

Present Status, Health Conditions, and Work-related Stress of Women Workers—Including Future Issues

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The purpose of this study is to show an interdisciplinary overview of Japanese women's working status, health conditions and of work-related stress.

I have approached to this theme by introducing Japanese Government's several surveys on women's work situation, by focusing on women's health conditions, especially on work-related stress, and by taking up some future issues.

I. Governmental survey

Women as % of the whole hired labor in Japan

According to the study by the Management and Coordination Agency, the ratio of women to the whole hired labor in 1995 is 38.9%, which is close to those of Europe and the U.S.¹⁾ (Fig. 1) However, the question is if the Japanese women workers' status and type of work are same as those of Europe and the U.S. The number of women workers exceeded 20 million, and one-third of them are part-time workers. The contents of part-time work are not much different from those of full-time work. On the other hand, the part-time workers' conditions such as of wages are at very low level.

Women as % in managerial positions in Japan

It should be featured that the proportion of

women in managerial positions in Japan is very small. A study comparatively shows a proportion of women of the whole hired labor and of women in managerial positions in several countries.²⁾ Sweden, a highly advanced country in terms of social welfare, is also advanced in the matter of woman labor. In Canada and the U.S., both the proportion of women workers of the whole and the proportion of women workers in managerial positions, rise over approximately 40%. In Western Germany, women's proportion of the whole hired labor is over 40%; however, the proportion of women in managerial position is only 20%. The proportion of women in managerial positions in Japan is 8.7%, which is the worst percentage among these five countries.

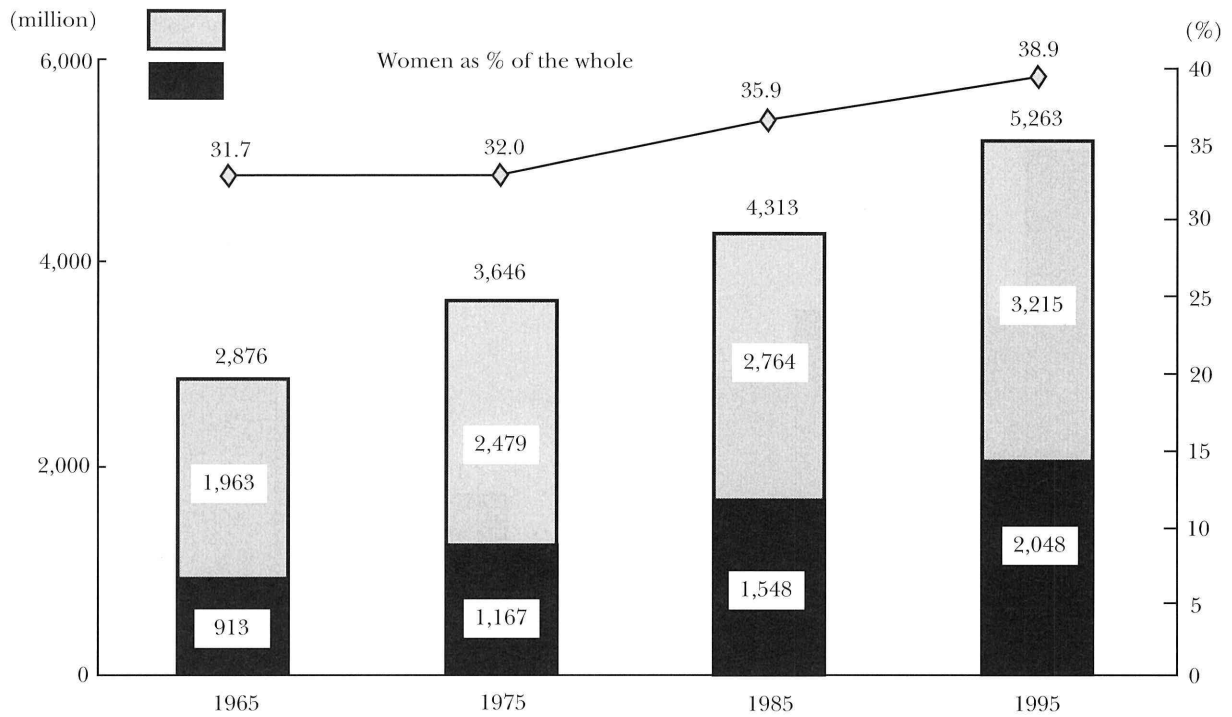
Wage gap between men and women

In the U.S., the wage gap between men and women is apparently becoming smaller. The women's wages in U.K. is gradually increasing. In Sweden, the proportion of women's wages to men's is around 90%. In South Korea, the women's wages has been increasing since 1985 and now the gap is getting smaller, compared to that of Japan. In Japan, the gap has not been narrowed in these ten years. The proportion of Japanese women's wages to men's in 1990 is lower than that of 1985, and the 1993's proportion still remains lower than the 1985's.³⁾ Japan, however, since 1985 till 1993, have had several arrangements such as an

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Source: Management and Coordination Agency

Fig. 1 Trends in Hired Labor

establishment of law for a gender-equal employment. But it seems not to have come into effect yet.

Distribution ratio of women employed, classified by marital status

The survey on the distribution ratio of women employed, classified by marital is as follows:¹ In 1965, the ratio of single women workers was 50.3%, in 1975, 38.0%, and in 1995, 33.5%. On the other hand, the ratio of married women workers was 57.1% in 1995. Added to 9.4% of the widowed/divorced, totally 66.5% of women workers has a husband and a child or children. That is to say, two thirds of working women have families. It clearly means that the problems of women workers are the problems of married, family-holding workers.

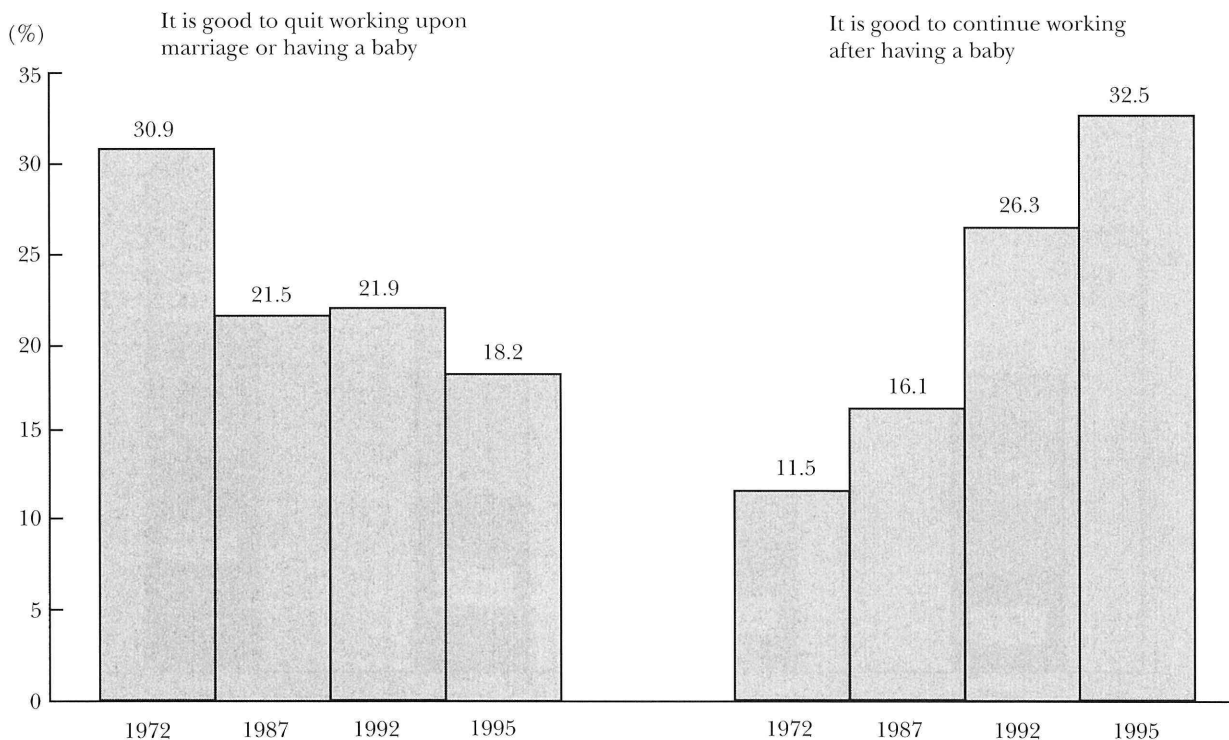
Trends in view-points on occupation

Women’s viewpoints and ideas on occupations are changing.⁴⁾ (Fig. 2) 30.9% women wanted to work until getting married or having a baby in 1972. However it decreased to 21.5% in 1987, leveled out around 21.9% in 1992, and marked 18.2% in 1995. On the

other hand, in 1972, only 11.5% wanted to continue working after having a baby. But it increased to 16.1% in 1987, 26.3% in 1992 and increased up to 32.5% in 1995. From the statistics, we may tell that the reason why women continue working is not only because they want to help their house economy but also because their points of view on job has been drastically changed.

Tendency of women workforce

Figure 3 is a very famous graph. The tendency of Japanese women workforce is clearly different from the U.S. In case of Japan, the graph shows a M-shaped curve. And there is a big dip between the latter of age 20’s and 30’s. Marriage, child-birth and child-nursing are supposed to be the reason to it. The dip became smaller between 1971 and 1990, however, the curve is still M-shaped. Compared to it, the U.S. does not show such a big dip as Japan. In 1971, the U.S. once showed a rather M-shaped curve. But the bottom of dip went up gradually and the curve is now shaped as upside-down “U.” The point is that women in the U.S. can continue working without their career interrupted on each life stage.



Source: Prime Minister's Office, Public Opinion Poll on Gender Equality (1995)

Fig. 2 Change of Feeling towards Work

Proportion of woman employee who left work place due to pregnancy/childbirth

I would want to go further and see the Japanese women's career situation. The ratio of female worker who left their work place due to pregnancy or childbirth was 31.6% in 1994.⁵⁾ The ratio has not been changed much since 1985. In other words, the situation has not been changed for almost twenty years, though the number of women is increasing, who want to continue working in spite of many difficulties.

Arrangement by companies for maternity welfare before/after childbirth

An arrangement for maternity welfare provided by a company before/after childbirth is an important factor for a woman's career. The following study reflects the reality:

40.8% companies provide resting room to lie down, and 22.7% grant leave for clinical examination before/after birth. Only 7% grant leave for maternal disorders and only 7.8% for morning sickness. Also only 18.1% companies make an arrangement of a flexible commute time for pregnant women.⁶⁾

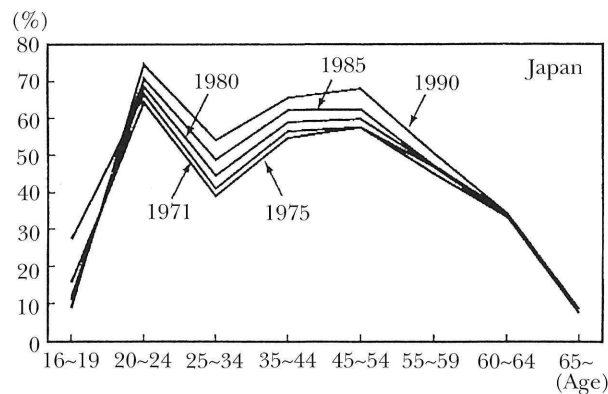
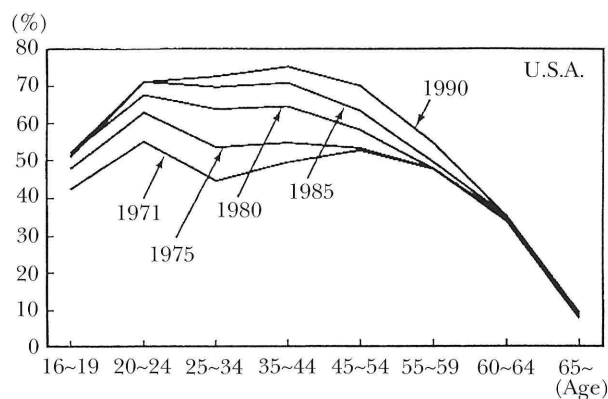


Fig. 3 Proportion of Working Women

II. Japanese women workers' stress and health disorders

Japanese women workers' occupations

An occupation of Japanese women's high proportion is health service such as medical care, nursing, elder care and care of disabled persons. The need for this service is expected to be more increased. Traditionally manufacturing and office works have been occupied by a large number of women workers. And now, in service industry and also in distribution industry, women workers are increasing. However, in the departments of technology, management, transportation and security, large proportion of employees are still occupied by men.

Mental stress factors of women workers, classified by occupations

Sakai studies the mental stress factors of women workers, classified by occupations.⁷⁾ (Fig. 4) Women are dominant specially in medical/health service area; for example, a nurse. There are many stress factors to them; in addition to overtime work and long time

work, irregular work shift, time pressure, and human relations. As for teachers, office workers, sales persons, workers in manufacturing, service, and agricultural and forestry industries, all of them are suffered from a time-related stress such as overtime work, irregular work shift and being hustled by time.

The interesting thing is that a human relation is a serious factor of women's mental stress. Besides, it should be noted that many women's occupations also have a work-related ergonomic problems and sometimes an environmental hazard, too.

Women workers 's disorders/symptoms

Focusing on physical problems, we find that the complaint rate of health disorders for men is 80%, and for women 88%.⁸⁾ Especially women complain about symptoms such as of back and shoulder pain, lumbago, eye strain, diarrhea, constipation, stomach/belly ache, failing eyesight, headache and irregularity of menstruation.

It seems many of them are caused by a nature of women's occupations; for example, a back and upper-limb disorder caused by

		Mental Stress Factors					
		late/long work	irregular shift	time-pressure	new skill requirement	human relations	strict management
Special Skills	Health/Medical Service	○	●	●		●	
	Teacher	○				●	
	Engineer	●		●	●	○	●
	Management	●	○	●		●	
	Office Work	○		○	○	○	○
	Sales		●	●		●	
	Transportation/Telecommunication	○	●				○
	Manufacturing Industry		○		○	○	○
	Security		●				
	Service Industry	○	●			●	
Agricultural and Forestry Industry	●		●				

Sakai (1992, Revised)

Fig. 4 Mental Stress Factors of Female Workers, Classified by Occupations

a job at a video display terminal (VDT) workstation. However, please note, as for a prevalence rate, men shows higher rate than women.⁹⁾

Diseases of women's high prevalence rate are lumbago, work-related back and upper-limb disorder, hyperthyroidism, migraine, autonomic imbalance, irritable colon and so on. First, these diseases reflect the workloads and work situation of typical women's occupations. We can also find that the stress syndrome such as migraine, autonomic imbalance and irritable colon, is increasing among women.

Japanese women's syndromes

"Croissant Syndrome" is a unique syndrome among Japanese women. "Croissant" is a title of Japanese magazine for women. The magazine once proposed a "revolution" in women's identity; to be mentally and economically independent from men, and even not to get married. The proposal became a social phenomenon and was called "Croissant Syndrome". Afterwards, women found the syndrome rather radical and excessive, and now the "Croissant Syndrome" has a negative meaning. However, it still has influence onto many working women. Sometimes a dilemma between the syndrome and the reality causes a mental stress to them.

"Superwoman Syndrome" has a dilemma, too. Being perfect sometimes opposes to the reality.

Then why are Japanese working women not able to manage these syndromes? Why are they sometimes suffered from the gap in the real life? Why does the gap occur? The answers are that Japanese women's social skill has not been established yet; that men are not used to treating working women and that neither legislation nor support system is adequate at this moment in Japan.

Japanese married women's multiple roles with 3 "P" burdens

Then, what kind of considerations should be taken up? In Japan, women take most of house responsibility such as household work and child care. Considering issues of husband's business transfer and of care of old parents, women's burden is rather heavier than men.

I imagine most of working women are mud-

dling through the present situation with 3 "P" burdens; by "Psychologically" and "Physically" overworking and by "Paying" money for time. My impression is that working women's situation will be very serious without giving any solution to their present problems.

Occupational stress factors of women in the U.S.

According to Quinn et al., there are four stress factors for the U.S. working women.¹⁰⁾ The first one is a house responsibility especially for a married woman who has multiple roles. The second one is about the job control. The third one is discrimination in wages, positions and job promotions. The fourth is sexual harassment, which is becoming substantial in Japan, too. It does not seem that the stress source of women in the U.S. is much different from that of Japanese women.

III. Present workload and legislation

Workload factors common to women's work

I have classified women's workload factors into three; fundamental factors, direct factors and social problems. (Fig. 5) The fundamental factors are biological matters. Women are different from men in their maternal function, muscular power, athletic ability and cardiopulmonary function.

The direct factors are as follows: Irregular work shift may allow a flexible time use; however, on the other hands, it may be very difficult for women to work early morning. As for ergonomic aspects, also men have the same problems. However, when women go into a conventionally-men-dominated occupation, because the work place is not designed for women, not a few workloads will be imposed on women.

The situation is same as for work environment, too. There is a problem of mental health, too. Women feel a stress rather in human relations.

House responsibility and role responsibility are categorized as social problems. In Japan I suppose women are still silently required to devote themselves to household work. The expectation sometimes causes a stress of role responsibility to women. Both responsibilities are substantially related.

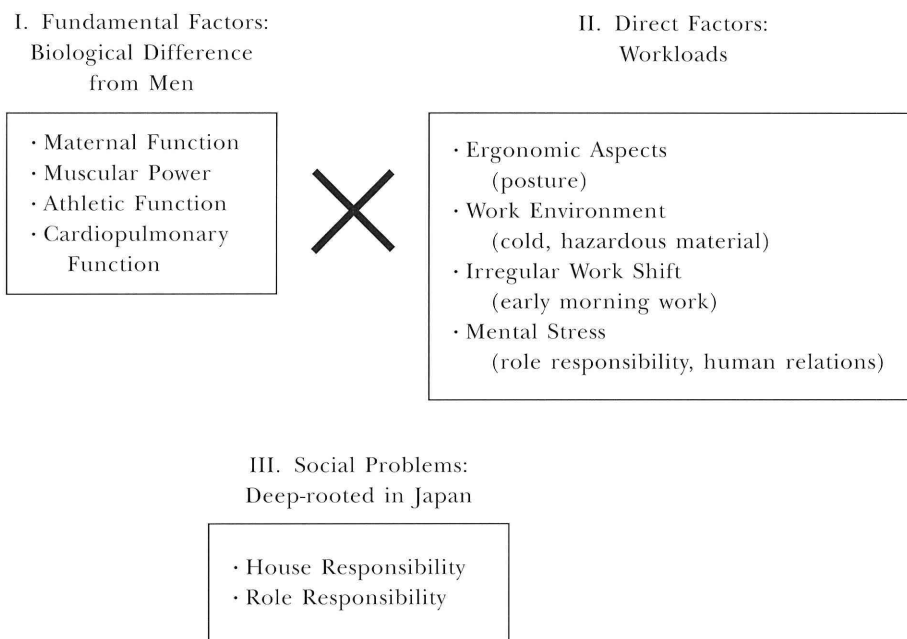


Fig. 5 Structure of Women Workers' Workloads

Amendment of the labor standards law: abolition of “women protection rule”

The Japanese Diet decided the abolition of the Women Protection Rule from the Labor Standards Law. From April 1999, women may work overtime, on holidays and late at night as well as men do.

I have a serious concern if women workers' fatigue and work-related disease may be revealed and increase. Men's prevalence rate is relatively higher than women's at this present moment. However, I wonder if women's complaint and prevalence rate will be kept lower after the abolition of the Protection Rule; working overtime, on holidays and late at night. My concern is that a physically weak person or a person on the border of health problems may drop out.

Even though the abolition certainly has a merit to give a wide job opportunity for women towards the Gender Equality Society in the 21st Century, my concern does not disappear yet.

IV. Future of Japanese women workers

The clear future of working women is hard to tell. A favorable expectation is a society where women are mentally satisfied, able to continue working, able to develop their

ability, able to achieve their career, able to contribute to the society, and able to find a meaning in their work. (Fig. 6)

The worst scenario is that women may suffer from chronic fatigue and more disease; that they may get irritated and burnt out; that they may not be able to accomplish their career; that they may go into a situation where they have to quit their job or get divorced, unless they want it; and that they may go into a family collapse eventually.

These two futures depend on how supports at work place will be improved as well as social and instrumental supports will be.

Another point is a share of house responsibility. Even if the social supports are sufficient, even if the job sharing at work place is enough, the fundamental key unit is a family. What is required is a situation where men and women in a family take care of each other, share a house responsibility and can develop their each ability as possible.

Acknowledgement

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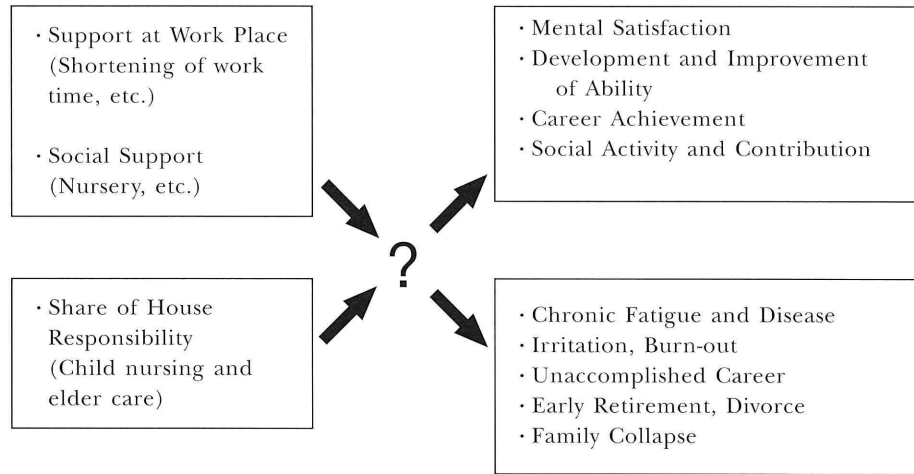


Fig. 6 Future of Female Workers

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