

Abstract

Gender Analysis of Job-Seeker Support Training in Japan: From the Perspective of Participant Empowerment

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The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the job-seeker support training program introduced in Japan in 2011 on work, life, and awareness of female participants. To analyze these effects, I used the concept of *empowerment*, which is defined by Naila Kabeer as a process of acquiring power. I analyzed the current training subjects and their contents, life history of female participants, and effects of public vocational training and job-seeker support training on women from a gender perspective. The job-seeker support training is an unprecedented public vocational training for job seekers who are not eligible for employment insurance. The intended beneficiaries of this program are job seekers and unemployed persons who are not eligible to receive employment insurance and struggling financially. Since its inception in 2011, more than 70% of the participants have been women. The number of women in need is increasing and public employment support is expected to become even more important in the future.

The study consisted of three main surveys. The first survey examined prior research related to vocational training, the development of fund training, the history of job-seeker support training, and the purpose of the program and used related materials released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and the Ministry's meeting proceedings. In the second survey, I analyzed the vocational training subjects from the perspective of gender segregation of job categories. In this study, I categorized the vocational training subjects as commissioned training, job-seeker support training, and commissioned training for women, which have a high proportion of women in vocational training, using the subclassification of the Japan Standard Vocational Classification. I investigated the factors behind the high proportion of women, the expected occupations and their proportion of women workers, and the proportion of non-regular employees. Thirdly I interviewed six women who participated in fund training in 2010 and job-seeker support training in 2011. Women's experiences before and during vocational training as well as changes to in their lives, jobs, and attitudes during the approximately ten years after vocational training were surveyed through life history interviews conducted between 2015 and 2020. The analysis was carried out on two levels: the investigation of the system of public vocational training and job-seeker support training and vocational training subjects at the meso level and the life history interview investigation of female participants at the micro level.

In examining the effects of vocational training of women, I focused on the concepts of *connection* and *place*. Empowerment is the process by which those who have been denied the capacity to make choices gain this capacity (Kabeer 1994, 1999). Kabeer distinguishes three types of power: "the power within: transforming consciousness," "the power with: solidarity and connection," and "the

power to: mobilizing for change.” Along with the three powers, I also used the three interrelated themes of *resources*, *agency*, and *achievement* in the analysis.

From the results of this study, I argue that vocational training is not only a means of acquiring skills but also a social resource that enables people to acquire three types of power. While vocational training functions as a place to connect with people and society, there is also a dark side to social capital, such as problems in human relations due to connections. Based on these findings, I conclude that vocational training has made it possible for women to acquire power as defined by Kabeer but that it is difficult for women to demonstrate and achieve agency unless all of their social, human, and economic needs are satisfied.

In this study, I focused on the social resource field of public vocational training and conducted empirical research using the concept of *empowerment* as a process to acquire power. This study is significant in that it has contributed to improving employment support for women and public vocational training.