

Contribution to the thematic report on the right to freedom of opinion and expression and gender justice for the 76th session of the General Assembly

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This examination will bring input on the issues faced by women in Japan. Japan is a modern, well-developed country with a powerful economy and a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.919¹. However, Japan still has a lot to improve regarding women's rights as it ranked 120th among 156 countries in the gender gap rankings in 2021. It is also facing an aging population crisis that is strongly correlated to the circumstances in which many women find themselves. This short report will shine a light on the current situation in Japan.

Tradition still holds a strong place in Japanese society, a good aspect in itself. Traditionally, women are expected to quit their job after marriage and become a housewife. This dynamic has been functioning well in Japan up until the decline in birth rate. With its aging population, the country is facing many issues which stem from gender inequalities.



Women's issues have been brought up many times in the political sphere, former Prime Minister Abe had launched a set of policies called "Womenomics" in 2013² but not much has been achieved, it can be said that the quality of the work environment for Japanese women has not improved and their work-life balance is even more challenging than before with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Many Japanese women find themselves in caregiving positions while having to work full or part-time. This time management dilemma pushes them into situations of hardship that hinder their work skills and capacities and few politicians are willing to resolve these issues as they prioritize the productivity to the well-being of the workers. Every year some Japanese politicians find themselves at the center of "blunder" scandals (what is called "mondai hatsugen" in Japanese), where they make problematic comments regarding women. We have witnessed recently the head of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics organizing committee, Mori Yoshirō who implied that he did not want women to speak during meetings as "they would talk for ages"³. He later resigned amid public outrage. As Japan protects free speech he is allowed to make these comments, however free speech doesn't mean that there shall be no consequences. He is an important political figure, who holds a lot of power, in the case of his comment reflecting in his actions, it could be said that many women working for him might have been prevented from speaking up or might have felt intimidated.

The Japanese political sphere is a good example of a hostile working environment for women, as there have been one too many heckling incidents. In 2014, during a session at the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, Ayaka Shimomura, a Japanese politician was making her speech on birth and childcare when a male politician interrupted her and yelled things such as : “you should get married” and “can’t you have children ?”⁴. This incident is far from isolated, as similar incidents have happened throughout the years. This kind of hostility that Japanese female politicians have to face makes the job unappealing, and many Japanese women have a negative opinion of politics and politicians, making them not wanting to engage in political life.

法律 law

Improvements were meant to be made this year on the legislative side, but this has not been achieved. This year, the Tokyo High court rejected the appeal to change the law regarding surnames⁵. Japanese women are still not allowed to keep their maiden name after getting married, only one last name is permitted, and it is the husbands. This is because of the Japanese “Koseki” (family registry), once a woman is married, she is part of the husband’s family, and therefore cannot keep her former last name. The system was created to ensure the solid unity of families. This rule can be challenging for authors, journalists, and researchers who find themselves with a different name than the one used in the publication of their work pre-marriage. Many women have to explain their marital situation to justify the difference in last names. This lack of choice leading to administrative challenges can be considered unnecessary. Only women are affected by this and therefore it cannot be said that the system in place is egalitarian. The situation is not likely to change as even Japan’s gender equality minister, Tamayo Marukawa opposes reforms⁶. As a result, some women refuse to get married and are faced with harsh criticism from the part of the population accusing them of trying to undermine Japanese traditions and society⁷.

報道機関 media

The media has played a double-sided role, as it can condemn sexism very harshly but at the same time helps to spread and normalize sexist views. During the reporting on the Medical school admission scandal in 2018, where some universities had admitted removing points from female students' test results because there were too many women admitted compared to men, the media were divided as there were many people justifying these actions. Japanese media’s response was not as outraged as it would be expected with western media⁸. Journalists and news anchors’ personal life and marital status are often discussed and publicly brought into question, the legacy media often emphasizes a woman’s physical appearance and contributes to the idea that attractiveness is the most important asset. .

嫌がらせ

harassment

Online harassment and stalking are very serious issues in Japan, having an online presence as a woman can even prove to be dangerous. The stabbing of the then 20 years old artist Mayu Tomita⁹ by her “fan” after refusing his advances, is a sad example of the tragic result of online harassment. As a consequence, laws concerning death threats sent online were revised. However online harassment is still a huge problem, more recently the death of the Japanese professional wrestler, Hana Kimura reignited the debate surrounding cyberbullying¹⁰.

結論

conclusion

Many things are left to be done to improve gender equality in Japan, it must start in the political sphere to set an example to the public. Many Japanese women are brought down by hostile environments and oppressing attitudes. Japan's constitution grants them freedom and equality but Japanese society is still behind this ideal. Harsher punishments for grave sexual crimes, change in attitudes and better education are all needed to bring positive change. Japan's influence and economic contributions to other nations are valuable. It is a great example of growth and improvement. Hence the importance of leading the way on gender equality.

References

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