Work–family planning and gender role attitudes among youth

Tomoko Adachi
Department of Human Sciences, Osaka Kyoiku University, Osaka, Japan

ABSTRACT
The present study investigated work–family planning and gender role attitudes among Japanese youth. Valid data were obtained from 948 tertiary students having an average age of 19.60 (SD = 1.18). The results showed that most males planned to continue their work, while more than half of the females planned to quit on childbirth. As for time allocation plans, the results reinforced traditional tendencies; with males allocating more time for paid work and leisure, while females allocated more time for household work and childcare. Examination of the relationships between gender role attitudes and work–family planning revealed that females with liberal attitudes are more willing to be involved in the workforce. The relationships between gender role attitudes and time allocation identified by the study showed that people with liberal attitudes also have more balanced time allocation plans about work–family interaction than those without. Implications for education and intervention were discussed.

Introduction
Achieving balance: the current situation in Japan

Work–life balance is one of the issues that is capturing the interest of many Japanese citizens, as there is substantial evidence for positive outcomes from striking a better balance between work and family life. Yamamoto and Matsuura (2014) confirmed that Japanese firms understand that there is a positive correlation between work–life balance practices and productivity. Haar, Russo, Sune, and Ollier-Malaterre (2014) demonstrated that work–life balance is a key factor in increasing life satisfaction and promoting mental health across diverse cultures. In reply to this growing attention on work–life balance, the Japanese Government has introduced a variety of strategies. In 2007, it formulated 'Shigoto to seikatsu no chouwa kenshou, ' which is synonymous with a work–life balance charter, and updated this in 2010. In line with this charter, the Government then launched the 'Kaeru Japan' campaign, which is intended to encourage working people to come back home earlier each day, and the 'Iku men' project, which is designed to facilitate greater involvement of fathers in childcare. It has also endeavoured to increase the number of nurseries supporting parents with very young dependent children, to help them to successfully combine work and childcare.

These government endeavours appear to have changed people's attitude to the balance of work and life in a more positive direction. The Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2013) suggested that the percentage of people who support the traditional idea of the 'Husband is expected to work outside the home, while wife is expected to take on domestic duties,' is decreasing. However, there is a great difference between idea and reality. Alternative data provided by the OECD (2016) show how difficult it still is to combine work and family in Japan. Males spend an average of 471 minutes a day on work-related
activities, the highest in the OECD countries, while they spend only 62 minutes on unpaid work. On the other hand, females spend 206 minutes a day for work-related activities, less than half that of males, but spend up to 299 minutes a day in unpaid work around the home (three times more than males).

Moreover, the annual labour force survey shows a deep-rooted gender distortion in participation (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2016). Most males continue working without any interruption across their working life, while nearly 60% of females between the ages of 25 and 39 interrupt their careers because of child care. Although the female workforce has been growing year by year, childcare responsibility still falls almost entirely on females, and consequently hinders their labour force participation. Accordingly, the figures of labour force participation ratios by age groups exhibit different shapes for males and females. Males show a trapezoidal curve with no depression, while females show M-shaped curve with depression during the period 25–39, the busiest time for intensive childcare. This curve gets flatter gradually, but still depicts an M-shape not now observed in European and North American countries (The Japan International Labour Foundation, 2014; Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015). Zhou et al. (2013) conclude that Japan must break through the traditional gender division at home as well as in work places, for any real change to be achieved.

**Gender role attitudes: sociocultural influences**

There are several studies that describe the effects of culture, practice and people's attitudes on work–family planning. Zhou (2013) found an ‘echo effect’ in the work–family interface in Japan, which means that culture and traditional practices influence not only the current working generation, but will also affect future generations. The ‘echo effect’ implies a younger generation uptake of the prevalent culture, traditions and practices, and their reproduction when they balance work and family in the future. Likewise, Japanese social norms in terms of attitudes towards gender roles explain employment status and number of working hours (Tolciua & Zierahna, 2012), and the traditional gender role ideology, such as expecting males to take responsibilities as breadwinners, and females to be the homemakers, has an impact on career planning (Zhou, 2013). Similarly, females follow career patterns that vary in their gender role attitudes; with those possessing traditional attitudes being inactive in employment at certain times in their work–family sequence, and the presence of dependent children posing a further barrier to their participation in the full-time labour force. However, the impact of family is smaller among females with a work-centred attitudes (Kan, 2007).

In discussing the results of a study of Japanese females, Nakai (2000) reported that attitudes towards gender roles influences work–family planning, and that career-oriented females tend to seek partners who are positive and supportive of their wife's need to work. The impact of gender role attitudes has been confirmed among males as well. Donald and Linington (2008) noted that males with non-traditional gender role ideologies are more likely to be involved in family domains, and will take greater responsibilities for both work and family domains. These findings suggest that in exploring the determinants of successful work–family planning, gender role attitudes is one of the indispensable elements to consider.

Furthermore, this gender gap in work–family planning does not appear in later life as adults, but appears among youth as a form of future perspective. Friedman and Weissbrod (2005), examined work–family attitudes among college students and reported that female students were more likely than males to consider that they should combine work and family responsibilities in their future life. However, female students with egalitarian gender role attitudes were less definitive about getting married, and/or have children in the future, and males with egalitarian attitudes expected to spend less hours for work, and would be willing to spend more time at home than males with traditional attitudes (Kaufman, 2005). Bleske-Rechek, Fuerstenberg, Harris, and Ryan (2011) also reported the existence of obvious gender differences in work–family planning between male and female college students, with females showing a greater tendency to work fewer hours when they have young children at home. Accordingly, it is suggested that people with liberal gender role attitudes will in most cases develop non-traditional work–family plans.
**Hypotheses**

The purpose of the present study was to explore the ramifications of work–family planning with a sample of Japanese youth, and analyse the relationship between gender role attitudes and work–family planning. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed:

**Hypothesis 1**: In line with the ‘echo effect’, Japanese youth will possess prospective career patterns and time allocation plans that reflect the existing tendencies in relation to work–family balance in current Japanese society.

**Hypothesis 2**: In line with previous findings depicting the effect of gender role attitudes on career planning, individuals with liberal gender role attitudes will prefer non-traditional career patterns and flexible time allocation plans.

**Methods**

**Survey participants**

Valid data were obtained from a survey of 948 Japanese students having an average age of 19.60 (SD = 1.18). Of the participants, 165 were male university students, 218 were female university students and 565 were women’s junior college students.

**Instruments**

**Prospective career pattern**

Participants were asked to choose their preferred future career pattern from seven alternatives as follows:

1. Never work and never have children
2. Never work and have children
3. Work but quit when children arrive
4. Work but temporarily quit to raise children and go back to work after parenting
5. Work and have children
6. Work and do not have children
7. Others

**Time allocation plan**

Participants were asked to imagine themselves in their 30s and assign a number for five activities (household work, child care, paid work, leisure and others), where the total of all assignments should be 10.

**Gender role attitudes**

Fifteen items developed by Suzuki (1994b) were used to assess egalitarian gender role attitudes. A sample item is ‘Domestic duties should be shared by men and women.’ Another 10 items developed by Suzuki (1994a) were used to assess liberal attitudes towards males. A sample item is ‘Men can make complaints and cry in front of people.’ Participants rated their attitudes towards each item on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more liberal attitude, whereas a lower score indicates a more traditional gender role attitude.

**Results**

**Prospective career patterns**

The answers for seven career alternatives were classified into four patterns as follows, and the frequencies of each pattern were calculated (Figure 1).
A chi-Square test of independence was performed to compare the frequency of career patterns among three groups. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (6) = 162.44, p < .001$); with 94% of male students choosing a continuous pattern, implying that most of them plan to work persistently, regardless of family responsibilities. The patterns for females were different: 47% of university students and 38% of women junior college students chose a continuous pattern, while 42% of university students and 52% women’s junior college students chose an intermittent pattern, and 11% university students and 9% women’s junior college students said they would completely stop their career on childbirth.

**Time allocation plans**

The average scores of time allocation for the five activities were calculated for three groups (Table 1). One-way ANOVA were performed on these scores and showed statistically significant differences for ‘Household work,’ ‘Paid work,’ ‘Child care,’ and ‘Leisure’ (respectively, $F(2, 871) = 122.09, p = .001$; $F(2, 871) = 127.76, p = .001$; $F(2, 871) = 85.39, p = .001$; $F(2, 871) = 5.24, p = .01$). Tukey post hoc tests indicate that males allocated more time for paid work and leisure, while females allocated more time for household work and child care. No statistically significant differences between female university students and women’s junior college students were obtained.

**Gender role attitudes**

Average scores for egalitarian gender role attitudes and liberal attitudes towards men were calculated (Figure 2). One-way ANOVAs performed on these scores showed significant differences in egalitarian gender role attitudes ($F(2, 945) = 19.72, p < .001$). A Tukey post hoc test indicated that female university students ($M = 3.84$) possessed more liberal attitudes than male university students ($M = 3.61$), or women’s junior college students ($M = 3.59$). In terms of liberal attitudes towards men, a significant difference was obtained ($F(2, 945) = 28.39, p < .001$). Post hoc comparison indicated that female university students ($M = 3.82$) possessed the most liberal attitudes, followed by women’s junior college students ($M = 3.60$), and male university students ($M = 3.52$).
Relationships between gender role attitudes and prospective career paths

Rank order correlations between gender role attitudes and prospective career patterns (dummy coded: Never worked pattern = 1, complete stop pattern = 2, Intermittent pattern = 3, continuous pattern = 4) were calculated. No significant correlation was found among males, suggesting that most of them will work continuously regardless of their gender role attitudes. Significant correlations between egalitarian gender role attitudes and career patterns were obtained among female university students ($\rho = .360$, $p < .001$) and women’s junior college students ($\rho = .345$, $p < .001$). In addition to that, significant correlations between liberal attitudes towards men and work–plan intentions was obtained among women junior college students ($\rho = .133$, $p < .05$).

Relationships between gender role attitudes and time allocation

Regression analyses with gender role attitudes as independent variables and time allocation for five activities as dependent variables were conducted (Table 2). Results of analyses using egalitarian gender role attitudes showed significant regressions among female university students and women’s college students. Positive regressions on paid work (respectively $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) and negative regressions on household work (respectively $\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$; $\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$) and childcare (respectively, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$) were obtained. When independent variable was changed to liberal attitudes towards men, no significant regression was obtained among females, while, positive regression on childcare ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$) and negative regression on paid work ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$) were obtained among male university students.

Table 1. Time allocaiton plan

|                | (A) Male university students | (B) Female university students | (C) Women’s junior college students | $F$       |
|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
|                | $M$ (SD)                   | $M$ (SD)                       | $M$ (SD)                           |           |
| Household work | 1.43 (0.74)                | 2.61 (0.93)                    | 2.60 (0.83)                        | 122.09*** |
| Child care     | 2.27 (0.77)                | 3.33 (1.12)                    | 3.37 (0.90)                        | 85.39***  |
| Paid work      | 4.45 (1.45)                | 2.42 (1.62)                    | 2.41 (1.34)                        | 127.76*** |
| Leisure        | 1.69 (0.89)                | 1.51 (0.83)                    | 1.46 (0.72)                        | 5.24**    |
| Others         | 0.15 (0.47)                | 0.13 (0.38)                    | 0.16 (0.42)                        | 0.46ns    |

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$

![Figure 2. Gender Role Attitudes](image-url)
Discussion

Traditional prospects among current Japanese youth

This study examined work–family planning among Japanese youth, and its relationship to their gender role attitudes. The results suggest that contemporary Japanese youth possess extremely traditional perspectives on their future work–family interface, with males planning to be more engaged in paid work, and females to be more involved in household responsibilities.

Although national survey results show that the younger generation’s ideology has changed towards a gender equal direction (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2013), this study shows that, when it comes to their individual futures, their prospects converge towards the traditional directions. In support for Hypothesis 1, future career plans among contemporary Japanese youth exhibit the ‘echo effect’ depicted by Zhou (2013). Thus, young people’s prospective career patterns replicate the current gender disparity in the labour force represented by the trapezoid curve for males and an M-shaped curve for females. Moreover, their time allocation plans also reflect the current gender disparities shown by an OECD survey (2016); with males spending longer hours for paid work, and females being more involved in household responsibilities. The plans that Japanese youth are making for the future thus do not reflect the government’s policy and ongoing propaganda; they mirror the reality of contemporary Japanese society. This implies that young people observe the current situation and, understanding how difficult it is to pursue non-traditional work–family plans, are then persuaded to conform to traditional intentions.

At present, the Japanese government fails to provide pro-family support for females experiencing the double burdens created by the traditional pattern (Kinoshita & Guo, 2015). The result is that having childcare responsibilities is now one of the set of common factors that discourage females from committing to an employment career as well as other factors such as additional work in the household, glass ceilings and gender segregation in occupational fields (Kan (2007). Systematic childcare support is therefore mandatory if the community wants to have more females involved in paid work.

In addition, long held working practices and inconsiderate attitudes around working fathers prevent them from being involved in family responsibilities. In Japan, working fathers are entitled to take childcare leave, but the ratio of fathers taking this form of leave has been stagnant in recent years (the latest statistics show that only 2.65% of eligible males take this opportunity; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2016). A study by the Japan Trade Union Japan Trade Union Confederation (2014), showed that 11.6% of working fathers experienced ‘paternity harassment,’ that is, words and deeds that prevent fathers from taking childcare leave or participating in childcare. In addition to that, only 5.7 per cent said that their company’s parenting support arrangements function well, and 45.1% said that they have no colleagues who will support a father’s involvement in parenting. Thus, even though the system

| Table 2. Relationships between gender role attitudes and time allocation ($\beta$) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Male university | Female university | Women’s college  |
|                 | students        | students         | students        |
|                 | $\beta$ | $R^2$ | $\beta$ | $R^2$ | $\beta$ | $R^2$ |
| Household work  | .09  | .02  | −.35*** | .09*** | −.30*** | .09*** |
|                 | .05  |       | .08  |       | .01  |       |
| Child care      | −.12 | .02† | −.27***| .05** | −.22***| .88*** |
|                 | .22  |       | .08  |       | .07  |       |
| Paid work       | .08  | .03† | .42***| .14***| .36***| .11*** |
|                 | −.24 |       | −.08 |       | −.09 |       |
| Leisure         | −.12 |       | −.03 | .00  | −.02 | .00  |
|                 | .14  |       | −.07 |       | .09  |       |
| Others          | .01  | −.01 | −.02 | −.01 | −.05 | .00  |
|                 | .02  |       | .08  |       | .02  |       |

Upper line: Egalitarian gender role attitudes
Lower line: attitudes toward the roles of liberated men
***p < .001; **p < .01; †p < .10

Discussion

Table 2. Relationships between gender role attitudes and time allocation ($\beta$)
exists, lack of social understanding and workplace support become obstacles for fathers wishing to be involved in parenting. It will become increasingly necessary to persuade companies to provide some form of education about the societal benefits, to create a family friendly organizational environment.

The effect of gender role attitudes

Examination of the relationship between gender role attitudes and career patterns has revealed that a male's career patterns are not influenced by changing gender role attitudes. This implies that most of them plan to continue working without interruption during their working life. When this is combined with the results that show that the male student respondents to this study exhibited conservative attitudes about gender roles, our research confirms O'Neil's comments (O'Neil, 1981). He contended that males possess rigid attitudes towards gender roles, and that many of them are affected by masculine ‘mystique’ and traditional values. However, in support of the findings of Kaufman (2005), liberal attitudes when held by men do exert a positive influence on the time they spend on childcare, and a negative influence on the time spent on paid work. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported for males. To put the two findings together, we found that, though most males planned to work continuously regardless of gender role attitudes, males with liberal attitudes have more balanced time allocation plans about work–family interaction, and allocate more time for childcare and lesser time for paid work.

Among females, gender role attitudes had effects on both career patterns and time allocation plans. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was fully supported for females. The results imply that females with egalitarian attitudes prefer to continue their careers without interruption, and find suitable balances in time allocation by spending more time for paid work and less time for household work and childcare. Considering the claim that there is an inverse relationship between less traditional gender role orientation and work–family conflict (Donald & Linington, 2008), it is suggested that people with liberal attitudes are less likely to be tossed about by pressures to conform themselves to the traditional ideology, and are more likely to strike a suitable balance between work and family. Accordingly, in addition to government-level solutions, intervention targeting prevalent gender role ideologies is required. For example, there are various ‘Hidden Curricula’ that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes in Japanese educational settings (Clark, 2016; Lee, 2014). Researchers and educators can expand young people’s future careers by providing gender sensitive education, and encouraging them to consider non-traditional lifestyles in negotiation with their environment.

Another finding of great interest is as follows: in the examination of the relationship between gender role attitudes and time allocation plans, liberal attitudes towards men exerted influence only among male students, while egalitarian gender role attitudes exerted influence only among female students. Considering the scale of egalitarian gender role attitude questions in this study, which included more items on females than males, it is assumed that attitudes about one’s own gender role does have effects on a person’s career planning, but attitudes about the opposite gender do not. In Japan, the gender equality movement is mainly focusing on female labour force participation and work–life balance, and males appear to be left behind by this movement. Nevertheless, to improve the work–life interface we should remember that a wife’s plan and a husband’s plan are or should be, interactive with each other. As the OECD (2014) study pointed out, balance is not achieved only by encouraging females to influx into the labour market; it is also closely related to encouraging males to reduce their hours of paid work.

Future directions

Although the present research has clarified the tendency of today’s Japanese youth to possess traditional work–family plans, and elicited practical recommendations concerning this situation, it also had some limitations that should be tackled in future studies. In the present study, responses were obtained by asking students about their future plans, but this did not incorporate the effect of their interaction with potential partners. However, it is reported elsewhere that when females have partners, they become less likely to participate in the labour market unless their partner possesses liberal
attitudes towards gender roles and supports their decision to work. When this occurs, they reduce the probability of being homemakers, and expand their employment chances (Tolciua & Zierahna, 2012). Future research should therefore include the plans and gender role attitudes of prospective partners, and explore their influence on work–family planning.

The second point to be considered is the reciprocal interaction between attitudes and behaviour. Kan (2007) pointed out the interaction between gender role attitudes and labour force participation, implying that employment choice is not only affected by gender role attitudes, but also by those employment experiences that can change gender role attitudes as well. Future research should therefore try to understand this factor by adopting a longitudinal methodology to examine potential reciprocal relationships between attitudes and behaviour. Despite these limitations, this study has clarified the nature of work–life plans and gender role attitudes among contemporary Japanese youth, and the findings should facilitate appropriate education and intervention policies for next-generation career designs.

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Notes on contributor

Tomoko Adachi, PhD, is an associate professor of psychology at Osaka-Kyoko University in Japan. Her research focuses on career counseling and intervention, gender difference and organizational behaviour. She has devised career development programmes which facilitate young people's career decision process and support adaptation during their early career stage.

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