

Factors Restricting Occupational Expectations of Japanese Females – Results from International Comparisons –

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In recent years, the importance of women's participation in the workforce has increased due to a diminishing labour force, resulting from declining birth rates. To address this issue, the government has introduced policies to realise a "society where women shine" and promote a better work-life balance. However, despite efforts, gender inequalities in wages and career advancement persist in the labour market. Considering these challenges, this thesis focuses on the occupational expectations of Japanese females. The main reason is because Japanese females have significantly lower occupational expectations than those of males in Japan and females of other countries, despite scoring very high in OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) assessments.

Thus, this research explores factors contributing to this situation, as female students with low occupational expectations during high school may lack motivation to pursue university education, which in turn could pose difficulties in their subsequent job search and career advancement. Therefore, maximising the human capital of Japanese females requires more than just increasing the representation of women in managerial positions or encouraging their return to work after childbirth. It is essential to enhance female students' aspiration towards future occupations before they enter the workforce.

This study combines quantitative studies using the OECD's PISA 2018 data for international comparisons and a qualitative investigation involving interviews with female university students in Japan and the UK. The PISA survey includes a question asking 15-year-old high school students the kind of jobs they expect have when they are 30, with socioeconomic indicators applied to their responses. Utilising these data and comparing averages by gender, the study reveals that, among the 36 developed countries, Japan is the only one where females on average choose occupations with significantly lower socioeconomic status compared to males.

Based on this finding, a quantitative analysis was carried out in two parts. Firstly, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, individual characteristics and the micro/meso factors were examined, such as the aspiration to go to university, scores in maths and reading, and parents' educational background and occupation. As a result, in Japan, the lower average occupational expectations of females compared to males was associated with a lower proportion of females planning to go to four-year universities and their lower maths scores. In other countries, the higher averages of occupational expectations of females compared to males were related to greater proportions of females planning to go to universities and their higher reading scores. Secondly, relationships with exo/macro factors related to female labour were analysed. The results indicated relations between the gender differences in occupational expectations and the gender equality landscape in each country. In other words, the large gender wage gap, low representation of women in managerial positions, short unpaid work hours by men, and positive attitudes toward housewives in Japan were related to the significantly lower occupational expectations of females compared to males.

The qualitative analyses involved interviewing 48 female university students studying in Japan and the United Kingdom (UK). Consequently, it was confirmed that the Japanese students expected future occupations with lower socioeconomic status compared to their counterparts in the UK. It

appeared that the lack of encouragement to pursue prestigious occupations by the parents of the Japanese students and the latter's strong reservations about work-life balance contributed to this. Taking these insights into account, work-life balance policies between Japan and the UK were compared by reviewing government statistics and literature, particularly regarding the flexible work systems and their utilisation. The analysis indicated that, while both Japan and the UK have established systems to enable flexible working for all employees, the utilisation of the system was more universal in the UK.

The findings of this research suggest that the lower occupational expectations of Japanese females compared to Japanese males and females of other developed countries are due to persistent norms of gender roles and the challenging work environment. The gender gap in the aspiration to go to university and maths scores, as indicated by quantitative analysis, could potentially stem from gender biases and stereotypes. To address these issues, essential reforms involve transitioning to a norm where both men and women work and take care of the family, as well as enforcing more flexible work arrangements. Additionally, eliminating gender biases in school education and the media, along with strengthening education in life planning to promote women's economic independence, is crucial. By implementing these measures, the occupational expectations of Japanese females could be elevated, which would facilitate the country in maximising their skills. This, in turn, could boost Japan's productivity, thereby contributing to a sustainable economy.

The limitations of this study are as follows. Firstly, the Japanese labour market operates under a "membership-type", which entails a more generalised perception of occupations, contrasting with the "job-type" characteristics of other developed countries. Secondly, the sample sizes for the countries with appropriate gender equality indicators were limited to 32 to 36 countries. Therefore, caution is required in generalising their relationships with gender differences in occupational expectations. Additionally, the female university interviewees were likely to be more career-oriented than the average student. Moreover, as the nationality, race, and cultural backgrounds of the interviewees in the UK were diverse, interpreting cultural influences becomes complex. Future research could include longitudinal surveys tracking the occupational expectations of 15-year-old students and the actual occupations engaged at the age of 30. Based on the findings, it would be essential to carry out a detailed examination of the gender related factors that promoted or restricted females from pursuing the expected occupations.