

Women and Their Way of Work

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Widening Gap between Men and Women, and Regular and Irregular Employees

(excerpts; the article also contains reference to ILO Part-Time Work Convention and a figure on women in the managerial jobs in selected countries prepared based on ILO publication)

Wages and treatment should be equal when jobs are the same

By Mitsuko Horiuchi, Director, ILO Office in Japan

Foreign countries view Japan as a country with large gaps between men and women in the world of work. For example, women's share in the managerial and administrative jobs is 9 per cent, which is one of the lowest in the world, and, depending on statistics, women earn 50-60 per cent of men's wages, which is also the lowest among the industrialized countries.

Naturally, many factors are contributed to these statistical gaps. These include differences between men and women in the duration of services in their work and levels of educational attainment, and occupational segregation. Among other, women in management are extremely low. Not all gaps are caused by discrimination. The data, however, can be regarded as a plain indicator that demonstrates the magnitude of discrimination against women in Japan.

In addition, representation of women in various decision-making posts is limited and this illustrates the Japan's «male dominated society ». The share of women in parliamentarians is another example. Although it has been increasing in recent years, women share only ten per cent of the parliamentarians, which is the lowest among industrialized countries. As for representation of women in the decision-making positions in employers' and workers' organizations, which have influence on policy formulation concerning the world of work, 12.6 per cent of all the officers in central workers' organizations are women and no employers' organizations have more than one per cent of women among their officers.

Significant number of Japanese people thinks that women are discriminated in world of work. According to the opinion survey concerning active participation of men and women in the society, published in 2002 by the Cabinet Office, only 25 per cent of surveyed men and women together replied that men and women were equal in the world of work while 57 per cent replied that men were more favoured than women.

Numbers of fundamental problems remain in Japan in spite of the existence of the Law concerning Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment. One of them is the increasingly flexibilization of labour market due to intensified severe business competition caused by the globalized economy. Many women are forced to take irregular jobs like part-time employment and temporary jobs. Principle of equality (in wages or treatment) for equal work is not applied strictly and the gap between men and women is difficult to narrow. .

Moreover, women undertake responsibilities for essential household work for human life including housekeeping, and care of child, elderly and other family members, which are

unpaid and unrecognized. Unpaid house chore and care work at home are sources of discrimination against women in the formal labour market.

Combined with the practice of lifelong employment, it is very difficult for women who once quit their jobs due to marriage, child bearing or raising to return to labour market. A lack of comprehension of totality of lives of human being leads to separation between working, and family and citizen's lives in Japan. Japan must ensure decent work in particular for women.