

JAPAN 2022

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Why Japan continues
to shrug off the staggering
costs of gender inequality

February 2022



IPSOS
FLAIR COLLECTION

GAME CHANGERS



INTRODUCTION
**JAPAN:
EAST ASIA'S
WORST
PERFORMER
ON GENDER
EQUALITY**



In 2020 Japan fell 11 places in the World Economic Forum's Report on Gender Equality¹ to the position of 121st out of 153 countries in terms of gender equality, followed by a slight improvement to 120th place out of 156 countries in 2021.² At 34.4%, the gender inequality gap between Japanese men and women is greater than in 119 other countries, and the greatest in East Asia.

Yet, unlike countries with similarly low rankings, gender inequality is not an obvious feature of everyday life in Japan; it does not manifest in overt, oppressive, or aggressive ways. In fact, most Japanese women would likely be unwilling to trade places with Japanese men, who carry their own burden of expectations.

FIGURE 01

OVERALL GENDER EQUALITY RANKING	COUNTRY	OVERALL GENDER EQUALITY GAP
1	ICELAND	10.8%
16	FRANCE	21.6%
30	UNITED STATES	23.7%
34	MEXICO	24.3%
54	SINGAPORE	27.3%
102	SOUTH KOREA	31.3%
107	CHINA	31.8%
120	JAPAN	34.4%
133	TURKEY	36.2%
140	INDIA	37.5%

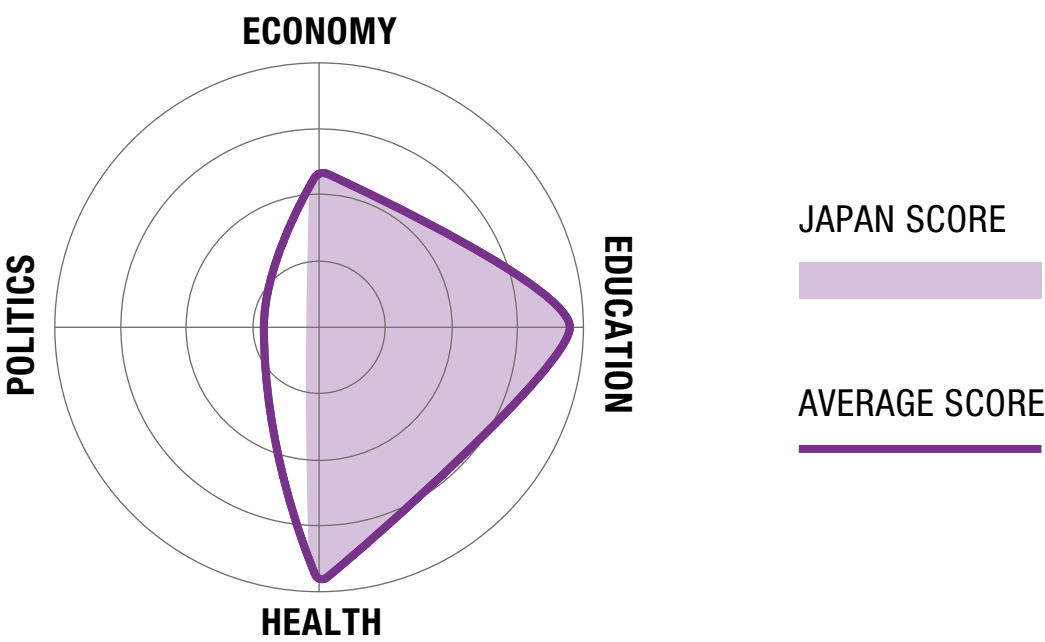
Source: “The Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, World Economic Forum

HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN JAPAN’S LOW RANKING?

The World Economic Forum classifies each country’s overall gender equality ranking as comprised of four components: (1) **Health & Survival**, (2) **Educational Attainment**, (3) **Economic Participation and Opportunity** and (4) **Political Empowerment**.

In terms of Educational Attainment (1.7% gap) and Health & Survival (2.7% gap), Japan is nearly gender equal. A lack of Political Empowerment (93.9% gap) and Economic Participation and Opportunity (39.6% gap) are the key drivers of gender inequality in Japan.

FIGURE 02



Although Japanese men and women are close to parity in the realms of Educational Attainment and Health & Survival, it is in Economic Participation & Opportunity and Political Empowerment where the greatest equality gaps persist.

Source: “The Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, World Economic Forum

SERIAL PROCLAMATIONS, LITTLE CHANGE

The Japanese government has made proclamations and set goals around achieving greater gender equality over the past decade, yet progress continues to fall vastly short of stated intentions. Nearly a decade ago, former Prime Minister Abe embraced the idea of “Womonomics” and removing barriers to fuller professional participation of women, setting the goal of having 30% of all management positions occupied by women by 2020. By 2019, with less than 15% of management jobs held by women³ and recognizing that the goal would be missed by a wide margin, the government pushed the goal back to 2030. In the context of Covid and the absence of major change, this goal too is extremely likely to go unmet.

Some gains have been made, however slowly and unevenly. The government has made increasing access to childcare for working parents a priority⁴ and, by 2021, female employment participation has risen to 72.8% (vs. 86.7%) for men.⁵

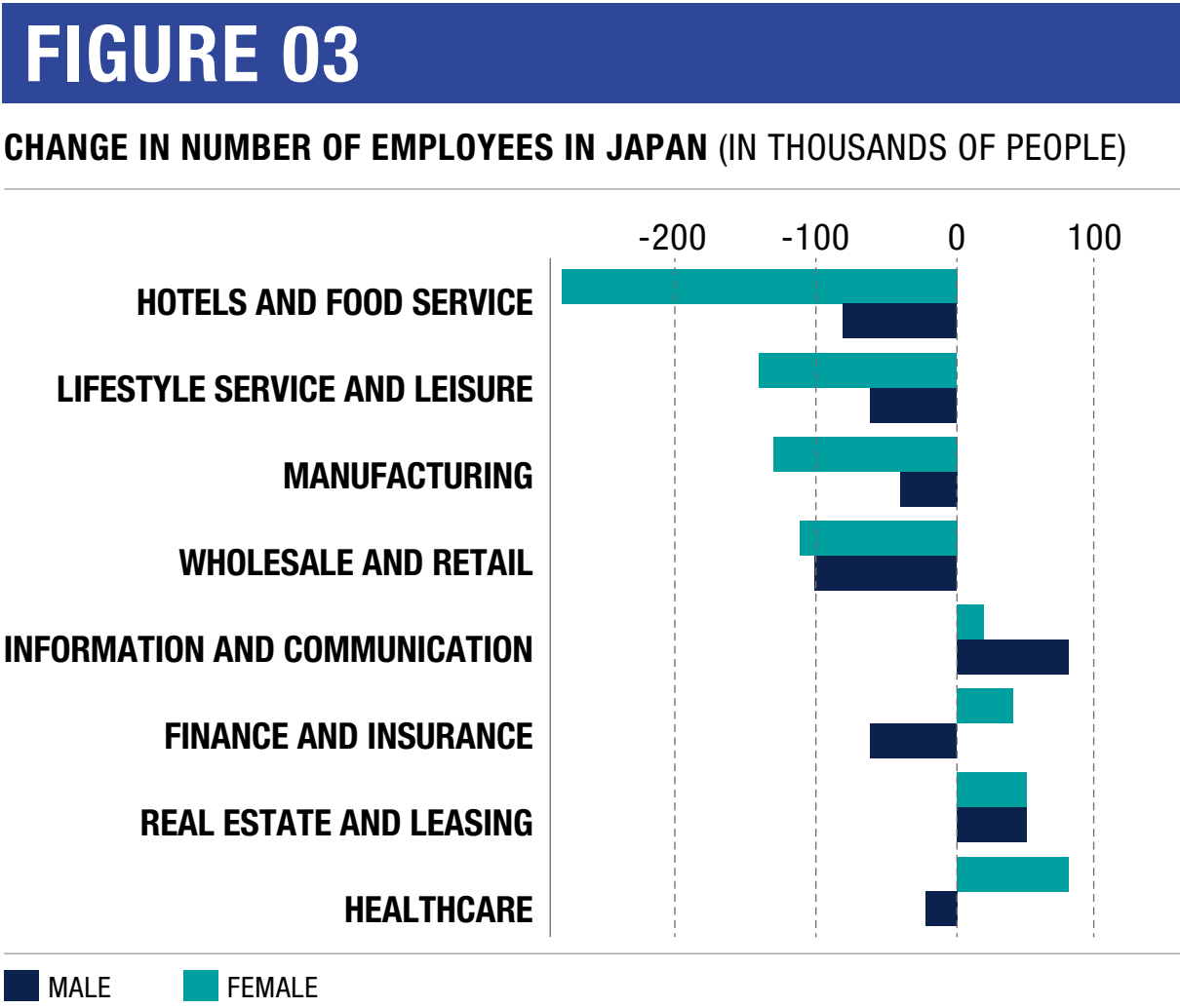
While there are more women in the workplace, however, the quality of their employment has not improved at the same pace. Women continue to make up two-thirds of “non-regular” (part-time and contract) employment positions which offer far less pay, job security, training, and benefits. And only 45% of women hold permanent employment contracts compared to 78% of men.⁶ In essence, women get far less for their labor in myriad ways. And while the gender pay gap in the workplace is 23.5% at home,⁷ Japanese women do nearly 5 times as much unpaid labor as men.⁸

When it comes to boosting female corporate leadership, new guidelines (rather than binding requirements) were set in 2015 to increase the number of women on Japanese corporate boards, along with the requirement to disclose the percentage of female executives in corporate reporting. As of July 2019, 63% of companies in the JPX 400 had at least one female board member (vs. 54% in 2018). Still, more than one-third of boards remained all-male.⁹

COVID’S UNEQUAL IMPACT

In Japan, as in many countries, Covid has disproportionately negatively impacted working women. More likely to hold tenuous “non-regular” (contract and part-time) professional positions,¹⁰ Japanese women are the first to go when times get tough.¹¹ While the entire number of employees

in Japan declined by 3.2% between the end of 2019 and July 2020, the decline of male workers was only 0.8%.¹² Women are over-represented in the hard-hit food service and retail sectors where laying off workers is made easier by the prevalence of short-term contracts.



Monthly average April–July 2020 compared to April–July 2019
Source: Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

BOTTOM OF THE HEAP

The gender equality gap in **Political Empowerment** continues to be yawning, sinking Japan to a ranking of 147th of 156 countries. As of January 2020, female representation in the Japanese parliament was only at 10% in the Lower House and 23% in the

Upper House.¹³ Although two female politicians competed for the Labor Democratic Party’s nomination for Prime Minister in the past election, Japan has never come remotely close to having a female head of state.

SO, WHERE’S THE OUTRAGE?

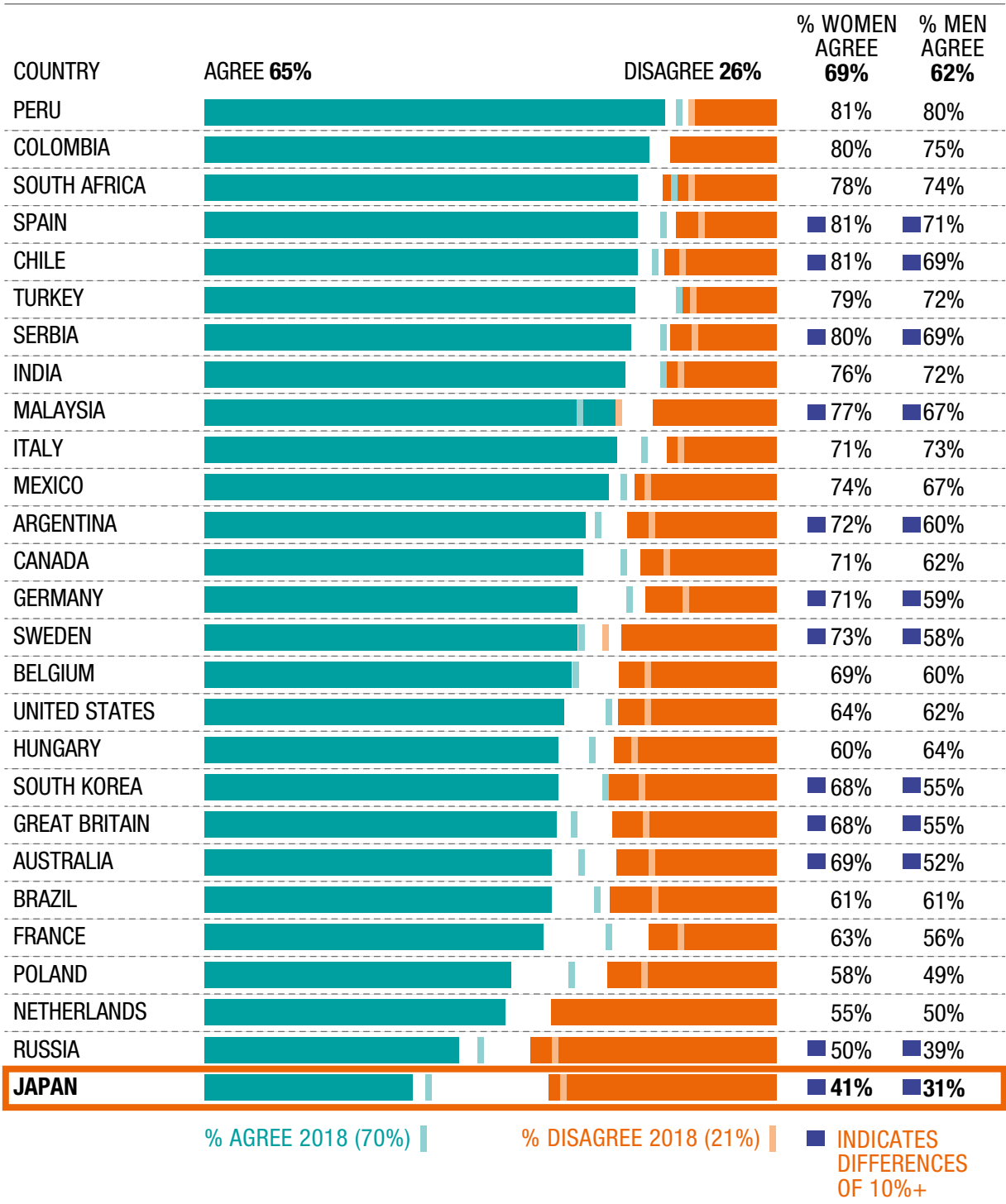
Despite Japan falling lower on the gender equality rankings in recent years, and despite women earning only 44% of what men do at work with little decision-making authority¹⁴ or even voice in the realms of business or politics, there is curiously little conversation or energy around achieving greater gender equality in Japan, even among women themselves. Occasionally, a story of egregious gender discrimination does catch the media’s attention and becomes a point of societal reflection (e.g. the remark by 83-year old Head of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics organizing committee in February 2021 that women “talk too much” at meetings, and the 2018 scandal around medical schools altering

female applicants’ test scores to prevent their admittance). In 2018, as #metoo protests took to the streets in countries around the world, including in East Asia, they were noticeably met with relative indifference in Japan.

This seemingly resounding lack of concern around gender equality issues is apparent in the results of an Ipsos 2019 Global Advisor Survey. Among the 27 countries surveyed, Japanese people were the least likely to agree with the statement: “Achieving gender equality is important to me, personally” (36%; 41% of women and 31% of men). Even for women, gender inequality appears not to be perceived as an issue of personal relevance in Japan.

FIGURE 04

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "ACHIEVING EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IS IMPORTANT TO ME PERSONALLY".



Base: 18,800 online adults aged 16-64 across 27 countries, 21 Dec 2018 - 4 Jan 2019
Source: Ipsos International Women’s Day 2020 report

SECTION 2
**DRIVERS OF
INDIFFERENCE**



WHY ARE JAPANESE WOMEN NOT CLAMORING FOR GREATER GENDER EQUALITY?

Three main drivers provide insight into the dynamics at play:

1

Framing of gender inequality issues: What is gender inequality? Who does it affect? Who does it harm or benefit? Where are these perceptions coming from?

2

Cultural Context within which gender inequality is intertwined with cultural practices, traditions, relationships, and foundational understandings.

3

Institutional and Societal Context that supports perceptions of gender differences and upholds, propagates, and reinforces strict gender roles across the Japanese media, educational system, and working culture and structure.



FRAMING

A “WOMEN’S ISSUE”

Japan is not exceptional in perceiving issues around gender inequality as being essentially “women’s issues”. Even the most purportedly progressive governments and organizations have tended to focus potential solutions around how to “fix” or accommodate

women to enable them to function more effectively in the corporate workplace. The potential gains of addressing gender inequality are often perceived as belonging to women and, therefore, the onus to address gender inequality is on them.

LACK OF A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

A 2019 Ipsos Japan survey¹⁵ revealed a lack of both understanding and consensus about what constitutes “gender inequality”. Rather than understanding it as inequality of opportunity, gender equality was more often understood to mean that men and women must be treated exactly the same. In Japan, genders have long been considered innately different, both biologically as well as possessing complementary strengths and weaknesses. Men and women are thought to each play their own critical role, contributing to overall harmony and stability of Japanese society. As one respondent of the Ipsos study commented:

“Gender equality is being talked about a lot now and I think women’s rights are becoming equal with those of men. However, a part of me feels that it is a fact that men and women are good at different things. Ignoring those different strengths is irrational. It is not meant to be male dominant, but it seems illogical to treat men and women equally. It has to be considered on a case-by-case basis to decide what kind of inequality may be suitable depending on the situation.” Male, age 39¹⁶

THE SEPARATION OF THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL

Another way in which framing plays into the apparent ambivalence of Japanese men and women towards gender inequality relates to how personal experience or struggle is not readily extrapolated to the bigger picture. In other words, my salary being lower than my male co-worker's for the same job is my personal issue.

It is up to me to navigate within the existing structure to get my needs addressed, rather than to raise my voice and try to affect change on a larger scale. To make my personal issues an issue of societal concern in this context is unnatural and illogical. Therefore, considering gender inequality as a larger societal issue beyond the personal fails to register.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Much within the historical and contemporary Japanese cultural context explains the apparent ambivalence towards gender inequality.

HIERARCHY AND ROLE DIVISION

The adoption of Confucianism around 285AD contributed to the transformation of Japanese society into a hierarchical and patriarchal feudal structure. During the long Tokugawa period, the *bushido* (“way of the warrior”) code of ideals and behaviors served to further place women in a position of dependence and subservience. Until 1946, women lived under the authority of the male head of household.

Within this social structure, women were to play a supportive role and embody ideals of restraint, respect, organization, decorum and modesty. Even today, women most typically fulfil roles of nurture, care and support within the family and society. Men serve as the public face, protector, and financial provider of the family. To enable the “economic miracle” of the post-war period, government policy reinforced this clear division of gender roles. Women

were to be full-time housewives, managing every aspect of the household and child-rearing, while men were to devote themselves, body and soul, to the needs of the corporation.

Although the economic and demographic structure of Japan has changed dramatically in recent decades, a corresponding update in the expectations and aspirations for the lives of men and women has lagged. Even among young women, the role of full-time housewife is most often considered the aspirational ideal. A man with a job that is stable and well-paid enough to support a full-time housewife can allow her the time, attention, and energy to devote to the family and pursue her own interests. Men continue to strive to uphold these expectations, yet the realities of an economy that has contracted and wages that have stagnated over the past three decades makes this increasingly less achievable.



The Ipsos study on gender in Japan revealed a high level of mutual respect between men and women in the roles that each play. Rather than focus on unfair differences in rights or privileges, our respondents spoke about the responsibilities that each must take on. Women don't envy the pressures and limited free time that are

part of being a family man in Japan. It looks difficult, tiring and not nearly as emotionally gratifying as the role of wife and mother. In this way, the lack of energy Japanese women show around achieving gender equality may be partly driven by a lack of aspiration for the alternative.

IDEALS OF FEMININITY

From a young age, girls in Japan are conditioned to look and behave in a "feminine" way. For Japanese women, the goal of embodying femininity informs how she dresses, walks, speaks and behaves. Feminine norms require behaving in a way that is soft-spoken, gentle, and conscientious about maintaining a

good atmosphere and group harmony. Being vocal, insistent, or demanding of others is considered distinctly unfeminine. In this context, achieving positions of leadership and authority within corporate or political contexts can feel in conflict with feminine ideals and, even worse, carries a whiff of masculinity.



INSTITUTIONAL & SOCIAL CONTEXT

While Japanese culture creates a firm foundation of clear gender roles for men and women, the educational system, media messaging and the nature of work reinforce them, limiting ideas about what men and women

can do and be. Over the course of a lifetime, these ideas become so internalized that men and women don't question the status quo and limited options offered to them.

EDUCATION

The educational system in Japan contributes to creating clear perceptions of gender difference from a very early age. As Yuriko Murakami, former Head of the OECD's Tokyo Bureau, explains, "Children have developed gender bias by kindergarten or first grade." Gender is color-coded through name tags, uniforms, and backpacks. Although gendered curriculums were abolished in the 1990s, what remains today is a sort of "hidden curriculum" that promotes and reinforces ongoing unconscious bias. In textbooks, the doctor is male and the nurse female. The man returns from work while the wife waits at home.

Not only does the educational system limit ideas about what men and women can do and be through color-coding and gender stereotyping, the educational system fails to offer education around issues of gender and gender bias. The concept of gender equality is taught as the law of Japan, but there is no discussion of why it is important or what it means practically on a day-to-day basis. Without frameworks or the vocabulary to think about and discuss issues of gender inequality, Japanese men and women struggle to have a shared definition of "gender inequality" and to see its relevance.

Most importantly, Japanese boys and girls are not taught to reflect on their own assumptions and experiences of gender. The limited choices offered according to gender roles from childhood into adulthood go unquestioned. By the time that a young woman faces the choice of pursuing a career or marriage and motherhood, she doesn't question why she must choose only one. The examples and messaging that she has received through family, education,

media messaging and social policy around what it means to be feminine and admired reinforce this binary choice as logical, reasonable... and even obvious.

The 2021 Ipsos & Women's Forum Barometer Survey evidences this: 36% of Japanese agree with the statement "A woman will always be happier in her role as a mother, rather than her professional life," compared to 26% across G7 countries.¹⁷



MEDIA MESSAGING

The media plays a critical role in reinforcing perceptions around gender roles. Ideals of femininity projected through the media reinforce the expectation of a woman to be supportive and willing to sacrifice herself for the needs of others. From variety shows to idol culture, women are shown in support positions to men, and young women are treated as time-limited, perishable commodities.

Especially in Japan's ubiquitous variety shows, a young, cute female assistant is often paired with an older male host. While the male host remains constant over years, and even decades, the female assistants are routinely replaced after a certain time. They are said to “graduate”, placing a positive spin on this forced stepping down of older women. Major television news channels often feature male personalities (rather than journalists) leading the afternoon shows, with young female assistants.¹⁸

This manner of treating young women as generic commodities that require regular “refreshing” can be seen in celebrity culture as well. While many male “idols” can sustain popularity

over the longer-term, the turnover of female idols is far quicker. Amongst the most popular idol groups, males are at least 10 years older than their female counterparts. Beyond age disparities, women on television are typically placed in secondary, support positions, validating and expressing fascination with what the men have to say.

In a world where social media removes traditional media gatekeepers, there are some signs of positive change. Former female newscaster Keiko Kojima has become an activist since leaving her news career, founding an organization called FUN (Women's Announcer Network) to help women in news support each other and raising awareness around the pressure put upon female announcers to conform to a Japanese female ideal.¹⁹

However, traditional media has offered little in terms of role models to widen perspectives about what men and women can be and do within Japanese society. Television and movies lack images of working mothers able to competently balance professional life and family life.

FIGURE 05



TV Asahi's cast feature young women and older men
<https://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/goodmorning/cast/>

FIGURE 06



The average age of members of popular boy band Arashi was around 37 vs. 21 average age for popular girl group.

FIGURE 07



Former TBS news announcer, Keiko Kojima, has become an activist raising awareness around gender bias in television news.

WORK STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

The feminine world lies within the domestic realm in Japanese culture, while the external world of work and politics is that of men. As such, the corporate world is perceived as essentially masculine. While most women in Japan do work professionally, their presence - until recently - was typically deemed as temporary (until they marry/have children), and best suited to support roles.

The decision to pursue a career or not is made when a woman is hired into either the administrative track (一般職) with its shorter hours and lesser demands, or the management track (総合職). In 2014, only 22% of female employees chose to enter the management track. Of these, 60% left

their jobs within 10 years.²⁰ The men are the leaders and “lifers”, setting the tone, structure, and rhythm of the Japanese workplace.

Career progression is typically seniority-based, which penalizes women who must take time off for maternity leave. Women returning from maternity leave are typically offered a “jitan” (時短) arrangement of reduced hours and reduced salary. This practice puts working mothers on a “mommy track” of limited expectations and limited career progression. The salary reduction and increased difficulty securing childcare and tax incentives make continuing to work challenging and less financially rewarding.

Add to this arrangement the societal conditioning that places motherhood as a woman’s highest purpose and the widely-held belief that a child’s first 3 years of life should be spent physically close to the mother, it is no wonder that women with children perceive enormous pressure to leave the workplace and become full-time mothers. In Japan this is called a “specialized housewife”.

These pressures are felt intensely and go relatively unquestioned. The individual tends to accommodate herself to the situation. The personal burdens and challenges are made to feel like one’s own failing, rather than a larger societal issue. In fact, this is all the product of a government, corporate structure and society that operates under the assumptions of strict gender roles that no longer suit the societal and economic realities of Japan.

IN SUMMARY...

Within Japanese society, the way that issues of gender inequality are framed, the cultural context, and the institutional and social context all reinforce ideas and practices, working in conjunction to limit conceptions of what men and women can do and be. Conditioned since early childhood, and visible across every aspect of society, a belief that gender differences are natural and necessary is deeply internalized. This means that neither Japanese men nor women question the status quo and the limited life paths open to them.

A GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Part of the reason that Japan's attitude towards gender equality looks like ambivalence is that the younger generation lacks political and institutional influence and power, and has not yet reached decision-making leadership positions. In Japan, young people tend not to vote, contributing to the problem that their needs and viewpoints are brushed aside in favor of those of an older generation, who diligently turn up at the polls. In Japan's most recent general election, just one-third of people in their twenties cast their ballot compared to 72% among people aged 60-69.²¹

Younger Japanese may want and need change, but they do not have a strong enough voice to accelerate change. As a result, they are pushed in two directions: between systems and structures based on former realities and traditional value systems, and an economy that often requires a two-income family and greater flexibility in strict gender roles at home. As one female respondent remarked:

"The idea that men work outside the home and women take care of the home is deeply-rooted. However, today's reality is that women need to contribute to household finances

by working, but they still must bear the burdens of housework and child-rearing. This is impossible to balance, especially when you have a nursing or sick child. I think that the mindsets and social systems don't recognize that these old values don't match with today's realities." Female, age 37 ²²

What may look like ambivalence from an aggregate perspective reflects the confusion of societal forces pulling in two directions: an older generation tethered to traditional value systems and their own highly-gendered life experiences as reference points versus a younger generation with greater awareness and sensitivity to gender inequality when experienced personally, especially within the work context.

As the older generation passes the torch to the younger generation, and as economic necessity continues to push women into the workplace, attitudes and beliefs about the relevance and necessity of strict gender roles will likely evolve. Simultaneously, economic necessity will drive behavior change, which will eventually result in new values, aspirations, and beliefs.



SECTION 3
**REFRAMING
THE ISSUE**



INCONVENIENT TRUTH TO HUGE OPPORTUNITY

If progress on gender inequality is inevitable, and if about half of the population are not concerned about gender inequality while the other half is not vocally protesting, why the need to push for change? As urgent priorities like the strain of a ballooning elderly population, increasing inequality, and Japan's diminishing international influence and competitiveness beg for attention, what is the relevance of gender?

Put simply, addressing gender equality issues could potentially provide answers to Japan's most urgent challenges; economically, societally, and individually. Japan no longer has the luxury of underutilizing the talents, skills, and knowledge of half of its citizens across its business and political spheres. Nor can it afford to keep the other half from fully participating in family life. Gender equality must be understood as an opportunity for all of Japan's citizens, both men and women, to fulfill their full potential.

THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The positive economic impact that more women in the workplace brings is widely acknowledged in Japan; in fact, women's empowerment (versus "gender equality") was positioned as an economic growth strategy of former Prime Minister Abe's 2013 "Womenomics" initiative. A higher level of female participation at all levels of the workforce is essential to address the labor shortage and ever-growing public spending needs as the older generation

retires and younger generations cannot fill the gaps. In 2010, Goldman Sachs estimated that, if Japan's female professional participation rate matched that of males, GDP would be boosted by 15%.²³

The opportunity is not just about numbers of workers filling gaps, but also about improving the quality of the work that women do. This will improve Japan's lagging productivity and boost

wages and economic growth. Currently, Japan is investing in providing equal education to girls and boys, but then throws away the investment by maintaining work structures and cultures that underutilize women and discourage their long-term, meaningful participation. Japan's most ambitious,

dynamic, and talented young women who feel they cannot thrive in these circumstances often join foreign companies or leave Japan altogether, gaining education and building careers where they feel they will be most valued.

THE SOCIETAL OPPORTUNITY

The Japanese population has been shrinking every year since 2008. And, thanks to increasing longevity combined with a declining marriage rate and declining birth rate, Japan is famously the world's fastest-ageing nation²⁴ with 28% of the population aged 65 or above.²⁵

Part of the reason for the decline in marriage has to do with the restructuring of corporate Japan over the past three decades from "regular" employment with benefits and security towards "non-regular" employment with lower salaries, no benefits, and no security, as well as long-term wage stagnation. There are simply fewer men that can afford to support a family with a full-time housewife. With a pragmatic attitude towards marriage, more and more Japanese

men and women are simply choosing not to marry and have children, hence the famous "demographic timebomb" of more old people and fewer young people, squeezing society at both ends.

Addressing gender inequality to create more flexible work structures and cultures will allow Japanese couples greater flexibility and resources to combine careers and family life by sharing work and care responsibilities.

Scandinavian countries are well-known to be the most gender-equal and, likely not by coincidence, tend to have higher fertility rates compared to the EU average and rank as the happiest nations on earth. What new kind of family life could we imagine for young Japanese couples and children?

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

The OECD's 2018 PISA study reveals that, amongst 30 OECD countries surveyed, only 15-year-olds in Turkey and the UK rated their life satisfaction lower than Japanese 15-year-olds.²⁶ Despite strong improvement since the number of suicides peaked in 2003, Japan continues to have the highest suicide rate of the group of 7 advanced economies. Notably, suicide is the top cause of death for those aged 15-39.²⁷ The pandemic appears to have only worsened the situation for women and young people; in 2020, the overall suicide rate increased by +3.7% in Japan, but increased by

more than 14% for women and, sadly, by nearly 30% for elementary school students as well.²⁸

How could greater gender inequality give a greater sense of opportunity, optimism and possibility to Japanese younger people? By releasing men and women from the pressure of fulfilling strict gender roles that only suit some, how much human potential could be unleashed as each individual has the opportunity to choose his/her own path to find fulfillment, satisfaction and joy?

IN SUMMARY...

Gender equality is not the end-goal in itself, but also the means to an end that will create opportunity for all of Japan's citizens to fulfil their full potential, with benefits to be had economically, societally and individually. Without a doubt, greater gender equality is essential to achieving a more prosperous, more hopeful, and healthier Japan.



SECTION 4
**THE VALUE
OF DIVERSITY**



Japan is moving in the right direction when it comes to addressing issues of gender inequality in the economic and political spheres, but progress is too slow and uneven. New Prime Minister Kishida's cabinet includes three women out of 24 members (see Figure 8 below).

Board diversity in Japan's top companies (the Nikkei 225) is only at 6% in 2020²⁹ and, although the Tokyo Stock Exchange has set new guidelines for reaching female inclusion on corporate boards, the American NASDAQ has been more forceful in setting strict requirements.

FIGURE 08



Prime Minister Kishida (front, centre) and cabinet

Corporate and political Japan may now be starting to speak the language of diversity, but the value of diversity is likely not well-understood, and certainly not internalized. Homogeneity is perceived to enable Japanese society's incredible social cohesion and has thus long been perceived as one of Japan's greatest strengths, preserving a society that is cooperative, peaceful, and stable. Sameness is a strength, not diversity.

Against this cultural backdrop, the value of diversity to a workplace or an institution is not fully understood or embraced as a way to navigate the challenges of rapid demographic, economic, environmental, technological and geopolitical changes. To the individual and organization, "diversity" as a concept is likely just as poorly understood and seemingly irrelevant as "gender equality".

Until the value of diversity is truly understood and internalized by government and corporate leaders, Japan will continue to struggle to make gains in gender equality. Japan has innumerable strengths, including

an educated, capable workforce, a strongly cohesive and peaceful society, wealth, and technology. Continuing to favor the status quo when it comes to gender inequality means a Japan that decides that shrinking is better than changing.

As noted by Bill Emmott in his book *Japan's Far More Female Future* (Oxford University Press, 2020), "the three decades of Heisei [era] have [...] seen Japan lose its world champion status", with depressed real incomes, lower household consumption and savings, and lower expectations that result in less frequent marriage and fewer children, not to mention steadily growing levels of poverty and inequality.³⁰

"The result is that a country that could and arguably should be a high-wage, high-quality place, operating at or near the technology frontier [...] enters Reiwa [era] as a surprisingly low-wage, even high poverty society. It doesn't look like that if you wander the streets of Tokyo. But it is."³¹

IN CONCLUSION

An advanced society in so many ways, Japan lags far behind other industrialized nations and its Asian neighbors in achieving gender equality. Yet, among Japanese men and women, there is seeming ambivalence around issues of gender inequality in Japan.

Causal factors include the way that issues of gender inequality are framed, the cultural context, and how the institutional and social context reinforce ideas and practices, limiting ideas about what men and women can do and be.

A belief in gender differences as natural and necessary is deeply internalized, so that both Japanese men and women do not question the status quo.

The assumptions of strict gender roles no longer suit the societal and economic realities of Japan.

Yet, enabling all of Japan’s citizens to achieve their full potential in a more gender-equal society can unleash enormous benefits economically, societally, and individually. Without a doubt, greater gender equality is essential to achieving a more prosperous, more hopeful, and healthier Japan.

While the status quo (“the devil you know”) may seem like the easier path in the short-term, Japan’s continued lagging behind on gender equality issues is creating missed opportunities and holding its people back from a far brighter future.

REFERENCES

1. World Economic Forum’s 2020 Report on Gender Equality.
2. World Economic Forum’s 2021 Report on Gender Equality.
3. “Slow Progress on Gender Spurs Calls for Legal Targets,” Eric Johnston, The Japan Times, September 17, 2021, p.4.
4. According to the OECD Survey of Japan, p. 19, under the Abe government, Japan added 530,000 childcare places and 300,000 after-school places in 2013-2017
5. World Economic Forum’s 2021 Report on Gender Equality, p.233.
6. Emmott, Bill. Japan’s Far More Female Future. Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 27.
7. World Economic Forum’s 2021 Report on Gender Equality, p.234.
8. World Economic Forum’s 2020 Report on Gender Equality
9. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Japan-s-all-male-boards-face-rejection-by-foreign-investors>
10. Emmott, Bill. Japan’s Far More Female Future. Oxford University Press, 2020, p.28.
11. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Success-and-suffering-The-pandemic-s-burden-on-working-women>
12. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/Women-bear-brunt-of-Japan-s-pandemic-job-losses>
13. “Slow Progress on Gender Spurs Calls for Legal Targets,” Eric Johnston, The Japan Times, September 17, 2021, p.4.
14. “A growing push for equality”, The Japan Times, August 26, 2021.
15. 2019 Ipsos Japan Survey, “Attitudes towards Gender Inequality”.
16. 2019 Ipsos Japan Survey, “Attitudes towards Gender Inequality”.

17. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-06/Women%27s%20forum%202021%20report%20G7.pdf>
18. Some examples: <https://www.ntv.co.jp/sukkiri/> <https://www.fujitv.co.jp/viking/>
19. https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/entry/story_jp_61246746e4b07fee0cb0be2d
20. <https://www.businessinsider.jp/post-34485>
21. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211029-generation-gap-why-japan-s-youth-don-t-vote>
22. 2019 Ipsos Japan Survey
23. “Womenomics 3.0: The Time is Now”, Goldman Sachs, 2010.
24. <https://www.oecd.org/economy/ageing-inclusive-growth/#:~:text=Japan%20is%20experiencing%20the%20fastest,mot%20significant%20challenges%20from%20ageing.>
25. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-japan-marriages-idUSKBN2AM1FY>
26. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c414e291-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/c414e291-en>
27. <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00857/>
28. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/01/22/national/japan-suicide-rate/>
29. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Japan-s-all-male-boards-face-rejection-by-foreign-investors>
30. Emmott, Bill. Japan’s Far More Female Future. Oxford University Press, 2020, p.31.
31. Emmott, Bill. Japan’s Far More Female Future. Oxford University Press, 2020, p.31.

THE IPSOS FLAIR PROGRAMME

“The Devil You Know” dives into the issue of gender equality in Japan and is part of an ongoing *Ipsos Flair* programme in the country, developing articles on key topics of interest today.

Flair seeks to transform survey results into inspiring insights, capturing the mood of a society, drawing on our experts’ intuition. Beyond the figures, *Flair* wants to understand the deeper motivations and perspectives of consumer-citizens.

In this way, *Flair* uses Ipsos surveys and external data sources – the hard facts – as a starting point for the expression of our experts’ points of view. We look at the signals in society that indicate the development of broader trends, focusing on changes in markets, sectors, and values, and connect the dots to understand people’s feelings and expectations.

Flair is also developed in Brazil, China, Colombia, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Russia, Mexico, Peru, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand.

For more information, please contact:

Yves Bardon, Ipsos Flair Programme Director
Yves.Bardon@Ipsos.com

Yuko Yamanobe Marketing & Communications, Ipsos in Japan
Yuko.Yamanobe@Ipsos.com

JAPAN 2022

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

AUTHORS

Deanna Elstrom Strategic Insight Partner, Ipsos in Japan

Erina Miyazaki Research Manager, UU, Ipsos in Japan

Japan Photos provided courtesy of **Marco Spola Photography**
www.marcospola.com

Ipsos Editions
January 2022

www.ipsos.com
[@Ipsos](https://twitter.com/ipsos)

GAME CHANGERS

