

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN JAPAN

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The traditional Japanese work style appears to negatively affect the work-life balance of workers and to contribute to persistent gender inequality in the work place and at home. Regular workers in Japan are often expected to follow the ideal worker image, which often requires them to put work before personal life. As a result, men are more likely to struggle to meet the ideal worker image and women are more likely to be in non-regular employment so as to cut back on work and take care of home and family. The aim of this study is to determine if offering of limited-regular contracts, with lower pay and security but reduced requirements for overtime, relocation and transfers compared to regular contracts, could improve workers' welfare (in Chapter 2), and whether an offer of opportunity for males to engage in housework or childrearing would improve gender equality within couples (in Chapter 3). These are two main chapters in this dissertation. Chapter 2 presents an online Choice Experiment (CE) and Chapter 3 an economic experiment with married couples, investigating worker acceptance of and the effectiveness of those policy measures to address the issues of work-life balance and gender equality in Japan. This study, presented in Chapter 2, is the first use of a CE in a Japanese labor market study. More than 1000 subjects participated in the CE, in which they made a series of best-worst choices from a set of three jobs described by five attributes such as annual wage, overtime, employment security,

transfer possibility, and relocation possibility. It was found that people are willing to forfeit a significant portion of their wage to avoid extreme overtime and job transfer. The results of the study also suggest that willingness to pay (WTP) varies across gender, family structure (i.e. presence of children), and emotional state (i.e. guilt level) of workers. The study advances the policy argument about the use of limited-regular contracts, by quantifying the tradeoff between wage and non-wage job attributes for workers with various characteristics. Towards a complementary policy to improve gender equality, this study also explores the effectiveness of prior task allocation for improving equality in task division among couples, by examining experimentally testing the effect of additional experience of tasks on preference for doing those tasks, presented in Chapter 3. This is the first economic experiment conducted with Japanese married couples. In the experiment, a total of 51 Japanese couples performed two kinds of tasks, one paid task and one unpaid task. In each couple, one person was randomly assigned to get more experience of the paid/unpaid task. Then the husband and the wife separately indicated their preference regarding the division of work with their partner. Contrary to expectations, despite subjects' different prior task experience and gender, their indicated preferences of task division were similar: subjects gave higher preference to the Traditional task pair (i.e. male breadwinner option) over the Reverse task pair (i.e. female breadwinner option) or the Mixed task pair (i.e. half-time dual earner option with equal unpaid task sharing). However, when taking into account subject performance of the paid task, the results of regression analysis suggest that while more productive males favor traditional task division more than less productive males, more productive females prefer the traditional option less than less productive females. This could

be a reminder that the success of labor market reform may depend at least in part on whether the reform package addresses gender stereotypes.