



JAWW
NGO REPORT
FOR
BEIJING +30



JAWW (Japan Women's Watch)
October 2024

Special thanks go to Masako Tanaka, Advisor of JAWW (Convenor, 2011-2014),
who passed away on June 19, 2024, before the completion of the project.

JAWW NGO Report for Beijing +30

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Translation support (areas B, Q, S, and U) by Tokyo YWCA International Language Volunteers (ILV)

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This project is supported by the following funds:



WAN (Women's Action Network) Fund
The Akamatsu/Corti Fund for Gender Equality

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October 2024

Introduction - Toward Beijing +30

ASANO, Mariko

Convenor, JAWW (Japan Women's Watch)

As Japanese civil society has begun to show, though still quite small, signs of better awareness and perception of gender equality, now is the time to accelerate gender equality in Japan.

The “JAWW NGO Report Beijing+30” production project which began at the end of October 2023 is finally ready for publication in both English (on the web) and Japanese (in print). This is a record of the past five years and important lead to the future. We hope civil society, government agencies, national and public libraries, and gender equality centers in Japan and abroad will find it informative and a reliable reference.

In August 1999, the *Japan NGO Report: Toward the World Conference on Women 2000* was published by the “Japan NGO Report Making Group”, the predecessor of JAWW (Japan Women's Watch) (hereafter JAWW). Since then, the JAWW NGO Report production project has been conducted every five years, while continuing the basic policy to compile different perspectives and opinions.

As for the Beijing+30 NGO Report, we asked people from diverse fields, with a gender perspective, and their related organizations to contribute their respective reports. We are aware that among the contributors there were members still in their infancy at the time of the Beijing Conference. The report covers the progress and challenges of gender equality in Japan since Beijing+25. This includes: policies and projects formulated and implemented over the past five years, practical examples, challenges faced, and measures taken to address them, as well as the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference. All in all, it has in total, 22 areas including the original area of concern raised by JAWW. The report includes information on the commitment of initiative and other areas of concern.

As an NGO report on Japanese society, the report should also cover issues that cannot be overlooked from the NGO perspective. This implies areas set after “Toward Japan NGO Report 2004: Toward Beijing+10” (May 2004). Initially, there were five areas: Youth, Roles of Men and Boys in Gender Equality, Elderly Women, Women in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Commerce and Industry, and Minority Women. The number has increased each time since then, and this time it has grown to

10 areas (Youth, Women and Work, Immigrant Women, Women with Disabilities, Role of Boys and Men, Older Women, "Agricultural, Forest, and Fishing Women", Sexual and Gender Minorities, "Disaster Prevention, Mitigation, and Reconstruction", and Technology and Gender).

The increase in the number of JAWW's areas of concern is due to the diversification of issues faced by women and girls as a result of the impact of social changes, natural disasters, and other factors on their lives and environment, the opportunity to focus on the current situation and challenges of women and girls who have been left out of the target, who are marginalized or face multiple and intersectional discriminations, and the rapid progress of the country. It is also related to the fact that there are areas where gender perspectives have not kept pace with the rapid change in society. It is no exaggeration to say that the establishment of JAWW's original areas of concern resulted in the characterization of the "NGO Report" at that time which visualized the changes in Japanese society over the past five years.

We are pleased to announce that we have received grants from the Akamatsu-Corti Fund for Gender Equality (Japanese Association of International Women's Rights) and the WAN Fund (Women's Action Network, authorized NPO), respectively. We are very happy and grateful that the value of the JAWW NGO Report project, based on the passion of our predecessors who brought the enthusiasm of the Beijing Conference back to Japan has been recognized.

The translation of areas B, Q, S, and U was done with the help of the Tokyo YWCA International Language Volunteers (ILV).

Lastly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors, the JAWW members who raised their hands to the planning committee, and later served as coordinators to liaise with the authors, and all volunteers who offered every possible support to the project.

We hope to be a civil society that stands by those who cannot raise their voices.

A. Women and Poverty

TAMIYA, Yuko

1. Gender Disparities in Relative Poverty Rates

The relative poverty rate in Japan is shown in Figure 1. The OECD definition of the poverty rate is based on the OECD standard, which defines the poverty line as 50% of the median equivalized household disposable income, and the poverty rate as the percentage of people whose equivalized household income is below the poverty line. The poverty rate for women is 17.1%, 3 percentage points higher than for men¹. Poverty risk varies by age, with a poverty rate as high as 20.0% for those aged 65 and over. Looking at poverty at older ages by gender, the poverty rate for women is 22.9% compared to 16.6% for men, more than 6 percentage points higher than the poverty rate for men, indicating a higher risk of poverty among older women. For older women, the poverty rate is notably high for those who are divorced (43.6%) or never married (43.1%), whereas it remains relatively low for older adults with a spouse (Figure 2).

For households with children, the risk of poverty is significantly elevated in single-adult households (i.e., single-parent households), where the poverty rate stands at 44.5%, compared to 11.5% among children in general (Figure 1). The issue of single-parent poverty can be viewed as a facet of the broader issue of women's poverty. Notably, single-mother households represent 88% of all single-parent households² and, on average, have lower incomes compared to their single-father counterparts.

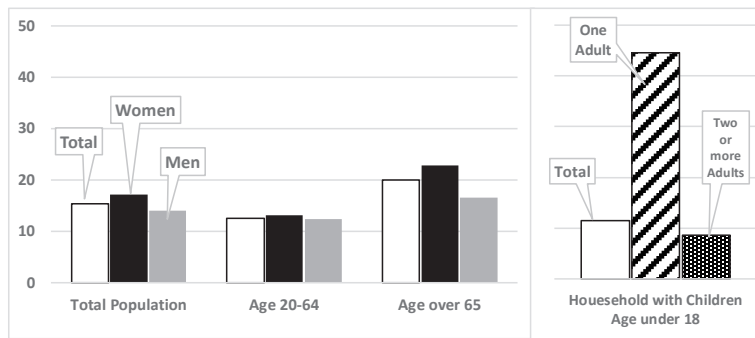
For the working-age population, on the other hand, the risk of poverty is lower than that of the older generation. However, when compared by gender, the poverty rate for women is 13.1%, while for men it is 12.4%, slightly higher than for men (Figure 1). In the working-age group, as in the older generation, the poverty rate is lower for men and women with a spouse, whereas the poverty rate is higher for never married, divorced, and widowed. Note that the poverty rate for never married men exceeds that of never married women, showing a different trend from the others (Figure 2).

The following section will evaluate whether current policies address female poverty, focusing on pension improvements for single elderly individuals and work and income security measures for single mothers.

¹ The poverty line in 2021 is 1.27 million yen.

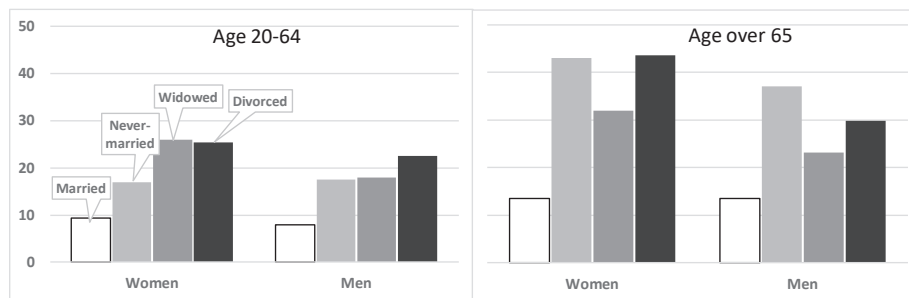
² Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *2020 Population Census*.

Figure 1. Relative Poverty Rate of Women and Men in 2021, by age group



Source: MHLW, *Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions*.; OECD, *Income distribution database*.; Abe, 2024.

Figure 2. Relative Poverty Rate of Women and Men in 2021, by marital status and age group



Source: Abe, 2024.

2. Poverty among Women in Older Ages

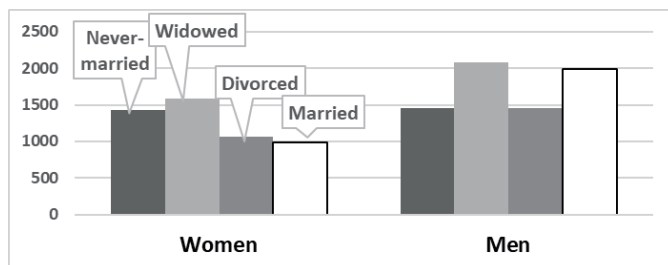
The risk of economic poverty increases in old age compared to the working-age population. In Japan, the majority of individuals rely primarily on public pensions as their main source of income during later life, and the likelihood of experiencing poverty is higher for those with lower pension benefits. The previous section demonstrated that the poverty rate is particularly high among divorced and never-married older women, which correlates with these groups receiving lower levels of pension benefits, placing them at an elevated risk of poverty. Specifically, the average pension amount for divorced women fell below the poverty line (1.27 million yen, Figure 3). Conversely, it is crucial to note that in the case of married women, their own pension benefits are the lowest (990,000 JPY), even though their poverty risk is not high, as we saw in the previous section. This disparity is mitigated by the shared pension benefits between spouses, which increases overall pension income and significantly reduces poverty risk. Upon a husband's death, the wife inherits his pension as a survivor's benefit, which exceeds her own old-age pension and thereby ensures that widowed women receive higher benefits than divorced or never-married women. Although the husband's pension plays a substantial

role in preventing poverty among women, it is evident that a woman’s individual pension alone is insufficient to keep her above the poverty line.

One major factor contributing to women's low pension benefits is gender disparity during their working years. Lower wages and shorter employment durations compared to men result in reduced employee pension amounts for women. Examining the relationship between work patterns and pension levels (Figure 4), we find that pensions are higher for full-time employees and executives, while non-regular employees—including temporary, daily, part-time, and contract workers—receive lower pension amounts. Women with less than 20 years of work experience receive pensions similar to those of non-standard employees. Self-employed individuals have the lowest pensions since they are ineligible for employee pensions, receiving only the basic pension. Interestingly, lifelong housewives receive the second-highest pension amounts in comparison, largely due to their high eligibility for survivor's pensions. The survivor's pension, which is 75% of the husband's old-age pension, exceeds the level of the old-age pension based on the woman's individual work history.

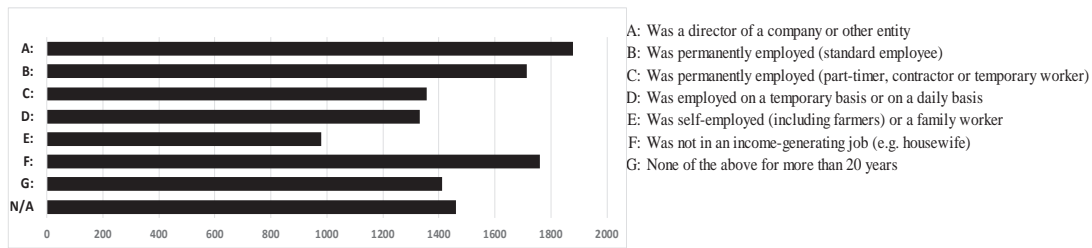
One significant factor contributing to the high poverty risk among older women, particularly divorced and never-married women, is the gendered structure of the pension system. The Japanese public pension system, while effective in preventing poverty among widowed women, inadequately addresses the poverty risks faced by divorced and never-married women. This insufficiency arises from a pension system design that primarily assumes male breadwinner households. Moreover, the pension system's emphasis on regular employees, with insufficient provisions for non-regular workers, results in lower pension benefits for women, who are disproportionately represented in non-regular employment compared to men. Additionally, the pension system's emphasis on regular employees, with insufficient provisions for those in precarious or irregular jobs, results in lower pension benefits for women, who are disproportionately represented in these forms of employment compared to men.

Figure 3. Amount of Public Pension by marital status (per annum, thousands JPY)



Source: MHLW, Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions of Pensioners 2022.

Figure 4. Amount of Public Pension by work history (per annum, thousands JPY)



Source: MHLW, Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions of Pensioners 2022.

3. Poverty among Single Mothers

As noted in Section 1, the child poverty rate is particularly high among single-parent households, especially those headed by single mothers. Despite an employment rate exceeding 80%, single mothers face a high poverty rate. A key factor contributing to this working poverty is the gender disparity within the labor market. Women in Japan earn lower wages, have shorter job tenures, and are more frequently employed in non-regular positions compared to men. Additionally, caregiving responsibilities further disadvantage women in the labor market. In two-parent households, the low earnings of the female parent do not necessarily lead to poverty; however, for single mothers, who are the sole income providers, the gender gap in employment directly results in lower household income, thereby increasing their risk of poverty.

The second factor contributing to the heightened poverty risk among single mothers is the inadequacy of social policy. The Child Rearing Allowance (*Jido Fuyo Teate*), received by 70% of single mothers, provides limited income security, insufficient to offset inadequate employment income and effectively mitigate poverty risk. The allowance alone cannot elevate recipients above the poverty line. Even when combining employment income and the allowance, the annual average income of single-parent households remains at only 30-49% of that of two-parent households with children.

Widowed mothers are eligible for survivor's pensions, which provide a higher benefit level compared to the Child Rearing Allowance. The basic survivor's pension (*Izoku Kiso Nenkin*) is approximately twice the full amount of the allowance, and if the recipient also qualifies for the employee survivor's pension (*Izoku Kosei Nenkin*), the total benefit can be nearly three times as much. Despite these higher benefit levels, the number of widowed households is relatively small, accounting for only 6% of single mothers, resulting in a limited number of eligible recipients.

Public assistance (*Seikatsu Hogo*) is a general poverty alleviation measure that includes support for single mothers in need. Although single mothers who receive assistance reach an income level above the poverty line, the proportion of recipients remains low, at 11% of single-mother households³,

³ The number of households receiving public assistance according to the MHLW “2022 National Survey on Public Assistance Recipients” divided by the number of single-mother households in the “2022 Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions” by the MHLW.

due to stringent asset eligibility requirements and the stigma associated with welfare.

4. Policy Recommendations

The Government of Japan must implement policies to address gender discrimination in the labor market and expand the inadequate social security system that relies on women's unpaid caregiving roles to promote both gender equality and poverty reduction. Specifically, the following measures should be undertaken: strengthening labor laws to address low wages, job insecurity, and excessive working hours; ensuring worker-led employment flexibility; expanding support for balancing caregiving responsibilities with employment, particularly for parents of preschool and school-aged children; enhancing income security programs for single-parent and low-income families with children; eliminating disparities between non-regular and regular workers within the social insurance system; and increasing the benefit level of the basic old-age pension to support those with inadequate pensions.

Survey on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Single Mothers by a Women's Group

The Single Mothers Forum conducted a survey examining the conditions faced by single-mother families during the COVID-19 pandemic and reported significant adverse effects (Single Mother Research Project 2021). The survey revealed a decline in income for single mothers due to work restrictions, alongside an increased childcare burden resulting from school closures. It has been noted that the reduction in food expenditures due to decreased income may have contributed to a decline in the weight of their children.

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B. Education and Training of Women

KIMURA, Ikue

KIMURA, Ryoko

ASAI, Haruo

1. Introduction

According to the Gender Gap Index (GGI) published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), it appears as if Japan has accomplished gender equality in the field of education. However, there still are many challenges in education and training that are making it difficult to narrow the gender gap in the fields of politics and economics.

2. Continuing Gender-Based Admission Restrictions without Rational Reasons

Before World War II, Japan had adopted a single-sex education and school system, but coeducation became the standard after the war and women were given access to higher education. In some areas in Eastern Japan, however, single-sex public high schools have remained, continuing the old system of single-sex education. Thus, some prefectures such as Saitama and Gunma have many single-sex public high schools, although coeducation was promoted in many prefectures from the 1990's to the 21st century. In Saitama, the Gender Equality Grievance Committee issued a recommendation in 2023 that called for an early implementation of coeducation, following up on a recommendation in 2002, but the matter is still under discussion with many pros and cons.

In 2018, it came to light that some universities had been restricting the number of female students admitted into the faculty of medicine. In 2023, after the wrongful admission system was corrected, it was reported that the female ratio in new entrants to the faculty of medicine exceeded the “40% barrier” that had existed for many years. Also, the male/female admission quotas have been abolished from FY2024, after it was revealed that the quotas, which were adopted by public high schools in Tokyo during the process of promoting coeducation after World War II, were tending to disadvantage female students in recent years. Moreover, while there are many women's universities in Japan, Ochanomizu University and some other universities have begun to move towards admitting transgender women.

3. Fewer Female School Managers

In the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2010), the government set a goal to raise the ratio of women in managerial positions in various fields to 30% by 2020. In the educational field, the plan set a goal of raising the ratio of women working as “vice principal or higher” to 30%. It was a breakthrough that correcting the gender inequality in the composition ratio of school teachers became a political issue. In the Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2015), however, the goal of “30% by 2020” in the educational field was lowered to “20% or more by 2020,” which was an unbelievable change for a plan implemented by the government. It should be noted that such a drastic reduction has not been seen in fields other than the educational field.

As of 2024, the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality still promotes setting a target for the female ratio in managerial positions in schools. However, the ratio of female principals in public schools in 2023 remained at 26.8% in elementary schools, 11.0% in junior high schools, 10.3% in high schools, and 31.7% in special needs schools, which were significantly lower than the ratio of female teachers at each school level. Gender gap in the organization of school teachers, who can be close role models for children and students, is a major issue.

4. Gender Gap in the ratio of students advancing to higher education and their majors

Although the ratio of students advancing to high school, which is upper secondary education, is almost the same between male and female students (male 98.6%, female 98.8%: These and subsequent numbers in this section were taken from the FY2023 School Basic Survey), the advancement rates tend to differ by gender for students advancing to specialized courses such as commerce, technical, agriculture, and nursing care.

Looking at the advancement rate to higher education (including those who graduated from high school in the previous year), female students have a higher advancement rate compared to male students (male 80.9%, female 87.1%), but male students have a higher advancement rate to four-year universities (male 60.7%, female 54.5%). Moreover, while the overall advancement rate to graduate schools has been rapidly increasing since the 1990s and has now exceeded 10% with the encouragement of an educational policy to expand graduate schools, gender gap in graduate school has actually become more noticeable (male 15.2%, female 6.6%).

Gender imbalance by major in higher education, such as more female students in humanities and more male students in science and social science, has narrowed significantly over the past 30 to 40 years. However, female students advancing to science and technical fields are still rare. To solve this so-called STEM issue, science and technical faculties of four-year universities are proactively introducing “admission quotas for female students” in the 2020s.

In recent years, gender gap in access to so-called hard-to-get-into universities and after enrolment to those schools have drawn social attention. For example, peculiar tendencies and practices at the University of Tokyo were featured in the media, such as male students accounting for 80% of the total and the existence of student clubs that female students could not join. Female students from rural areas are rare, too. In 2023, a survey conducted by “#YourChoiceProject,” a University of Tokyo student organization, revealed that a high percentage of female students from rural areas felt that their parents didn’t want them to advance to a hard-to-get-into university and that they were expected to go to a university near their parent’s home. These survey results attracted a lot of public attention.

Even now in the 21st century, female students are more at a disadvantage compared to male students in terms of advancing to universities and graduate schools, and advancement to higher education has been restricted especially for female students from rural areas in tangible and intangible

ways. While it is now being globally recognized that respecting diversity is essential in realizing innovativeness and richness in research and education, we must say that universities in Japan are falling behind in this trend.

5. Battles in School Textbook Screening, and Life Education/Life Planning Education

There is no gender-specific regulation in the government curriculum guidelines now, but it has become an issue as to what extent the gender perspective should be incorporated in educational contents. In recent years, more and more textbooks are incorporating contents that question “femininity/masculinity” or take up diversity in family types and sexuality, and such textbooks are passing the textbook screening system. However, items related to SOGI or diversity in family types are not clearly stated in the curriculum guidelines. Textbook companies have started to incorporate diverse messages in their textbooks, but the positioning of such messages has its limitations.

As for history textbooks, the expression “military comfort women” disappeared from junior high school history textbooks after the textbook screening held in March 2024, following a 2021 Cabinet decision on military comfort women who were forcibly taken away. A controversy broke out when a textbook published by Reiwa Shoseki Co., which had failed the previous four screenings, passed the screening while emphasizing the achievements of Emperor Meiji, Emperor Showa, and historical Emperors, and also clearly stating that “there is no fact that the Japanese military forcibly took away Korean women” with regard to military comfort women.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) set an objective “not to make children subjects of sex crimes,” and published model textbooks (teaching materials) and “Instruction Guideline” for teachers. The educational and enlightenment initiative led by the government, named “Life Safety Education,” was planned to be introduced to schools step by step from FY2021 through FY2023. The Instruction Guideline and examples of teaching procedures for kindergarten to high school (including college and general schools) are published in a dedicated website. Although these materials may have a certain significance in questioning some mythologies that criticize the victims of DV and sex violence, there is criticism that power structures such as patriarchy and heterosexualism are overlooked. It is also pointed out that the guideline obscures the concept of sexual consent by listing only negative information rather than conveying science-based sexual knowledge.

We also need to keep an eye on the government measures against the declining birthrates that are interfering with education. The government has been promoting these measures since the “1.57 shock” in 1990, when the total fertility rate recorded a postwar low. In recent years, the government and municipalities have been promoting life planning education for high school students and teenagers as well as expanding the “government-operated matchmaking service,” aiming to get the younger generations more interested in marriage and giving birth. There is a concern that these kinds of policies are increasingly tending to inhibit free and diverse lifestyles of individuals.

6. Dealing with Sexual Minority Has Just Started

In 2010, MEXT issued a notice to prefectural boards of education asking to introduce an educational counseling service for “dealing with children and students with gender identity disorders.” Then, in 2013, the ministry conducted a “Survey on the situation of dealing with gender identity disorders in schools” in public and private elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, secondary schools, special needs schools, and the like. Based on the survey results, MEXT issued a notice entitled “Implementation of detailed procedures for dealing with children and students with gender identity disorders” to prefectural boards of education in 2015, and published materials for teachers in 2016. In December 2022, the “Student Guidance Handbook” was revised for the first time in 12 years, and the issues related to “sexual minority” and how to address them were clearly stated for the first time. Although schools have started to consider how to care for children of “sexual minority,” not only individual care but a comprehensive review of education is needed in various aspects such as contents of education, student guidance, and school culture.

7. Weakening of Life-long Education for Women

In 2023, the government announced the closure of National Women’s Education Center (NVEC), which was established in Saitama Prefecture in 1977 and had been playing a vital role as a central base for learning and training for gender equality for a long time. As the closure met many objections, the government newly announced in July 2024 the role shift of NVEC from facility (hardware) oriented to function (software) oriented as the “Center of Centers” governing the regional centers, and a plan to demolish the lodging and training buildings, sports facilities and so on by 2030. There is a concern that opportunities for women to receive life-long education, which have been provided by NVEC, will be significantly reduced. Also, the Women’s Center in each region, which is a learning center for women, is being weakened due to the conversion of regular employees to non-regular employees and budget reduction.

8. Sex Education

In March 2018, a member of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly attacked sex education by namely criticizing teachers who conducted sex education classes at a junior high school in Adachi Ward, Tokyo, claiming that it was “improper sex education” and that “teaching contraception and abortion is a deviation from the curriculum guidelines.” However, against this sex education bashing, many signatures supporting the classes were obtained, and the school principal and the Adachi Ward Board of Education declared that those classes were necessary. Moreover, mass media formed an overwhelming opinion that sex education was definitely necessary. These events became a major turning point. Since 2019, sex education bashing has not been a major trend although it has surfaced sporadically.

The “Life Safety Education” program promoted by MEXT is planned to be fully implemented for three years starting in FY2023. However, as the program provides no definition or explanation about “life” and lacks the perspectives of science and human rights, it appears to be largely intended to reinforce the “moral” curriculum. The most critical problem is that the program mainly focuses on indoctrinating that life is important and does not include the scientific “learning about the body.” There is no mention of “physical rights,” which is provided in the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education published by UNESCO. In response to this program, the Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality, a private education and research organization, is expanding its initiatives by publishing studies and actual practices on the specific contents of “education on physical rights.”

The so-called “restraining provision,” which was abruptly introduced in the curriculum guidelines in 1998 without a clear explanation, has not been abolished to date. This policy prohibits teaching in classes about the “process leading to fertilization,” meaning sexual intercourse, while it allows teaching about fertilization and pregnancy. This policy is based on a theory that “sex education awakens sleeping kids.” Also, teachers actually have no opportunity to learn how to teach sex education, because sex education is not designated as a compulsory subject in the teacher training course.

In January 2021, the youth group of Plan International Japan, a public interest incorporated foundation, conducted a questionnaire survey on sex education of roughly 1,000 people aged 15 to 19. Of the respondents whose ages were the same as high school graduates, 68% answered that sex education was “important” and 27 % answered that the contents of sex education they received were “insufficient.” Only 19 % answered that sex education was “familiar” to them. The question is, how the government and MEXT intend to deal with the current situation.

In response to this current situation, comprehensive sex education, which has become the global standard, is carrying a lot of expectations from the society. Postwar sex education in Japan has been a mixture of ①abstinence-based sex education, which teaches children not to have sex before marriage, ②terror-based sex education, which keeps children and youth away from sexual matters by exaggerating the damages caused by sexually transmitted diseases, and ③suppressive sex education, which associates sexual knowledge to sexual delinquency. In recent years, however, ④comprehensive sex education, which is based on respect for diversity, science, and human rights, is now becoming the mainstream theory. Many translated documents, theory books, educational reports, picture books, and Q&A books on comprehensive sex education have been published, and seminars and workshops are continually held by various organizations.

In spite of these trends, comprehensive sex education still faces some challenges in the present situation. For example, it was pointed out in a Diet session that the word “comprehensive” was too ambiguous, while fake information was newly spread, claiming that comprehensive sex education

allowed transgender males to enter women's restrooms and bathing rooms. In response to these challenges, the "Network Aiming for Establishment of Comprehensive Sex Education Promotion Act" has been launched. These movements that aim for the establishment of a law are also moving forward and looking ahead to the future.

C. Women and Health

- from the perspective of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for ALL -

KUSANO, Hiromi

1. Introduction

Regardless of one's self-identified gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is a fundamental human right. Especially for women (including some trans men and non-binary persons) who have the bodily functions of pregnancy and childbirth, it is one of the most important basic human rights to maintain their health and make their own choices at each milestone through their lives, including adolescence, puberty, menopause, and old age. At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the concept of reproductive health (RH) was coined, which "implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so."

The Beijing conference took place in 1995. In the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome document of the conference states, "The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence." Thirty years on, this report analyzes whether the SRHR of women and girls in all their diversity (hereafter referred to as women) in Japan is sufficiently protected.

2. Contraceptive

Among those classified by WHO as modern contraceptive methods, three are currently available in Japan: male condoms, oral contraceptive pills (combined and mini pills), and intrauterine devices (IUD)/intrauterine systems (IUS). Sterilization is only available if the requirements of the Maternal Protection Act are met, requiring that those who wish to be voluntary sterilized must already have a child and obtain spousal consent. The remaining methods such as female condoms, contraceptive implants, rings, patches, injections, which women can use with their initiative, are not available in Japan.

Pharmacy sales of emergency contraceptives, which are the last resort to prevent unintended pregnancy in the event of contraceptive failure or sexual violence, have also not been realized despite repeated requests from civil society. Public comments by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) from the end of 2022 to January of the following year attracted as many as 46,300 comments of which only 300 opposed the pharmacy sales, while 46,000 supported the pharmacy sale¹. This was

¹ <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20230501/p2a/00m/0li/019000c>

a major win by the efforts of civil society, especially the youth. However, the pharmacy pilot sales, which began in November 2023 as a response to the public comment have not helped improve access. As of August 2024, only 145 out of over 62,000 of the nation's dispensing pharmacies have implemented the program.² Even in Tokyo, home of over 12million inhabitants, there are only 5 pharmacies which participate in the pilot sales. Prices are also expensive, ranging from 7,000 to 9,000 yen. Even though the drug must be taken within 72 hours, there are additional hurdles to access involved in the pilot, such as looking for a pharmacy, calling them to confirm the stock availability, filling in the agreement to participate in the pilot sales, taking the drug in front of the pharmacist to prove it was taken appropriately, and filling in once again a pilot participant questionnaire³. These additional steps can compound the stress and anxiety of those seeking such treatment. Urgent improvements are desperately needed, yet the prospects for when pharmacy sales will start nationally are still uncertain.

During the July 2023 Universal and Periodic Review (UPR Review: approximately every four and a half years, each UN member state is reviewed by other UN member states on their human rights status), the Government of Japan (GOJ) responded that it “accepts to follow up” on the recommendation to improve access to contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives⁴. The GOJ must act to keep its promise: available contraceptive methods should be increased, barriers to access should be eliminated, and pharmacy sales of emergency contraceptives should be realized as soon as possible.

3. Abortion

The biggest issue related to abortion is that the criminalization of abortion, legislated in 1907, still remains to this day in Japan. This law has shrouded abortion in negativity, when it is in fact required to protect the health and autonomy of people with unintended pregnancies. The responsibility of pregnancy lies in the hands of not just the pregnant individual but also their sexual partner, who is not legally punished. Abortion should not be criminalized.

While retaining the criminalization of abortion, the Eugenic Protection Law (passed in 1948 and amended to the Maternal Protection Law (MPL) in 1996) allows “conditional” abortions. The imposing of conditions itself is a violation of the reproductive rights of women and individuals that can conceive, particularly the spousal requirement which requires the intervention of a third party in one's right to bodily autonomy. Abortion is performed only by doctors designated under the MPL, and because it is not covered by health insurance, the cost of the procedure is expensive, ranging from

² <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Gender/Japan-s-over-the-counter-emergency-contraception-trial-5-things-to-know>

³ <https://www.pharmacy-ec-trial.jp/>

⁴ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session53/advance-versions/A_HRC_53_15_Add.1_AV_Japan_E.docx

100,000 to 200,000 yen for an early abortion of less than 12 weeks⁵. In April 2023, oral abortion pills were finally approved (limited to abortions within 9 weeks of conception). The oral abortion pills are also included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines and have been used in 96 countries as of May 2023 since they were first approved in France and China in 1988⁶. WHO states that the drug can be used up until 12 weeks of pregnancy and can be taken at home or any place where the individual feels safe and relaxed⁷. In Japan, the drug must be taken at a clinic with a doctor designated under the MPL. Hospitalization is required after taking the drug. The cost is 50,000 yen for the drug, and additional charges for the doctor's consultation fee and the hospital stay which are estimated to sum up to over 100,000 yen⁸. In July 2024, MHLW announced a policy to relax the requirements so that the oral abortion pill can be used in hospitals without inpatient facilities. Unintended pregnancies can happen to anyone, so it is vital that those who do not wish to continue their pregnancies have access to accessible and timely abortions in a method of their own choosing as part of their medical care.

4 . The State apologies SRHR violations under the Eugenic Protection Act

In July 2024, the Supreme Court Grand Bench ruled that the forced sterilization of people with disabilities under the Eugenic Protection Act was a violation of the Constitution. In addition, it directed the government to compensate the victims. Chief Justice Saburo Tokura stated that the Eugenic Protection Law forced people with disabilities to make the grave sacrifice of losing their reproductive capacity⁹. This discriminatory law, aimed at “not producing defective offspring,” sterilized the bodies of disabled persons without their consent, depriving them of the choice to have children and the right to form their own lives. In other words, their bodily autonomy and SRHR were taken away from them by the government. On July 17, Prime Minister Kishida met with the plaintiff victims and apologized¹⁰. The ruling that the law is unconstitutional, as well as the government's apology, are groundbreaking, but they do not eliminate the suffering and loss experienced by the victims. The State must protect all aspects of human rights without forgetting the past including the reparation of those harmed.

5 . Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The impact of the backlash against sex education that occurred in the early 2000s has persisted, and due to the so-called “halting provisions” that remain in the curriculum guidelines, sexual intercourse continues to not be taught in compulsory public education. However, it is important not only for children but also for adults to have correct SRHR knowledge based on science and human

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/29/japan-approves-abortion-pill-for-the-first-time>

⁶ <https://www.guttmacher.org/2023/07/mifepristone-abortion-global-context-safe-effective-and-approved-nearly-100-countries>

⁷ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240039483>

⁸ <https://www.nhk.jp/p/kyonokenko/ts/83KL2X1J32/episode/te/GZ3W3Z5MK9/>

⁹ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/07/03/japan/crime-legal/forced-sterilization-ruling/>

¹⁰ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/07/17/japan/society/kishida-eugenics-victims/>

rights, including topics such as menstruation, sex, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, infertility, childbirth, abortion, gender, sexuality, romantic relationships, partnership, and the prevention of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence (DV), etc. It is internationally recognized that comprehensive sexuality education that is "science-based, developmentally appropriate, and based on human rights and gender equality" is highly effective in acquiring such knowledge¹¹. The government has repeatedly received recommendations to implement comprehensive sexuality education from the CEDAW¹², the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹³, and the UPR review¹⁴.

In the 2023 UPR, the Government of Japan stated, "Sex education is already provided from various perspectives according to the developmental stages of children. Comprehensive sexuality education, including that proposed by the UNESCO Guidance, is unacceptable to the Government of Japan."¹⁵ The GOJ stubbornly refuses to implement comprehensive sex education. On the other hand, because sexual violence against children continues to occur, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Cabinet Office launched a nationwide "Life Safety Education" program in FY2023. The goal of this program is to prevent children from becoming perpetrators, victims, or bystanders of sexual violence, but its scope is much narrower than that of comprehensive sexuality education. The implementation of science-based sex education is crucial to the realization of gender equality and improved health outcomes for all.

6 . LGBTQIA+ people's rights and SRHR

Who you have romantic feeling towards, who you wish to have as a sexual partner, who to marry and have children with, not feeling romantic or sexual attraction to the others, living a life that does not require having sexual relationship, marriage, or children, living one's own life with their own true gender identity and deciding how to live with their own body — these are also crucial elements of SRHR.

The Act on Promoting Public Understanding of Diversity in Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity was passed in June 2023, but its contents have caused concern among those involved, as it not only does not prohibit discrimination against sexual minorities but could encourage it.

In October of the same year, the Supreme Court Grand Bench ruled that the "sterilization requirement" of the Gender Identity Disorder Special Law was unconstitutional. Specifically, the "removal of glands (testes/ovaries)" that was imposed as a condition for transgender people to change their gender on the family register was ruled to be unconstitutional. The Supreme Court ruled that this

¹¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education>

¹² CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/7-8

¹³ CRC/C/JPN/CO/4-5

¹⁴ A/HRC/53/15/Add.1

¹⁵ A/HRC/53/15/Add.1

condition was inexcusable because it forced a person to make a harsh choice between undergoing unwanted surgery or renouncing the rewriting of one's legal sex. The removal of the glands would, of course, make subsequent reproduction impossible. It was a condition that grossly violated the reproductive rights of transgender people by imposing invasive surgery on their bodies, depriving them of the ability to have children. This Supreme Court decision was a step forward in restoring to transgender people the SRHR which everyone should universally possess, that is, to decide for themselves what their gender is, whether to have children, and how to live in their bodies.

In the meantime, hormone treatment and gender reassignment surgery, which transgender people undergo at their own volition and choice according to their own gender needs, are necessary components of medical care to respect and protect the physical and mental health and SRHR of transgender people. The lack of timely, appropriate, and affordable access to these services is also a problem.

7. In Closing

At the 2023 G7 Hiroshima Summit, chaired by the GOJ, the G7 leaders signed the Leaders' Communique as countries that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. It says, “We express our strong concern about the rollback of women’s and girls’ rights in particular in time of crisis and we strongly condemn all violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms for women and girls and LGBTQIA+ people around the world. We further recognize the essential and transformative role of comprehensive SRHR in gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment, and in supporting diversity, including of sexual orientations and gender identities. We reaffirm our full commitment to achieving comprehensive SRHR for all, including by addressing access to safe and legal abortion and post abortion care. (Para43)¹⁶”

The GOJ signed the communique as one of the member countries that “protect[s] human rights”. I hope that Japan will become a country which truly protects SRHR, which is a fundamental human right it does not currently uphold, by the next benchmark of “Beijing +35”.

¹⁶ https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/hiroshima23/documents/pdf/Leaders_Communique_01_en.pdf?v20231006

D. Violence against Women/ Gender-based Violence

KITANAKA, Chisato

1. Situation /definition and prohibited scope under the law

1-1 Domestic violence (DV) and the Anti-Domestic Violence Act

The definition of domestic violence in the Anti-Domestic Violence Act included not only physical violence, but also "speech and conduct that has a harmful effect on the mind and body", since the law was first enacted in 2001. However, the protection orders (restraining orders, orders to leave) were issued by the courts have until recently been limited to "assaults that constitute criminal assault or battery", or "cases where there is a high risk of death or bodily harm due to physical violence". It was also deemed problematic that certain victim support measures were also based on the scope of application of these protection orders.

In response, the revised law, which came into force in April 2024, expanded the scope of the restraining order, and the so-called "coercive control" can now be applied for when there is a "significant risk of serious harm to the victim's body and mind". It also extended the period of the restraining order (from 6 months to 1 year), expanded the prohibited acts of the telephone restraining order (prohibited acts also include letters, approach via social media, and GPS, and it also prohibited against children), increased the penalties for violating the order (from 1 year to 2 years or less of imprisonment, from 1 million to 2 million yen or less of fine), and made improvements, such as the ability to apply online.

Evaluation and Remaining Questions

The expansion of the scope of the restraining order will have an impact on the awareness of people in society, but it will be interesting to see whether the order will be issued even in cases where there is no actual physical violence in evidence. There is no emergency protection order system. Despite the fact that cases of serious DV, including murder, have occurred with partners who do not live together¹, the fact that DV with partners who do not live together is not covered by the Anti-DV Act is also a major problem. There is concern that "post-separation abuse", in which DV and child abuse continue after separation or divorce, will worsen when the revised Family Law, which will allow for joint parental authority, takes effect in 2026. With the exception of violations of protection orders, there is no system in place that specifically prohibits domestic violence as a crime, or that increases the severity of the crime.

¹ 2023: Stalker murder at Hakata Station, murder in a Yokohama City apartment, murder of an 18-year-old woman in Edogawa Ward, Tokyo, 2024: murder of a university student in Hirakata City, Osaka Prefecture, etc.

1-2 Sexual violence/Sexual assault

Law: Through the 2017 and 2023 revisions (amendments to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure), the Sexual Offenses Act has made the following major advances.

- (1) Acts of sexual intercourse without consent are now considered to be crimes, and acts committed under the pretext of control through domestic violence, etc., or by taking advantage of a situation where it is difficult to refuse (find, express, or fulfill the will to not consent) due to coercion based on a power relationship, such as at work, or due to freezing, surprise attack, or shock, are now also considered crimes.
- (2) The so-called age of consent has been raised from under 13 to under 16, but with conditions.
- (3) The statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse has been extended.
- (4) The so-called "forensic interview" was introduced for victims of child sexual abuse.
- (5) Sexual violence between married couples was clearly defined as a crime.
- (6) The crime of rape was rendered gender-neutral.
- (7) The requirement that a complaint be made by the victim has been abolished.
- (8) Sexual violence against a child by a legal guardian has been criminalized.

Facts and figures:

According to a random sample survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2023)², approximately 7% of women have experienced rape, and the percentage of those who experienced it as children is also high (47.1% of the victims experienced it when they were 17 years old or younger). Sexual abuse within the family, sexual violence by a partner, and abuse by people associated with schools and workplaces are serious problems. In Japan, since the #MeToo movement, there have been a number of accusations of sexual violence in the media, the military, and in the arts, theater, and film industry³.

In 2023, Johnny Kitagawa (died in 2019), the founder and president of Johnny & Associates, a talent agency that represents many male celebrities, was accused of sexually abusing many boys. An investigative report published in August 2023 stated that "the sexual abuse occurred almost without exception from the 1950s to the mid-2010s," and that "we received multiple testimonies that there were at least several hundred victims."⁴ Sexual violence against boys was a form of violence that took

² Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, *Survey on Violence between Men and Women*, 2023

³ Sexual assault by TBS bureau chief YAMAGUCHI, Noriyuki (against Shiori Ito), accusations of sexual assault in the Self-Defense Forces (accused by GONOI, Rina), sexual harassment against a female TV reporter by FUKUDA, Junichi, the administrative vice-minister of the Ministry of Finance, sexual violence by journalist HIROKAWA, Ryuichi, the accusation by KaoRi, who was the subject of the photographer ARAKI, the Chaos*Lounge case, the case of the art critic HAYASHI, Michio, and other accusations by people involved in the arts, and cases related to theater including sexual assault by the playwright TANI, Kenichi, the sexual assault by the film director SONO, Sion, and the sexual assault by film director SAKAI, Hideo.

⁴According to the official announcement by the company, which has changed its name to "SMILE-UP", as of August 30, 2024, there were 996 people who had reported to the compensation reception desk. Investigation report <https://www.smile-up.inc/s/su/group/detail/info-711?ima=3120>, announcement <https://www.smile-up.inc/s/su/group/detail/10045?ima=2931>; Last accessed on Sep. 16, 2024.

advantage of the boys' low social status and shook society to its core. In addition, the media, the entertainment industry and society's attitude of ignoring the facts until then was also seen as problematic.

Evaluation and Remaining Questions

Over the past few years, legal regulations have been developed, and the change of public opinion has been seen in the fact that "flower demonstrations"⁵, which are street rallies where people speak out about sexual violence and report cases, have taken place all over the nation. In the process of amending the law, the victims were appointed to the Legislative Council⁶ and were also called on as witnesses. However, the legal amendments extended the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse, but did not abolish it. The problem of not being able to seek legal redress for child abuse due to the statute of limitations in civil cases remained. Additionally, legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace only requires companies to take action under the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (with almost no penalties), and the situation of victims having to leave their jobs has not improved.

1-3 Technology-facilitated GBV/Image-based sexual violence

Situation: Dissemination of sexual images on the Internet, dating scams and extortion of self-made sexual images through online dating sites and social media, grooming (where adults try to get on the good side of children with the aim of having sexual contact with them), sexual blackmail and surveillance, etc. have been revealed through the consultation activities of NGOs.⁷

Laws: In 2022, a new law was enacted allowing people who were forced to appear in pornographic videos against their will to terminate their contracts, etc. (AV Appearance Damage Prevention and Relief Act). In 2023, the new Sexual Photography Punishment Act was enacted; it prohibits sexual photography without consent, and also prohibits the sharing of image data with a few people. In the same year, the crime of online solicitation of a meeting with a person under the age of 16 for the purpose of obscenity, which is online grooming, was also criminalized. The revised Anti-Stalking Behavior Act and the revised Anti-Domestic Violence Act reflect the prohibition of acts, such as GPS-based tracking.

2-1 Victim Support and Women's Welfare Act

In Japan, the main domestic violence counseling centers and public emergency shelters under the Anti-Domestic Violence Act are prefectural support centers. However, until the enactment of the

⁵ Street rally protesting sexual violence. It began on April 11, 2019, when people gathered in the streets with flowers to protest the acquittals in multiple sexual assault cases. It has become a monthly event, taking place on the 11th of every month in different locations across the country.

⁶ Ms. YAMAMOTO, Jun of the victims' group Spring participated as a committee member.

⁷ For example, NPO PAPS <https://www.paps.jp/paps>

"Women's Welfare Act" in April 2024, the basis for the operation of the centers was the Anti-Prostitution Act, which targets acts that promote prostitution and is not in line with the principles of welfare and human rights. With its low budget, the support was extremely insufficient. The implementation of the "Women's Welfare Act" should provide comprehensive support based on the principles of gender equality and women's welfare. In addition to domestic violence, the law includes support for victims of stalking and young women abused by family members. However, in practice, the law is not implemented as it should be, and not all victims receive the necessary protection and medium- to long-term support. For example, the following points should be mentioned.

(1) Difficulty in using public shelters

For various reasons, it has been reported that it is difficult for victims to access public emergency shelters, and that not all victims who wish to use them are able to do so smoothly. For example, the center may not provide temporary protection to victims because they have a certain amount of cash or savings⁸. In cases of psychological violence or where there has been severe physical violence in the past but not presently, temporary protection is not provided on the grounds that there is no "urgency".⁹ Moreover, in many cases, people are turned away for reasons such as mental illness, age, or disability. Additionally, there are many people who are reluctant to use the shelters because of rules (and rumors) such as a ban on using cell phones or a ban on going out. As a result, the vacancy rate of shelters is high, and there are large regional disparities (average occupancy rate 14.1%, as low as 2% in some prefectures).¹⁰ In the case of mothers and children fleeing domestic violence, there is a practice of separating them by placing them in different facilities, except for infants and young children. Because of the differences in agencies and laws, it is difficult to rescue and protect victims in households where domestic violence and child abuse coexist, and there have been serious incidents of child deaths as a result.¹¹ In addition, public shelters are designed to provide shelter for only about two weeks, and few people are able to access other facilities for longer stays after that.

(2) It is assumed that women's consultation centers are responsible for providing initial emergency shelters, and there are no public agencies that specialize in providing medium- to long-term support. It is assumed that each municipality (city) is responsible for providing this support, but the content of the support and the responsibilities are unclear.

(3) In contrast to the lack of public authorities, there are more than 100 NGO shelter groups throughout the country that have the enthusiasm, principles, experience and know-how to develop comprehensive support. However, due to the lack of commission and financial support from the government, they are forced to carry out activities as volunteers, and remain small.

⁸ Cases where the victim has 80,000 yen, 100,000 yen, 200,000 yen, or 500,000 yen in cash, or 1 million yen in pension or savings, etc. (Source: All Japan Women's Shelter Network)

⁹ Source: All Japan Women's Shelter Network, <https://nwsnet.or.jp/archives/582>, Last accessed on Sep. 16, 2024

¹⁰ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, *Basic Policy on Measures for Supporting Women with Difficulties*, March 2023

¹¹ The 2018 Meguro Case, the 2019 Noda Case, etc.

2-2 One-Stop Centers for Victims of Sexual Violence

In Japan, since 2019, one-stop service centers for victims of sexual violence (rape crisis centers, where victims can receive support such as police and medical assistance for contraception, evidence collection and storage, legal advice, psychological counseling, and welfare support) have been established in all prefectures, enabling comprehensive support for victims of sexual violence. In particular, some hospital-based centers are easily accessible for victims and have achieved significant results in detecting child sexual abuse. However, in the absence of a legal basis for the centers, the content of the assistance provided by each center varies. In addition, public financial support is insufficient, and it is becoming difficult for centers that deal with a large number of victims to maintain their activities. Furthermore, there is a shortage of specialists, such as doctors and psychological counselors who can provide trauma treatment and sexual abuse examinations, as well as specialist support staff involved in victim support, and there is a need to train specialists.

2-3 Online attacks against NGO support groups

Beginning in 2022, there was a series of online attacks against several NGOs in Tokyo that support young women and victims of sexual violence. A man who was a misogynist and his followers attacked them by misinterpreting the activities of the NGOs and the financial support they received from local governments, spreading criticism online, and posting information about the organizations that they had obtained through the local government's document disclosure request system. They spread false rumors online that the organizations were misusing public funds.¹² As a result, the activities of each organization were severely disrupted, and the situation even developed into a lawsuit. Subsequently, perpetrators of domestic violence have also copied this approach, obtaining information from local government about organizations that support victims of domestic violence from local governments and attacking them online, as well as putting pressure on local governments' policies to support victims of domestic violence.

As we have seen, in recent years people have become more aware of the problems of domestic violence and sexual violence, and several legal changes have been made. More victims now feel that it is okay to seek help or make a complaint, but there is still not enough support for victims. At the same time, there is a backlash against victim support groups and local government policies.

¹² Activities by “HIMASORA, Akane”. In addition to attacks, they obtain donations by that.

E. Women and Armed Conflict

MOTOYAMA, Hisako

1. Overview: Global War and Escalating Militarization

In Japan, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequalities in access to social protections, including based on nationality, gender, employment and family situation, as well as how the deficit in public healthcare resources particularly places a burden on women, who tend to be relegated with caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, natural disasters, which are becoming more severe year by year, are having long-term effects that outpace recovery efforts. What is suggested by the lack of security experienced by people in these increasingly routine disasters is the need to re-conceptualize security with an emphasis on people's survival rather than the military while remaining aware of the natural environment and gendered care economies and the need for resource reallocation and international cooperation to reconstruct equitable and inclusive socioeconomic systems. However, without any serious consideration of such issues, since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese Government has become an even stronger proponent of state- and military-centric security.

In 2015, the Japanese Government made possible the exercise of the right to collective self-defense that had been prohibited by the Constitution through a 2015 legal amendment. This pushed forward the integrated operations of the American military and Self-Defense Forces (SDF). In 2022, as part of national security strategy, it revised three strategic documents, representing a significant shift in security policy from the retention of minimum military capabilities for national defense to the acquisition of "counterattack" capabilities, including for the purpose of defending other countries.¹ Subsequently, by 2027, defense-related expenditure is set to increase from 5.4 trillion yen to 11 trillion yen, or 2% of GDP. This represents the third-largest military expenditure in the world. The government also decided to allow the export of weapons and actively support strengthening the defense industry. By clearly positioning China as a threat rather than easing tensions through diplomacy while strengthening military cooperation with "allies," militarization, and division and conflict in the Asian region are rapidly accelerating.

The impact of military expansion has reached an extensive range of areas. The Government, which seeks to promote military research, is increasing pressure on the Science Council of Japan,

¹ "Counterattack" presupposes an attack by another country, but the Government has been vague on the criteria for judgment, and the possibility of Japan carrying out a pre-emptive strike, a violation of international law, cannot be ruled out.

which has maintained a policy against military research since 1950, by refusing to approve personnel decisions independent of the Government (Normile, 2023). The monitoring of private economic activities under the guise of national security has also been strengthened, resulting in severe consequences due to the lack of provisions for human rights and privacy protections.² The following section will describe, from a women's and minority rights perspective, the response of the Japanese Government to international conflict and the domestic impact of militarization.

2. Response to International Armed Conflicts

2.1. The Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

Since 2015, the Japanese Government has implemented an action plan related to WPS, and in 2023, it formulated the third iteration of this plan. WPS has been integrated not only into development aid but also into security cooperation, with the Ministry of Defense becoming one of the key proponents of WPS. However, in reality, the Japanese Government has not consistently reflected peace based in gender justice in its foreign policy. The double standards of major powers, including Japan, which have not strongly objected to the genocide in Palestine, have eroded trust in the international human rights and security system. Japan's Development Cooperation Charter, revised in 2023, clearly positions development cooperation as a tool for pursuing Japan's national interests rather than focusing on the human security of people in impoverished countries. The newly introduced Official Security Assistance (OSA) overturns the principle of non-military international cooperation by enabling direct support for the military-related activities of partner countries. Combined with allowing arms exports, Japan has significantly increased the risk of exacerbating rather than alleviating conflicts and human rights abuses in other countries. Due to a lack of transparency regarding the details of these major shifts in security policy and insufficient debate in the National Diet, women have filed a lawsuit for state redress, arguing that the sovereignty of women involved in public decision-making on security has been infringed, contrary to the principles of WPS.

2.2. Protection of Conflict Refugees

The Japanese Government provided unprecedentedly generous support to conflict refugees from Ukraine, offering residence status, transportation means, living expenses, and settlement assistance.

² In 2017, despite the absence of arraignment, business owners were detained for an extended period on suspicion of illegally exporting devices that could be converted for use in weapons, and one of them died after being unable to receive medical treatment.

This should be the standard for all subsequent refugee support. However, the government has emphasized that this was an exceptional response based on political judgment, and it has not provided the same level of protection to refugees fleeing armed conflicts and persecution from other regions such as Myanmar, Afghanistan, or Turkey. The number of refugees recognized by Japan remains significantly low compared to other countries, and NGOs and researchers have pointed out that the refugee status determination procedures do not adhere to the international standards set by the Refugee Convention (Plantilla, 2023). Most asylum seekers not only fail to receive protection as refugees but are also excluded from all forms of social protection, including stable residency status, employment opportunities, and healthcare. They are at constant risk of detention, forced deportation, and family separation. This situation particularly deprives women and girls of health, safety, and developmental opportunities, increasing the risk of rights violations in all areas. The consideration of persecution based on gender or sexuality in refugee recognition continues to remain extremely rare. The administration of the immigration system is not only largely racially discriminatory but also gender-discriminatory. In 2021, a Sri Lankan woman who refused to return to Sri Lanka due to experiencing domestic violence died as a result of abuse in an immigration detention facility. It is also common for detainees to be treated in a way that does not align with their gender identity (Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move, 2021)

Despite these numerous issues, in 2022, the Government passed a law that allows the deportation of asylum seekers even while their refugee status application is still being processed. This has been pointed out as a violation of the principle of non-refoulement and is feared to put many asylum seekers at risk in the future (OHCHR 2023). The government's failure to recognize the rights of asylum seekers has reinforced public prejudice. Racially discriminatory attacks, in particular against the Kurdish community, are intensifying.

3. Impact on the Rights of Women and Minorities in Japan

3.1. The Threat to Residents' Safety from Regional Militarization

In the process of advancing military integration with the U.S., the Japanese Government has been expanding military bases in Okinawa, where more than 70% of U.S. military-exclusive facilities are concentrated, despite ongoing opposition from local residents. In recent years, the government has also been establishing military facilities in the southwestern island region. The presence of these facilities, which are shared with the U.S. military, is aggravating tensions in surrounding areas and

raising concerns that this will put local residents at risk. In spite of this, the Government has pressed ahead with construction without addressing the concerns of municipalities and residents. Locals who resist the militarization of the region, which is rooted in Japanese and American colonial history, face worsening race and gender-based hate speech and misinformation by right-wing media and on social media.³

Among the various social and economic impacts brought by military bases, sexual violence perpetrated by U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan is a severe human rights violation where sexism and racism intersect. Under the U.S.–Japan Status of Forces Agreement, the investigative authority of Japanese police is restricted, and even among the cases reported to the police, most result in neither punishment nor prosecution (Motoyama, 2018). In June 2024, it was revealed that information about a sexual violence case in which a girl was the victim had not been conveyed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the police to the local government or the public under the pretense of “protecting the victim’s honor and privacy.” Stigma towards victims of sexual violence is being used to obscure the harm that military alliances inflict on the human rights of local residents, particularly women.

3.2. The Socioeconomic Impact of Military Expenditure

Japan has decided to increase its military spending to 2% of GDP, but to avoid significant tax hikes, the government plans to review existing expenditures. This means that despite the inevitable cost increase due to an aging population, social spending—already at one of the lowest levels in the OECD—will be further restrained. Poverty is particularly concentrated among single and senior women due to a gender-discriminatory social security system. If public spending on social reproduction—such as healthcare, childcare, senior care, and education—is further reduced, it is feared that there will be even more severe consequences for the rights of women, who often bear the burden of unpaid or low-wage reproductive labor.

3.3. Human Rights Violations within the SDF

The notably low levels of social spending on education and childcare, in comparison with other OECD countries, have become a factor that draws many young men and women with limited educational and employment opportunities due to financial circumstances into the SDF. While the demand for personnel has increased along with the doubling of defense spending, the SDF is facing a

³ In 2016, a riot police officer dispatched to the Okinawa base construction site used the racially discriminatory term “dojin” (a derogatory term meaning “native”) against protestors, but the government did not clearly denounce the remark. In 2017, a TV program aired discriminatory misinformation based on race and gender targeting the Okinawan anti-base movement and its supporters.

severe personnel shortage due to the declining birth rate. Although the SDF is making efforts to recruit more women, it has not taken sufficient measures to prevent human rights violations, including gender-based discrimination and violence. Gender-based and sexual violence within the SDF is treated more as a lack of discipline rather than a human rights violation, and proper investigative and response procedures that would allow victims to safely access support are not in place. As a result, many victims are forced into silence or resignation.

3.4. The Historical Erasure of Wartime and Colonial Violence

Japan's active militarization today is fueling a historical revisionist movement aimed at erasing and justifying the historical facts of human rights violations, including wartime sexual violence during its colonial wars. In particular, regarding the former Japanese military "comfort women" system, the Japanese Government continues to assert that the 2015 Japan-South Korea agreement resolved all issues, despite the fact that it was only a partial settlement that ignored victims. Not only has the Japanese Government erased this history from public education, but it has also continued to exert pressure on the efforts of domestic and foreign organizations that work to carry-on the memory of these events (WAM, 2019).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite a Constitution that declares military power shall not be used as a means of resolving international conflicts, the Japanese Government has continued military expansion over the past 30 years and, following the war in Ukraine, is now aiming to become one of the world's leading military powers. Although military international security cooperation is being promoted alongside the discourse of WPS, this has not only accelerated dangerous division, conflict, and military competition in the Asia-Pacific region but has also resulted in human rights violations, including gender-based violence, within Japan. The promotion of WPS for the sake of militarization calls for serious reconsideration of the direction of gender mainstreaming in security. The Beijing Platform for Action's framework on "Women and armed conflict" must be restructured towards demilitarization and the reallocation of public resources away from military spending. Accountability must significantly be strengthened for major powers that, through double standards in applying human rights norms and international law, are promoting global militarization with large military expenditures and arms exports, thereby endangering the survival of marginalized people.

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F. Women and Economy

- Assessing gender equality in Japan's economy: Progress, challenges, and policy directions -

ICHII, Reina

This paper aims to review the progress of gender equality in women's economic participation in Japan over the past five years. It analyses the selected themes related to women and the economy in Japan. These themes include unpaid work and childcare support policies with a focus on child allowance. It also examines financial inclusion, women in leadership and women entrepreneurs. Lastly, it provides future policy issues.

1. Unpaid work: The gendered burden and its economic implication

In Japan, unpaid work including unpaid housework and care work is disproportionately allocated to women. The Statistics Bureau conducts the Survey on Time Use and Leisure every five years to collect data on unpaid work. According to the latest survey undertaken in 2021, the amount of men spend on unpaid work increased by seven minutes from 2016 to 51 minutes per week. In contrast, women's time spent on unpaid work decreased by four minutes to 3 hours 24 minutes per week. Indeed, men's time on unpaid work is still less than a quarter of women's time.

In 2021, the monetary valuation of unpaid work reached a record high of 146 trillion yen, equivalent to the GDP of Japan's manufacturing sector. The monetary valuation of unpaid housework was 144 trillion yen, an increase of 4% compared to 2016. Looking at the monetary valuation of unpaid work by gender, a threefold disparity can be seen, with men earning 600 000 yen compared to 1,940 000 yen for women. This is partly due to the wage gap between men and women. In calculating the monetary valuation using the opportunity cost method, the hourly wage per person by industry, gender and age group in the Basic Survey on Wage Structure of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare was used, and women's wages were lower than men's wages in all age groups above 15 years. As a result, the monetary valuation of men's unpaid work is overestimated.

Reflecting on these circumstances, there is an urgent need to reduce women's burden of unpaid care work and the gender pay gap. Providing adequate social infrastructure will enable women to participate in economies. Additionally, the private sector can contribute to expanding care services and providing flexible work arrangements, which will reduce gender inequality in unpaid work.

2. Challenges of child support policies

The low birth rate and rapid ageing society are a serious issue in Japan. In 2023, the total fertility rate was recorded at the lowest, 1.2, and in Tokyo it is below 1. The decline in the fertility rate leads to lower workforce population to support the Japanese economies. The government has announced an 'Acceleration Plan' for the next three years as a 'countermeasure against the declining birthrate', which

includes the expansion of child allowances, before and after school care programs and post-natal care, and the work style reform. In April of the same year, the Children and Families Agency was established to centrally manage and administer childcare support policies that had previously been dispersed across multiple ministries and agencies.

The core policy of the 'different dimension of measures to combat declining birthrates' is the expansion of child allowances: in FY2024, approximately 30% of the total budget of the Children and Families Affairs Agency (5,283.2 billion yen) was allocated for budgeted child allowances (1,524.6 billion yen), an increase of 304.7 billion yen from the previous year. Until September 2024, the child allowance provides a monthly allowance of between 10,000 and 15,000 yen to children under 15 years of age whose household income is less than 9.6 million yen per year (a couple and two children), but after September the eligible age will be extended to 18 years and the household income limit will be abolished. The amount paid will also be increased to a maximum of 30,000 yen.

However, it has been pointed out that the income redistribution effect of the child allowance is limited. First, the total amount of child allowance received as a percentage of lifetime income is less than 1%. In addition, according to a survey by the Cabinet Office, the annual cost of raising a junior high school student is 1.56 million yen. Even if a child receives a monthly child allowance of 10,000 yen, this covers only 8% of the annual cost of raising a child. Furthermore, the reform of the child allowance system will create income inequality. Traditionally, childcare support policies, including child allowances, have been characterised by a high proportion of public expenditure financed by taxes. However, the government has submitted a proposal for the establishment of a new child and childcare support system to the next ordinary session of the Diet and aims to secure financial sources by imposing additional insurance premiums on the insured. Kita (2023) argued that even though the government argues the budget of the childcare support policies will be doubled, this does not mean a doubling of the taxes poured into childcare support measures. In reality, this will double the direct burden on the public.

In summary, child allowances could disadvantage lower-income households. The financial sources of the childcare allowances will shift from the taxes to social insurance, resulting in higher insurance premiums. This highlights an importance of gender-responsive budgeting to analyse the comprehensive impacts of the childcare policies.

3. Women and financial inclusion: Current trends, executive representation and initiatives

Financial inclusion refers to the state in which all people have access to financial services. This is particularly important for supporting the economic activities of low-income and socially vulnerable groups. In Japan, 98% of the population has a bank account, a high rate compared to other developed countries. However, the few who do not have bank accounts are often homeless individuals or victims of domestic violence. These vulnerable people are often in difficult situations because they may find

it challenging to seek help (Koseki 2020). Furthermore, many older people and people with disabilities have difficulty managing their finances. There is also an institutional issue that pensions, and welfare payments are paid every other month, which complicates financial management for households. Additionally, with the increasing prevalence of cashless payments, there is an increasing risk that older people and people with disabilities who lack sufficient digital literacy face financial exclusion.

In addition, the labour participation rate of women in Japan is increasing but remains lower than that of men. In particular, women have limited opportunities to work full-time, often in fix-term contracts or part-time jobs. This means that their wages are lower than men's and it is difficult for them to earn a stable income. This is considered to be a contributing factor to women's low financial literacy. Women's low and unstable incomes are also a factor limiting access to financial services, as they are often disadvantaged in loan screening.

Nagano Bank has introduced a housing loan for women, called Will, which was proposed by the Working Group on Women's Activities. The loan offers a grace period of up to one year for principal repayments if the borrower takes an extended leave of absence for childbirth or childcare. In addition, loan subscribers can use the bank's 'Alice Prime' subscription-based sharing service for free for six months and have access to more than 800 products, including baby products. In 2021, the bank also began offering LGBTQ housing loans.

Nagano Bank's initiative echoes the Japanese government and corporate initiatives on business and human rights. In response to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 2011, the government developed the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (2020-2025) in 2020. This action plan provides guidelines for measures to be taken by the government and for human rights due diligence in corporate activities, with particular emphasis on human rights risk management in the supply chain and respect for workers' rights. The government also emphasises the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promotes policies to address a wide range of social issues, including business and human rights.

Businesses also integrate human rights into business practices. For example, businesses are also promoting diversity, taking into account CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) investment perspectives, and striving for fair treatment regardless of gender, age, disability or nationality. However, the number of female board members in Japanese companies remains low: at the 2023 Canon Annual General Meeting of Shareholders, the absence of female board members was seen as a problem, with only 50.59% in favour of reappointing Chairman and CEO Fujio Mitarai as a director. In the same year, the percentage of directors in companies listed on the prime market increased by 2% to 13.4% from the previous year, but while more than 80% of women directors are from outside their companies, the percentage of men outside directors is only 40%, and the internal promotion of women directors remains slow.

Although progress is being made towards financial inclusion, access to financial services for low-

income people, the elderly and women remains inadequate. In addition, the proportion of female board members in Japanese companies remains low and internal promotion lags behind. In the future, it will be important to promote financial inclusion and the appointment of female board members internally.

4. Women and entrepreneurship: The role of women entrepreneurs

The Japanese Government's '2024 policy package for supporting women adopted in June 2024, aims to develop human resources to promote women's activities and gender equality, and lists the promotion of women in companies, etc. as one of the four pillars of the policy package. Among these, support for women entrepreneurs is regarded as one of the key policies. The policy indicates the enhancement of networks for women entrepreneurs and the implementation of support programmes to provide advice on business plans.

In Japan, the proportion of women entrepreneurs is on the rise: in 2017, the proportion of women entrepreneurs reached 28%, but this figure has not reached the achievement target of more than 30% by 2025 set in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality. In recent years, freelance and side jobs have attracted attention as a flexible way of working: according to a 2019 survey, freelance entrepreneurs and freelance/non-freelance entrepreneurs each accounted for 46% of the total, while side job entrepreneurs accounted for 8.3%. However, the reality of this situation differs greatly depending on income and the presence or absence of children. Fujiwara (2021) found that the percentage of single mothers owning a second job is high and that these second jobs are often done late at night or on weekends and are an essential means of maintaining their livelihoods.

Women entrepreneurs also have a significant impact on local communities and economic development. For example, the Minami Sanriku Mother's Taste Study Group was established in 2013 by the women's group of a local fishing cooperative to develop and produce canned products using local seafood; after the experience of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the group focused on canned food, which was a food available in situations where electricity and water were not available, and with the support of the fishing cooperative and Kirin With the support of the Disaster Recovery Fund of Kirin Holdings, a manufacturing facility was built. Promotional activities supported by local women members and young women from the city who came as reconstruction volunteers were successful and contributed to the revitalisation of the local economy. In this way, women's perspectives and actions are playing an important role in solving local problems and revitalising the economy.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the selected themes relevant to women and economies, including unpaid work, childcare support, financial inclusion, the appointment of women executives and women entrepreneurs in Japan. As the birthrate declines and the population ages, women's unpaid and care

work remains a significant burden, and there is an urgent need to eliminate gender inequality in unpaid work. With regard to childcare support, the establishment of the Children and Families Agency has enabled to centralise childcare policy and programs. However, challenges remain regarding the funding and effectiveness of child allowances. To create more a financially inclusive society, improving access for the elderly and people with disabilities, especially women, is important and further efforts are needed.

The appointment of female board members is also an important issue. The proportion of female board members in Japanese companies remains low, and there is a particular delay in appointing female board members within the company. In order to achieve gender equality, companies need to actively promote women and ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in decision-making. Freelance and side jobs are attracting attention as a flexible way of working, and for single mothers side jobs are an essential means of maintaining their livelihoods. The activities of women entrepreneurs also contribute to the development of local communities and economies. Networks and support for women entrepreneurs are therefore key.

The implementation of gender-responsive budgets is essential for the promotion of gender equality. In recent years, the government has been working to integrate administrative evaluation into budgeting through evidence-based policy making (EBPM) (Ichii 2024). This will be a new avenue to implement gender-responsive budgeting. In order to maximise the effectiveness of policies and budgets for gender equality, the government and the private sector must work closely together to address various issues in a comprehensive and integrated approach.

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G. Women in Power and Decision-making

MIURA, Mari

1. Introduction

The proportion of women in power and decision-making roles in Japan remains notably low, contributing to its 2024 Gender Gap Index (GGI) ranking of 118th out of 146 countries. Although Japan improved from 125th place in 2023, this progress is largely attributed to a temporary increase in women cabinet ministers, which is unsustainable given the limited number of women MPs. While the Gender Parity Law and Women's Empowerment Law have helped increase women's representation in politics, business, and local government, their non-mandatory nature has led to minimal impact. Introducing quotas is essential for meaningful change.

2. Women in Parliaments

As of January 2024, Japan ranks 165th out of 186 countries for the percentage of women in its Lower House, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Women's representation is similarly low in local assemblies: 13.0% in prefectural assemblies, 22.9% in city councils of government-designated cities, 19.1% in city councils overall, 36.2% in special ward assemblies, and 13.6% in town and village assemblies (as of March 31, 2024).

It is worth noting that while there has been virtually no change in the Lower House, the percentage of women in the Upper House and local assemblies has increased. The Upper House now aligns with the world average, and special ward assemblies exceed 30%.

The "Law to Promote Gender Equality in the Political Field," also known as the "Gender Parity Law," was enacted in May 2018 to increase the number of women lawmakers. It requires political parties to aim for gender parity in candidate nominations, marking the first law to address gender composition in Japan's parliaments. In 2021, it was significantly amended to include the prevention of harassment as a duty for political parties and a responsibility for national and local parliaments.

In the year following the enactment of the law, local elections and the House of Councillors election demonstrated its effectiveness to some extent. After the law was revised, the number of women candidates and winners increased in the 2022 House of Councillors election and the 2023 local elections. Media attention on women candidates also grew, contributing to increasing social momentum for boosting the number of women representatives.

In the October 2021 Lower House election, 45 women were elected, representing 9.7% of the total, down from 47 (10.1%) in the 2017 election. Although the percentage increased slightly due to subsequent supplementary elections, this marked a decrease in both women candidates and elected officials despite it being the first general election since the Gender Parity Law was enacted.

This highlights the challenges of increasing women's representation in the Lower House.

Article 4 of the Gender Parity Law encourages political parties to make voluntary efforts, such as setting numerical targets for gender parity. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (KDP), Communist Party of Japan, and Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) have established such targets. As of July 2022, the percentage of women MPs by party was as follows: LDP 11.3% (43 women), DPJ 22.2% (30 women), Japan Restoration Party 12.9% (8 women), Komeito 13.6% (8 women), Communist Party 33.3% (7 women), Democratic Party for the People 19.0% (4 women), Reiwa 37.5% (3 women), and Social Democratic Party 50% (1 woman). While the LDP has a low percentage of women members, its 43 women make up about 40% of the total number of women MPs.

Globally, conservative parties tend to have fewer women MPs compared to center-left parties, and Japan follows this trend. However, the LDP has an even lower percentage of women members than conservative parties in other developed democracies. The LDP's dominance in both the Diet and local assemblies, along with its long-standing hold on power, creates a unique political dynamic in Japan, further contributing to the low representation of women.

In terms of leadership positions, Takako Doi served as Speaker of the House of Representatives, while Chikage Ougi and Akiko Santo served as Speakers of the House of Councillors. As of September 2023, there is one woman Speaker in the prefectural assemblies (Tokushima Prefecture) and four women Vice Chairpersons. Historically, only four prefectures—Fukuoka, Shiga, Aichi, and Wakayama—have had a woman Speaker..

3. Women in the Executive

The percentage of women in key positions within the executive branch, such as cabinet ministers and heads of state (governors and mayors), serves as a critical indicator of women's political participation. Since the 1990s, the number of women cabinet ministers has typically been around two, with a peak of five in the first Junichiro Koizumi cabinet, the second Shinzo Abe cabinet, and the second Fumio Kishida cabinet. Although the second Fumio Kishida cabinet included five women ministers, there were no women among the deputy ministers or parliamentary secretaries. This disparity is largely due to the small number of women MPs within the ruling LDP.

As of August 2024, there have been only seven women governors in Japan, with two currently serving: Yuriko Koike, the Governor of Tokyo, and Mieko Yoshimura, the Governor of Yamagata Prefecture. In terms of local leadership, there are 35 mayors, 7 special ward mayors, 14 town mayors, and 6 village mayors, totaling 62. While the presence of women mayors is becoming more visible, particularly in urban areas, the overall number remains extremely low.

In the bureaucracy as well, the percentage of women is increasing. As of April 1, 2023,

women comprised 38.7% of those recruited through the national civil service recruitment examination, 35.9% from the national civil service recruitment examination for career-track positions, and 27.2% from the technology-related category of the national civil service recruitment examination.

However, as of July 2023, the percentage of women in management positions decreases significantly at more senior levels: 29.2% in positions equivalent to section chiefs (head office), 25.5% among newly promoted officials in similar roles, 15.0% in positions equivalent to heads of national regional agency divisions and assistant directors, 7.5% in positions equivalent to heads of offices, and 4.7% in designated positions. To promote women in management roles, it is essential to align reforms in the Diet, as long working hours are partly driven by the need to accommodate legislative activities.

The number of women in local public offices is also increasing. In 2022, women comprised 41.6% of those hired through local public officer recruitment examinations for prefectures, with 39.2% being university graduates. As of April 2023, the percentages of women prefectural officials at various levels were 22.2% for section chiefs, 22.6% for assistant managers, 14.4% for managers, and 8.6% for department heads and deputy directors. These figures highlight the urgent need to review personnel practices and training systems to enhance the representation of women in senior positions.

4. Women in the Judiciary

In the judiciary, the percentage of women who have passed the bar exam has generally remained between 20-30% since 1992, showing little significant increase and standing at 29.4% in 2023. The representation of women among judges is 24.3% (as of December 2022), prosecutors is 27.2% (as of March 2023), and lawyers is 19.9% (as of September 2023). Women remain underrepresented among attorneys, partly due to unstable incomes in the profession.

In 2024, Naomi Unemoto, the first women Prosecutor General, was appointed. In the same year, Reiko Fuchigami was elected as the women female president of the Japan Bar Association.

5. Women in the Private Sector

In the private sector, the percentage of women in managerial positions in companies employing 100 or more full-time workers remains at 23.5% for section chiefs, 13.2% for managers, and 8.3% for directors as of 2023. Despite the enactment of the Women's Empowerment Law, the degree of improvement has been very slow.

In contrast, the percentage of women on the boards of listed companies has been increasing. As of July 2023, women accounted for 10.6% of board members across all listed companies and 13.4% on the boards of companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) Prime Market. In

2013, these figures were significantly lower, at 1.8% for all listed companies and 1.6% for those on the TSE First Section. Among the 20 vice presidents of the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren), two are women: Tomoko Namba and Yumiko Noda (as of May 2024). Additionally, the number of women in top leadership positions within labor unions is growing; Tomoko Yoshino serves as president of the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), and Masako Obata is chairperson of the National Federation of Trade Unions (Zenroren).

6. Conclusion

Women are participating in decision-making across various sectors; however, only a small percentage of the figures presented in this report exceed 30%. There are significant differences in efforts across different areas, as well as substantial regional disparities. To address these issues, it is essential to utilize data such as the Prefectural Gender Gap Index to identify local bottlenecks and share best practices.

In the political field, it is essential to sustain interest in the gender ratio and increase social pressure for all political parties to establish numerical targets. Amending the Gender Parity Law to make such targets mandatory would also be effective. Additionally, reforming the Political Party Subsidies Law and the Public Offices Election Law could help change the recruitment methods used by political parties. Furthermore, promoting women's participation in local communities is crucial, particularly considering that only 7.2% of community association presidents are women as of 2023.

It is essential to strengthen the pipeline and prevent the decline in the number of women in senior positions through training, reform of working hours, and the removal of unconscious bias. As the disclosure of the gender wage gap and the percentage of women in management positions by company advances, active reporting by the media will help stimulate competition among companies.

In recent years, there have been a few instances of women in top management positions; however, to improve overall women's participation, it is crucial to eliminate structural barriers to ensure that the promotion of women does not become mere tokenism. Fostering a culture of gender equality in society is also essential. To this end, legislation for laws such as Separate Family Names for Married Couples, Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law, and Anti-Harassment Law is needed. Additionally, introducing enforceable quotas would likely enhance the gender ratio in both the Diet and corporate boards.

H. Institutional Mechanisms for Advancement of Women

IWAMOTO, Misako

We would like to mention two institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: the National Machinery and the mechanism for mainstreaming gender.

1. The Japanese National Machinery comprises four organizations.

- Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality (hereinafter referred to as “HPGE”) 1994
- Council for Gender Equality 2001
- Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office 1999
- Headquarters for the Creation of a Society in which All Women Shine 2012

No statutory foundation exists for the position of minister in charge of women’s issues in Japan; since 1992, during the Miyazawa administration under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Chief Cabinet Secretary, with one exception¹, has been responsible for women’s issues. At the concluding phase of Koizumi’s LDP-Komeito coalition cabinet in 2005 (following the Yosiro Mori administration, where the term “LDP administration” refers to the Coalition between the LDP and Komeito, a political party associated with a sect of Buddhism), a Minister of Gender Equality was appointed alongside the Chief Cabinet Secretary, thus increasing the number of women in this position.

Since the 2nd Abe Cabinet in 2012, gender equality has been prioritized for women’s empowerment. The role of Japanese cabinets is short-lived (6–20 months) because ministerial positions are shared among ruling-party lawmakers as honorary positions; however, many important posts are retained. Similarly, the roles of the Minister of Gender Equality and the Minister of Women’s Empowerment are short-lived (see Table 1). Some politicians are enthusiastic about gender equality, whereas others are against it, and male ministers who are indifferent to gender are assigned in some cases.

The HPGE is presided over by the Prime Minister and, as of October 2024, comprises the Minister of State for Gender Equality (i.e., the woman responsible for women’s empowerment) and other ministers (17 men and one woman). The Council for Gender Equality is chaired by the Chief Cabinet Secretary and comprises 12 ministers, the minister responsible for gender equality, and 12 academic experts, thus resulting in a total of 15 members (as of August 2024, there were 8 women). All of them submitted their opinions regarding the Basic Plan for Gender Equality to the Prime

¹ Seiroku Kajiyama (male) refused to be in charge of women’s issues, and then Minister of Home Office took over this charge in 1996-7. Mayumi Moriyama, only woman Chief Cabinet Secretary, was in charge 1989-1990, so she did not owe this position.

Table 1: Minister of Women's Issue, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

	Prime Minister	ruling party	official title	name	sex	Other job title	women ministers
1991	Miyazawa 1	LDP	—	—	—	—	0
1992	Miyazawa 2		Ladies' issue	Kono	M	Chief Cabinet Secretary (CCS)	1
1993	Hosokawa	non LDP	Women's issue	Takemura	M		3
1994	Hata			Kumagai	M	2	
1994	Murayama1	LDP, Social Democrat, Sakigake	Women's issue	Igarashi	M	Internal Affairs	1
1995	Murayama2			Nosaka	M		1
1996	R.Hashimoto1	LDP, Liberal, Komei	Women's issue	Kajiyama	M	Internal Affairs	1
1996	R.Hashimoto2			Muto	M		1
1997	R.Hashimoto3	LDP	Gender Equality	Muraoka	M	Chief Cabinet Secretary	0
1998	K.Obuchi1			Nonaka	M		1
1999	K.Obuchi2	LDP, Liberal, Komei	Gender Equality	Aoki	M	Chief Cabinet Secretary	1
1999	Y.Mori1			H.Nakagawa to Fukuda	M to M		1
2000	Y.Mori2	LDP	Gender Equality	Fukuda	M	Decreasing Birthrate (DB)	2
2000	Y.Mori3						2
2001	Koizumi 1			5⇒4			
2002	Koizumi 2			4			
2003	Koizumi 3			3			
2003	Koizumi4			3			
2005	Koizumi 5			2			
2005	Koizumi6			2			
2005	Koizumi 7			Inoguchi	F	Okinawa and Northern Territory, Science and Technology, Innovation, DB, Food Safety	2
2006	Abe I 1			Takaichi	F	DB	2 to 3
2007	Abe I 2			Kamikawa	F	DB	2
2007	Fukuda1			Kamikawa	F	DB	2
2008	Fukuda2			Nakayama	F	DB, abduction by North Korea	2
2008	Aso	Obuchi	F	DB	2		
2009	Hatoyama	Democrats, Social Democrats, People's New Party	Gender Equality	Fukushima	F	Consumer, DB	2
2010	Kan1	Democrats, People's New Party	Gender Equality	Hirano	M	CCS, DB, Consumer	1
2010				Gemba	M	New Public(NP), DB	2
2010	Kan2	Democrats, People's New Party	Gender Equality	Y.Okazaki	F	NP, Safety Commission Chair	2
2011	Kan3			Yosano	M	Economy & Finance	1 to 0
2011	Y.Noda1	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	Renho	F	Ad Reform(AR)	2
2012	Y.Noda2			Okada	M	AR, NP, DB	1
2012	Y.Noda3	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	M.Nakagawa	M	Disaster Prevention, NP, DB	1
2012	Y.Noda4			Nakatuka	M	Finance, NP, DB	1
2012	AbeII 1	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	M.Mori	F	DB, Consumer	2
2013	AbeII 2			Arimura	F	DB, AR, Consumer	5 to 4
2015	AbeII 3	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	K.Kato	M	DB	3
2017	AbeII 4			S.Noda	F	Internal Affairs	2
2018	AbeII 5	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	Katayama	F	AR, Regional Revitalization(RR)	1
2019	AbeII 6			S.Hashimoto	F	Olympic	3
2020	Suga	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	S.Hashimoto to Marukawa	F to F	Olympic	2
2021	Kishida1			S.Noda	F	AR, RR	2 to 3
2022	Kishida2	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	Ogura	M	DB, Children, Youth Empowerment(YE)	2
2023	Kishida3			A.Kato	F	DB, Chirdlen, YE, Isolation	5
2024	Ishiba	LDP, Komei (a sect of buddhist)	Women's Empowerment	Mihara	F	Children	2

Minister and provided a general overview of gender-equality policies. The council comprises several expert panels. The Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office oversees the administration of the HPGE, conference, and the Coordination Council for the Promotion of Gender Equality (with 120 members, more than half of whom are women). The headquarters for Creating a Society in which All Women Shine (women's empowerment) was established by Prime Minister Abe in the Cabinet Secretariat in 2014 and was headed by the Prime Minister himself, with the Chief Cabinet Secretary and the minister in charge as deputy chairpersons. This headquarters comprised all the cabinet ministers and bypassed the HPGE, which demonstrated a proven track record for gender equality. The headquarters is located at the highest level of government, but the degree of political commitment varies among the administrations. Prime Minister Abe (2006–07, 2012–20) was a leader in gender backlash when he was the LDP secretary general; the 2nd Abe cabinet since 2012 positioned “women's empowerment” as the third pillar of its economic policy, which was named the “Abenomics” policy. He used women as an economic resource instead of considering equality and human rights. The headquarters for the Promotion of the SDGs is headed by the Prime Minister, with other ministers serving as members. It is located in the Cabinet Secretariat. Among the 433 items in the 2023 SDG Action Plan, only 58 mentioned gender.

The HPGE is frequently bombarded by gender backlash. Additionally, the Japanese administration encounters the challenge of interfering with the jurisdiction of other ministries. The HPGE remains outside the established authority of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) and the Child and Family Agency, established in 2023 (and now oversees the Maternal Protection Law pertaining to abortion, which was transferred to this agency) concerning reproductive rights, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) concerning education. Regarding domestic violence, the court is responsible for protection orders, the MHLW oversees victim protection, and the HPGE is responsible for statistics and raising awareness. The “Assistance to Women with Difficulties Act (2023)” is under the jurisdiction of the MHLW. The HPGE should have the authority to investigate and provide recommendations on such matters under the jurisdiction of other ministries.

Except for Chiba Prefecture, 46 prefectures and 20 special cities have gender-equality ordinances. Approximately 98.3% of wards of Tokyo and cities and 69.4% of towns and villages have gender-equality ordinances. Chiba Prefecture was affected by gender backlash when it was under a feminist governor. The “Diversity Respect Ordinance,” which promotes understanding of men, women, LGBT, the elderly, and people with disabilities was enacted in 2023; however, it emphasizes “a society where diversity is respected and everyone can flourish” and does not mention the elimination of discrimination or intersectional discrimination.

The National Women's Education Center was established in Saitama Prefecture (adjacent to Tokyo) by MEXT in 1977 as a central facility for social education with accommodation available

and has provided information and leadership to women's centers (under various names) in prefectures and municipalities. In 1999, the purpose changed to promoting the formation of a gender-equal society. In 2023, the idea of relocating and reconstructing owing to the aging and declining number of users was discussed, which the local communities opposed. However, the authorities decided to maintain the location of the new center as the exchange function might be lost if accommodations are abolished. Additionally, its jurisdiction was transferred from the MEXT to the Cabinet Office.

2. Gender Mainstreaming

(1) Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020)

The government drafts the aforementioned plans every five years, which serves as a coordination process for gender mainstreaming. The second plan was reactionary because of the Koizumi administration's anti-gender equality stance. By contrast, the third plan was comprehensive under the administration of the Democratic Party of Japan. As of July 2023, 29.2% of the national civil servants were women in the rank of assistant director, compared with the 2025 target of 30%, and only 7.5% were women in the rank of section chief or office manager, although the target was higher than 10%. In the fourth plan of the second Abe Cabinet (2015), the section on "reform of male-centered labor practices and women's activities" was included.

The fifth plan (2020) was formulated under the Suga Coalition, which stated that "the speed of efforts toward gender equality in other countries is rapid, and the gap between Japan and other countries is widening significantly. First, we must strive to be on par with the standards of other countries and review our legal systems and practices, instead of merely extending them." Initially, whereas the willingness was acknowledged, the plan did not entail any to transcend the conventional extension.

Only one reference to "reproductive health/rights" was indicated, and education emphasized learning about the sanctity of life, early education on menstruation-related and cervical cancer, medically appropriate ages for pregnancy and childbirth, and planned pregnancy, whereas the choice of not giving birth was not mentioned. Emergency contraceptives were approved in 2011 but required a prescription, and the fifth plan mentioned a trial of non-prescription use. In 2023, the trial began in small number of pharmacies. Oral abortion was approved in 2023; the availability was initially limited to bedside medical facilities, and a few restrictions were loosened. Prescriptions by anyone other than a physician designated under the Maternal Protection Act constitutes an abortion offense. Additionally, this act requires spousal consent, with no mention of oral abortion either in support or opposition.

COVID-19 disproportionately affected women, and the development of a safety net that can function not only in normal times but also in emergencies is necessitated. Whereas new work styles,

such as remote work, encourage women to work and men to participate in housework and childcare, no evidence or policy support exists for these statements.

The fifth plan is not limited to “men and women.” In fact, it includes references to age, nationality, Ainu people, hereditary caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, and women with disabilities. Furthermore, it acknowledges “intersectional difficulties” and their unsatisfactory tendency but does not use the word “discrimination” or mention the establishment of a national human-rights institution.

Furthermore, the plan addresses the strong population decline and mentions the commendable migration of young women from rural areas to cities. However, the solution to this problem is to facilitate working in rural areas. Furthermore, problems in rural areas are not mentioned, such as men’s low participation in housework and childcare (particularly at religious, local, or familial ceremonies) and the pressure to get married and have children early.

New references to issues, such as coercion to appear in adult videos was mentioned. They do not support the introduction of a separate surnames for married couples.

(2) Gender Budgeting

The Japanese government has yet to implement a gender-based budget. The fifth plan states that the government will incorporate a gender-equality perspective into each process, from policy formulation to implementation, and enhance and strengthen measures to address diverse issues while considering the concept of gender budgeting.

(3) Gender Statistics

The fifth plan states that efforts should be made to comprehend gender-disaggregated data to enhance gender statistics. The Working Group for the Examination of Gender Columns from the Perspective of Gender Statistics was established in 2022 as an expert panel for the Gender Equality Bureau. The directorate permanently established a supervision committee.

Conclusion

Gender backlash continues to occur. On her blog, lawmaker Mio Sugita (LDP, female) ridiculed the Korean women in Japan and Ainu women who participated in the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Geneva in 2016, calling them “cosplayed old ladies in Ainu folk costumes and Chimachogori (Korean folk costume)” and “lacking in dignity.” In September 2023, the Sapporo Legal Affairs Bureau discovered a violation of human rights, and in October of the same year, the Osaka Legal Affairs Bureau raised awareness to enhance understanding toward respect for human rights. The HPGE should actively encourage the correction of individual human-rights violations if a domestic human-rights institution has not yet been

established.

Sugita was appointed by Prime Minister Kishida as the Cabinet Undersecretary for Internal Affairs after Abe's death in 2022. Although she resigned within four months due to harsh criticism, one must be aware that a member of the LDP who despises international anti-discrimination mechanisms was placed in a key position in the LDP.

I. Human Rights of Women

OMI, Miho
KOYAMA, Ruka

1. Legal Changes concerning Women's Human Rights since Beijing+25

The Beijing Platform for Action calls for actions to “promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention)” in its Strategic Objective I.1, and Japan is, of course, obliged to ensure de facto equality as well as equality de jure for women as required by the CEDAW Convention and the General Recommendations (GRs) of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) (CEDAW Committee GR No. 25, para. 4). Since Beijing+25, several Civil Code amendments have been made, including raising the legal minimum age of marriage for women to 18 years old to be equal to that of men (2018), the review of the system of presumption of legitimacy so that a child born after remarriage is presumed to be the child of the husband after remarriage, the abolition of the waiting period before remarriage required only for women, and the extension of the right to deny legitimacy, which was previously only granted to fathers, to children and mothers (2022). In addition, the Act on Support for Women with Difficult Problems (Act on Support for Women) was adopted (2022), and the crimes of forcible sexual intercourse and indecency through compulsion were introduced in the Criminal Code (2023). The Act on Support for Women defines sexual victimization, family situations, relationships with the local community, and other issues as difficulties women face “because they are women” (Articles 1 and 2), taking the deep-rooted influence of gender in many aspects of Japanese society into account. However, concerns have been expressed regarding its implementation (see All Japan Women’s Shelter Network 2023). There has been no particular move toward abolishing the provision of the Family Registration Act regarding discriminatory entries of children born out of wedlock and the criminal abortion clause of the Criminal Code to punish women and medical professionals.

2. Introduction of a System to Allow Married Couples a Choice of Separate Surnames

One of the issues remain after the above-mentioned Civil Code amendments is the system obliging a married couple to have the same surname under Article 750 of the Civil Code. The choice of surnames after marriage is a personal right of the husband or wife stipulated in Article 16, paragraph 1 (g) of the CEDAW Convention. CEDAW Committee’s GR No. 21 also states that “[W]hen by law or custom a woman is obliged to change her name on marriage or at its dissolution, she is denied these rights” (para. 24). Since the CEDAW Committee requested “to repeal discriminatory legal provisions” including this clause after the consideration

of the 4th and 5th periodic reports of Japan in 2003, the same recommendation has been repeated at each consideration. Article 750 of the Civil Code does not stipulate whom to change the surname. However, it is widely recognized that gender-neutral laws and regulations do not necessarily produce equal outcomes (see CEDAW Committee GR No. 28, para. 5), and it is, in fact, women who overwhelmingly change their surnames when they marry¹.

Following the Supreme Court Grand Bench ruling that Article 750 of the Civil Code was constitutional on December 16, 2015, the Grand Bench decision of June 23, 2021, and the Third Petty Bench decision of March 22, 2022, reached the same conclusion. However, in the June 2021 decision, the majority opinion stated that it expected serious discussion of this matter in the Diet, and several judges acknowledged that the article was unconstitutional in their opinions in all three cases. In March 2024, another set of lawsuits, so-called “the third lawsuits to allow married couples a choice of separate surnames” was filed in the Tokyo and Sapporo district courts.

In various opinion polls, the percentages of people who support the introduction of a system to allow married couples to choose separate surnames far exceed those who oppose². In June 2024, the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren) also announced a proposal to the government calling for an early introduction of the system, titled “Aiming to Realize a Society with Choices: Overcoming the Institutional Barriers to Women's Participation.” Denying the right to choose surnames for each spouse after marriage not only causes inconvenience in social and business life, but also means not recognizing a woman (or a man) as an individual with her own name and the life and career she has cultivated before marriage along with that name. As the Supreme Court's majority opinion states, sincere discussion in the legislature is urgently needed to guarantee women's human rights.

3. Racist Hate Speech and Women

Racist hate speech against minority women, such as women of Korean descent who have lived for multiple generations in Japan, Ainu, Burakumin, and Ryukyu/Okinawan women, and women with disabilities, is prevalent, especially on the Internet. “Hate speech” is an offensive discourse inciting discrimination, hostility, or violence against minority groups or individuals, based on the grounds of their attributes such as race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender (Morooka 2013). Because hate speech is an attack on an attribute that cannot be changed, victims with such attributes suffer serious psychological harm. In

¹ According to “the Marriage Statistics Specified Report of Vital Statistics in FY2016” by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 96% of couples married in 2015 chose husbands' surnames.

² See, for example, the results of the following opinion surveys: the Mainichi Newspapers with 57% supported the introduction of the new system and 22% opposed it (published on June 23, 2024); NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) with 59% supported and 24% opposed (published on July 9, 2024); The Asahi Shimbun with 73% supported and 21% opposed (published on July 22, 2024).

addition, if a person has multiple attributes that make them susceptible to hate speech, they may be subjected to hate speech as multiple/intersectional forms of discrimination. It is widely recognized that women who belong to minority groups suffer greater damage because they face discrimination against women both within and outside their groups, in addition to racial discrimination against the group they belong to.

In Japan, multiple forms of discrimination were recognized for the first time in two lawsuits filed by Lee Shinhae in 2014. The first case was filed against Makoto Sakurai, the former chairman of the group called “Zainichi tokken wo yurusanai simin no kai” or “Zaitokukai” (Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi Koreans), who made defamatory remarks against Ms. Lee on live streaming video services on the Internet. On September 27, 2016, the Osaka District Court found that the acts of Mr. Sakurai constituted racial discrimination, and on June 19, 2017, the Osaka High Court found that they constituted compound discrimination, including racial discrimination and discrimination against women. The defendants appealed and filed a petition for acceptance of final appeal. On November 29, 2017, the Supreme Court's Second Petty Bench decided withdrawal of the appeal and denied the petition for acceptance of final appeal. Ms. Lee's second case was filed against the operator of the aggregator website “Hosyusokuhou” (Conservative News Flash) collecting discriminatory online posts about Ms. Lee over the course of a year and publishing them as more than 40 entries on his blog. On November 16, 2017, the Osaka District Court found that this constituted compound discrimination, and the Osaka High Court ruling on June 28, 2018, followed suit with the first trial. The defendant appealed and petitioned for acceptance of final appeal. On December 11, 2018, the Supreme Court's Third Petty Bench dismissed the appeal and refused to accept the petition, finalizing the damages awarded to Ms. Lee.

More recent hate speech cases against minority women include the following three cases: 1) In a case where the DHC Television's program “News Joshi” (News Girls) reported that Shin Sugok was “the mastermind behind the scenes” of the protest rallies against the construction of a US military helipad in Okinawa Prefecture, the Supreme Court's Second Petty Bench dismissed the defendant's appeal on April 26, 2023, and finalized the plaintiff's claim for damages against DHC Television; 2) In a case where a self-proclaimed “Washizu Masahiko, the Vulture” wrote on his blog “go back to your homeland” against Choi Kang-ija, a third-generation Korean resident of Japan who made a major contribution to the enactment of the Hate Speech Elimination Act, the Yokohama District Court ruled on October 12, 2023, that the defendant was obligated to pay damages; 3) In the case where Mio Sugita, a member of the House of Representatives posted derogatory remarks on her blog against Korean residents of Japan and Ainu women who were present at the sessions of the CEDAW Committee which considered the Japanese periodical report, the victimized Ainu women filed a human rights relief petition with the Legal Affairs Bureau in March 2023. In September 2023, Representative Sugita's posts were found to be a human rights violation (Japan Network towards Human Rights Legislation for Non-Japanese Nationals & Ethnic Minorities 2024). In these cases, a certain

degree of remedy was provided, but since filing a civil lawsuit or filing a human rights remedy petition with the Legal Affairs Bureau places a heavy burden on victims and the remedies provided are limited, there is still room for improvement in the current remedy systems for victims of hate speech.

4. To Better Protect Women's Human Rights: A Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law and the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention

To fully protect women's human rights based on international standards, a legal framework including the enactment of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law and the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention with the individual communication procedure is necessary.

International human rights treaties are based on the premise of equal and non-discriminatory protection. There is a growing international consensus that countries which have ratified these treaties must adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to fulfill their obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to non-discrimination (OHCHR and ERT 2022). In enacting a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, it is necessary: 1) to make the prohibited grounds for discrimination comprehensive; 2) to prohibit discrimination in all aspects of life; 3) to include not only direct discrimination but also indirect discrimination, multiple and intersectional discrimination, harassment, abuse, and other forms of discrimination; and 4) to establish a national human rights institution independent of the government as the implementing body for the comprehensive anti-discrimination law (Hayashi 2023). Since anti-discrimination laws literally prohibit all discrimination in a comprehensive manner, they can also address discrimination that is not specified in existing laws as well as indirect discrimination and multiple discrimination, which is deeply related to gender discrimination, including hate speech as an expression of multiple discrimination mentioned above. Many human rights treaty bodies have recommended that Japan enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law (CEDAW Concluding Observations on the Combined 7th and 8th Periodic Reports of Japan (2016), para. 13(c); CERD Concluding Observations on the Combined 10th and 11th Periodic Reports of Japan (2018), para. 8; CRC Concluding Observations on the Combined 4th and 5th Periodic Reports of Japan (2019), para. 18; CRPD Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Japan (2022), para. 14; CCPR Concluding Observations on the 7th Periodic Report of Japan (2022), para. 9; Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Report of the Working Group on the UPR (2023), paras. 158.86, 158.244, 158.266, 158.267, 158.272).

Although it is almost 40 years since Japan ratified the CEDAW Convention, which is an important international standard for the protection of women's human rights, it has not been fully respected in Japanese courts, as seen in the case of the surname issue of married couples. The individual complaint system stipulated in the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention allows those who believe that their rights under the Convention have not been protected after the exhaustion of domestic remedies to file their

complaint directly to the CEDAW Committee. It is expected to not only better protect individual rights, but also to encourage domestic courts to fully consider the Convention. The Protocol has been ratified by 115 countries (as of August 21, 2024), and Japan received repeated recommendations from the CEDAW Committee to ratify it. In Japan, women's NGOs have submitted petitions to the Diet calling for ratification and local assemblies have also adopted letters of opinion to the Diet or a relevant administrative agency calling for ratification³, but the Japanese government has not clearly indicated its intention to ratify it. It is urgently needed to enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, establish a national human rights institution, and ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention to ensure human rights of women in Japan.

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³ The number of local assemblies which adopted such letters of opinion reached 279 according to the OP-CEDAW Action as of July 2024. See <https://opcedawjapan.wordpress.com/> (in Japanese).

J: Women and the Media

TANIOKA, Rika

Key events concerning “women and the media” in the five years since Beijing+25

1. Disaster prevention and reporting on disasters is related directly to saving lives. The 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake revealed that the media industry’s knowledge and experience of disaster prevention are insufficiently informed by gender perspectives.
2. Foreign media alerted Japanese society to the fact that the founder (now deceased) of a major entertainment production company had been sexually abusing pre-teen and teenaged male talent at his company over a period of many years.
3. Progress has been slow when it comes to female staff at mass media companies being involved in decision-making processes, and Japan lags significantly behind the world as a whole. Diversity is emerging in terms of the people portrayed in the media.
4. In the film industry, there was a movement pushing for reform in relation to respect for human rights.
5. While the use of new media to disseminate information is on the rise, there has also been an increase in the use of insulting and abusive language.

1. Disasters and the media

After the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake, which occurred in Ishikawa Prefecture on January 1, women’s support groups and researchers across the country were shocked to see images on television of people sleeping all together at evacuation shelters in the middle of winter. In the 30 years since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, the first to record a 7 on the JMA Seismic Intensity Scale, women’s support groups have led research into issues related to the gender of disaster victims, carefully asking women about the problems they face in evacuation shelters, and preparing guidebooks and other materials to support the management of such shelters, from a gender-based perspective.

Even several months after the Noto earthquake, however, television broadcasts were showing images of people sleeping in one big group at gymnasiums that were being used as evacuation shelters. The statement of a male leader explaining that “It’s easier to see how everyone is doing if there aren’t any partition boards” was broadcast on television unedited; and during the broadcast, no one in the studio indicated that this view was problematic.

The earthquake that occurred subsequently in Taiwan provided a stark contrast to the situation in Japan, with large tents quickly and neatly organized within spacious gymnasiums in order to preserve privacy. We also saw the provision of hot meals to the disaster victims. For the prompt, proper management of evacuation shelters, it is necessary to standardize the protocols nationally in terms of provision of essentials such as tents and meals. The failure to put such systems in place is nothing

other than state lethargy; given that there were more disaster-related deaths in the period following the earthquake than deaths caused directly at the time of the earthquake itself, the media bears significant responsibility for not raising a critical voice. The network of women's support groups is showing a steady expansion. More lives might have been saved if news organizations had collaborated with such groups during normal times, taken the opportunity to learn about gender-related perspectives that become relevant when disasters occur, and disseminated such perspectives more widely as part of people's disaster-mitigation awareness.

2. Increasing visibility of sexual violence and discriminatory structures

It has come to light that Johnny Kitagawa (deceased in 2019, at 89 years of age), founder of the major entertainment production company Johnny & Associates, Inc., sexually abused pre-teen and teenaged male talent at his company over a period of many years. Almost as many as 1,000 people have now come forward, accusing Kitagawa of having abused them.

Sexual abuse allegations had been identified by the magazine media decades earlier, during Kitagawa's lifetime, and the memoirs of an abused performer had even been published. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of Japan ruled that allegations of sexual harassment by Kitagawa were true.

Despite this, the television stations and major newspapers hardly covered this serious sexual assault story. It became impossible for them to continue ignoring it when, in March 2023, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) broadcast a documentary¹ about Kitagawa's abuse of minors. Why had Japanese broadcasters allowed such a significant sexual assault scandal go unreported? The stations all conducted internal reviews and aired investigative programs, taking measures such as the establishment of a special time slot. These programs included many statements along the lines of, "There wasn't enough awareness about human rights violations," or, "We were only dimly aware of it as a tabloid magazine entertainment story."

This scandal was also the subject of an investigation by the UN Human Rights Office's Working Group on Business and Human Rights. The investigation report published by that body in 2024 stated that exploitative labor conditions in Japan's media and entertainment industry create an environment where sexual violence and other forms of misconduct go unchallenged, and recommended the establishment of an independent human rights institution, given the "systemic human rights challenges" found in Japan.

The 'dissolution' of Johnny & Associates, Inc., was announced after the BBC's broadcast and, less than a year later, the name 'Johnny' has vanished from television screens. However, the problem should not be considered resolved simply because it has disappeared from view.

¹ "Predator: The Secret Scandal of J-Pop," *This World*, first broadcast by the BBC in March 2023.

3. The participation of women in decision making, and diversity, in the mass media

(1) The participation of women in decision making in the mass media

Progress has been slow, with not significant progress in women's participation in decision making in the mass media.

Newspapers and news agencies: The total number of journalists at the 89 companies that responded, when asked, as part of a survey carried out by the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association of its newspapers and news agency members, was 15,905. Of those, 3,930 were women, meaning that 24.7% of those journalists were female and, even at the general reporter level, women are yet to reach 30%. There were 1,325 women among the 12,793 staff in all divisions at management level, which amounts to a ratio of 10.4% (among the 85 companies that provided relevant data). There were 657 officers, as defined by the Companies Act, with the 35 female officers amounting to 5.3% of the total (among the 85 companies that provided relevant data).

NHK: As of 2023, according to data published on its website, 2,351 of NHK's 10,268 total employees, were women, representing a ratio of 22.9%. Women occupied 12.0% of total management positions, and in 2024, three of ten board members are women. Although the proportion of decision-making positions occupied by women is slightly higher than that of commercial broadcasters, progress is slow when one considers NHK's role as a public broadcaster.

Commercial broadcasters: The Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association (JBA)—to which commercial television, radio, and satellite broadcasters across the country belong—does not publish gender-specific data, and so the following is data on broadcasting stations in Tokyo from a survey published by the Japan Federation of Commercial Broadcast Workers' Unions (MINPOROREN) in 2023.

Management—department heads

Women occupy two of the 25 department head-level positions in the content production and programming departments at major Tokyo stations. There is not a single woman in top management at a Tokyo station's news or production department.

Officers at major Tokyo television stations

There are nine female officers, among a total of 110. The breakdown is as follows: one female officer among the 23 officers at Nippon Television Network Corporation (4.3%); four female officers among the 23 officers at TV Asahi Corporation (17.4%); two female officers among the 21 officers at

Tokyo Broadcasting System Television, Inc. (9.5%); one female officer among the 15 officers at TV Tokyo Corporation (6.7%); and one female officer among the 28 officers at Fuji Television Network, Inc. (3.6%).

MINPOROREN conducted a survey on the gender pay gap of its members. This survey found a clear gender pay gap, with the average salary of female staff equating to 82.1% of that of their male counterparts, even among regular employees.

(2) The image of women as portrayed in the media

There is still an enduring gendered division of roles in news broadcasting, with men in the leading position and women acting as younger assistants. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of televised dramas with a greater consciousness of diversity and gender. NHK, in particular, has many dramas that are impressive in this respect. One of these, the serialized morning television drama *The Tiger and Her Wings*, which was broadcast over six months in 2024, has become a social phenomenon. The drama depicts the life of a real woman who studied law in Japan—at the beginning of the Shōwa era (1926–1989), at a time when the Meiji Civil Code, which treated women as having limited legal capacity, was in force—and who went on to become the country’s first female judge. It deals with multi-layered themes that remain relevant today, such as war, the Japan’s invasion of the rest of Asia, Japan’s patriarchal family system, the issue of married couples being required to have the same family name, homosexuality, and transgender issues. Putting the constitution’s respect for the human rights of each and every individual at the center of a television drama has acted as a counterbalance to the current administration’s push for constitutional amendment and militarization.

(3) Problems posed by news organizations

Media organizations are not the same as actors in other industries. They have a powerful influence on society, and are expected to perform a public function. A longstanding recession and the wave of digitization, however, have made survival of the industry a more pressing problem for management than the public interest.

Above all, the very nature of the news industry up to this point has come into question. One significant aspect being challenged is how it operates as a ‘boys’ club,’ whereby decisions are based on male-centric values. A network of well-educated and healthy men who are able to endure long hours at work has come to ignore the perspective of individual dignity. There is no escaping the fact that stories are gathered on the basis of the exclusive privileges of reporters’ clubs, and that energy has been poured into competition among media groups trying to outdo, and avoid being outdone by, each other. This stance of Japan’s mass media is reflected in its low international ranking. Japan ranked

70th in the international NGO Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, and continues to be last among G7 countries. The system of exclusive reporters' clubs and gender inequality are principal reasons for this poor ranking.

4. Reform in the film industry

Over the past five years, it is the film industry that has shown the most significant transformation. Industry groups collaborated in 2022 to establish the Japan Motion Picture Production Standards Association (J-MOPS), and create guidelines on harassment countermeasures and the prevention of long working hours. Between 70 and 80 per cent of workers in the film industry are freelance. Previously, they were forced to bear the brunt of many of the industry's problems, including losing work during the COVID-19 pandemic, or revelations of sexual misconduct by directors, but legal developments such as the new Freelance Act² have played a role in improving the situation, creating an obligation that workers be provided with contracts. The push for reform in the film industry has gained real momentum.

Furthermore, the role of intimacy coordinator has been also introduced to protect the dignity of actors when performing in scenes of a sexual nature, not only for film but also television and stage. This practice is widely accepted in Hollywood and elsewhere, but there are still only a limited number of such professionals in Japan, which is yet to reach a point where their existence and role is sufficiently recognized.

5. New venues for the dissemination of content

With the lack of progress in the gender mainstreaming in the media, there has been a rising number of women putting out content in new, alternative media. In 2023, a group of women who had left their jobs at newspaper companies founded Seikatsu News Commons, citing the male-dominance of the mass media as a reason for its establishment. Founded in 2020, the YouTube channel Politas TV is another positive example that actively deals with gender-related issues.

On the other hand, Japan is no exception when it comes to the endless insulting and abusive language used online. There have been incidents of victims dying by suicide after statements and forms of verbal behavior observed in television programs acted as the trigger for abuse that was amplified on social media. There have also been cases of groups that support women in positions of financial hardship or young women being targeted by individuals or groups known for the use of misogynistic language. A fundamental solution to the problem is yet to be found.

² The Act's formal title is "Act on Improvement of Transactions between Freelancers and Undertakings." It was enacted in April 2023, and will take effect in November 2024.

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K. Women and the Environment

ENDO, Risa

Three environmental crises (climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution) are intensifying on a global scale. The 2024 G7 Climate, Energy and Environment Ministers' Meeting Communiqué explicitly addressed these three environmental crises and reaffirmed the commitment to “put gender and LGBTQIA+ equity at the heart of our efforts to tackle the triple crisis and to accelerate clean energy transition.”¹

1. Gender mainstreaming in Japan's environmental policy

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) calls for: 1. Actively involving women in environmental decision-making at all levels, 2. Integrating gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programs for sustainable development, and 3. Strengthening or establishing mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women. While the number of women involved in environmental issues has increased, gender mainstreaming in environmental plans, strategies, and assessments is still a work in progress.

Regarding participation in environmental decision-making, the Ministry of the Environment, for example, appointed 15 women out of 30 members to the Central Environment Council on February 8, 2021.² As of September 30, 2023, women accounted for 43% of the members of the ministry's eight councils and committees (55 out of 128 members) and 25% of the five councils and committees with expert members (133 out of 531 expert members).³ In international negotiations, the number of female negotiators in the Japanese government delegation to the Climate Change COP increased from 33 in 2018 to 44 in 2021 (although the overall proportion decreased from 28% to 25%),⁴ indicating a gradual increase in women's participation in forums that determine environmental policies and international institutions.

Regarding the incorporation of gender perspectives into environmental policies and plans, there is an increasing trend to explicitly state the importance of integrating gender perspectives into policies alongside women's participation. For instance, the Sixth Basic Environment Plan⁵ mentions this as part of the background context for environmental policies (pointing to the gender wage gap and gender

¹ G7 Climate, Energy and Environment Ministers' Meeting Communiqué https://www.g7italy.it/wp-content/uploads/G7-Climate-Energy-Environment-Ministerial-Communique_Final.pdf

² Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, “White Paper on Gender Equality 2021” https://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/whitepaper/r03/zentai/html/honpen/b2_s05_05.html (in Japanese)

³ Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, “Survey on Women's Participation in National Advisory Councils and Committees” <https://www.gender.go.jp/research/kenkyu/ratio/pdf/r5/1st/houkoku.pdf> (in Japanese)

⁴ Japan's Submission on Progresses in Implementation of Gender Action Plan https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202203311908---Japan_Gender%20Action%20Plan_Submission_20220331.pdf

⁵ Sixth Basic Environment Plan <https://www.env.go.jp/content/000223504.pdf> (in Japanese)

and diversity as significant elements of well-being and welfare that cannot be fully captured by GDP). Furthermore, the plan explicitly states the need to further support women's participation in environmental policy from the perspectives of human resource development and information infrastructure improvement, as well as to promote women's participation from a gender equality perspective in the process where all actors learn from each other through involvement in environmentally conscious social development. It also states that when implementing measures to be nature-positive, "an approach should be taken that includes gender perspectives and outreach to young people, given that engagement with and understanding of biodiversity may differ by gender, generation, and other factors." Thus, the plan's call for promoting women's participation in policy-making and human resource development, its explicit recognition that engagement with and understanding of environmental issues such as biodiversity may differ by gender, and its setting of the highest goal as "well-being/high quality of life" as a concept integrating environment, society, and economy, represent important steps toward addressing structural social issues, including gender, in environmental policy. Moving forward, it will be necessary to clarify how to tackle these issues in concrete terms through individual measures.

Japan still has very few goals and indicators related to the impact and outcomes of environmental policies on women, including a lack of gender-disaggregated environmental data necessary for setting such goals and indicators. For example, in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, the outcome targets for "Field 8: Disaster Prevention and Reconstruction and Environmental Issues from Gender Perspectives" only cover disaster prevention, with no numerical targets set for environmental policies.⁶ However, there are some emerging trends towards evaluating social and economic outcomes, including gender, such as the setting of targets related to SDG 5 on gender equality under the "Pilot Program for Mainstreaming SDGs,"⁷ implemented with targets for SDGs that match a program's mission and SDGs expected to have secondary benefits in some of the Ministry of the Environment's projects in FY2020. Additionally, there are surveys such as the "Public Understanding of Climate Change Adaptation"⁸ (which includes reference material on climate change adaptation awareness by region, gender, and age group) and heat stroke patient information⁹ (which includes the number of patients by gender and age group). Nonetheless, there is a continued need to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies and to explore the data, goals, and indicator setting necessary for evaluation.

⁶ List of Outcome Targets for the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality
https://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/basic_plans/5th-2/pdf/mokuhyo.pdf (in Japanese)

⁷ Ministry of the Environment, "About the Pilot Program for Mainstreaming SDGs into the MOEJ's Project Cycle"
https://www.env.go.jp/council/02policy/mat101_1-4.pdf (in Japanese)

⁸ Center for Climate Change Adaptation at the National Institute for Environmental Studies, "Public Understanding of Climate Change Adaptation"
<https://adaptation-platform.nies.go.jp/en/archive/report/20220308.html>

⁹ National Institute for Environmental Studies, "The Incidence of Heat Stroke Patients and Future Predictions"
<https://www.nies.go.jp/kanko/kankyogi/32/10-11.html> (in Japanese)

2. Gender and Specific Environmental Issues and Policies

The Sixth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA6) in 2024 adopted a “Resolution on promoting synergies, cooperation, or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant environmental instruments,” advancing efforts toward an integrated approach to environmental issues. Gender perspectives are expected to be integrated into this approach in the future.

In the context of climate change, where adverse effects are widespread and growing, various domestic plans exist to implement the Paris Agreement. For example, Japan’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)¹⁰ for its 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target and its Climate Change Adaptation Plan¹¹ explicitly mention expanding women’s participation in policy and decision-making processes and consensus-building, as well as consideration for gender equality. It would be beneficial to add descriptions that capture the potentially gender-differentiated impacts of climate change and participation in countermeasures to the KPIs of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, the FY2022 Policy Follow-up Report, and the Plan for Global Warming Countermeasures,¹² which is the government’s comprehensive plan for global warming.

The Sixth Strategic Energy Plan,¹³ crucial for reducing energy-related CO₂ emissions, mentions the participation of diverse stakeholders and deepening communication with younger generations regarding public understanding of energy issues. However, it does not refer to gender or gender equality. Nevertheless, Japan participates in international initiatives such as The Equal by 30 Campaign,¹⁴ which aims for gender equality in the transition to clean energy. As part of the G7 Joint Commitment, Japan has declared investment in diverse human resource development and prevention of harassment and discrimination against women in the energy sector (Japan’s efforts also include appointing female officials in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry). While efforts are being made to increase the number of women in management and leadership positions in companies, their numbers are still low, and there are few women in STEM fields who could become experts in related technologies.¹⁵ Therefore, education and human resource development will be essential in the future.

Regarding nature and biodiversity loss, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

¹⁰ Japan’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) *Decided by the Global Warming Prevention Headquarters on October 22, 2021 <https://www.env.go.jp/earth/earth/ondanka/ndc.html> (in Japanese)

¹¹ Climate Change Adaptation Plan / Follow-Up *Refer to the Cabinet-approved version of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan from 2021 https://www.env.go.jp/earth/earth/tekiou/page_00004.html (in Japanese)

¹² Plan for Global Warming Countermeasures (Approved by the Cabinet on October 22, 2021) <https://www.env.go.jp/earth/ondanka/keikaku/211022.html> (in Japanese)

¹³ Sixth Strategic Energy Plan https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/category/others/basic_plan/pdf/strategic_energy_plan.pdf

¹⁴ The Equal by 30 Campaign <https://www.equalby30.org/>

¹⁵ G7 Report on Gender Equality and Diversity in the Energy Sector <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Artikel/Energy/g7-report-on-gender-equality-and-diversity-in-the-energy-sector.html>

was adopted in 2022, and related domestic plans have been developed. For example, the Cabinet approved the National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2023–2030 in 2023. This strategy emphasizes considering different values based on gender and generation when establishing mechanisms for various actors to collaborate on activities. In developing the foundation to support biodiversity initiatives, it promotes women’s participation in decision-making processes. It sets the goals of increasing the percentage of female members in biodiversity conservation-related councils to 40% by FY2025 (22% in FY2021) and the percentage of women in managerial positions at the Ministry of the Environment to 30% by FY2030 (12.3% as of January 2023).¹⁶

Regarding pollution, as intergovernmental negotiations progress toward developing a legally binding international instrument on plastic pollution, the Cabinet approved the Fifth Fundamental Plan for Establishing a Sound Material-Cycle Society in 2024. This plan explicitly mentions promoting active citizen initiatives in reducing, reusing, repairing, and maintaining products to prevent waste generation, supporting the creation of mechanisms and business models for this purpose, and promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through collaboration with diverse local stakeholders in advancing environmental education and consumer education for the practice of sustainable consumption.¹⁷ However, references to gender are also needed in this context.

3. Future Challenges and Prospects in Japan

What is needed to further advance efforts toward the strategic objectives of the BPFA?

Environmental conventions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change include gender-related action plans that, while not mandatory, expect signatory nations to take action. Domestically, mechanisms to support women’s participation have begun to be included. However, progress has not been made in discussions on how to concretely address the differentiated adverse effects of environmental crises shaped by entrenched gender roles, nor how to reflect women’s contributions to environmental measures in individual policies and budgets. On the other hand, looking at international efforts, Japan supports gender-related initiatives, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), through financial contributions and projects. In bilateral overseas support projects through organizations such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM), Japan actively incorporates gender equality into environmental measures by formulating and implementing environmental and social considerations and gender guidelines. Reflecting the knowledge gained from these activities in domestic policies would be profitable.

Another challenge is the lack of visibility of gender perspectives in Japan’s environmental policies, including the collection of data and hearings through dialogue with stakeholders necessary

¹⁶ National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2023–2030 <https://www.env.go.jp/content/000124381.pdf> (in Japanese)

¹⁷ Fifth Fundamental Plan for Establishing a Sound Material-Cycle Society <https://www.env.go.jp/content/000242999.pdf> (in Japanese)

for setting individual measures and budgets. It would also be necessary to fully utilize and analyze existing data in this process. Collecting and disseminating examples of women-led environmental activities and businesses could also be an effective way to support initiatives.

As we approach Beijing+30, it is also essential to accelerate efforts by both the public and private sectors to achieve environmental measures and gender equality. In the process of formulating the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality in 2020, civil society organizations addressing gender issues and environmental problems collaborated, and the environment was given a position as part of the “Promotion of Gender Equality in Disaster Prevention, Reconstruction, and Environmental Issues” section of the plan through opinion exchanges and public comments. Through such collaboration among various actors regarding environmental issues, it is hoped that different perspectives and needs based on gender, generation, and circumstances will be more easily reflected in environmental policies and measures, making it easier for everyone to commit to environmental measures.

L. The Girl-child

GOTO, Hiroko

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child and Law

In 1994, Japan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter referred to as CRC) thereby committing itself thirty years ago to the implementation of CRC's provisions. Like all conventions, CRC is a legally binding instrument that takes precedence over all other legislation. Thus, any legislation that contravenes the provisions set forth in CRC is deemed invalid. Since its ratification, CRC has been in force as domestic legislation. However, the complete fulfillment of the children's rights has not been sufficiently achieved, in part due to the absence of a law that could serve as the basis for a basic plan to implement concrete measures.

The Basic Act on Children's Policy, which came into effect in April 2023 following the revision of the Child Welfare Law in 2016, unequivocally states that it is based on CRC and the Constitution of Japan. It establishes the fundamental principles of non-discrimination, the right to growth and development, the right to express opinions, and the paramountcy of the best interests of the child. It is expected that the enactment of the Basic Act on Children's Policy and the formulation of the General Principles for Child-Related Measures as a basic plan will bring about significant changes in the guarantee of children's rights.

The Basic Act on Children is based on the spirit of CRC and aims to have the state implement policies to support children's growth and development from every angle. The act uses the term "children" to refer to a child, and it does not define a child by age, instead describing them as "a person who is in the process of mental and physical development." It also states that support will be provided "throughout the process of mental and physical development" until the child becomes an adult, and that child-rearing support will also be provided "to contribute to the realization of a society in which people can experience the joys of raising children."

The initial plan for the Children and Families Agency was to establish a "Children Agency" that would focus exclusively on children. However, this plan was subsequently modified to incorporate the term "families" into the designation due to the fact that both the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito party had expressed the view that "children grow up with the families as their foundation, and supporting child-rearing in the family is essential to ensure their healthy growth" (Asahi Shimbun Digital, December 20, 2021). This has been rightly criticized by children who had been abused and raised in an abusive environment, who believed it to be an inadequate reflection of their upbringing outside the home (by social care) (Asahi Shimbun Digital, December 16, 2021).

Presently, the General Principles for Child-Related Measures, which provides a comprehensive framework for essential measures at each stage of a child's life, is guiding the implementation of policies under the slogan "child-centered". These policies also promote the involvement of children and youth in the national policy-making process and facilitate their expression of opinions. Additionally, they include measures to support child rearing.

In regard to the selection of the designation "Children and Families Agency", concerns have been raised regarding the potential burden of care work on women, given the historical responsibility of women for child-rearing roles within the domestic sphere. In the General Principles for Child-Related Measures, the term "gender" appears only in the context of educational opportunities for children and adolescents. The issue of gender is addressed in the context of concerns that traditional gender roles may limit the career options available to girls, particularly in relation to higher education.

In other words, "children" are described as if gender does not exist. In instances of life-threatening child abuse, the mother may be the perpetrator. However, there are many cases where the father is an accomplice and there is evidence of domestic violence; however, the father is not held accountable for the domestic violence (e.g., the Meguro and Noda cases). While there are cases where the victims of sexual exploitation are men, such as the Johnny Kitagawa case, however in cases at schools, on trains, and in nightlife districts such as Kabukicho, the overwhelming majority of victims are girls.

These circumstances presuppose the existence of gender-discriminatory social norms and misogynistic beliefs that have existed at the base of society since before World War II and are still deeply rooted. If policies are implemented on the premise that society is based on the equality of men and women, without paying attention to the power relations between men and women, it is unlikely that future policies will be implemented with the girl child as a central consideration.

2. Sexual Violence against Children

Among the measures for children, the most intensive measures need to be taken to prevent and respond to sexual violence, which has long-lasting effects on children. The General Principles for Child-Related Measures also states that "comprehensive efforts will be made to prevent perpetration, facilitate counseling and victim reporting, support victims, and conduct ongoing awareness-raising activities." However, "regardless of age or gender" is still applied as the standard, and a special focus on girls is lacking.

In regard to sexual violence against children, significant amendments were made to the Penal Code's Sexual Offenses provisions in 2023, following the establishment of the new crime of custodial sexual intercourse in 2017.

Firstly, the age of consent for sexual conduct was increased from 13 to 16 years of age, which has long been recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A five-year age difference requirement was also established on the grounds that it is not appropriate to punish sexual conduct between junior high school students when it is based on sincere romantic feelings.

However, in the case of children under the age of 16, if there is a relationship of a senior and junior, even if the age difference is only one year, there can be a power dynamic based on age which can lead to the suppression of girls' right to sexual self-determination, particularly when coupled with societal gender discrimination. The five-year age difference requirement was introduced with the intention of guaranteeing the

right to sexual self-determination of children between the ages of 13 and 16. However, as stated in the supplementary resolution of the House of Representatives, "if the age difference between the two is less than five years, it does not mean that the relationship is 'equal';" thus, if the age difference is within five years, the issue becomes whether there was non-consent. So the requirement does not provide sufficient protection for those under the age of 16, just as it had been in the past. Unless the five-year age difference requirement is abolished, it is not possible to conclude that the age of consent for sexual intercourse has now become 16 years old. The elimination of the five-year age difference requirement is thus essential to protect girls from sexual violence.

The 2023 amendments to the Penal Code not only alter the nomenclature of the offenses in question, substituting "forced sexual intercourse" and "indecent assault" with "nonconsensual sexual intercourse" and "nonconsensual indecency", respectively, but additionally, the definition of the crime has been modified to encompass "sexual intercourse, etc., with the intention of causing a person to form, express, or fulfill a state of nonconsent, or taking advantage of such a state," through eight acts or conditions, etc. The crime of non-consensual sexual intercourse is established when a person engages in sexual intercourse "by causing a person to form, express, or fulfill a non-consensual intention, or by taking advantage of such a condition." The aforementioned eight acts or conditions constitute a crime and include not only instances of freezing due to surprise, fear, or being startled, and due to the effects of abuse, but also cases where the victim is made to "fear being disadvantaged due to influence based on economic or social position", such as between a teacher and a student.

The number of arrests for nonconsensual sexual intercourse with a child during FY2023 reached 709, representing the highest figure observed over the past decade.

(https://www.npa.go.jp/policy_area/no_cp/uploads/R5kodomo.pdf) While the increase in the number of arrests is a positive development, it is also essential to address the "culture of impunity" in which arrests are not prosecuted or, if prosecuted, the sentence is suspended.

Moreover, the criminal offense of "requesting a visitation" has recently been codified for individuals under the age of 16, establishing it as a criminal act to persistently request a visitation even after refusal, or to request that someone send them sexually explicit images.

Furthermore, the Act on Punishment of Taking Sexual Photographs and Erasure of Electromagnetic Records of Sexual Images Recorded in Confiscated Property was recently enacted, establishing criminal penalties for the surreptitious taking of sexual photographs without a legitimate justification (i.e., voyeurism) and the taking of sexual photographs of individuals under the age of sixteen. It is a noteworthy advancement that, for the first time, the law enables the prosecution of the sexual exploitation of children through grooming.

Regarding victimization during childhood, a survey conducted by Spring, a nonprofit organization, revealed that in cases of sexual victimization of children under the age of 16, 36% of victims only realized that it was sexual victimization after 11 years or more. Considering this situation, the statute of limitations for cases of victimization under the age of 18 was extended by adding the number of years up to the age of 8 to the statute

of limitations for sexual crimes, and the statute of limitations for sexual crimes was extended by about 5 years. From the perspective of protecting children's rights, it would be desirable to abolish the statute of limitations for prosecution, just as it is for murder.

In the past, testimony regarding child sexual crimes was conducted as few times as possible and recorded on video (including victim identification interviews and joint interviews). The recent amendment has established the admissibility of audio and video recordings that document the interrogation conducted by the prosecutor as evidence. Nevertheless, in certain instances, children may be subjected to cross-examination at trial, which highlights the necessity for measures to prevent the secondary victimization of children.

3. Child Sexual Abuse by Educational Personnel

Schools are environments where children spend a significant amount of time. In response to the issue of sexual abuse by parents, the Child Abuse Prevention Law was enacted in 2000, leading to enhanced measures against child abuse. However, although corporal punishment is prohibited by the School Education Act, sexual abuse by schoolteachers is only treated as a crime as an “indecent act”.

In 1959, an elementary school teacher was convicted of a sexual offense (indecent assault and rape) for taking a 10-year-old female student from his class to his home to commit a sexual crime, and he was sentenced to four years imprisonment by the Supreme Court (Asahi Shimbun, May 8, 1959, morning edition). In the context of a school environment, when the victim is a girl student, teachers can have three distinct levels of power: as an adult, a teacher, and a man (in heterosexual cases). For children, teachers are people who should be absolutely trusted. Teachers exploit this trust to easily subjugate and control children and students. Even if a child consults with a person about "something bad happening," not only are the children not treated as victims, but they are even themselves subject to suspicion, perpetuating and exacerbating the harm.

The case of a teacher who was sexually victimized in high school and only later recognized the damage as an adult—in which the victim filed a lawsuit for damages, and the court recognized the damage, leading the school board to take disciplinary action 28 years later—is illustrative of the hidden nature of sexual assault by teachers. Subsequently, other victims continued to raise their voices about their own abuses, which resulted in the enactment of the Law for the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Children by Educational Personnel (hereinafter referred to as the Law for the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Children), which came into effect in April 2022.

Following the enactment of this legislation, consultation services were initiated and manuals for the prevention and detection of sexual violence were developed in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). For example, in response to years of sexual violence perpetrated against children by teachers, the Chiba City Board of Education established the "Study Group on Measures to Prevent Sexual Violence against Children" and, based on its recommendations (2021), issued the "Declaration for Creating Safe and Secure Schools Free of Violence". It then established appropriate systems, including the elimination of physical and psychological blind spots in schools, a minimum

number of interviews of victims after discovery, and interviews of perpetrators by a third-party committee established by the Board of Education.

It is imperative that children be educated about sexual consent in order to prevent sexual violence in schools. MEXT recommends the comprehensive implementation of "life safety education" from 2023 onwards, with the objective of preventing children from becoming perpetrators, victims, or bystanders of sexual violence. However, several issues remain. For instance, the 2023 revision of the Criminal Code has not been reflected in the content of "life safety education", and comprehensive sexuality education in accordance with UNESCO's International Guidance on Sexuality Education has yet to be implemented.

In order to enhance the safety and security of educational institutions, a Japanese adaptation of the DBS system is scheduled for implementation in 2026. The system will require individuals who work with children to undergo background checks to ascertain whether they have a history of sexual offenses. The checks are mandatory for schools and child welfare institutions, but they are only voluntary for institutions that are certified to work with children in ways that satisfy the criteria of being "controlling", "continuous", or "closed". In the first place, in order for someone to have a sexual offenses record, they must be convicted in court and their charges confirmed. Consequently, there are numerous issues that require consideration, including how effective this system will be at preventing sexual offenses, and whether it will lead to the elimination of offenders.

4. Parental rights

There have been a series of legal revisions regarding parental rights. In 2019, the Child Abuse Prevention Act banned corporal punishment. However, the disciplinary rights provision in the Civil Code has continued to be used as an excuse to justify child abuse. The disciplinary rights provision of the Civil Code was finally removed in December 2022. However, it is still not clear whether "punishment in which physical force is used which is intended to cause some pain or discomfort, no matter how mild" (General Comment No. 8 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child) is truly prohibited as corporal punishment.

Furthermore, with regard to post-divorce custody arrangements, a new system has been introduced, scheduled to take effect in 2026, that will permit joint custody to be selected over sole custody following a divorce, a previously unavailable option. In order to safeguard the human rights of children in the context of divorce, it is essential to ensure the provision of child support and, if there is no child abuse, to guarantee the right of children to visit both parents (visitation rights). With regard to child support payments, effective measures such as garnishing wages are desirable, and if a child's safety and security cannot be ensured, allowing them to meet with a parent who commits violence, including domestic violence, would be a violation of the child's rights.

In high conflict cases, it is necessary for the family court to respond in a manner that truly protects the rights of the child so that the choice of joint custody is not forced on to them.

1. The spread of feminism among young women and its background

Young people, particularly women, are less aware of gender-based division of labor roles.¹ A proper awareness of gender equality, that one's life should not be determined by one's gender, seems to be taking root. A growing number of young women are not afraid to identify as feminists. Although it may be encouraging to see this younger generation sympathize with feminism and participate in the movement, it is also important to recognize that we continue to live in a society where people are subjected to discrimination and oppression based on gender. Young women confront a range of obstacles and challenges; some of them are highlighted below.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of suicides among young women aged 10 to 24 increased compared to other generations and men.² The rise in suicides among young women has been gaining attention for several years and the pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. The Act on Support for Women with Difficult Problems was enacted in April 2024 to solve these issues such as sexual abuse and violence, alienation at home, and poverty that young women experience.

It has been pointed out that starting in the late 20s, there are wage gaps between men and women in every industry.³ Furthermore, almost 30% of students who are job hunting has experienced “Shukatsu Sekuhara” which is a term describing instances of sexual harassment throughout the job-hunting process.⁴

The gender gap exists from the time children enter school. The university enrollment rate is 53.4% for women and 59.7% for men. This is a difference of almost 6 points; moreover, in the prefectures where the difference is greatest, it is more than 16 points.⁵ Specifically, the enrollment rate at universities is lower in rural areas than in the metropolitan area. This is partly explained by the fact that male students occupy over 60% of the 52 prefectural dormitories in the metropolitan area, which are only available to students

¹ The younger the age group, the lower the awareness of gender role division of labor. Moreover, there is a 7-point difference in responses to the question "Housework and childrearing should be done by women," indicating that women are less aware of gender roles in labor distribution.

² According to a joint research group study titled, *COVID-19, young people, and suicidal behaviour* conducted by Nobuyuki Hotta, Director of the Chemotherapy Center at Yokohama City University Hospital, and Sho Moriguchi, Co-researcher at the Department of Neuropsychiatry, Keio University School of Medicine, the increase in suicides among 10–24-year-olds due to the COVID-19 pandemic was notable only among girls and women.

³ According to the Asahi Shimbun (2024), women's annual income is lower than men's in all industries from their late 20s to their 50s, even for full-time employees.

⁴ According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's (2023) *General Survey on the Workplace Harassment*, 31.9% of job-hunting students responded that they had experienced sexual harassment during their job hunt, up from 25.5% in 2020.

⁵ According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (2023) *Basic Research on School*, when looking at university enrollment rates by gender, men have a higher rate than women in 44 prefectures, excluding Tottori, Tokushima, and Kochi, and the difference in enrollment rates between men and women is highest in Yamanashi Prefecture (16.1 points), followed by Saitama Prefecture (13.0 points), Hokkaido (10.1 points), and Fukui Prefecture (9.3 points).

from that prefecture. Prefectural dormitories are one type of housing available to students relocating from rural areas to the metropolitan area.⁶

Many concerns exist in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Unwanted pregnancy is one of the issues young women faces, with one in every 100 women aged 20 to 24 having an abortion each year.⁷ A record 46,000 comments were received during a public comment session in January 2023, indicating the widespread calls for improved access to emergency contraception, which is thought to be the last stronghold in preventing unintended pregnancy. Despite this, there are still many obstacles to improving access, including costs and pharmacy sale.⁸

Attention should also be paid to concerns pertaining to sexual minorities' rights. In elementary, middle, and high school, 38.8% of LGBT teenagers reported having been bullied at school, according to a survey of those who identify as LGBT. 85.5% of LGBT youth said that they had "seen or heard discriminatory remarks about LGBTQ within the past year."⁹ In addition, transgender discrimination has intensified in the past few years, particularly online, and this has had a detrimental effect on mental health.

Although there have been concerns regarding marriage for many years, no solution has been reached. A public opinion survey revealed that 93.3% of respondents under 30 are in favor of married couples having the option to choose separate surnames.¹⁰ Furthermore, when it comes to same-sex marriage, 91.4% of those under the age of 30 support "recognizing same-sex marriage by law."¹¹

Additionally, according to Plan International, which works with young women to achieve a gender-equal society, there are five issues that girls and young women in Japan face: loneliness and isolation (inability to build good relationships at school or work, discord with parents or family, violence, abuse, lack of social support, few places to turn for advice), poverty and hardship (non-regular and low-income employment known as "the working poor," difficulty in accessing social welfare, rising prices and tuition fees, young carers), mental health problems (loss of hope for the future, anxiety, helplessness, increased suicidal ideation, depression, adjustment disorder, developmental disorder), gender-based violence (sexual

⁶ Quoted from the NPO #YourChoiceProject (2024) *Survey Report on the Acceptance of Female Students in Prefectural Dormitories*.

⁷ Quoted from the Gender Equality Bureau (2023) *The White Paper on Gender Equality 2022*, Figure 7-6: Trends in the number of induced abortions and the implementation rate by age group.

⁸ According to the Asahi Shimbun (2023) *Emergency contraception should be made available over the counter; an unprecedented 46,000 public comments, many in favor* (May 12, 2023), the OTC of emergency contraception was discussed at an expert meeting in 2017, and the public comments were mostly positive. However, the OTC was postponed due to concerns about resale, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases because of discontinuing contraception use, concerns about its misuse for sexual violence, and cautious opinions expressed by the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, among others.

⁹ From the *3rd LGBTQ Awareness Survey* conducted by Lifenet Insurance Company, a commissioned survey by Yasuharu Hidaka of Takarazuka University Nursing School.

¹⁰ From FNN Prime Online, "70% of women, 63% of men, and 55% of LDP supporters are in favor of optional separate surnames for married couples, [FNN opinion poll]" (July 24, 2024).

¹¹ From FNN Prime Online, "71% in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage, over 90% of people in their 20s in FNN opinion poll" (February 20, 2023),

abuse, sexual violence including online abuse, dating violence), and issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (concerns about sexuality, pregnancy, body, menstruation, unwanted sexual intercourse).

2. The spread, successes, and challenges of online activism

In reaction to the challenges mentioned above, young feminists have become more active. Even after the COVID-19 epidemic hit, this movement persisted, with social media being used more frequently for online activism.

For instance, the author and a few friends started an online petition in February 2021 in response to a report that Yoshiro Mori, the chairman of the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Game at the time, had expressed his opposition to having more women on the board during a meeting by stating, "Meetings with women take time." 157,000 signatures were collected in just two weeks; the petition received extensive media coverage and contributed to his resignation. The petition gained traction mostly through social media, and as a result, participation increased, setting an example of something that became possible now that it wouldn't have in the past.

In 2023, a new offense of non-consensual sexual intercourse was also established as a result of the efforts of feminist movements and the involvement of numerous young women. Four organizations—Chabudai-gaeshi Joshi Action, Tomorrow Girls Troop, Shiawase Namida, and the Association of People Concerned about Sexual Violence and Penal Code—launched the Believe Campaign in the fall of 2016 to revise the sex crime law. Due to the campaign, the Penal Code was amended in 2017 to include sexual offenses for the first time in 110 years; nevertheless, non-consensual sexual intercourse was not included. In 2017, Shiori Ito accused former TBS reporter of rape. In 2018, the administrative vice minister of the Ministry of Finance sexually harassed a female journalist, which sparked outrage and led to his resignation. In 2019, all four cases of a biological father sexually abusing his daughter—including one in which the father admitted the abuse was rape—were found not guilty. Voices of rage, primarily from women, were heard on social media and on the streets. The nationwide protest, "Flower Demo" gained momentum, and with the effort of the organization of sexual abuse survivors "Spring" and others, the non-consensual sexual intercourse became an offense in 2023. This is also an example where social media played a significant role.

While there have been achievements in social media activism, there are some challenges to consider. For instance, one of these is online slander, and it has been suggested that being a woman can be one of the elements that contribute to online harassment. Those who identify as feminists or who reject established gender norms, as well as those who express thoughts regarding male-dominated fields such as politics,

sports, diplomacy, defense, and cybersecurity are at risk of being harassed on social media.¹² Moreover, the backlash against feminism is growing, and there are issues such as false information spread by anti-feminists online, which is impeding support activities for young women, and platforms must be held responsible.

3. Current circumstances and challenges regarding the exercise of suffrage

Gender inequality in the political sphere, which influences the legal system that firmly establishes the idea of men and women having different roles, is a fundamental issue that contributes to the inheritance of gender gaps throughout generations. There are several current circumstances and obstacles that young women encounter when it comes to their political participation.

Although it is well known that young people have low voting rates, there has been a recent trend showing that women vote at a higher rate than men among this demographic. The most recent 2021 House of Representatives election, for instance, had the following voting rates: teens (45.63% for women and 40.94% for men), which is about 4.7% higher for women; early 20s (35.66% for women and 31.80% for men), which is about 3.8% higher for women; and late 20s (42.26% for women and 36.61% for men), which is about 5.7% higher for women.

Women tend to be more interested in politics among young people, which is seen in voter participation; yet there are additional difficulties to exercising the right to run for office. People under the age of 25 or 30 (depending on the municipality) are not eligible to run for office in Japan due to age restrictions. To address this issue, the "Youthful Democracy Project" initiated a campaign to lower the candidacy age, of which I am a part.

A survey conducted by FIFTYS PROJECT, an organization I represent that aims to close the gender gap in politics, shows that the gender ratio of local assembly members by age group was 16% for those aged 25–29, 19% for those aged 30–39, and 20% for those aged 50–59, with 20% being the highest percentage. In other words, the ratio of female politicians is exceedingly low, particularly among younger generations, and does not correspond to an increase in awareness of gender equality. In the nationwide local elections in April 2023, new female candidates in their 20s and 30s were elected across the country, and as of July 2024, the gender ratio of politicians under the age of 40 had increased to 24% from 15% in 2015. This improvement is partially the result of young women voting at higher rates and feminist initiatives supporting candidates. Still, the female politicians make up less than 30%, despite the progress. Further improvements are needed in the future, including ensuring the representation of young women in decision-making positions.

¹² From withnews "Are women more susceptible to attacks on social media? Even though they are sending the same messages...researchers have questions" (October 12, 2022).

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Q. Women and Work

SUZUKI, Kyoko

The labor market in Japan has a significant gender gap¹, attracting increased policy attention in recent years. Over the past decade, there has been notable progress in the “quantity” of female labor force participation, especially among women with young children, leading to a flattening of the M-shaped curve. However, in terms of the “quality”, women’s working conditions still fall considerably behind men’s, with ongoing challenges such as low wages and job insecurity. This chapter will examine three primary domains where the gender gap persists.

1. Gender gap among regular employees within organizations

The first domain involves disparities between male and female regular employees within organizations, including differences in job assignments, years of service, and promotions to managerial positions. These gaps largely stem from how human resource management systems are implemented within organizations. In recent years, various policy measures have targeted this area. For instance, the “Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace”, enacted in 2015, requires companies to disclose gender gaps in hiring, overtime hours, years of service, and managerial promotions. In 2022, gaps in average annual wages were added to the mandatory disclosure items.²

The gender wage gap is generally considered to be narrowing. According to the OECD’s Gender Wage Gap index, frequently referenced by the Japanese government, the wage level for female full-time employees in 2023 was 78³, with male full-time employees set at 100. However, this index only considers “full-time employees” and may not fully capture the gender wage gap in Japan. To accurately assess the situation, it is crucial to include “non-regular employees”.

Recent government policies have focused on encouraging companies to reduce gender gaps within their organizations. However, these efforts mainly target “regular employees” in large corporations, who comprise a small portion of the female workforce. As a result, the overall impact on reducing the gender gap remains limited. Moreover, the focus is on a relatively advantaged segment in terms of working conditions. While the policies benefit this group, they fail to improve the situation for “non-regular employees,” thereby widening disparities within the female workforce.

¹ Japan ranked 120th out of 146 countries in the area of “economic opportunity” in the Global Gender Gap Index 2024, published by the World Economic Forum.

https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_syogaikoku/int_shihyo/index.html

² Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Ordinance on General Employer Action Plan based on the Act on the Promotion of Women’s Active Engagement in Professional Life.”

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11900000/000964453.pdf>

³ OECD, Gender Wage Gap <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/gender-wage-gap.html>

2. Disparity between regular and non-regular employment

The second domain involves disparities between regular and non-regular employment. An analysis of employment trends since the 1980s reveals significant differences in the growth of non-regular employment between men and women. Among employed workers aged 15 and older, only 23% of men are non-regular employees, compared to 53% of women.⁴ Moreover, women account for 68% of all non-regular employees.⁵ Although the rise of nonstandard employment is a global trend, the expansion of non-regular employment in Japan is notably skewed towards women. It is characterized by three unique features.

First, there exists a substantial wage gap between regular and non-regular employees. Non-regular employees not only earn lower hourly wages, but they also typically work fewer hours and are often excluded from bonuses and allowances. Consequently, their average annual income in the private sector amounts to only 38% of that of regular employees.⁶ Due to the high concentration of women in non-regular employment, the average annual income for female employees in the private sector is just 56% of that of their male counterparts.⁷ However, the deeply rooted “male-breadwinner” norm in Japanese society has prevented this substantial gender gap from being criticized. One contributing factor to the lower annual income of non-regular employees is that women often adjust their work hours to keep their income below certain thresholds. This adjustment is driven by tax and social policies that offer exemption from income tax and social insurance premiums or provide deductions from a spouse’s income if annual earnings remain below a specified amount. Addressing these gender-biased tax and social security systems has become a topic of ongoing debate.

The second characteristic is that disparities between regular and non-regular employment extend well beyond wages, impacting job security and career development. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Japan declared its first state of emergency in April 2020, the overall workforce decreased by 730,000 compared to the previous month. However, the number of non-regular female employees declined by 940,000 during this period⁸, suggesting that employment adjustments disproportionately affected non-regular female workers. Additionally, non-regular employees face significant disadvantages in career advancement; they typically do not receive wage increases or promotions tied to age or tenure, and they have limited access to training and educational opportunities.

⁴ Calculated by author, based on the “Labor Force Survey” (Whole Japan, Yearly results, 2023)

Note that male non-regular employees are concentrated among younger and older age groups. When focusing on the 25 - 54 age range, the ratio of non-regular employment is 11% for men and 46% for women, showing a larger gender gap.

⁵ “Labor Force Survey, Basic Tabulation” (Whole Japan, Yearly results, 2023). During the survey period, the number of regular employees increased.

⁶ “Statistical Survey on Actual Status for Salaries in the Private Sector 2022 (Summary of Survey Results)” <https://www.nta.go.jp/publication/statistics/kokuzeicho/minkan2022/pdf/002.pdf>

⁷ “Statistical Survey on Actual Status for Salaries in the Private Sector 2022 (Summary of Survey Results)” <https://www.nta.go.jp/publication/statistics/kokuzeicho/minkan2022/pdf/002.pdf>

⁸ “Labor Force Survey, Basic Tabulation” (Whole Japan, Monthly results, Number of employees by type of employment, 2023).

The third characteristic is that non-regular employment in Japan is not defined by objective working conditions or contractual terms. In official statistics, it is classified based on “how the worker is referred to at the workplace” rather than by clear criteria such as working hours, contract length, or job responsibilities. As a result, the classification of “non-regular employment” can vary from one workplace to another. In fact, 40% of non-regular employees in Japan work 35 hours or more per week, and 59% have been employed at the same company for over three years. Thus, non-regular employment in Japan cannot simply be characterized as short-term or part-time work.⁹ Moreover, regular and non-regular employees perform the same tasks in many workplaces. Yet, those classified as “non-regular employees” are subject to significantly lower working conditions solely because of their employment category.

The root cause of this discriminatory treatment lies in the absence of a robust “equal pay for equal work” principle in Japan. When the government enacted the “Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act” in 2018, it promoted “equal pay for equal work” as a slogan. However, this legislation falls well short of international standards. For instance, even if two workers perform identical tasks, it is not illegal to treat them differently if one is designated as a regular employee and the other as a non-regular employee. This indicates that performing the same job is not sufficient to be considered “equal work.” If there are differing expectations for future roles, such as compliance with overtime and transfer orders, it is legally permissible to categorize the two workers under different employment categories and maintain significant wage disparities. This framework has effectively confined women with family responsibilities to non-regular employment, thereby hindering the application of the “equal pay for equal work” principle between men and women and perpetuating a substantial gender wage gap. From an international perspective, this situation violates the principle of “equal pay for equal work” and infringes on women’s human rights.

3. Gender segregation in industries and occupations

The third domain addresses gender segregation across industries and occupations. In terms of industry, women are predominantly represented in “healthcare and welfare (22%),” and “wholesale and retail trade” (17%). For occupations, women are most frequently employed as “clerical workers (29%),” “professional and technical workers (20%),” and “service workers (18%).”¹⁰ These female-dominated industries and occupations typically have lower average wages. Conversely, in higher-wage industries, such as finance, the wage gap between men and women is often more pronounced.

Within the category of “professional and technical workers,” significant gender disparities persist. This group can be divided into “human service professionals”, such as caregivers, nurses, and educators, and “other professionals,” including university professors, doctors, and dentists. In Japan,

⁹ “Employment Status Survey 2022” (Whole Japan, Basic Tables of Population and Employment Status).

¹⁰ “Employment Status Survey 2022” (Whole Japan, Basic Tables of Population and Employment Status).

the majority of “human service professionals” are women, while the presence of women in “other professionals” remains notably low. Despite being classified as professionals, “Human service professionals” —dominated by women—earn lower wages than men employed in “clerical,” “sales,” or “manual labor” jobs. This stark gender-based occupational segregation, along with the inadequate recognition and compensation of expertise in professional roles, presents significant challenges to Japan’s labor market.

Finally, the issue of self-employment warrants attention. Japan remains largely an employment-centered society, and since the 1980s, the number of self-employed workers--particularly female family workers-- has significantly declined. As of 2023, 92% of female workers were employees, and only 8% were self-employed or family workers.¹¹ Research suggests that self-employed workers are increasingly disadvantaged compared to employees in terms of income and access to social protection. With the rise of cloud-based work, more women are working as freelancers. Therefore, enhancing workers’ rights and social protection in these emerging employment forms is crucial.

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¹¹ “Labor Force Survey, Basic Tabulation” (Whole Japan, Yearly results, 2023).

Colum - Q. Women and Work

The Unaddressed Issue of Non-Regular Employment in the Public Sector

- The Paradox of Counselors Providing Support While Facing Job Insecurity Themselves -

FURUKAWA, Akiko

“It would not be surprising if those who are currently providing support, could become the ones to receive support at any moment. It is extremely difficult to provide good support in such an unstable ‘Today you, tomorrow me’ situation.” (Female, 30s, Hokuriku region)

This is the voice that responded to an internet survey conducted by the National Women’s Network on Non-regular Government Employees (as known Ham-Net), which has been active since 2021.

The problem in the employment sector, which is one of the causes of the gender gap in Japan, is deep-rooted. Even at public institutions that support people with their problems and difficulties in life, many women are forced to work precariously as non-regular employees.

In 2020, a Fiscal Year Appointed Employee System was introduced to non-regular employees working for Japanese local governments. Many of the non-regular employees who had been employed in various ways by different municipalities and departments were unified as “fiscal year appointed employees.” The number of such employees is 662,000¹ according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) in fiscal year 2023, and has continued to increase since the system’s inception. Also, the MIC survey of 2020² shows that 76.6% of the 622,000 fiscal year appointed employees are women. Although they are hired precariously on a “fiscal year,” i.e., on a yearly basis, the work they perform is wide-ranging, including personal support and social education, and is characterized as low pay despite its importance in public service.

Ham-Net is an organization that aims to solve the problem of non-regular government employees by collecting information from the frontlines and the voices of those involved that are not revealed in government surveys. It began its activities in 2021, triggered by the introduction of the Fiscal Year Appointed Employee System. Our survey revealed the problems faced by non-regular government employees, such as job instability, poor treatment, physical and mental health strain, and anxiety about the future. Furthermore, when the Fiscal Year Appointed Employee System was introduced, more problems arose, such as monthly pays being cut on the grounds of bonus payments, and their positions being released for open recruitment after a certain number of years regardless of their own will. “Open recruitment” that goes against the employee’s will for continued employment and the resulting “termination of employment” are causing great stress to non-regular government employees. Because

¹ Results of the survey on temporary and part-time employees, including fiscal year appointed local government employees (as of April 1, 2020).

² Results of the survey on the implementation status, etc. of the Fiscal Year Appointed Employee System for FY 2023 (Number of appointments, etc.).

regular employees have the discretion to decide whether or not non-regular employees should continue to be employed, it is difficult for non-regular employees to speak up even if they consider it a problem, which can lead to harassment.

Ham-Net has been trying to make the problem of non-regular government employees visible through media dissemination and other means. As a result, the problem has become known to the public. In 2024, the National Personnel Authority and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications made it clear that they would review the open recruitment system. In the private sector, the Labor Contract Act has been amended to create a clause that will allow the “Conversion of Fixed-Term Employment Contracts to Employment Contracts without a Definite Period.” Also, the Part-Time Employment Act provides for the principle of equal pay for equal work. However, no system whatsoever exists for non-regular government employees at this point. The problem of non-regular employees in the public sector, which has been overlooked in the past, requires continued attention and solutions will be sought.

R. Immigrant Women

SAKUMA, Yoriko

1. Introduction

According to the Immigration Services Agency, as of December 2023, the number of foreign nationals residing in Japan reached a record high of 3,410,992. This highlights the growing importance of immigrants in a society grappling with population decline and labor shortages. Of this population, approximately half, or 1,697,001, are women. Immigrant women are often expected to take on roles traditionally held by Japanese women, such as household chores, caregiving, and other precarious, low-wage jobs. However, they frequently lack access to adequate public support, leaving them in financially challenging situations. Despite facing multiple layers of discrimination and human rights violations based on gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality, the government has taken few steps to improve their situation.

This report focuses on key issues facing immigrant women, particularly serious human rights violations, and addresses: 1) domestic violence, 2) issues within the Technical Intern Training Program, including challenges related to pregnancy and childbirth, as well as concerns regarding the upcoming "Training and Employment System (tentative English translation)," and 3) reproductive health and rights concerns affecting not only technical interns but all immigrant women.

2. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (DV) against immigrant women remains a serious issue in Japan. While most DV victims in the country are women, immigrant women are especially vulnerable, yet they receive insufficient support. When an immigrant woman who is a victim of DV is found to be violating the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (Immigration Act), addressing the violation often takes precedence over her protection as a victim. In March 2021, a Sri Lankan woman sought police protection from her abusive partner but was arrested for violating the Immigration Act. She was transferred to a detention facility at the Nagoya Immigration Bureau, where she was denied proper medical care and tragically died. This occurred because the police failed to protect her as a DV victim, and the Nagoya Immigration Bureau continued to detain her, ignoring internal regulations that stipulate DV victims should not be detained but referred to women's shelters if necessary.

Additionally, immigrant women who lose their residency status or hold visas such as "Dependent" or "Technical Intern Training," which are ineligible for social welfare benefits, are sometimes denied access to public shelters. The UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR), in its 2022 concluding observations, urged the Japanese government to provide prompt and adequate assistance and protection to all DV victims, regardless of immigration status.

Another pressing issue is that immigrant women whose visa status is dependent on their

partner/spouse risk losing their residency when fleeing abusive relationships or after divorce. This problem is particularly severe for those who are spouses of non-permanent residents such as those holding "Dependent" visas or "Long-Term Resident" visas as spouses of "Long-Term Resident" visa holders. As a result, many DV victims remain in abusive situations out of fear of losing their residency and facing deportation.

The June 14, 2024, amendment to the Immigration Act, which includes provisions allowing for the revocation of permanent residency, raises concerns that previously protected women could lose their protection. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has repeatedly recommended, including in its 2018 concluding observations, that Japan amend its laws to ensure immigrant women do not stay in abusive relationships out of fear of losing their status or being deported. Despite these recommendations, the Japanese government has not responded adequately. Japan must reform its legal framework and bolster support systems to align with international recommendations, ensuring immigrant women can seek safety and receive the necessary support without fear of losing their residency.

3. Technical Intern Training Program

In June 2024, amendments to the Immigration Act led to the decision to abolish the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), which had been widely criticized both domestically and internationally as "modern-day slavery" and "human trafficking." A new "Training and Employment System," aimed at fostering and securing foreign labor, is set to be established by 2027. While the TITP was originally intended as a means of international contribution through "human resource development," in reality, it has functioned as a system to supplement Japan's persistent labor shortages, plagued by numerous issues. Since 2010, TITP workers have been recognized as workers under labor laws. However, they are restricted from changing jobs¹, unless there are "unavoidable circumstances" leaving them unable to escape poor working conditions or unfair treatment, thereby limiting their rights as workers.

Despite the Labor Standards Act in Japan prohibiting unjust dismissals without reasonable cause, dismissals have been frequent under the TITP. Many TITP workers advocating for better working conditions or those who become pregnant have been unfairly dismissed or forcibly repatriated. Supervisory bodies, including the supervising organizations and the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT), often fail to address these dismissals. As a result, many TITP workers, already burdened with significant debt upon arrival in Japan, are forced into situations of low wages, long hours, and harsh working environments. Consequently, in 2022 alone, 9,006 TITP workers were

¹ Under the TITP, changing to a different occupation is strictly prohibited. Transfers to another company within the same occupation, known as "tenseki," are only permitted under exceptional circumstances, such as company bankruptcy.

reported missing, according to the Immigration Services Agency (ISA, 2024).

Additionally, the issue of isolated childbirths among TITP workers has grown in recent years. Many TITP workers are of childbearing age, and unplanned pregnancies during their training period occur. Despite the Equal Employment Opportunity Act prohibiting discrimination based on pregnancy or childbirth, TITP workers are often forbidden from engaging in relationships or becoming pregnant, and those who do are frequently forced to return to their home countries. Language barriers, financial burdens², and pressure from supervising organizations further prevent them from accessing necessary healthcare services. Consequently, cases of isolated childbirth have led to arrests under charges of corpse abandonment or neglect, as outlined in Articles 190 and 219 of the Penal Code³.

The government has issued multiple directives, including a February 16, 2021 notice, to ensure the prohibition of discriminatory treatment against pregnant TITP workers. Supervising organizations and employers have been instructed to impose administrative penalties for unfair treatment. However, no penalties have been enforced thus far. From November 1, 2017, to March 31, 2023, out of 2,062 TITP workers who submitted a "Notification of Difficulty in Continuing Technical Intern Training" due to pregnancy or childbirth, 244 expressed the desire to continue, yet only 71 were able to resume their training (Cabinet Response No. 136, June 21, 2024).

A key barrier to resuming the program is that TITP workers are not permitted to have family accompany them. If they give birth in Japan, their child is granted a six-month residence status for "Designated Activities," but this status is generally non-renewable. This demonstrates that the program does not anticipate TITP workers raising children in Japan, forcing them to leave their children in their home countries to continue their training.

Moreover, supervising organizations and employers are not obligated to support TITP workers going through pregnancy and childbirth or with childcare. If they choose not to assist, the workers are left to manage these challenges alone. While pregnant TITP workers have the right to access maternal health services, exercising these rights is difficult without external support due to language barriers and financial challenges. In Japan, medical information in languages other than Japanese and free medical interpretation services are limited, and some medical institutions refuse services due to language issues, leading to a case where a TITP worker was forced to give birth in isolation without medical care (Mainichi, 2022).

It remains uncertain whether the new "Training and Employment System" will resolve the issues identified in the TITP, particularly concerning pregnancy and childbirth. The new program continues to emphasize "human resource development," and job transfers still require one to two years of

² Pregnancy and childbirth, without any public financial assistance, must be covered entirely out-of-pocket, and both pregnancy tests and abortion procedures are also fully self-funded.

³ In 2020, a Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainee, Ms. Lin, was charged with corpse abandonment following an isolated stillbirth but was ultimately acquitted by the Supreme Court (http://kumustaka.org/TITP/Linh_TITP.html). However, similar cases continue to occur.

employment within the same organization, along with passing skill and Japanese language exams, meaning that freedom to change jobs remains restricted. Family accompaniment is also not permitted, as with the previous program. Given that many supervising organizations under the TITP have prioritized employer interests over worker welfare, there is skepticism as to whether stricter permit requirements under the new program will lead to fundamental improvements.

4. Reproductive Health and Rights

The issues surrounding reproductive health and rights for immigrant women extend beyond just those in the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). According to a notice from the Immigration Services Agency (Circular No. 2352, June 9, 2021), it is deemed inappropriate to treat international students unfairly due to pregnancy or childbirth. The notice also states that students who take leave for these reasons have legitimate grounds, which should not affect the renewal of their residence status. However, cases still arise where students are pressured to drop out due to pregnancy or childbirth, ultimately losing their residence status. Additionally, immigrant women, including those with permanent or long-term residency, tend to work under fixed-term contracts and frequently face contract renewal refusals due to pregnancy.

Another critical issue is the protection of the right not to bear children. In Japan, male condoms are the most commonly used form of contraception, with other options being scarce. Oral contraceptives require a prescription and are not covered by insurance. While oral abortion pills were approved in April 2023, institutions that offer the pills are limited, hospitalization is mandatory, costs are high, and spousal consent is required. For immigrant women, the situation is even more complicated, as they may not be able to prove marital status through the Japanese family registry (Koseki), often leading to the requirement for the father's consent even when there is no spouse. As a result, many immigrant women face unplanned pregnancies or unwanted births due to limited access to familiar contraceptive and abortion methods in Japan. Therefore, improving access to contraception and abortion services is essential.

At the same time, it is vital to safeguard the right of immigrant women to become pregnant and give birth. TITP workers, in particular, are often pressured not to get pregnant or have children. For instance, in January 2024, it was reported that five out of nine Vietnamese TITP workers who were instructed that they would be required to return to their home country if they became pregnant were fitted with contraceptive devices (Kyodo News, 2024). Similarly, women working under the "Specified Skilled Worker" visa have been dismissed due to pregnancy (Nikkei, 2024).

The lack of protection for immigrant women's rights to pregnancy and childbirth stems from discriminatory attitudes that view immigrant workers as being in Japan solely for labor and, therefore, not entitled to become pregnant. While the government focuses on addressing declining birth rates and labor shortages by promoting higher birth rates and women's participation in the workforce, immigrant

women are often excluded from these considerations. The government must take concrete steps to ensure the reproductive health and rights of all immigrant women, including TITP and specified skilled workers, to protect them from discrimination and adverse treatment based on pregnancy or childbirth.

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S. Women with Disabilities

Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) Women's Network Japan

Introduction

DPI Women's Network Japan (DWNJ), the author of this report, was formed in 1986 setting the goal to promote the independence of women with disabilities and the elimination of the Eugenic Protection Act, and for the purpose of networking and exchanging information among women with disabilities in Japan. The Network was temporarily inactive due to the major event of the removal of the eugenic article of the Eugenic Protection Act in 1996 and the activation of the independent living movement of people with disabilities in the 1990s, but resumed its activities in 2007, the year after the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted, at an international conference of people with disabilities held in Korea, following a momentum that international solidarity was called for. Currently, the group is engaged in various efforts to eliminate multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities, both in Japan and abroad.

This paper aims to record the issue on the Eugenic Protection Act, which has undergone major changes since the Beijing Conference, as well as domestic efforts to address the issue of multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities, as pointed out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006.

1. Eugenic Protection Act finally confirmed unconstitutional in 2024

The Eugenic Protection Act was enacted in 1948, with Article 1 stating, "the purpose of this act is to prevent the birth of defective offspring from a eugenic standpoint and to protect maternal life and health." Under this act, eugenic operations (sterilizations) to prevent the birth of "defective offspring" and abortions for eugenic reasons were performed. Between 1949 and 1996, about 16,500 people were subjected to "sterilization procedures that did not require their consent," and about 70% of them were women. In addition, beyond the scope of the Act, hysterectomies, and irradiation on the ovaries of women with disabilities have been performed to reduce the burden of assisting menstruation.

DWNJ has been working for the repeal of the Eugenic Protection Act from the beginning. In 1994, a year before the Beijing Conference, DWNJ raised awareness about the problematic nature of the Eugenic Protection Act at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo as the Japanese Women's NGO "Women and Health Network with the "SOSHIREN Women's (Our) Health Network (hereinafter referred to as SOSHIREN)" members, and this approach received great response from the international society as well. Moreover, the Network held a workshop to raise the issue on the Eugenic Protection Act with SOSHIREN and Friends of Finrrage - Network for Infertile Women in Japan at the NGO Forum of the Beijing Conference the following year.

The series of actions to raise the issue in the international conferences led to the 1996 revision of

the Eugenic Protection Act into the Maternal Protection Law, removing the article that stipulated the eugenic surgery.

However, although the act was amended at that time, there was neither investigation and verification of the real situation of forced sterilization, hysterectomies for women with disabilities, and other operations performed under the Eugenic Protection Act, nor any compensation for those affected, which means the issue was left substantially unresolved for a long time.

In the meantime, together with DPI Japan, SOSHIREN, and Initiative for the Compensation for the Victims of the Eugenic Sterilization in Japan, DWNJ has been working towards the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to report the issue of forced sterilization under the Eugenic Protection Act, and submit reports for demanding an apology and a compensation to the government, as well as establishing Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for women with disabilities.

In response to such activities, since the UN Committee on Human Rights issued recommendation for compensation for victims of forced sterilization in 1998, the Committee pointed out that the 1998 recommendation had failed to be followed in 2008 and 2014, and recommended that the government should make sure to take actions in line with the recommendation. In addition, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women produced a strong recommendation calling for clarification of the real situation of the harm, compensation, and punishment of the perpetrators in its concluding observations of the 2016 Japanese government report.

During the movements, a lawsuit seeking state compensation for forced sterilization under the Eugenic Protection Act was filed in 2018 at the Sendai District Court in Japan, which led the issue to be recognized as a serious social problem. In response to the lawsuit, in 2019, the Diet passed the “Law on the Payment of One-time Reparations for Victims of Eugenic Sterilizations under the Eugenic Protection Law” as a bipartisan legislative bill, which provides a compensation payment of 3.2 million yen to those who applied for.

Furthermore, after the lawsuit for the national reparation in 2018, similar lawsuits were filed nationwide, leading to a groundbreaking decision by the Grand Bench of the Supreme Court in 2024, which recognized the unconstitutionality of the Eugenic Protection Act and allowed victims to claim compensation. Currently, the Diet is discussing legislation to provide comprehensive compensation for harm caused by the Eugenic Protection Act.

Even after the removal of the eugenic clause from the Eugenic Protection Act, SRHR for women with disabilities has not yet been established. In the early 2000s, sex education practices in schools attended by people with intellectual disabilities were subject to bashing by politicians, violating their right to sex education, which continues to this day. A phenomenon has also spread that the “development” of reproductive health care technology functions for screening out the lives of people with disabilities.

DWNJ plans to submit a report again to lobby for the full resolution of the damage caused by the Eugenic Protection Act and the establishment of SRHR for women with disabilities, as the examination of the Japanese government report at the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women is scheduled for 2024.

2. Rights of women with disabilities specified in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and reflection in domestic legal systems

In 2006, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In its preamble, the need for all efforts toward removal of multidimensional discrimination and realization of gender equality, and a separate article focusing on the rights of “women with disabilities” was contained as in Article 6.

In Japan, the domestic legislation was developed in the process leading to the ratification of the Convention in 2014, and the multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities was also discussed in the course of the legislation enhancement. As a result, when the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities was revised in 2011, “gender” was described for the first time in Article 10 (basic policy of measures), Article 14 (medical care, nursing care, etc.), and Article 26 (disaster prevention and crime prevention). In addition, the Disability Discrimination Act enacted in 2013 prohibits administrative agencies and businesses from discriminating against people with disabilities, and from 2024, requires businesses to provide reasonable accommodation “in accordance with the gender, age, and disability status of the person with disabilities.”

However, the multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities has remained a problem, as it is only described in the Basic Plan for Persons with Disabilities, and has not been clearly stated in the text of the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities or Disability Discrimination Act.

In the first government report that the Japanese government submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016, 42 statistics were included in total. Among them, the statistics on gender only presented the number of people with disabilities and the data showing actual situations in the field of employment, without showing any measures based on this data.

The national data on the percentage of employees by gender and the percentage of employees by gender and employment status show that men account for more than 60% of the employees with disabilities in all the categories (physical, intellectual, or mental disabilities). Also the statistics reveals that the percentage of men with disabilities employed as regular employees is higher than of women with disabilities in all the categories and women is more than men in the percentage of fixed-term employment other than regular employment.

On the other hand, local ordinances to eliminate the discrimination against persons with disabilities in prefectures of Kyoto, Tokyo, Shiga, Miyagi, Nagano, city of Sendai and other local

governments have included statements focusing on multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities ahead of the national government, thus steadily expanding the awareness to the issue domestically.

3. The reality of multidimensional discrimination that has been revealed by the parties involved

In 2011, DWNJ conducted the “Survey on Difficulties in Living for Women with Disabilities (Survey on the Actual Situation of multidimensional Discrimination). The survey consisted of questionnaire and interviews, in which participants were asked to “write down any difficult experiences you have had in your life.” In addition, an institutional survey was conducted to examine descriptions of women with disabilities in gender equality plans and domestic violence prevention plans of local governments.

A total of 262 responses were received from 87 respondents with physical, visual, hearing, mental, intellectual, intractable, deaf-blind, and developmental disabilities.

The most common response was “sexual victimization” (45 responses) - 35% of the respondents experiencing some form of sexual victimization. The victimization occurred in assisted living, welfare facilities, medical settings, workplaces, schools, and in home. All of the places have the setting which the victims can hardly leave, and where the perpetrators are in a stronger position such as being the caregiver and the victims cannot stop their relationship with the perpetrators. The circumstance makes protests and appeals difficult. The issue of unwanted cross-sex assistance in hospitals and welfare facilities was also found to be a major issue that could lead to “sexual victimization.”

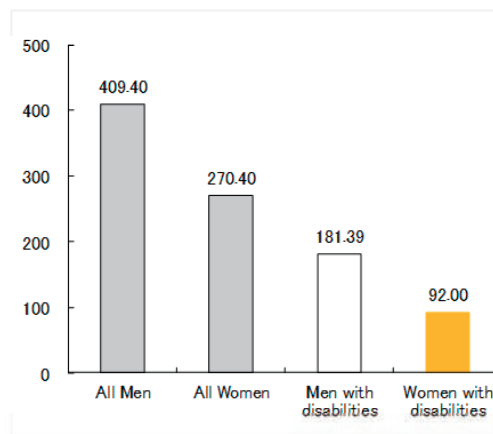
The respondents also referred to their experiences regarding the difficulties they felt in the work place. It revealed that the necessity for women with disabilities to work is not fully understood, and that the view of gender role division of labor is an obstacle to employment for women with disabilities.

The 2008 “Research Study on Income Security and Self-Reliance Support Policies for People with Disabilities” revealed that women with disabilities are in an extremely low status in terms of annual income for single-person households, both compared to women as a whole and to men with disabilities (Figure 1).

Women with disabilities are often placed in a socially vulnerable position because they have difficulty achieving independence, both financially and in their daily lives, and are forced to rely on family members and welfare facilities. This also contributes to the escalation of domestic violence and abuse.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s “Report on the Protective Care of Women (2016)” also shows that a high percentage (47.3%) of the residents of women’s protection facilities have some kind of disability or illness. The 2023 report on the Act on the Prevention of Abuse of Persons with Disabilities

Figure 1 Average of Annual Income for Single-Person Households



(Unit: 10,000 yen)

Source: Compiled based on Table 18 on page 81 of “Research and Study on Income Security and Self-Reliance Support Policies for Persons with Disabilities” by Sachiko Katsumata et al. (2008).

and Support for Caregivers also indicates that 66.2% of the victims of abuse by caregivers were women, and 12.2% of the abusers were their spouses. Furthermore, statistics on DV consultations by the Cabinet Office reveal that the number of DV consultations among disabled women has been increasing in recent years.

Although the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims states that victims, “regardless of with or without disabilities,” need to be supported, the information and services of counseling and support organizations are not provided to the victims with disabilities in an accessible manner, and there is no system in place at any stage of counseling, protection, or self-reliance support for the victims with disabilities. In addition, as for victims of sexual violence, there is no legal basis for support, which brings about the fact that the support system is weak, and there are significant challenges in terms of access, same as the domestic violence counseling. It is essential that people involved in health, medical care, welfare, education, police, and judiciary receive training and education, so that they can be aware of the reality and challenges of multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities to properly perform their duties.

While the various challenges have remained unresolved, even after the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear power plant accident in 2011, the country was hit by major earthquakes in Kumamoto and Noto, as well as rainstorm disasters in various regions, and the pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020. The difficulties of women with disabilities, who are likely to be placed in a more vulnerable

position, were also evident in these disasters. In addition to strengthening support systems during normal times, it is essential that disaster prevention planning and disaster support efforts be carried out with the participation of women with disabilities.

4. Ensuring the transformation of the domestic situation, supported by international power

In 2022, the First Report Review and Constructive Dialogue on Japan of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was held. In response, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities called for the following measures to be taken in gender equality policies to ensure equality and take effective and concrete measures to prevent multidimensional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities; mainstreaming the gender perspective into legal policies on disability; conducting research on sexual violence and domestic violence; strengthening measures for the prevention of violence, including counseling and redress; explicitly prohibiting forced sterilization and forced abortion, including the hysterectomy for women with disabilities; ensuring quality and gender-sensitive health services for all people with disabilities; developing a system for collecting data on persons with disabilities, (including the disability gender statistics), and ensuring disability diversity and gender-equitable representation in selecting the members of the Committee on Disability Policy, the Convention's domestic monitoring mechanism.

It is necessary to make sure to implement these admonishments and to resolve the multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities through shedding light to the reality of the issue by leveraging the “Law on Support for Women with Difficulties,” which came into effect in 2024. We strongly hope that a society will be created in which women with disabilities are not discriminated against based on gender or disability, and will be able to receive necessary support, be empowered, and live independently.

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T. The Role of Boys and Men

SAITO, Keisuke

In the current global trend concerning gender equality, there is growing emphasis on the importance of men being actively involved as key agents in social change to achieve gender equality. This emphasis arises from the recognition that to attain gender equality, not only women but also men must be involved as stakeholders. Additionally, it has become clear that men face unique issues that need to be addressed because of their gender.

When considering men's issues from the perspective of gender equality, it is beneficial to analyze them from two distinct viewpoints that differ greatly in nature: one as issues faced by men and the other as issues where men are the problem.

Until the end of the 20th century, discussions on gender equality tended to focus solely on women. However, there has been a recent shift towards an equal focus on men. Although this is undoubtedly a positive social change, there are still many challenges to overcome in determining how men should be involved in achieving gender equality.

1. The Generation Gap in Gender Awareness

Kumio Ito, one of the leading figures in Japanese men's studies, highlights two key terms, "gender" and "generation," as crucial for correcting the distortions in Japanese society, which failed to undergo a fundamental transformation in the 1990s, and for transitioning toward a diverse, dynamic, and stable society (Ito 2019: 53).

Indeed, there is a significant generational gap in gender awareness among male groups. For

example, let's consider the data on "time spent on household chores" from the "2021 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities" conducted by the Statistics Bureau of Japan. By examining trends in the time spent on household chores over the past 20 years among households with couples and children (excluding single-person households and those with children under the age of six), we can infer

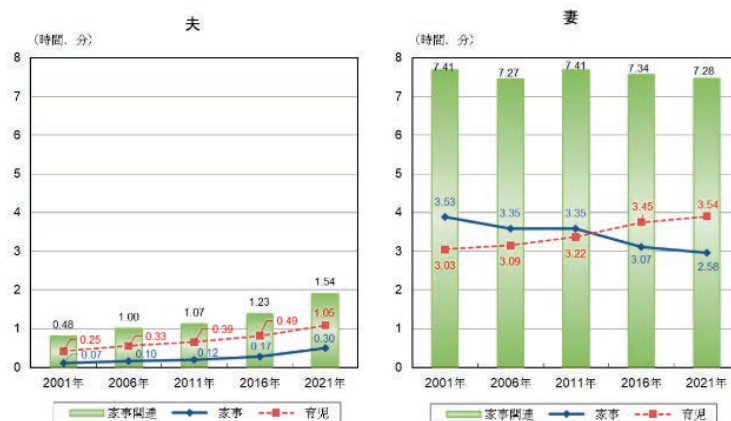


Figure 1: Transition of Time Spent on Household Chores by Husbands and Wives (2001–2021) - Weekly Average for Households with Couples and Children Under Six Years Old Source: Statistics Today No. 190 (Shigetoku Okuno, "Gender Differences in Time Spent on Household Chores in Japan - Gender Gap from the Perspective of Daily Time") p. 2

changes in values across generations (see Figure 1).

Although the gender gap remains significant, the time men spend on household chores and child-rearing is on the rise, with a notable increase from 2016 to 2021. While the time men spend on these tasks is still overwhelmingly shorter than that of women, it is clear that younger men are more involved in household chores and child-rearing.

A similar trend was observed in the other surveys. The "Survey on Awareness and Reality Regarding Genderless and Diversity" conducted by Cross Marketing, a marketing research company, in 2021 also reveals generational differences, pointing out that younger generations tend to have a higher share of household responsibilities. The survey explicitly states, "The challenge seems to be the mindset shift among men in their 40s to 60s...", and highlights that younger generations tend to share household chores more equally.

When viewed through the lens of the generational gap in gender awareness, a significant boundary can be drawn around men in their 40s (born in 1980). Indeed, around 1980, there was a rapid shift in gender-related policies, including changes in the family structure (such as the decline in the number of full-time housewives after peaking in 1975) and the implementation of gender equality policies, beginning with the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986.

In summary, with regard to the generational gap in gender awareness, younger people generally have values closer to gender equality. While many challenges remain, past efforts toward gender equality have been somewhat successful.

2. Promoting Paternity Leave

The momentum to promote paternity leave among men has been steadily increasing. This trend is driven by various factors, including changes in family structures, declining birth rates, emphasis on the role of fathers in society, and shifts in individual fathers' awareness of work-life balance.

The government has implemented several measures to increase the paternity leave uptake rate. In June 2021, the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law was amended, and the changes have been gradually implemented since April 2022. A key feature of this amendment is the introduction of a new system for paternity leave at the time of childbirth (commonly referred to as "postpartum paternity leave"). Additionally, starting

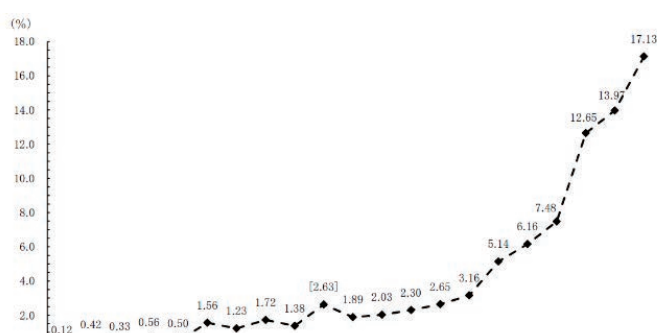


Figure 2: Trends in Paternity Leave Uptake Rate (Men)

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2023, "Overview of Results of the Basic Survey on Employment Equality for Fiscal Year 2022," p. 18.

in April 2023, companies with more than 1,000 employees are required to disclose their paternity leave utilization rates, making the facilitation of paternity leave a significant management issue for businesses.

The roots of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law can be traced back to the Welfare Law for Working Women enacted in 1972. This was followed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986, a revised version of the earlier law, and then by the enactment of the Child Care Leave Law in 1992, influenced by the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 of 1981. Since then, the law has been repeatedly amended to align with changing times, making Japan's paternity leave system one of the most generous worldwide. The UNICEF report also ranks Japan's paternity leave system as the best among 41 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), noting that "Japanese male workers are entitled to the longest period of paid paternity leave, and the system is rated the highest" (Uchida et al. 2023: 111).

This trend is likely to accelerate further. In March 2023, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida referred to increasing the paternity leave uptake rate as part of "unprecedented countermeasures against the declining birthrate," which he described as "the last chance to reverse the trend." Specifically, in the "Child Future Strategy Guidelines" approved by the Cabinet in 2023, the paternity leave uptake rate target was initially set at 30% by 2025, but it has significantly increased to 50% by 2025 and 85% by 2030.

The paternity leave uptake rate has been steadily increasing, reaching a record high of 17.13% in the fiscal year 2022 (see Figure 2). However, this approach is still far from achieving the government's target. Legal frameworks are steadily improving, and multiple surveys have shown that young men are increasingly willing to take paternal leave. For example, according to a preliminary report from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's Ikumen Project in 2024, 84.3% of young men expressed a desire to take paternity leave, with 29.2% wanting to take leave for six months or more. Looking forward, it is important to create a more flexible system and environment that makes it easier for those who wish to take paternity leave to do so.

3. Sexual Violence Against Men

Previously, the victims of sexual violence were predominantly women. While it is not uncommon for boys and men to experience sexual violence, societal prejudice, such as the belief that "men cannot be victims of sexual violence," has made it difficult to recognize male victims as a social issue. In 2023, when Johnny and Associates held a press conference acknowledging the sexual abuse of Johnny's Jr. members by the late Johnny Kitagawa, the issue of sexual violence against men gained widespread attention.

In 2017, the Japanese Penal Code was revised, changing the crime of rape, which had previously

been defined with female victims in mind, to a broader category of "forcible sexual intercourse." This revision included anal and oral intercourse, thereby making the law gender-neutral. Although the number of male victims of forcible sexual intercourse and indecent assault is still lower than the number of female victims, these cases are becoming increasingly visible in crime statistics (Ministry of Justice 2023, *White Paper on Crime 2023: Juvenile Delinquency and Growing Environments*, p. 285).

Similarly, in cases of domestic violence (DV), which has become a social issue in recent years, men have rarely been considered victims, similar to sexual violence. However, according to the *Survey on Violence Between Men and Women* (2023), violence against men by spouses or partners occurs in various ways. Among married men, 22.0% reported having experienced abuse from their spouses (compared to 27.5% of women), and 7.2% of men had been repeatedly victimized (compared to 13.2% of women). Furthermore, the percentage of men who experienced violence from their cohabiting partners was higher than that of women (82.8% vs. 75.0%, respectively). These findings highlight the fact that victims of domestic violence are not exclusively women.

4. HeForShe

HeForShe is a movement launched by UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Women as part of the effort to achieve gender equality. This movement aims to encourage people worldwide, particularly men, to take action towards gender equality. It became widely known after Emma Watson, then a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a public declaration that launched the campaign in 2014. Emma Watson's speech, in which she addressed men by saying, 'Gender equality is your issue too,' became famous. She said, "Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too. Because to date, I've seen my father's role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother's."

The initiative to address gender equality in men is a rare approach of the United Nations. However, this was not the first time the UN addressed men's issues. In the "Beijing Declaration" adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, the United Nations included, for the first time in its gender equality policy documents, a statement encouraging men to "fully participate in all actions towards equality" (Itō et al., 2022: 66). In October 2003, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women under the Department of Economic and Social Affairs hosted an Expert Group Meeting on "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality" in Brasília. The keynote speaker was R. Connell, an Australian



Figure 3: HeForShe Symbol Mark
Source: UN Women Japan Office website
(<https://japan.unwomen.org/ja/heforshe#:~:text=HeForShe>)

sociologist and one of the world's leading authorities in men's studies (Taga, 2022: 76-81).

From the Beijing Declaration in 1995 to Connell's keynote speech in 2003, and about ten years later to Emma Watson's HeForShe speech, there has been increasing attention on the role of men in achieving gender equality, both within the UN and globally. The question being evaluated is how much closer the world has come to achieving gender equality over the past decade.

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U. Older Women

OYA, Sayoko

According to the 2024 Annual Report on the Aging Society, Japan's total population is 124.35 million, and the elderly population aged 65 or over is 36.23 million - 15.71 million men and 20.51 million women - as of October 1, 2023. The ratio of the elderly to the total population is 29.1%. The higher the age group gets, the larger share of the population the women make up.

As for the household structure of the elderly, there are 8.553 million "one-person households" and 7.303 million "married-couple-only households", as of June 1, 2023 (Summary Report of Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2023). Women's percentage in "one-person households" is 64.4%, much higher than men's 35.6%. Despite the high shares of women in the elderly population and one-person households, their actual living situation remained unknown for a long time. Since 2008, however, their circumstances have gradually been pointed out by state institutions and researchers in their surveys and studies, as well as by the people and groups concerned. As a result, social issues related to elderly women living alone have begun to be clarified.

1. Surveys and studies by the state and researchers

In 2008, the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office set up "a study group for fact finding of men and women facing economic hardships", and released the results in November 2009. The findings revealed that as the numbers of one-person and single-parent households increased and the structure of employment and other factors changed, economic hardships have spread to a broader range of groups. The relative poverty rates of women were higher than those of men in most age groups. The rate gap between genders widened further in elder age groups. The relative poverty rates were particularly high in elderly woman living alone and mother-and-child households.

In 2021, the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office held an expert meeting, the "study group on marriage and family in the era of 100-year life", and released the summary of their discussion in July 2022. With the coming era of a 100-year life, the form of families has recently changed significantly in Japan. In response to such a change, the meeting aimed to clarify the reality of families from various aspects by using data, and to find and organize related challenges. The discussion comprised three main points: 1) - the current status of marriage and family; 2) - diversification of life; and 3) - attitudes toward sharing of housework and childcare and a change in those responsible for caregiving. In comparison with 1985, several changes were reported: the numbers of unmarried and divorced people have increased; the number of households with "a salaried man and a full-time housewife" has decreased, and the numbers of "double-income" and "one-person" households have grown. It was pointed out that various systems in society, working practices and people's awareness have not fully caught up with those social changes. Therefore, the expert meeting pointed out that the

systems and the working practices need to be reviewed to accommodate to our changing society so that people can live peacefully and happily in the era of a 100-year life.

According to “The Trend of the Relative Poverty Rate” (Abe 2024¹) released in 2024, the relative poverty rate of women aged 65 or over living alone is 44.1%. It is almost at the same high level as the poverty rate (44.5%) of single-parent households at the working age, which is released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The poverty rates of elderly women by marital status are 43.1% in unmarried women, 43.6% in divorced women and 32.0% in bereaved women, while 13.5% in married women. The poverty rates of unmarried and divorced women are higher than other groups. Although the poverty rate of bereaved women is slightly lower than the two groups thanks to a certain amount of income support provided by the survivor’s pension scheme, as a whole, elderly women not in married-couple households tend to fall into poverty.

2. The actual situation of elderly women living alone clarified by their own voices and through results of surveys

It took a long time for the poverty of elderly women to come to light. In 1985, the poverty rate of elderly women living alone was already as high as 70.1% (Abe 2024). It means that 7 in 10 such women were economically poor. In those days, women were generally married and supported by their husbands. Not so many women were thought to face economic hardships in their older years, and this was not seen as a significant problem. With the passage of some decades, our society has changed, seeing more divorce cases and more unmarried people. In addition, women living alone have started voicing their concerns about their circumstances. “Wakuwaku Senior Singles”, a self-support group of middle-aged and elderly single women represented by the author, has conducted the “Survey on the Actual Living Conditions of Middle-Aged and Elderly Single Women” twice, - in 2016 and 2022, and reported the actual situation to the politicians and the society through the survey result.

The 2022 survey covered 2,345 respondents who were “single women aged 40 or over not living with their spouses or partners”. Its questionnaire contained a broad range of items, including their age, attribute of being single, status of employment, income, residence, anxiety over daily life and access to support programs. Of all respondents, women aged 65 or over were 219, more than 80% of whom lived in one-person households and 90% of whom were main breadwinners. Regarding the total amount of pensions in their older years, excluding the survivor’s pension, 54.3% received less than JPY100,000 per month (including those receiving no pension) and only 7.1% were granted more than JPY200,000 per month. Those who replied, “It is slightly difficult or very difficult to live on the current amount of pension”, were 80.7%. To supplement a shortfall in income, 51.5% “worked” and 49.1% “spent” their savings. One in three cut back on their living costs. As for the level of living, 52.5% responded, “It is slightly difficult or difficult to subsist”, and 55.6% said, “The household budget

¹ ABE, Aya (2024) “The Trend of the Relative Poverty Rate (the 2022 survey update)” JSPS 22H05098¹

becomes tight after paying housing costs”. The high cost of living and the poor public housing support for low-income people contribute to worsening the life of elderly women living alone who have already subsisted on the low pension benefits.

The survey was conducted by the group of middle-aged and elderly women living alone to investigate and analyze their own actual situation, and to convey the real voices of those people behind the data to the public. The media showed a high degree of interest in the survey and gave it much publicity. Furthermore, National Diet and local assembly members started taking up the “poverty issue of middle-aged and elderly women living alone” in the question sessions of their meetings. Their voices are beginning to motivate the government and the society to address the long-left-behind issue.

Table 1. Amount of Old-age Pension per Month

Monthly pension (JPY)	Degree	Percentage
No pension	5	2.4%
~ less than 50,000	24	11.4%
50,000 ~ less than 100,000	85	40.5%
100,000 ~ less than 150,000	46	21.9%
150,000 ~ less than 200,000	27	12.9%
200,000 ~	15	7.1%
No reply	8	3.8%
Total	210	100.0%

210—the respondents aged 65 or over who ticked the “recipient of old-age pension”

Table 2. Old-age Pension – Sufficient or Insufficient?

	Degree	Percentage
Reasonably sufficient, very sufficient	32	15.8%
Slightly insufficient, quite/significantly insufficient	163	80.7%
No reply	7	3.5%
Total	202	100.0%

202 – excluding 8 of the respondents with no reply from the total of 210

Source of Table 1. & Table2:

The 2022 “Survey on the Actual Living Conditions of Middle-Aged and Elderly Single Women” By Wakuwaku Senior Singles

3. The pension issue behind the poverty of elderly women living alone

Before discussing the pension issue closely related to the poverty of elderly women living alone, it is necessary to understand what kind of era today's elderly women have lived through. The current elderly women aged 65 or over were born in or before 1959. They lived in the time when the norm of gender-based roles was dominant, in which women were expected to "get married and become dependent on their husbands and, if necessary, supplement their family income by working part-time". In their younger years, the Japanese economy was rapidly growing, so they were able to land their first jobs as regular employees. However, salaries for women were kept as low as about 60% of those for men because "women were supposed to get married and become dependents". In fact, most women became full-time housewives after marriage. Housewives are mostly hired as part-timers, who are in the status of the non-regular employee, and work to supplement their family income. Under such circumstances, for women living without a spouse, including divorced and unmarried women, it also becomes more difficult to be employed as regular workers as they age once they leave their regular employment. As a result, many women enter their old age, remaining as non-regular workers whose pensions are lower due to working for shorter periods at lower wages.

Japan's national pension system is composed of two programs, the first tier of which is the basic pension that is targeted at all the nationals. The basic pension is as low as JPY68,000 per month (fiscal 2024) even for those who have paid premiums for a full period of 40 years, making it difficult to live only on the basic pension. And the second tier - the corporate employees' pension and the mutual aid pension - is added to the first tier. The second-tier pensions are calculated on the basis of the recipients' salaries while employed and their periods in employment. So, those who were employed for shorter periods at lower salaries can only receive a smaller amount of pensions. Moreover, as a household with "a salaried man and a full-time housewife" is regarded as a "standard household model" in the corporate employees' pension plan, those who live alone are left behind in the system planning.

The 2022 Survey on the Recipients of Old-age Pension indicates that the percentage of elderly women who receive the low basic pension only is higher than that of elderly men (13.6% for women, 5.8% for men). Women's average amount of annual pensions, including the second tier, is JPY1,207,000, over JPY700,000 lower than men's average amount of JPY1,926,000. The phenomenon of the elderly women's pension is caused by the fact that the basic pension amount is limited in the first place. It is also due to the reality of the women's low salaries and their short subscription periods to the corporate employees' pension or the mutual aid pension, which is brought about by the circumstances not allowing them to work for a long period. More than half of elderly women receive pensions lower than livelihood protection benefits (the total of housing and livelihood assistance) in urban areas.

Table 3. Amount of Pension for Men and Women

Amount of Pension (JPY)	Men	Women
Less than 500,000	2.4%	6.9%
500,000 ~ 1,000,000	13.7%	42.9%
1,000,000 ~ 2,000,000	31.8%	37.5%
2,000,000 ~ 3,000,000	47.4%	12.1%
3,000,000 or more	4.8%	0.8%

Compiled by the author utilizing the 2022 Survey on the Recipients of Old-age Pension

Elderly women with spouses – if in line with the standard household in the corporate employees’ pension plan – do not need to pay premiums for medical insurance and basic pension as long as they are dependents. They appear to be protected by their husbands’ pensions but their individual pensions are low because of their short subscription periods to the corporate employees’ welfare pensions. If they get divorced in their older years, they may fall into poverty. At present, the national pension system - due to be revised in 2025 - is under review and deliberation at the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare’s Social Security Council (the pension sub-committee). The agenda includes issues related to women and pension, such as the dependent spouses of salaried workers and the bereaved family pension. The sub-committee is scheduled to complete its revision plan at the end of 2024. It is worth paying close attention to the process of the discussion.

4. Health and care of elderly women

Japanese people’s average life expectancy in 2023 was 87.14 years for women and 81.09 years for men, both of which exceeded those in the previous year for the first time in three years, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Japan has ranked top in the life expectancy of women for 39 consecutive years among the countries and regions where such statistics are available. Judging from the healthy life expectancy in which people have no limitation in daily life (75.38 years for women and 72.68 years for men as of 2019), women are more affected than men by medical and care insurance systems on which they depend for longer years.

The long-term care insurance system started in April 2000 to respond to social changes, such as the nuclearization of families and the aging of people who care for elderly members in their family. The system was launched for the following purposes: to make a society- and community-wide approach in elder care; and to assist those in need of care in leading independent lives. This epoch-making system gives a hope of being able to live through their older years to elderly men and women, including those who have neither spouses nor children and married couples who might become alone in the future. Nevertheless, the system has become far from its initial ideals and worse through the system revisions made every three years since its start. The 2024 revision has included neither a “plan

to transfer the care service at 1-2 levels to the general program”, nor a “plan to charge fees for care planning”, but the basic remuneration for home-care services has been lowered. Home-care services, such as physical nursing care and daily life assistance, are indispensable in supporting the lives of those living alone and those in need of care. But due to hard work and low salary, there is a serious shortage of workers sustaining the home-care services. Therefore, it is of concern that if the current situation continues, it might cause the home-care services to collapse, leaving many elderly people without care or assistance.

5. Human rights of elderly women

In Japan, the number of elderly people who live alone is expected to increase to 10.84 million by 2050. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has launched a pilot program for the purpose of providing support to people who have no families or relatives to depend on. The program is intended for municipal governments to help such people apply for the medical care, to provide the emergency support and to offer necessary procedures after death. Some local communities and municipal governments have started working together to stop elderly people from being isolated in a society-wide approach. Our social structure is being rearranged, though gradually, to respond to the needs of the entire elderly population, including those living alone. Women’s economic vulnerability (low pensions) is a cause for women to fall into poverty in their older years. However, this issue is not listed on the high priority agenda for the government or the politicians although it concerns their right to live and their human rights. The poverty rate of elderly women living alone is high due to their low pensions, and married women cannot afford to live without the pensions paid to their husbands. Whichever position they are in, the current circumstances do not guarantee their individual rights to live or their human rights.

Recently, the employment rate of women has increased, but more than half of them is hired as non-regular workers. The ratio of women employed as regular workers peaks at the age of late twenties. After that, it continues to decline, marking the “L-shaped curve”. As women get older, they become more likely to have no choice but to be hired as non-regular workers at low wages. The gender pay gap for regular employees has not improved yet. Without improvement in these unfair employment situations, the women who will get into the elder generation in 20 years will also face the financial difficulty, as the elder women currently are. A society where women can financially live alone can protect elderly women’s human rights and their right to live. Therefore, it is an important agenda to eliminate discrimination against women in employment and to review the systems which covers the gender gap in financial situation (e.g. Category 3 insured person in the pension system, spouse tax deduction).

V. Agricultural, Forest, and Fishing Women

NAKAMICHI, Hitomi

1. Current Status of Women in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, as Seen in Statistics

(1) Decrease in the Working Population

Japan's working population in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries is in a critical situation, declining significantly and also aging over the 30-year period from 1990 to 2020. Japan's food supply is therefore in a truly critical situation.

Although the agricultural workforce has decreased by about half, as shown in Table 1, the number of women has decreased by about one-third. By 2020, the proportion of women in the workforce had dropped to about 40%, indicating that women are leaving agriculture at a faster rate than men. In addition, while the number of the agricultural workforce has increased slightly in recent years, the increase in the number of women has been small.

The workforce in fisheries has decreased even more drastically, shrinking to one-third over the past 30 years. The number of women workers has dropped to less than one-fifth, with women workers accounting for less than 10% of the workforce.

On the other hand, the number of the forestry workforce has only decreased by around 40%, and the decrease in women in the forestry workforce has remained at approximately the same rate. In recent years, the number of the forestry workforce has been increasing slightly, and the number and proportion of female workers has increased slightly as well.

Table 1. Female workers in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. unit: thousands, %

Year	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Female working population in agriculture	3,403	2,372	2,171	1,788	1,300	1,009	1,095
Ratio of females	60.2	57.3	55.8	53.3	49.9	48.1	43.9
Female working population in forestry	18,0	13,8	11,5	7,0	8,7	9,1	9,7
Ratio of females	16.4	16.4	17.2	15.0	12.6	14.3	15.1
Female working population in fisheries	67	54	44	36	30	22	12
Ratio of females	18.1	17.9	16.9	16.3	14.8	13.1	9.9

Source: Agricultural and Forestry Census, and Fishery Census, by year; forestry population taken from the National Census

One of the reasons for the recent slight increase in the agricultural workforce is the migration of Japanese citizens to rural areas through the Community-Reactivating Cooperator Squad Program. Regarding the increase in the forestry workforce, particularly the rise in female workers, the Green Youth Employment Preparation Grant Program has played a significant role by supporting skill acquisition at forestry colleges and ensuring job placement. Additionally, the Green Employment Program has provided substantial support for forestry employment. Collectively, these employment support policies have contributed to the increase in the workforce.

(2) Lack of Progress in Women's Participation in Major Agricultural, Forestry, and Fisheries Organizations

An indicator of social participation in rural areas is women's participation in major organizations in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, and their involvement in decision-making.

The participation rate of active women in the main organizations of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries has increased. As of 2020, the agricultural cooperatives have the highest active women participation rate, at 23%, while this rate drops to just 5% in fishing cooperatives and 11% in forestry cooperatives, as shown in Table 2.

Regarding participation in decision-making within major agricultural, forestry, and fisheries organizations, the first organization to be mentioned is the municipal agricultural committee, which makes significant decisions about regional agriculture. In the past 30 years, the number of women in agricultural committees has only reached as high as 10%. Moreover, while the number of municipal agricultural committees without any women members has decreased dramatically, women still only account for around 10%. A major factor behind this change is the vision of the Agricultural Committee Act. In 2015, significant revisions were made, and Article 8, Section 7 stipulated that “consideration must be given to avoid significant bias based on age, gender, etc.,” which led to a sharp decline in committees without any women members. On the other hand, Article 9 requires the recommendation of candidates from “farmers, organizations of farmers, and other relevant parties” and requires the simultaneous reduction of the number of committee members by about half, which has made it more difficult for women to be selected.

Looking at the board members of agricultural cooperatives, one of the farmers' organizations also involved in the election of agricultural committee members mentioned above, the number of female board members has increased, but it is still less than 10%. As for the fishery and forestry cooperatives, female board members account for less than 1%, a miniscule number that has remained stagnant for the past decade.

Table 2. Female participation ratio in major organizations in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries
unit: %

Year		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Active members	Agricultural cooperative	12.1	13.02	14.2	16.1	18.9	21.2	22.7
	Fishery cooperative	5.8	5.8	5.7	6.8	5.7	5.6	5.3
	Forest cooperative				6.6	8.2	9.4	11.3
Decision-making board members	Agriculture committee	0.15	0.33	1.8	4.1	4.9	7.4	12.3
	Agricultural cooperative	0.10	0.20	0.6	1.9	3.9	7.2	9.1
	Fishery cooperative	0.10	0.14	0.2	0	0.4	0.5	0.5
	Forest cooperative				0.2	0.4	0.4	0.6

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, Bureau of Economic Affairs, Administration Division; Agricultural Cooperatives Division; Fisheries Agency Cooperative Division

2. Revision of the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas and Women's Participation in Agricultural Management

The Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas was revised in 2023. Regarding women, there were no changes at all compared to before the revision. As in the previous version, in the field of agricultural policy, the “promotion of women's participation” aims to “properly evaluate their roles in farm business” and “promote the development of an environment that allows women to have opportunities to participate in farm business and other related activities by their own volition.”

Table 3 shows the percentage of male and female farm managers. The number of farms in Japan is decreasing, and the number of both male and female farm managers is decreasing as well. The percentage of female farm managers is not only less than 10% but is also decreasing, indicating that women are withdrawing from farming operations.

Table 3 Gender of farm managers unit: %

Year	Male managers	Female managers	Ratio of female managers
2015	1,241	89	7.2
2020	976	61	6.2

Source: Agricultural and Forestry Census

Table 4 shows the percentage of male and female farm managers with participants in management policy decision-making by gender. First, regardless of the gender of the manager, there are many farms with “no participants in decision-making on management policies”, which means many managers make decisions alone, with 70% of female managers and 60.5% of male managers in 2020. Even when there are participants in policy making, the number of farms with participants of different genders has decreased in 2020, suggesting that it is difficult to participate together in making management decisions.

Table 4: Male and female participants in management policy decisions unit: %

Year	Male manager					Female manager				
	With participants	Both male and female participants	With male participants	With female participants	No participants	With participants	Both male and female participants	With male participants	With female participants	No participants
2015	47.9	7.7	4.8	35.4	52.1	33.9	6.0	22.9	5.1	66.1
2020	35.7	7.6	3.8	24.3	64.3	29.0	5.4	19.9	3.6	71.0

Source: Agricultural and Forestry Census

Although women's asset building and farmland ownership was identified as an issue in the 2018 CSW, only 10.3% of women owned farmland (19.5% in their 50s or older) in the 2013 Survey on Promotion of Female Farmers' Active Engagement (MAFF website), and most of them inherited the land from their parents. The survey targeted “Female Farmers with Progressive Initiatives” and even so, it shows that transferring farmland to married women is very difficult. There is still no data on ownership of management assets by gender, such as farmland, forests, fishing boats, or agricultural, forestry, and fishing facilities.

3. Report of the Investigative Committee on the Promotion of Women's Activities in Agriculture

The “Study Group for the Promotion of Women's Active Engagement in Agriculture” was established in 2020 to review the progress of the report “Women in the New Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishing Communities Toward Year 2001” (called “Vision”) formulated in 1992, and to consider specific measures from a broad perspective.

The study group's report points out that various issues still remain, and that outside of the leadership level, the situation continues to prevent women farmers from demonstrating their abilities. The findings emphasize that, although the number of certified farmers (managers) applying for business improvement plans, either individually or jointly with their spouses, has increased, female certified farmers still account for less than 5%. Therefore, policy support is needed to help (1) create an environment in rural areas and farm households that encourages women to continue both their personal lives and work, and to fully demonstrate their abilities. (2) Temporary special measures (affirmative action) are required to increase women's participation in decision-making. (3) The framework of family farm management agreement should be designed as a Japanese-style partnership, as this is an effective approach to fixed role-sharing, work-life balance, and other issues. (4) It is necessary to create an environment that makes it easier for women to participate in face-to-face training and information exchange meetings, and to take measures that prevent childcare and nursing care from becoming barriers to participation. In addition, (5) the creation of a cross-cutting network to connect women’s farming organizations is also required.

4. Women’s Issues in Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishing Communities Related to Declining Population and Aging

The issues reported in “Vision” still remain today. The “change in consciousness and behavior” of rural communities and the “creation of an environment where women can live and work comfortably” have not progressed sufficiently. Moreover, the “change in consciousness and behavior” and the “improvement of women’s abilities and the development of various capacity building systems” have stagnated, and the “improvement of their economic status and the conditions of employment and working environment” in other industries makes women seek opportunities outside of communities.

Organizations that once focused on supporting these women have been dismantled, and the technical staff who provided support have disappeared. As a result, the “development of a system that can accept and implement the ‘Vision’” has regressed.

Japan's food production is in a critical situation due to the declining birthrate and aging population in agricultural, forestry, and fishing communities. Society remains androcentric in its thinking and structure, and there are various obstacles that prevent women from playing a vital role in society to fulfill their potential. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to introduce temporary special measures (affirmative action). It is also important to combat the isolation of women by promoting the formation of diverse women's organizations and creating a cross-sectional network connecting these organizations.

W. Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGM)

HARA, Minata
NISHIYAMA, Akira

1. Current Status of Legislation on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)

Since December 2019, when “JAWW NGO Report for Beijing+25” was issued, through August 2024, the Government of Japan (GoJ) has enacted several laws related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). No significant progress has been made, however, on the three key legislative reforms recommended by the United Nations, namely, 1) Anti-discrimination law based on SOGI, 2) Marriage equality, and 3) Amendment/elimination of legal gender change requirements of the “Act on Special Cases in Handling Gender Status for Persons with Gender Identity Disorder (hereafter GID Special Provisions Act).” Contrastingly, several landmark court decisions have been issued by the judiciary, which has been remarkably proactive. This paper is an update on the recent political/legal developments related to SOGIESC as well as the social barriers that still exist in this country.

2. Enactment of so called “SOGI Awareness Law”

As of April 1st, 2023, 66 local governments have introduced anti-discrimination ordinances based on SOGI, according to The Japan Research Institute for Local Government. Meanwhile, anti-discrimination law based on SOGI at the national level, which the LGBTQ+ community has long called for, has not been enacted until today.

The political climate shifted in February 2023 with reports of discriminatory remarks against SGMs and same-sex couples made by then-secretary to the Prime Minister, Masayoshi Arai. These remarks, together with the G7 Hiroshima Summit scheduled in May, fueled the public call for SOGI-based legislation. As a result, the “Law to Promote People’s Understanding on Diversity of SOGI (hereafter, SOGI Awareness Law)” was passed on 16th of June, 2023. Although this law only stipulates the basic principles of SOGI and does not specifically prohibit discrimination, it is nevertheless the first SOGI-related law of its kind.

The new law requires the government to create a basic implementation plan and operational guidelines, publish progresses, conduct academic research and establish a liaison council to coordinate policy implementation. In addition, local governments, employers and schools are “encouraged” to implement necessary measures related to SOGI diversity. However, the forming of the basic implementation plan and operational guidelines are at a standstill (as of August 2024) and need to be formulated urgently.

3. Consecutive Court Rulings Guarantee SOGI-Related Rights

In contrast to the slow progress of the legislature, progressive judicial rulings have significantly

increased in the past several years. One example is the Supreme Court ruling of October 2023. Under current law, a transgender person needs to fulfil several requirements based on the “GID Special Provisions Act” in order to legally change the gender marker. Supreme Court ruled that sterilization, which is one of the mandates, is against Article 13 of the Constitution since it infringes on the “freedom from bodily harm.”

Furthermore, the Supreme Court ruled that it is unlawful to restrict transgender woman from using certain bathrooms at the workplace. The Supreme Court also ruled for the first time on March 2024 that same-sex partners are eligible for crime survivors’ benefits, since the “relationship between a crime victim and their same-sex partner can be considered as *de facto* marriage.”

As described above, courts have been issuing landmark decisions to remove social barriers based on SOGI. As for lawsuits demanding marriage equality, which started in 2019, six out of seven District Courts ruled that not allowing same-sex marriage is “against the Constitution” or “is in an unconstitutional state.” Sapporo High Court also ruled it unconstitutional. We are keeping an eye on the Supreme Court decision that will be issued in a few years’ time.

4. Challenges in Creating a Safe Environment for Sexual/Gender Minorities (SGMs)

Despite the landmark judicial decisions, many SGMs living in Japan still face a number of social barriers in their daily life. LGBTQ+ people living in metropolitan areas now have more access to local social events or lectures on sexual/gender diversity, where they can meet their peers and allies. Many SGMs living in rural areas, however, have no such support system and are often forced to live closeted. This section takes up issues that need to be tackled to improve the living conditions of SGMs, with a major focus on consultation in the field of welfare.

The first barrier is the difficulty in coming out. According to a recent nationwide LGBTQ Children and Youth Survey¹ conducted in 2022 by ReBit, a certified NPO, 91.6 % of its teenage respondents do not feel safe enough to confide in their parents, and 93.6 % of school-aged youth hesitate to confide to their homeroom teacher. Many users of government-funded SGM consultations by telephone/SNS talk about how they are unable to disclose their identity to such professionals as doctors, counsellors and even social workers, for fear of receiving judgmental treatment or discrimination. The problems that come up range from prohibiting or forcing to come out; disclosure without consent; restricting the use of name, hairstyle or clothing of the chosen gender; trivializing the sexual abuse of boys and men, heeding to the wishes of the family rather than one’s own, restricting the use of communal space or toilet the user wants, and verbal abuse and disregard of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Second barrier is difficulty in gaining access to administrative services. Local governments have

¹ “LGBTQ Children and Youth Survey 2022.” Respondents: 2623 SGMs of ages 12-34.
<https://prtimes.jp/main/html/rd/p/000000031.000047512.html>

been making efforts to improve the social services to complement the lagging efforts at the national level, by conducting local government and educational staff training on LGBT issues, displaying rainbow flags at the public office counters, introducing the “partnership oath” system for legally same-sex partners, and setting up consultation services dealing specifically with SOGIE issues. Even so, many LGBTQ+ people remain unable to enjoy appropriate administrative services due to lack of awareness regarding gender and sexuality at the administrative counter. Cases of harassment and unintentional violation of human rights have increased in the field of welfare, in particular, as due to increased visibility of SGMs and perceived contact with the welfare workers.

Here are some typical cases of human rights violations at government offices and welfare services:

- Discrimination by gender stereotype: At the employment agency service counter, a client who informed the staff about having gender incongruence was recommended to take a ‘backyard job’.
- Dismissing one’s gender identity: A client was treated by their registered gender and was referred to as ‘she,’ even though they clearly stated to have no gender identity.
- Preventing gender expression: When a client asked to be treated according to her preferred gender, the welfare office told her to “better not tell anyone” and deprived her of the opportunity.

It is difficult to find out which of the government’s gender/sexuality-related services and reforms are now available:

- Administrative reform has made it possible to remove the legal gender from the front side of the health insurance card and transcribe it at the back. Likewise, legal gender can be omitted by request from the certificate of residence register. But these requests are often refused by the local government staff who are unaware of the changes, thereby depriving the rights of transgender citizens.
- In Japan, national health insurance does not cover the use of hormones for gender transition. A client, who heard from a transgender colleague that “hormone treatment is not allowed if you are on welfare,” decided to give up applying for welfare even though she needed it. (To be exact, hormones are allowed at one’s own expense while on welfare as long as it is declared.)

Denial of partner relationship, the family closet and the pressure to conform:

The counsellor in charge of the local government consultation service referred to one’s long-standing partner as “your friend”.

- A client told us that he wanted to apply for welfare but couldn’t, because he didn’t want the neighbors to find about his same-sex partner.
- A client who was looking after an elderly parent said he had no intension of using the public

elderly care services even though he was eligible, because his father “wears women’s clothes.”

5. Future Challenges

Above examples clearly indicate that SOGIE-related human rights violations and harassment in administrative and welfare services are a serious issue. One of the reasons for this is the lack of social awareness training and inadequate social support of SOGIESC issues. ReBit's “Caregivers’ LGBTQ Awareness Survey 2023” shows that approximately 50% had supported LGBTQ clients, and nearly 90% of them felt that their support was neither sufficient nor appropriate. The survey attributed this to a lack of professional training. In the same survey, 88% of those who were certified in Japan's three major welfare-related professions said that gender diversity was never taken up in their training courses.

Based on such surveys, “Questions on so-called power harassment and abuse in the field of welfare” was submitted to the Diet in June 2024. The government’s response was that “the prevention (of so-called power harassment and abuse in the field of welfare) is not only desirable under the Law for Comprehensive Promotion of Labor Policy, but also under the Child Welfare Law, Abuse Prevention Law for Persons with Disabilities, and Abuse Prevention Law for the Elderly.” However, no guidance or specific remedial measures have been provided so far, and we await more development in the near future.

The burden on SGMs’ mental health is another serious issue that needs to be addressed. The lack of social awareness and the infrastructure of social support for SOGIESC is taking toll on the mental health of SGMs. ReBit's Children and Youth Survey 2022 reports that 48% of teenage respondents considered suicide. The Nippon Foundation's “5th Suicide Awareness Survey”², published in March 2023, also reports that more than 75% of sexual violence survivors considered suicide.

The survey indicates that sexual assault of transgender/non-binary youth is more than twice as likely as cisgender women, and four times more likely than cisgender men. The strong assumption that the women who need safe and secure shelters are all “cisgender and heterosexual” makes it difficult to use for those who do not fit these descriptions. On the other hand, the development of facilities where transgender and male survivors can feel safe remains untouched. Countermeasures to support transgender people and men who have suffered sexual assault are urgently needed.

Will “excluding transgender women” really protect cisgender women?

With the enactment of the SOGI Awareness Law, the backlash against LGBTQ+ has also

² The Nippon Foundation “5th Suicide Awareness Survey” https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/app/uploads/2023/04/new_pr_20230407_01.pdf
(Respondents: 14,819 men and women of ages 18-29 nationwide)

intensified. In particular, verbal attacks towards transgender women are increasing with the argument that “excluding transgender women will protect women's safety”.

Here, transgender women are being pitted against cisgender women and depicted as a “threat to (cisgender) women.” The voice is becoming stronger not only in civil society but also in the political arena.

For instance, after the enactment of the SOGI Awareness Law, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party established a new Diet Members’ Caucus to “Protect the Safety and Security of All Women and the Fairness of Women's Sports.” The caucus requested the Ministry of Justice to retain the reproductive sterility requirement and formulated its own bill to amend the GID Special Provisions Act to impose such new mandates as hormone intake for a certain period of time, which would mean an additional burden on one’s health.

In response to these developments, we need to promote the further inclusion of SGMs in public policies based on the consultation contents and survey data, while enacting the anti-discrimination legislation, which has been left behind. It is also necessary for society as a whole, to eliminate stereotyped assumptions on gender and sexuality, and to work together with other social movements to create a safe community where diverse people can live safely and securely.

X. Disaster Prevention, Mitigation, and Reconstruction

Japan's Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction (JWNDRR)

FUNABASHI, Kuniko

Introduction

It is now common knowledge around the world that gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential for disaster risk reduction. In Japan, however, women are absent or underrepresented in decision making, despite shouldering the entire burden of labor associated with care behind the scenes, without compensation, in emergency response, recovery, and reconstruction efforts in disaster-hit areas.

Nevertheless, women have faced the varied problems of increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters, and combined disasters such as nuclear incidents alongside natural events, and empowered each other by forming networks within and without disaster-affected areas, and engaging in diverse activities and learning programs. Now, we have learned that disasters magnify the discrimination and disparities that already existed, that disaster risks are determined by the vulnerabilities created by society, and that the harms suffered vary according to one's position. This paper seeks to bring attention to the following issues: how women have confronted the invisible gender discrimination and disparities in disaster-affected areas; the impact that the nuclear incident, a disaster of human origin, has had on women; domestic disaster policies and the state of disaster-affected areas, from the perspective of gender; and challenges going forward, based on international trends and the domestic situation, and with a focus on the international standard Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

1. The formation of women's networks

Experiences such as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 and the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 led to the creation, expansion, reinforcement, and promotion of a range of women's networks, as well as the connection of such initiatives across the country. Japan's Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction (JWNDRR) is one of these organizations, and continues to advocate policy to the government from the perspectives of gender and diversity. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Women's Net Kobe was quick to deploy countermeasures that had been applied in response to violence against women when they experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake firsthand. Community organizations such as All Japan Women's Shelter Network that support female survivors of domestic violence have established 24-hour hotlines for consultations and worked painstakingly to bring visibility to human rights violations such as sexual violence (which are just the tip of the iceberg). Women from Equal Net Sendai investigated the state of the damage in the region

affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and put together a report of their findings.¹ A range of projects are being undertaken at Gender Equality Centers in disaster-affected prefectures, in collaboration with local women's NPOs, including the training of women leaders and consultation services following disasters, including but by no means limited to sessions for those suffering from PTSD.

It was the women and mothers living in Fukushima who were the first to leap to action following the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident. They measured the radioactivity levels themselves, and entered into discussions with educational establishments and the local government. Meanwhile, people were organizing their own evacuation to different parts of the country in order to distance themselves from the radioactive material. Women's networks were also formed to assist in such efforts. Women of Fukushima Against Nuclear Power protested in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in October 2011 for three days, and the anti-nuclear movement has continued to pitch tents and demonstrate outside METI from that point until the present day.

2. Japanese government initiatives, and challenges

The Japanese government first introduced a resolution entitled "Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters" at the 56th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2012, aiming to share the experience of and lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake with other countries and to promote initiatives that take greater consideration of women.

Indeed, the Gender Equality Bureau has become central to the Japanese government's disaster policy following the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the promotion of 'gender equality' and 'women's perspectives' are listed among that organization's policies.

The Basic Act on Disaster Management (as revised in 2021) specifies that one of the principles in accordance with which disaster control measures must be taken is as follows: "...the victims are provided with appropriate aid according to the timing, taking into account the ages, genders, existence or non-existence of disabilities, and other circumstances of the disaster victims." *Women's Perspective for Strengthening Disaster Response Capabilities: Guidelines for disaster prevention and reconstruction from the perspective of gender equality*, guidelines for the management of evacuation centers, clearly sets out resources including a stockpile checklist, a shelter checklist, and a check sheet for the collection of gender-specific data. Furthermore, there has been a systematization of disaster case management, whereby an assessment of the individual damages and resulting living conditions is used to inform tailored planning and the formulation of support measures, as well as the provision of coordinated livelihood support. Communication of these policies to the local level has been

¹ *Higashi nihon daishinsai ni tomonau 'shinsai to josei' ni kansuru chōsa hōkokusho* [Survey report on 'women and earthquakes' following the Great East Japan Earthquake], 2012.

insufficient, however, meaning that it is difficult to see results on the ground.

The Cabinet Office established the District Disaster Management Plan System in 2016, as a result of which the number of district disaster management plans rose from 984 in 2017 to 2,428 in 2023, but there is an absence of gender-based and diversity-respecting perspectives. One observes the policy's background as a local government-led initiative, formulated by male-dominated community and local community associations and voluntary disaster prevention organizations.

The level of women's participation in decision making at all levels with respect to disaster-related policy is rising, but far below the government's target of 30%, at 19.2% at the prefectural level and 10.2% at the municipality level (as of 2022). Women's participation in decision making at regional voluntary disaster prevention organizations is extraordinarily low, at under 10% in around 40% of municipalities; furthermore, women occupy between 0 and 10% of all staff at the disaster prevention departments of around 60% of cities, towns, and village in the country.

There is no overlooking that the reductions to firefighting and administrative staff due to the vast number of municipal mergers that took place during the Heisei era (1989–2019), as well as the rapid shift to non-regular labor in the civil service, have also played a part in the vulnerability of municipality disaster-response capabilities.

3. Variations in the impact of disasters due to gender, age, and social class

There is insufficient objective data in Japan to demonstrate the variations in how natural disasters are experienced as a result of various characteristics of a given individual such as gender, age, dis/ability, nationality, social class, and sexuality.

Table 1 provides a gender comparison of the number of deaths caused by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake. 3,680 women (57.2% of total deaths) died as a result of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, almost 1,000 above the figure for men (2,713, or 42.8% of the total). The story is similar for the Great East Japan Earthquake, which led to the passing of 5,287 men (approximately 40%) and 8,244 women (approximately 60%), meaning that women accounted for around 60% of deaths in both cases. Of those, around 60% were elderly women. With the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, many elderly single women, who accounted for half of those living in relative poverty, became victims of collapsed buildings due to their inferior accommodations.

We do not have gender-based statistics on the deaths caused indirectly by these earthquakes, but 919 deaths were caused indirectly by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, and approximately 90% of those indirect victims were 60 or older. 2,688 deaths were caused indirectly by the Great East Japan Earthquake (as of March 2013), including 1,263 refugees from the nuclear incident (according to the Reconstruction Agency, as of August 2012), and around 90% were of people aged 65 or older. These

figures demonstrate the vulnerability of older people.²

Table 1: Comparison by gender of deaths caused by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and Great East Japan Earthquake

	Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake		Great East Japan Earthquake (Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number of deaths	2,713 (42.4%)	3,680 (57.6%)	6,287 (approx. 40%)	8,244 (approx. 60%)
Total of male and female deaths	6,393		14,531	
Under 70 years	1,754 (27.4%)	2,124 (33.2%)	2,596 (17.9%)	2,896 (19.9%)
70–79 years	488 (7.6%)	780 (12.1%)	1,794 (12.3%)	1,965 (13.5%)
80 years and over	471 (7.4%)	776 (12.1%)	1,290 (8.8%)	2,091 (14.4%)
Age unknown			607 (4.2%)	1,292 (8.9%)

Note: Based on data from the *White Paper on Gender Equality 2012*.

The main causes of deaths indirectly resulting from disasters are substandard conditions at evacuation shelters, and the physical and mental strain caused by moving between shelters, both of which could be described as human-caused disasters. In the absence of any established standards for the certification of victims whose deaths were indirectly caused by disasters, local governments make their own decisions. Once certified, disaster condolence grants are provided. The number of deaths indirectly caused by disasters is published in the form of the number of certified victims for the disaster condolence grants. The value of the disaster condolence grant is JPY 5 million with respect to the breadwinner of a household, and JPY 2.5 million with respect to an individual who is not the household's breadwinner. There is a large income disparity between men and women within a household, with men as the breadwinner in the majority of them. This means that it is difficult for a woman to be deemed the household breadwinner, which amounts to indirect gender-based discrimination. The foremost priority is the lives that can be saved through policy—it is imperative that the number of deaths caused indirectly by disasters is brought down to zero.

4. The impact of the nuclear incident on women

What was the impact of the combined disaster of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident together with a severe earthquake, a catastrophe beyond prior human experience, on the people of Fukushima, on its women, and on Japanese society more widely? While progress stalls in terms of returning evacuees to their homes, infrastructure-focused 'residentless' reconstruction projects are being pushed ahead in an entanglement of interests as general contractors, builders, and male

² Mitani, et al. "Consideration of Vulnerability Concerning the Elderly on Disaster and Disaster-related Deaths." *Journal of the Japan Academy for Health Behavioral Science* 29 (2014): 23-30. 2014.

politicians swarm toward the large budgets provided by the national resilience policy. There is nowhere for women to voice their opinions, and 33.9% of Fukushima Prefecture’s municipal councils have zero female membership (as of 2021), which can be compared against a national average of 18.9%. Nevertheless, there are women working their hardest in patriarchal councils—often facing abusive language from those in positions of power, as the only female representative in their council—voicing concerns about matters such as children’s health, contaminated water runoff, and the town’s welfare policies.³ Given the scarcity of venues where women can express their opinions, so-called ‘evacuee mamas’ acted on their own judgment to voluntarily evacuate in order to protect their children from radiation poisoning. However, society has directed harsh gender-based scrutiny on their decision, and these women have been forced to confront many difficulties. The prejudice against women having less science-based reaction to radiation held by men, including their husbands, has led to rifts between couples and even divorces; there has been a lack of public support, grounded in the idea of personal responsibility for those who evacuated voluntarily; and the media used language to praise them that was couched in terms such as “female instincts,” or “uniquely female sensitivity.”

Even so, these women realized the danger posed by nuclear power, a national project and symbol of the patriarchal system itself, and leapt out from their role as simply ‘wives’ in Fukushima, a place where the ideas about the family structure are deeply engrained. In doing so, they are becoming aware of the structures and contradictions of the state and society, questioning the current form of society, and becoming a force for transformation.

5. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and international movements

Sendai Mayor Kazuko Kōri participated in the High-Level Meeting on the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 that was held at the UN in May 2023. Mayor Kōri presented progress that had been made on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as the centralized collection and analysis of statistics relating to disaster damage across various departments. Although this was commendable as the first such attempt by any municipality, there was no analysis from the perspective of gender and diversity, with gender-based statistics also absent.⁴ At this midterm review, it was proposed that steps be taken to respond to environmental degradation and climate change, including the establishment of early warning systems, sounding the alarm on development that exploits nature, and enhancing integration with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Important problems concerning Japan’s disaster policy were raised, such as further improving the quality and availability of risk management approaches and risk

³ Funabashi Kuniko, “*Jendā no shiten naki fukkō seisaku 10 nen* [10 years of reconstruction policy without a gender perspective].” *f visions* 3 (2021).

⁴ Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. 2023. <https://sendaiframeork-mtr.undrr.org/high-level-meeting-midterm-review-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

data, improving risk communication and appropriate communication of decision making. The Sendai Gender Action Plan (GAP) was jointly developed by the UNDRR, UNIFEM, and UNFPA, on the basis of the political declaration, with nearly 500 gender stakeholders from 65 countries involved in the consultation process, including participation from JWNDRR. It was recognized that prioritizing gender equality, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, and gender-related disaster risk reduction as components of each country's disaster policy would accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

Sendai GAP's priorities include understanding disaster risk by increasing the availability of data disaggregated by factors such as gender and age, and strengthening disaster risk governance through gender equality in laws and policies, and meaningful participation of women and people from other diverse groups in decision making. Japan's policy of assessing the level of participation purely through quantification, including redefinition of qualifiers for such quantification, require investigation.

International movements such as Sendai GAP are hardly shared among government ministries and agencies, but they are also not being publicized to civil society

6. Future challenges

With the complex crises caused by the intensification and greater frequency of natural disasters brought about by climate change, pandemics, and rising geopolitical tensions, the reality is that achieving the SDGs will be extraordinarily difficult.

It is clear that progress toward the creation of a sustainable society in Japan will stall without the elimination of gender discrimination. As we have explored, however, the Japanese government over the last 30 years has lacked the political will to end gender discrimination, making it impossible for the country to escape from its position as a 'sexist superpower.' Restarting nuclear power plants, the rapid expansion of poverty due to widening disparity, depopulation, and the policy of abandoning the elderly are all consequences of the patriarchal system (male-dominated society) that prioritizes the economy above all else. Our challenge for the future is to make the Japanese government enforce international standards for the elimination of gender discrimination. In specific terms, the most important challenges are as follows: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Sendai GAP—the latter of which will accelerate implementation of the former—must be disseminated to and acted on by local governments and civil society; national laws must be put in place to protect life, without bias toward infrastructure; and systems must be maintained that propose and implement data-driven disaster policies, taking into account gender- and diversity-perspectives, in the reconstruction of disaster-resilient communities. Indeed, women need to play prominent roles in all of these areas.

Y. Technology and Gender

NPO Waffle

1. Introduction

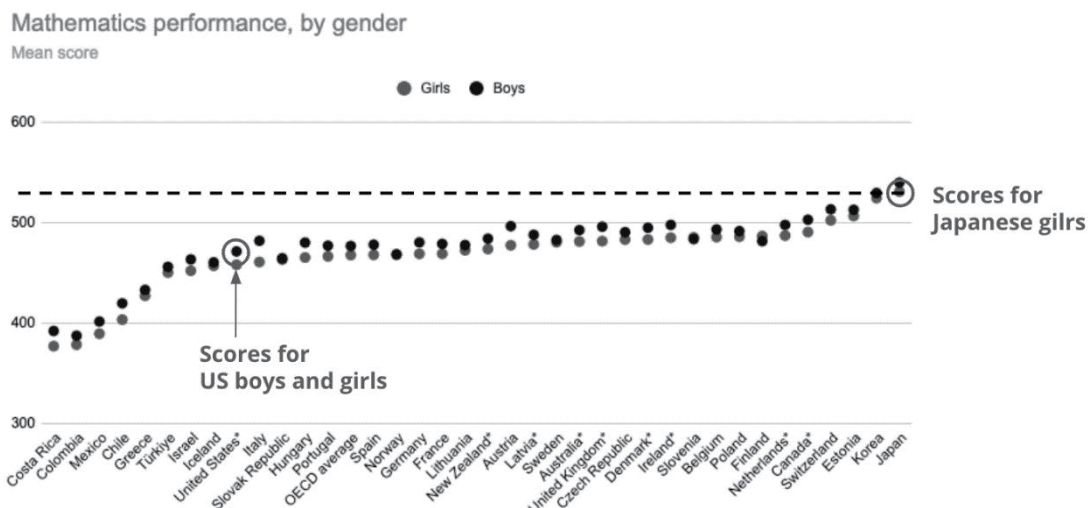
Technology, including IT, forms the foundation of modern society, and its evolution has the potential to fundamentally transform our lives. However, the participation of women and gender minorities remains significantly low, which could negatively impact both the quality of technological innovation and overall development of society.

2. Challenges of the Gender Gap in Technology Fields in Japan

The math and science proficiency of female students in Japan ranks among the highest globally, as shown by the international PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey (see Figure 1). However, the percentage of female students entering university engineering programs is only 16%, the lowest among OECD member countries. Furthermore, the proportion of women working as IT engineers in Japan is 16.9%, placing the country 22nd out of the 34 OECD countries for which data is available.

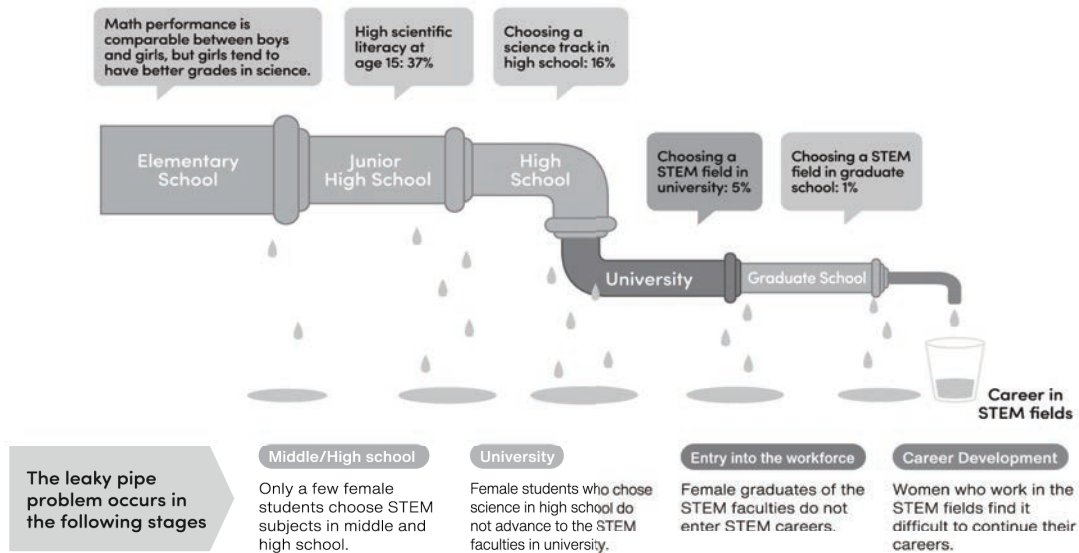
This issue is rooted in societal structures that make it difficult for women to choose STEM fields as career paths. For example, in Japan, students must choose between arts and sciences during junior high or high school, and it is challenging to change direction afterward. Social stereotypes and unconscious biases also play a significant role. Stereotypes like "girls aren't good at science" are reinforced through education, family, and media. These fixed ideas erode girls' interest and confidence in science and impede the advancement of women into STEM and IT fields. This gradual decrease in female participation in STEM education, employment, and career development at various stages is referred to as the "leaky pipeline problem" (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Results of the PISA (2022) Mathematics Assessment



Reference Based on PISA(2022) I.B1.4.17

Figure 2: The "Leaky Pipeline" Problem in Female STEM Career Paths



Reference: Based on PISA (2018), TIMSS (2019), and materials from the Cabinet Office

3. The Growing Momentum for STEM Education and Challenges Facing Girls

In 2019, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) launched the "Global and Innovation Gateway for All (GIGA) School Program," which aims to provide every student with a computer and high-speed internet access. In 2020, programming education became mandatory in elementary schools as part of the revised curriculum guidelines. Starting in 2021, programming education was expanded in junior high school technology and home economics classes, and from 2022, information science "Information I" was introduced and made mandatory in high schools. Additionally, the expansion of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the adoption of ICT devices in education and heightened interest in STEM education.

However, surveys by an NPO revealed that more boys than girls expect to pursue programming-related careers in the future, and a higher percentage of girls express that they do not wish to learn more about programming. In teacher training for programming education, about 80% of participants are male, indicating a shortage of female instructors¹.

The concentration of IT and digital industries in metropolitan areas also contributes to a lack of role models and few opportunities for interaction with professionals in rural areas. This limits exposure to and interest in STEM careers. Moreover, programming schools and contests for middle and high school students, as well as university students, show low participation rates among girls. To address

¹ Minna no Code 2023: "2022 Programming Education and High School 'Information I' Reality Survey" <https://code.or.jp/news/20230809/> (Accessed September 13, 2024)

this, there is a need to create more accommodating environments for girls, such as having female instructors and judges in contests.².

4. Changes in Domestic Policies in Japan Over the Five Years Since Beijing +25

During the formulation of the "5th Basic Plan for Gender Equality" in 2020, youth organizations focused on gender equality played a central role in making recommendations for the plan. It was noted that the low proportion of girls interested in STEM fields is influenced by factors such as the educational trends of other girls, parental expectations, and the lack of role models. These observations led to promotion of actions by academia, industry, and government.

In 2021, the Cabinet Office's "Youth Roundtable Conference" proposed solutions to obstacles and identified barriers to increasing the number of female students in STEM fields, as well as addressing issues related to women's life events and careers. Additionally, the Japanese government's "Council for the Creation of Future of Education" in 2022 emphasized the importance of increasing the number of women in STEM fields.

The "Women's Digital Human Resources Development Plan" of 2022 highlighted the importance of supporting women's employment in response to the growing demand for digital talent and the need to address gender gaps in the digital sector.

Furthermore, from fiscal year 2021 to 2024, the government's budget planning has been significantly influenced by the "Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Structural Reform" (aka the Honebuto Policy), which includes promoting IT field choices among female junior and senior high school students, technical college students, and university students.

These various recommendations for increasing the number of women in STEM fields are reflected in the expanding initiatives within universities and companies.

5. Initiatives by Universities and Technical Colleges in Japan

Various initiatives are underway at universities. MEXT encourages "admissions for individuals from diverse backgrounds" including female students in STEM faculties. In response, an increasing number of universities have introduced special admission quotes for women in these fields.

In 2023, the deans of science faculties at 10 national universities issued a statement aiming to create a gender-balanced environment and nurture diverse talent. For the 2024 entrance exams, approximately 700 slots designated for female students will be available across 40 universities. Additionally, some newly established private technical colleges are working towards gender balance, with some achieving a 1:1 male-to-female ratio in incoming classes.

² Minna no Code 2024: "Recruitment Open for the 'SteP Phase 3' Program for Female Elementary School Teachers in Programming Education" <https://code.or.jp/news/20240522/> (Accessed September 13, 2024)

There has been an increase in inter-disciplinary faculties and departments, such as data science and technology-related programs. Many of these programs accept students from both arts and science backgrounds after enrollment. This has contributed to expanding opportunities for female students to pursue studies in STEM fields.

6. Initiatives by Companies and other Organizations

Companies are increasingly promoting DE&I (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) within their technical development teams, while also prioritizing the development of their employees' skills and expertise. One major IT company has launched a "Tech DE&I Project" under the direct supervision of a technology executive. A female engineer, who has been involved in various gender-related projects both inside and outside the company, has been appointed as the "Tech DE&I Lead". She spearheads initiatives such as organizing study sessions for all engineers.

Another, a major manufacturer is working to increase the proportion of female students pursuing STEM fields by offering scholarships to female students in science and engineering programs at universities and technical colleges. Additionally, companies that develop programming courses and materials for children are organizing programming events designed to be more accessible to girls.

These efforts are not only aimed at fostering female engineers but also at transforming corporate culture, with the potential to reduce the gender gap in society as a whole.

7. Gender Equality in AI Development

AI (artificial intelligence) technology learns from past data to generate outcomes, meaning that biases in the dataset can significantly influence its results. For example, if AI is trained on data biased by gender or race, it risks making unfair decisions. In Japan, an AI station attendant displayed on a digital signage at train stations was criticized for emphasizing feminine traits, such as gestures like touching its hair, reinforcing stereotypical depictions of women and promoting gender-based stereotypes³.

There are also concerns about AI voice selection. Female voices are often used for AI assistants and bots, while male voices tend to be chosen for delivering authoritative information.⁴ One securities company was noted for using a female voice to report stock market information but switching to a male voice for transaction-related communications⁵. If AI technologies, which will be widely used across various fields, continue to incorporate gender-based stereotypes or biases, their

³ YOKOYAMA, Miwa 2020: "AI, Automation, and Gender Equality: An International Perspective" *International Gender Studies Journal*

⁴ YOKOYAMA, Miwa 2020: "AI, Automation, and Gender Equality: An International Perspective" *International Gender Studies Journal*

⁵ YOKOYAMA, Miwa 2020: "AI, Automation, and Gender Equality: An International Perspective" *International Gender Studies Journal*

societal impact could be significant.

It is crucial to integrate diverse perspectives into the design of AI and other technologies. This will ensure that a broad range of talent, including women, is involved in technology development, helping to distribute the benefits of new technologies more equitably across society.

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Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) Women's Network Japan: Founded in 1986 to repeal the Eugenic Protection Act and promote the independence and empowerment of women with disabilities. It contributed to the repeal of the eugenic clause of the Act in 1996. Today, it works to eliminate multidimensional discrimination against women with disabilities and engaging in lobbying activities nationally and internationally, including lobbying at the UN CEDAW and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. https://dwnj.chobi.net/?page_id=41

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X. Disaster Prevention, Mitigation, and Reconstruction

Japan Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction (JWNDRR): JWNDRR was founded in June 2011, 3 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake, to unite the women's organizations and individuals across Japan in advocating to the government for policies from the perspectives of gender and diversity. The network's representative is Akiko Domoto.

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