Masculinities and Men’s Household Work
Aikawa Shoko

In the 21st century, although the Japanese government and media have encouraged men to involve themselves more in household work, including the fact that the term *ikumen* (men who actively participate in child rearing) was nominated as one of the 2010 buzzwords and father-friendly legal revisions, such as the Childcare Leave Law, were adopted (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2010), Japanese men spend much less time with their families than women.

In Japan, the “salaryman” model of masculinity has persisted. The salaryman was characterized by a person playing the role as a family’s breadwinner and who has a strong commitment to work, becoming an ideal model of masculine superiority and success (Taga 2018b: 5). Recently in European countries, “caring masculinities” have been emphasized in order to change the role of men and improve gender equity in society. This new model of caring masculinity is based on men taking on care-giving roles rather than provider roles (European Commission 2012; Taga 2018a). In addition, Elliott (2016: 252) suggested that “caring masculinities are masculine identities that reject domination and its associated traits and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality.” In other words, caring masculinity may be a new model of masculine superiority and success that affects men’s identity as well as their behaviors.

The first objective of this study is to examine how many people support the idea of caring masculinity, focusing on working men. The second purpose is to assess the relationship between the salaryman model of masculinity and caring masculinity, and the third purpose of this research is to prove whether adherence to the salaryman model of masculinity or to caring masculinity influence men’s behaviors, focusing on married men and fathers with children under 6 years of age. There is little known about whether those who subscribe to the caring masculinity model contribute to an equal division of domestic work, while substantial research supports the fact that the salaryman model of masculinity prevents men from participating in household work (Petts et al. 2018).

For the purpose of this study, data were obtained from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation’s project entitled “Men’s New Role in a Gender-Equal Society.” Participants in the study comprised 5,000 Japanese men, aged 20 to 60, living in Tokyo, Tohoku, Hokuriku, Kyusyu, and Okinawa. The data were gathered using an online survey in March 2018. We conducted a one-way analysis of variance and ordinary least squares regression on data from the 3,527 working men and performed structural equation model analyses to assess
masculinities’ effects on gender roles and the division of household labor using the data from 1,875 married men and 443 fathers with preschool-aged children.

The results are as follows. First, this study shows that working men in their 20s to 40s adhere more to the caring masculinity model than to the salaryman model of masculinity. Working men in their 50s were also found to be as supportive of caring masculinities as of the salaryman model of masculinity, while men in their 60s were inclined to adhere to the salaryman model of masculinity. In addition, men with high socioeconomic statuses, such as executives, managers, and those with income over 4 million yen or more, appear to conform both to the caring masculinity model and the salaryman model of masculinity. Second, the salaryman model of masculinity is positively associated with adherence to caring masculinity. In other words, Japanese male workers do not reject their success as workers and economic providers, but they also include caring values, such as positive emotions and relationality, in their identities. Third, the research also suggests that adherence to the salaryman model of masculinity decreases the frequency of men’s participation in housework, while adherence to the caring model of masculinity increases that frequency. With regard to childcare, an inclination toward the salaryman model of masculinity reduces the extent of fathers’ involvement in childrearing and an inclination toward caring masculinity promotes the men’s engagement in housework and parenting.

In summary, adherence to a caring model of masculinity, which encourages men to hold care in high regard, may lead to a conclusion that gender roles have gradually been changed.