DRIVERS OF POLICY CHANGE ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN RESPONSE TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES IN JAPAN

RINTARO MORI[1], RENE LOEWENSON[2] AND MARIE MASOTYA[3]

Introduction

Japan is experiencing a demographic challenge, with fertility falling after the 1940s and reaching 1.26 by 2005. The country also has the highest global growth in the ageing population, with the share of people aged over 65 years projected to reach 40% by 2050. This means that while there were 12 workers for every retiree in the 1970s, there will only be one for every retiree by 2050 (WPR, 2019). The fertility decline is attributed to marriage later in life, advances in women's education and employment and difficulties in balancing childcare and work (NIPSSR, 2003).

Women's economic activity rose significantly from the mid-1990s. Female university graduates rose 12-fold from 1968 to 12 million in 2007 and female employment rose from 5 million in 1953 to 23.5 million in 2011 (Ikezoe, 2014). These trends raised new challenges for the balance between work and family responsibilities. Japanese society still holds traditional gender norms with least gender equality among high-income nations (Fukuda, 2017; Ito, 2019). Large Japanese companies expect employees to demonstrate commitment to the company, creating a difficult balancing act for working mothers (Schoppa, 2006; Takahashi et al., 2014; Yu, 2009). A combination of long working hours and frequent overtime, a gender pay gap, tax disincentives and the expectation that working women take on the demands of household work and care have led to 60 percent of women leaving employment around childbirth. Added to this, workplace gender norms and corporate cultures discourage female employment. Mothers returning to work faced difficulties in finding regular jobs and were compelled to take part-time or temporary agency jobs (OECD, 2012; Mun and Brinton, 2015, Ito, 2019). Men play little role in child and elderly care and household chores. In a competitive environment, many women leave work to support their children's schooling. While public preschools are free, the high combined costs of private preschool and child care costs lead women to leave work to take on childcare, to be able to afford private preschools.

---

[1] Specially Appointed Professor, Education and Research Institute for Death Control and Prevention, Graduate School of Medicine, Osaka University, Japan.
[2] Director, Training and Research Support Centre, Zimbabwe.
[3] Consultant, Training and Research Support Centre, USA.

Company managements, while concerned about the long term economic consequences of the ageing population, gave low priority to these work–life balance issues (Sato, 2012; Mun and Brinton, 2015). Permanently employed workers, mainly men, had greater job and benefit security, albeit with longer hours of work. Companies preferred to hire workers on less secure contracts, with more variable benefits and limited job security. The tax/benefit system also created disincentives in couple-families for second earners (usually women) to work (OECD, 2012). In 1981, when measures to address childcare were being considered, the four largest business groups in the country opposed legislating childcare leave, arguing that it would burden firms. Therefore, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) abandoned its intention to change the law (Lambert, 2007). In the 1980s, business argued for reduced welfare spending in economic downturns and the legislature approved cuts to childcare in 1985, despite opposing petitions from childcare and parent groups (Lambert, 2007).

In the early 1990s, as the national birth rate hit the lowest ever recorded, the Japanese economic bubble burst, creating national anxiety about the future and generating debate about women's role in the home and workplace (Shirahase, 2007). In the 2000s, the profile of work-life balance (WLB) rose significantly on the policy agenda, with debate throughout the 2000s on how to address it (Takahashi et al., 2014). This raises a question of what led to WLB and family and child health issues rising up the policy agenda, and with what change in policy content. This paper explores this change, applying a policy analysis lens to understand the drivers of change.

Methods

The study was carried out within the project 'Fostering policy support for child and family wellbeing - Learning from international experience', applying the project's thematic and analytic framework to this Japan case study, drawing on Kingdon's multi-streams theory (Loewenson & Masotya, 2018). Given the aim to analyse drivers of improved policy recognition and policy change in family and child health and wellbeing (FCHW), the wider project reviewed a number of explanatory frameworks that engaged with the complexity, and the dynamic and non-linear nature of policy change. These frameworks identified stages of policy change, in agenda setting, policy negotiation and formulation, policy adoption and implementation (Loewenson & Masotya, 2018; Gilson, 2012; Walt et al., 2008). To better understand the drivers, Kingdon's multi-streams theory was used to frame how those raising the issue, those framing policy content and the political actors come together as 'streams' to tap windows of opportunity for policy change, whether in setting the policy agenda, in policy negotiation or adoption, or in all of these stages (Kingdon, 2003; Loewenson & Masotya, 2018). Applying this approach in Japan, key word searches of online published and grey literature identified and included 40 non-duplicating papers and 4 databases of statistical evidence identified by all authors as relevant, with two high level key informants, one from a technical institution and one from political/policy level, interviews of

major stakeholders in the current and past population policies and content analysis implemented by the first and second authors. The content analysis used the Kingdon framework to extract and organise evidence on how different policy actors came together to raise policy attention, develop policy options and promote their political adoption as processes for policy change, taking advantage of windows of opportunity for that change.

Limitations

There were limitations in identifying relevant information as not all policy relevant evidence is documented. Grey literature was thus gathered from the first author's networks and gaps were filled using key informant interviews. Although a wide range of evidence was thus used, there may be a publication and memory bias in what is included. Nevertheless, we triangulated across multiple sources and consider the findings to be a reasonable reflection of the changes and their drivers.

Results

Evidence of a policy change

The policy changes are summarised in Table 1. They reflected an intention to create a more favourable environment for women to work, have children and balance the demands of working life and childcare. They included an improved supply of accredited childcare, improved parental leave benefits and support for their uptake, incentives for men to play a greater role in childcare, more flexible working conditions for workers with children and improved housing, education and health services for families with children. Work-Life Balance as a concept was given greater profile in the beginning of the 2000s, with the synonymous term *'shigoto to seikatsu no chouwa"* proposed by the Japanese government and widely discussed (Ikezoe, 2014).

The Japanese government implemented a series of policies to address obstacles faced by working mothers. As outlined in Table 1, a series of family support policies were tested and implemented, as were. housing, education, and healthcare policy changes (Fujisaki & Ohinata 2010; Center for Public Impact, 2017), backed by labour policy reforms for employers to implement the family support policies (Harris, 2006; Next Generation Law 2003; Centre for Public Impact, 2017; CESifo DICE, 2014). Between 2001 and 2009 improvements were made to the eligibility for and levels of parental leave benefits. (Yamaguchi, 2016; Ikezoe, 2014; CESifo DICE, 2014).

From earlier concerns with promoting fertility, policies later in the decade began to take on **gender roles and wider employment conditions affecting the work-life balance**. A 2007 Charter for Work-Life Balance and an associated Action Policy drawn up by business, labour and local authorities and various laws

encouraged changes to men's working styles and corporate cultures to be more supportive of family roles. They reduced long working hours, encouraged workers to take annual paid leave and promoted flexible working hours, teleworking and working from home (Ikezoe, 2014). In 2010, the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare launched the national *Ikumen* Project to link masculinity and heroism with involvement in childcare, to encourage greater paternal involvement in family life.

A 2015 *Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace* strengthened the rights of female workers, requiring employers to prevent their unfair treatment due to pregnancy, childbirth, maternity and family care leave (HRW, 2017). With Japan having the second lowest proportion of female managers among OECD countries, in 2015, the Cabinet adopted a new five-year *Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality*, aiming for a target of at least 30% of leadership positions being held by women in all areas by 2020 and 15 percent of middle managerial positions in the private sector (HRW, 2017). In the same year a Comprehensive Support System for Children and Childcare (CSSCC) was launched as part of the **integrated reform of the social security and tax system**. Unified early child education and care centres (ECEC) were given status as facilities for education and welfare, to connect childcare to related services (Sakaue & Ogawa, 2016).

Table 1: Timeline of policy and legal reforms on the work life balance

Year	Policy/ law/ program/institution
Pre 2000 **1990-1995**	1990: An Inter-ministry committee *Creating a Sound Environment for Bearing and Rearing Children* is established; 1991: A *Childcare Leave Act* provides working mothers and fathers one-year of job protected leave as the first of a series of changes in family policy. 1992: Parental Leave (PL) introduced offering job protection for limited employee types until the child reaches age one and no cash benefits. 1994: The Angel Plan is published by government to address low birthrate and plan daycare and child care services.
1995-1999	1995: *Childcare and Family Care Leave Act* introduces cash benefits (25% pay) for workers on indefinite contract; Council on Population Problems publishes 'Basic ideas on a decrease in the number of children' pointing to the need to address gender-based roles
2000	Work-Life Balance as a concept is given greater profile by researchers Government pays full contributions to social security while on parental leave
2001	The childcare and family leave benefit increases to 40% on monthly pay and government meets employee and employer contributions to social security during parental leave.
2002	Government encourages revision of working styles including those of men and restructures the dependent children's allowance
2003	*Basic Act for Measures to Cope with Society and Declining Birthrate* and *Act on advancement of measures to support raising next-generation children* passed. A *Next Generation Law* requires large employers to submit a plan on support of working parents.

Year	Policy/ law/ program/institution
	Table 1 continued from previous page
2004	A New Angel Plan produced
2005	Workers on limited-term contract included as eligible for PL if employed for over a year
2007	Shinzō Abe appointed as Prime Minister. The first Minister of State for Measures for Declining Birthrate is appointed. A Charter for Work-Life Balance and an Action Policy is drawn up by state, business, labour and local authority leaders. The policy seeks to change corporate culture and to promote a balance between child-rearing, with measures to reduce long working hours, encourage workers to take annual paid leave, promote flexible working hours and working from home. The cash benefit raised to 50% of monthly pay and maternity leave pay increased to 66% of daily earnings.
2009	The *Employment Insurance Act* amendment provides that 50% of the wage is paid before taking leave from employee insurance funds as a childcare leave benefit. The Angel Plan is revised to strengthen childcare support and passed unanimously by the Japanese Diet.
2010	A new agreement on work-life and care balance is concluded between top executives of government, labour, and employers. Parental leave becomes an individual entitlement. The Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare launches the national *Ikumen Project* promoting male involvement in childcare. *Womanomics* discussed in Cabinet
2014	The child care leave allowance paid out of employment insurance funds is increased
2015	The Comprehensive Support System for Children and Childcare (CSSCC) is launched within the reform of the social security and tax system with unified early child education and care centers given formal status, boosting their numbers. Law reform prohibits unfair treatment due to pregnancy, childbirth, maternity leave, family care leave. A 2015 *Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace* strengthens female workers' rights and a Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality is adopted.

Sources: NIPSSR (2003) ; Enzawa & Fufiwara (2005); Lambert (2007); Haub (2010); Taguma et al. (2012); Ikezoe (2014); Sakaue & Ogawa (2016); Yamaguchi (2016); HRW (2017)

There is some evidence that these policies improved preschool enrolment; uptake of childcare leave; and a rise in men taking paternity leave and in women retaining their jobs and continuing to work after the birth of their first child (Abe & Takewaza, 2013; Ikezoe, 2014; Centre for Public Impact, 2017).

Household economic concerns motivating a delay in childbirth contrasted with national economic concerns over a fall in the number of workers by 10 million by 2030 (Centre for Public Impact, 2017). WLB policies thus combined two parallel strands of policy; social support for working women and policies related to the economic impact of the falling birth-rate and the ageing population (Takahashi et al., 2014). The policy changes described sought to address both, linking the balance of personal and work lives to Japan's economic strength.

Drivers of the policy change

The pressures for a new approach emerged from the "1.57 shock" in 1989 of the lowest birth rate in recorded history and a projected further fall in the total fertility rate to 1.16 by 2020. This drew policy attention, significant media coverage and public reaction and a range of actions to understand the causes, particularly from surveys of working people, couples and communities (Centre for Public Impact, 2017).

While women were most affected by the work culture and social effects of slow changes in gender norms, they were often silent and weakly organized collectively. Social perceptions of different and specialized roles for men and women persisted (Kato et al., 2018). Women who spoke out were viewed as an embarrassment or nuisance, even by other women (Ito, 2019). A Gender Equality Office in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, upgraded in 2001 to a bureau in the Cabinet Office, promoted women's social advancement. The *Equal Opportunity Law* passed in the 1980s aimed to address gender discrimination, but with a slow real change in men's roles, it placed the burden of change on women. When, after the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the 1999 *Basic Law for Gender Equal Society* was passed, linking low birth rates to gender inequality.

Before the 1980s, Japanese trade unions were highly organized and militant, particularly around wage negotiations. A significantly weaker electoral performance by the Japan Socialist Party in the 2000s, less tolerance of labour activism by the LDP and a shift from permanent to 'irregular' employment weakened the unions and led to falling membership (Penn, 2013). While women were taking on significant burdens, weak civil society and unions diminished the social voice on the policy changes needed. It left workers often unaware of even those WLB reforms that had been introduced. A negative view of social activism added to this: *People who attempt to exercise their rights in Japan are frequently labelled 'selfish', while there is a strong tendency to regard those who practice silent endurance of difficult situations as 'virtuous* (Takahashi et al., 2014:20).

Evidence on the problem and its causes as a driver of policy change

Research findings played an important role throughout the 2000s in pointing to changing social conditions and causes of labour shortfalls and to the negative consequences of traditional gender norms, as well as corporate cultures that positioned women as care providers and men as breadwinners. Surveys provided a more credible vehicle to raise the concerns of working women and families and to open debate on problematic norms, taking advantage of the attention raised by demographic and labour market concerns.

Research evidence gave voice to family concerns, pointing to the gap between people's aspirations on the number of children they wanted and the pressures they faced in achieving this (Centre for Public impact, 2017; Kato et al., 2018). A

growing body of WLB research communicated women's views on changes that would enable them to work and have a family and get support from male partners for childcare. Women proposed reducing working hours, making childcare leave mandatory, permitting telecommuting and covering the employee's entire salary during childcare leave (Holloway & Nagese, 2014). Studies provided evidence of the pressure long working hours placed on men, discouraging their participation in childcare and housework (Kato et al., 2018). They highlighted the role of organizational cultures in discouraging employees from taking advantage of parental and other leave policies, and the conflict between family time and care and a social image of the ideal worker working long hours in a 24/7 commitment to work (Perlow, 1998; Gottfried & Hayashi-Kato, 1998; Thompson et al., 1999; Blair-Loy & Jacobs, 2003; Drago et al., 2006; Cha, 2010; Turco, 2010; Damaske et al., 2014).

Research evidence associated fertility decline in Japan with a rise in dual-income households and delayed marriage, itself linked to improved levels of education and career motivations in women that were unmatched by male progress (Fukuda, 2017). A growing body of WLB research linked the low uptake of parental leave amongst men to cultural expectations and corporate pressures; with a "perceived group norm" against men's involvement in child-care (Steger, 2017; MHLW, 2010; Nagase, 2018).

Some studies moved beyond the causes of problems to informing policy responses. Studies provided data to highlight the imbalance between social security benefits paid out to elderly people and those paid to families with children (55% vs 4% respectively. This was used to make the case for investment in more comprehensive parental leave and childcare services (Centre for Public Impact, 2017).

As these findings emerged, there was some increase in social debate. Some male company leaders began to urge for an improved WLB. Female scholars, individual women politicians and individual companies also raised WLB and other issues facing women workers, although these individual voices were often overshadowed by the wider socio-cultural context noted earlier. Japanese media picked up and amplified research findings and people's struggles around family life. For example, media reported cases of discriminatory practices in the workplace and long approval processes impeding men who wanted to use their paternity leave benefit, with subsequent loss of jobs, position or eligibility for paid childcare benefits (McCrostie, 2018). Other media stories in 2014 described how fathers taking paternity leave in the private sector *are given a hard time for even applying* (Aoki, 2016:1).

In 2010, building on an advertising concept, the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare launched the national *Ikumen Project* referred to earlier, to promote the

idea of men taking care of children as heroic, masculine and 'cool', to encourage paternal involvement in family life. Men associated with the campaign were supported by *Work-life Balance Handbooks* to help them juggle the competing demands of office and home. Media amplified this image into an *Ikumen boom* from 2010, on the one hand profiling the death and suicide from excessive work and overtime and on the other projecting heroic male figures caring for children in magazines like FQ (Father's Quarterly), in a 'Mr Ikumen pageant', an Ikumen Club, as leads in a popular TV series reading stories to their children and in 'Bunny Drop', a film of a man bringing up a child (Hughes, 2011; Robson, 2018).

Notwithstanding its key role, there is some critique that the WLB research and social advocacy focused more on large corporations and their workers, that it took female work for granted and placed pressure on men to succeed at home without reducing their pressure to over-perform in the workplace (Robson, 2018). The situation and concerns of those working in small- or middle-sized firms, in fact the majority of workers, and of precarious workers in multiple low-paid jobs to make ends meet were not well covered in the research, drawing policy attention to specific concerns and excluding others (Toivonen, 2011). WLB research was noted to respond to economic concerns on fertility and ageing, with less focus on contesting gender norms defining male and female roles, observing that this demands research and changes beyond the company level (Takahashi et al., 2015)

The research did, however, raise policy attention and open debates on deeply rooted social mindsets. The body of WLB research that grew in the 2000s, the media amplification of this evidence and social campaigns like *Ikumen* drew attention to WLB concerns and their causes, linking findings to policy concerns on fertility decline. It gave a credible voice to the experience of workers and women in a context that discouraged social activism and introduced a discourse that differed from that of the influential large companies on what needed to be tackled.

Processes and actors developing policy options as drivers of change

While the profile of WLB rose on the policy agenda, there continued to be debate throughout the 2000s on how to address it, with evidence and interests informing policy options, as explored in this section.

As noted earlier, the data and policy debate focused on both workplace and family practices. With a gap between a relatively high degree of gender equality in employment and a low degree of gender equality in family life diagnosed as the major cause of low fertility, formal measures were sought to relieve the burden of childcare on women to enhance fertility. Such measures included support for childcare services and incentives for male roles in childcare (Fukuda, 2017).

Under the initiative of the Prime Minister, various high-level committees and technical working groups were established by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and related ministries to review, dialogue on and design policy options and measures (NIPSSR, 2003). They involved officials and relevant stakeholders from academia, researchers, business and civil society. While business had an important role in these committees, ministry leads used formal and informal networks to involve advocates for change or sources of technical evidence and to draw information from a wider spectrum of implementers, managers, local government actors and opinion leaders. The committees in the Cabinet office and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry were influential, co-ordinating the high-level inputs across sectors, particularly as fertility, ageing and the WLB became increasingly linked to economic outcomes. The committee work, while responding to political and policy signals, was largely driven and informed by state officials. They drew learning on what was happening in other high-income countries but developed the policies locally. State capacities for this were supported by public investment in universities and a view of state employment as desirable by high-skilled graduates.

One key policy issue to negotiate was how to address the workplace factors discouraging uptake of existing policies on childcare and leave. This meant addressing the tension between the Japanese government's promotion of parental leave policies in the 2000s and the evidence of a less-than supportive corporate culture (Mun & Brinton, 2015). Under the leadership of Shinzō Abe in 2006-7, government advocated reduced overtime work. Negotiations between government, employers and unions led to a 2007 *Charter for Work-Life Balance* with an accompanying Action Policy. This gave direction to the 2009 legal reforms developed by government officials that obliged employers to reduce working hours, provide flexible working hours and exemptions from overtime work, and to improve support for workers to take annual paid leave and parental leave. To address employer concerns, return after parental leave was incentivised by only a portion of leave pay being paid by the employment insurance system during the leave itself, with the remaining portion paid 6 months after the return to work. In practice, however, many firms still created their own rules about the timing of leave payments *to motivate those employees who do not intend to come back to work after a leave to simply quit instead* (Mun & Brinton, 2015:9).

This drew attention to the need to address parental leave provisions as a matter of wider public policy, to provide childcare leave benefits in a way that would enable workers to take childcare leave more easily and to facilitate their smooth return to work. Over the 2000s therefore policy changes were introduced in stages, with monitoring and review of their impact by government, to:

a. Clarify the criteria for childcare leave to cover leave to take care of infants in the first year of life, increasing this to 18 months where illness or disability require it and, in later measures, providing longer leave periods for both parents to encourage uptake of joint parental leave.

b. Take over the payment by government of social security contributions while workers are on parental leave, to make this less dependent on individual workplace cultures.
c. Progressively extend eligibility for parental leave entitlements to all categories of workers, balancing employer and worker interests by providing for a window of 12 months before short term workers can claim these entitlements.
d. Progressively increase the share of the wage paid for parental leave, and consolidating from 2010 onwards basic child care leave benefits and work resumption benefits after child care leave into the "child care leave benefits," with the full amount paid during the leave (MHLW, 2010).

The barriers to male worker uptake of parental leave and roles raised in research, media and social dialogue also informed tripartite negotiations on incentives to encourage changes in norms and practice. The 2001 law reforms prohibited discriminating against women applying for or taking parental leave. In a second stage in 2002, the reforms limited overtime work and raised the eligible age of children whose parents could take shorter working hours. In s third stage in 2005, law reforms expanded the eligibility of workers for child or family care leave, extended the childcare leave period, eased the limit on the number of leaves taken and established the sick/injured child care leave system (MHLW, 2010). If fathers took the leave, it was extended by a further two months until the child is 14 months old. Noting still poor uptake, the newly elected LDP leader Prime Minister Abe in 2012 led government to increase the leave allowance in 2014 from 50 percent to 67 percent of the recipient's pre-childbirth monthly standard income, paid out of employment insurance funds for the first 6 months of child care. This had a real impact on mothers and fathers, with the Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management of private enterprise with more than five employees showing the share of fathers taking childcare leave rising from 1.23 percent in 2008 to 2.6 percent in 2015 and 3.16 percent in 2016 (Nagase, 2018).

These policy revisions were implemented in stages, accompanied by information on their aims, scope and changes achieved, as shown. The 2001 Revision of the *Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave* was implemented in stages, to test policies as they were applied. The MHLW and individual municipalities were responsible for implementation of these policies, and a monitoring system was put in place to track specific indicators over time. The Ministry published an annual report tracking these indicators, rating progress as weak, fair and good, analysing their association with overall demographic trends, and monitoring initiatives such as daycare centres' availability and quality (MHLW, 2010). Ministries also monitored operational outputs, policy implementation and reviewed progress in their committees. While there was limited independent evaluation, the state monitoring of the impact of WLB reforms introduced evidence based policy making, integrating review of ley indicators such as working hours, vacation time, the number of women in managerial positions, male uptake of paternity leave, male participation in housework and

childcare, employment status of married, pregnant women and those after childbirth, and company promotion of WLB.

Yet municipalities faced resource challenges in expanding facilities, complaining of high running costs (Centre for Public Impact, 2017). As one response, in 2005 parents were given in law 6 months further leave if the mother could not go back to work due to a lack of accredited childcare facilities (Nagase, 2018). The policy dialogue thus turned to measures to boost the number of daycare centres and the enrolment of children (Centre for Public Impact, 2017). In 2012, the law also made it easier for small-scale nurseries to operate. After implementation of the law in 2015, overnight, 1,655 existing small-scale nurseries were accredited. The subsidies they were given enabled them to lower their tuition fees, immediately increasing by 7 percent the number of authorized nurseries in Japan (Sugeno, 2017). This was only a first step, and various measures were identified as necessary for both the quantitative expansion and the qualitative improvement of early childhood school education, childcare and child-rearing support services in communities.

To support these initiatives, Cabinet implemented its own research on social trends and attitudes, with research also at the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research on how other high-income countries addressed these issues (Fukuda, 2017). In 2015, Cabinet set up a new organization called Children and Childrearing Administration in the Cabinet Office, with a Minister of State for Special Missions. A National Council for Promoting the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens was set up in 2015, chaired by the Prime Minister to discuss the policy options, with policy proposals framed by this council and by Cabinet (Govt. of Japan, 2018).

The policy options emerging from these processes combined kindergartens and nursery centers in 'early childhood education and care centres (ECEC)' and expanded the provision of ECEC centres to reduce the number of wait-listed children, with measures to improve the quality of ECEC and child-rearing support, particularly in areas of falling child numbers. Local governments began in 2009 to initiate community schemes to support families with young children through home visiting by volunteers, modelled on the United Kingdom's *Home Start* system, while also considering how to make transport, commercial and other facilities more family and child friendly (Govt. of Japan, 2018). The 2012 *Child and Childcare Support Act* consolidated the legal framework for these measures, combined in a *Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing,* with implementation commencing in 2015 (MECSST & MHLW, 2012). Projects were created to support owners of company-site daycare facilities. In 2017 plans aimed to provide by 2020 enough childcare facilities for about 320 000 children, to prepare for an 80% employment rate in women (Govt. of Japan, 2018). Government also drew on and shared positive experiences from particular companies. For example, MS Manufacturing Co., Ltd., a mold manufacturer for automotive parts in Kiyosu City, introduced a child-companion attendance system

from 2017 on the advice of female employees. In this system the company provides a safe "children's room" in the workplace where employees can bring children to the workplace and have time with them during the working day (Govt. of Japan, 2018).

While together these measures addressed many dimensions of the WLB, some family-related polices still sustained old, gendered work and family norms and patterns, such as the 1980 support for statutory share inheritances, the 1984 special tax reductions for part-time earners, the 1985 guarantee of basic pension for housewives and special income tax deductions for spouses (Takahashi et al., 2014). Their persistence suggests that policy reform is ongoing.

Over fifteen years, policy dialogue and law reform thus progressively expanded family-friendly workplace policies and childcare services. The changes drew on evidence in government-led mechanisms for policy dialogue, negotiation and review to inform and encourage stepwise policy design and reform. The next section shows how this, and the profile built for WLB connected with high level political support, to facilitate adoption of this stepwise reform.

Political and decision maker support as a driver

Japan's LDP is a centre-ground political party that has been in power almost continuously since its foundation in 1955, excluding between 1993-1994 and 2009-2012, when coalitions of smaller parties formed the government. It is a coalition in the centre ground, combining conservative economic policies with welfare approaches in social policy, including for families and children. The LDP has traditionally supported rapid, export-based economic growth and a streamlined government bureaucracy. Since the 1990s it has pursued a vision of Japan as a high-technology information society, promoting scientific research and domestic demand.

This stability of the political system and its orientation gave large corporations influence in the response to WLB issues before 1990. For example, when the LDP considered improving legal provisions on childcare leave in 1980, as noted earlier, the four largest business groups in the country, successfully opposed this, arguing it would place a burden on firms and that a single standard should not be applied. The LDP abandoned the policy change and voted down all subsequent similar legislation proposed by the opposition party in the 1980s (Lambert, 2007). As noted earlier, the business community successfully advocated for reduced public spending on childcare and service subsidies during a period of economic recession, dominating over advocacy and joint petitions submitted by childcare and local parent groups (Lambert, 2007).

Nevertheless, the '1.57 shock' low birthrate in 1989 and demographic trends also raised political concern and response in the 1990s. In 1990 the government established an inter-ministry liaison committee in the Cabinet called *Creating a Sound Environment for Bearing and Rearing Children* to debate family policy measures. The political leadership adopted and communicated a strong pro-natal position in a 1991 government guideline, *Towards Satisfactory Conditions for Healthy Child Rearing* and made consequent reforms to the 1995 Childcare and Family Leave Act, taking them forward through the technical committees noted earlier (Centre for Public Impact, 2017).

For the LDP, this became an electoral issue, within the rising political concern over the economic and social consequences of an ageing population and a need to revive economic growth (Lambert, 2007). In parliamentary debates, opposition parties and women raised social and WLB issues. In 1989, 22 female lawmakers won seats in the Upper House of the Diet, (termed the 'Madonna whirlwind'), and Takako Doi became the first female leader of a major party, the Japan Socialist Party. This was also reported to have added pressure for political support for gender related issues, including on domestic violence against women, albeit not specifically on WLB reforms (Ito, 2019).

The Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, took leadership of the political response, giving policy direction and working with key groups of parliamentarians in the LDP and the Diet (legislature) to widen reforms in the 2000s towards more comprehensive approaches. Women's active participation in Japanese society and in the economy were promoted as a key dimension of a wider politically-led campaign in the 2000s for an economic revitalization strategy, termed *Abenomics*. The first lady was also an advocate of this focus on women, while the evidence and processes described earlier, and various expert meetings added support to the link between WLB and economic revitalization.

The measures intensified and became more comprehensive after 2010, with the adoption of a policy strategy termed *Womenomics*. This strategy was discussed in a Cabinet office committee that adopted proposals from Kathy Matsui, then Japan strategist for global investment bank Goldman Sachs. Womenomics argued that greater participation by women in the workforce, especially in leadership roles, could improve Japan's GDP and fertility rates. It thus proposed increasing women in leadership positions, strengthening childcare provision, encouraging men to take more active roles in parenting and reducing working hours (Nagase, 2018). It also proposed workplace organization changes that could enable women's work, such as teleworking and flexible hours, and fairer ways of evaluating and compensating for work inputs. The various policy measures that followed were those described earlier, while noting that some changes are still in progress.

While these changes had high-level support in the LDP and thus government policy attention, they still had to win political support from influential Japanese companies. One way this was done was by positioning womanomics as an *economic* rather than a social strategy, labelling the policies as economic *investments* rather than costs, and as vital to address the labour demands of the economy. A 2 trillion yen package of public financing (US$17.5 billion) was used to invest in childcare services and leave benefits, labelled by Prime Minister Abe in 2012 as a revolution in productivity and human resource development, linked to wider policy options such as free university education for students in low-income households (Nikkei Asian Review, 2017). A *Conceptual meeting for an era of 100-year life expectancy* in 2017 discussed a grand design for policies to establish an economic and social system in anticipation of a 100-year life expectancy and of technological change, with investment in children a means to meet the skills and capacity demands for future production systems (Govt. of Japan, 2018).

Beyond the LDP's broader liberalization and tax incentives for companies, government applied incentives to build corporate support for WLB policies. This included award of a government certification (*Kurumin*) mark on products of firms with high WLB awareness and childcare measures (Nagase, 2018; Smith, 2017). Male 'pathbreakers', while more the exception than the rule, played a role at different levels and departments of companies, adjusting their work patterns and visibility reprioritizing work to spend time with families and in childcare, stating that *we have this policy, so we should use it* (Takahashi et al, 2015: 114). As social mindsets shifted and to further consolidate such changes, relevant duties that were voluntary became mandatory, such as the shift in 2014 requiring company disclosure of key aspects of women's participation as mandatory.

Having more women in management was also seen to build corporate support. Prime Minister Abe personally encouraged listed firms to appoint at least one woman to their boards and by 2015 all listed firms were required to disclose their number of female board members. The 2015 *Act Concerning Promotion of Women's Career Activities* further nudged enterprises to promote women through voluntary action plans, with firms with good performance recognized through certified government marks (*Eruboshi*) on their products and given preference in public procurements (Nagase, 2018). The trade unions and civil society were involved through the jointly negotiated worklife charter noted earlier, but also had their own influence. Long working hours and its relationship to suicide became electoral issues that could not be ignored by politicians and labour unions and parents associations intervened on WLB practices, such as on municipal accredited day care (Nagase, 2018). High level political support thus opened space for and levered change with converging input from the technical and social 'streams', taking advantage in both policy strategies and actions of the window of opportunity opened by the demographic 'shock'.

Discussion: Key drivers and processes fostering the policy change

The 1989 demographic shock of the lowest birthrate in recorded history and concern over fertility and ageing opened a window of opportunity in Japan to understand the causes, merging two policy issues: firstly, support for working women, raising issues of gender norms and workplace cultures, and secondly, the implications of the demographic changes for sustained economic revival and growth. The case study describes how an analysis of the causes of low fertility led over two decades to a range of policy changes related to the WLB, including reforms on childcare and other services for families and children, parental leave, working hours, male roles in childcare, flexible working conditions for workers with children and ongoing reforms to the social security and tax system.

In a context of weak civil society and union voice, a negative view of social activism, a conservative political leadership and strong business influence, a significant body of WLB research provided a credible vehicle to give voice to the concerns of working women and families. It opened debate on problematic norms and workplace cultures and strengthened a policy discourse on the WLB. There was some critique over the greater attention given in these studies to fertility than to gender norms and over the bias towards large workplaces, but given the political concerns on fertility and the policy influence of larger firms, these links may have been important to draw policy attention, especially where reinforced by media stories and social debate.

The response was a process of policy development and law reform that, while involving a range of stakeholders in various committees and including wider evidence and international experience, was largely informed by evidence and analysis generated by Japanese state actors. In fact, the investment in key universities for the capacities needed for this and a view of state employment as desirable by high-skilled graduates pointed to the longstanding intentional nature of this approach to policy development. Policy reforms were implemented in stages, with incentives and dialogue to support their uptake, and monitoring of their delivery and, to some extent, of their impact.

The long period of LDP governments and the party's conservative orientation gave large corporations averse to state constraints on their business practice historical influence in policy decisions. WLB became a stronger electoral issue partly as a result of the accumulating evidence from research, social and media dialogue on gender and workplace norms and from the work by state officials. Collectively, they pointed to a disconnect between economic and social policy and between corporate culture and the aspirations and practices of working people and women, making a connection between this and Japan's demographic challenges. Political contestation around the WLB also increased as women became more involved in opposition parties and raised WLB issues in parliamentary debate, with a coalition of opposition parties winning power from

LDP in 2009-2012. From 2010, the LDP leader and later Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, took leadership of and intensified the political response, giving policy direction and widening the reforms, as part of his economic revitalization strategy, Abenomics. The inclusion of Womanomics within this raised WLB reforms as an *economic* rather than a social strategy, labelling them as economic *investments* rather than costs and as vital to address the labour demands of the economy. This economic framing was key to trigger business support, as was significant public financing and various incentives to encourage uptake of the workplace reforms.

The change in gender norms and roles has been more difficult to achieve. Japanese men still spend the lowest number of hours per day in household chores (1.23 hours) of high-income countries and women are reported to be reluctant to negotiate changes in domestic roles with men who work long hours (Ito, 2019; Takahashi et al., 2015). While female employment has risen and childcare support has improved, women continue to dominate in irregular and lower income jobs and unpaid domestic work (Fujisaki & Ohinata, 2010; Takahashi et al., 2014). Campaigns such as Ikumen did revision these male stereotypes. Male 'pathbreakers' visibly changed work styles to choose family time and some firms proactively shifted to a family-friendly firm culture (Takahashi et al., 2015). Social attitudes may be changing as a result of the concrete changes achieved to date, but changes to deeply rooted gender norms are slow, potentially intergenerational, and may rely on further changes to address gaps between WLB as policy and its practice. This is acknowledged, including in political discourse, with an articulated need to go further in promoting women to managerial positions, in closing the wage gap between men and women and between permanent and temporary employees, in improving the career paths and skills development of new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market and in other family-related policies (Nagase, 2018; Takahashi et al., 2014).

Conclusions: Learning and insights on the facilitators of policy change

The documented and key informant reflections on the policy changes on WLB in Japan point to further learning and insights from the experience on policy change. These are shared while noting the unique features of Japan's social, political, institutional and workplace cultures.

In raising and keeping the issue on the policy and political agenda, tackling an issue requires many 'angles of entry'. Early processes may have focused on workplace practices and early childcare. However, an appreciation of investment in children as bringing both social and an economic return to both families and country and an understanding of the deeply rooted level of gender norms affecting the WLB means that attention is now shifting to measures that address these issues. Such measures include free access to high school, to target young people's thinking on the norms and capacities they bring to the wider economic

and social policies. Social concepts and norms are more easily taken up when embedded in social culture and with commodities to support uptake, such as for fathers to easily participate in childcare.

In the development and adoption of policy options, it is necessary to think about the sequencing of change. For example, after adoption of the core features of the WLB concept, work is continuing on the wider application across different groups of workers – full/part time- including through other policy areas such as taxation and in the slower process of reform of gender norms. As is common in East Asian policy, the technical input and policy processes are framed as collective rather than individual, with a collective of influential technical state officials providing input, evidence, options and response to political directions, providing stability in dealing with the longer-term changes needed.

In building political and public support and sustaining policy implementation, it was effective to use the economy as a driver, to get support from key actors, and to focus on issues and approaches where there was greater chance of support, such as in linking fertility with the economy. This enabled changes to be achieved that could act as a pathway for more difficult issues, like changing gender and social norms. The strong leadership of the prime minister was important.

The Japan experience highlights that policy change is a process, and that the measures for it need to be envisaged as such. It requires communication and measures to engage and convince key actors on the pathway for the change, to create links between different social, technical and political actors. As social consensus builds and norms change, it also implies moving from voluntary to compulsory approaches to consolidate the change.

References

Abe, A. and Takezawa, J. (2013). Child well-being in rich countries: Comparing Japan, UNICEF Office of Research – Inocenti: Florence. https://tinyurl.com/y57tgff2

Aoki M. (2016). Ministry eyes Scandinavian plan to boost paternity leave and keep women working, *The Japan Times*, online. https://tinyurl.com/y3g4s6d3

Blair-Loy, M. & Jacobs, J.A. (2003). Globalization, work hours, and the care deficit among stockbrokers. *Gender and Society, 17*, 230–249. https://tinyurl.com/y39j8muu

Center for Public Impact (2017). Tackling the declining birth rate in Japan, Center for Public Impact. www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/tackling-declining-birth-rate-japan/

Cha, Y. (2010). Reinforcing separate spheres: The effect of spousal overwork on men's and women's employment in dual-earner households. *American Sociological Review, 75*, 303–329.

Damaske, S., Ecklund, E.H., Lincoln, A.E., and White, V.J. (2014). Male scientists' competing devotions to work and family: Changing norms in a male-dominated profession. *Work and Occupations, 41*, 477–507.

Database for Institutional Comparison in Europe (CESifo DICE) (2014). Parental leave entitlements: Historical perspective (around 1870 - 2014). https://tinyurl.com/y3frd6ju

Ezawa, A. and Fujiwara, C. (2005). Lone mothers and welfare-to-work policies in Japan and the United States: Towards an alternative perspective. *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare 32*(4), 41-63. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3113&context=jssw

Fukuda, S. (2017). Gender role division and transition to the second birth in Japan, Working paper No. 28. National Institute of Population and social security research, Tokyo. http://www.ipss.go.jp/publication/e/WP/IPSS_WPE28.pdf

Gilson, L. (Ed). (2012). Health policy and systems research, a methodology reader. AHPSR, W Geneva.

Gottfried, H. and Hayashi-Kato, N. (1998). Gendering work: Deconstructing the narrative of the Japanese economic miracle, Work. *Employment & Society, 12*, 25–46. https://tinyurl.com/y6373uqe

Government of Japan, Cabinet Office (2018). A 2018 declining birthrate white paper (summary). https://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shoushika/whitepaper/measures/english/w-2018/index.html

Harris, F. (Ed). (2006). *The baby bust: Who will do the work? Who will pay the taxes*. Landham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield *Publishers*. https://books.google.com/

Haub, C. (2010). Japan's demographic future. Washington DC: Population Reference Bureau (PRB). https://www.prb.org/japandemography/

Holloway, S.D. and Nagese, A. (2014). Child Rearing in Japan. In Selin, H. (Ed.), *Parenting Across Cultures: Childrearing, Motherhood and Fatherhood in Non-Western Cultures*, *Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science.* Dordrecht: Springer: https://tinyurl.com/y37kdeam

Hughes, F. (2011, August, 30). Ikumen: Raising new father figures in Japan, The Japan Times. https://tinyurl.com/y2eqr6qk

Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2017). Japan Events of 2016. HRW: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/japan

Htun, M., Jensenius, F.R., Dominguez, M.S. (2018). Forging Ikumen in Japan: On state efforts to change gender roles, Mimeo. https://malahtun.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/ikumen_july2018.pdf

Ikezoe, H. (2014). Work-life balance in Japan; Outline of policies, legal systems and actual situations. *Japan Labor Review, 11*(1),108-124. https://tinyurl.com/y2b2yv37

Ito, T. (2019, February, 23). Defining the Heisei Era: Women in Japan speak out on inequality, Japan Times. https://tinyurl.com/y5sdbb9s

JIJI. (2018). Japanese government panel makes key proposals for blanket nursery subsidies', *The Japan Times.* https://tinyurl.com/y6synv79

Kato, T., Kumamaru, H., Fukuda, S. (2018). Men's participation in childcare and housework and parity progression: A Japanese population-based study, *Asian Population Studies, 14*(3), 290-309. https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/sBxR7FAZjZhHtJ229S2F/full

Kingdon, J. (2003). Agendas, alternatives and public policies. New York: Longman.

Lambert, P.A. (2007). The political economy of postwar family policy in Japan: Economic imperatives and electoral incentives. *The Society for Japanese Studies 33*(1), 1–28. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25064677?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Loewenson, R. and Masotya, M. (2018). An analytic framework for gathering evidence on the drivers of policy priority and change in FCHW, TARSC.

Ma, L. (n.d.). Social policy and childbearing behavior in Japan since the 1960s: An individual level perspective. https://paa2010.princeton.edu/papers/100325

Matsuda, S. (2015). Declining birth rates: Actual conditions and causal factors of Japan's declining birth rates' [Lecture], Child Research Net, online. https://tinyurl.com/yyuqrb2o

McCrostie, J. (2018). Court cases shine a light on Japan's problem with paternity leave. *The Japan Times.* https://tinyurl.com/yy9plva8

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MECSST) and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. (MHLW) (2012). Comprehensive support system for children and child-rearing information booklet. http://www.kokusai-koryu.jp/foreigners/living-information/topics/post-16.html

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. (2010). Introduction to revised child care and family care leave act. https://tinyurl.com/y2tapl4e

Mun, E. and Brinton, M.C. (2015). Workplace matters: The use of parental leave policy in Japan. *Work and Occupations 0*(0).1-35. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/brinton/files/workplace_matters.pdf

Nagase, N. (2018). Has Abe's Womanomics worked?. *Asian Economic Policy Review 13*, 68-101. https://tinyurl.com/y5xokyzl

National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2003). Child related policies in Japan. Tokyo: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. http://www.ipss.go.jp/s-info/e/childPJ2003/childPJ2003.htm

National Institute of Educational of Educational Policy Research (NIER) (2009). Policy and practice of early childhood education and care across countries. Tokyo: NIER. https://tinyurl.com/y4bo85t8

Nikkei Asian Review (2017, November, 19). Japan expanding free preschool part of Abe's 17.5 spending. https://tinyurl.com/y64v9vy7

OECD. (2012). Policies for a revitalization of Japan. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/general/50190618.pdf

OECD. Stat (2019). OECD database. https://stats.oecd.org/

Osawa, M. (2016). How Abenomics shortchanges Womenomics', https://tinyurl.com/y44jlajs

Penn, M. (2013). Japanese labour unions feel pain of new era, Al Jazeera online. https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/02/201321713641911842.html

Robson, D. (2018). Ikumen: How Japan's 'hunky dads' are changing parenting, BBC Future now, UK, aFuture nowline at https://tinyurl.com/yb4y26fk

Sakaue, K. and Ogawa, K. (2016). Financing of early childhood care and education in Japan. *ASR: CMU Journal of Sciences and Humanities 3*(2), 169-195. https://tinyurl.com/yyd3uqd3

Schoppa L.J. (2006). Race for the exits: The unraveling of Japan's system of social protection. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7zjsw

Shirahase, S. (2007). Women's economic status and fertility: Japan in cross-national perspective. In Rosenbluth, F.M. (Ed.), *The political economy of Japan's low fertility* (pp. 37–59). Stanford: Stanford University Press. https://tinyurl.com/y5kzk2kk

Stenger, I. (2017). Researchers have figured out why almost no men take paternity leave in a country that offers 12 months of it', *Quartz*, online. https://tinyurl.com/yy5dnymg

Suboi, E. (2004). Basic policies of the Japan Medical Association', *JMAJ 47*(1),1-6. Tokyo: Extraordinary General Assembly of the Japan Medical Association.https://tinyurl.com/y2h45aqp

Sugeno, F. (2017). Solving Japan's childcare problem. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/solving_japans_childcare_problem

Taguma, M., Litjens, I. and Makowiecki, K. (2012). Quality matters in early childhood education and care: Japan. OECD Publishing,' online. https://tinyurl.com/y2jrndp4

Takahashi, M., Kamano, S., Matsuda, T., Onode, S. and Yoshizumi, K. (2014, January). Worklife balance in Japan: New policies, old practices. *Oxford Scholarship Online*. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199681136.003.0004

Takahashi, M., Kamano, S., Matsuda, T., Onode, S. and Yoshizumi, K. (2015). Worklife balance in Japan: new policies, old practices. In Hobson, B. (Ed.), Worklife Balance: The agency and capabilities gap (pp. 92-125). UK: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, C.A., Beauvais, L.L. and Lyness, K.S. (1999). When work-family benefits are not enough: The influence of work-family culture on benefit utilization, organizational attachment, and work-family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 54*, 392–415. https://tinyurl.com/y2spb8ye

Toivonen, T. (2011). Is there life after work for Japan? Political 'Work-Life Balance' research begins to address the hard questions. *Social Science Japan Journal, 14*(1): 55-61. file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/2011TOIVONENIstherelifeafter workforJapan-SSJJ.pdf

Turco, C.J. (2010). Cultural foundations of tokenism. *American Sociological Review, 75*, 894–913. https://tinyurl.com/y5wewjh2

UN Data (2019). Japan [database]. http://data.un.org/en/iso/jp.html

Walt, G., Shiffman, J., Schneider, H. et al. (2008). 'Doing' health policy analysis: Methodological and conceptual reflections and challenges. *Health Policy and Planning, 23*, 308-17.

World Population Review (WPR) (2019) 'Japan population 2019'. http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/japan-population/

Yamaguchi, S. (2016). Family policies and female employment in Japan. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2634281

Yu, W.H. (2009). *Gendered trajectories: Women, work, and social change in Japan and Taiwan*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.