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Japan: Human Rights

## **Human Rights in Japan**

Many factors of Japanese culture show that in general the country is well off in terms of food security, urban development, and average income. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016), the typical family in Japan is composed of about 2.71 people per house hold, ranking slightly higher than the OECD average of about 2.63. The average Japanese diet consists of low fat, and high carb foods that are rich in soy. The foods they eat are generally healthy as they eat a lot of seafood that tends to be rich in fat soluble vitamins (Fallon & Enig, 2000). Japan is a relatively food secure nation. Japan is a top performing country in terms of the quality of it's educational system. Health care in Japan is offered to the poor however it is of higher quality for those of higher status. In Urban areas the average employment is different among men and women. There is a 62% employment rate for women, while for men there is an 81% employment rate. The average gross yearly wage of Japanese citizens is about \$29,304 (World Salaries, 2008). Access to purchased food in Japan is relatively easily despite a lack of large amounts of agricultural land available due to urbanization. Japan has access to such foods because of their strong trade connections with highly agricultural nations in the western world such as Canada and the United States (The Japan Times, 2015). Overall Japanese food production, especially in urban areas, is in sync with population, however resources are often not evenly distributed, which in turn leaves some families without adequate access to nutrition (Matsumura, 2001).

Japanese average household income ranks above average as it's per capita rate is USD 26,111 per year, however it comes at a cost of some basic human rights. 72% of people aged 15 to 64 in Japan have a paid job, and a very low rate of work-life balance. Without a healthy work-life balance humans are not able to successfully care for themselves or the other's they are responsible for. Their hours of work versus the amount of free time they have to be with and care with their families is extremely low. On a scale of 1-10 in comparison to other nations such as Denmark with a 9.8 and the United states with a 5.3, Japan's work-life balance ranks relatively low with a 5.1 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016).

The effects of Human Rights issues on the average Japanese family is not physical so much as moral family connections. Poor work-life balance decreases the amount of time that parental figures are able to spend with their children, and care for them. While the increased household income increases the ability for Japanese citizens to care for their families monetarily, their work hours are not proportionate to the wages that they earn. Also, as more women are willing to enter the workforce rather than raise children there is a shift in population. There are drastically less young children among the Japanese population compared to the amount of working age, and elderly citizens (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016).

The present status of Human Rights issues in Japanese culture includes issues mainly along the focus of poor working conditions and gender inequality. Work-life balance is a huge issue for

working Japanese citizens. On a scale of 1-100 in comparison to other nations. The highest being Denmark at 98, Japan ranks relatively low at a 5.1. Gender inequality is present in the country as the employment rate of women is about 62% compared to 81% of men. It is also shown that men in Japan earn an approximate 26.6% more than women (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). Due to lower employment rates and the wage gap between men and women, more women seek to enter the workforce to help provide for their families as well as work longer hours to secure a reasonable income. These factors cause an imbalance between their work and family life. If the employment and wage gap between men and women were closed then both would be able to work the same jobs, the same amount of time, for the same amount of money, therefore stabilizing the average Japanese families income. If incomes are stabilized and all family providers are able to work reasonable hours to earn a reasonable wage then work to life balances may stabilize as well. The stabilization of family life in Japan is extremely important as their population of younger children is steadily declining and in turn decreasing the population of future generations who will join the Japanese workforce and be responsible for the future food security of Japan.

The current condition of Human Rights issues is not currently improving as there have been few movements that directly address workers' rights, and gender equality. (Human Rights Watch, 2015). As if there were to be an increase of employment of women in Japan without the previous issue of work-life balance, and the wage gap between men and women being remedied first, then that issue would only grow, as women would be away from home more, and eventually negatively affect the overall quality of family life.

If Human Rights issues in Japan are rectified the quality of life for families may improve. If there is a redirection of money flow implemented by governmental action conditions may be made better for the general worker as well as women specifically. Marginalized groups in Japan require support and awareness if conditions are to be made better.

Population growth in Japan directly corresponds with human rights as human rights directly with population growth. Due to centuries of a heavily patriarchal society Japanese women believe that if they choose to stay at home and raise a family they will be seen as disposable, and low ranking in society. More and more Japanese women are seeking jobs in a quickly urbanizing Japanese society. As more women choose to work rather than raise families there is a steep population decrease of young children, and an influx of working age and elderly Japanese citizens. If there were to be a drastic population increase, there would be more of a need for both Japanese men and women to seek jobs in order to monetarily support their families. Once again, if Japanese men and women seek more jobs to support their family, the current working conditions of a poor work-life balance would restrict them from physically caring for said families (Nova, 2004).

Japan's agricultural sector has been greatly wounded as their population ages rapidly and cheap food imports increase in popularity. Compared to their food self sufficiency rate of 73% in 1965 it now hovers at about 39%, as well as a shrinking agriculture production percentage which now rests at about 1.2% (Kakuchi, 2013). In the 1960s there was an average of about 7 million people per month moving from rural to urban areas in search of better paying jobs. In 1999 about 2.8 million households took part in commercial farming operations which has shrunk by about 200,000 families who are now dependent on non-farming incomes (Kakuchi, 2013). These trends

are most likely due to a strong national policy that looks over agriculture in favor of mass industrial development which will eventually lead to huge bills for food imports to feed a massive and aging population. Rice production that is heavily subsidized by the government is the only crop that can feed Japan's large population of 127 million without relying on import staples such as wheat, meat, and vegetables (Kakuchi, 2013).

Yukako Harada states "It's time for a makeover to save Japanese farms and the only way to do this is to get youth and more women involved in agriculture" (Kakuchi, 2013). The Japanese government has invested money to reverse the trend of the falling agricultural sector. There was an investment of about 50 million dollars in efforts promoting awareness on women's farmers rights to land ownership and income as farm titles traditionally are held by men in the family (Kakuchi, 2013). A perfect example of women entering the agricultural work force is the Girls Farm a project in Yamagata Prefecture in the Tohoku region of Honshu island. It contains a large area of fertile land where crops such as rice, watermelons, and grapes are grown. The Girls Farm challenges traditional gender biased Japanese farming by promoting happy young women working in their fields (Kakuchi, 2013). Professor Tomoko Ishida stated "simply improving women's income could have a positive impact on the limping sector. My research has shown that women farmers are good at innovation. They are bringing new value - added products- jams and pickles made from fruit and vegetables, or small restaurants, for example - into the market, which have become popular with Japanese consumers" (Kakuchi, 2013). Government data from 2011 showed that more than three fourths of new agribusiness or nearly 10,000 start ups in 2010 were headed by women. Different forms of education have arisen to promote work in the agricultural field among women. Seminars on business management have created great self sufficiency among women business owners however much more needs to be done to encourage the Japanese youth to join their weakening agricultural sector, and jeopardized future food security (Kakuchi, 2013).

The issue in Japan is not necessarily food security, but more so what people are doing to obtain it, and the consequences of their actions. Japanese citizens, are food secure due to factors of high education and average house hold income rates, which come at a cost of basic human rights. Many Japanese citizens struggle with a healthy work-life balance, as even though their incomes are relatively high, they are not necessarily proportionate to the hours they work. There are also high rates of gender inequality among Japanese citizens in the work place. These conditions could be rectified through reforms that directly address the needs of the individual. Income per hour of the average Japanese citizen should be directly addressed as well as the growing income gap between male and female. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is one of the nations leading donators to human rights issues. However, the organization's focus has been placed on gaining governmental support rather than connecting directly with the communities it's meant to be supporting (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This program could improve the human rights issues it's meant to support by directly connecting to communities and minority groups that are being oppressed. I believe that the current position of Human Rights in Japan is due to the lack of national government involvement in corporations. There's obviously some sort of money flow issue within the nation. The national government should investigate, and take action on the issue surrounding work-life balance, because while Japanese average house hold income is high the citizen's suffer from long hours that detract from their own personal health as well as that of their family if they are involved with or responsible for such. There are also unfair

opportunities presented to Japanese men in the workplace. Though there seems to be an increase of women entering the workplace there is still a large income gap. If the wage gap between men and women were to be closed, and equal employment opportunities were offered then there would no longer be a need for women to work longer hours or spend more time seeking employment. If the wage gap were closed, then fathers or other family providers wouldn't have to work excessive amount of hours in order to provide for their families. If employment opportunities and the wage gap between men and women were stabilized then work to life balance of Japanese citizens, family relations, and Japan's youth population would stabilize as well. Whether these issues are present because the national government has chosen to overlook them, or is simply unaware of the issues I do believe that one of the solutions, or at least the beginning of a solution can be found in bringing awareness to the situations. The typical family can be involved with implementing these issues by becoming more vocal about their current status. The issues at hand do not receive enough awareness presented from the people directly affected by the issue. It is also very important that more education is brought to Japan's youth about the importance of agriculture and how it corresponds with their future food security.

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