

Thematic Session
Gender Inequality in Housework

Urging for the payment of housework allowance to bring about the recognition of social values of care/housework and the promotion of gender equality

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Housework is repeated indefinitely, but its importance has not been properly recognized and it has been regarded as just chores, which has led to low wages of housework performers in the public labor market. I think it is well-timed and positive for the Gwangju Metropolitan City to adopt the housework allowance policy to realize the social value of domestic labor. The introduction of such allowance policy is "symbolistic to spread a culture of respecting the value of housework and sharing the burden of housework by building a social compensation system for the public value created by domestic labor," and based on this, it is expected to bring about gender equality effects in the future. However, there are some concerns and questions about the policy as well.

First of all, it is believed that the ultimate social effect to be achieved through the housework allowance system is to break down the unilateral responsibility of housework by gender and pursue gender equality at home through appropriate division of domestic labor among family members. These days, although unpaid housework at home is still concentrated on one gender, the structure of "women = housekeeping" is gradually fading away. I would like to ask if the fact that this allowance provides compensation to "dedicated housework performers" rather reinforces the traditional stereotype of gender role.

In addition, it appears that the primary recipients of the allowance are economically inactive housework performers in their 40s and 50s (including men), who are taking care of their parents or children and are excluded from other allowance systems. Caring work at home adds to housework. We need to make sure that there is no misunderstanding that this allowance system designed to recognize the value of housework is only applicable to those who involve caring work in addition to general domestic work. Furthermore, since people in their 40s and 50s are the age group who engage in economic activities for various reasons such as self-realization and home economy, it is questionable how many people will meet the conditions above and whether the housework allowance policy will be effective.

Depending on the type and age of each household, it seems necessary to provide domestic labor service along with the housework allowance. In fact, for single-parent households, providing household services may be much more effective than a small amount of housework allowance. It would be good to link the housework, including caring work, with social services and wage labor so that the social and financial value of the domestic labor can be properly evaluated.

Lastly, we need to think about the criteria for determining monthly amount of the housework allowance. According to "Survey on Gwangju Citizens' Perception of Housework and Housework Allowance", most of the respondents (40.8%) said that the appropriate monthly payment per household was KRW150,000 or less, but the actual proposed amount was KRW100,000. Also, more than 50% responded that the housework allowance should be paid to single-person households. This is because single-person households are also a group that is in the blind spot of the cash-based allowance system provided by the central government and local governments. Considering all of these, it seems necessary to revisit the subject of the housework allowance and its monthly amount.

Contrary to the recognition of the need for housework allowance and high expectations for its effectiveness, it is worrisome that the scale is too limited. I am also concerned that its operation may be done as a mere functionality, overwhelmed by the fact that the Gwangju Metropolitan City introduced the first housework allowance system in Korea.

However, aside from these concerns, the Gwangju Metropolitan City's efforts to conceive and review the 'housework allowance' system are definitely positive. Even if it is a small step today, I hope that this attempt will be a meaningful beginning for the recognition of the social and economic value of domestic labor, and for the preparation of various systems and improvement of awareness of the state's compensation for domestic work.