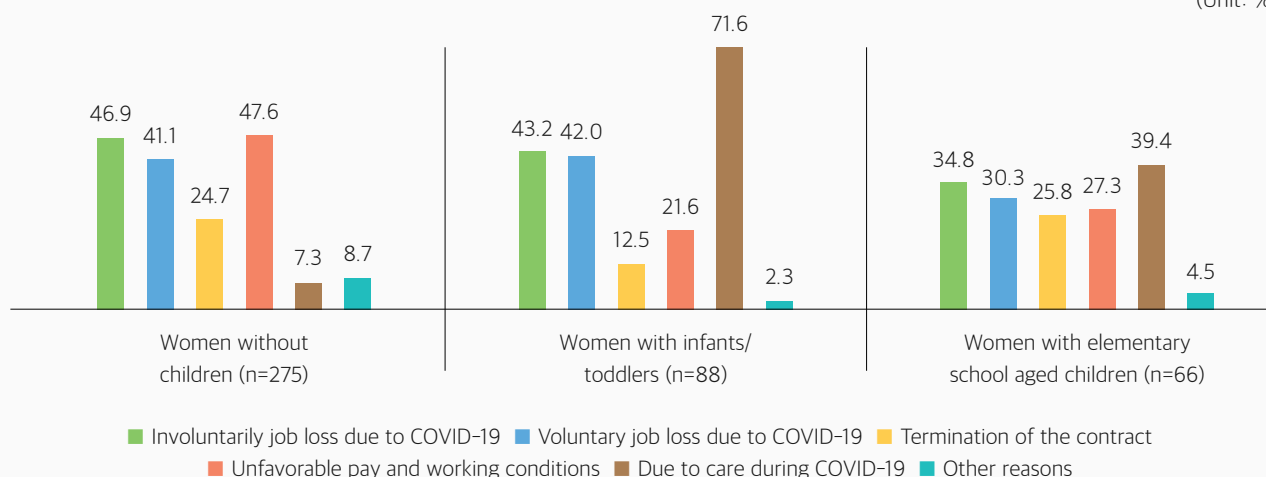


Note: 1) Classification on the presence or absence of children is applied to married women only, and the age group of children and the number of children of elementary school age or younger were based solely on the children regardless of the women's marital status.

2) Children's age group was classified based on the ages of the last-born children.

**[Figure 2] Reasons why women left their employment during COVID-19 (Ranking 1+2+3)**

(Unit: %)



Note: 1) The figures represent women who left employment and have children of elementary age or younger.

2) Involuntarily job loss due to COVID-19: Business closure/temporary closure due to worsening management conditions since COVID-19, dismissal (termination of contract) due to worsening management conditions since COVID-19, no dismissal but the workplace subtly pressured the women to quit, prolonged leave of absence since COVID-19, etc.

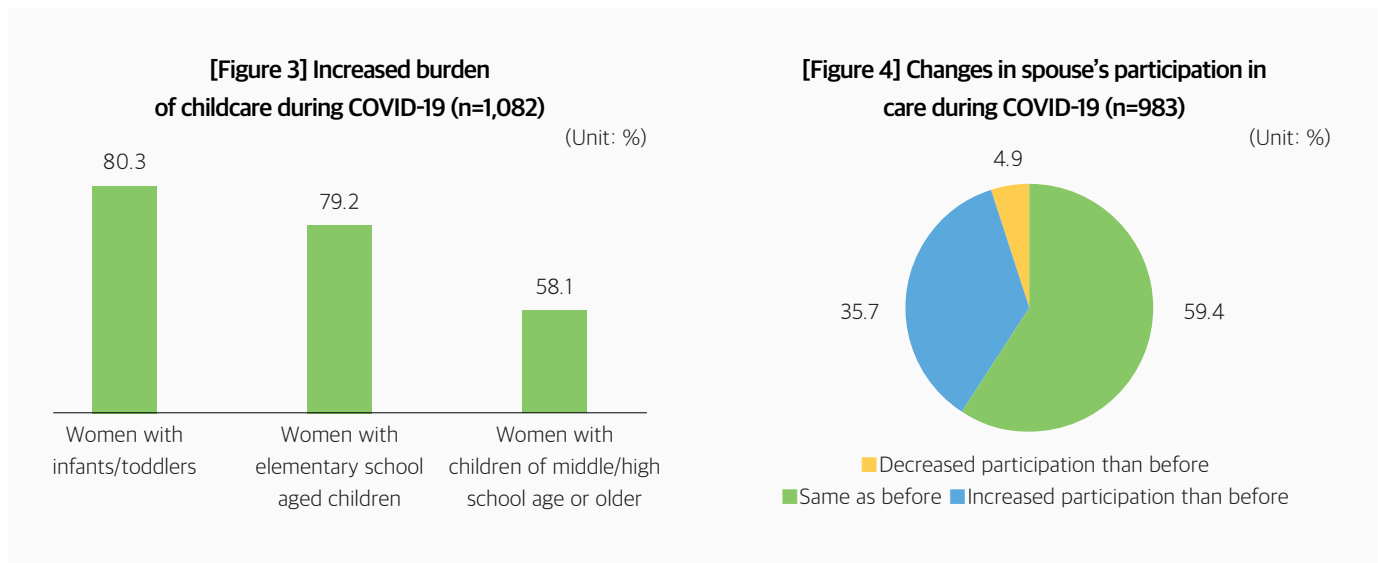
- Voluntary job loss due to COVID-19: Dramatic decrease in workload since COVID-19, dramatic increase in workload since COVID-19, fear of infection if the women continued working, etc.

- Due to care during COVID-19: Direct caring of children or help with schoolwork since COVID-19, addition of a family member who needs care (not children), pressure from the family members to leave employment since COVID-19, etc.

- Unfavorable pay and working conditions: Inadequate pay or income, poor working condition apart from inadequate pay, etc.

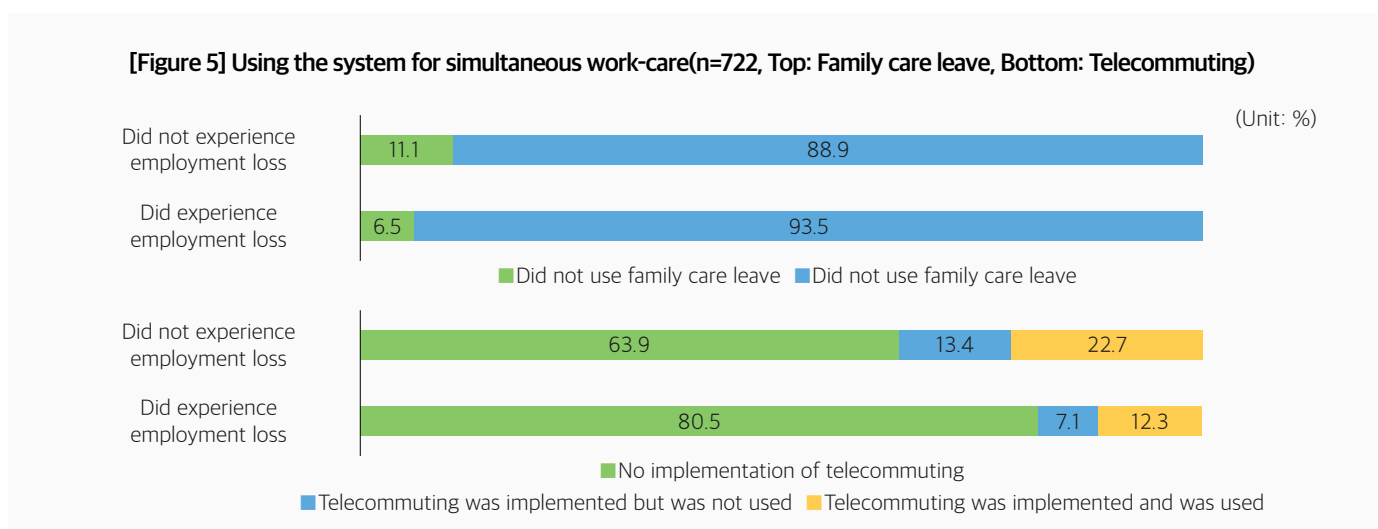
## Experience of work-care burden among female workers with children and the perception of the surroundings

- About 80% of women with children of elementary school age or younger reported increased burden of childcare due to COVID-19, and about 60% reported that their spouse's participation in care remained unchanged, confirming the intensification of the dual burden of work-care among women with children of elementary school age or younger during COVID-19 [Figures 3, 4].



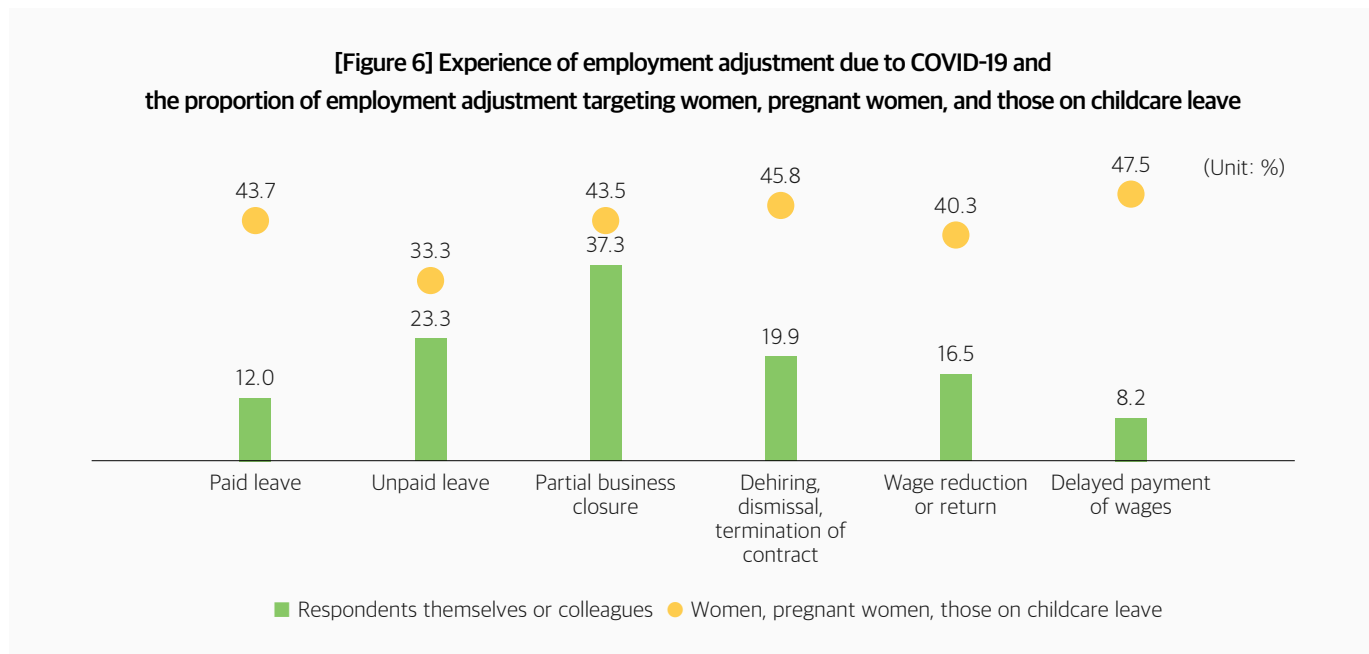
Note: The figures for 'Increased burden of childcare during COVID-19' represent those of women with children, and the figures for 'Changes in spouse's participation in care during COVID-19' exclude those who reported 'Not applicable (I do not have a spouse, etc.)' among women with children.

- However, many of the respondents faced conditions that were not supported by the system that was supposed to facilitate simultaneous work-care, or they faced difficulties actually utilizing the system [Figure 5].



Note: The figures represent those of women with children of elementary school age or younger.

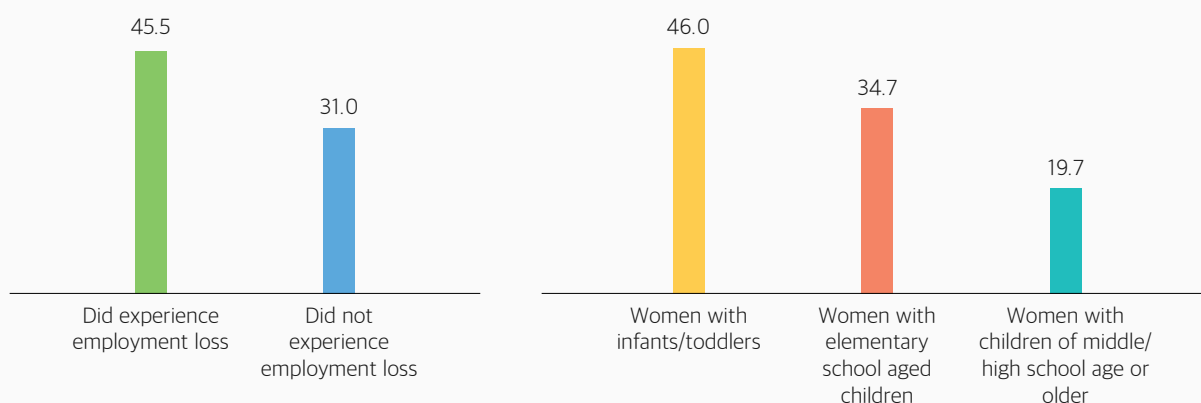
- During the COVID-19 crisis, about one out of two women (49.3%) with children of elementary school age or younger experienced employment adjustment directly or indirectly at least once at their workplace (47.2% of all women surveyed).
- More than one-third (33~47%) of employment adjustments due to COVID-19 targeted women, pregnant women, and those on childcare leave first. About half of all cases of dehiring, dismissal, and contract termination targeted women, etc., confirming that many gender-discriminatory employment adjustments were implemented at businesses where management conditions deteriorated [Figure 6].



Note: The figures are those of 722 women with children of elementary school age or younger. Among them, only those who had experienced employment adjustment were asked if it targeted women, pregnant women, or those on childcare leave. Each question has a different number of respondents, and the proportions exclude missing values.

- About one in two women who left their employment during the COVID-19 crisis was encouraged by their spouses or family members to quit their jobs to take care of their children, and this proportion was higher if the age of their last-born children was younger [Figure 7].

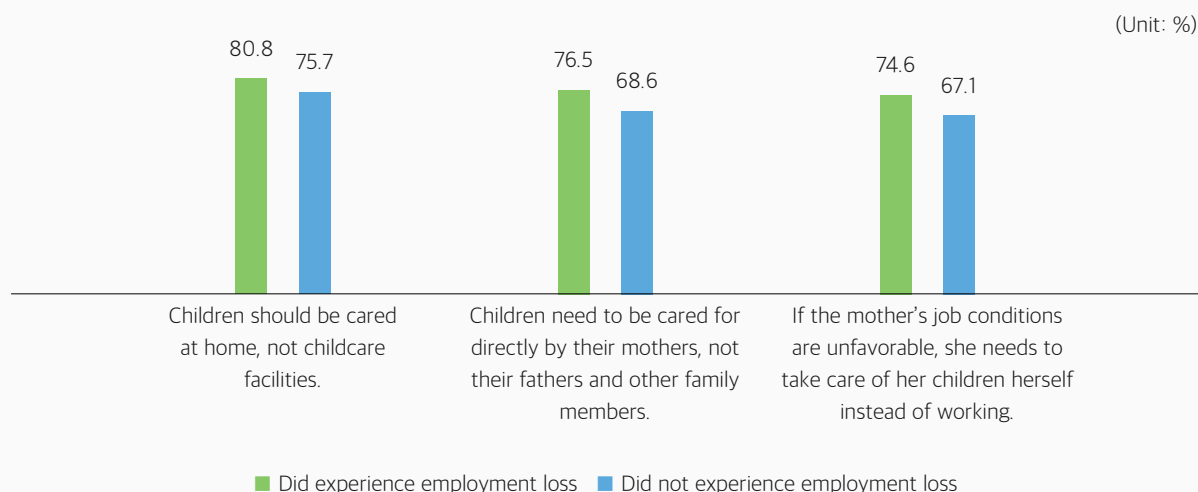
**[Figure 7] Encouraged by spouses or family members to leave employment**  
(n=1,082, Left: Experience of leaving employment, Right: Age group of the last-born child) (Unit: %)



Note: The figures represent those of women who have children. The responses represent “I was encouraged (often + sometimes)”

- Women with children were strongly aware of the social pressure that required women to act as ideal caregivers during the outbreak of infectious disease. The survey confirmed that our society perceived that it was ideal for mothers to take care of their children themselves, and mothers with unfavorable job conditions were perceived to experience stronger pressure to provide direct care.
- In particular, the survey confirmed that women who had left employment were more likely to recognize these social pressures compared to women who did not leave employment [Figure 8].

**[Figure 8] Perceptions about childcare in our society during the outbreak of infectious disease (n=1,082)**

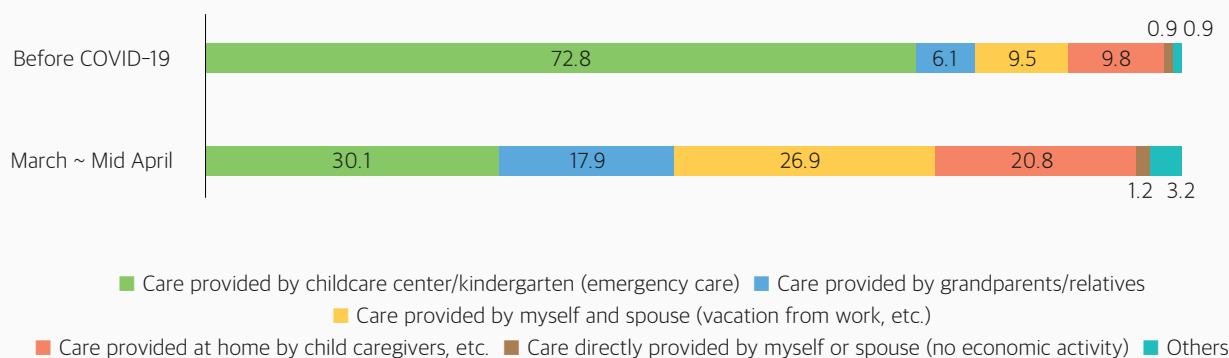


Note: The figure represent those of women who have children. The responses represent “I agree (very + mostly)”.

## Changes in childcare during COVID-19 and the impact of gaps in care

- During the initial gaps in care due to COVID-19, women with children of elementary school age or younger were highly likely to take care of their children at home themselves by leaving employment, using their vacation, or through grandparents/relatives, etc. rather than using emergency care offered at childcare centers, kindergartens, schools, etc. due to concerns about infections.
  - In the case of infants/toddlers, most of them were using care facilities before COVID-19 (72.8% before COVID-19), but the use of emergency care in the early days of the spread of COVID-19 fell to 30.1%. The forms of care were replaced with other forms, as shown by the respondents reporting 'Either myself or my spouse left employment to provide care' (9.5% → 26.9%), 'Either myself or my spouse provided care by using vacation days' (6.1% → 17.9%), or 'The grandparents/relatives provided care' (9.8% → 20.8%).
  - For elementary school students, the proportion of those using after-school care and private academies reduced after the COVID-19 outbreak due to concerns over COVID-19, and not unlike infants/toddlers, the proportion of those cared for by parents, grandparents, relatives, etc. at home increased. Also, the proportion of children who were left alone at home was 26.0% before COVID-19 but increased to 29.9% since COVID-19. The increase was not substantial, but about 3 out of 10 elementary school students were found to have stayed at home alone.

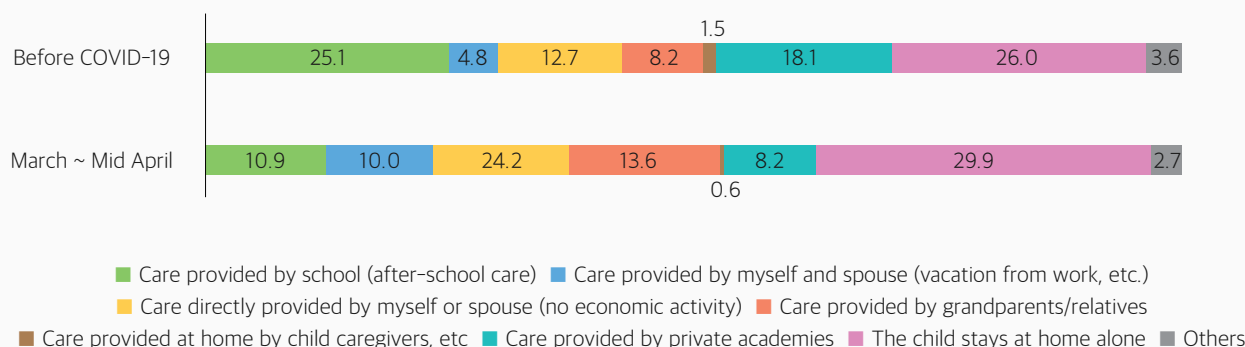
**[Figure 9] Changes in the main form of care for infants/toddlers between before COVID-19 and after COVID-19 (March ~ Mid-April) (n=346)** (Unit: %)



Note: The figures represent those of women who have children but excludes women who responded "I did not have any children prior to COVID-19".

**[Figure 10] Changes in the main form of care for elementary school aged children between before COVID-19 and after COVID-19 (March~mid-April) (n=331)**

(Unit: %)

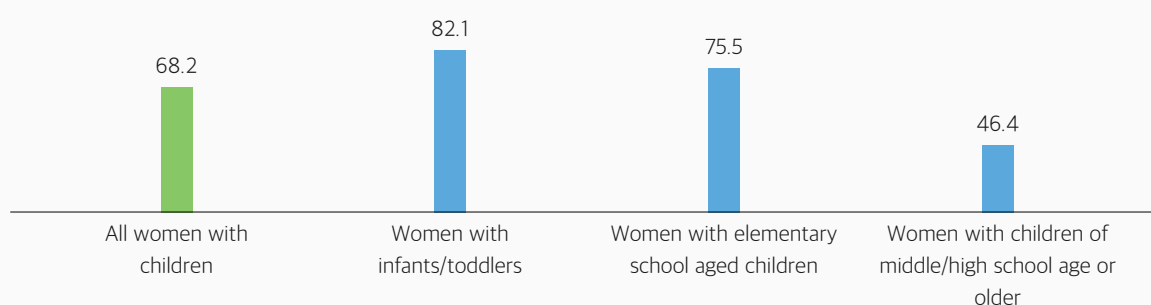


Note: The figures represent those of women who have elementary school aged children.

- As the dual burden of work and care increased due to the continuing gaps in care during COVID-19, about 7 out of 10 women with children were found to have considered leaving employment to provide childcare during the COVID-19 crisis [Figure 11].
  - Since the spread of COVID-19, 82.1% of women with infants/toddlers, 75.5% of women with children of elementary school age or younger, and 46.4% of women with children of middle/high school age or older have thought at some point that they should quit their jobs to take care of their children.
  - The main reason (multiple responses) why women with children of elementary school age or younger considered leaving employment was "Because I have no one else who can look after my children" [Figure 12]. More than four out of five of those women were found to have considered the possibility of 'family/child care' in their current jobs when they were employed [Figure 13]. This suggests that women's involuntary career interruption may be resolved and their reemployment can be achieved only if family/child care issues are addressed first.

**[Figure 11] Proportion of those who considered leaving employment to take care of their children since the spread of COVID-19 (n=1,082)**

(Unit: %)

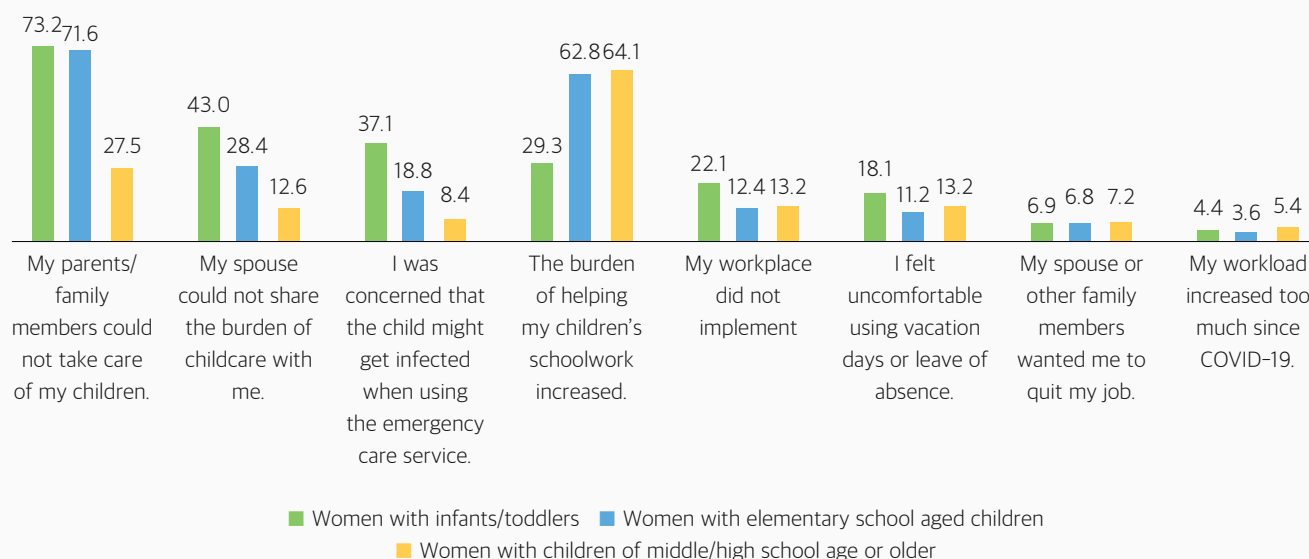


Note: The figures represent those of women who have children. The responses represent "Yes I have considered it (often + sometimes)".



**[Figure 12] Reason why women considered leaving employment after the spread of COVID-19 (n=738, multiple responses)**

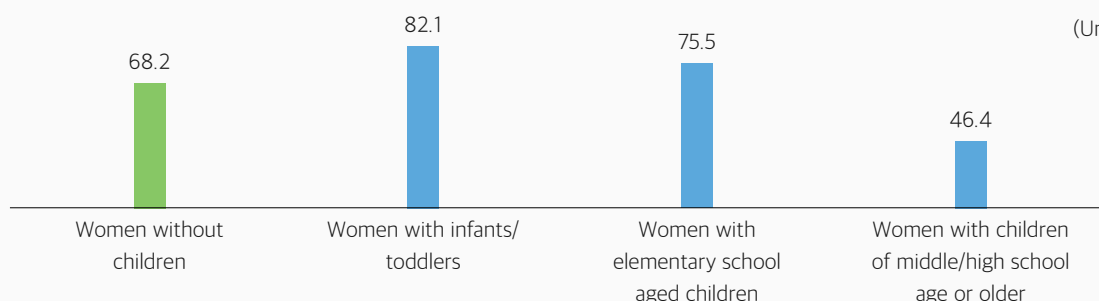
(Unit: %)



Note: The figures represent those of women with children and reported "I have considered leaving employment since the spread of COVID-19".

**[Figure 13] Proportion of women who put importance on family/child care when choosing their current employment and found employment during COVID-19 (n=155)**

(Unit: %)

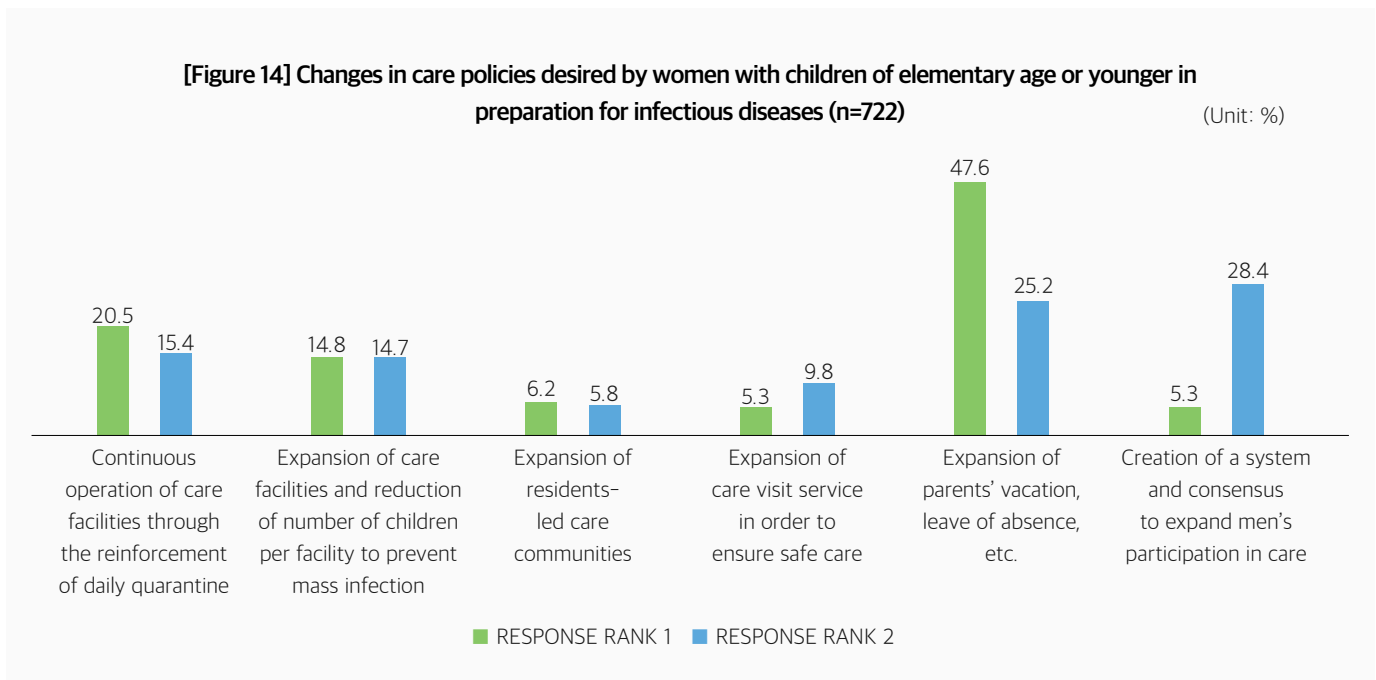


Note: The figures represent those of women who left employment and found reemployment during COVID-19, and women who were not working prior to COVID-19 but obtained employment after COVID-19. The response was "I considered childcare or family care was very important when choosing my job (very + a little)".

## Changes in care policies desired by women with children

- With regards to the desired changes in care policies against the epidemic, women with children of elementary school age or younger wanted support for parents'simultaneous work and care, operation of safe and sustainable care services, and equal participation in care between men and women [Figure 14].

- In particular, the respondents reported a need to expand vacation, leave of absence, and flexible work hours to support parents to take care of their children themselves (the most popular choice of response, 47.6%) and a need to create a system and social consensus to expand men's participation in care (the second most popular choice of response, 28.4%). The results confirmed that there are high demands for establishing work conditions conducive to simultaneous work and care and resolving the imbalance in care between men and women during COVID-19.



## Conclusion and policy recommendations

- The survey confirmed that the spread of COVID-19 has intensified the job crisis for women who have children of elementary school age or younger.
  - This can be attributed to a combination of poor working conditions that lack support for simultaneous work and care, social pressure that tends to pass on childcare to women, and so on. To improve this, an environment that supports simultaneous work and care needs to be in place, and equal distribution of care is required.
  - Based on the results of the survey, we recommend the future care policies to:
    - △ Expand the support system that facilitates working parents' work and care simultaneously;
    - △ Establish a safe and sustainable public care;
    - △ Provide management and supervision to prevent penalties for mothers such as gender-discriminatory employment adjustment, etc.
    - △ Expand the equal participation in care for men and women, etc.