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**Gender Inequality in the Japanese Workplace: Issues Related to the Promotion of
Childcare Leave Taken by Men**

Diploma Thesis

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In Prague, June 25, 2021, Maiko Hata

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Abstract

Gender inequality in the workplace is a high-profile issue. Presently, Japanese women face a variety of issues in terms of gender inequality, particularly in the workplace. The concept of work-life balance has been used to understand the linkage between women's participation and advancement in the workplace and Japan's low birth rate. It has been discussed by the government, media, and companies and utilized as a mantra since the early 2000s. Since then, the government has provided and developed the state's system of childcare leave and policies to support parents raising children. The expansion of childcare leave and benefits reveals Japan's concerns about the country's decreasing birthrate and aging population.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law was implemented in 1986. Since then, the number of women gaining college degrees and participating in the labor force has increased significantly. Today in Japan, gender-based discrimination is prohibited by labor law and women have equal rights to access education and equal opportunities to work. However, gender inequality persists, such as the gender wage gap, the percentage of men taking childcare leave, and female representation in management positions. This thesis thus aims to clarify the sociopolitical and cultural backgrounds of gender inequality in the workplace and explore how Japanese companies handle these measures with a focus on the promotion of childcare leave for male employees.

Keywords: childcare leave, gender inequality in the workplace, promotion of women's participation and advancement in the workplace, work-life balance

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Gender Inequality in the Japanese Workplace: Issues Related to the Promotion of Childcare Leave Taken by Men

Introduction

This thesis clarifies the sociopolitical and cultural background to how gender inequality in the workplace had been produced, explores current issues and barriers in Japan, and examines the reality of how Japanese companies have understood, promoted, and attempted to ensure childcare leave taken by men.

The issues of gender inequality in the workplace are ubiquitous. Gender inequality remains problematic globally. Insofar as gender inequality in the workplace is concerned, a United Nations [UN] report of 2020 clarifies that: women are paid 16 percent less than men, and only one in four managers are women (*SNAPSHOT*, 2020). Japan is no exception to this picture. In fact, Japan has not coped as well with gender inequality as other economically advanced countries.

More specifically, there have already been discussed the gender wage gap (ILO, 2018; Blau & Kahn, 2017), motherhood penalties (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Kricheli-Katz, 2012; Budig & England, 2001), and parental leave (Atkinson, 2017; Guo, 2017; Lanfranconi & Valarino, 2014). As the prior academic research suggests, gender inequality in the workplace is a high-profile issue, and it has gained a lot of interest in Japan as well.

The former Abe administration (2012–2020) promulgated key policies, including “Womenomics” (2013), a “Society in which All Women Shine” (2013), and the “Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace” (2016). These policies have encouraged Japanese people to consider gender inequality in the workplace such as the pay gap, career interruption, motherhood penalties, and work-life balance on a broad

scale. The government established these policies by reflecting on the desperate current and future labor shortage in Japan and the high demand for the advancement of women's positions in the workplace. However, gender inequality is often discussed within the discourse of demographic problems, productivity growth, and diversity in the workplace. The aging population, combined with the diminishing number of children, has caused a desperate demand for a larger future working population.

This thesis aims to answer the main research question: What is the reality of Japanese companies which have enthusiastically encouraged men to take childcare leave. I will investigate common keywords and motivations as well as challenges behind the promotion of men's childcare leave in Japanese companies. To acknowledge the main research questions, this thesis will elaborate on the following detailed questions: how they consider the necessity or importance of childcare leave taken by men; what their motivation is; how they have managed human resources; what their challenges are.

To answer the research questions, I collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with 10 Japanese companies which have participated in the "Manifesto of 100% men's childcare leave" organized by the consultancy company WORK-LIFE BALANCE Co., Ltd. I mainly focused on given experiences and stories behind the promotion of men's childcare leave by the selected companies to grasp the reality and their challenges.

This thesis is divided into two large sections: theoretical and empirical. Chapter 1 "Gender Inequality in Japanese Context" begins with prominent definitions of gender inequality assessed by using quantitative indicators by two international organizations. To complement the ambiguity of quantitative data of gender inequality, it looked at the

qualitative aspect of gender inequality such as incidents and problems in Japanese politics and academia by reviewing media resources.

Chapter 2 “Gender Inequality in the Workplace” elaborates on the contexts where gender inequality in the workplace comes into being, specifically focuses on Japanese socio-political and cultural background and systems. It starts with the issue of the “Wall of 1.5 Million Yen,” the spouse tax deduction system which hinders women from participating and earn more by paid work. Following the controversy of the tax system, I trace back two employment paths in subchapter 2.2. that clarify the Equal Employment Opportunity Law is a token agreement. In subchapter 2.3., I introduce Japanese corporate culture and the rules tailored by men and for men based on long-hours working style and a seniority system. The last subchapter closes the issues mentioned above eventually resulting in career interruption for female employees due to the difficulty of managing double work as a carer and earner. The barriers recreate gender inequality in the workplace.

Chapter 3 “Work-Life Balance in Politics and Laws” disentangles the problems of policies and the childcare leave systems. Subchapter 3.1. introduces how “work-life balance” has been conveniently utilized in women’s promotion of participation and advancement in the workplace and childcare leave and shows the current situations. In subchapter 3.2., I raise problems from the feminist perspective, focusing on nursery schools, heteronormativity in childcare systems, and the limitation of the work-life balance debate. The final subchapter 3.3. “The Barriers to Childcare Leave for Male Employees” unravels the reasons that the percentage of childcare leave taken by men has stagnated.

Chapter 4 “Methodology” formulates the structures of the empirical section of this thesis. In the first subchapter 4.1., I explain my positionality in this research. The theme of the thesis came from my experience and family background, and therefore it is meaningful to

disclose the connection between the researcher's position and academic interest. Then, subchapter 4.2. documents the whole procedure of how I decided on methodology and methods to answer research questions. In subchapter 4.3., I utilize the model stated by Esterberg (2002) to analyze the collected data by following the grounded theory coding approach. Finally, subchapter 4.4 provides the information on the research participants.

Chapter 5 "Reality of the Promotion of Childcare Leave Taken by Men," namely the data analysis chapter untangles three topics to answer the research questions. Subchapter 5.1. provides the background stories and motivations for a strong commitment to childcare taken by men. Subchapter 5.2. clarifies how companies have confronted issues and barriers to promoting childcare leave taken by men and how they have managed and coped with those issues. Then, finally in the last subchapter 5.3., I explain the perception of the concept of work-life balance amongst the interviewed company representatives.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the most important findings of my research that together give answers to the research questions stated in the introduction.

Theoretical Section

Chapter 1: Gender Inequality in Japanese Context

It has been 25 years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law [EEOL] became effective, and five years have passed since the “Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace” was enforced in 2016. Notwithstanding, people in Japan identify the country as gender-unequal: “More than 60 percent of people in Japan think gender equality, guaranteed by the Constitution, is not or not greatly realized in the country, despite the government’s efforts to reduce the underrepresentation of women in politics and business” (Kyodo News+, 2021). Correspondingly, foreign researchers state that “Japanese women have long been underrepresented in positions of power” (Binder et al., 2019).

The former Abe administration established a package of policies to promote women’s participation in the workplace; however, the evaluations of gender equality and such policies are not always positive, both among the Japanese people, as mentioned above, and from academe: “Although five years have passed since the Abe administration announced the intention of strengthening women’s participation in the labor market as part of a national growth strategy, there has been no increase in Japan” (Iida, 2018). Alongside gender inequality in general, the Heisei era (1989–2019, the reign of Emperor Akihiko) brought the actual change of feminization in education and the workplace. Bill Emmott, a British journalist and the former editor-in-chief of *The Economist* describes women’s progress in Japan in his latest book *Japan's Far More Female Future* (2020) by taking a retrospective glance at the Heisei era:

(...) the essentials are that during these three decades of Heisei Japan became older, the economy became slower-growing as productivity growth also slowed, citizens

came to feel more insecure financially and more unequal, and both tertiary education and the workplace became far more female (p. 11).

Without a doubt, the government promoted women's participation in the workplace, and the legal systems prepared for it. Also, it is certain that more and more Japanese women accessed higher education and went into the full-time labor force. The question, therefore, arises of why gender equality lags behind that in other countries, despite academia and the workplace becoming far more female, as Emmott claims. This chapter will explain gender inequality in Japan from both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

1.1 Quantitative Aspect of Gender Inequality and Gap

To explain the conditions of gender inequality in Japan, it is best to start by discussing the quantitative data presented in the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum. This prominent evaluation assesses the gender gap worldwide. By utilizing the Gender Gap Index [GGI], which is made up of four realms; economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. In 2020, Japan's score was 0.652, ranking 120th among 156 countries, which was the worst score among G7 and ASEAN countries (*Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, 2021). However, the Gender Inequality Index [GII], which is "a composite measure, reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market" (World Health Organization (WHO), n.d.), evaluates Japan as having "very high human development." This GII, reported in the Human Development Report of 2020 by the UN Development Programme [UNDP], shows that Japan is in 24th place among 160 countries (UNDP, 2020). These two reports are contradictory because they have different indicators to evaluate gender equality: while the GGI is oriented

to politics and the economy, the GII focuses more on the safe environment surrounding women, such as conditions of childbirth. Therefore, quantitative data is not enough to show every aspect of gender inequality. Rather, it is important to decide what aspect one should prioritize to assess gender inequality. From the quantitative perspective, there is indeed a lack of female representation in politics and the economy in Japan. Only 9.9 percent of politicians are women in the Lower House and 22.9 percent in the Upper House. In local government, the proportion of women in prefectural congresses is just 11.4 percent, while among regional politicians it is 14.6 percent. The lack of female representation in politics is even worse when the issues are examined in detail: more than 30 percent of regional congresses do not have a single congresswoman (*Seijibunya Ni Okaru Danjokyoudousankaku No Suishin Ni Kansuru Houritsu (Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field)*, 2020).

The absence of women in power has become high-profile in the last eight years since Abe's administration launched "202030" originally claimed by the former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (Liberal Democratic Party [LDP]) in 2003, which aimed to raise the percentage of women in leadership posts to 30 percent by 2020 and eventually it failed. Only 11.8 percent of women ended up in positions above section manager, according to survey data collected by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [MHLW] (NIKKEI STYLE, 2020). In addition, only eight percent of employers are female (TEIKOKU DATABANK, 2020), and only 20 percent of doctors are women, which is the lowest among the OECD countries (nippon.com, 2018). Moreover, Kawano (2018) clarifies the underrepresentation of female researchers based on the survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology "Gakkou Kihon Chousa (Report on School Basic Survey)" of 2017:

In all school types, the proportion of women tends to decrease as the position increases. 29.8% of university assistant professors and 31.8% of lecturers are women,

but when they become associate professors, they drop to 24.2%, and for professors (including the president and vice president), they drop to 16.0%. Also, the proportion of women among professors in national universities is only 9.8 percent (p. 60).

In the mass media, there are countless reports bemoaning not only a lack of female managerial representations in business, politics, and academia but also the low percentage of childcare leave taken by male employees (Kanemoto, 2020: NIKKEI STYLE, 2020: KYODO NEWS+, 2020). According to the report by MHLW, while 83 percent of women took childcare leave in 2019, only 7.48 percent of men did so (*Reiwa Gannendo Koyou Kintou Kihon Chousa No Kekka Gaiyou (Summary of Results of Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management in 2019)*, 2020). Although the percentage of taking men's childcare leave has increased little by little, the gender discrepancy in number should not be overlooked.

From the perspective of statistics showing women's current situation, especially in politics and the economy, the GGI truly illustrates gender inequality in Japan. However, it is ambiguous to use the term "gender unequal" simply to describe Japan from a quantitative perspective.

1.2. Qualitative Aspect of Gender Inequality

A qualitative perspective, in contrast, introduces an in-depth look at the "why" factors of gender inequities in Japan, starting with the historical background. The number of female workers dramatically increased during World War I and World War II to make up for the labor shortage due to the mobilization of men to the military. Generally, it is believed that the severe labor shortage during wartime created a demand for labor and inevitably drew more women into the labor force. Eventually, the government had no choice than to admit the capability of women to do the same jobs that men used to do before the wars. This

“discovery” of the “worth” of women working outside the home was a significant trigger of the emergence of women’s participation in paid work. However, the meaning of “work” and the ideology behind work may have drastically differed from the current work environment. Female factory workers in wartime were trained to become “women,” “wives,” and “mothers,” with civic and moral duties, and industry managers offered “practical domestic training more consistent with the needs of housewives than industrial workers” (Faison, 2007). Thus, although more women, specifically unmarried women from rural areas across Japan joined paid work, factories took the role of “teaching” and “civilizing” women to nurture their femininity. They educated female factory workers that women’s caretaking roles as being wives and mothers were most important, not being independent workers. The demands of war created the historical moment for many women to participate in paid work for the first time, yet it did not change the male-dominant society. Rather, it enforced a set of paternalistic and pro-natalist beliefs: Men went to the battlefield to protect the nation at the front, while women stayed to take care of families or worked in the arms industry to support them. This ideology is still clearly seen in the gender-segregated labor systems of today. Essentially, women were identified as mere replacements for assistants to men in the name of the victory of the Empire of Japan.

About forty years later, during the bubble economy, the EEOL was passed in 1985, when the Japanese demography was young and the economy was booming (“the bubble economy”). A look at the history of the EEOL reveals that it dates back to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, passed in 1979 by the UN. Discussion of gender inequality in the workplace started in Japan in the late 1970s, in the wake of the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), when the Japanese government made covenants to rectify gender inequality and ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination by the end of the decade. Japan's willingness to conform to international rules can be in part explained by its desire to acquire global leadership (Mikanagi, 2000). Because the lawmakers were impatient to catch up with other economically developed countries, the EEOL merely guarantees equal "opportunity" not "results." Moreover, Mikanagi (2000) concludes that, "due to the staunch resistance of the business community as well as the LDP, the law was designed so it would not cause much change and so that it would not obstruct the restructuring process of the economy" (p. 128). Yukiko Abe (2011), who investigated cross-sectional data to examine the impact of the EEOL on women's employment for the period from 1987 to 2007, used a sample of women between the ages of 20 and 45 and, likewise, states:

The regular employment ratio did not go up for either married or single women of post-EEOL cohorts (cohorts who entered the labor market after the EEOL). For educational groups other than university graduates, the regular employment ratio for post-EEOL cohort single women actually fell (p. 52).

Therefore, the EEOL is a tokenistic gesture toward gender equality, and the status of women in the workplace has not changed dramatically.

In addition to historical facts of gender inequality in paid work, a set of Japanese traditions and values should be considered. Frequently, these come out as misogynistic remarks by Japanese male politicians which cause controversy. For example, in 2007 a former Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Hakuo Yanagisawa described women as machines to give birth (McCurry, 2007). In 2014, in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, 35-year-old assemblywoman Ayaka Shiomura was subjected to sexist abuse during a debate on support for parenting, when male assembly members shouted "You are the one who should get married as soon as possible" and "Aren't you able to have children?" at her (McCurry, 2014).

Sexism and gender discrimination happen not only in the political world but in academia. Four medical schools in Japan have admitted to systematic discrimination against female candidates for examinations; specifically, an investigation found that

Tokyo Medical University had reduced all medical school applicants' initial test scores by 20%, before inflating the scores of male applicants' exams. The institution initially defended the policy by arguing that women were more likely to leave the medical profession to pursue motherhood, creating a staffing shortage in the sector (Haynes, 2018).

Male supremacy justified by women's weak career commitment because of motherhood is a classic excuse, but it is still present in Japan. The Tokyo Medical University case explains the scarcity of female doctors and the extent to which discrimination and systemic violence prevail in Japan. Moreover, the Japanese corporate culture of sexist rules causes much controversy, such as the #KuToo movement, which is a pun on the words Kutsu (shoes) and Kutsū (pain). The movement was started in 2019 on Twitter by Ishikawa Yumi, who collected over 23,000 signatures from women who wanted not to be forced to wear high heels in the workplace and presented the petition to MHLW (Gunia, 2019).

Chapter 2: Gender Inequality in the Workplace

As the data and misogynistic utterances noted in the previous chapter show, gender inequality, especially in the workplace and politics, is pervasive in Japan. The traditional gender division of labor remains: men work as breadwinners and while women are the primary carers. Gender differences in employment and a male-centered corporate culture hinder women's career continuity and promotion. According to Starnarski and Son Hing (2015), "Gender inequality in organizations is a complex phenomenon that can be seen in organizational structures, processes, and practices." The power of organizations, based on the national collective culture, and authoritarian processes and practices have influenced female workers in Japan negatively. Gender inequality in the workplace in the Japanese context spring from multiple reasons. Although it is impossible to simplify its background and problems, I focus on two issues in gender inequality in the workplace: the gender wage gap and the Japanese employment system.

The problem of the gender wage gap is ubiquitous. It could cost 160 trillion USD in lost earnings globally and women account for only 38 percent of the global human capital wealth and face barriers in the workforce in practically every country as the World Bank reported (THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, 2018). Japan is no exception: OECD data comparing full-time employees showed, a gender wage gap of 23.5 percent in 2019, which is the second largest number amongst OECD countries (OECD, 2021)

In addition, the gap in annual income between non-regular and regular employees in the Japanese context is enormous: non-regular employees earn approximately 70 percent of regular employees annual income (*Reiwa 2nen Chingin Kouzou Kihon Toukei Chosa Kekka No Gaikyo (Overview of Basic Survey on Wage Structure in 2020)*, 2021). It is axiomatic that there are more non-regular female employees; hence, this data indicates they are likely to earn

less. Consequently, this wage difference by employment type eventually leads to the gender wage gap.

Japanese employment consists of two broad categories: regular and non-regular employment. Although there are no concrete judicial definitions of regular and non-regular employment, generally, regular employment means direct, full-time employment on a permanent contract, while all other employment patterns are often described as non-regular employment, such as part-time or fixed-term. Overall, there has been an increase in non-regular workers regardless of gender in the past three decades. Therefore, the increase of non-regular workers cannot simply be explained by gender per se; rather, it is due to the stagnation of the economy. General hypotheses of the reasons that non-regular employment has increased cite a post-industrial society, high volatility, the growth of women's participation in the labor force, and the relaxation of regulations (Tarohmaru, 2017). According to the "Labour Force Survey, 2020 Yearly Average Results" by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2021), the rate of employment among female employees aged 15 to 64 had increased to 70.6 percent by 2020, which indicates it rose more than 10 percent in a decade. However, as the statistics show, the rise of female participation in the labor force did not necessarily result in a dramatic increase in either regular workers or female representation in leadership positions. One of the reasons that the ratio of female managers stagnates is considered the low rate of female regular employment. According to Maeda (2019):

In 2018, the number of female employees (younger than the age of 64) who work in regular employment is less than half of men and the rate is 46.1 percent, which has decreased significantly; in 1988 it was approximately 65 percent (p. 27).

Even though there is an increase in non-regular employment, regardless of gender, Maeda also mentions: more than 80 percent of men work in regular employment, while about 50 percent of women work in non-regular employment (p. 27).

Furthermore, focusing on the same figures among mothers who have unmarried children below the age of 18, according to MHLW, 72.4 percent of such mothers have a job, consists of 26.2 percent are in regular, 37.8 percent of them work in non-regular, 8.5 percent in other employment, and 27.6 percent of them do not have a job (*2019 Kokumin Seikatsu Kiso Chosa no Gaikyo (Overview of Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions in 2019)*, 2020). Considering a precarious situation in non-regular employment in terms of social security etc., this is a significant problem.

As this data suggests, gender disparities in employment status and wage influence and enlarge gender inequality in the workplace. This chapter explains why the gender differences in the workplace are still wide by focusing on four main points: 1) Wall of 1.5 million yen, 2) Two employment paths, 3) Rules tailored for men in Japanese corporate culture, and 4) Career interruption.

2.1. Wall of 1.5 Million Yen

During the Abe administration (2012-2020), policies such as “Womenomics,” a “Society in which All Women Shine” (2013), and the “Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace” (2016) were established to accelerate economic growth. He set off a clamor for the necessity of having more women in the labor force. In 2018, the administration introduced a new income tax deduction to induce women to continue working while raising children, but some households faced a larger tax burden

depending on the size of the deduction and other conditions (Kyodo News+, 2014). Initially, it was a policy of large-scale tax deduction by the LDP, but today it is argued from the perspective of gender inequality. According to Emmott (2020), under a spousal tax deduction, a normal household's primary earner benefits from a Y380,000 (\approx 3.6 thousand USD¹) deduction from their income tax if there is a secondary earner who brings in less than Y1.5 million (\approx 14.1 thousand USD) a year (p.43). It is often argued that this tax mechanism hinders married women from earning more. Under this regulation, if a spouse earns more than Y1.5 million, the household will lose a large number of deduction benefits. Naturally, the spouse, especially one in non-regular employment would like to save their time and earn up to Y1.5 million to ensure a tax reduction for the whole household income. To be precise, it is a barrier for women, since there is a huge gender pay gap between women and men as previously cited. There are more barriers such as if a second earner brings in more than Y1.03 million (\approx 9.7 thousand USD), income tax will be imposed so that they will earn less than that. In addition, if one spouse earns more than Y1.3 million (\approx 12.2 thousand USD), he/she will not have a spouse's social insurance support, which means a second earner is necessary to pay insurance. The spouse tax deduction has been described as "not modern" or a "mismatch to modern dual-earner model" for a long time; however, a tax deduction manifesto is "popular" in elections. Thus, it is noteworthy that although the LDP is conservative and prioritizes "traditional" families, this may be simply because doing so wins popularity.

From the feminist perspective, women who earn less than Y1.5 million annually are in an extremely precarious situation. It is extremely difficult to live within an annual income of

¹ Calculated Y106.73 is 1 USD according to the average rate in 2020 by Bank Japan.

¥1.5 million, this being nearly equal to the minimum wage in Japan. Emmott (2020) further points out that

what the tax and social security rules do is to offer some benefit to households who get a bit of extra income if the wife does some part-time work at or close to the minimum wage, but then penalizes the household through quite a sharp rise in taxation if she chooses to work longer or for higher pay (p. 43).

Similarly, a famous Japanese feminist, Chizuko Ueno (2013), states that the social welfare system guides women into disadvantageous non-regular employment. Therefore, it is a highly probable trigger of gender inequality in the workplace. Hence, there has been an increase in women's participation in the workplace; still, however, many wives work as non-regular part-time workers on low pay. This is the first reason that many women in Japan work precarious non-regular employment, which hinders gender equality in the wage gap.

2.2. Two Employment Paths

The Japanese hiring system is one-size-fits-all. It is different from many Western countries: college students usually start looking for jobs before they begin their senior year of school, which is called “shūkatsu” (job-hunting). Junior or senior students on the verge of graduation usually take employment exams and interviews simultaneously and obtain a job before graduation. The starting period of the job-hunting season is decided annually by the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations, which means students can follow different job-hunting schedules each year. This system of simultaneous recruiting of new graduates can be traced back to the 1890s, and surprisingly it has not changed. Companies want to acquire young and talented students and educate and invest them to become fledged generalist workers. Until the EEOL was finally effected, the workplace was full of male full-time regular employees with a university degree. They have now become seniors in companies,

which, undoubtedly, is also one of the causes of gender inequality in today's ratio of managers. Emmott (2020) looks back on a human management system after the oil crisis in the 1970s when the only real resource in Japan was human capital. They proved the well-organized education system and in-house corporate training, but it only applied to men (p. 7).

Concerning the equal treatment of employees, the EEOL changed the conditions: employees may not be legally permitted to be treated differently depending on gender. However, companies especially large ones, have defeated the goals of the EEOL. They have shrewdly established two employment paths, instead of training female employees to become fully-fledged generalists. The two employment paths are "*ippan-shoku*" and "*sogo-shoku*." *Ippan-shoku* is the so-called feminine general clerical position: most employees in this category are female and have less responsible jobs with no pay raise, promotion, job transfer, or relocation. In contrast, *sogo-shoku* is a "career" oriented employment path: men and women who graduate from a four-year university program are mostly hired, and they are the candidates for future executive positions.

Although those companies which adopt two employment paths did not clarify which path is "suitable" for the genders, it is obvious that *ippan-shoku* has been designed for unmarried women who are going to be wives and mothers in the future: such women may work after marriage and childbirth, but they will possibly leave their job. Senda (2015) looked back at the system after the EEOL passed: "although only a few companies used this type of system, it is 'ideal' type as same as Japanese management system was; many Japanese companies used a human resource management that was essentially the same and actually based on gender, explicitly or implicitly" (p.55).

Many large companies now rarely use the *sogo/ippan* dichotomous job categories; instead, they segmentalize occupational categories such as engineers, sales representatives,

clerical posts, etc. There are countless occupational categories in different companies; hence, discussions of gender ratio and income in different jobs are limited. However, I would like to point out that human resource management depending on occupational categorization, may enlarge the wage difference not necessarily by gender but also by class and academic background. The tradition of managing human resources in Japan to raise “generalists” might have started to change slightly.

2.3. Rules Tailored for Men in Japanese Corporate Culture

In general, group harmony is one of the core collectivist traits in Japanese culture, and the Japanese workplace is no exception. As mentioned above, the recruitment system embodies corporate culture: most students take employment exams and interviews in the so-called “job-hunting season” altogether once per year. If they cannot follow the tide of job-hunting, they will redo it the following year. This in-house corporate training and education system was tailored for men and by men. Consequently, corporate culture has also been fostered for men and by men as well. The tailored corporate culture has created a notorious seniority system and long working hours, both of which have led to a lack of female representatives in the workplace. After all their efforts and academic success, and even if they are in the highly competitive “*sogo-shoku*” career-track employment path, women need to adapt to a masculine corporate culture. That is to say, in most industries, the majority of employees are men; thus, they will notice a lack of role models in the workplace.

Group harmony in corporate culture is present in terms of after-work drinking. If an employee is new to the workplace, he/she should join such “events” to be friendly with co-workers and keep harmony in the office. Women have often been victimized by an unreasonable corporate culture, and they are more likely to become victims of sexual harassment and struggle with male-oriented regulations and norms in the workplace.

Although gender discrimination and detrimental treatments are now prohibited according to the revised EEOL of 1997, endless cases of sexual harassment and sexist corporate culture have been reported, such as the #KuToo movement mentioned in the previous chapter.

Kumiko Nemoto (2010) reports the struggles of female workers in these terms:

They are often treated as hostesses in after-work drinking: they are touched and harassed verbally and physically. Women also are often excluded by male workers because sometimes male colleagues communicate in male-only sites. For example, male colleagues and seniors go to adult entertainment shops exclusive to men, which means they talk about business at the shop and strengthen their bond.

The problem is the ambiguity of the borderline: most women hesitate and feel “shame” about reporting incidents because of the difficulty of proving such incidents in most cases. Other than after-work drinking, there are many unwritten roles in Japanese corporate culture: young female workers should make drinks and pour alcohol for male seniors, and female workers should give a Valentine’s Day chocolate gift to male counterparts (usually, men return similar gift a month later). The question here is: how many women can fit themselves into Japanese corporate culture and rules tailored for men?

Long working hours remain pervasively in Japanese corporate culture. According to Suzuki (2016), an ILO’report of 2014 shows the percentage of those working more than 49 hours in a week country by country. Although this data includes the self-employed, who usually work longer hours, 21.3 percent of workers in Japan spend more than 49 hours per week working (p.7). In other words, more than 20 percent of people are fundamentally working against The Employment Standards Act (Roudou-Kijun-Hou), which stipulates that 40 hours a week is the maximum that employees should regularly work. This number is much higher than in other economically developed countries; the figures are 16.6 percent and 12.5

percent in the US and UK respectively (Suzuki, 2016, p. 7). Notably, 16 percent of male workers in their thirties work over 60 hours per week (*Chojikan Rodo Taisaku (Provisions of Long-Time Labour)*, 2017), albeit men in this age range are likely to be fathers raising young children. Interestingly, data shows that workers in Japan have started to work less and less, and Japan had the third-highest number of public holidays in 2020 (*Public Holidays in Japan 2020 / Few Holidays Compared with Overseas?*, 2020). Even so, the long-hour working culture is persistent.

The reason for this culture of long working hours may be the “atmosphere” in which younger employees hesitate to leave the office earlier than seniors, as well as the need to work more because of a low basic salary. Moreover, this deleterious long-hours working culture and the promotion system are still deeply connected: the one more works, the more one is likely to be promoted and better paid. In other words, based on the Japanese traditional corporate culture, salary does not depend on one’s productivity, but on one’s commitment and loyalty to the company in terms of “performing” longer working hours and keeping harmony in the workplace.

According to MHLW, (*Ikuji Kyugyou Seido Ni Tsuite (About Child Care System)*, 2019), approximately 50 percent of women quit a job because of pregnancy and the birth of a first child, and more than 80 percent of women take childcare leave (pp. 12-13). Thus, it is obvious that women are less likely to stay in the workforce than men because of the career interruption due to motherhood. Also, those statistics showcase that Japanese corporate culture makes it extremely difficult for women to be promoted and stay in one company as well as manage motherhood and work. This traditional Japanese employment system and corporate culture are out of step with the times, namely, a downshift of productivity and economic growth, an acceleration of demographic aging, a lack of manpower, and an increase

in non-regular “precarious” workers. Therefore, tailored rules for men, such as the seniority system and long working hour culture, influence the lack of female representation and hinder the development of gender equalities and a fair environment in the workplace.

2.4. Career Interruption

As noted above, 50% of female employees leave a job before and after the birth of the first child. This means that the hiatus in their career affects the gender inequality inherent in qualifying to receive a pension and, potentially, causes old-age poverty (OECD, 2017). There is no doubt that the incompatibility of work and childcare is the most significant factor that sustains gender inequality in the workplace. According to MHLW’s *“Ikuji Kyugyou Seido Ni Tsuite (About Child Care System)”*(2019), research by Mitsubishi Research & Consulting (2015) surveying female regular employees who quit a job before and after childbirth showed that 30.2% of women had left their jobs due to difficulty of balancing work and childcare, despite their wish to continue to work. When it looks deeply at the specific reasons for the “difficulty,” the same survey research presents: “Working incompatibility with childcare expected (caused)” (57.7%), “Working hours making (or likely to make) childcare infeasible” (42.6%), “Workplace lacking in willingness to support mothers” (38.5%) (p. 13). These reasons are possibly due to corporate culture and rules tailored for men and by men. Moreover, women left a job due to “Excessive physical exhaustion expected (or caused)” (23.1%), “Frequent days off unavoidable for the child’s sickness, etc.” (19.2%), “Little or no likelihood of the child’s being admitted to a day-care center” (15.4%), and “Other family members’ request to leave the job” (11.5%) (p.13).

These findings indicate that the inflexibility of working time, overconcentration of childcare among women, and an unsupportive atmosphere in the workplace before and after

childbirth eventually lead to career interruption among female regular workers. Interestingly, according to Yamaguchi (2008), the gender wage gap is wider among regular employees than among non-regular employees. This is because while employees on the *sogo-shoku* career path are significantly influenced by a career hiatus, such as maternity or childcare leave, and it is highly possible that they will have to work in a “mommy-job” after their leave, non-regular employees work in the same conditions regardless of gender. Thus, their salary is less affected by the temporary interruption of work.

Then, if career interruption due to motherhood causes and recreates gender inequality in the workplace, should men take childcare leave for as long as women? Whereas the percentage of female employees taking childcare leave has been stable and high, the latest data shows 83 percent of women but only 7.48 percent of men take it (Takizawa & Okabayashi, 2020). This gender difference in the percentage of workers taking childcare leave highlights the pervasive gender division between paid work and unpaid housework.

If the incompatibility of work and childcare is the major difficulty encountered by women, why do companies and the government not suggest to male employees that they work less and spend more time for their families? The government and some companies have, at least, publicized the necessity for men to take childcare leave. For example, the government has been working on the “Ikumen Project” since 2010 (“Ikumen” means men who take an active role in child-rearing). The project aims to promote a movement so that men’s involvement with childcare is seen more positively in wider society, and the government is attempting to increase the rate of men taking childcare leave up to 13% by 2020; however, given the result in the year 2019 (7.48%), this will be difficult. Besides some critique of the term “Ikumen,” it is unlikely to quantitatively change the situation of fathers’ participation in childcare. In fact, according to (*Heisei 28nen Shakai Seikatsu Kihon Chosa Seikatsu Jikan ni*

Kansuru Kekka Youyaku (Summary of the Result of Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities in 2016), 2017), conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, approximately 70 percent of men do not participate in childcare and housework at all. The same research compared Japan and the US in terms of how many hours wives and husbands with children below the age of six spend on childcare and housework. The result explains how women in Japan struggle with one-operated domestic work. Whereas wives tend to spend more time on childcare and housework in both countries, Japanese husbands only spend 1.23 hours per week, while husbands in the US spend 3.10 hours per week on this type of activity (p. 2). Therefore, even if female *sogo-shoku* workers can continue to work after childbirth, it is nearly impossible to manage both work and childcare without the spouse or partner participating more in childcare and housework or hiring a helper or nanny to support them.

Lastly, even if women could continue to work by managing both work and domestic work, they are challenged by the momentous task of the expectations of motherhood. Ellingsæter (2003) mentions two types of motherhood: biological and political. Biological motherhood, as quoted by Eisenstein in 1983, entails pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding, which Ellingsæter explains are partially socially constructed. For example, in Norway, good mothers are expected to practice certain maternal behaviors, such as prolonged breastfeeding. In contrast, political motherhood is “all the other care work mothers do in connection with children (including economic provision, physical and psychological care), and its content is defined politically and socially” (p. 45).

Although Ellingsæter states that this research was carried out in Norway, Japan has a similar “myth” concerning motherhood. According to Yoshiharu Deguchi, “some people still hold to the so-called 3-year-old child myth — that a mother should take care of her child until the child turns at least 3 years old (Deguchi, 2019).” However, a Japanese psychologist

Nobuko Uchida clarifies there is no evidence to support the three-year-old child myth and working mothers have no negative influence on children. She points out it is essential to incorporate the perspective of the family environment such as the relationship of the parents (Uchida, 2010, p. 82). However, the myth remains present. In 2013, then Prime Minister Abe announced a policy called “Support for returning to work with unlimited hugs for three years” as a part of a growth strategy, a plan to prolong childcare leave for up to three years. Although there was a backlash against the policy and it did not succeed, the ideology behind it represents LDP’s conservatism and traditionalist beliefs that mothers are expected to prioritize spending time with children. Moreover, once women return to work after childcare leave, they frequently put themselves onto the “mommy-track” in the name of maternal instincts and responsibility, simply because of the incompatibility of work and childcare.

The “mommy-track” influences not only the career path but the wage, according to Dumauli (2019), who uses data from the JHPS/KHPS (Japan Household Panel Survey by Panel Data Research Center at Keio University) and finds that “the median monthly wages of mothers are 80.5% of those of childless women” (p. 378). However, she showcases a contradictory aspect of the motherhood penalty between regular and non-regular employment. While mothers earn less than non-mothers generally, mothers in regular employment earn monthly wages which are 13.6% higher than those of non-mothers (p. 378). In addition, Dumauli finds there is a larger wage motherhood penalty in large companies than small ones: The presence of children causes mothers to suffer an 8.3 percent decrease in wages on average per child (p. 383). Thus, the motherhood expectation may cause not only the career transition to the mommy-track but also the gender pay gap. As Yamaguchi (2008) clarifies, the gender pay gap in regular employment is more significant than in non-regular employment. The career change in the name of motherhood stratifies regular female workers

in large companies according to whether they have a child or not. Therefore, motherhood penalties justify the gender wage gap, a lack of chance at promotion, and scarcity of female managers. Then, the question arises of how women's career interruption and job transition due to the incompatibility of work and childcare can be solved, and society or family can reduce their burden in the double role of earner and carer.

The awareness of financial benefits is one of the keys to future discussion. It is beneficial to reduce the gender wage gap in order to secure women a lifetime income: Kuga (2017) notes that once a university graduate quits a full-time regular-employment job, there would be a tremendous gap in lifetime income: Women university graduates working at the same company in full-time regular employment have a lifetime income of Y260 million yen (≈ 2.4 million USD²) if they worked until the age of 60 in the same company (p. 105).

Kuga (2017) also estimates a lifetime income in two cases:

1) if one left a job before and after childbirth and returns to work when a child entered a primary school (6 years old) as non-regular full-time employment, and 2) if one returns to a part-time job after childbirth. Case 1) only earns around Y96.7 million (≈ 906 thousand USD), and Case 2) earns about 61.5 million (≈ 576 thousand USD) (p. 106).

As the data suggests, career continuity and secure employment would be beneficial for both corporations and women themselves. Corporations can save time and money for chronic recruitment and job training for new employees, and women can be financially fit. As

² Calculated Y106.73 is 1 USD according to the average rate in 2020 by Bank Japan.

mentioned above, approximately 50 percent of women quit a job before and after childbirth of the first child, which is a huge loss for the economy and society.

Chapter 3: Work-Life Balance in Policies and Laws

The fundamental aim of establishing parental, childcare leave systems in different developed countries is to promote gender equality or equity in the whole society and to create dual earners/carers due to a decline in childbirth and an aging society (Atkinson, 2017; Carlson, 2013; Guo, 2017; Lanfranconi & Valarino, 2014). Japan is no exception. The desperate demographic problem in Japan established new laws and policies *nolens volens*. In the name of “work-life balance,” the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act has been amended many times since it was first passed in 1991, and the Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement was effected in 2016. Demographic problems and labor scarcity have been frequently discussed together. For example, four issues were discussed in the *Introduction to the Revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Law* by MHLW: 1) “The falling birth rate and the start of population decline,” 2) “Rapid change expected in Japan’s demographic structure,” 3) “Women’s employment situation,” and 4) “Gap between the reality and people’s desire concerning marriage, childbirth, and parenting.” Following those issues, the government started claiming that there is a “need to provide a work-life balance as a means to address the falling birthrate.” Given the low birth rate, the downshift of productivity, and labor shortage, the government has tried to have women in the labor force and emphasized the necessity of more births at the same time in the name of a good work-life balance. This chapter introduces the following set of policies: “Work-Life Balance,” “Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace,” “Work Style Reform,” and “Child Care and Family Care Leave Act.” I also raise problems and barriers in these policies from a feminist perspective.

3.1. Policies and Current Situations

Work-Life Balance

In 2005, it came as a shock that the death rate exceeded the birth rate for the first time, while the birth rate fell to its lowest recorded namely 1.26 percent. This incident was sufficiently shocking for politics to start promoting the terminology of “Work-Life Balance” (technically “Shigoto to Katei no Chouwa” at that time), which gradually attracted a great deal of attention.

In 2007, the Cabinet Office formulated the “Work-Life Balance Charter,” which defines a “society that has achieved a good work-life balance” as one in which an individual citizen can work with motivation and a sense of fulfillment and discharge his/her responsibilities at work, while at the same time can choose and lead a variety of living styles in his/her family and community life, in accordance with each stage in life, such as raising children and middle- and older- stages of life (*Society in Which a Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved*, n.d.).

As written, the charter itself does not specifically mention the promotion of women and the birth rate, nor reducing work time. Rather, it states that work-life balance is the fulfillment of diverse lifestyles regardless of gender or age. Nevertheless, work-life balance is a new mantra for the Japanese populace to ask for less work and more private time, and it led to the spread of pro-natalist political attitudes in the government.

Work-Life Balance for Women as a Growth Strategy

As mentioned above, the Abe administration formulated statements and policies associated with encouraging more women to join the labor force. First and foremost, a “Society in which All Women Shine” was announced by Shinzo Abe at the Sixty-Eighth

Session of the General Assembly of the UN, “Open a New Window,” on 26th September 2013. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan:

The government of Japan will cultivate the power of women as the greatest potential for the growth of the Japanese economy, and further strengthen cooperation with the international community as well as assistance to developing countries with the belief that creating a ‘society in which women shine’ will bring vigor to the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.).

Abe’s speech is directly associated with a growth strategy for the economy without respecting women who work in “unpaid” domestic work.

Secondly, the former Abe administration adopted the policy “Womenomics” as official government policy in 2013; however, it has already been claimed by a group of investment strategists at Goldman Sachs Japan led by Kathy Matsui in 1999 (Crawford, 2021). Crawford (2021) explains the origin of the term “Womenomics” was “to describe their recommended strategy for revitalizing the stagnant Japanese economy by ‘closing the gender employment gap’ and promoting the better utilization of human capital through workplace equality” (p.1). Therefore, this term perfectly suits Abe’s growth strategy.

Thirdly, the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace was effected in April 2016. It consists of three principles: 1) actively provide and exploit opportunities to hire and promote women, 2) improve an environment so that women and men can balance work and family life, and 3) respect women’s choices concerning their balance between work and family life. The Act attempted to ensure these principles were met by obliging enterprises with more than 300 employees to:

(a) collect and analyze data on issues of gender and employment; (b) devise and disclose action plans to improve gender equality with concrete objectives and

measures to be taken based on these analyses; (c) disclose data regarding women's participation and advancement in the workplace (WE EMPOWER G7 Programme, 2019).

Disclosure of numerical data and plans may not go to the heart of gender inequalities. As Binder et al. (2019) noted, the Act “fails to realistically address the problem of gender inequalities with regard to unequal wages and child care burdens falling disproportionately on women. Thus, it appears that women are expected to carry single-handedly the triple burden of a full-time job, the household, and child and elderly care” (pp. 323-324). As mentioned in the previous chapters, more and more women have started (or restarted) joining the labor force gradually since the inauguration of the Abe administration, but the majority work as non-regular and part-time workers. That is to say, even if they successfully transit from non-regular employment to a regular job later, they are less likely to be promoted and gain managerial positions because of the seniority promotion system and overtime working culture.

Finally, the Act on the Arrangement of Related Acts to Promote Work Style Reform came into force in 2019 as the link between the promotion of women's participation in the workplace and the need to respect a work-life balance. According to the report created by several international organizations (ILO, EU, UN Women):

The main elements of the Act include (i) establishment of the basic policy on work-style reform; (ii) correction of long-working practice at workplace and realization of more diverse and flexible form of work; and (iii) ensuring fair treatment regardless of employment type (i.e., regular or non-regular) (WE EMPOWER G7 Programme, 2019, p. 10).

These two policies and two new laws are used to promote a good work-life balance for women as well as growth strategies.

Work-Life Balance in Childcare Leave System

Although gender inequality in the workplace in Japan has not lessened in comparison to other countries, from both quantitative and qualitative aspects, the laws related to the childcare leave system have been amended many times. Reviewing the history of the childcare leave system in Japan shows that the first time that employees in Japan were guaranteed the legal right to take childcare leave came when the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act was first enshrined in April 1992 (initially it was entitled “Family Care Leave”). Currently, there are several systems related to childcare leave for employees. The OECD family database defines these parental leave systems as, “Maternity leave,” “Homecare leave,” and “Father-specific parental and home care leave.” This paper uses “childcare leave” and “Mom & Dad Child Care Leave Plus” instead of “Homecare leave” and “Father-specific parental and home care leave,” respectively, according to the judicial and governmental descriptions.

To assess the Japanese state’s childcare leave system and measures, this paper utilizes gender-systems approaches, which have two central characteristics: First, they (gender-systems approaches) recognize the complexity of the structuring of gender relations and the multiplicity of their origins; thus, economic determinism is avoided. Secondly, gender essentialism is rejected, and gender relations are viewed as socially constructed (Crompton, 2003, p. 204). Following Stone’s “conceptualization of policy strategies,” the current situation around the Child Care Leave Act and its related measures can be summarized as shown in *Table 1* (see Appendix). According to Stone (2006), there are ways of exerting power, of inducing others to do what they otherwise might not do, which are divided into three types of

policy: 1) inducements; penalties or rewards, 2) rights; positive (by state), normative (derive power from outside enforcement, such as religion), 3) rules; a force to include/exclude people.

Notably, Japan has generous systems of childcare leave compared to other countries. According to UNICEF's 2019 report "*Are the world's richest countries family-friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU,*" among all OECD and EU countries, Japan has very generous childcare leave for fathers since they can obtain nearly full amount of salary for 30 weeks (Chzhen et al., 2019). However, only some employees are eligible to take childcare leave and related measures in principle. In other words, certain groups of people are excluded, for example, freelance workers, temporary daily workers, and limited-term contracted workers (part-time, non-regular, fixed-term, etc.) who do not meet conditions: The worker must have worked at the current workplace for at least a year and work two or more scheduled working days a week. All others are regarded as "ineligible" to take childcare leave.

Changes occurred not only due to the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act per se but also in the legal systems related to childrearing and Japanese work style. I shall point out some important changes from the 1990s to today. Firstly, in principle, women used to be prohibited from working at night generally, except nurses, on holidays and to do overtime, according to the "Women's Protection Provision". However, this provision was abolished and women can work more and more at their own request. Secondly, in 2003, the Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation was enacted to secure both work and childrearing: For business owners hiring more than 100 employees, it became mandatory to submit and publicize an action plan about employees' work. The fifth amendment of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act concerned work-life balance issues: business owners were obliged to introduce a system that shortened working hours (to six

hours per day) and eliminate extra work for employees with a child aged 0–3. In 2019, the new labor law limited overtime to less than 100 hours in a month; if companies break the rule, they will be punished. Lastly, in June 2020, the eighth amendment strengthened precautions against harassment about childcare leave, prohibiting detrimental treatment by business owners due to consultation about harassment related to childcare by employees. Hence, legal systems and policies have changed along with the work-life balance policy.

In addition to the expansion of childcare leave systems, from 2016 the government started providing childcare subsidies to small and medium-sized enterprisesⁱ [SMEs] which promote and take measures to allow childcare leave for employees. Today, even large companies can apply for subsidies if they meet the conditions. Currently, there are six types of subsidies to support those who work and raise children at the same time. One is dedicated to men: in short, this subsidy is given to the companies which have worked to create a workplace culture that makes it easier for male workers to take childcare leave and holidays for childcare. Eligible male employees must take leave for 14 consecutive days or more (five or more consecutive days for SMEs), starting within eight weeks of the birth of the child. SMEs can obtain up to Y720,000 (≈ 6.7 thousand USD³) for one male employee for a first child. On the other hand, companies except SMEs can gain up to Y360,000 (≈ 3.4 thousand USD) for a male employee who takes it for a first child. Additionally, if companies introduce certain measures which reassure employees taking childcare leave, such as conducting an individual interview, they can obtain between Y12,000 (≈ 112 USD) and Y60,000 (≈ 562 USD). The amount of subsidy will change depending on the length of childcare leave for the

³ Calculated Y106.73 is 1 USD according to the average rate in 2020 by Bank Japan.

second or later child for both SMEs and other companies. There is also a general type of subsidy to support those who work and raise children at the same time regardless of sex or the duration, yet the amount of general type of subsidy is approximately half of that for men taking childcare leave within eight weeks (*Ryoritsu Shientou Joseikin (Subsidies for Work-Life Balance Support, Etc.)*, 2021).

Through multiple amendments of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act, childcare benefits have been expanded from 25 percent to 67 percent of gross monthly salary with the coverage of social insurance premiums. Some major companies have childcare leave systems which cover a higher percentage of employees' gross monthly salary than that provided by the state'. The Child Care and Family Care Leave Act and related laws and policies have developed and advocated an emphasis on women's promotion, supporting childcare leave systems, and a work-life balance. However, it is questionable that they will change Japanese corporation culture and work-style mindsets.

Many issues remain to be tackled in the employment context of Japanese women, and it is extremely difficult to achieve the improvement of gender equalities in the workplace, self-actualization, and a varied lifestyle defined by the Work-Life Balance Charter. It is worth noting that the Japanese people perceive work-life balance as the remedial measure to obtain more salaries and rewards. According to the "Satisfaction degree of work-life balance" survey carried out by the Japanese recruitment service company en Japan Inc. (2020) among regular, temporary, fixed-term, part-time, and freelance workers. The survey asked the current situation of work-life balance to the participants; while more regular employees answered their work-life balance is "bad" than "good," the respondents in other employment styles showed more satisfaction than dissatisfaction. To the respondents who answered their work-life balance is "bad," the survey suggested seven choices of remedies for a better work-life

balance: 1) Obtain rewards that match your work; 2) The working hours and days will be appropriate; 3) Create an environment where you can work regardless of changes in your life; 4) Enrichment of life other than work; 5) Choose a rewarding job; 6) The burden of household work such as housework is reduced; 7) Other. In general, full-time, temporary, and fixed-term workers are least concerned about the alleviation of the burden of household work such as housework. On contrary, the participants chose two suggested remedies more than other choices: 1) and 2). In other words, they are less conscious of the important relationship between domestic work and work-life balance. Therefore, they perceive a good work-life balance needs a higher salary and the improvement of working hours and days. This survey demonstrates people's priorities and standards in relation to the work-life balance. Financial stability and worktime are more important than reducing the burden of housework.

3.2. Problems From a Feminist's Perspective

As part of a set of measures to promote women's participation and advancement in the workplace, the Abe administration tackled the establishment of more nursery schools. As a result, there are more nursery schools on company sites. Although a report by MHLW concluded that the number of children on waiting lists for childcare services reduced under Abe's government, it noted that "the total number excludes so-called hidden children on waiting lists — those who wait for an opening at a specific facility. Their number increased by 913 from a year earlier to 74,840" (*Record-Low 12,000 on Japan's Nursery Waiting Lists, but Zero Goal out of Reach*, 2020).

This situation is because of a lack of licensed nursery schools and the privatization of childcare services on the neoliberal market in Japan (Kimoto & Hagiwara, 2010). In other words, parents need to take care of children themselves or leave them in unlicensed nursery schools until they win the lottery for a licensed one. This thesis does not intend to compare

the quality of the price of licensed and unlicensed nursery schools. However, the licensed schools are certified and subsidized, hence, parents are more likely to rely on them and there are certain reasons they choose them. It is noteworthy that there are still many issues in childcare services; for example, the standard wage of childcare workers is lower than for other specialist jobs.

I would like to point out the general issue of the low wages of childcare workers by referring to government data. The average monthly salary in Japan is Y307,700 (\approx 2,9 thousand USD⁴). In contrast, the average of childcare workers is Y244,500 (\approx 2.3 thousand USD), which is less than the average female worker's monthly salary (Y251,800 \approx 2.4 thousand USD) according to *Reiwa 2nen Chingin Kouzou Kihon Toukei Chosa Kekka (Basic Survey on Wage Structure in 2020)*. Low wages have surely influenced the lack of childcare workers and nursery schools, as noted by Masuyama (2018). The lack of childcare workers eventually brings the problem of the lack of nursery schools. If a parent(s) cannot leave a child to nursery schools, he/she/they have to take care of children by themselves, which causes career interruption of female workers as mentioned above.

From the feminist perspective, the current systems of childcare leave have “exclusions.” Firstly, the childcare systems per se were generally designed for heterosexual “couples,” more specifically, such couples have more benefits. For example, “Papa Mama Ikukyū Plus” (Mom & Dad Child Care Leave Plus) is only applied to fathers and mothers. If both father and mother take childcare leave, the period is extended for two more months. When a father takes childcare leave during the eight weeks following childbirth by the

⁴ Calculated Y106.73 is 1 USD according to the average rate in 2020 by Bank Japan.

spouse, he will be able to take childcare leave again as an exception. Whereas this system was intended to boost the number of men taking childcare leave, it is unfair for mothers that they cannot retake leave at a time of their choosing. Single fathers and mothers are excluded from Mom & Dad Child Care Leave Plus completely.

Secondly, related to the heteronormativity in the childcare system, given the current law that bars same-sex marriage, same-sex couples are not eligible for the state childcare leave system. Following the current state's childcare systems, even if one member of a same-sex couple has a biological child and wants to take childcare leave with their partner, they cannot both take childcare leave. Hence, they do not have the rights that same-sex couples and common-law heterosexual couples naturally have. However, this issue has changed positively. If same-sex couples are qualified to become foster parents by municipal decision, they are eligible to both take childcare leave. Two cases have been reported of same-sex couples permitted to raise a foster child, in Osaka and Nagoya prefectures. As this number of cases shows, it is still difficult for same-sex couples to be foster parents in Japan, and same-sex couples still cannot adopt a child under the civil code.

Thirdly, the concept of work-life balance produces "exclusion." Work-life balance policies have been utilized as a solution to the low birth rate as mentioned above. This concept estimates the people who "can" marry and have children judicially and financially. Warren (2015) argues that the work-life balance debate needs a consideration of economic inequalities by class: "Too few hours can mean too low a wage; a low wage can lead to very long hours (in order to earn a living wage); and increases in living costs, as well as wage cuts or freezes, impacted living standards in the crisis" (p. 705). In other words, the concept of work-life balance is designed for middle-class and above people, thus it excludes working-class people who are required to work long hours to make their ends meet. Therefore, the

work-life balance suggested by the government excludes certain groups of people. If the government strongly requests for the achievement of work-life balance, it is imperative to deconstruct traditional families rather than stick with the feudalistic family system and incorporate class inequalities into the work-life debate.

There are not only problems of “exclusion” but also pro-natalist attitudes of the government. The government research results indicate that “the longer the husband does housework and childcare, the more likely the couple is to have a second and subsequent children” (*Introduction to the Revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Law*, n.d., p. 18). However, in light of the Japanese tradition of overwork and expectations of motherhood, as noted in the previous chapter, it is challenging and burdensome for women to have larger families. Also, it is noteworthy that although the childcare systems have evolved in the past two decades, the birth rate has not dramatically changed as the government expected. Thus, the relationship between the birth rate and the expansion of childcare leave systems cannot be simplified. Notably, the main reason for the declining birthrate is an increase in unmarried people, hence, as long as the rate of marriage and possible parents decreases, the expansion of childcare leave systems is not an imperative solution to the “declining birthrate.”

As mentioned above, the laws have changed, and policies have encouraged work-life balance and women’s participation and advancement in the workplace for the past three decades. However, still, women are overwhelmingly responsible for housework and childcare. They have double and triple burdens of full-time work, childcare, housework, and parental care. Thus, it is significant to focus on how other family members (mainly fathers) should be involved with childcare and housework. It has been already clarified that half of women leave the labor force before and after childbirth and that it is economically and socially beneficial to

minimize women's career interruption. Then, why not childcaring more cooperative and inclusive?

3.3 The Barriers to Childcare Leave for Male Employees

What are the issues concerning and barriers to childcare leave for male employees? According to an MHLW report (*Dansei no Ikuji Kyugyou no Shutoku Jokyō to Shutoku no tame no Torikumi ni Tsuite (About the Status of Taking Child Care Leave for Men and Efforts to Promote it)*, 2019), male employees do not take childcare leave principally because they are too busy at work, there is a lack of labor (27.8%), childcare leave systems are not set up in companies (27.5%), and the atmosphere makes it difficult to do so (25.4%) (p. 7).

Also, previous research by the NLI Research Institute⁵ found that “child care leave is difficult to take for men in companies of all sizes” (*Introduction to the Revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Law*, n.d., p. 19).

Although men are concerned about the lack of childcare leave systems in companies, this is simply a misunderstanding and failure to explain the situation to employees. Unfamiliarity with misunderstandings of childcare leave systems will be solved by the revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Act, which obligates companies to inform employees of childcare leave systems and confirm their intention to use them from April 2022 (*Japan Enacts Law Making Paternity Leave More Flexible for Men*, 2021). However, it is difficult to resolve these failures instantly because they were caused by management difficulties. As Maeda (2019) states, approximately 80 percent of men in regular employment are willing to

⁵ NLI Research Institute (NLIRI) is Japanese think tank: Profit-making, Independent, private company, founded in 1988.

take childcare leave in the future. Despite the high demand for male workers, the reality is that 7.48 percent of men took childcare leave in 2019, which I see as another kind of penalty for fathers. Male-dominated Japanese company culture, Japanese style corporatism, and corporative capitalism eventually strangle themselves and impose penalties on fatherhood.

Miyajima and Yamaguchi (2017) found that male employees overestimated other men's negative attitudes toward childcare leave: "That is, although individual men had positive attitudes toward taking paternity leave, their inaccurate assumption that other men have negative attitudes toward taking such leave restrains them from behaving in accordance with their private beliefs" (p. 9). Moreover, several cases have been reported in the media that fathers who took paternity leave experienced detrimental treatment after returning to work. For example, a man was transferred to a different region, approximately 500km from his original place of work (Yoshida, 2019a). In another case, one male employee was transferred to a subsidiary company and assigned to light-duty work which he had never done before (Yoshida, 2019b). Such discriminatory actions are called "paternity harassment," which has recently been spoken by men.

Concerning the duration of childcare leave taken by men, there is a tremendous gender disparity: 36.3 percent of men took less than five days, 35.1 percent took more than five days, and only 9.6 percent took more than two weeks. On the other hand, 90 percent of women took leave for more than six months, albeit around 90 percent of female employees took more than six months of childcare leave on average (*Ikuji Kyugyou Seido Ni Tsuite (About Child Care System)*, 2019).

What is cardinal here is to solve these issues and barriers by correcting pervasive discrimination and inequity in the workplace. The EEOL secured equal opportunity to work in the judicial discourse, but this has not shown in "the results" of gender equality from

quantitative and qualitative aspects. As I mentioned above, gender inequality in the workplace, such as the wage gap and promotion gap, are generally justified by the interruption of employment or change of employment type because of motherhood. Social expectations, pressure from companies, and traditional gender-essentialist views of motherhood are still pervasive throughout Japanese society; consequently, 50 percent of women still quit their job and restart a part-time job in accordance with work-family balance. In contrast, as the low percentage of men taking childcare leave suggests, there are also certain issues preventing men from utilizing the systems of childcare leave. Therefore, the management of employees should be developed to foster a supportive atmosphere that allows employees to prioritize family for a certain period.

Considering the background to the difficulties men have taking childcare leave, the empirical section of this paper focuses on examining the research question: What is the reality of Japanese companies which have enthusiastically encouraged men to take childcare leave? To acknowledge the main research question, the next section will elaborate on the following detailed questions: how they consider the necessity or importance of childcare leave taken by men; what their motivation is; how they have managed human resources; what their challenges are.

More specifically, I would like to focus on SMEs because 99.7 percent of Japanese companies are SMEs, but they are underrepresented. Investigating the strategies and measures taken by SMEs could reveal general issues related to Japanese companies and how companies manage employees during childcare leave in the labor shortage. I question how, exactly, those such companies consider childcare leave for male employees and take precautions against some of the problems identified in the previous research. I hypothesize that there are common

perspectives on the efficiency or advantages of encouraging male employees to take childcare leave.

Empirical Section

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Positionality

This section elaborates on my positionality as a researcher. Typically, personal experience is irrelevant in mainstream research, yet as noted by Reinharz (1992), “utilizing the researcher’s personal experience is a distinguishing feature of feminist research” (p. 258). Following Reinharz, I will clarify the influence on the decision-making of this topic of my work experience in Japan and physical positionality. In short, I have worked in Japanese companies both as a full-time regular worker and a part-time non-regular worker. From my experiences, there are tremendous differences between regular and non-regular employment status in terms of income, responsibility, overworking, and the rituals of corporate culture. My academic interest was triggered by two incidents. First, when I quit a regular employment job in a large Japanese company, one male colleague came and asked me “Are you going to get married?” with a larky tone at my farewell party, even though I had barely talked to him before. This case represents the fact that it is still common to believe that women quit a job because of marriage.

Second, there was a small but significant conversation with a colleague: right before I quit a job, one of my male team members (approximately 90 percent of them were male in the office) planned to take childcare leave, so I said to him, “That’s great to take childcare leave! Your wife will be pleased!” with excitement. However, he seemed reluctant and said, “It is just a few days, and it is not even my choice,” I did not quite understand his meaning at that time. Still, later I realized he was guided to take childcare leave just because the company wants to create a “diversified” image and increase the number of men taking childcare leave. I

had not seen gender inequality in my entire life – when I was at a university, approximately 80 percent of my classmates in the department were female students – until I started a real job. From those experiences, I realized that a constructive discussion is lacking: Gender inequality in the workplace is pervasively present in the subconscious and at a practical level.

My family also influenced me to pursue this study theme. My mother worked as a manager for a long time, and my father was more engaged in childcare and housework than other fathers/salarymen in Japan. My older sister and older brother have raised two children each in my home city, and they frequently gather and play with the children together. Although my parents and my sister and brother do not live together, they raise the children inclusively. As I have seen the struggles and enjoyment of childcare from being with them, I started thinking in what way more people can engage in childcare to create a supportive environment for parent(s) and children, and how childcare leave taken by men can lessen the burdens which women are usually assigned in the name of motherhood. I hypothesize that if men's childcare leave shifts the childcare and housework loads from women and contributes to them devoting equal time to domestic work, gender inequality in the workplace, such as career interruption, will be improved.

Moreover, being a student living in Prague influenced the decision-making of the research topic. I have seen the difference in how much fathers spend time with children between the Czech Republic and Japan. I often see fathers pushing and running with a baby carriage alongside the river in the evening or going shopping with toddlers, which I have rarely encountered in my life in Japan.

From my experience as a woman who has been through countless episodes of verbal and physical abuse and harassment in Japan, I was worried that my behaviors, interpretation, and analysis processes during research in the companies would be harsh and skeptical. This

could have potentially distorted my interpretation of the data. Yet, as Reinharz (1992) states, the tension between objectivity and subjectivity is what many feminist scholars try to work out, and they are cautious about interpreting their own experience as normative (p. 262). Moreover, Esterberg (2001) carefully reminds us of the limitation of neutrality in scientific activity; hence, researchers must not only be aware of their own values but also embrace a set of carefully considered values (p. 18). Thus, as a feminist researcher, I paid attention to the values and experiences of others to discover the potential meanings of the data I collected.

4.2. Research Design

The main purpose of this research is to provide an understanding of phenomena around childcare policies: how companies encourage men's childcare leave; the reasons they strongly commit to it; the problems and struggles that companies have encountered since they started promoting such leave; how they try to provide a psychologically safer working environment for employees; what narratives they use to promote men's childcare leave; how they cope with the shortage of labor during the leave; and how they perceive the concept of work-life balance. This study also aims to investigate similarities and differences behind the encouragement of men's childcare leave across companies.

In conclusion, a qualitative methodology based on a constructivist paradigm engaging with a grounded theory analytic (coding) approach is a suitable research design to make meanings that reflect the realities of Japanese companies facing the promotion of men's childcare leave.

To decide the paradigm and analytic approach, I reflected on the issues discussed above concerning gender inequality in the workplace. As stated in Chapter 1, gender inequality is analyzed from both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Initially, this research aimed to investigate SMEs specifically, because of the invisibility of SMEs in media

compared to the publicity given to large-sized companies as successful examples of childcare policies, albeit the vast majority of Japanese companies are SMEs. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), “qualitative data, it is affirmed, are useful for uncovering emic views: theories, to be valid, should be qualitatively grounded” (p.105), and the constructivism paradigm suits the basic beliefs of this research in terms of a relativist ontological aspect, transactional/subjectivist epistemology, and hermeneutical/dialectical methodology (p.109). In addition, as Morrow (1994) indicates of qualitative research, “there is a reliance on the natural language accounts of actors concerning their actions or the actions of others within their social field” (p. 206), which dovetails with the research aim to focus on social actions. Therefore, qualitative research based on a constructivist paradigm was suitable for understanding the subjects’ experiences precisely and producing knowledge and theory about unheard voices.

Then, several methods were considered carefully to capture the realities, including the positive and negative aspects of companies promoting men’s childcare leave. Survey research could be the easiest to conduct because most Japanese companies prefer communicating in written forms rather than verbal communication, as it is less stressful for them. However, as Reinharz (1992) points out, “survey research typically excludes, and interview research typically includes, opportunities for clarification and discussion” (p.18). I was afraid that the subject might have prepared too much to answer questions, which would, thus, not reflect the truth. Media content analysis is also potentially effective in investigating the problems and stories behind success. Yet there is not enough detailed information and analysis on issues related to childcare leave in SMEs and, usually, media articles only report its positive sides. In the end, I decided to conduct interviews via online communication tools; as noted by Reinharz (1992), “interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and

memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (p.19). Moreover, it perfectly suits my physical positionality in Prague and the pandemic situation.

After choosing the interview method to collect data, I considered multiple interview models including question styles and attitudes to research subjects. In short, I concluded that a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions following Oakley’s “participatory model” was fitting to communicate with the research subjects as well as the topic. According to Letherby (2003), Oakley urges researchers to develop a balance of “friendly but not too friendly” approach when conducting interviews. The interviewer should be friendly, courteous, conversational, and unbiased. Oakley emphasizes the development of a “participatory model,” which produces non-hierarchical and non-manipulative relations between researchers and respondents (pp. 82-85).

The main reason I chose semi-structured interviews is that I needed to ask certain questions to collect basic information, such as the measures and systems each company has established, as well as stories and history behind them. However, I also wanted to elicit their opinions about issues, solutions, and work-life balance to understand how they perceive and interpret the terminology. Therefore, unstructured interviews could not have correctly and fully collected the essential information on the characteristics of companies and their experience of popularizing men’s childcare leave. Also, the research subjects are business-people, so the interviews could not be like an everyday conversation, as an unstructured interview aims to be.

The structured interview seemed a reasonable method of conducting interviews, especially with company representatives. However, presumably, respondents would like to stick with organized questions to save time, and the answers are predictable. Thus, a semi-

structured interview was best, as it enabled me to keep up a pseudo-conversation but gather essential information and individual opinions following rigid Japanese business manners.

In the process of finding the study subjects, I gave great consideration to whom I should ask for their opinions and experience. Firstly, I needed to find suitable companies that could talk about men's childcare leave. Therefore, the research subjects had to be knowledgeable about this topic to some degree. Then, I found "Dansei Ikukyū 100% Sengen (Manifesto of 100% men's childcare leave)," which has been organized by a consulting company, WORK-LIFE BALANCE Co., Ltd. [WLB Co., Ltd.], since March 2019. According to the website (*男性育休 100%宣言*), the company professes that men taking childcare leave will lead to new community participation and a paradigm shift in values and that the employees will bring innovation and highly productive work styles to the workplace. It also connects the security of future social security bearers and the realization of a sustainable society. It asks the representatives of organizations that are working to achieve 100% of male employees taking childcare leave within their company to work together to reform the then far customs. Its website shares 105 companies,⁶ information, and declarations such as messages and measures taken. Therefore, those companies were suited to the research subject in terms of their strong commitment to taking action for the promotion of men's childcare leave.

Soon after I had decided on the methodology, the approach, the method to collect data, and the research subjects, I first contacted WLB Co., Ltd. via email to secure access to interviewees and explain my research motive. I also asked WLB Co., Ltd. for permission to

⁶ Data in 2021/06/24, 105 companies except WLB Co. Ltd. themselves.

contact selected companies who had signed the manifesto authored by them. I was permitted to access those companies. Secondly, since one of the initial aims of my research was to investigate unheard voices to understand the realities around issues of men's childcare leave in the workplace, I initially selected 18 SMEs as the research subjects, based on the fact that they have already achieved a high percentage of men's childcare leave or are implementing measures to try to provide a working environment in which employees find it easy to work and take men's childcare leave. Then, I sent a message (an email) asking the favor of cooperating with my study and being interviewed. Given the size of the companies, I did not ask a specific person to volunteer to take part in the research but, instead, relied on the recommendation and decision of company representatives. Consequently, four of the 18 selected companies replied to my request and accepted to be interviewed. Interestingly, although those SMEs had unveiled a "Manifesto of 100% men's childcare leave," most did not react to my request at all.

My biggest concern was whether they would reveal their true opinions or not, as not telling is a common habit in Japanese customs. Thus, I organized open-ended questions meticulously (see Appendix *Table 2*), starting with simple questions about the backgrounds and stories behind their company policies and commitment to the manifesto, then asking questions about social issues around men's childcare leave and personal opinions about the concept of work-life balance. It was not very likely that I could produce a plausible interpretation of the data from four SMEs, thus, I also contacted WLB Co., Ltd. and asked to conduct an in-depth interview, which would reflect the interview answers from SMEs. I asked critical questions principally about the meanings of work-life balance suggested by the government and them (see Appendix *Table 3*).

In the end, I concluded that the collected data was not enough in terms of finding similarities, differences, concepts, and meanings. Therefore, I decided to expand the range of the research subjects and contacted large companies on the list of the manifesto, and I selected them carefully as I did the SMEs. I contacted 29 large companies, five of which agreed to be interviewed, nine companies replied but denied the request for several reasons, such as they “do not accept offers generally,” or were “not confident to meet my expectation because of a lack of actual achievement,” and the others did not reply. In total, I conducted interviews with 10 companies: five SMEs, including the company which organized the manifesto, and five large companies, which enabled me to grasp the realities and compare them, and to understand phenomena from different perspectives. Informed consent was sought from all participants and, to ensure anonymity, I created a pseudonym for all research participants. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes to one hour each. Considering my physical positionality in Prague, Czech Republic, and the pandemic situation, it was best to conduct interviews via the online communication tools Microsoft Teams and Zoom; hence, the recording was carried out by those tools. In case of data was corrupted, I also used an iPad for recording and took memos for backup. I did not ask specific job types to become interviewees, I only told the selected companies that I would like to interview a person (people) who was (were) aware of the current situation regarding men’s childcare leave. I agreed that multiple interviewees or an observer could participate in the interviews if they asked. During the interviews, I tried to be empathetic but not too friendly and check I had understood what they meant to say after they answered each question to prevent misunderstandings and misconceptions. The recorded interviews were transcribed for data for analysis.

4.3. Data Analysis and Interpretation: Working With Grounded Theory

Approach

I worked with the grounded theory coding approach by following the instructions of Esterberg (2002), which sets the goal of beginning to focus on the potential meanings of your data. Esterberg (2002) presents practical procedures, which are suited to this research. For the first step, I used the open-coding technique to see what was going on in my collected data by referring to the transcribed interviews and created codes (labels). Secondly, to find the most helpful codes in shaping my analysis, I followed “development of themes,” paying careful attention to the codes. Once I completed “development of themes” and found keywords and codes, the third step was “focused coding:” focusing on the key themes and similar keywords I identified during open coding by using a word processing program. For the next step, I used maps and diagrams to try to find relations among all themes I had identified and memos to track how I had coded and what was important in my data. Before moving on to developing an analysis, the “asking questions” process was useful to identify the meanings of collected data. After the identification of themes and keywords, “developing an analysis” looking for patterns, comparing cases, and building typologies were advantageous to my research in terms of discovering similarities and differences among the stories of the research subjects. For the sixth step, “content analysis” was also useful in terms of analyzing what the research participants told me linguistically; sometimes, counting the number of words they spoke was effective. At last, I proceeded by “grounding the analysis,” which is necessary for researchers to examine the work carefully. Grounding the analysis includes a meticulous investigation of shortcomings, negative cases, null hypotheses, and triangulation. Among these analytical

techniques, triangulation, in particular, bringing different kinds of evidence helped me to analyze and to understand the social phenomena related to men's childcare leave correctly.

4.4. Research Participant Information

Company	The major category of business	Number of participants (s)	Size of company	Job type	Length of interview (from the first question to the last one)
A	Manufacturing	1	Small-medium	General affairs	48 min (42 min)
B	Wholesale trade	1	Small-medium	General affairs	Answered the questions by a document ⁷
C	Care welfare	1	Small-medium	Business owner	38 min (29 min)
D	Information and communications	2	Small-medium	PR and labor management	44 min (36 min)
E	Retailing	2	Large	Diversity Promotion in HR as interviewee and PR as an observer	42 min (29 min)
F	Information and communications	3	Large	Diversity Promotion in HR	42 min (32 min)
G	Construction	1	Large	Diversity Promotion	64 min (59 min)
H	Information and communications	2	Large	PR person as the main interviewee and Sales representative	44 min (36min)
I	Service	2	Large	HR and Promotion of New Style of Working	55 min (46min)

⁷ Due to a demand by a person in charge in Company B, I firstly sent a document of explanation of the overview of the research to the other party. Then the person in charge sent a 11-page document answered the background and measures. After checking the answers meticulously, I asked additional questions to the other party, and I received 8-page document.

WORK- LIFE BALAN CE Co., Ltd.	Service	2	Small-medium	Consultants/ “Manifesto of 100% men’s childcare” project members	67 min (51 min)
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Chapter 5: Reality of the Promotion of Childcare Leave Taken by Men

This chapter will analyze the narratives articulated by the research participants to formulate the motivations to promote men's childcare leave and the background to participating in the "Manifesto of 100% men's childcare leave;" how they have dealt with the problems, what the results are, and how they identify the meaning of work-life balance. The research did not aim to depend on the quantitative aspects. However, this chapter will consider the percentage and duration of childcare leave taken by male employees as a reference to understand how their strategies and actual measures have worked. Therefore, this part mainly focuses on the given narratives.

As I asked different questions to WLB Co., Ltd., its narratives are utilized to compliment the discussions and viable solutions. The interview with WLB Co., Ltd. Is also used for the arguments in the last section to refer to the terminology of work-life balance.

5.1. The Beginning: Women's Promotion and Work Style Reform

As noted in Chapter 4, the selected four SMEs and five large companies signed up for the "Manifesto of 100 % childcare leave." Although their business sector and the stories behind joining the manifesto are varied, they presented a similar pattern. They had addressed the promotion of men's childcare leave based on the "Promotion of women's participation in the workplace" and the "Work Style Reform" before participating in the manifesto/project. They started engaging in the promotion from the early 2010s to the mid-2010s. These prominent features resonate with the governmental policies and acts discussed in previous chapters: the Act on the Arrangement of Related Acts to Promote Work Style Reform of 2019 and the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace of 2016. These are the essential ground for men's childcare leave.

Whilst most of the companies responded that those two policies were the foundation of the promotion of men's childcare leave, Company H emphasized "individuality" instead. Company H elucidated their motivation for participation in the manifesto: they do not aim to have all male employees taking childcare leave; however, they sympathize with the idea of "100% of companies allowing men to take childcare leave." The core ideology behind this company is "individuality" and real "choice:" "If some male employee wants to take childcare leave, it is better to have the environment and the choices that respond to a request anytime." Based on their corporate policy, Company H does not calculate what percentage of their male employees took childcare leave; instead, they disclosed how many men took it. Interestingly, they reformed the long-working-hours style as a result of the high turnover rate and employee demand. This company has an idiosyncratic philosophy in corporate culture and a different path to advancing the work environment than the others.

Whereas most of the companies started promoting men's childcare leave based on two key policies, they interpreted them differently. In light of the policy of the promotion of women's participation and advancement in the workplace, some illuminated that its importance is "for both men and women" – men's participation in child-raising and housework is a cardinal element of such policy. They have seen the promotion of men's childcare leave as an opportunity for "awareness" and "understanding" of child-raising, which are often defined as women's jobs. On the other hand, some companies have identified the policy as significant for "women" specifically. For example, Company D was concerned about women's continuity of work and child-raising simultaneously. Also, Company C articulated that since most of its employees are female, it prioritizes women as the core workers, and the interviewee answered the policy is for "motivating women."

In the matter of “Work Style Reform,” they identified the policy from four aspects: cutting overtime work for employees and their families; the development of communication and teamwork skills; a solution to the labor shortage by the enhancement of the corporate image; and a solution to eliminating works depending on specialist skills. As noted by the interviewees, some interpreted that a diminution in overtime work would connect “happiness for employees and their families.” This suggests that they identify work style reform as more like “work-family balance”. Some of the participants expected employees to develop motivation and teamwork/communication due to feeling delight from family and individual happiness. More research is needed on the correlation between the time saved for family and the extent to which “happiness” can develop one’s communication and teamwork skills. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that a few participants positively identified that work style reform would elevate the feeling of happiness.

Three SMEs revealed that “Work Style Reform” is undertaken for the sake of enhancing the corporate image, recruitment, and retention of employees. It is a make-or-break business issue for SMEs to gain human resources in the already desperate erosion of the population in Japan. Those in the provinces are facing particular recruitment difficulties. The participant from Company A stated:

In our case, we are a small and medium-sized enterprise in the countryside, and the work we are doing is a fairly simple metal processing technology called press processing. So, honestly, there is no advanced technology, and if we do not take action more and more, there is a risk that the attractiveness of the company will diminish, and we will not be able to gather human resources.

Similarly, Company B disclosed the difficulty of running and managing SMEs:

The active job openings-to-applicants ratio for new graduates in SMEs is 8 to 9 times. It is hard in the recruitment race. Companies want to be more productive and profitable and want to improve the image of the company. So why not raise employee salaries, clean up the company, increase holidays, and let employees challenge whatever they think, like we do? Why don't they allow male employees to take such easy childcare leave? It is 6.3%, the survival rate of companies within 10 years of starting a business, and 0.4% within 20 years. Companies are designed to collapse. On the other hand, two of the companies emphasized "diversity" in human resources along with "Work Style Reform" and put efforts into the cultivation of human resources through workshops and supporting employees to gain competencies. For example, Company I described "diversity" policies that contributed greatly to the awareness of the importance of cooperating:

Diversity is the idea that a company will become stronger as various people play an active role, so we would like to promote it regardless of gender. Many companies develop diversity policies that specialize in women, but I think it is a major feature of our company that we have pursued this policy regardless of gender. As a result, the awareness of employees changed, and a culture was created in which it was important for different people to work together.

Reflecting on the backdrop to why the selected companies have promoted childcare leave taken by men on the basis of two governmental policies "Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the workplace" and "Work Style Reform," they interpreted them together as "work-life synergy" — an increase in productivity and efficiency through "having experiences they can utilize for work" and "encouraging male employees to

understand that family and household are directly related to their jobs.” Thus, some of the participants see that the experiences of child-raising can promote productivity.

Along with the governmental policies, prompt actions and the inclinations of the head of the company contributed to creating an atmosphere of embracing and accelerating men’s childcare leave in the workplace. Their actions harmonize the traditional Japanese organization style, top-down decision-making and disciplined employees following the rules as instructed by the upper rank. In other words, if the top of the company changes, all the employees will follow. Interviewees shared stories behind the promotion of men’s childcare leave, especially how a company president acted towards this topic.

The case of Company A indicated how the behaviors of the heads of companies have affected the process of the promotion. The president of Company A coincidentally heard a conversation between a person in general affairs and a male employee. The male employee “had to” take childcare leave as he was having his fourth child and there was no one to take care of the older children. The employee claimed that “even though the company insists we take childcare leave, in fact, it is difficult to say ‘I want to take childcare leave’ to the boss unless the situation is ‘urgent’ as in my case.” The company president asked about the situation and instructed the supervisor of the male employee to give him childcare leave. Furthermore, the company president instructed “Get male employees to take childcare leave from now on” in front of all the employees at the next day’s morning meeting.

Identical cases have been reported. The heads of the selected companies made an instantaneous decision and announced the promotion of men’s childcare leave. For example, Company B explained that the head of the company listened to a seminar by WLB Co., Ltd., and he made a declaration of men’s childcare leave at the morning meeting in front of the employees. Also, the executive head of Company G was influenced by “Latte Dads” – men

spending time with their toddlers in Sweden, where he witnessed a lot of men taking care of children and was inspired. Soon after he returned to Japan, he notified employees to create in-house childcare leave. A couple of months later, Company G launched their original childcare leave system, which covers one month's salary and allowance regardless of gender.

Not only speedy actions but also interaction with employees can be seen in Company I. Successive executive heads of Company I have written message cards to employees who returned to the workplace after taking childcare leave for a long time. It is rare to be given a word from the president, thus the employees were impressed and appreciated the kind action. Initiatives by the company head influence the creation of a new corporate culture. For instance, Company H reflected on what happened after their executive head took childcare leave for the first time in 2010. It used to be difficult for men to go back home earlier than the boss; however, it became normal to spend more time with family after that. These examples open a crack in the stagnation of the men's childcare leave status quo.

Although the researched companies are aware of the importance of childcare leave by men as related to women's advancement in the workplace and work style reform, none mentioned "why" men's childcare leave is directly associated with women's participation and advancement. Certainly, the experience of taking childcare leave by men leads to an awareness and understanding of the difficulty of managing housework/childcare and paid work simultaneously. However, the awareness of why women's advancement in the workplace is important should be discussed along with encouragement for men's childcare leave. Interestingly, they assumed the experience of taking childcare leave could be a useful source for productivity growth for men. I will develop the topics of "work-life synergy" and "productivity" as they were told by the participants later in this chapter.

5.2. How Do They Solve Problems? Process and Results

Three major problems face the encouragement of men to take childcare leave: the rush of business and a lack of labor (27.8 %); childcare leave systems are not set up in companies (27.5 %); and the atmosphere does not make it easy to take childcare leave (25.4%) (*Dansei no Ikuji Kyugyou no Shutoku Jokyō to Shutoku no tame no Torikumi ni Tsuite (About the Status of Taking Child Care Leave for Men and Efforts to Promote it)*, 2019). The selected companies have distinctive support systems and practices to encourage male employees to take childcare leave regardless of their size or sector. One of the significant similarities among the companies is that the companies do not interfere with employees during childcare leave. Rather, the researched companies have prepared practices and educated the benefits and experience of childcare leave to employees before they take it.

First and foremost, there was (and still is) a problem at a level below the conscious mind. Male employees tend to feel apologetic about bothering colleagues in the same team by taking childcare leave. Also, they are more likely to have various anxieties, such as salary, career, or personnel appraisal, albeit research in 2016 by the Cabinet Office clarifies that people disagree with the idea that “husbands should work outside and wives look after the household” (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2017). Even so, gender bias –a consciousness of gender-assigned roles hinders men from recognizing the importance of men’s childcare leave. For example, Company G mentioned that they needed to prevail on male employees to take it in the earlier days. The interviewee articulated, “some male employees still do not understand the necessity of taking childcare leave.” The interview participants often identified misunderstandings about and unfamiliarity with the childcare leave systems as well as difficulty taking childcare leave because of the atmosphere.

Therefore, the struggles, lack of awareness of childcare leave, and hostile atmosphere to men taking childcare leave align with findings of the governmental report.

As the solution, most of the companies have attempted to keep everyone in the workplace informed about childcare leave specifically targeted at men. For example, some companies hold seminars for fathers specifically; hence, they can interact with other fathers and share the experience. Although Company D has not achieved 100 percent of men taking childcare leave, an interviewee stated that “it seems that men who took childcare leave are firmly involved in childcare. I can tell the experienced male employees say things like ‘you should not mess around during childcare leave’ at in-house seminars.” Holding lectures or discussion meetings on “Ikumen” or “Ikuboss” (bosses who play an active role in child-raising) provides opportunities for employees to share their experiences and show companies’ strong dedication to convince them to take childcare leave. Company F held a seminar from a perspective of men’s studies. One of the interviewees explained:

In terms of lowering the hurdles to men’s childcare leave and thinking about diversity at the same time from the perspective of men’s studies, we held a seminar titled “It’s also hard for men;” like, even men want to whine, but we are working too hard. We asked a university professor who is doing men’s studies to come and talk from that point of view, and we attempted to make bigoted middle-aged men a little softer. After the lecture, we talked about experiences with male childcare leave, so we have been working to broaden our awareness of the issue.

In addition to those seminars, the publicization of men’s childcare leave is a ubiquitous measure. A lot of the large companies attempt to instruct their employees about childcare leave systems through a guidebook and reports of experiences during childcare leave.

Moreover, some share photos of fathers who have already taken leave in the company intranet

or magazine. For example, they hold a “Dads Photo Exhibition” in Company G: dads post photos of their childcare leave on the corporate intranet, and employees like or comment on them as if Instagram so that all the employees can see them. The interviewee continued:

The point is that if co-workers see a picture like a salesman who works hard at the workplace opening himself up and falling asleep while putting his child to sleep, they grasp the human side of him. Then his colleagues do not feel like asking this person to work late at night because he has such a cute child waiting for him to come home.

Such things encourage the employees to communicate actively in the workplace.

To sum up, most of the selected companies have informed employees about the systems and visualized men’s childcare experience to raise awareness and knowledge of men’s childcare leave and create the atmosphere of allowing freedom to take childcare leave.

Together with the full dissemination of men’s childcare leave systems to all employees, learning about the details of financial support was often discussed by the participants. This process is useful to alleviate employees’ anxieties; companies describe how much they can receive childcare benefits during the leave from employment insurance or the company. Salary coverage depends on the company: Some have childcare benefits or “baby cash,” and some do not. For example, Company G provides a full salary and allowance for a month to both men and women; hence, all the male employees have already taken childcare leave for at least a month. As noted above, subsidies to companies that enthusiastically promote childcare leave taken by men are advantageous for eligible employees, since they can receive a certain amount of cash from such companies. Company B gives “baby cash” regardless of gender and “contribution cash” to male employees only: the participant doubted this is gender-unequal, and explained the contribution cash comes from the subsidy system which aims to encourage men to take leave. Company C supplies “baby cash” to those who

work more than one day a week, whether part-time or full-time. The interviewee shared the policy as an employer:

I am particularly conscious of the fact that part-time workers tend to be viewed as low-rated. I do not know if it is because of Japan, nor not. But I see as a manager, it is not that part-timers are not working hard because of their employment status. Some part-timers are working harder than regular employees, so I am still trying it with an awareness of creating a fair system for the part-timers and regular employees as much as possible. The only difference between them is the working hours.

This remark accords with the problem of the employment system in Japan. Even though “Work Style Reform” changed some rules, such as “equal pay for equal work,” non-regular part-timers are precarious in terms of social security and social status.

It seems that financial support, including in-house childcare benefits, encourages male employees to take childcare leave. However, the case of Company F implies that the financial support is not enough to convince male employees to take childcare leave: Whereas Company F provides special paid holidays for five days, 71.51 percent of male employees took them in 2020. Hence, taking a five-day holiday is “unmanageable” or “unnecessary” for approximately 30 percent of men. The question of what is more urgent than taking care of one’s own child for a week should be scrutinized further. Nevertheless, this case indicates that the system per se does not always achieve an outcome. However, given the change in the rate of men taking childcare leave in the selected companies, the measures to raise employees’ consciousness could be seen as effective in general.

Associated with the childcare-friendly atmosphere in the workplace, facilitation by supervisors or HR people is also compelling. Some of the companies conduct a hearing for eligible employees before they enter the childcare leave period. For instance, Company I’s

strong engagement in creating a supportive environment is distinctive: they interview the employee himself, his supervisor, his supervisor's boss, a person in the department of diversity, and a person in the general affairs sector, thus five people in total. Their consultation aims to make the supervisor and the boss of the eligible person say out loud, "We support you" in front of the general affairs and diversity promotion sector people from the company headquarters:

We ask the employees in detail: what kind of work they would like to do after returning to work and what they are worried about during childcare leave. Also, we create a place to articulate that "everyone would support them even if you returned."

We introduced it as a space where both the managers can present a supportive attitude on the spot; hence, they have no choice but to encourage them.

By doing this, they assume that employees' apprehension will be alleviated, and supervisors and bosses in job sites will inevitably shift to becoming sympathetic. Having a consultation with eligible workers may or may not suggest different meanings than simply being "supportive." In this case, Company I assumes that senior employees are relatively stubborn about men's childcare leave so people from HQ are necessary to create a safe environment for communication. However, this process of consultation may have been done because of subsidies as I revealed in Chapter 3 (*Ryoritsu Shientou Joseikin (Subsidies for Work-Life Balance Support, Etc)*, 2021). The companies are eligible to gain more subsidies if they actively encouraging male employees to take childcare leave, such as in a consultation.

In order to create a "friendly atmosphere," the managers in Company E invariably ask the same question to eligible male employees: "Congratulations, when do you want to take childcare leave, then?" It is simple but effective. The interviewees clarified that most of the companies have taken certain measures to attempt to convince men to take childcare leave by

HR or the general affairs sector. For example, they send “reminder” emails and make phone calls or directly talk to eligible candidates to urge them to take it. This pattern echoes the Japanese top-down corporate culture and collective character. Correspondingly, one of the representatives in WLB Co., Ltd revealed that men’s childcare leave can be contagious:

I have heard that childcare leave is contagious. If there are employees who already took childcare leave in the workplace, others around them also take it, but if no one has already taken childcare leave in the workplace, they will not take childcare leave. Even within a single company which encourages men’s childcare leave, there are some branches in which a lot of men take childcare leave and others where no one has taken it.

Considering collectivism and peer pressure in Japanese culture, those efforts by companies are reasonable for both employees and employers. Employees do not have to confront their managers, and employers can obtain subsidies by conducting these strategies such as measures of the promotion of childcare leave taken by men.

To raise awareness of men’s childcare leave, the procedures that Company I developed are idiosyncratic. The interviewees explained that “diversity and inclusion” policies were adopted because the company established a specialized unit and made a plan according to the data. The interviewee from Company I pointed out that:

Even if there is a sector such as HR or general affairs, it is extremely tough to proceed with such a massive in-house reform project and regular works simultaneously; hence, it was significant to establish a specialized unit. It became a key part of making a plan, and once a project was made, everyone should act according to it, that is how the reform has proceeded, I reckon.

The interviewees from four of the selected large companies were the representatives in a “diversity promotion sector” or a similarly named sector inside or outside HR or general affairs. Thus it seems that large companies are more likely to strongly promote men’s childcare leave and increase the number of men taking it. However, in fact, the selected SMEs are not far behind large corporations from the quantitative aspect, namely the percentage of taking men’s childcare leave and the duration of the leave. The question is how far companies can interfere in their employees’ private lives?

Secondly, the companies also had and still have problems with the level of practical operations. As I clarified in Chapter 3, due to the chronic business slowdown and demographic decline in Japan, the “Work Style Reform” policy was established for the productivity growth under the conditions of labor shortage and reduced working hours. The labor shortage in the workplace was the main reason that men could not take childcare leave, which suggests a struggle to find alternative personnel during such leave. Moreover, jobs are dependent on individual employees’ professional skills or job experience in Japanese corporate culture. Thus, if someone takes leave, the other members cannot make up for the tasks because they are unfamiliar with his/her/their work.

Following the practical operation problems, all the selected companies take appropriate measures to alleviate the issues and they increasingly visualize and share information about the tasks through either paper-based or online tools. Company C created a manual so that more employees can perform the same tasks now. Visualization of tasks by online tools enables employees to grasp each team member’s work anytime. For example, Company H has an online work tool that permits employees to share the tasks and inform others about their progress, and employees can communicate there as well. Company A also has prepared an online tool since the COVID-19 pandemic. Installing online work tools

provided more work flexibility; employees now work from the home office or the real office.

Visualization of works is effective for the elimination of personalized works which depend on specific people, and it helps younger members develop as well. Company G mentioned:

It is not compulsory, but the point is when you take a childcare break, you let go of your work and give it to your colleagues or juniors. Then they will try to communicate with each other and might get some ideas such as “Isn’t that way of working old?,” “Wouldn’t that be dealt with more effectively by IT systemization?,” or “Can such work can be eliminated?” Giving work to young people leads to their development.

Consequently, visualization and accessibility of information about work could be one of the most useful solutions to hand over jobs smoothly and safely before, during, and after childcare leave generally. The decision-making by the heads of companies, however, requires fast action, appropriate to the situation. However, it is questionable whether all companies can facilitate a developed information technology environment in terms of budget. Moreover, the use of information technologies depends also on the type of job. In general, those who can work from home are white-collar workers, and companies should have enough funds for IT systemization. Therefore, SMEs or certain types of workers (such as blue-collar workers) are more likely to face difficulties with visualization of work, accessibility to shared information, and compensating for someone’s absence. Company G shared that some people on the line, such as sales representatives or managers in the construction sites, found it more difficult to take childcare leave. Because they have to stay on site, they are more likely to face challenges. For example, since many employees always have company mobile phones, sales staff sometimes receive calls even on holiday as noted by an interviewee from Company G.

Preparation for leave is also a common strategy to reassure male employees to take childcare leave. For the preparation, some companies offer unique tools. For instance,

Company G has a “Family Meeting Sheet” which mandates male employees and their partners to discuss the allocation of childcare and housework tasks. It helps to visualize what tasks they do currently (i.e. before taking childcare leave) and to decide how these tasks should be divided between partners during and after childcare leave. Using this sheet boosts communication between partners, also prevents men from messing around during the leave. As this measure implies, male employees, in general, are not identified as trustworthy in terms of how much they contribute to child-raising and housework.

Similarly, the quality of childcare leave was questioned by the interviewees. Company E also provides this kind of preparation sheet to help partners and employees make a schedule based on a guidebook they offer on the company’s intranet. Also, the Cabinet Office provides “A magical sheet that husband and wife can really talk to, ‘○○ Family Strategy Meeting’” (put the family name on ○○). In contrast, Company G’s worksheet is more focused on men taking part in housework and childcare while the one by the Cabinet Office is a communication tool for identifying daily household chores and childcare items, sharing them, and confirming how to support each other. Secondly, Company G specifies more tasks on the worksheet than the Cabinet Office, which is more helpful for their visualization. Although both are practical and helpful for interactions between husband and wife, they are debatable as they target merely heterosexual married couples. On both sheets, there are illustrations of a man and a woman and the specific descriptions “husband” and “wife.” The worksheet by the Cabinet Office even names it the “○○ Family” pointedly, which can be interpreted as a trace of the feudalistic family system and expectation of a “traditional family.” In light of the family name, either the man or the woman must adopt the other’s surname upon marrying, following the principle introduced in 1898. The Japanese feudalistic family system, so-called *ie* (literally meaning “house” in Japanese), is “just as important as the continuity of the line,

and that is the group identity of the *ie*" (Ochiai, 1997, p. 154). This is an example of heteronormativity with a feudalistic family system that remains pervasive in Japanese society.

Through the interviews, I encountered "flexibility" as the keyword to proceed with men's childcare leave. Flexibility is understood as flexibility in time as well as in space the work carried out. Company H equipped a room in their offices for employees and their kids to stay together and work (or play). Moreover, approximately 80 percent of the employees work remotely. In terms of flexibility of working time, Company B and E prolong the eligible term of reducing scheduled working hours for childcare until the child is six years old (until children enter an elementary school), which is twice as long as the state law system.

Flexibility in terms of the period of childcare leave is applied in Company G: eligible employees can divide one-month childcare leave during which the company covers salary and allowance up to four times, after which they can take it by the day within eight weeks after childbirth. Under this system, they do not have to take a consecutive 31-day leave. For example, they can take a week off once a month. Interestingly, half of the male employees (51.8%) in Company G took a separate week four times. On the other hand, 10.9 percent took it all at once, which implies the difficulty of taking a consecutive one-month leave. In addition, flexibility in the employment system has suggested more equal treatment in accordance with employees' life cycle: Company C stated they treat all employees equally regardless of employment differences (full-time, regular, part-time, non-regular): even though employees took childcare leave and returned to work as a part-time worker, their career remains. Once their children grow up and begin commuting to school, and the employees do not have to take care of children that much, they can resume working as a full-time employee. Thus, Company C's employees can work in a managerial position but work a part-time

schedule, which is different from the conventional seniority system and long-hour working style.

However, there are still challenges at the practical level. Some companies, such as Company A and B, disclosed that they are dependent on outsourcing or temporary staff. As I have mentioned above, the jobs are dependent on one's professional skills and job experience in general, which suggests it is difficult to operate with a limited number of employees. Moreover, some companies need employees to have unique and professional skills (such as Company D and I), and cannot rely on temporary workers or outsourcing due to their specificity. In those cases, perhaps the personnel evaluation system taken in Company D solves this problem. According to the interviewee, "we have a system that if someone helped to cover the jobs, the person will be evaluated and obtained rewards (earning, bonus, compliments from other members) so that they will not lose." The evaluation program is surely one reasonable solution to make up for the labor loss caused by childcare leave. Of course, employees who took the leave should be supported, but more importantly, team members who took over the tasks should also be appreciated and rewarded. On the subject of support during childcare leave, the interview participants commonly articulated that "we should help each other in times of need;" they are not only concerned with replacement because of childcare but also nursing care for employees' parents. The representative from Company G expressed how managers should deal with future problems for themselves:

Whilst they can prepare for childcare leave for three to four months, nursing care leave often comes suddenly. There is almost no preparation period for this. In the case of childcare leave, relatively young people in their twenties and thirties take it, the managers remain, so management is possible. However, if the manager or the person in charge suddenly takes nursing care leave, the commander will disappear, the

organization might fall apart. The manager class must create the next leader in anticipation of nursing care leave. It is the training for nursing care leave by managing everyone can take childcare leave one after another. That is what I tell the managers. The severe aging of society, with fewer children, has influenced the management of human resources in the workplace. Operationally, these are handled by utilizing IT tools, flexible work style, and leave; however, there are still management issues caused by a labor shortage or specialized skills in reality.

Then, how do men reflect on their experiences of childcare leave? Overall, male employees looked back on it as positive. They understood their partner's psychological and physical burdens and the struggles of child-raising in general. Some mentioned that family ties also became stronger. They became more likely to go home earlier and sit with children and do housework. Also, some companies clarified that men who experienced childcare leave developed a sense of productivity and effectiveness of work in limited working hours. However, some reported that their employees have recognized how pervasive gender-assigned roles are. The interviewee from Company E shared a story: When men picked up children every day at the nursery school during childcare leave, people saw them as weird. Similarly, the interviewee from Company I disclosed that at a very early stage of the promotion of men's childcare leave, some male employees who had childcare leave disliked being seen as "special" because they considered it is what fathers are supposed to do.

Many interviewees also mentioned the development of camaraderie among employees. Company F articulated: "They adjust their work to each other since it is difficult to deal with sudden overwork for employees who have children, and they successfully reduced overwork." It seems that endeavors undertaken thus far have caused positive reactions and experiences. However, the decision of whether to take childcare leave or not is

there for men to make. From the perspective of the individuality of employees, it is biased to standardize people who have experienced childcare leave as productive workers and better communicators. Emphasizing the “development” of those taking childcare leave may cause exclusion or division in the workplace.

Furthermore, the participants were asked about future challenges. Four issues were raised by the interviewees: 1) to compensate for absent employees, 2) lost revenue by women working reduced schedules, 3) to increase the number of men who take childcare leave and its duration, and 4) the quality of men’s childcare leave. In the first place, research participants were concerned about the imposition on other employees to fill vacant positions, which was often debated as the most challenging issue in companies. As the previous section clarified, the obstacle of filling up a vacancy depends on job type. Ideas were provided by each company, such as visualization and information sharing on a corporate intranet or online tools, which are certainly effective for some professions, but it is not applicable to companies requiring workers with specific skills.

I asked the representatives of WLB Co., Ltd. how to solve this issue. Their suggestions are 1) to plan to operate at 90 percent of employees at all the time, not to set operations on the basis of a 100 percent workforce, and 2) to know a little of the substance of work in the different sectors in the company through information sharing. As I noted in Chapter 2, Japan’s hiring system is distinctive: Students usually start job-hunting altogether, and they begin working from April at the same time. Human resource management in Japan is typically designed to create “generalists” in the company, not “professionals” in a specific field/sector. Employees on career paths have a job transfer mission once in the space of a few years. The suggestions from WLB Co., Ltd. representatives are reasonable concerning the

current corporate culture in Japan. Yet, more research is needed about whether producing more generalists would help mitigate employees' impositions and burdens or not.

Secondly, lost revenue, particularly among female employees, came up for debate. Women who work a reduced schedule are naturally unable to earn as much as they used to. Among all OECD and EU countries, Japan has very generous childcare leave for fathers since they can obtain nearly full amount of salary for 30 weeks (Chzhen et al., 2019). However, according to *Reiwa Gannendo Koyou Kintou Kihon Chousa No Kekka Gaiyou (Summary of Results of Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management in 2019)* (2010), gender disparity in the ratio of employees working on a reduced schedule is prominent: 91.9 percent of female and only 5.2 percent of men. The same report clarifies that the percentages of companies paying a salary to compensate the reduced hours for childcare are as follows: 11.8 percent pay the full amount, 11.1 percent pay a partial amount, and 77.2 percent pay none (pp. 29-30). This data indicates critical issues in gender inequality; whereas companies encourage men to take childcare leave and partake in housework and childcare more during and after their leave, more than 90 percent of women work the reduced schedule but still Japanese husbands only spend 1.23 hours per a week for housework and childcare. Company H complained about lost revenue from female employees:

Although we are said to be a work style promotion company, in terms of income, the salary system has changed due to the shortened working hours (because of raising children), so the payment method has changed from the annual salary system to an hourly wage. Women are dissatisfied with low salaries.

As lost revenue was discussed as one of the issues after taking childcare, a measure taken by Company E is helpful: the employees can receive 50 percent of the salary lost due to reduced working hours for childcare.

For most of the selected companies, the third challenge is to increase the number of men who take childcare leave and to increase its duration. This research does not discuss the length of childcare leave, however, according to the data given by the selected companies, on average men took it for less than a month. The interviewees did not state the specific target period. Yet, Company G expressed that they encourage men to take it within eight weeks of childbirth because this is the most challenging period in terms of their partner's physical recovery and postnatal health. Taking childcare leave for less than a month is too short to fully grasp their partner's physical recovery and the difficulty of 24/7 hours of childcare. According to the selected companies, the average length of men's childcare leave tends to be gradually longer. Nevertheless, gender disparity in time dedicated to childcare and housework is still a substantial problem. Within the discussions on how to increase the number of men taking childcare leave, flexibility during childcare leave seems to be the key. Under the current corporate rule, employees in Company I cannot work full time whereas the legal regulation permits employees to work less than 80 hours during childcare leave in total. The interviewee from Company I assumed this regulation is a hindrance to taking childcare leave. Therefore, it is necessary to try to meet the job types and the demands of employees flexibly.

Moreover, whereas the companies have put effort into the quality of childcare leave, particularly what men should do during the leave through the preparation sheet or seminars for men, it is still necessary to discuss the quality. Company A prioritized the quality rather than the length:

What is important for men during and after childcare leave is inner awareness: to understand the difficulty of child-raising and the mother's body condition after childbirth: to realize what they should do during and after childcare leave. Even after you return to work and your wife takes care of a child, go home and check your wife.

If your wife made dinner, then you wash the dishes or bathe the children;
understanding and caring are needed.

For the sake of enhancing men's awareness and the quality of childcare, the representative from WLB Co., Ltd. advised increasing the number of men taking childcare leave. Certainly, this is one of the first steps to further discuss the quality of men's childcare leave until the share of men taking childcare leave reaches critical mass.

After all, the issues above cannot be solved without reliability and psychological safety in the workplace. Company C prioritizes psychological safety and communication; Thus, it holds a communication study meeting once or twice a year. Some companies have addressed the issues by holding seminars for managers, in which they are taught how to communicate with co-workers. WLB Co., Ltd. considers holding meetings is important to change the atmosphere and develop psychological safety in the workplace. The meetings serve for bringing ideas to the table, articulating what work employees want to do, what they would like to achieve in the sector, etc. To provide psychological safety in such meetings, it is primarily important how seniors and supervisors communicate with younger staff.

5.3 Perception of the Concept of Work-Life Balance

The term work-life balance was used as a mantra before the dissemination of "Promotion of Women's Participation in the Workplace" and "Work Style Reform". It was utilized not only in government policies but also in companies. As I revealed previously, it was suggested as a solution for the low birth rate. The governmental report *Introduction to the Revised Child Care and Family Care Leave Law* ostensibly mentions the "need to provide Work-Life Balance as a means to address the falling birthrate." As the Work-Life Balance Charter defines, "a society where each citizen can choose and live a variety of lifestyles" is a good work-life balance (*Society in Which a Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved*, n.d.).

However, it is questionable how many working-age people perceive this concept as it is defined. To understand the topic profoundly and compare the companies' views on the definition, I lastly asked how the interviewees consider "work-life balance." Through conducting interviews, I discovered that their translations of the term are generally summarized as 1) choice, 2) administrative strategy, and 3) diversity.

"Choosing" and "designing" employees' lives by themselves were the keywords used by the participants. They identified that work-life balance is not an either-or choice, but whether there are choices or levers to challenge whatever they want to do or not. It is cardinal not to sacrifice their life for work, and not to give up what they want to achieve. Yet, the emphasis on "choice" could connote "easiness" and "fulfilling of private life" to some people. One of the research participants interpreted that work-life balance leads to creating an "idle, stupid, powerless, easy-to-give-up generation" and is concerned that there will be a gap of development in individuals according to how they spend their time. Nevertheless, some interviewees identified work-life balance as a part of freedom of choice to design each life better, which dovetails with the Work-Life Balance Charter.

Having choices in life consequently leads people to a higher sense of happiness. Although happiness is a broad theme, it is certainly a high-profile issue in terms of mental health today in Japan. According to the "World Happiness Report" by the UN, the country ranked 40th based on the 2020 surveys and 50th in 2017–19 (p. 18), which is the lowest rank among G7 countries. Moreover, crude suicide rates (per 100,000 population) in 2019 indicate that Japanese people are the most likely to commit suicide of all G7 countries, and this rate has increased, as presented in the latest domestic report in 2020 (*Reiwa Ninenchū ni Okeru Zisatsu no Joukyou (Conditions of Suicide in 2020)*, 2021). Furthermore, as the previous chapter mentioned, the chronic overwork corporate culture has caused numerous cases of

karoshi (“overwork death”) because of both mental and physical maladies. Ochiai (1997) clarifies that “the term usually applies to company employees, and in such cases, there is now a system of compensation for deaths that are legally recognized as *karoshi*; however, there are countless cases of *karoshi* caused by domestic work such as a woman who took care of her mother-in-law and had a stroke and died (p. 166). Two of the interviewees named happiness as one of the end goals of work-life balance: “It is important to become happy through work and to think happiness for co-workers, that eventually leads balancing between work and life” (Company G); and “If you cannot feel happy in your work and life individually, productivity cannot increase, and it is impossible to become happy without a work-life balance” (Company I). Similarly, the working environment where a fraught atmosphere is defused, creates happiness. One of the interviewees in Company F insisted on creating a working environment that allows employees to talk about their situation to be understood by others.

Interestingly, the interviewees opined that “happiness” connects with “productivity;” namely, it has been utilized as the new mantra of “work-life synergy.” It is, of course, attached to “administrative strategy.” Reflecting on the labor scarcity and aging society, it is vital to attract, acquire, and hold on to talent. From that point of view, work-life balance is a significant administrative strategy. Three of the interviewees identified work-life balance as an absolute “administrative strategy.” Also, two saw “work as the core” and life as a sideshow. Similarly, one of the interviewees from Company I mentioned that “they aim and believe that wellbeing will be associated with increase productivity.” As noted above, the experiences and reflections of men who took childcare leave suggest they became more sensitive to productivity and effectiveness at work. The promotion of men’s childcare leave is inevitably one of the strategies for productivity growth.

Although a correlation between work-life balance policies and productivity growth in quantitative terms is still ambiguous, Yamaguchi (2011) reveals a positive relation between the promotion of work-life balance policies in Japanese corporations, productivity and competitiveness. The positive relation is confirmed by OECD macro and microdata for Japanese companies collected by the REITI (Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry). However, Yamaguchi (2011) also states that there is a negative relation between the expansion of the childcare leave system in companies on the one hand and the productivity of employees from a sociometric approach on the other:

Unlike Western countries, in Japan, more companies think that both the childcare leave system that exceeds the law as well as nursing care leave systems that exceed the legal minimum have a negative impact on productivity, rather than a positive impact. This means that corporate childcare and long-term care support in Japan is not necessarily linked to the utilization of human resources (p. 23).

This conclusion is in utter opposition to the positive evaluation of male employees' improvement of productivity after childcare leave noted by the companies. Concerning the relation between productivity growth and the improvement of the childcare leave system in companies, more research is needed from both quantitative and qualitative approaches and the point of view of companies and individual employees. Nevertheless, most of the selected companies answered either that they expect productivity growth or that actual positive effects on productivity could be seen by the promotion of men's childcare leave. However, if men who took childcare leave are assessed as having "more productivity" and "more communicative and performing better camaraderie teamwork," then why can the same discourse not be applied to women? In other words, if it is hypothesized that there is a correlation between the experience of childcare and productivity growth, female workers who

are more experienced and spend much longer hours on child-raising are naturally more productive and effective employees. If so, it would be beneficial for companies to contribute to equal opportunities and equal duration of childcare leave. This contradiction represents that, when it comes to the development of productivity in men, it is still presumed that “men’s childcare leave is something special.”

Lastly, as many large companies have prepared a special unit for diversity, the enhancement of the sense of diversity is noticeable. The representatives of WLB Co., Ltd. stated:

Companies are essentially working on it (men’s childcare leave) from the perspective of innovation. Innovation is diversity, it is something that creates new value by putting together different things. We use the work-life balance to create a lot of diversity in the organization without exclusions. Anyone can become part of the workforce even three times a week, or even during childcare and nursing care.

Given that various people achieve innovation by gathering their experiences and creativity, possibility and worth in individuals should not be cut, especially for childbirth or child-raising. According to the interviewee from WLB Co., Ltd.:

Japan is the only country that has continued to work and spent tremendous hours without seriously working to add value. It is the task for Japanese companies to manage human resources who have different values and motivations, I would like to change the side of the majority.

They further articulated the difference between work-life balance and work-family balance:

Work-life balance is not a protective measure to protect those who care for the family.

There will be a conflict between those who work loosely and those who work hard. It

is important to perceive all employees have life and understand that bringing diversity to the workplace will increase the strength of the work.

Indeed, work-life balance is the diversity of organizations, yet to what extent can Japanese companies handle it? Are they ready to manage a “diversified” human resource in the gender unequal workplace?

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the actuality of men's childcare leave in Japan today, the philosophy and strategies behind its enthusiastic promotion, the measures against issues faced, achievement and effects, and the perception of the term "work-life balance."

As mentioned in the first chapter, the situation of Japanese women is full of difficulties from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The Gender Gap Index indicates that decision-making in politics and the economy is male-oriented; hence, there are few female representatives such as politicians, managers, or professors. Not only the numerical aspect but also the history of female workers during wartime and post-war social phenomena have shown that the ideology of policymaking has not developed gender equality. Similar to the wartime, Japanese women today struggle with a pro-natalist atmosphere in society, policies supporting gender stereotypical roles, and responsibility for domestic work. Neverending thoughtless remarks by male politicians shamefully represent the pervasive misogyny in Japan. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law merely guarantees "opportunities" but "results" of equality in the workplace; thus, women are required to work as hard as men and raise children simultaneously. Women take the role of "double-jobber," doing paid and unpaid work without support from the workplace and family; hence, they inevitably leave the office before and after childbirth.

Chapter 2 raised problems that women are more likely to face than men. The former administration of Shinzo Abe proclaimed many policies related to women's participation and advancement in the workplace out of necessity. The problem of an aging society with a diminishing number of children is severe, so the government started suggesting that women involve themselves in paid work as much as men. However, it has already been clarified that

more women have joined the workforce as non-regular part-time employees. Therefore, women have participated in the labor force, but “advancement” has not yet been achieved.

When thinking about the reasons behind gender inequality in the workplace, the wall of 1.5 million yen might be the first challenge for part-timers who are willing to earn more and be independent. The tax system hinders women from working and earning more, which does not correspond with the dual-earner model currently suggested by the government. Because 50 percent of women quit their job before and after the birth of the first child, career interruption amongst women eventually recreates gender inequality in the workplace such as employment status and pay gap. As mentioned above, there is a tremendous gap in the life-long income between full-time regular employment and non-regular part-time employment. One of the reasons that women quit a job is the corporate culture, which was mainly tailored by and for men. It entails systemic gender division in hiring patterns, long working hours, harassment, and a notorious seniority system. That is the logic of how career interruption because of motherhood eventually recreates gender inequality in the labor force.

Chapter 3 clarified the current systems and policymaking. Although the current childcare systems for men are praised by the OECD report, men spend far fewer hours on childcare and housework and rarely take childcare leave. While women spend 7.34 hours per week on domestic work and struggle with being both earner and carer, men spend only 1.23 hours on domestic work (*Heisei 28nen Shakai Sikatsu Kihon Chosa Sekatsu Jikan ni Kansuru Kekka Youyaku (Summary of the Result of Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities in 2016)*, 2017). Even worse, 70 percent of men do no housework. How can women participate and “advance” in the workplace in this unfair situation? Whereas the government strongly promotes women’s participation and advancement in the workplace, the domestic labor shortage is to be expected. The labor shortage is not only in white-collar office jobs but also

in care and domestic work. Imagine if more women started working a full-time job from 9 am to 5 pm, and their partners or husbands worked the same schedule: who would have time to do domestic work? Perhaps, one solution for the labor shortage is the utilization of older people to achieve a more generation-inclusive environment. For example, Toho Banak in Fukushima prefecture is in the process of introducing “Iku Mago Kyuka (childcare leave for grandchildren),” so that grandparents can take full-paid holidays for grandchildren at times such as childbirth. A generation-inclusive environment is beneficial to both economics and society. However, due to generational gaps in issues such as parenting, older generations may need to update their values.

To address the gender disparity in both paid work and domestic work, the government formulated a package of policies to encourage women to stay in the workplace and encourage them to raise children at the same time. Along with policies, the government ostensibly states the necessity of a work-life balance to solve many issues from the low birth rate to the percentage of female managers. Inevitably, there has been an argument about the need for men to participate in domestic work more and more for the sake of women’s career continuity. As I have shown from prior research, women’s career continuity and advancement are beneficial for both the economy and individual achievement and lifetime income. The awareness should be extended to the understanding of the benefits of men’s childcare leave and why women’s participation and advancement are valuable for society.

Men’s struggle between “reality” and “willingness” is also one of the hindrances to the promotion of men’s childcare leave. Although 80 percent of men want to take childcare leave (Maeda, 2019), only 7.48 percent do so. The length of childcare leave of men is extremely short compared to women; men spent less than two weeks on childcare leave (*Ikuji Kyugyou Seido Ni Tsuite (About Child Care System)*, 2019). The three fundamental reasons

behind the low percentage and short duration of childcare leave are the labor shortage in the workplace, unfamiliarity with the childcare leave system, and the workplace atmosphere.

In the empirical section, I have examined the realities of how companies, especially those which are committed to promoting men's childcare leave have addressed and grappled with the issues. I selected the research companies from the "Manifesto of 100% men take childcare leave" organized by the consultancy company WLB Co., Ltd., and conducted semi-structured interviews by asking open-ended questions. The selected companies have encouraged men to take childcare leave following a set of "Work-life balance" policies such as "Women's participation and advancement in the workplace" and "Work Style Reform." The government gives subsidies to those companies (*Ryoritsu Shientou Joseikin (Subsidies for Work-Life Balance Support, Etc.)*, 2021). As this thesis has analyzed, the companies have addressed the promotion of men's childcare leave for the sake of administrative strategy, in other words, productivity growth given a limited number of employees and hours. In addition, most of the companies intend to promote it to seek happiness in "work-family balance" rather than work-life balance. However, some participants stressed individuality and choice in life is the "work-life balance."

The management style of human resources is distinctive in each company. Nevertheless, there are some similarities, such as visualization and systemization of the tasks each person carries out. These IT tools are useful and should be utilized more to make sharing information and work less stressful. Enthusiasm for men's childcare leave is common among the heads of companies. To defuse male employees' anxiety about taking childcare leave, firstly, publicizing men's experience with childcare leave is useful to change other men's mindsets. Secondly, supervisors and seniors should be good communicators and supporters. Thirdly, there should be an expansion of childcare benefits. In the current system, the

childcare leave benefits decrease according to the duration of the leave and only cover 50 percent of the monthly salary after six months. If there is a positive association between childcare experience and productivity growth, as the selected companies claimed, why are the systems made not more egalitarian? Or if men take the same length of leave as their partners do, or even longer, why not increase the benefits to more than 67 percent?

As noted by the research participants, consciousness about gender roles is still present and hinders men from taking childcare leave, consciously or subconsciously. In terms of practical problems, according to the research participants, people are more or less suspicious about the quality and ability of child-raising by men. It is commonly argued that we need men to be “aware” of the meanings and significance of men’s childcare leave from the perspective of gender equality and the economy. The initiative by the heads of companies in terms of responding to employees’ demands, the circumstances in foreign countries, and the work-life balance seminars are surely game-changers. However, as shown in the interviews, the reality of childcare leave is a lack of spontaneous and voluntary initiative from employees, namely their representation in decision-making. Employees need to raise their voices constructively. The incorporation of a variety of opinions and voices is “diversity” in the workplace. Updating traditional top-down decision-making and considering comfort in the workplace regardless of gender are the key solutions to perform best in the workplace, not just for women or men, but for all employees.

Regarding work-life balance, it is neither work-family balance nor the solution to the low birth rate. Individualization has accelerated and the shape of the family has altered. The diversity of family types and choice of life should be equally respected and considered in childcare leave. If someone takes childcare leave and another person takes over their job, they should be equally praised and evaluated. I also noticed that the participants overused the word

“productivity.” As stated by the interviewees, productivity growth will never be achieved without fulfillment in individual life. Yet, the increase of productivity needs a great deal of energy, especially given limited time and human resources. Then, how do people see “unproductive” people, the people who cannot perform profitably given limited time, such as the physically and mentally challenged? Or what if people cannot work and are not productive according to capitalist ideology? The postulated “diversity,” from the economic perspective may eventually introduce the exclusion of certain groups of people in precarious situations. That is not a society that has achieved “diversity” at all.

The young generation no longer values long working hours whereas former generations were desperately committed to them. It is the responsibility of companies to shift work styles and extend individual beliefs, creativity, and motivation. They must also prepare psychologically safe spaces for constructive discussions amongst employees. As noted by the interviewees, the core of management is daily communication based on psychological safety. Companies should thus provide an environment which enables employees to speak and be understood by other people. Some of the interviewees also suggested “choice” as the interpretation of work-life balance to challenge themselves and proceed with their career plan.

Finally, how far can work-life policies be a solution to the low birth rate? Is “Work Style Reform,” namely working productively in a limited time, a resolution to the low birth rate? Work-life balance policies value positively people who “can” marry and have children judicially and financially. What about people who have to work double shifts part-time to make their ends meet and are financially insecure, or people who want to have a child but cannot legally be married and have children because of their sexuality or gender identity? The idea of the family that the government promotes excludes certain groups of people. If the government strongly requests the achievement of work-life balance, it is imperative to

deconstruct traditional families rather than stick with the feudalistic family system which excludes same-sex couples who want to raise children. The deconstruction of the heteronormative family systems brings openness to a variety of families and sexuality and a more inclusive and egalitarian family system.

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Appendix

Table 1⁸

Inducement	Rights	Rules
<p><u>Papa Mama Ikuyu Plus (Mom & Dad Child Care Leave Plus)</u> If the father and mother both take childcare leave, the leave shall be one year until the child reaches 14 months of age (two extra months).</p>	<p><u>Childcare leave</u> <u>Definition</u> In principle, leave that a worker takes to take care of a child (including an adopted and a child with foster parent(s) who is less than one year of age. <u>Target</u> ① The worker takes to take care of a child (including a legally adopted child and a child with foster parent(s) who is less than one year of age. ② It is not established that the work contract ends and does not get updated by the time the child reaches 18 months of age (24 months if the childcare period ends when the child reaches 24 months of age). <u>Period</u>: In principle, until the child reaches one year of age (14 months in certain cases, 18 months for reasons such as admission to a nursery school has not been available, and 24 months if the child still cannot be admitted to a nursery school).</p>	<p><u>Limitation of working in excess of scheduled working hours for childcare</u> <u>Provisions</u> Employers must not make a worker work in excess of scheduled working hours if the worker with a child is less than three years of age. <u>Target</u> Workers taking care of a child that is less than three years of age. <u>Period/Frequency</u> For one month to a year per application / no limit on the number of applications</p>
	<p><u>Time off for sick/injured childcare</u> <u>Provisions</u></p>	<p><u>Limiting late-night work for childcare</u> <u>Provisions</u></p>

⁸ This table was made by the author according to “Ikuji Kaigo Kyugyohou no Gaiyou (Outline of the Act on Child Care Leave, Family Care Leave, and Other Measures for the Welfare of Workers Caring for Children or Other Family Members), Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2019, and KAVLI INSTITUTE FOR THE PHYSICS AND MATHEMATICS OF THE UNIVERSE, The university of Tokyo.

	<p>Workers who take care of a child before primary school age can take up to five days a year (10 days if there are two children) to care for them if they get ill or injured, or for their vaccinations or medical examinations. The leave can be taken on an hourly basis.</p> <p><u>Target</u> Workers, workers who work for four hours or less a day can only apply for one-day leave.</p>	<p>The employer must not make a worker work between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. (late night) if the worker taking care of a child before primary school age.</p> <p><u>Target</u> Workers taking care of a child before primary school age.</p>
	<p><u>Reducing scheduled working hours for childcare</u></p> <p><u>Measures</u> Employers must establish a reduced working hour system of six hours a day in principle for workers taking care of a child who is less than three years of age.</p> <p><u>Target</u> Workers taking care of a child below three years of age (Excludes workers whose scheduled working hours is six hours or less)</p>	<p><u>Limitation of overtime work for childcare and nursing care for family members</u></p> <p><u>Provisions</u> Employers must not make a worker work overtime exceeding the limit (24 hours a month, 150 hours a year) if the worker with a child below primary school age.</p> <p><u>Target</u> Workers taking care of a child before primary school age.</p>
	<p><u>Childcare leave benefits</u></p> <p><u>Measures</u> During childcare leave, you will get 67% over your gross monthly salary including allowances (but capped at 424,500 yen) excluding honorariums for the first 180 days after maternity leave ends and 50% until the child turns 1-year old within the first continuous leave. In case you are unable to enroll your child in a daycare center, you can extend your leave until the child becomes one-and-half to two years old.</p> <p><u>Target</u> ①The worker takes to take care of a child (including a legally</p>	<p><u>Measures to be established by employers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligation to make efforts to establish measures needed for workers taking care of a child below primary school age. • Obligation to make efforts to establish a childcare leave system for workers taking care of a child below primary school age, such as a childcare leave system for partners. • When the work location is changed, employers must consider the circumstances of the worker for whom the relocation will make it

	<p>adopted child and a child with foster parent(s) who is less than one year of age.</p> <p>② It is not established that the work contract ends and does not get updated by the time the child reaches 18 months of age (24 months if the childcare period ends when the child reaches 24 months of age).</p>	<p>difficult to take care of their child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Employers must make efforts to notify the worker individually of systems they can use when they come to know that the worker or his / her partner is pregnant or gave birth. •Obligation to ban power harassment, harassment because of childcare leave and maternity leave, or workplace bullying by those who take advantage of their superior positions (small and midsize companies will start in April 2022)
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Table 2. Questions in interview

	Questions
1	What was the motivation and background behind the manifestation of “Men’s Childcare Leave for 100%”?
2	Why do you think the promotion of men’s childcare leave is important in your company?
3	These days, it has discussed how companies support or what should men do during childcare leave not to merely ‘take’ the leave, does your company support in the process of taking the leave to return from the leave?
4	What does your company take measures? What was the background to make those measures?
5	Regarding atmosphere in the workplace, in what way do you want to make the atmosphere easy to take the childcare leave?
6	In the process of the promotion of men’s childcare leave, what kind of issues did your company solve, or what kind of arguments have you done?
7	Whereas the promotion of men’s childcare leave has strengthened, I think when employees take childcare (or nursing care) leave, management or

	support becomes difficult, how does your company divvy up the tasks and manage them?
8	How do you perceive Work-life balance?

Table 3. Questions to WORK-LIFE BALANCE Co., Ltd.

	Questions
1	From the companies I interviewed, they mentioned issues like how they manage manpower shortage during childcare leave, in what way they can resolve the tasks which are dependent on individual skills, and how they eliminate a toll on the other workers. Against those problems, they have tried to take a variety of measures, such as visualization of the tasks, hiring temp staff, enhancement of communication in order to enable any employees to handle any works. Do you have any other suggestions for management or dissolving the tasks which are dependent on individual skills?
2	Some interpreted and concerned the term “work-life balance” that it will produce generations who do not have a zest for living or it will return “More relaxed education policy” (a Japanese education policy which reduces the hours and the content of the curriculum in primary education). Could you tell me what you think about this?
3	<p>I understood “work-life balance” that your company suggests are based on two pillars, administrative strategy, and solution to a baby bust. “Work-life balance” as the solution to baby bust and measures to the promotion of men’s childcare leave outstandingly work for traditional heterosexual couples.</p> <p>3. 1. Then, how far the concept fit certain people? Such as those who do not have or are not willing to have family, people who cannot have a family because of economic reasons, people who cannot have children (do not want to have children), people who reluctantly work as a part-timer because of academic background or child-raising but want to work as a full-time regular employee.</p> <p>3. 2. Reflecting on the procedures by the government has done, it has assumed traditional family, namely fathers and mothers, that is why the</p>

	development of legal systems have progressed this much. On the other hand, how far the word fits those people mentioned above (socially vulnerable people) or same-sex couples? Could you tell me your opinions?
4	In your company, there are a lot of measures to enhance psychological safety through communication. In conventional Japanese-style companies, it is difficult to ensure psychological safety because it remains a hierarchical relationship prominently, how do you think about this issue?
5	As an idea, if we could take childcare leave by a day, such as a mother takes it on Monday to Wednesday and father gets Thursday and Friday, what are the assumable problems?
6	There is a suggestion to raise children in the whole society. What do you think the systems which can take advantage of the elderly like the “Grandchildcare leave” system taken in Toho Ginko (Bank of Toho)? Or how do you consider supporting those elderly people who want to participate in child-raising and have experience of it in the Human Resources Center for the Aged?
7	What measures are needed to prevent ‘just take’ childcare leave? And your company explains the importance of participation in child-raising and support for the partner as alleviation of postnatal crisis, but some say “I cannot stand just husband stays by the side. Some prefer her mother stays beside her. What do you think about this?
8	At last, do you think gender inequality (wage, employment, sexual harassment, etc.) will be improved by more men taking childcare leave and participate in childcare and housework after that?

ⁱ See the definition of small and medium enterprise stated in Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Basic Act: (1)Any entity which is a company whose capital or total amount of investment does not exceed three hundred million yen (300,000,000 yen), or a company or an individual whose regular workforce does not exceed three hundred persons, and which is principally engaged in

manufacturing, construction, transportation or any other category of business (except those categories of business mentioned in any of items (2) to (4) below);

(2) Any entity which is a company whose capital or total amount of investment does not exceed one hundred million yen (100,000,000 yen), or a company or an individual whose regular workforce does not exceed one hundred persons, and which is principally engaged in the wholesale trade;

(3) Any entity which is a company whose capital or total amount of investment does not exceed fifty million yen (50,000,000 yen), or a company or an individual whose regular workforce does not exceed one hundred persons, and which is principally engaged in the service industry;

(4) Any entity which is a company whose capital or total amount of investment does not exceed fifty million yen (50,000,000 yen), or a company or an individual whose regular workforce does not exceed fifty persons, and which is principally engaged in the retail trade.