

**Nonstandard Employment and Marital Instability in South Korea:
Gender Differences and Mechanisms**

Sojung Lim¹

Donghyun Kim¹

Yeonjin Lee²

Abstract

The growth of nonstandard work in South Korea has been the subject of concern due to its precarious nature in a rigidly segmented labor market. While the rise in nonstandard employment is posited to have negative implications for family outcomes in South Korea, our understanding of the impact that nonstandard work has on marital instability is still limited. In this paper, we fill this gap by examining how nonstandard work arrangements are associated with the risk of divorce with a focus on gender differences and mechanisms. Methodologically, we use nationally representative longitudinal data (the Korean Welfare Panel Study) to estimate discrete-time hazards models. The results indicate that, for men, nonstandard employment is associated with higher likelihood of divorce. However, there are no statistical differences in the risk of divorce among women by employment type. In addition, two hypothesized mediators, income and depressive symptoms, do not explain the association of nonstandard work with the risk of divorce.

¹ Utah State University. Co-first authors.

² Nanyang Technological University.

Today divorce is one of the most critical social issues in South Korea. The crude divorce rate rose more than 5 times from 0.4 to 2.3 between 1970 and 2010. In addition, the number of divorces has increased rapidly in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The number of divorces in 2003 was a historic record high of 166,617. Compared to 1993 (59,313 cases of divorce), this figure is almost 2.8 times higher. Along with declining marriage rates, such persistently high divorce rates could indicate that the institution of marriage in South Korea has been changing substantially in recent years.

Increasing labor market inequality and deteriorating employment conditions have been posited as one of the major contributing factors to persistently high divorce rates in South Korea (e.g., Cheong, 2004; Chung, 2008; Jung, 2008). Of particular importance with regard to the rapid increase of the divorce rate in Korea is the 1997 IMF financial crisis (Chung, 2008). Right after 1997, the number of divorces and the crude divorce rate exceeded 100,000 and 2.5, respectively (Kim, 2017). Prior to the financial crisis, South Korean workers enjoyed relative job stability (e.g., permanent employment as the prevalent system in large companies). However, after the financial crisis, South Korean labor market has been increasingly segmented into “good jobs” and “bad jobs” along with the growth of nonstandard work arrangements as observed in many developed countries in recent decades (e.g. Autor, Katz, & Kearney, 2006; Kalleberg, 2009) . Nonstandard employment also called contingent, non-traditional, irregular, and precarious work refers to the type of employment that is different from standard employment, which is regular, full-time, and permanent (Kalleberg, 2000). Examples of nonstandard work include part-time, contract, temporary work, day labor, and self-employment (Houseman & Osawa, 2003; Kalleberg, 2000). Growth in precarious nonstandard employment not only deteriorated economic stability but also increased inequality and uncertainty among workers (Holzer, Lane, Rosenblum,

& Andersson, 2011; Kalleberg, 2009, 2011). According to recent data, the number of nonstandard workers in Korea has increased steadily since the economic crisis of 1997, with a substantial increase observed in the early 2000s (KOSTAT, 2018). As a result, more than two out of five of waged workers were employed in some forms of nonstandard jobs in 2017 (KOSTAT, 2018). Compared to most other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, such a high level of nonstandard work is very unusual.

Many scholarly works have reached nearly universal consensus that economic resources can function as one of the primary determinants for union formation and dissolution (Becker, 1981; Oppenheimer, 1988; Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Considering that most people derive economic resources from employment and that labor market inequality has been widening, the type and quality of employment should have become an important factor for marital stability (e.g., Cherlin, 1979). Employment quality is also important for a stable marriage since marriage is increasingly a “marker of prestige,” and securing a high-quality job (i.e., a full-time standard job with benefits) can be considered a symbol of economic achievement (e.g., Cherlin, 2014; Smock et al., 2005). The importance of employment type in marital stability can be more pronounced in a setting like South Korea where the labor market is highly segmented and mobility from nonstandard to standard employment is limited. In such a context, whether one holds (non)standard employment determines one’s labor market status, beyond differentials in economic resources from employment.

Therefore, it is unfortunate that very little research has examined how nonstandard work is associated with the risk of divorce in South Korea. Existing evidence is also limited in that most of the studies relied on cross-sectional data analyses. In this study, we begin to fill this gap by employing data from the national representative longitudinal survey (the Korean Welfare

Panel Study) and examining how nonstandard work arrangements are associated with marital instability with a focus on gender differences and mechanisms. Findings of this study will broaden our understanding of economic determinants of marital dissolution in South Korea in the context of growing labor market segmentation and inequality. Findings of this study will also have important policy implications by documenting the impact of employment insecurity on family dissolution.

Data and Methods

Data come from the Korean Welfare Panel Study (hereafter KWPS), an annual longitudinal study of representative sample of 15,251 individuals from 7,072 households. In this study, we use data from wave 1 (2006) to wave 8 (2013), the most recent survey available for public use. Retention rates have been consistently high during the observation period: 74.53% of households at baseline survey still participated in interview in wave 8. We restricted the analytical sample to men and women between 20 and 60 years old considering that the legal age for marriage (without parental consents) is 20 and the official retirement age is 60 in South Korea. After applying listwise deletion, the analytic sample is comprised of 19,557 person-year observations for men and 22,863 for women.

The dependent variable of interest is whether a respondent got divorced between waves. Using information on marital status updated in every survey, divorce is defined when a respondent in a first marriage at the previous year ($t-1$) left the marital union at year (t). The measure for divorce includes those who are being separated.

An independent variable is the type of employment, which includes standard employment (reference group), nonstandard employment, self-employment (also includes family business), and non-employment. Based on the classification by the Korean Statistics Bureau and prior

research (e.g., Kalleberg et al. 2000), we define nonstandard employment as temporary work, part-time jobs, and other short-term contract jobs, in contrast to standard employment, which refers to full-time regular jobs (without expected termination of contract). Self-employment is considered a separate category since the rate of the self-employed is relatively high in Korea compared to other OECD countries (Kim & Ok, 2013).

In this study, we evaluate two potential mediators linking nonstandard work and marital instability. First, we include income, which refers to logged annual household income. Second, depressive symptoms are measured using 11 items from the CES-D scale (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale). The level of depression is a mean response to the eleven items with an alpha reliability of 0.87 and a mean of 1.36 with higher scores indicating greater levels of depressive symptoms.

In all models, we include several control variables that may affect both employment status and the risk of divorce (e.g., Chung, 2008), such as age (measured linearly), place of residence (urban vs. rural), educational attainment (a categorical variable that consists of high school degree, junior/2-year college, and university degree or more), and the number of children (0 or 1+). All controls are time-varying, measured at the previous interview (year $t-1$) since we lag the measure of divorce by one year so that an independent variable (employment type) and all controls precede a dependent variable.

Preliminary Results

In light of the characteristics of the outcome variables and structure of data (i.e., annual survey), we estimate logistic regression models to evaluate how one's employment type is associated with the risk of divorce. Since theoretical expectations about the relationships between employment type and divorce differ by gender, models are estimated separately for men and women.

Table 1 presents results from discrete-time hazard models. Results from the baseline model (Model 1) show that, for men, the risk of divorce is higher for nonstandard workers (1.82 times) compared to standard workers (reference group). It is interesting that self-employed men do not differ from those in standard employment in terms of the likelihood of divorce. This result is due to the fact that self-employed men have lower education than their counterparts in standard employment (supplementary analyses, results not shown). That is, initially negative association between self-employment and men's divorce disappears once educational attainment is introduced into the model. It is important to note that this significant association between nonstandard employment and men's risk of divorce is found, net of various background characteristics and socioeconomic resources (e.g., education and income). Not surprisingly, the likelihood of divorce is higher for the men who are not employed (reference is standard employment). In contrast, for women, the coefficients for all the employment types are not statistically significant compared to those in standard employment. Combined, these results show that men's nonstandard employment is associated with higher marital instability (Becker, 1981; Oppenheimer 1988), while women's employment type may not matter in terms of marital stability in a context in which women's employment might still be supplementary to men's income and women have limited career opportunities (e.g., Lim, 2018).

The second model adds income (logged annual household income) to examine the extent to which income accounts for the relationship between employment type and the risk of divorce observed in the baseline model. Higher household income is associated with the lower risk of divorce, regardless of gender. However, adding income does not change relationships between employment type and divorce for both men and women.

In Model 3, depressive symptoms are introduced to examine whether they mediate the association between nonstandard work and divorce. With the inclusion of depressive symptoms, the significant association of non-employment with men's divorce disappears. It implies that stress and compromised mental health of non-employed men, measured by depressive symptoms, may explain their higher likelihood of divorce compared to those in standard employment (Model 1). In addition, the magnitude of nonstandard employment (relative to standard employment) in terms of the risk of divorce reduces when depressive symptoms are considered (98% to 58%) in Model 3. This change suggests that, to some extent, nonstandard work is associated with higher depressive symptoms, which may lead to marital instability. However, it is worth noting that men with nonstandard jobs still have higher odds of divorce than their counterparts with standard jobs (58%, $p < 0.05$) even with the inclusion of depressive symptoms. That is, the negative association between men's nonstandard work and marital stability observed in the baseline model is not completely explained by compromised mental health of nonstandard workers. It is plausible that other factors associated with nonstandard employment in the South Korean labor market such as job instability, bad work conditions, and unstable labor market status with limited prospects for mobility and promotion may account for elevated risk of divorce among male nonstandard workers (e.g., Kim, 2014).

In subsequent revisions of these preliminary analyses, we will further examine other mechanisms linking the observed associations between nonstandard work and the risk of divorce such as health behaviors (e.g., smoking and alcohol consumption) and work-related stress. In light of wide spread of precarious nonstandard work conditions in most developed countries, understanding how nonstandard work in South Korea is associated with marital instability will

offer new insights into the ways in which linkages between nonstandard work and family outcomes are shaped by social context.

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Table 1. Comparison between Discrete-Time Hazard Models regarding Coefficients of Divorce Estimated in South Korea, by Gender

Variables	Men			Women		
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Age	-0.07***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
Employment Type						
Standard Employment (omitted)						
Non-standard Employment	0.69**	0.60**	0.46*	0.34	0.28	0.23
Self-Employed	0.37	0.31	0.21	-0.19	-0.26	-0.29
Not Working	1.02***	0.76**	0.27	-0.04	-0.14	-0.20
Education						
High School or less (omitted)						
Junior College	-0.58**	-0.51*	-0.38	-0.40**	-0.30*	-0.22
University or more	-0.97***	-0.86**	-0.67*	-0.51**	-0.36	-0.24
Number of Kids						
0 (omitted)						
1+	-0.37***	-0.37***	-0.39***	-0.67***	-0.66***	-0.67***
Location						
Rural (omitted)						
Urban	0.03	0.06	-0.01	-0.10	-0.07	-0.11
Household Income (log)		-0.26**	-0.19		-0.25***	-0.14*
Depression			1.15***			0.81***
Constant	-1.28*	0.65	-1.49	-3.17***	-1.18	-3.21***
N		19,557			22,863	

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001