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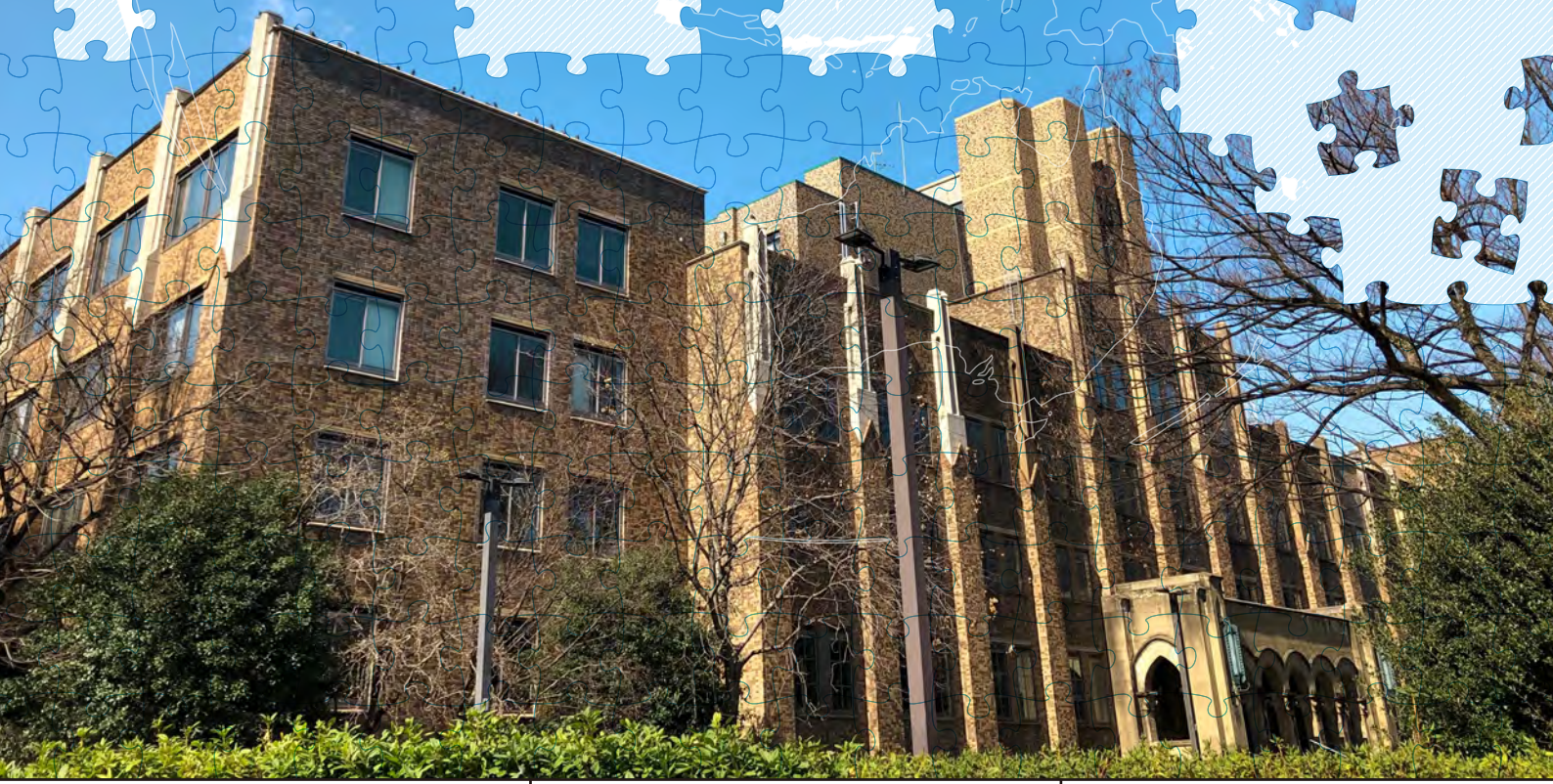
The Effect of Parental Support on the Transition from School to Work in South Korea



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The Effect of Parental Financial Support on the Transition from School to First Job in South Korea

Mari Shindo †

Abstract

This study examines the characteristics of first job transitions and explains the impact of parent–child support on such transitions in South Korean society. To address this issue, an original web-based survey was conducted. Using these data, this study examined the effects of parental support, such as the amount of tuition and nontuition educational expenses, living expense support, and cohabitation, on both the age at one's first job and the transition status to one's first job, such as the type of job, employment status, and company size, based on gender for 764 males and 762 females. In the regression analysis with age at one's first job serving as the dependent variable, the effect of education cost support was not found to be large; however, tuition support for males and nontuition education cost support for females significantly increased the age at one's first job. In addition, living cost support was found to delay labor market entry by 0.6 years for men and 0.4 years for women. The results of the logistic regression analysis with the professional management dummy, regular employment dummy, and public sector/large firm dummy as dependent variables revealed that parental support has a positive effect only on the likelihood of becoming a professional manager for men. The results of this study indicate that parental support may slow first job placement but has no significant effect on first job placement under good conditions.

Keywords: intergenerational family support, transition from school to work, youth, South Korea

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Introduction

In South Korea, difficulty in finding a job for university graduates has become a social problem. The transition from school to one's first job in South Korea is characterized by a large noneconomic population and late entry into the labor market due to the rapid shift to higher education and intense job competition. Such a prolonged transition period increases the costs in terms of time and money. Therefore, this study examines how the financial support provided by parents to their youth during the term of transition affects youths' first jobs.

The transition to adulthood is a problem observed in many societies (Jones and Wallace 1992); Asia is no exception (Yi and Tsai eds. 2023). The period of support for adult children has increased, as have the burden on parents and the prevalence of mental health problems among young people (Aquilino 1999; Miyamoto 2007). The issue of transition to adulthood is one related to young people's independence and the difficulties they face in life; it can be said that such a transition forces us to reconsider a society that assumes the presence of a standard transition. Although the orders of transition to adulthood are diversifying in general (Shanahan 2000), the order of life-cycle events, such as graduating from university, finding a job, and marrying, is said to remain unchanged in South Korean society (Lee et al. 2010). In such a society, the school-to-work transition is the starting point of the transition to adulthood and is thus at the core of any delay in transition. Thus, unemployment and delays in transitions among university graduates have been critical issues in South Korean society since the late 1990s, when the nature of the transition changed.

South Korea is a highly educated society, with the percentage of students going on to higher education in South Korea once exceeding 80% and currently hovering at approximately 70%. This percentage expanded rapidly in a brief period. In addition, South

Korea boasts an employment structure in which one's first job has a significant effect on the level of wages and employment stability present throughout one's life. For this reason, young people aim to obtain a first job as a regular position at a large company that offers good conditions over the course of their lifetime. Additionally, South Korea has a formal recruitment system that is similar to the new graduate lump-sum recruitment system but has a more tolerant entry age and trainable recruitment criteria that allow for students who have taken a leave of absence and graduates than do similar Japanese systems, for example (Arita 2017). Against the backdrop of these hiring systems, the preference for large firms drives young people to compete to acquire skills for employment. This competition is both time-consuming and expensive. Both the expansion of higher education, which serves as the background for intensifying competition for employment, and the resulting investment in education to prepare for future employment have been supported not only by the individuals themselves but also by their families, who are aware of the costs[1].

In South Korean society, the reality, background, and problems related to parents' high educational cost burdens, especially those related to university entrance examinations, have been widely verified in previous studies. On the other hand, there is still ample room for further research, both domestically and internationally, on the support of educational expenses after students enter university. It is possible that parents' educational cost support is extended after their children enter higher education against the background of fierce competition for positions in the job market when considering the current situation in South

[1] The expansion of higher education in South Korea is influenced by state-led policies (e.g., the implementation of a graduation quota system). At the same time, the demand for higher education in South Korea has always exceeded the government-determined enrollment capacity; it has been pointed out that the expansion of higher education is made possible by the willingness of recipients to bear the costs of higher education institutions, and that the financial burden on the recipient side makes the further expansion of higher education possible (Arita 2020).

Korea. Therefore, this study focuses on parental support for the period when students are in higher education and examines its impact on the age and content of one's first job.

In South Korea, "spoon class theory," which refers to those born into wealthy families as having "golden spoons" and those born into poor families as having "earthen spoons," is widely recognized by people. It can be said that people who share the image that the future they can choose differs depending on the family from which they come. On the other hand, how receiving parental support affects the actual age at first employment and the job content has not been sufficiently verified. This study examines whether the life choices that can be made depend on the availability of support from parents during the early career development period.

Transition from School to Work in South Korea

Prior to the analysis, I will first provide some background information of the transition from school to work in South Korea. In South Korea, the difficulty of finding a job for university graduates, which is known as university graduate unemployment, has become an important social problem (Yoon et al. 2017). According to the "Economically Active Population Survey" conducted by Statistics Korea[2], the unemployment rate of youth in their 20s, which was approximately 5.5% in the 1990s, jumped to more than 10% after the IMF economic crisis, remained at approximately 7% in the 2000s and has been approximately 9% since the mid-2010s. While the unemployment rate for all age groups has remained at 3–4% since the 2000s, the unemployment rate for young people is notably high. However, South Korea's youth unemployment rate is not high compared with that of other OECD countries. The

[2] Statistics Korea, "Economically Active Population Survey" Accessed September 30, 2024. https://kostat.go.kr/menu.es?mid=a20204010000

statistically low youth unemployment rate in South Korea is attributed to the large noneconomically active population (Kim 2020)[3].

Among OECD countries, South Korea has one of the lowest labor participation rates for young adults. This is due to South Korea's rapid increase in the number of highly educated people and fierce competition for jobs. The university enrollment rate in South Korea was 30% in 1994, 50% in 2000, and over 70% in 2007; it reached a peak of 83.8% in 2008, according to "Educational Statistics"[4]. This rapid expansion of higher education has naturally led to a shortage of employment opportunities for university graduates. Simultaneously, the Asian currency crisis of 1997 triggered a sharp decline in job opportunities for university graduates. As a result, the unemployment rate among those in their twenties rose, and the number of noneconomically active individuals increased. If graduates seamlessly entered the labor market in their first job, then women would enter the labor market by their early twenties, while men, due to military service, would enter by their late twenties. The labor force participation rates for these age groups are compared before the Asian currency crisis and in 2023 based on the "Economically Active Population Survey." The labor force participation rates of women in their early twenties, men in their early twenties, and women in their late twenties declined from 66.0% in 1996 to 53.4% in 2023, from 59.1% to 43.0%, and from 88.4% to 75.6%, respectively. The increase in higher education expansion since the 2000s and the rise in the instability of the youth labor market have altered the mechanism of labor market entry for young people in their twenties.

The young noneconomically active population, the members of which are neither

[3] Other factors include the high proportion of informal workers and self-employed people (Kim, 2020).

[4] Korean Educational Development Institute, "Educational Statistics" Accessed September 30, 2024. https://kess.kedi.re.kr/eng/index

employed nor unemployed, spend their time looking for employment. South Korean university students are in a race to obtain advantageous skills (called "spec" in South Korea) that will be evaluated for employment, such as studying abroad, internships, certificates, TOEIC and other foreign language exam scores, university grades, and awards in competitions. The specific competition for jobs with better conditions encourages students to either take a leave of absence, enter graduate school, or have a period of preparation for employment after graduation. In 2021, the average time until graduation for university graduates, including junior college graduates in South Korea, was 4 years and 3.4 months, and 48.1% had taken a leave of absence (Statistics Korea 2021)[5]. In South Korea, where leaves of absence from school due to military service have always been common, university graduates tend to be students for relatively long periods; however, despite the shorter military service period, previous studies have noted that younger cohorts have longer periods of university enrollment (Park 2015). In addition, the rapid increase in the number of students who continue to prepare for employment after graduation has become a social problem. In 2021, 859,000 people, or 19.1% of the 4,488,000 noneconomically active individuals aged 15 to 29 years, were preparing for employment exams. This figure is 1.5 times greater than that found in the mid-2000s (Statistics Korea 2021).

Data

This paper analyzes the results of an original internet-based web survey conducted in May 2022. The web survey was commissioned to a research firm in South Korea and targeted 35–

[5] As of May 2021, the average time until graduation was 5 years and 0.5 months for men, 3 years and 8.7 months for women, 2 years, and 11.9 months for less-than-3-year college graduates, and 5 years and 1.6 months for 4-year university graduates. The percentage of who had taken a leave of absence was 75.4% for men, 27.8% for women, 34.9% for those who had graduated from a 3-year or less university and 56.7% for those who had graduated from a 4-year university.

40-year-old men and women (born in 1982–1987) who had graduated from 2–3-year universities and resided in South Korea[6]. Although the policy definition of youth in South Korea is set to those 29 years of age or younger, the upper age range of this survey is higher than that; the subjects of this survey had already experienced the transition to adulthood. In other words, the data in this survey can be considered retrospective data targeting adults who experienced the transition from school to first employment in the 2000s, which is when the nature of this transition changed in South Korea. The analysis includes 764 males and 762 females. The main survey items used in the analysis are the amount of tuition and nontuition financial support (educational costs, including language training, cram schools, prep schools, reading rooms, online distance learning, and qualification acquisition), living expense support, living together, age at graduation, number of years devoted to job preparation, and sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, educational background, parents' educational background, and parents' occupation. The variables used in the analysis are shown in Table 1.

In the analysis, to measure the impact of not only the presence or absence of support but also the size of the amount of support on the age at first employment, the amount of support for tuition and nonacademic educational expenses is input as a class value in units of 1 million won[7]. The OECD statistical database "OECD. Stat" reported that the average annual wage in South Korea in 2022 was approximately 44.5 million won.

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[6] The use of web-based survey data as a resource has disadvantages in terms of understanding contemporary South Korean society, i.e., in terms of representativeness. In other words, there is a possibility of bias in the answers depending on the attributes of the panel. On the other hand, the use of web-based surveys has various advantages, such as the ability to obtain data from a large sample in a brief period and the ability to ask detailed questions that are tailored to the research topic.

[7] One million won equals approximately $830 when simply calculated at the average exchange rate for the month of the survey. A higher amount implies a longer period of support; thus, care should be taken in understanding the timing of support.

Table 1 Variables and descriptive statistics

	Male			Female		
	Mean.	S.D.	N	Mean.	S.D.	N
Education						
University	0.830	0.376	764	0.777	0.417	762
graduate school	0.144	0.351	764	0.144	0.352	762
Parents' Education						
father High education	0.314	0.464	764	0.235	0.424	762
mother High education	0.181	0.385	764	0.151	0.358	762
Parents' occupations						
father Professional Manager	0.254	0.436	764	0.252	0.434	762
mother Professional Manager	0.063	0.243	764	0.066	0.248	762
support amount(1,000,000 units)						
Tuition fee	20.451	23.955	764	23.357	26.752	762
other education costs	8.424	18.622	764	7.350	16.742	762
Support for the year before graduation						
Living together	0.415	0.493	764	0.560	0.497	762
Receiving living expenses	0.419	0.494	764	0.462	0.499	762
Transition						
Job preparation(year)	1.856	0.698	764	1.786	0.714	762
age of graduation	26.377	3.033	764	24.459	3.691	762

Therefore, the average amount of tuition support of approximately twenty million won and the average amount of job preparation support of approximately eight million won are not considered low. Since university tuition fees in South Korea are high and public subsidies are not sufficient, neither the cost nor the personal burden of obtaining a university degree or higher is considered small[8]. There is also a strong normative sense that parents should pay their children's university tuition[9].

Analysis Results

The Effect of Financial Support on the Age at One's First Job

First, this study analyzes how parental support affects one's age at one's first job

[8] The average annual tuition for the four public universities in South Korea is just under $5,000, and approximately 70% of students attend private schools. There are scholarships and loan programs, but such public subsidies are not sufficient.

[9] After analyzing individual-level data of the Korean Women's Policy Institute's Seventh Panel Survey of Women and Families conducted in 2018, 90% of respondents were found to answer affirmatively that parents should pay university tuition for their children.

experience. The average age at which the subject first found employment was found to be 25.9 years for men and 23.6 years for women. The support received from one's parents creates financial and temporal leeway to create favorable conditions for one's employment. For this reason, it is hypothesized that the more support is received from one's parents, the later the age at one's first job is. There are three analytical models for age at one's first job. In Model 1, the amount of financial support after university and the amount of educational expenses other than tuition are used as support variables to obtain an overall picture of support from parents. In addition, as variables indicating the status of support from parents during the second semester of university when preparing for employment, cohabitation in the year before graduation and the existence of living cost support are included in the model as dummy variables. In Model 2, the number of years devoted to job preparation in one-year increments and the age at graduation are used as transition variables to examine the continuity with events prior to one's first job. The model examines whether the age at one's first job increases with the age at one's graduation and the number of years one devotes to job preparation, considering the South Korean situation. Model 3 is a full model including all the abovementioned variables. In all the models, parent–child attributes such as a dummy for the individual having a four-year university degree, a dummy for having postgraduate degree, a dummy for parents' high school education, and a dummy for parents' professional management at age 18 are added as control variables.

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis by gender. First, Model 1 shows that the following factors affect the age at one's first job for men: the individual's educational background, the amount of tuition support, and the living cost support dummy for the year before graduation. The signs of the coefficients are positive, indicating a positive effect, i.e., a higher (later) age at one's first job. Thus, a greater amount of tuition assistance increases the age at one's first employment. Furthermore, the age at one's first employment increases

Table 2 Results of regression analysis on age at first job by parental support

	Male						Female					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
constant	23.227 ***	0.272	18.773 ***	1.022	17.714 ***	1.038	21.469 ***	0.250	16.299 ***	0.754	16.120 ***	0.805
Educations（ref=Junior college）												
University	2.335 ***	0.274	2.022 ***	0.279	1.812 ***	0.279	2.100 ***	0.238	1.581 ***	0.242	1.383 ***	0.243
graduate school	0.723 *	0.298	0.121	0.331	0.131	0.330	1.444 ***	0.282	0.679 *	0.324	0.643 *	0.320
Parents' Education												
father High education	-0.118	0.273	-0.065	0.269	-0.100	0.266	0.590 *	0.284	0.567 *	0.275	0.543 *	0.271
mother High education	0.486	0.336	0.441	0.329	0.458	0.327	-0.257	0.331	-0.046	0.321	-0.172	0.317
Parents' occupations												
father Professional Manager	-0.120	0.248	-0.110	0.244	-0.207	0.242	-0.025	0.237	0.117	0.230	0.026	0.227
mother Professional Manager	0.400	0.433	0.373	0.427	0.381	0.422	-0.498	0.402	-0.517	0.389	-0.548	0.384
support amount(1million units)												
Tuition fee	0.015 **	0.005			0.015 **	0.005	0.005	0.004			0.007	0.004
other education costs	-0.006	0.006			-0.011	0.006	0.024 ***	0.007			0.017 **	0.006
Support for the year before graduation												
Living together	0.079	0.206			0.156	0.201	-0.344	0.193			-0.208	0.186
Receiving living expenses	0.616 **	0.214			0.688 **	0.211	0.283	0.196			0.427 *	0.191
Transition												
Job preparation(year)			0.728 ***	0.143	0.723 ***	0.142			0.920 ***	0.130	0.855 ***	0.129
age of graduation			0.151 ***	0.039	0.177 ***	0.039			0.173 ***	0.032	0.178 ***	0.032
N	764						762					
R^2	0.153		0.170		0.201		0.228		0.269		0.297	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

by 0.6 years if the worker receives living expense support in the year before graduation; i.e., the transition to one's first job is delayed if the individual is not financially independent of his or her parents during the early career development period. For women, the time at first job is delayed, albeit slightly, as the amount of nontuitional education cost support increases.

Model 2 shows statistically significant effects of job readiness and age at graduation on age at one's first job for both men and women. A one-year increase in the period of job readiness leads to a delay in first job by 0.7 years for men and 0.9 years for women. While the effect of the age at graduation is not as large as that of the period devoted to job preparation, a one-year increase in the age at graduation increases the age at first employment by 0.2 years for both men and women.

Finally, this analysis examines Model 3, which includes all the variables. For men, the amount of financial aid and the experience of receiving living expense support in the year before graduation increase the age at one's first job. Additionally, the length of time

dedicated to preparing for work and the age at graduation have an effect on delaying the age at one's first job. Parental characteristics do not directly affect one's age at one's first job. In the case of women, the age at one's first job is greater depending on the length and amount of time devoted to job preparation. Similar to men, the effect of receiving living expense support in the year prior to graduation was found to delay the age at one's first job. For women, father's higher education affects the age at one's first job in all the models; when father's higher education is considered to be the economic strength of the family of origin, the transition to one's first job is delayed when the family is economically well off. Thus, the results indicate that the amount of tuition support for formal education delays the first job transition for men, whereas the amount of support for educational expenses other than tuition delays the transition for women.

The results of the above analysis show that education cost support influences the age at one's first job, although the effect is not large. In addition, the financial nonindependence status of receiving living cost support in the second semester of university delays labor market entry by 0.6 years for men and 0.4 years for women. Regarding the relationship between the support received from parents during the transition to one's first job and the age at one's first job, the hypothesis that first job entry is delayed when support is received from parents is supported to a certain extent. Furthermore, the results of the present analysis also reveal a continuum of delayed transitions, in which time delays, such as a later age at graduation and a longer period devoted to preparing for employment, directly delay the age at one's first job.

Effect of Financial Support on the Content of One's First Job

Next, this study analyzes how parental support affects the content of one's first job. For the

content of one's first job, we focus on the job type, employment status, and firm size, which are considered to have an impact on subsequent income and other factors in South Korea. The dependent variables are a dummy for professional management as the first job type, a dummy for regular employment as the first job type, and a dummy for public institutions and large firms (with three hundred or more employees) as the first job size. The percentage of the total for each type of first job is as follows. 23.2% for men and 27.2% for women in professional management positions; 74.7% for men and 65.1% for women in regular positions; and 28.5% for men and 21.1% for women in public institutions and large firms. Binomial logistic regression analysis is an analytical method. The results for the independent variables are the same as those found in the regression analysis for age at one's first job. The results are presented as odds ratios, with odds ratios greater than one indicating a greater likelihood of being employed in professional management, regular employment, and public or large firms.

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis. For men, the amount of tuition support and the cost-of-living support dummy influence the likelihood of becoming a "professional manager." For men, the model itself is nonsignificant for the likelihood of becoming a "regular employee"; thus, it can be said that the presence or absence of support and the age during transition events that occur prior to one's first job do not explain whether men are more likely to find regular employment at their first job. With respect to the ease of entering public institutions or firms with a large firm size (three hundred or more employees) that are classified as "public or large firms," only educational background has an effect; the presence or absence of support does not have an effect. For women, the results of the present analysis show that the presence or absence of parental support has no significant effect on the ease of finding a first job in "professional management," "regular employment,"

Table 3 Results of logistic regression analysis for first job occupation, employment, and firm size by parental support

	Male						Female					
	professional manager		regular employee		public/large firm		professional manager		regular employee		public/large firm	
	exp(β)	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Educations (ref=Junior college)												
University	0.744	0.254	1.275	0.239	2.606 ***	0.289	1.015	0.236	0.710	0.226	1.176	0.255
graduate school	2.263 **	0.281	0.899	0.280	1.314	0.262	2.975 ***	0.285	0.376 ***	0.271	1.647	0.295
Parents' Education												
father High education	0.670	0.256	0.966	0.232	1.098	0.224	0.881	0.259	0.855	0.233	1.192	0.265
mother High education	0.952	0.314	1.516	0.300	1.201	0.269	0.803	0.301	0.905	0.270	1.006	0.306
Parents' occupations												
father Professional Manager	1.138	0.217	1.188	0.217	0.873	0.204	1.898 **	0.205	0.847	0.196	1.062	0.224
mother Professional Manager	2.171 *	0.347	1.010	0.391	1.339	0.340	1.957 *	0.332	1.639	0.344	0.946	0.373
support amount(1million units)												
Tuition fee	1.011 **	0.004	0.994	0.004	1.003	0.004	1.002	0.004	0.998	0.003	0.999	0.004
other education costs	0.993	0.006	1.008	0.006	1.000	0.005	1.004	0.006	1.003	0.006	1.000	0.007
Support for the year before graduation												
Living together	0.721	0.186	0.856	0.175	1.066	0.171	0.778	0.177	1.355	0.162	1.127	0.188
Receiving living expenses	1.563 *	0.193	1.141	0.186	0.852	0.180	1.259	0.184	0.890	0.168	0.692	0.196
Transition												
Job preparation(year)	1.003	0.130	0.784 *	0.124	0.979	0.120	0.760 *	0.125	0.855	0.112	0.965	0.130
age of graduation	1.006	0.035	0.950	0.033	1.043	0.033	0.991	0.031	1.000	0.028	1.014	0.031
constant	0.234	0.934	14.555 **	0.892	0.053 **	0.897	0.501	0.764	3.673	0.705	0.175 *	0.780
-2LL	791.2		849.4		880.7		835.0		944.8		770.5	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.069		0.027		0.061		0.103		0.072		0.031	
N	764						762					

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

or "public institutions and large firms."

In other words, the only significant effects are the amount of tuition support and living cost support for men's employment in professional management. In the case of men, the more financial support they receive, the more likely they are to become professional managers. Furthermore, even controlling for tuition support for university and graduate school, men with a graduate degree or higher are more likely to be employed in professional management positions. The education required to obtain the expertise needed to find a job in professional management is expensive, and the amount of parental support is large enough to cover these costs. In this analysis, which is highly homogeneous in terms of age and educational background, the effect of tuition support itself is normally difficult to observe because of the indirect effect of educational background. In addition, the experience of receiving living expense support in the year before graduation has a positive effect on

professional managers for men. Although living expense support delay the age at which men start their first job, it is found to have a positive effect on their entry into professional management.

Other findings are suggestive of the negative effect of the work preparation period on women's employment in professional management positions in relation to such a transition. Situations in which women have more than one year of dedicated time to prepare for employment in South Korea include preparation for civil service examinations and study abroad experience. However, neither the amount of time devoted to job preparation, nor the amount of money spent on job preparation have a significant effect on first-time employment with a public or large company. A longer period spent in preparation for employment after a leave of absence or graduation does not have a particularly positive effect on professional management, regular employment, or employment in either public or large firms. This is suggestive of the recent increase in the number of students preparing for employment. The same is true for the fact that the age at graduation is not related at all to the content of one's first job. When a late graduation age is understood as an extension of formal schooling, the length of study does not have a positive effect on professional management, formal employment, or large company employment.

Conclusions

This study examines the effects of parental support on the age and content of one's first job, focusing on the timing of the transition from a higher-education school to the first job in South Korean society. A positive effect of parental support is found for only men's employment in professional management. Moreover, while educational background has an effect on employment in professional management and employment in large firms for men,

neither delayed age at graduation nor having a period of dedicated preparation for employment have a particularly positive effect on employment in these occupational conditions. In fact, having a period of dedicated preparation for employment influences women's difficulty in becoming professional managers. In an analysis of age at one's first job, this study finds that formal schooling support for men and job preparation cost support for women increase the age at one's first job and that the time cost of education, such as one's age at graduation and the length of time dedicated to job preparation, also significantly delays the age at first job for men and women.

South Korean youth heavily compete to acquire the skills necessary to find a job, which are called "spec," probably because they believe that doing so will lead to an excellent job, even if it delays their age at graduation or the age at which they start their first job. There may be more than a little intention behind parents' large investments of money so that their children can obtain an excellent job with good conditions in the future. However, the results of this study indicate that parental support may slow first job placement but does not have a significant effect on first job placement in good conditions.

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