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Welcome to the Regular World! Exploring How Female Doctorate Holders in Education Transition from Irregular to Regular Work in South Korea

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the adaptation process of female Ph.D. holders working in universities who shifted from being irregular employees to regular employees. The study adopted a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews to investigate participants' experiences and discover any inconsistencies, as well as how they are alleviated. The basic findings of the study indicate that the adaptation process is more feasible when the gap between the personal aspect of job adaptation and the organizational environment and satisfaction with it decreases. The participants in the study joined the labour union to convert to regular jobs. However, after transitioning to full-time positions, the participants did not realize the structural aspect of the contracts they had signed. Although they expected to make their unfair situation more fair through the transition of their job positions, they still faced structural discrimination. As the participants were women with doctoral degrees, their professionalism was considered a cardinal value, and their job satisfaction varied according to the degree of matching between their work and their expertise. Moreover, during the evaluation period, they began to establish themselves as legitimate members of their teams through the employee evaluation procedure of full-time employees, which is conducted mutually rather than unilaterally. Through its in-depth interviews with transitioning university staff, this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of how female faculty adjust to changes in their life and position in the organization following a change in their status. These findings prove that higher education institutions need focus on career development for female students as well as their faculty and staff members. Such a focus also requires more active actions by university and college members.



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1. Introduction

South Korea (The Republic of Korea) began to introduce and expand irregular employment in the late 1990s. This change has since been expanded to reduce the budget and operate organizations more efficiently through flexible workforce management, starting with the IMF crisis [1]. In the West, the widespread introduction of irregular jobs began in the mid-1980s, and one of the aspects that has always appeared in any discussion of the proliferation of irregular jobs in the West and Korea is that flexible employment and alternative employment are needed to increase women's participation in economic activities, and to increase the number of overall jobs available for women [2,3].

However, more than 20 years later, the circumstances in the women's labour market have not changed a great deal. Kwon [4] reported that complex issues for women still remain in our labour market. Women's careers are interrupted, occupations are gender-segregated, and women often hold only irregular jobs. Further still, all these issues interact with each other. Because of this circumstance, even if an identical worker occurs in the workplace, depending on the nature of the structure of the employment, the irregular female will face both psychological and career barriers in that workplace.

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In accordance with recent changes in the employment policy of the Moon Jae-in government, not only State institutions but also corporations are making new moves to convert irregular jobs into full-time jobs. At the same time, various government policies and businesses are promoting the transition to regular employment, and are seeking to stabilize employment. Although the regularization of irregular faculty is occurring in higher education institutions, the transition of irregular employees to regular employees in higher education institutions—one of the main workplaces for highly educated women—remains a blind spot in that policy. In the education sector, twice as many women as men have doctoral degrees, but about 80% of the related positions are held by men; women hold only 63% [5]. Irregular female employees with doctoral degrees also have a high rate of employment insecurity, even after the implementation of the Irregular Employment Protection Act, especially for women in their 20s and 40s [1,4]. This is because the current law does not protect the term of contracts and part-time workers for Ph.D. holders. Women with doctoral degrees are thus vulnerable in many ways.

Previous studies have approached these regular and irregular employees at universities, but have often only made comparisons between two type of employees [6–8], studied irregular-time-related systems and laws [1,3,4], or conducted exploratory research on the organizational culture of full-time and irregular jobs in the university [2]. The research on irregular jobs has not sufficiently examined how workers navigate the transition from irregular job position to regular jobs.

The transition from irregular to regular is not just a change in employment status; it also brings with it a number of complex problems, a process of transition into a struggle and conflict relationship [9], and adaptation to a new environment that is only eventually achieved by alleviating the basic discrepancy [10]. The process of transition into regular work for female doctoral holders in education is a career adaptation process that involves constantly learning, recognizing, and modifying to join new environments. Therefore, in order to effectively help women in higher education transition successfully to regular employment, it is necessary to fully understand their world and the ongoing process of adapting to full-time employment status.

The research objective of the current study is to explore the experience and perceptions of female faculty with doctorates in education during their transition from irregular to regular employment. This study answers two research questions: (a) What are the experiences and perceptions of workplace conflict of females with doctorates in education who are now irregular employees? (b) How does that transition from irregular to full-time employment for female faculty who have doctorates in education take place? In order to pursue these two research questions, this study conducted in-depth interviews. The research is structured as follows. Section 2 provides academic information on South Korea's labour situation, focusing on females with doctorates in education and reviewing the previous literature on work adjustment that explains female transitions from irregular to regular positions.

The results of this study offer meaningful implications for related research and policies by providing an in-depth understanding of the transition process to full-time employment for women in higher education.

Definition of Terms

This paper utilizes two significant terms: irregular employee and regular employee. In South Korea, irregular employees are primarily defined by the type of employment they hold, i.e., either temporary or limited. These employees are paid, but limited in receiving tenure, earnings, and welfare, etc. Irregular jobs can sometimes include tenured positions, but the worker in this position cannot be promoted a higher job position, and they cannot receive any welfare support from the organization [11]. The term 'regular employees' is only described as those other than irregular employees.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Current Trends of Female Ph.D. Holders in Labour Market

Workers with Ph.D. degrees are an important sector that is now affected by ongoing changes in the labour market and society due to the increase in the rise of artificial intelligence and technological changes. In particular, there is a high expectation that women with doctorate degrees can easily enter society and economy than women who do not. As of 2017, there were 8,340 individuals with newly acquired doctoral degrees in South Korea, of which 3,005 (36%) were women [12]. The number of women with doctoral degrees has been increasing steadily yearly since the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training began its statistical analysis in 2007.

However, due to the deterioration of labour market conditions since the 2000s, the youth employment rate has consistently decreased, and the employment rate for new Ph.D.s has also decreased to 73.7% [13]. In addition, over 50.9% of Ph.D. employees were found to be staying at their universities. The trend of overqualification, skill-job mismatch, and employment insecurity has also intensified [14]. There has also been atrophy in the quality of jobs, such that most jobs created after 2000s are jobs with lower employment security, such as contract instructors and researchers.

According to a 2018 survey by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the total employment rate since graduation for Ph.D. candidates was 76%, and the proportion of regular employees was 70% for men, but for women, it was only 55.8%

According to the Survey of Economically Active Population conducted by Statistics Korea, the proportion of irregular employees among female Ph.D.s is relatively high, considering that 40.9% of that total workforce is now irregular employees [15]. Further still, gender differences can be found not only in terms of employment type but also in wages. The majority of the male respondents (55.8%) said their annual salary was more than 50 million KRW, compared to only 25.4% for female Ph.D.s. In short, those who gain doctoral degrees are often underemployed, particularly when they are female. Female Ph.D.s reported higher rates of irregular or temporary employment than male Ph.D.s, and their average wage was lower than that of male Ph.D.s [16].

Thus, the evidence from various surveys clearly shows that female Ph.D.s are marginalized not only for their gender differences of discrimination in employment but also in employment type. Indeed, the personal growth and careers of many women are vulnerable, and due to those situations, the utilization of highly educated women in the workforce is not sufficient enough in South Korea today.

2.2. The Difficulties That Women with Ph.D. Degrees Face When Acquiring Permanent Job Positions

The number of new doctoral graduates every year has increased significantly since the 1990s in OECD countries. However, the number of jobs commensurate with their education level has not met the demand, resulting in severe discrepancies in supply and demand in most countries [5]. In Japan, the supply of employees with Ph.D. degrees has soared as a result of the policy to increase the number of postdoctoral students since 1990. However, the quantity and quality of postdoctoral jobs have declined significantly. The proportion of individuals who have regular jobs has dropped to half its previous level, and Korea is experiencing a similar circumstance [17].

Accordingly, many doctoral graduates are likely to enter the labour market as part-time employees. Individuals' attempts to move on to regular job positions are likely to produce only an unstable job situation, including unemployment [18]. Considering that gender, age, and industry factors influence the movement of employees from temporary to regular job positions, it is highly likely that women with Ph.D. degrees will have a lower chance of obtaining regular job positions in universities or public research institutes. Korea has the highest percentage of temporary employees in all its industries, and the lowest opportunities for upward mobility to regular job positions of all the OECD countries [18]. The low likelihood of transitioning from being a temporary to a regular employee leads

to greater separation in the labour culture between these two groups. Individuals in the temporary job market thus continue to face difficulties when trying to move into the regular job market due to this separation of cultures.

Even if the cultures of the temporary and regular labour markets are distinct and distanced from each other, personal investment in human capital and its social use would not be as serious an issue if the mobility between the two markets was not restricted. The lower the likelihood of conversion within the same labour market, the more likely it is that there will be continuous job transfers into other temporary job positions. This issue can lead to poverty due to frequent unemployment and low income, which in turn leads to lower self-esteem among these workers. For women with doctoral degrees who have high educational and career aspirations, being unable to find regular job positions means the deprivation of opportunities to receive a fair valuation of their skills, which then directly relates to lower self-esteem.

Unemployment and underemployment for women with doctoral degrees is not just a recent problem. Early studies have suggested that the difficulty that women with doctoral degrees have in the labour market is closely related to general discrimination. Chang (2001) claimed that the unemployment of women with a doctoral degree is a problem of discrimination against women in the labour market [19]. Unemployment is a result of two contrasting situations. First, gender equality in education is higher than in the labour market, especially in universities and public institutions. However, even if a female Ph.D. with a strong desire to build her career enters the labour market, there is a high possibility that she will be unable to find a full-time job due to ongoing gender discrimination in the academic labour market [16].

Previous literature has suggested that temporary positions in Korea are more likely to be a trap than a bridge to obtaining regular position [20–22]. Lee and Yoon (2007) analyzed the factors influencing the probability of moving from temporary positions to permanent positions, and found that women are less likely to be able to change their positions than men [23].

It should also be noted that the Act on the Protection etc. of Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employees (Act No. 15848) does not apply to Ph.D. holders, university instructors, and national research institutes. In the case of Ph.D. holders, it is especially difficult to switch from irregular to regular work because of this law.

2.3. Theory of Work Adjustment and the Transition Experience of Irregular Jobs

The number of irregular employees in South Korea has continued to increase over the past 20 years. The increase has the advantages of reducing costs and flexible employment in the short term. Still, the negative attitude of irregular employees due to discrimination, psychological conflicts with regular employees, and high turnover are clear disadvantages. Bang and Jang (2020) argued that as the negative attitude increases, the satisfaction of the existing irregular employees who have been able to convert to regular employees falls [24]. The reason for this was the disappointment of being a regular employee of a subsidiary company, but not a regular employee directly hired by the parent company, along with the consciousness that this employee was discriminated against by different wage levels and wage systems. In other words, the reference groups were the irregular employees around them. The absolute level improved, but the sense of falling again at the relative level remained. They compared job satisfaction and organizational immersion with irregular workers who had been converted to regular employees, and the existing regular employees. According to the study, the converted showed significant upsides in terms of ‘wage income’ and ‘employment stability’. On the other hand, ‘employment stability’ is declining for existing regular employees. Furthermore, the transition of irregular employees to regular employees is a sign that their jobs were threatened. This finding suggests that the transition of more competent, highly educated women to regular employees can be seen as a particular threat by already established regular employees. Another study examined changes in organizational effectiveness whenever irregular employees became regular

employees. This view is explained by partial inclusion theory and social exchange theory. In partial inclusion theory, the degree of immersion varies depending on the individuals and status; irregular employees become less immersed in certain areas and more immersed in the non-organizational social parts of organizations than regular employees [25].

Social exchange theory sees workers' attitudes and behaviors as conditional responses to tangible and intangible benefits that can differ depending on employment patterns [26]. For example, irregular employees are generally less effective than regular employees because they have lower salary and welfare levels, have fewer opportunities for promotion, and do not expect long-term employment. Irregular work is based on short-term and external exchange relationships, and can be judged as having lower organizational immersion due to unfair psychological contracts. The regularization of irregular employees requires a shift from engagement in non-organizational work to full engagement, and a shift to contracts that enable continuous work. Han, Lee and Bok's study (2009) also found that people who have converted to full-time jobs are more sensitive to organizational effectiveness than those who have not converted [27].

After a transition to full-time jobs, each individual needs to adjust their expectations and their current view of their status, whether positive or negative. Shaffer (1956) defined adjustment as reconciling one's needs and the surrounding environment, and overcoming the environmental obstacles that hinder individuals from attaining harmony [28]. Vocational adjustment is a continuous and dynamic process wherein an individual achieves or maintains harmony with the work environment [26]. Vocational adjustment consists of "satisfaction," which refers to the individual's needs being met environmental reinforcement factors, and "satisfactoriness," where the requirements of the environment are satisfied by the individual's abilities or skills [26,29]. Job satisfaction increases when a person's job values and work environment are in harmony. Swanson and Schneider (2020) indicated that an individual's satisfaction depends on how their abilities correspond to the requirements of the environment, i.e., demand–ability fit [29]. However, the process of a female with a doctorate with high educational expectations for themselves consists in adjusting their professional values and work environment, which can be exceptionally difficult.

Our study sought new implications for the work and experience of the increasing number of highly educated irregular employed women by looking at their experiences, perceptions and conflicts, and how they are coordinate during the transition process.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Method

This study explored the experiences and perceptions during the transition process from irregular to regular job position employment of female faculty with a Ph.D. in Education. To this end, we conducted a qualitative case study using in-depth interviews.

Qualitative case studies are a thorough and systemic survey of one individual, family group, community, or other unit (group, community, organization, culture or event, etc.) and a natural study of in-depth data related to their background, current state, environmental characteristics, and interactions [30]. Qualitative case studies have four components, namely contexts, boundaries, time, and intensity, pursued in context. Bromley (1986) suggests that an appropriate focus for the case study method is people in situations, not just people, and also organizations, events, or procedures [31]. Qualitative case studies stimulate insight into areas where there is relatively little experience of social phenomena, and focus on a few limited cases in order to find hypotheses for further research and/or obtain sufficient information to characterize and explain individuals, groups and communities.

Case study research also has a level of flexibility that is not readily offered by other qualitative approaches like grounded theory or phenomenology [32]. Researchers who use case studies are urged to seek out what is common and what is particular about the case. This focus involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, its historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political contextual factors [33]. Furthermore, a case study is developed by forming a relationship between the

researcher and the informants, and is presented to engage the reader, inviting them to join in this interaction and discovery [34].

Qualitative case studies are most appropriate to examine the special contextual situations of conflict and mitigation processes experienced during the transition process of female Ph.D.s to regular employment. The process of transitioning from irregular workers to regular workers is difficult but not uncommon. On the other hand, the process of transitioning from research to administrative work is both difficult and rare. Many female Ph.D.s have been working in the form of irregular employees since obtaining their degrees, and this rate has recently increased. To understand full-time transitioners and their struggles, conflicts, and adaptation to a new environment, we need to examine the hidden world of highly educated women in order to help them transition to regular employment. This process can also help predict the career track of highly educated women and help them achieve the timely support required at each stage of their career development.

3.2. Sample

This study focuses on women with doctoral degrees who experienced a transition from temporary to regular job positions, and derives the implications of such transition. Our research is not academically established due to relatively little experience with the social phenomenon. Therefore, the intentional sampling method was used to select the people who could best answer the research question. For this reason, we choose University A, which is the first informant and has a research participant who has been converted to a regular one. The participants in this study are three Ph.D. holders who work at University A, who recently converted from irregular to regular job positions in the same workplace. Up until September 2018, when the interview began, there were four cases of female doctors who transferred from irregular to regular work positions. At the start, the total number of samples in University A was four, and three (or 75%) participated.

University A is a four-year university located in Seoul, and it was almost the first university in Korea to introduce irregular job positions. Therefore, it has the longest history of employing women with doctoral degrees as irregular employees. University A recently received applications for regular positions from irregular employees, and it approved the position changes for competence based on examination results. The participants were selected through a snowball sampling method to recruit acquaintances of the first research participants because not many female Ph.D. holders have switched to being staff rather than holding research positions in most universities.

The participants whose positions were converted started their careers as researchers. They had to work in an administrative organization in the university after the conversion. It is a professional organization with strong professionalism and a complex dynamic with diverse actors, including students, professors, and staff [35]. Participants were classified as 'staff', not 'teaching staff' in that organization. The participants had to go through a professional re-adjustment process and change their identities from being researchers to being staff.

The average age of the participants is 43 years old, and their average years of work experience is 10.6. All of the participants hold Ph.D. degrees in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Many universities at the time hired Ph.D.s in education as irregular employees due to the high demand for 'university evaluation' and 'CTL' (Center for teaching and learning). The same was true of A university. The characteristics of this study participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

Pseudo Name ¹	Age (years)	Work (years)	Work/Role before and after the Transition
Alice	45	16	Identical
Jina	43	10	Similar
Sophie	41	7	Identical

¹ The participants' names were changed to protect confidentiality.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection took place from August to December of 2018.. From September to December 2018, interviews were conducted one to three times each in a coffee shop near University A or the participants' office, wherever the participants wanted to meet. The interviews lasted from 1 hour to 1.5 hours each. The participants continued the interviews informally even after the interview ended due to their close relationships with the researchers

This study collected its data through these in-depth interviews. In order to examine the experience and perception of irregular employees and the easing process after the conversion to regular employees, the interview consisted of three main types of questions: First, questions about the participants' motivation for transitioning to regular positions; second, questions about their experiences after the transition in their organizations; and finally, questions about individual changes after the transition.

During the interview, the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the research and the rights of the participants. Pilot interviews were conducted with the participants before the actual interviews. The researchers obtained background information regarding their jobs and organizations in the pilot interviews. The interview questionnaires were sent to all of the participants by e-mail in advance. The interviews were recorded after the participants' consent was given, and they were immediately transcribed for analysis.

The interviews were carried out using the funnel interview technique, in which subjects are asked about a broader topic followed by more detailed questions to hone in on the main topic of interest [36]. The researchers compared each case and analyzed the data by segmenting the original data and constructing meaning units. Meaning units are similar to open coding in Constant Comparative Theory [37]. Open coding is a way of setting and reviewing categories without any limitation, which is commonly conducted at the beginning of the analysis. Specifically, this study was carried out by categorizing and coding data based on two research problems established by researchers during the open coding process, resulting in the first-order analysis results. Next, through the axial coding process, subcategories were created through the contents that constituted the central phenomenon of the categories found in the open coding. The analysis was conducted in the precise and analytical manner of grounded theory. It included the creation of an inductive theory that is discovered and developed through a systemic and analytical process based on social phenomena and the methodologies accompanying them. Our study is about the experience, perception, and mitigation process of female doctors in irregular work in the process of converting to the regular jobs. This study required a different perspective than norms, sampling, reliability, validity, hypothesis, and evidence from quantitative research. Therefore, we used the framework of grounded theory. The researchers could identify the important and unique phenomena that were relevant to the subject matter.

In qualitative research, reliability refers to whether or not faithful research has been performed, unlike the repeatability of quantitative research. In order to increase the reliability of qualitative research, researchers should carry out sufficient self-reflection in consideration of their degree of influence on the research participants. When selecting them, an appropriate informant should be selected, and they should strive to form appropriate categories for the collection and analysis of various types of data. As such, this study used the triangulation method of reviewing participants and analyzing data in order to increase the reliability. The triangulation method was applied to both the data collection

and analysis. With regard to the data collection, the triangulation method refers to the process of using two or more different data collection methods to ensure the reliability of the data.

Furthermore, multi-validation is as useful as it is in quantitative research, and is achieved by utilizing two or more data collection methods or re-examining research from different perspectives, time, and spaces [38]. In this study, we first verified the reliability by using sources such as transcriptional data from interviews recorded with voice recorders, interviewees' observation records, and research notes in order to verify multiple sources. We also sought to increase the reliability of the research through open-ended questionnaires written for in-depth interviews. Finally, we tried to gain credibility through peer review between researchers of the same majors.

The research participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the research. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were informed that they could see the results of the study if they wanted to, and that they could discontinue their participation at any time if they wished. All of the information that could identify the participants was anonymized.

4. Results

This study explored how women with Ph.D.s are adjusting to changes in their employment status from irregular to regular, and the nature of this transition process. As a result, the transition process is a type of occupational adaptation and a way for them to adapt to the new regular world, even though the workplace is still the same. The following results show the changes in the personal experiences and the organizational environment that the participants perceived.

4.1. The First Step in the Transition: Solidarity and Change

The transition of irregular female doctoral workers to full-time positions started with the opportunity to join the university labour union. Two of the research participants had completed their doctorate, but their initial jobs were Masters-level positions. As a result, they were able to switch to an unlimited contract, and like other employees, they could retire at age 60. However, they were in an unfair contractual relationship with a different evaluation system than other unlimited contractors in their university were. Thus, they were evaluated every six months, while others were evaluated every two years. They thus felt the instability resulting from this unfair employment contract. All of the names in the following quotations were changed to protect confidentiality.

"Any employee with a doctoral degree can't get into a full-time union. Fortunately, I have known someone very well a long time ago. My friend, Alice, and I really wanted to go into the union, and finally, they thankfully accepted us for irregular employees' issues. For example, most irregular employees were evaluated every two years. But I, as an irregular doctoral researcher, did every six months and cut it off if I did not get more than 80 points. Yes, it was one of the contract options. So, at that time, I felt that the university wanted to cast me out". (Sophie)

"In fact, even though I was an unlimited contract researcher in a Master's level position, I was guaranteed retirement, working to 60 age. [...] One day, my co-worker said to me, "why are you switching to the regular from unlimited contracts? It might not be going to get better than now". (Alice)

"I renewed my contract every year, and it was not difficult to renew the contracts if there wasn't a big problem. That was when my department was an independent one in the university. When it was merged into one of the colleges, they started to say that doctoral-level staff could only have contracts for six years maximum—they never told me something like that before. They started to mention my job

insecurity and gave me job tasks that other regular employees didn't want to do. Also, they gave me more and more work orders outside my job duty" (Jina)

The increasingly deteriorating treatment of irregular employees puts them in a difficult position, so they have come to expect a full-time position. They joined the union to change the way they renewed their contracts and challenge the way in which they were being coerced to work more than they were contracted to do. Still, their situation may not improve even if they become full-time employees. They also started to make an effort to be recognized as legitimate members of the organization by sharing their stories with others in the same situation.

4.2. *Changes in the Organization: Another Wall*

After the transition to regular employment, the study participants had no idea of the structural aspects of the contracts they had signed. University A changed the rules regarding employee recruitment and promotion prior to the transition of irregular employees, including doctoral-level employees, and as mentioned earlier, unreasonable provisions under the labour law were not shared with the members, despite the fact that these provisions were required to be shared. As a result, the participant hoped that the transition to full-time employment would change the unfairness of her situation, but then she was still in another unfair situation.

4.2.1. Gaps between Unfairness and Justice

The study participants, who had been working irregularly for many years, felt that the transition to regular work would solve issues of unfairness, but they still felt discriminated against in terms of salaries, work orders, and so on. This seemed relatively fair, compared to their previous hiring status, but it still meant facing a completely different world.

"The team described me as a stone that had been rolled around. [...] Anyway, I'm here to do more of my work than before. When the job is gone, I will call it there and back it up and think there's nothing else (that's coming to me again). You'll have to do something like this with the deputies who are getting a high salary. I gave it to the deputy (he said it wasn't his job). I don't know why I do it. So, is it my job? They didn't talk about salary, employment conditions, etc., to me at first. I am fine with getting a lot of work, but my tasks keep changing, and more of that happens to depend on their endless orders and needs." (Jina)

"I'm the youngest in the order of hire and age. Because (according to the organization's logic) I am a newcomer at this workplace. I'm doing more and more of the things. In fact, they do not recognize that "I am a Doctoral degree holder," and it is meaningless for them. It is a gap between their perspective and mine. I had the expectations and my respect as a Doctor." (Jina)

The participants' history of injustice has been long, and their career development worsened, as they created another fence for full-time employees due to the changes in school regulations and academic backgrounds that are now underway.

"It's been revised and added. I've been secretly putting this (prohibiting a lecture in a university.) for six months. There was no provision. That was the Deputy Head X of Team Y. And some regular employees hates it that we were pursuing a doctoral degree. The regular employees dislike the university hiring a worker holding a higher degree than them. They're full-time regular employees, and we're not, so they did not want us to become smarter than them. They had fully investigated all irregular employees with a doctoral degree whether they were going to lecture or not. A deputy head of the B team told me that our university would not get paid anything for my extra work, such as a lecture." (Sophie)

As they transitioned from being irregular to regular employees, the only change was that they secure tenured, full-time jobs, but all other aspects of their job—such as job

duties, team members, workplace, etc.—were the same. The participants agreed that they just felt “safety” after they became regular. They also described the feeling as follows: it was a relative sense of stability that eliminated the fear that if there was friction among employees, and that they would not be guaranteed their position.

“Finally, I am a regular staff member. But it did not change my job duties. I did the same thing, and I did all the special lectures my academic advisor requested. I think the only thing that has changed is job status. I think I’ve got a sense of stability. Before that, I didn’t have any special problems, but I had a lot of anxiety, and I saw that if I had a bad feeling, I could do it, even if I didn’t. Now they cannot do anything bad. I think I feel a sense of stability about such a thing.” (Sophie)

“When I used to be an irregular researcher, so they easily gave me indiscreet work orders. It was really serious, but now I can’t do it, and of course, they can’t do it. [...] So it’s funny that they told me about their work orders to help my career. So, in the end, at that time, I was an irregular employee, and my re-contract for 6 months was based on their evaluation. Now, officially no employee has any justification for forcing me to work.” (Sophie)

Some of the participants had a hard time clarifying their roles after they became permanent workers. The other members of the organization did not provide specific guidelines or roles for these participants, which is unlike what they did for other permanent workers. Instead, they gave the participants jobs that were not clearly enough intended for staff, instructors, or researchers.

“One-of my colleagues told others that they should not call me Dr. Lee but just Ms. Lee because I’m nothing more than a staff. But they made me write research reports on top of other administrative work, and the professors asked me to do research assistant work and even lecture assistance. What’s better now is that I could not say anything about this before, but now I can.” (Jina)

4.2.2. Change of Personnel Evaluation System, Filtering

Although the participants had been irregular researchers for a long time, their salaries still remained the same after switching to regular staff. None of their experience was recognized. In particular, Alice’s 16-year career at the university was useless now, as she was deployed as an apprentice. The other participants did the same thing with Alice’s case. The transition from being an irregular to a regular employee is not an individual issue, but an organizational one. The university changed its system of salary and employee evaluation. However, the interviewees did not know what conditions they were switching to before their transition to regular employment. There was filtering, which was now divided between existing regular employees and new transistors in an evaluation system.

Their transition to a regular position was not complete. Unlike regular employees, half the number of female workers with a doctoral degree can be promoted to the tenth salary class in three years. If they reach the top of the tenth salary class, they will be rewarded with a different salary track than their existing regular employees. The other three unqualified people should prepare for the second promotion exam for three more years.

“I do not know. [...] So I feel that I am not a regular employee. So now, I think a lot of things are going to be regular, and it’s weird. Before the transition, I felt I was under a different roof unlike the regular employees, and now I am under the same roof as regular employees. But I am still forcing different lives with them. It’s likely to put me in the basement and keep me using the tricks. We have six transitioned female workers with doctoral degrees in the university. Our atmosphere is weird. Only three of our six people will be able to pass the promotion exam. It’s strange. In the case of previous regular employees, the salary is equally good, and they’ve had a salary increase every year. However,

our case is quite different from their case. Our salary will not increase after we reach the 10th class. They are constantly making it tricky for us.” (Alice)

“If irregular jobs were a struggle for survival, now we are struggling with a different salary and promotion system. There’s a huge difference in wages. The first difference is the salary. They started at the 6th salary class, but we start with the 8th grade. They adopted a new hiring policy before our transitions. So, even though I have seven years of job experience at this university, they did not count it. I started my new position as an intern. Some of my team members have less experience, and yet they get more money and benefits.” (Sophie)

The walls that the interviewees felt, whether they were regular employees or not, were similar between the irregular and full-time jobs. This sense of deprivation also reduced their satisfaction and positive immersion in the workplace.

“Just before our transition, the university promoted every assistant manager to manager. The gaps between the manager and me don’t fill up. But this sense of deprivation is not a joke. They are just because of regular positions, they are getting salaries two levels above ours, and the gap continues to widen. I do not think it’s improved just because I’ve become a full-time employee.” (Alice)

“One of my concerns was the differences in the work evaluation system. Previously, just the director evaluated my work, but currently, I have to be evaluated by the administrative staff as a co-worker. I’ve been working as a researcher for a long time, but some of the staff have less experience than me in the university. Also, I had to spend a year as an apprentice. Because the university did not recognize my career in the university even though I have been here for 16 years. I didn’t get any credit for my career. To be transferred, I should quit my job and be re-hired in the same workplace and same position. It is funny, isn’t it?” (Alice)

The female doctoral degree holders who worked as irregular employees were not rotated, unlike regular employees, and they continued to work in certain departments. On the one hand, it would be a good strategy for them to develop the independence and professionalism of their work, but the networking and exchanges between employees were insufficient, and this made them feel less of a sense of belonging. As a result, their understanding of the organization, such as their placement and their transition, was very different from that of the regular employees.

As employees at a higher education institution, the irregular researchers expected that they would be treated more fairly by their institution than workers at the average private company, and so they felt a greater sense of deprivation. Under the Labour Law in South Korea, the member’s consent must be obtained for any unfavourable contract provisions, but in the process of transition, their opinions were not reflected, and no one asked them what they thought. In this filtering process, the superiority of existing regular employees and the regulations reflected on them. This led the interviewees to feel relative deprivation compared to the existing regular employees.

“It’s a university, it’s an educational institution, and I’m looking forward to it. There’s an expectation that our organization would be different from other businesses. But I think it’s more of a betrayal when you know you don’t. The university was in a hurry to make this transition to a regular work position. It went in a very impolite way. They did job analysis for all employees, including full-time and contractors. I think they wanted to create a standard to justify this unfair policy. The results of the job analysis were justified that the existing workers work more, and they need a lot of money. It would be a good document to solve enough legal problems to identify two types of employee contract. I sometimes say that I want to go back to the contract position in the old days. Because everything, such as vacation time, has been reset. When I had a contract position, my vacation days were increased a day every two years. I got about

20 days, but when I became a new full-time employee, I was reduced back to 15 days. Anyway, the regular staff members are the privileged class.” (Alice)

“It’s a little frustrating. They give me work that a manager with 17 years of experience used to do, and I even get extra work besides that. It’s not a matter of how much I work, but its rather than the respect, compensation, and satisfaction corresponding to the amount of my work. Also, I used to give lectures, and after my position became regular, they said I couldn’t give lectures at our college after work. It’s not that it’s against any regulation or the law, but just because it doesn’t look good for them. In short, I got more work but with less salary, and I cannot even be respected enough to be called “Dr.” I thought my position was changed to permanent and that I would become a legitimate staff member here, but I feel there is now another glass ceiling. A bullet-proof one.”. (Jina)

4.3. *Personal Change Since the Transition: Between Rest and Stability*

As women with Ph.D. degrees in education, our interviewees valued their professionalism, and their satisfaction with the job differed depending on the extent of matching of their work to their degrees. Sophie had been working at the Education and Learning Supporting Centre in the university, working on several government funded projects. She has a doctoral degree in Education Technology and is the main worker in the centre. Her supervisor was a regular employee, and rotated from other departments. Therefore, even though the centre she worked in is in the university, she felt she was working on an island, where any work-related issues or information did not come. However, the island was transformed into a stable one without information issues after the transition to regular employment.

“I’m doing the right job for my field, and I’m not alone in my work. I’ve been with my colleagues for a long time. All issues have been cleaned up, and employment anxiety is gone as well. I think it’s good.” (Sophie)

On the other hand, because Jina is a Ph.D., she was often asked to back up others’ work whenever there was a sudden change in staff in the department. This situation was less likely to result in a decrease in job immersion and satisfaction than when working in an irregular position.

“If suddenly, there’s a lot of extra work our team does not expect, or there’s a staff shift, vacancies, or unexpected situations, finally I get the extra work, and it’s coming to me. One of my team’s deputy heads said, “You are a convertible worker. It means flexibility. But the good news is that I didn’t say anything about it in the past. Now they look over my shoulder. Anyway, besides my job satisfaction or status, the value and meaning of my work are downgraded compared to before.” (Jina)

Decreased job commitment and satisfaction also led the participants to continue to be skeptical about the choice made to turn them into regular employees. They constantly suffered from a dissonance from their identity as Ph.D. holders. Jina felt that organizational socialization was not achieved and that she was not well-adjusted to the job.

“Sometimes I think I should learn in order to readjust to this organization and members, and in that respect, I failed to achieve organizational socialization. It was so hard for me at first. It’s really hard now. The fact that they call me “Ms. Lee,” not “Dr. Lee,” and that I have to call my friends and other professors Ph.D.’s. These things make me keep wondering if I made the right choice.” (Jina)

The greatest benefit these employees received from making the transition was in professional stability. Their situation was stable enough for the respondents to feel able to speak more freely about their work-related responsibilities and not feel constrained by the fear of not having their contract renewed. In addition, they disliked the previous irregular

employment; they could participate in the work evaluation of the other regular employees in the department. It helped that they had become full members of the team gradually.

“In fact, I usually felt like my hands were tied, and I could not speak out because there was always the threat that my contract wouldn’t be renewed. After my job status transition to a regular position, it has increased a lot of psychological stability. Actually, I think that’s not because I can’t quit my job in that my work itself is a problem, but because of my relationship with people, and I feel a little calm about it.” (Sophie)

However, rather than this sense of stability leading to satisfaction (i.e., expectations as discussed in the theory of occupational adaptation; the Theory of Work Adjustment: TWA) [10], the participants had to adapt to their dissatisfaction by lowering their expectations. The change in occupational status in their new positions was not only a matter of not having to seek new contracts but also gaining external rewards, such as health insurance and better loan terms from banks. The working conditions were still unfamiliar, but the participants were rewarded by families who were pleased with their employment status, and regular employee’s benefits from the university. This made them adapt.

“I was on loan (during my irregular term), and that income was maintained during my career. Even though the transition is now a much smaller salary than it was before, the bank is more concerned with guaranteed assets than the changed assets, even though my monthly earning has been much smaller than it used to be. Bank interest, which was 6% off, fell by 4% and was extended on a yearly basis. The Bank said to me that employment stability was the most important reason to decide a loan rate. I wasn’t happy with it.” (Jina)

Although the respondents were married and not living with their parents, their career aspirations were still affected by them. They were giving their own meaning to their ‘work’. The meaning of ‘work’ is not an individual thing, but rather is created in a complicated social context. The participants adjusted to their current work status by downgrading their career expectations.

“My Mom says it’s hard to survive in this society, so I shouldn’t complain, and my Dad is disappointed (that I gave up becoming a professor.) For me, considering the company welfare of the job, such as the health care insurance, pension, it’s fine. I always think I should quit, but every month when the payday comes, I get back to work. Honestly, in from compensation aspect, it’s not bad (compared to the temporary position.) The salary stayed the same. (but it is ridiculously low compared to the regular employees who have been there before.) So, it’s better than professors in small colleges, actually way better since there are not even many professor positions... I think it’s all good right now, but that’s just something I tell myself to feel better.” (Jina)

5. Conclusions

This study examined how three female Ph.D.s in education who had recently switched from irregular to regular positions coped with that transition. The following significant changes resulted from their transition to full-time status.

First, they faced a major change in the transition to regular employment from unfair treatment, such as a six-month contract or unilateral work orders. In Kim and Kim’s research (2009), the “culture between us” held by irregular administrative staff at the university was seen as closed and negative toward irregular employees, but it showed the process of creating positive solidarity through trade unions within the school, not solidarity within the department [2].

Second, the transition to full-time status of female Ph.D.s amounted to a transition into another unfair world, in which there was still a wall between previous regular employees and them. Although they had worked hard for the university for several years, they were still expected to intern for a year and then take a promotion exam after three years.

Unfortunately, only 50% of those who took the exam were able to attain a regular salary class. This was accompanied by a sense of relative deprivation and loss, and it reduced enthusiasm and morale on the job. They realized that there was another glass ceiling in the workplace, and that their roles in the organization and the process of becoming a legitimate member of the community had remained as unsolved issues for them.

Third, as professional female Ph.D.s involved in this process, they were satisfied that they could demonstrate their expertise with a sense of stability through the external compensation that the full-time job and other personnel regulations would bring, and they were adapting to a new work situation where unfairness nonetheless still existed. This is consistent with Dawis's (2005) study, which shows that when individuals are inconsistent with their expectations, they try to adjust to a job or the workplace while still lowering their expectations [10].

6. Recommendations

We suggest several recommendations for university administrators, policymakers, and future scholars.

First, even irregular female doctoral employees should be recognized for their professionalism, should not be given a unilateral manner of work instruction or contract unfairness, should be granted authority and responsibility corresponding to their duties, and should be provided appropriate compensation. This will create a more positive culture in university organizations.

Second, it is necessary to provide guidance and transition training on employment contacts as well as new tasks before the commencement of work. Higher education institutions in South Korea should be contractually obligated to provide sufficient guidance or relevant training in order to prevent job dissatisfaction or a sense of loss due to differences in expectations if individuals take on new duties. Because the fairness of the transition process and post-transition work life is a factor that can affect motivation and job enthusiasm for irregular employees, it is necessary to establish more reasonable personnel and management regulations.

Third, for female doctoral degree holders in education, there are many instances where they are more likely than males are to be employed in irregular positions at various centres and institutions, such as the Faculty Learning Development Centre and the University Innovation Centre. Male doctoral degree holders in education have a higher rate of employment in tenure-track positions than female doctoral degree holders in South Korea do. Of course, there is also a process of transition from an irregular to a regular position, but higher education institutions need to reduce the proportion of irregular jobs and increase the employment of regular faculty members on campus. Higher education institutions need to strongly emphasize career development for female students as well as their other faculty and staff members. This change is not only consistent with the current Korean government's policy direction but also requires more active actions to be taken by the university or college members.

Fourth, this study revealed that even though irregular female Ph.D. holders are valuable members of organizations, so the university considers their roles to be that of an educational service provider. The university needs to facilitate and utilize their talents and professionalism for much more productive works, such as inducing leading university policies.

This study shed light on irregular female Ph.D. holders, individuals who experience discrimination. Even though female doctoral degree holders are still a minority in higher education organization, we believe that considering such minority groups will contribute to the academic discourse on talent development and placement.

7. Limitations of the Suggestions for Future Research

This study made a significant contribution to our understanding of how female faculty adjust to changes in their lives and positions in the organization due to a change of status.

This study used a university's case in South Korea and discussed it in terms of South Korea's social context. However, future research could focus on the transition process of female doctors in other countries, relative to their socio-cultural backgrounds as well.

On the other hand, we recommend that further studies might take a longitudinal perspective on the ongoing career development process for irregular employees with doctoral degree, even though this study explored the transition period from irregular employees to regular. It is still necessary to further investigate what kind of career development process these same participants will experience in the future. By exploring these participants' future career development processes within the organization, it will be possible to learn whether they are considered to be threatening intruders in the organization or whether they are being given a new role as competent human resources within that organization. Based on these findings, it will be possible to explore a new direction in order to better support female Ph.D. holders.

In addition, it is significant to further explore the adaptation process of female Ph.D holders in various types of work. Future research can shed light on the adaptation process and challenges that regular employees face, and the process of transition between work statuses including irregular to regular, irregular to irregular, research to industry, and industry to research. Such analysis can provide meaningful insight into highly educated female workers and their career paths. The generalizability of this study's findings is somewhat limited by its qualitative nature and small sample. Therefore, future studies could extract a variety of variables found in the work adaptation process and empirically examine their interrelationships using quantitative research approaches instead, e.g., using structural modelling.

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