Womenomics: How Male Undergraduates Perceive Female Participation in the Workforce

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Introduction

In 2013, Prime Minister Abe launched an ambitious plan, currently referred to as "womenomics," to boost the country's economy by the rapid increase of female participation in the workforce. In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, he pointed out that it is a matter of great urgency to create a comfortable working environment for women, and to increase their participation in work and society. Moreover, his aim is not only to numerically increase female involvement in the workforce, but to bring women to higher echelons of management, where now they hold a miniscule ratio of 6.6 percent in 3,873 companies (*Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Pamphlet*, 2014). The noteworthy national benchmark for "womenomics" in this area is achieving 30 percent of leadership posts to be held by women by 2020 (*Japan Times*, Nov. 22nd 2014).

It is an obvious fact that Japan faces a threat of the inverted socio-economic pyramid, with fewer workers supporting the growing number of retirees, and desperately needs more labor force. It is also a fact that, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Japanese women are among the most educated in the world, with 42.5% having some postsecondary education and only 67.5% of them holding a job, part-time work included (Auslin, 2015). A 2010 Goldman Sachs report estimated that if women in Japan were employed at the same rate as men, or about 80%, economic output would grow by up to 15% (ibid.).

A wider inclusion of women in economic life is perceived worldwide as one of the major ways to mediate labor shortage in aging countries (Averianova, 2014). The fact that the Japanese government has started addressing this problem seriously only now is not surprising. In the Japanese society, labor distribution strongly reflects the traditional, highly conservative, from our point of view, treatment of women and their place in life. Most of them hold a job, often a temporary one, until marriage, and then they tend to leave labor force, especially when they give birth to a child, as indicated by the sharp drop in women's labor participation rate for the age group of 35−39 years old (OECD, 2012).

Obviously, this traditional pattern of female labor involvement does not go along well with "womenomics" agenda and needs to be changed. The top-down approach sketched by the Japanese government mandating large companies to craft and publicize plans for improving the role of women in their businesses is a first step in breaking the infamous "glass ceiling" (see Averianova, 2014). On the other hand, it is feared it might become counter-effective not only to the improvement of corporate efficiency and competitiveness of Japan's productive sector, but

also to the urgent need of the country to reverse its increasing demographic slide, with Japan's birthrate hitting a record low in 2014 (Auslin, 2015). Certainly, some government measures such as increasing child-care services and benefits for working mothers are imperative. But no less significant is the need for social transformation coming bottom-up, that is rethinking of traditional norms and patterns defining the society's attitudes towards working women.

Our study addresses this particular problem, as its purpose is to gauge the attitude of NUCB undergraduates, future participants of labor force, to the need and possibility of increasing underused female work potential. The first part of the study (Averianova & Nae, 2015) was guided by the major research question: "Do Japanese female undergraduates intend to participate in full-time lifelong employment?" and was based on a survey of female undergraduates. It revealed that most young women are willing to participate in the workforce and even intend to continue working after marriage and childbirth. However, they are also aware of the barriers which are still very much embedded in a conservative and sexist employment system and are easily discernible behind the façade of gender equality rhetoric. The second part of the study, presented in the current paper, addresses the attitude of male NUCB undergraduates to the problem of female employment and attempts to define their attitudes as citizens, future husbands and colleagues to women in the labor force.

The Study Assumptions, Hypotheses and Research Questions

The design of the study and interpretation of findings were determined by a set of assumptions pertaining to the complex nature of the phenomenon studied. The hypotheses tested in the study were based on the following assumptions about respondents.

Firstly, it was assumed that the participants of the study maintain male gender identity. The assumption was made that surveyed men are predisposed toward traditional heterogeneous family and they assume the role of a father and a husband. We also assumed that most of the study participants plan to get married at some point in their lives. Even though the research into the American Millennium generation showed a decrease in the relative importance Millennials placed on both long-term relationships and parenting compared to the older generations (Friedman, 2013), we believe that this trend has not yet developed in Japan. Thus, the first hypothesis to be tested in the study is that the majority of undergraduate men intend to get married and start families of their own.

The next assumption was based on the fact that the work-life balance, increasingly demanding in the context of a struggling economy and particularly challenging for working mothers, does not affect the decision of the study participants to have children. In America, this subject (labeled by many as work-life *conflict* due to the constant challenges families with small children face on a daily basis) is perceived as the major factor determining the decision of young Americans to opt out of parenting (Hamerstone & Musser Hough, 2013; Harrington, Van Deusen, & Mazar, 2011). A striking finding in the study by Friedman (2013) is that the Millennial men "are dramatically less

likely than their Generation X counterparts[1] to become fathers" and the reasons for this are: "the anticipated conflict between work and the rest of life; changes in gender role stereotypes, especially about men's role as breadwinner; and economic concerns" (Friedman, 2013, p. 29). All these factors, which preclude many Western men (and women alike) from having children, are assumed in our study to be largely mitigated in the Japanese socio-economic context.

In Japan, the division of work across genders has been preordained by the long-standing cultural tradition: holding a full-time job and being the breadwinner of the household (*daikokubashira*) is almost exclusively a masculine duty, whereas motherhood is the expression of femininity (Charlebois, 2014). A rapid economic growth after World War II reinforced the society's belief in the male-oriented economic and social systems that enabled it. "Gender role stereotypes (i. e. men should work while women should do housekeeping, or men should do professional work while women should be assistants) are deeply rooted in the mentality of the Japanese" (Fish, 2015). Since the enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1986, the legal framework has been put into place to increase women participation in the workforce. Still, as was revealed by our earlier research on female undergraduates (Averianova & Nae, 2105), most of respondents grew up in families where mothers either did not work when children were young (34%) or worked part-time (31%). It was assumed in the current study that a similar situation would be observed for the male respondents, the majority of whom grew up in families where mothers were homemakers and primary caregivers for their children.

This assumption is instrumental for understanding gender and role socialization of men, which is one of major factors in the development of a person's identity. From early childhood, gender socialization assigns a certain set of traditional roles and behavioral patterns, which males and females follow in all aspects of their lives. The need for affiliation, and establishing a positive affective relationship with other people, associated with feminine personality stereotypes (*Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2000), has assigned women to the social norm of full-time, stay-at-home motherhood. In Japan, this social role of women has even been authenticated by a special term *sengyo shufu*, or "*professional housewife*" (Vogel & Vogel, 2013). Most Japanese women choose to give up their career (or full/part time job) after marriage or childbirth in order to fulfill their traditional mission of wives and mothers. A 2014 survey regarding marriage and child rearing, conducted by Meiji Yasuda Institute for Life and Wellness among 3,616 men and women aged between 20−40, reveals that there is a discrepancy between young women's intentions, or aspirations of participation in the workforce, and reality. Thus, according to the respondents, ideally, more than half of the women declared they intended to work full time in the years after marriage and before the birth of the first child (61.8%), then quit after childbirth and dedicate themselves to household and child rearing, to resume full time employment after children reach middle school age (52.1%) (Meiji Yasuda, 2014a). This 'ideal scenario' coincides with the late 1990s M-shaped curve of women's involvement in workforce, which peaked significantly around

[1] The term "Generation X" refers to those born in 1966−1976 and coming of age in 1988−1994. In the context of Friedman's study (2013), these are college graduates of 1992.

ages 20−25 and 45−50 and dropped during child rearing years (around 30−35) (Statistics Bureau, 2013a). However, the survey reveals a different situation. Although most of the female respondents chose to renounce their full time jobs after marriage or childbirth (73%), very few continued working after marriage (14.7%), and even fewer returned to full time employment work after their children reached middle school age (13.6%) (Meiji Yasuda, 2014a). The main reason for quitting remains the wish to fulfill traditional mother and wife obligations; however, one in four women mentioned the companies' lack of child rearing support as a decisive factor (ibid). Despite this, recent statistics suggest that in 2012 the percentage of women aged between 15−64 in jobs (63.1%) was almost ten percent higher than in 1987 (54.2%) (Statistics Bureau, 2013b). In addition, as a consequence of the current trend of marrying and having children later, most women opt out of employment between ages 35−39, instead of 30−34 as it was previously (ibid).

For men, who are traditionally socialized into the role of breadwinner, to succeed professionally equals success in providing for their family, their children, so "historically, men were able to find a common thread and little conflict between work and family because both involved taking on the role of breadwinner" (Friedman, 2013). With the assumed majority of the study participants coming from traditional families, it was hypothesized that they will emulate family role patterns observed at home. Parental influence is proved by research to be instrumental in gender socialization and children learn sex-typed roles via the observation of parental behavior (Polavieja & Platt, 2010). The family model according to which the father is absent from household duties and little involved in children's education, while the mother is the one who sacrifices her career and stays at home with the children remains the traditional, cultural norm of the country (Prunier, 2014). Although Japanese law allows men to take paternity leave (*Childcare and Family Care Leave Law*, revised in 2009), in 2011 only 2.6% actually took it (ibid). Among the reasons invoked for this absenteeism are fear of the stigma, financial reasons, taking traditional norms of women as caretakers for granted, lack of precedent among peers, lack of knowledge, and the pressure of traditional families (ibid). Despite relative changes in Japanese men's work-life balance, many of them still live for their work, and they even take pride in being workaholics (Gordon, quoted by Prunier), although their aspirations may be different. In a 2012 attitude survey regarding personal happiness conducted by Meiji Yasuda Institute for Life and Wellness among 3,093 men aged 20−64, 74% of respondents declared themselves inclined to choose private life over contribution to the society. Out of these, 30.6% were in their 20s, 24.9% in their 30s, 21.4% in their 40s, and 16.5% in their fifties. It can be observed that younger men are less willing to sacrifice their private time to serving the society. Nevertheless, despite these figures, a 2012 poll by the Cabinet Office reveals a different situation, in which more men considered that work takes precedence (37.7%) before family life (18.9%) (Nakano, 2013).

But what do men think about their spouse's career choices? As male working population keeps shrinking, more women should be encouraged to participate in the workforce. For this they need assistance not only from the government and legislation, but from their spouses in the first place. Surprisingly, a 2013 survey found that men are more supportive of their wives' working full time until the birth of the first child (70.3%) than women themselves (65.4%) (Meiji Yasuda, 2013).

The emergence of the so-called *ikumen* trend (men actively involved in child care) is a proof that younger male generations are ready to take the future of their own children and families in their own hands. The term, combining the Japanese words *iku*, meaning "to nurture, to raise children" and the English *man*, was coined by the advertising agency Hakuhodo, and became a buzzword in 2010, when the then Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, Akira Nagatsuma, declared he wanted to make the term "ikumen" trendy, by promoting more participation of men in childcare (Prunier, 2014; *Kotobank*, 2015). That the term was chosen to sound very alike *ikemen* (meaning "handsome man") is no coincidence, but it also reflects the intention of making child care for men more attractive and positive. Any changes? As Scott North points out, "The pace of change has been slow. (. . .) For every Japanese husband who does the shopping, cleans the bath, cooks or takes his children to nursery school, there are nine who leave the household and care of children to their wives (or mothers)" (North, 2009).

Thus, on a larger scale, the social and cultural context of Japan plays a significant part in sex-role socialization. While more women are entering workforce, this economic dynamics has not much affected relatively static culturally generated perceptions of female "place." As Lobo (2014) contends, "Japan remains a deeply conservative society, and even innocuous calls for more free child-minding have been met with aggressive opposition. After the June 2013 protests, a number of political commentators took to the Internet to express their displeasure at the thought of women leaving the home to work" (Lobo, 2014). At the background of these two powerful factors − vicarious learning through family work distribution and rigid cultural perceptions of sex roles of men and women, the next two study hypotheses were formulated as follows: a) the majority of men do not anticipate life-work conflict and would want to have children; b) most of them adhere to the traditional sex-role work distribution and believe that housework and childcare is women's job while working outside the home is men's job.

These assumptions were further probed by the question of whether men would agree to their wives continuing working after the birth of a child or prefer them quitting their job and staying at home, at least while children are young. Concurrent with the above-mentioned hypothesis about role distribution, it was hypothesized that many respondents would choose the latter option.

On the other hand, gender socialization is not preordained and the mechanisms involved in the intergenerational transmission of sex-typical preferences are more complicated than it has been thought before (Polavieja & Platt, 2010). Recent research into gender socialization of American youth showed that the impact of maternal employment is minimal (Bianchi, 2000). Besides, it was also assumed in our research that, being undergraduates of a business university, most study participants are aware of the problems of the Japanese workforce and anticipated positive effects on economy from wider female employment. This assumption was probed by asking respondents whether they think more women in Japan should work. It was hypothesized that the study population will be divided along this line.

Based on the previous study about the choices of women with regards to their decision to continue working or quit after giving birth to a child, it was found that 51% of female undergraduates intend to continue working full-time. While this is only a conjectural intention at

this time of their lives, it does not reflect their own childhood experience, when 65％ of mothers did not work at all or worked part-time. As the conflict of combining family and profession has a far more insidious effect on women, who carry the major load of family responsibilities at home, women in our previous survey opted for several choices that might assist working mothers, like flexible hours, daycare centers, and paid childcare leave. The survey option of eliciting other solutions did not render any of more egalitarian dual-career alternatives (like stay-at-home fathers or at least fathers taking childcare leave) and only 9％ of the respondents viewed the increase in husband's help as important. This finding was not surprising as research in general shows that the expectation of fair homework distribution in dual-career relationships is somewhat idealistic, and modern women do not subscribe to it (Friedman, 2013). While men are now more inclined than in the past to see the value of shared domestic responsibilities, gender roles are slow to change (Gerson, 2010). Traditional gender stereotypes regarding housework and childcare operate like prisons for men, holding many of them back from trying new approaches to work and family life (ibid.). In the Japanese context, the expectation that men will do domestic chores is next to impossible due to the fact that social and work culture expects men, not women, to work hard and put in long hours:

> Japan's core workforce of predominantly regular male employees relies on a culture of status, hierarchy, long hours, limited flexibility and corporate citizenship. Little wonder that despite a 2008 survey suggesting that 32 per cent of men would like to contribute more to family life by taking parental leave, the take-up rate remains persistently low — a meager 2.6 per cent in 2012. (Macnaughtan, 2015)

Another research shows that "20 per cent of workers aged between 20 and 40 — prime parenting years — work more than 60 hours per week. This corresponds either to weekend work or four hours of overtime per day" (Fabian, 2014). Long hours plus corporate social obligations do not only explain why husbands with children under six in Japan spend with them only 1.0 hours daily (*OECD*, 2012) and in general display notorious "indifference to housework and child rearing" (Fish, 2015). It is also explanatory of the reason why wives (for instance, participants of our earlier study) do not expect much help from their husbands.

Obviously, this situation needs to be changed if more women were to enter labor force. In their assessment of Abe's workforce reforms most analysts are unanimous in the opinion that womenomics must include men too:

> If Abe really wants to increase female economic participation, then his policies need to directly challenge an entrenched workplace culture. His 'womenomics' can only succeed if it creates a new working environment for both women and men and requires a renegotiation of work, lifecycle and gender norms for both sexes in the economy. This will have to encompass not just legislative reform but also the development of new social norms. And this will take perseverance and time to implement. (Macnaughtan, 2015)

As Naoko Ogawa, a senior manager for Women's Empowerment at *Keidanren* (Japan Business Federation), an economic organization contributing to self-sustaining development of the Japanese economy and Japanese workers, suggests, reforms should address issues related not only to women,

but to all people: "This includes reforming work style to shorten work hours and find appropriate ways to share burdens in terms of housework and raising children. Japan will reach its goal only when 'Womenomics' becomes 'Humanomics' that everybody considers as his or her own business" (quoted by Fish, 2015).

In our study, we attempted to gauge the participants' awareness of the need to transform the workplace culture in order to ensure men's wider participation in family life. It was probed by two questions whether they would like work less and spend more time with children and whether they would help their working wives with childcare and household chores. Concurrent with our earlier assumptions that most young men are supportive of womenomics and do not yet realize the practical aspects of the work-life conflict in dual income families, we hypothesized that the answers to both questions will be predominantly positive.

The final aspect of male attitudes towards womenomics explored in the study was the opinion of the participants about the government support of the families with working mothers. Mr. Abe's blueprint for a society, in which women are able to better manage work-life balance, includes making childcare more accessible and expanding the length of maternity leave from one to three years. Analysts, however, are skeptical if these measures can significantly ameliorate the Japanese labor market: "Yet while they are welcome, policies to expand childcare will be insufficient. When the work day is 9am to 10pm you cannot leave your children in childcare while you go to work" (Fabian, 2014). It was interesting to see how the business university undergraduates see this problem and if they are able to come up with any suggestions of their own, since it was hypothesized that they would find existing measures insufficient.

Thus, guided by the major research question - "What is the attitude of Japanese male undergraduates to wider inclusion of women in full-time employment?" - this study addressed six main conceptual areas: the intention of young men to get married and have children; perception of gender role distribution in the family; maternal employment during and after child-rearing as a background to this perception; perception of the Japanese work culture and inclination to be more involved with family and less with work; and, finally, opinion about the existing government measures to assist dual-career families. With the focus on the mentioned above conceptual areas, several lines of inquiry were determined and a survey was designed to address eight working hypotheses.

Hypothesis # 1. The majority of male undergraduates intend to get married and start families of their own.

Hypothesis # 2. The majority of men would want to have children.

Hypothesis # 3. Most men adhere to the traditional sex-role work distribution and believe that housework and childcare is women's job while working outside the home is men's job.

Hypothesis # 4. Most men would prefer their wives to quit job and stay at home while children are young.

Hypothesis # 5. The study population will be divided on the question if more women in Japan should work.

Hypothesis # 6. Men would like to work less and spend more time with children.

Hypothesis # 7. Men are willing to help their wives, if these continue working, with childcare and household chores.

Hypothesis # 8. Participants find government support to dual career families insufficient.

These hypotheses were tested through a questionnaire of ten multiple-choice questions, most of which elicited alternative answers or comments. To ensure the clarity of the questions, the survey instrument was bilingual and administered in English and Japanese.

Data collection procedures were designed to ensure anonymity for respondents, the confidentiality of their responses, and, of course, as high rate of response as possible. The instrument for administering the survey was online software *Survey Monkey*, available for free in its limited to 10 questions and to 100 respondents format. In compliance with the limitations of the format, the researchers sent the links to two sites with identical questionnaires to two batches of undergraduate male students (1^{st} - 2^{nd}, and 3^{rd} - 4^{th} years of study), none of the groups exceeding 100 respondents. A message in English and Japanese was distributed via university electronic mail to all male students officially registered at the NUCB Department of Communication. It explained in brief the purpose of the research and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality for all respondents. As the audience receiving the questionnaire was assumed to be familiar with the mechanism of online surveys, no further instructions were provided. Two weeks after the initial mailing a reminder was sent to the participants. Two weeks after the income of new responses had ceased the results of the survey were subjected to further analysis.

Presentation of Data

The following data are based on information provided by 94 subjects, all undergraduate men who returned usable questionnaires. There were 141 questionnaires distributed, out of which 94 were returned. Thus, the return rate for the survey is 66.6％ .

The demographics of the study population was not explored as it was assumed to be homogeneous, comprising male undergraduate students with the average age of 20 years. The marital status was assumed to be single, and the specifics of educational attainment (freshman, graduate, etc.) were neglected due to the study limitations.

The majority of respondents who returned questionnaires answered most of the questions, with only 1 or 2 participants skipping some of the questions.

The first research question of the instrument was "Do you want to get married and have children?" While some (N = 12, 13％) have not yet made any decision on this matter and one skipped the question, the majority of respondents (N = 75, 80％) plan to get married and have children. Only 5 of them do not want to get married and 2 want to marry but have no children (Chart 1).

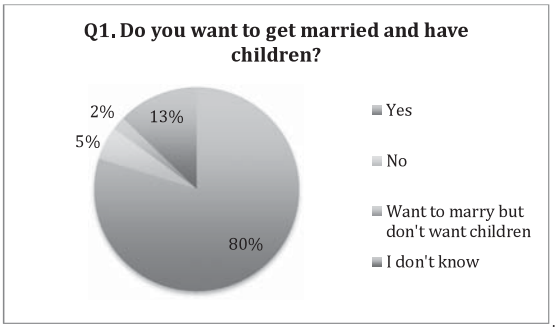

Chart 1

The second research question explored the opinion of respondents about women having a job before marriage (Chart 2).

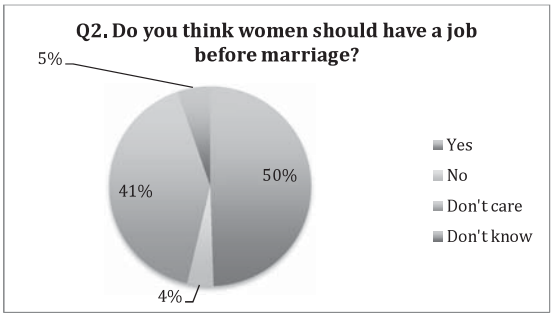

Chart 2

As can be seen from Chart 2, respondents were divided on this issue, with half of them (N = 47) supporting female employment and approximately another half either not caring (N = 39) or not having any opinion (N = 5). Only 4 people (4％) were against women having job before marriage.

The next, third question, addressed traditional gender role distribution, with men working and women responsible for housework and childcare (Chart 3).

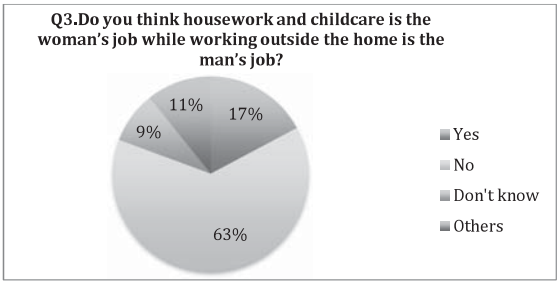

Chart 3

Surprisingly for us, only 17％ of the participants (N＝16) upheld the traditional pattern, while a considerable majority (N＝59, 63％) answered the question negatively. There were 8 students (9％), who did not have an opinion about the matter, but there were 10 comments, which were provided in the option "Other." These comments, however, should also be qualified as negative,

as they suggested either dual-career household (N = 3), or the egalitarian choice for both partners irrespective of gender about whether to work and where (N = 4). One comment was of a mixed type: the respondent stated that "the man should be responsible for income earning while the woman for the household. But she is also free to work outside the home if she wants to." Another participant believed that men too can take up child rearing, while still another one suggested the opposite of the traditional role allocation, stating that the men should do housework while women should work outside."

Question 4 probed this gender-role attitude from a more personal angle, asking respondents if they would ask their wives to quit the job. The egalitarian position of the participants displayed in the previous query was reconfirmed, as shown in Chart 4.

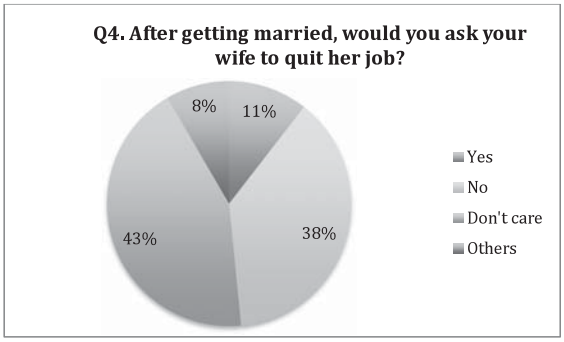

Chart 4

36 respondents were positive that they would not do so, and 41 men did not care either way, thus making together the overwhelming majority of 81% of the study population who do not mind their wives working. Three of the comments also suggested giving a woman a free choice. But the other three comments showed that respondents are more inclined towards the traditional role distribution. One suggested that his wife should quit after the birth of a child; the other said that she could work "provided she does not neglect her household duties," and yet another one stated that if his salary allows he would prefer his wife taking care of household and children. Thus, these three respondents, together with ten who were against their wives working, make up approximately the same proportion of the supporters of traditional gender-role setup (N = 13, 14%) as was determined through Question #3.

Interestingly, the attitude towards female employment changes to even more egalitarian with Question 5, when children come into the picture (Chart 5).

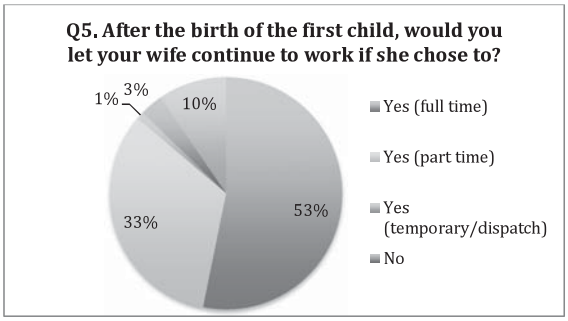

Chart 5

Quite unexpectedly, 50 men agreed to the full-time employment of their wives after children are born and 8 more suggested in their comments that wives should have free choice to pursue any kind of employment, thus making 62% of respondents (N = 58), who potentially support the idea of mothers working. 42 (34%) respondents agree to their wives working at part-time or temporary jobs. With regards to those who do not want their wives to work at all (N = 3) and the one who is against wife's work while children are young, their percentage (4%) is not consistent with the previous two queries - 17% and 14% for Questions 3 and 4 accordingly. Even if we add here one respondent who does not know the answer yet, still this strange inconsistency remains.

Question 6 was about the intention of men to help their working wives with housework and childcare and it has not yielded a single negative answer, with only 2 people choosing "Don't know" and one skipping the query (Chart 6).

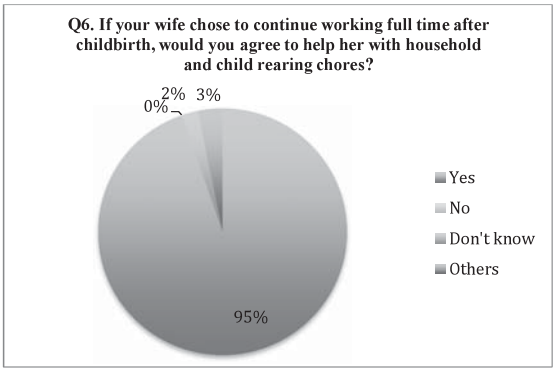

Chart 6

So, the overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) are ready to be involved in childcare and household chores. Three comments displayed desire for still bigger involvement, with one suggesting equal sharing of all household chores, the other – not just helping but doing "whatever we can" and one even willing to take upon himself all the chores.

Responses to Question 7 (Chart 7) elicited the situation with maternal employment at the time respondents were children themselves. The picture is somewhat different from the one we received earlier with female participants of the first study. Thus, more men's mothers worked full-time

(40% vs. 34%), and fewer mothers being homemakers (24% vs. 33%). The proportion of women working part-time for both groups is almost identical (34% vs. 31%).

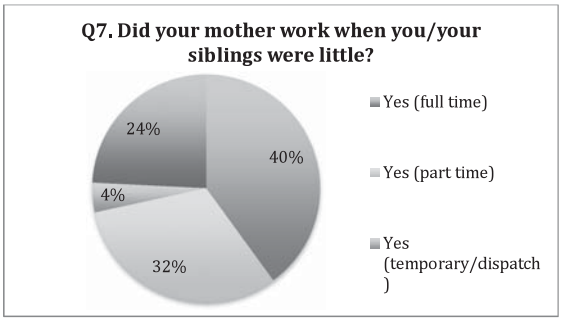

Chart 7

Question 8 invited participants to express their opinion about womenomics in general and, quite unexpectedly, the answers were distributed in three roughly equal groups: 33 % said "Yes," 37% - "No," and 30% - "Don't know" (Chart 8).

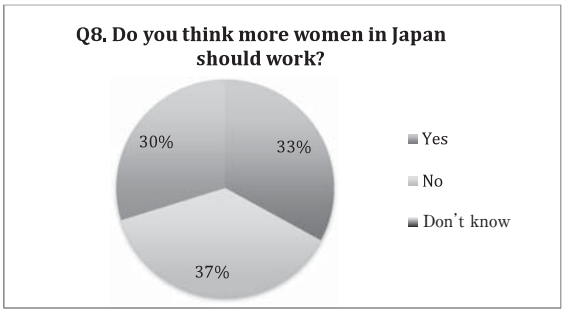

Chart 8

Looking at the results obtained on Question 9, which addresses the issue of womenomics from the viewpoint of men's more active involvement with child care, it is obvious that the proportion of respondents who are indecisive on this issue is similar to the above query (N = 30, 32%). Moreover, two participants skipped this question. At the same time 54% (N = 50) agree with the option suggested in the question (Chart 9). Compared with men's answers to the previous question about the need for more women working, the picture of the participants' attitude to womenomics looks inconclusive.

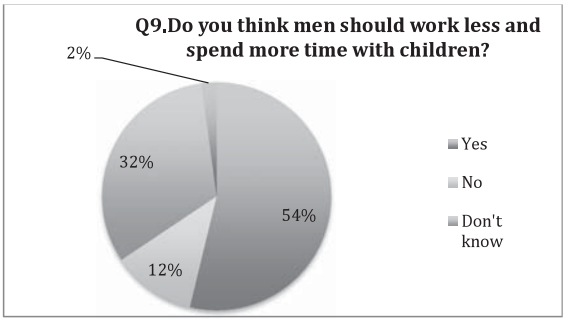

Chart 9

Finally, Question # 10 probed respondents' opinion about government support of double income families (Chart 10).

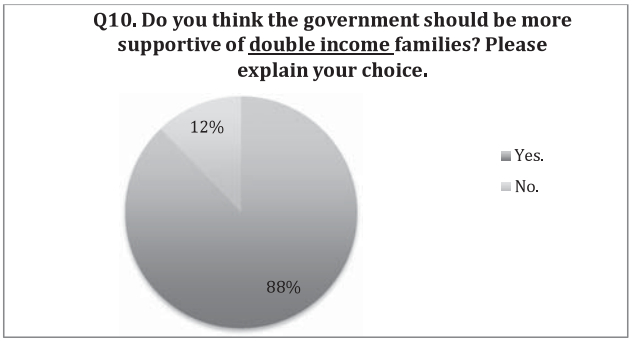

Chart 10

The answers received to Question #10 were distributed in the following manner: 79 people (88%) gave negative answers, and only 11 people (12%) answered positively. Since the question did not include the option of "Don't know" answer, the number of responses dropped from the initial 94 to 90.

Given that the question required participants to explain their choice it generated the largest number of comments (N = 35). It is not clear which of these comments were given additionally to the answer choices of the survey and which instead of them. The comments fall into three groups − positive (demanding more action from the government), negative (stating that the government is doing enough), and unrelated to the yes/no options. The first group, in which the participants think that the government is not supportive enough of families where both partners work, was the most numerous, which is concurrent with Chart 10 (N = 25, 71% of comments). Seven negative comments stated that the government has more important issues to deal with, that it is supportive enough and it is up to the family or the wife to decide what to do. The group we termed "unrelated" (N = 3) comprised comments not about the government role in supporting families with working mothers but more about gender role distribution in a family. Participants here implied that it is better for women to take care of children rather than work provided "they are not treated by politicians as baby-making machines." It was also believed that if women work the birth rate will

remain low and both parents will have insufficient time for children.

The common opinion of the predominant group of comments is that the government is not doing enough to provide support for double-income families while this should be the government's "foremost priority." There are 3 areas where more governmental action is expected by respondents: financial support, change of work-time arrangements, provision of child-care facilities and facilitation of general change of mentality with regards to the role of women and men at work and home. The participants envision more financial support in the form of child allowance and other benefits, and salary increase and tax cut for workers with children. With regards to time at work, a popular comment is about the need to decrease informal working hours, to revise the Labor Standards Act to allow for flexible working hours, and, in general, to change old-fashioned corporate mentality towards creating a better, family-friendly working environment. The latter, according to some respondents, should entail more support for returning women, creation of on-site, company day-care centers, corporate endorsement of paternity leave, and generally equal treatment of men and women regarding child-care. Lack of child-care facilities (nurseries, kindergartens, day-care centers), particularly in big cities, was emphasized in six comments. Others suggested extension of child-care leave, promotion of paternity leave by media, encouragement of multigenerational families, and, in general, making life better for all citizens by, for instance, saving more people from poverty and ousting corrupt politicians.

Discussion

Comparing working hypotheses set forward at the start of the research with the data obtained through the survey it is possible to conclude that conceptually the Millennial generation of men has significantly moved away from the traditional concept of sex role distribution of Japanese society. It was confirmed that most of them want to marry and become parents. While it was also corroborated that most of them come from families where mothers did not work or worked part-time while children were young, the respondents themselves are supportive of female employment and do not mind their wives working either before or after marriage. Thus, our hypothesis about men adhering to the traditional views on men's and women's roles has proved wrong. Even more unexpected was to find out that our anticipation of men being against their wives' employment after children are born was also disproven.

To a certain extent these findings are moderated by the assumption that respondents at this stage of their life are not fully aware of the challenges of the work-life conflict in dual career families with young children. However, their unanimous understanding that childcare and house chores are not just women's duty and their willingness to help their wives testify to the fact that participants are more cognizant of their choices than the researchers assumed them to be.

Participants also expect more from the government in support of working mothers and dual-income families, as was initially hypothesized, and their comments and recommendations are concurrent with those offered by womenomics analysts.

Still, at the background of all these findings, there are certain inconsistences, which threaten

to invalidate them to a certain extent. Thus, many participants believe that men should work fewer hours and spend more time with children. But at the same time only one third of them are sure that more women in Japan should work. The majority of respondents is either against or uncertain about the issue of increased female employment. Now, the quintessence of womenomics and all policies related to it is the shrinking labor force of the country. So the question remains: if men work less and women do not work more, who will work for Japan?

Conclusion

Young undergraduates appear, at least in theory, quite supportive of women's active participation in the workforce. A major limitation of the present study is that the target population is made of university students who are single and have little or no full time employment experience. They seem to be aware of the fact that times have changed, and that the traditional family picture with the father as sole breadwinner and mother as caretaker is no longer set in stone. Although the traditional model is still pretty much the norm, men and women have different aspirations and views compared to their parents. Men are no longer willing to sacrifice their life on the altar of corporate values. Women are more educated and more demanding when it comes to fulfilling their own dreams. However, as research has shown, there is a gap between men's and women's aspirations, on the one hand, and reality, on the other. Although more women would be willing to work full time before and after giving birth, very few actually do so, partly due to insufficient child care facilities and lack of support in the workplace. Men would like to dedicate more time to family and participate more actively in child rearing, but the pressure from peers and superiors to keep up with the corporate tradition is still strong. The study has also found that, perhaps, due to their lack of experience, some of the respondents have rather unrealistic expectations from society, in the sense that they would prefer to work shorter hours, but would still like their spouses to fulfill their traditional role of stay-at-home wife and caretaker. In other words, they want to eat the cake and have it too. Notwithstanding, most of the respondents were in agreement that the government should extend more support for families with children, in order to boost up the dismal birthrate. As one student aptly commented:

> Japan is ageing, the working population is decreasing, and so having more women participate in the workforce could solve the problem of workforce shortage. Having women work equally with men could help men and women be more aware of each other's value, and might improve the quality of work. The problem of childcare remains, but Japan could follow in the steps of Sweden, which provides comprehensive support to families with children". (Our translation)

In overall, despite other limitations of the study, such as a small subject pool and a restricted number of questions, it is possible to conclude that the Millennial generation of Japanese men has started questioning the traditional gender-role setup both at home and at work and are ready, at least conceptually, to embrace a new culture of humanomics.

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