

Abstract

The Impact of the Maximum 52-hour Work Week on Female Workers and the Challenges Going Forward

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President Moon Jae-in's government pledged to legalize the Maximum 52-hour work week and set the maximum annual working hours as 1,800 hours in order to carry out the action plan of "striking a work-life balance for people to enjoy leisure time," as specified under the Five Major National Policy Objectives of "building a nation that takes care of people's lives." The legalization of the Maximum 52-hour work week was discussed by the Committee on Working Hour Reduction from March 2012 and was implemented with the Cabinet's passage of the "revised bill for the reduction of working hours" in March 2018. The Maximum 52-hour work week system was first enforced in workplaces with three hundred or more employees in July 2018 and was further expanded to workplaces

with fifty to three hundred employees in July 2020 and to workplaces with five to fifty employees in July 2021.

Considering that the government introduced the Maximum 52-hour work week to reduce working hours for striking a work-life balance for people to enjoy leisure time, this study investigated how the policy has influenced female workers in the third year of its enforcement and what the policy had achieved. The gender gap in working hours is more substantial in terms of overtime work and holiday work hours than regular work hours, while the gender gap in wages is also more visible in overtime pay than regular pay. The study results indicate that the enforcement of the Maximum 52-hour work week helped reduce the gender gap in overall working hours and pay, as it resulted in a decline in overtime work and holiday work. The study also found that the commitment to work and the level of happiness were lower for workers with long working hours. This finding testifies that the practice of limiting extra hours to 52 hours is a key policy that improves an individual's job satisfaction, job involvement and quality of life. With regard to the impact of the Maximum 52-hour work week on businesses' hiring practices, there were no side effects, which was one of the concerns of leaders. If anything, the system was found to have a positive impact on employment in terms of the number of hired workers and newly-hired workers. The survey of workers in companies subject to the Maximum 52-hour work week system found that the workers were highly satisfied with the newly-enforced system and that the level of satisfaction was higher for women than men. The International Labor Organization's 2019 report titled "Work for a Brighter Future" wrote that because too many workers continue to work excessive hours, which leaves them time-poor, while large numbers of women throughout the world struggle to balance work

and care responsibilities, efforts must be made to meet companies' needs and grant greater autonomy (time sovereignty) to workers.

Based on the achievements of the Maximum 52-hour work week system revealed by this study and the wider discussion of workers' time sovereignty, various policies were suggested for the successful implementation of the Maximum 52-hour work week system. Suggestions include: supporting businesses that are expanding and implementing a flexible work system; finding and rewarding certain companies as role models for implementing the Maximum 52-hour work week system in different sectors; training managers of businesses that are enforcing the Maximum 52-hour work week system; revising the wage system so that it is centered on job skills and performance; reflecting the implementation of the 52-hour work week in the evaluation of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's Best Family Friendly Management Certification; and introducing the Maximum 52-hour work week system also to dispatched workers.

Research areas: labor·employment

Keywords: the Maximum 52-hour work week, working hours,
women's labor, work and life balance