

Women juggling husbands and jobs

By MICHAEL HOFFMAN

In many ways, as **Yomiuri Weekly** (April 27) observes, this is a good time to be a woman. In the workplace, women have more dignity and responsibility than ever before, though glass ceilings persist. In private life, childbearing is an option, not a socially imposed duty.

Is the price too high? **Yomiuri Weekly** focuses on the sometimes crushing



stress faced by young career women whose corporate rise follows a retreat from responsibility the magazine discerns in young men. Meanwhile **Spa!** (April 8) finds that many unmarried young working women do look forward to having children. They devise plans for future motherhood. The plans **Spa!** profiles are feverish blurs of maternal instinct and egotistical impulse, the latter generally dominant. Imagine unborn children hovering overhead, choosing on the basis of these plans whether or not to be born. Many would think better of it.

A common feature is the ditching of a current boyfriend in favor of someone, yet to be met, with more fatherly qualities. Seiko, to cite one example, is pressed for time. Now 30, she has imposed a deadline on herself — she wants to get pregnant within six months. Of her boyfriend of four years she says: "I like him a lot, but he has no discipline. Every night he's out drinking. It's not healthy. It could have

a bad effect on the baby. Breaking up will be painful, but I do have the future to consider."

So she hangs out at places where she's likely to encounter men with parental potential. And she exercises with a hula hoop. That's part of the plan. "They told me at the gym," she says, "that it's a good way to strengthen your abdominal muscles, so that after giving birth you get your shape back quickly. I'd hate the idea of not appealing to my husband as a woman."

Megumi also looks forward to pregnancy while doubting her boyfriend qualifies as her child's father. He's got everything a woman wants in a man, except a decent salary. "He earns so little," she says. "You can't raise a child on that."

She's in her mid-20s and busy with what she calls "maintenance:" getting her teeth fixed, attending to a skin allergy and so on — "because," she says, "you can't have X-rays or take anesthetic when you're pregnant."

As for getting pregnant, this is her plan: She'll find a man with money and other masculine virtues, yield to his seduction, and present him with a pregnant fait accompli; he'll marry her, and they'll live happily ever after.

The trouble is, babies can be demanding. "I'm afraid I'll abuse the child," she tells Spa! candidly. "I'm giving up my freedom for the kid, and if he doesn't do what I say I'll kick his ass."

So why, inquires Spa!, does she want a child in the first place?

"To take care of me when I'm old," she replies.

The women Yomiuri Weekly speaks to are more interested in taking care of themselves. Their professional competence is impressive, and with young men apparently losing their ambition en masse, the vacuum is the women's to fill.

But beware of pitfalls. Stress, depression and illness

lie in wait. Emi, 41, was in real estate. Everything was fine until she was promoted on merit. The five women who suddenly found themselves her subordinates were resentful. "Don't expect any cooperation from us," they said. Emi's workload swelled. Between the job and mothering three children, she got two to four hours' sleep a night.

One day her boss notified her of a retroactive cut in overtime pay. She protested and was told, "Don't bother coming in tomorrow."

The ups and downs that followed included another job, nervous collapse, hospitalization, a long rest and, most recently, a cautious return to work — not in business however, but helping out at a friend's restaurant. Perhaps she'll get back into the corporate game someday. For now, though, she's not sure it's worth it.

The Japan Times: Sunday, April 20, 2008
(C) All rights reserved

[Go back to The Japan Times Online](#)

[Close window](#)