

Impacts of the Japanese middle-class work culture on the development of the nation

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Abstract

Japanese are legendary for their workaholic nature which eventually makes Japan be super-aged country. This research aims to identify the drawbacks of their work culture towards their nation. 345 questionnaires were received using convenience sampling in Kanto and Kyushu areas. The recorded Cronbach Alpha of reliability is 0.623, which is an acceptable level. From the descriptive analysis, it is found that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that the job stress makes them neglect their responsibilities, increasing karoshi and karojisatsu, increasing late marriages, and declining birth rate. The government should encourage a healthy work-life balance among the Japanese.

Keywords: Labor force, Karoshi, Karojisatsu, super-aged nation.

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1.0 Introduction

Most Japanese employers require their employees to work more than eighty (80) hours of overtime each month voluntarily.. Japanese is perceived as dedicated employee to their companies due to the low industrial conflict, absenteeism, and turnover as well as the high employees' efficiency and high production quality. The company's success will be every employee's priority. As a result of their loyalty and dedication to their career, Japan will be a 'super-aged nation' in the coming years.". According to Eli (2020), the long working hours are not a coincidence; rather, they are ingrained in Japanese work culture. The ultimate ambition for every child is to become a salaryman. According to Lincoln and Doer (2012), the presence of Japanese organizational cultures supports paternalism or familism (*kazokughugi*), groupism, and vertical cohesiveness. When an employee utilizes his workplace to define himself rather than his occupation to identify himself, his basic attitude toward his employment changes.

The Japanese do not conduct their jobs solely for the sake of earning money but for satisfaction purposes. Due to lower turnover, one can expect to stay with the same employer until retirement, unlike the international employees. Employees are conditioned to blame themselves when they fail to achieve their employer's expectations. They work hard for their country because of the concept of "self-sacrifice for the country" since pre-war days. Japanese people are also known as "workaholics" and are

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prone to "*karoshi*" and "*Karo-jisatsu*". "*Karoshi*" is best defined as overwork-related death or a fatal ailment in humans (Purnawati, 2013; Asgari, Pickar, and Garay, 2017).

According to Widarahesty (2020), the Japanese work culture is defined by the word *ganbaru*, which means "hard work," and employees are noted for their stringent work ethics and discipline, as well as their zeal and organizational skills. Nonetheless, the people were pushed to "sacrifice for the country" as a show of patriotism for the country to progress. Many employees still feel awful if they leave work on time, particularly if their manager is still around. The legacy of the elder generation's concentration on work was admirable but difficult to duplicate, with Japanese employees believing that work is their priority. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the drawbacks of their work culture towards the nation's development.

2.0 Literature Review

Japan's long history of loyalty and servitude has had a good impact on Japan's economy. One of the consequences of their efforts is neglecting their personal life. Although Japan is a First World country, 86% of its citizens are from the middle class and this trend has been increasing over the last six decades. Households in the second to fourth quartiles of income are considered middle class. To make up for the high expense of living, both men and women are working longer hours. The income one can make is used to gauge social culture and masculinity is one of the psychological variables associated with "*karoshi*" and "*karo-jisatsu*" (Asgari, Pickar, and Garay, 2017). According to Kamesaka and Tamura (2017), several negative impacts associated with extended work hours such as poor sleep quality create unhealthy habits like drinking alcohol, increasing *karoshi* and *karojisatsu*, increases health issues, and lower birth rate and aging.

2.1 Poor sleep quality

The words of overtime and unhealthy work-life balance, according to Franklin and Nakai (2017), are the first concepts that spring to mind when thinking about Japanese corporate culture. During the feudal period of "*seppuku*" or the samurai's ritual suicide, suicide was viewed as a noble deed. Workaholic employees, according to Kubota et al. (2012), may purposefully create extra work for themselves, such as working on more projects unnecessary or refusing to delegate work. Workaholic distress may be linked to poor sleep quality, such as insomnia symptoms, difficulties waking up, daytime sleepiness or drowsiness, and inadequate sleep.

2.2 Creates unhealthy habits like drinking alcohols

In the 1950s, it was normal for salaried workers to take up habits like night after night of binge-drinking and chain-smoking while skipping meals and sleep. Alcohol outings or "*nomikai*" become systematic and self-destructive routines that resulted in alcoholics, underweight, and sleep-deprived, all of which are classic overwork signs. If left untreated, this could lead "*karoshi*". The amount of time one worked was determined by how long they were at their desk, as well as how many hours they were required to devote to mandated office socialization. In other words, for many Japanese workers, time that could have been spent relaxing after a long day at work or simply having fun is frequently wasted just creating extra tensions and stressors on one's body (Timinsky, 2019).

2.3 Increases "*karoshi*" and "*karojisatsu*"

Long working hours have long been considered a severe social and health issue, particularly in Japan (Kikuchi, et al., 2020). According to Yang et al. (2015); Yamauchi et al. (2017), *karoshi* is not as prominent in western countries as it is in eastern Asia. Due to the long working hours in Asian countries, work-related CVDs are legalized (Araki and Iwasaki, 2005; Takami, 2019). *Karoshi* has also been described as a suicide caused by a mental illness driven on by extreme work stress. Lawyers in Japan predict at least 100,000 deaths each year, according to North and Morioka (2016).

Employees are generally denied being exploited for the advantage of the company and the self-interest of the employers. Many experts, according to Tsutsumi (2019), have advised adopting a daily minimum rest period to help people recover from weariness and get enough sleep. However, *karojisatsu* cannot be averted solely by reducing working hours unless there is room for modifications in the quantity of work and handling ways. According to Steven et al., (2019), many middle-aged employees in Japan are committing suicide because of job-related stress and economic hardship.

2.4 Increases health issues

Prolong working hours are a common occurrence in most organizations and businesses, where the amount of time spent on work, which includes core activities, associated jobs, commuting, and travel, is excessive and directly or indirectly harmful to workers' health (Lee et al., 2007). Eli (2020) stated that they believe arriving at work two (2) hours earlier and leaving the office five (5) hours later than their typical working hours to be extremely normal. Prolong working hours have been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, chronic fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety, sleep quality, all-cause mortality, alcohol and smoking use, and self-perceived health, mental health status, hypertension, and health behaviors, according to epidemiological studies (Kotera et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2019; Xiao, 2019).

2.5 Lower birth rate and aging

After more than 40 years of exceptionally low birth rates, Japan today has one of the world's oldest populations, according to Tsuya (2017); Suzuki (2006); Shibata, and Raymo (2017). Low birth rates entail fewer children and, eventually, fewer working-age persons to fuel economic growth and sustain the comparatively large proportion of old people who were born in a time when fertility was greater. One explanation appears to be young men's unclear employment prospects, which makes them poor marriage

candidates. Thus, according to Tsuji (2018), Takaki and Hibino (2014), and Kato (2018), Japanese society is concerned about sexless marriage because it is associated with extended working hours and the current declining trend in the total fertility rate.

When more than 26% of the Japanese population is 65 years old or older, Japan faces a major aging problem, which is said to have increased four (4) times in the last forty (40) years. The Japanese labor force is expected to drop by 20% in the next 20 years, implying that more individuals will need to work longer hours to compensate for the labor shortfall.

In 1950, Japan's population pyramid was a standard-shaped pyramid with a broader bottom, as seen in Fig. 1. However, as both the birth and mortality rates have declined, the shape has shrunk dramatically. In 2019, the number of senior people aged 65 and up totaled 35.89 million, accounting for 28.4 percent of the total population. In 2060, projections predict that the pyramid base will be much smaller, and the total population will be smaller in all age groups.

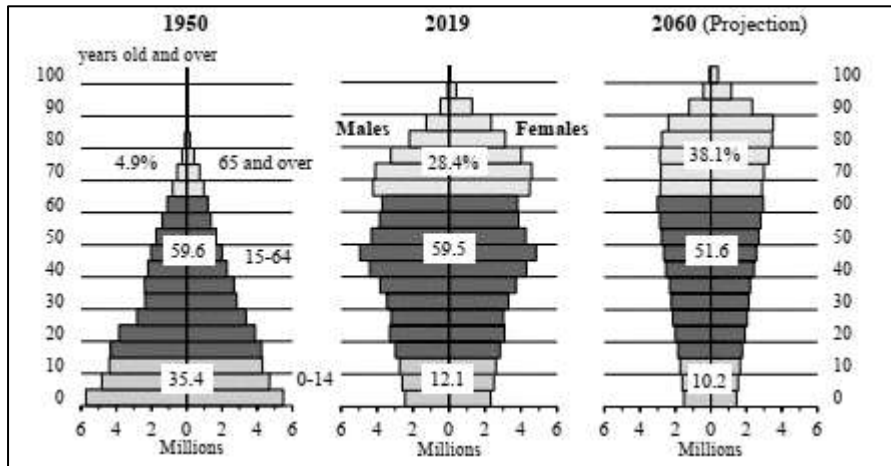


Fig. 1: Changes in the population pyramid
(Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan, 2020)

3.0 Methodology

This research was conducted in Kanto and Kyushu area. 900 sets of questionnaires were distributed physically and through google forms but only 345 responses were received, hence the response rate is 38.33%. Low responses are recorded due to this research was conducted in October 2020 until June 2021 which is in Covid1- pandemic. Convenience sampling methods were used whereby the respondents are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in this research. There are The targeted respondents in this research are middle-class employees from the age of 18 and above. General affairs employees, regular service employees, temporary employees, part-timers, and others whose monthly salary from 0 JPY until above 600, 001 JPY are the main target for this research. 232 (67.2%) male and 113 (32.8%) females were willing to participate in this research. 326 (94.5%) of them are employed, 7 (2.0%) are unemployed, 7 (2.0%) are looking for a job and 5 (1.4%) from other categories. 2 (0.6%) were from junior high school, 34 (9.9%) were from high school, 48 (13.9%) were from junior college, 181 (52.5%) were from university and 80 (23.2%) from graduate school. 57 (16.5%) owned a business, 238 (69%) were working in the private sector, 36 (10.4%) were working in the government sector and 14 (4.1%) were doing other jobs. 148 (42.9%) of them have more than 7 years of experience and 143 (41.4%) from the total respondents were working as ordinary employees. The questionnaires used in this research contain four (4) sections namely, Section 1 is demography, Section2 is the work culture in the current organization, Section 3 is for sociological impacts and Section 4 is for negative impacts of Japanese work culture. For this research, only Section 4 will be used for analysis. Table 1 shows that the Cronbach Alpha values for impact from the organizations and impacts to the nation in Section 4 are 0.720 and 0.614, respectively, indicating adequate internal consistency, while the Cronbach Alpha value for impact towards the family and friends and impacts to the younger generation is 0.885 and 0.849 respectively, indicating good internal consistency. The value of KMO in Table 2 is extremely near to 1.0, hence the factor analysis is appropriate for the data in this study.

Table 1. Reliability Test for Section 4

Section	Objectives	Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency	Number of Items
Impacts from the organization	The negative impacts of Japanese work culture from their organization	0.708	0.720	10
Impacts towards the family and friends	The negative impacts of Japanese working culture on the society	0.883	0.885	19
Impacts to the younger generation	The values of life will be taught to the younger generations.	0.836	0.849	3
Impacts to the nation	The negative impacts of Japanese working culture on the society	0.623	0.614	7

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test for Sphericity for Section 4

Section	Objectives	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
			Approx. Chi-Square	Sig	df
Impacts from the organization	The negative impacts of Japanese work culture from their organization	0.887	1982.105	0.000	171
Impacts to the towards the family and friends	The negative impacts of Japanese working culture on the society	0.888	1961.207	0.000	153
Impacts to the younger generation	The values of life will be taught to the younger generations.	0.702	472.352	0.000	3
Impacts to the nation	The negative impacts of Japanese working culture on the society	0.724	230.140	0.000	21

4.0 Findings

Descriptive results for impacts from the organizations, impacts towards family and friends, impacts to the younger generation, and impacts to the nation are listed in Table 3. From the results in Table 3, it is found that long working hours will produce waste and inefficient human capital allocation has the highest mean which is around 3.623. Long working hours pushing away women from contributing to the nation's economy, 3.530 has the second-highest rank. Japanese employees usually faced high pressure due to tough jobs at work has the third-highest rank which is around 3.348. Penalized for leaving some unfinished for the following day has the lowest mean score which is 1.246. For the impacts towards the family and friends, no time for making babies has the highest mean score which is around 3.000. Fail to segregate work hours and family time has the second highest mean score which is around 2.925. Abandoned their old parents due to busy work has the next highest mean score which is about 2.881. Regret of feel that your family is a burden, and you often feel nervous and regret having a family has the least mean score which is about 1.661. For the impacts to the younger generation, work and going up on the career ladder are more important than the family has the highest mean score which is around 1.528. It's okay to neglect the responsibility towards old parents and it's okay to put burden and responsibilities on your partner has the same mean score which is about 1.301. For the impacts to the nation, Japan has a low birth rate and a rapidly aging population, so its population is declining has the highest mean score which is about 4.484. Many sexless marriages in Japan have the second-highest mean which is about 3.904. *Karoshi* and *karojisatsu* are increasing day by day among the young adults who have the next highest mean score which is about 3.386. Many Japanese young adults who never had any relationship until the age of 40 have the least mean score which is about 2.128.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis for the impact of Japanese work culture towards their nation

	Item	Mean	Ranking	Median	Variance	Standard Deviation	
Impacts from the organizations	Faced high pressure	3.348	3	4.000	1.227	1.507	
	Always skip meals	2.241	6	2.000	1.463	2.143	
	Penalized for leaving some unfinished task	1.246	10	1.000	0.652	0.425	
	Long working hours produce inefficient human capital	3.623	1	4.000	1.320	1.743	
	Avoid taking paid annual leaves	1.939	9	1.000	1.176	1.383	
	Long working hours push away women	3.530	2	4.000	1.301	1.692	
	Hardly get positive employer feedback	2.186	7	2.000	1.154	1.332	
	Existence of seniority system	2.046	8	2.000	1.154	1.332	
	Being pressurized to fit-in in the organization	2.728	5	3.000	1.207	1.457	
	<i>Karoshi</i> is mostly caused by strokes, heart attacks, and even willful starvation.	2.968	4	3.000	1.343	1.803	
	Impacts towards the family and friends	Not giving any importance to them	2.116	11	2.000	1.135	1.289
		Abandoned old parents	2.881	3	3.000	1.321	1.745
		Hardly contact friends	2.754	5	3.000	1.338	1.791
No time to play with children		2.386	7	2.000	1.284	1.650	
No time to listen to the partner		2.359	8	2.000	1.228	1.510	
Low libido		2.870	4	3.000	1.359	1.846	
Prioritizing work over family members		2.006	13	2.000	1.191	1.419	

	No time for leisure activities	2.046	12	2.000	1.231	1.515
	No time for making babies	3.000	1	3.000	1.574	1.962
	Isolating from family and friends	2.241	10	2.000	1.401	1.158
	Neglecting child's education progress	1.841	14	1.000	1.076	1.561
	Hardly meet family members	1.820	15	1.000	1.249	1.356
	Cannot return home early	1.794	16	1.000	1.164	2.072
	No work life balance	2.354	9	2.000	1.440	2.070
	Fail to segregate time	2.925	2	3.000	1.439	1.803
	Do not share house chores	2.504	6	2.000	0.963	0.928
Impacts to the younger generation	Regret of having family	1.661	17	1.000	1.311	1.719
	Going up on the career ladder is more important.	1.528	1	2.000	0.1000	1.000
	It's okay to neglect the responsibilities	1.301	2	1.000	0.657	0.432
Impacts to the nation	It's okay to put burden on the partner	1.301	3	1.000	0.692	0.479
	Low birth rate and a rapid aging	4.484	1	5.000	0.900	0.809
	Many people still unmarried	2.719	8	3.000	1.261	1.592
	Foreigners will make up the labor force	3.365	4	4.000	1.255	1.576
	Increased medical expenses	2.887	7	3.000	1.167	1.362
	Many sexless marriage	3.904	2	4.000	1.089	1.186
	Many people never be in relationship	2.128	9	2.000	1.092	1.193
	Increased infertility	3.006	6	3.000	1.229	1.512
	Low nation productivity	3.162	5	3.000	1.209	1.462
	<i>Karoshi</i> and <i>karojisatsu</i> is increasing	3.386	3	3.000	1.342	1.802

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

To conclude this paper, the mean score for long working hours will produce waste and inefficient human capital is around 3.623, followed by long working hours pushing away women from contributing to the nation's economy which is 3.530, followed by Japanese employees usually faced high pressure due to tough jobs at work which is around 3.348 and penalized for leaving some unfinished for the following day has the lowest mean score which is 1.246 for impacts from the organizations. No time for making babies has the highest mean score which is around 3.000, followed by failing to segregate work hours and family time which is around 2.925, followed by abandoned their old parents due to busy work which is about 2.881, regret of feel that your family is a burden and you often feel nervous and regret having a family has the least mean score which is about 1.661 for the impacts towards the family and friends. The mean score for work and going up on the career ladder are more important than the family is around 1.528 followed by it's okay to neglect the responsibility towards old parents and it's okay to put burden and responsibilities on your partner which is about 1.301 for the impacts to the younger generation. Japan has a low birth rate and a rapidly aging population has the highest mean score which is about 4.484 followed by many sexless marriages in Japan which is about 3.904, followed by *Karoshi* and *karojisatsu* are increasing day by day among the young adults which are about 3.386 and many Japanese young adults who never had any relationship until the age of 40 has the least mean score which is about 2.128 for the impacts to the nation.

The Japanese government should tighten the rules regarding the extra working hours and introduce some new policies on early child care so that women could contribute to the nation's economy as well. In addition to this, the government should award the compliance organizations on the latest rules in terms of tax exemptions, providing additional leave policies, and others to promote a healthy work-life balance among the Japanese. Although many alternatives can be implemented things will not change overnight, therefore little changes can make a huge difference in increasing the quality of life of the Japanese community. The limitation of this research is data collection was conducted during the Covid-19 outbreak. therefore many respondents were reluctant to participate in this research and some of the respondents felt afraid to participate in the fear of being penalized by their organizations for reporting against their organization's policies. data obtained from this study cannot be used to generalize the work culture of the entire Japan as a whole, more research will be required.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This research will contribute to the body of knowledge under the workplace environment.

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