

Abstract

Title

How Experiences of Work Interruption make Women an Opportunity to Acquire Re-employment Resources:
Interview Research for Expatriate Housewives

Name

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1. Introduction and Purpose

As women's employment has become a significant topic of discussion in Japan, research of women's work interruption needs to include the knowledge about not only pregnancy or childbirth but other life events as well. In this study, I explored the employment activity and occupational career attitudes of expatriate housewives who had been regular salaried employees and did not have any child before they accompanied their husbands overseas. They desired to continue their occupational careers, but selected to leave their work because of their husbands' job transfers abroad.

There are three main objectives in this study. First, the reasons why expatriate housewives left their jobs and values relevant to their careers are examined. Second, I explored how expatriate housewives viewed their experiences of leaving the job, and the process of these evaluations in relation to socio-cultural background abroad is shown. Finally, this study examined how expatriate housewives gain occupational abilities and resources, and the mechanism for their re-employment utilizing these capitals.

In this study, data were collected from semi-structured interviews to 15 Japanese expatriate housewives in 2011, and from 2014 to 2016.

2. Results

First, all participants had a strong willingness to continue working in the future. However, there were three factors that influenced work interruption such as temporary retirement or resignation: "Work", "Family" and "Personal". These factors did not have any effect on work interruption individually, but the combination of two or more factors did have an effect. In particular, the participants considered leaving their jobs when they faced situations such as "eagerness of change from working life" and "desire of new family formation" or "seeking to establish a family with two persons in the future". After moving to overseas, in the situation such as "the lack of opportunity for contacting with the job", they tried to build the occupational career by "being Japanese" and "acquiring the qualifications".

Secondly, expatriate housewives had both negative and positive evaluations about their non-working experiences

during overseas stay. They had two self-evaluation frameworks regarding work interruption: Japanese company and local community. In the Japanese company framework, expatriate housewives evaluated their career-blank negatively. On the other hand, in the local community framework they had the positive feeling of self-growth due to the experience of living abroad. These contradictory results showed that the expatriate housewives' cognition, whether positive or negative, changed based on their situations.

Finally, results showed expatriate housewives gained 5 abilities: "insightfulness", "interest in cultures", "understanding of various viewpoints", "anti-stress depending on the situation," and "self-control". However, after returning to the Japanese workplace they could not utilize these abilities. On the other hand, after returning to workplace, it was demonstrated that these abilities were potentially useful for re-adaptation to work. Expatriate housewives, because of visa restrictions, had a limited opportunity to access to full-time work continuously during overseas stay. Therefore, even if participants' human capital for working such as high education or technical qualification was abundant, the work limitation prevented them from accessing to employment opportunities. In other words, they had enough capacity for working, but could not return employment because of the social system and Japanese company norms. In addition, expatriate housewives had advanced the job attainment activity from "aggressive involvement of husband," but had limited it to "non-judgmental attitude of husband" such as "respect wife's opinion".

3. Conclusion

This research clarified the social system through which expatriate housewives acquired abilities and skills from their experiences abroad. Interruption of their employment would decrease job opportunities upon their return to work due to the limited access to social capital during career break. Nevertheless, participants acted to find alternative activities and lifestyle to build upon experiences based on cross-cultural communication. They also tried to find different occupational career style in abroad and after returning to Japan. Future study should explore the multiple occupational careers for women whose employment was interrupted due to life events such as their husbands' overseas transfer.