



FEMALE LABOR PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH KOREA: POLICY AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

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South Korea, although being a highly developed nation, surprisingly exhibits a lower female labor participation rate when compared to other countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), such as the United States. The percent of Korean women in the workforce over the age of 15 is at nearly 50%, whereas American women are at 60%. South Korea has tried in past legislation to encourage fair practices in hiring and eliminate workforce discrimination for all women, but without much success. Some of the past landmark laws have included the Equal Employment Act of the 1980s and Affirmative Action in 2006. While the U.S. has had similar employment policies regarding gender, the female labor participation rate is much higher than of South Korea. It is true that the 1963 Equal Pay Act and 1967 affirmative action policies occurred decades before Korea made a shift towards legislative action, however, within five decades, South Korea has very quickly reached the level of countries in OECD and transitioned to a full democracy and technological powerhouse, in addition to being a developed economy. This research seeks to understand why South Korea has a lower female labor participation rate even though it has policies in place such as Affirmative Action targeting women's equality. This research tests two key hypotheses: 1) Korean policies around gender equality are largely ineffective and needs improvement, and 2) Culture, in addition to policy, plays an important role in the female labor participation rate.

