

Introduction

This paper will address changes in the work and family life of Japanese households which have been evident over the past decades. This paper will first address the changes seen in the field concerning women and labor in Japan. It will then look at changes in the family scene followed by its focus on policies and its impact, especially those concerning daycare and parental leave. The final purpose of this paper is to communicate between two countries, in order to exchange views and gain hints for options for measures on balancing family and work life.

Some changes Japan shares in common with many industrialized countries include the increase in female labor participation, increase in non-standard work arrangements and changing attitude of gender role towards work and family. However, there may exist what I would refer to as an “inertia” in the work and family choice pattern of average Japanese married women. Still as large as 70% of women are full-time mothers when one’s first child has reached the age of 1. Even though more women participate in the labor market when their children grow older, their income is rather low, comprising only about 30% of family income on average according to the Household Survey. Yet, an increasing number of young women are delaying their marriage until their late twenties and early thirties.

Increased Labor Participation of Women

More women are in the labor force, a trend in line with Canada. In 1975, women comprised 37% of the work force, increasing to 41% in 1999. The labor participation rate of wives in the age group of 20 to 60 was as high as 69% in 1997 according to Basic Employment Survey. Despite a substantial difference in the tenure year between the sexes, as much as 4.9 years in 1998, the average tenure of female regular full-time workers increased from 6.1 years in 1980 to 8.2 years in 1998. The wage gap between the two sexes has also been narrowing for regular full-time workers, but the overall wage difference has not narrowed because of the increase in non-regular workers and their diminishing wage.

More women are obtaining higher education. Percentage of enrollment to four-year degree at universities was approximately 35 for males in 1986 while the corresponding figure was nearly 15 percent for women when the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was implemented. The figures have now reached almost 45% for males and over 25% for females.

Still, there remains a marked difference between the sexes in the labor participation pattern. The age profile of labor participation for women still retains an M-shaped figure. The bottom of the age profile of labor participation comprises those in the age group of 30 to 34. Despite its increase from 51% in 1989 to 57% in 1999, the profile contrasts with that of males where the labor participation rates show a very high plateau of 95 to 98% in the age group of 30 to 59.

Table 1 Average Tenure of Male and Female Workers

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1994 | 1998 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Male | 10.8 | 11.9 | 12.5 | 12.8 | 13.1 |
| Female | 6.1 | 6.8 | 7.3 | 7.6 | 8.2 |
| Female Part-time workers | 3.3 | 3.9 | 4.5 | 4.9 | 4.8 |

(Soruce) Ministry of Labor *Wage Census*