

# Comparative study on gender-role attitudes of staff working at elderly care facilities in Japan and Vietnam

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Received 4 June 2021; published 5 July 2021

**Abstract:** *The paper aims at promoting the training quality of the female workforce in elderly health-care delivery service in Japan and Vietnam. Here, an in-depth analysis is conducted on the similarities and differences in the gender awareness of staff working at elderly health centres in both countries, as well as viewpoints of administrators regarding female worker recruitment and leadership education on this service.*

**Keywords:** Gender Awareness, Female Workforce, Female Leadership, Elderly Health Service, Comparative Study, Vietnam, Japan

## 1. Introduction

Japan has become the world's fastest-ageing nation and entered a super-aged society since 2007. The country's rate of aging is forecasted to reach its peak of 30% in 2025 and 28.4% in 2065 (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2020: 2). Vietnam is aging rapidly as well. In 2019, the country's 60-and-under-65 year olds and the 65-and-above population accounted for 11.86% and 7.7% respectively (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019: 62). It is predicted that by 2049 Vietnam will become a super-aged society with an aging rate of 25% (Ministry of Health of Vietnam, 2018: 67). Against this demographic background, it is urgent to take prompt measures to effectively support the elderly. Thus, there has been a boom of nursing services in both Japan and Vietnam in order to meet the

current needs for physical and mental health care of the elderly.

Another issue faced by aging nations is labor shortage, especially for young and high-quality human resources. To resolve this problem, it is necessary to develop a specialized, knowledgeable, and skilled labor force to meet the diverse demands of the labor market. From a perspective of gender equality, the evolving role of women is reflected not only in their participation in the workforce but also their social recognition. Elderly care is often perceived to be more suitable for female workers, so it is crucial to encourage the development and advancement (either at leadership or staff level) of women in general and of those who serve at elderly care facilities in particular. "Gender-role attitudes" refer to perceptions and behaviors of individuals of each gender

(male and female) in accordance with social norms and expectations. In other words, gender-role attitudes of individuals reflects their thoughts and actions concerning social norms about gender roles (Junko Suzuki, 1994: 34). The evolving role of women in our modern society has gradually reshaped gender-role attitudes and the concept of gender division of labor, which used to be based on traditional social norms (e.g. “men build houses, women build homes”). Gender-role attitudes are composed of three factors, namely gender division of labor, orientation of social advancement, and internalization of gender values<sup>1</sup> (Miki Nakai, 2000: 119).

## 2. Methodology and target population

This study aims to investigate gender-role attitudes at elderly care facilities in order to identify the values of female leaders and employees.

The study was conducted from March 2020 to April 2021, aided with a questionnaire survey of 376 randomly selected staff (120 Vietnamese and 256 Japanese), aged 20 to 65, from six elderly care facilities in Vietnam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh cities) and seven elderly care facilities in Japan (Saga, Karatsu Yamaga, and Asakura). The data presented in the figures and tables were analyzed using IBM, SPSS, Statistics 26, and Excel.

Female workers accounted for the majority of the survey participants (Japan: female: 76.6%, male: 23.4%; Vietnam: female:

80.0%, male: 20%). While people in their 50s are the dominant group among Japanese interviewees (27%), those aged 20 to 29 accounted for the largest proportion of Vietnamese respondents (34.2%). They are mostly registered nurses in both countries (Japan: 46.5%, Vietnam: 54.2%) and a smaller number of social workers (Japan: 9.3%, Vietnam: 9.2%). In terms of educational attainment, people participating in this study were mainly those reaching upper secondary school level (Japan: 41.8%, Vietnam: 38.3%) and those with an Associate’s degree (Japan: 21.1%, Vietnam: 35.8%) (Table 1). These results are consistent with the prevailing demographic situation among staff working at elderly care facilities in general as this sector is characterized by tasks requiring flexibility, gentleness, and persistence, the attributes commonly found in female workers. Specifically, since this service industry is “people-oriented”, diligence and a passion for care are prerequisites for a career in the field.

## 3. Similarities and differences in the gender-role attitudes of male and female staff currently working at elderly care facilities in Japan and Vietnam

### 3.1. Factors influencing the assessment of working environment

Previous studies indicate that “women’s job satisfaction”, “gender equality as well as opportunities for career advancement”, and “work-life balance” are the three factors influencing female employees’ perceptions and attitudes towards work (International Labour Organization, 2020: 3). Our findings also show that there is a statistically significant difference among the responses, indicating the association between certain characteristics (gender,

<sup>1</sup> “Internalization” is an individual’s process of absorbing a certain social behavior (a social characteristic) as a member of society, accepting the values and norms established by the society as his or her own (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://kotobank.jp/word/%E5%86%85%E5%9C%A8%E5%8C%96-107310>).

age, education, marital status, etc.) and assessments of the working environment (satisfaction, work commitment, co-worker relations, etc.).

**Table 1. Sample characteristics (Unit: %)**

		Japan		Vietnam	
Gender		Male: 23.4	Female: 76.6	Male: 20	Female: 80
Age	20 - 29	12.9		34.2	
	30 - 39	21.1		31.7	
	40 - 49	24.5		22.5	
	50 - 59	27.0		10.8	
	60 - 69	14.5		0.8	
Marital status		Married: 54.7	Single: 45.3	Married: 60	Single: 40
Education	Lower secondary school	4.3		9.2	
	Upper secondary school	41.8		38.3	
	Vocational certificate	14.8		7.5	
	Associate's degree	21.1		35.8	
	Bachelor's degree	17.2		6.7	
	Master's degree	0.8		2.5	
Position	Social worker	9.3		9.2	
	Registered nurse	46.5		54.2	
	Licensed vocational nurse	8.2		7.5	
	Physical therapists	0.8		4.2	
	Others	35.2		24.9	
Work experience	< 1 year	5.5		16.7	
	1 - < 2 years	8.2		35.8	
	2 - < 3 years	7.4		13.3	
	> 5 years	25.0		20.0	
	> 10 years	32.0		10.0	
	> 20 years	14.1		4.2	
	> 30 years	7.8		0	
Employment status		On-staff employee: 78.9; Contract worker: 21.1		On-staff employee: 35.8; Contract worker: 64.2	

As for the similarities, in both countries, education does exert an influence on job satisfaction in general, and pay satisfaction in particular, of the staff working at elderly care facilities. These relationships are shown through the differences respectively significant at  $p < .001$ ,  $p < .01$  in Vietnam and at  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$  in Japan.

As for the differences, it can be seen that in Vietnam, the factors that affect “co-worker relations” are age ( $p > .01$ ), marital status ( $p < .01$ ), and education ( $p < .001$ ); the factors that affect “pay satisfaction” are education ( $p < .005$ ) and work experience ( $p < .01$ ); and the factor that affects “work commitment” is employment status ( $p < .01$ ). On the other hand, there are statistically significant differences representing various other relationships in the data gained from the Japanese participants. In particular, the factor that influences “co-worker relations” includes solely position ( $p < .05$ ); the factor that influences “pay satisfaction” is employment status ( $p < .01$ ); the factors that affect “work commitment” are work experience ( $p < .01$ ), marital status ( $p < .001$ ), and education ( $p < .05$ ); the factor that influences “career advancement” is education ( $p < .005$ ).

### 3.2. Similarities and differences in the gender-role attitudes and perceptions regarding promotion of female staff in the elderly care industry

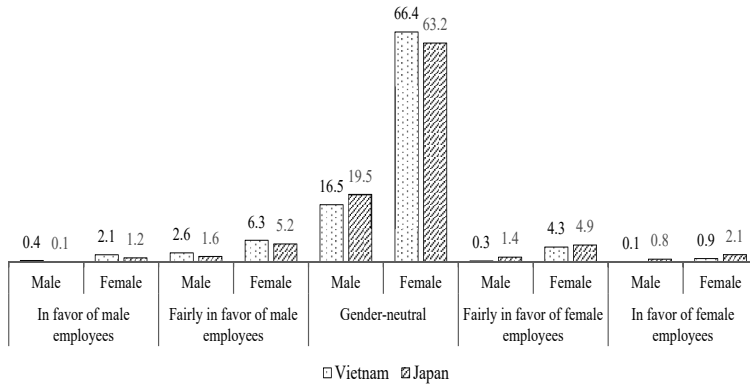
#### (i) Gender-role attitudes towards work

Our findings specify that the division of labor among staff working at elderly care facilities in both Japan and Vietnam is gender-neutral (respectively 82.7% and 82.9%). Nevertheless, in each country, there still exists a clear gender gap in the division of labor in general. (Japan: Male:

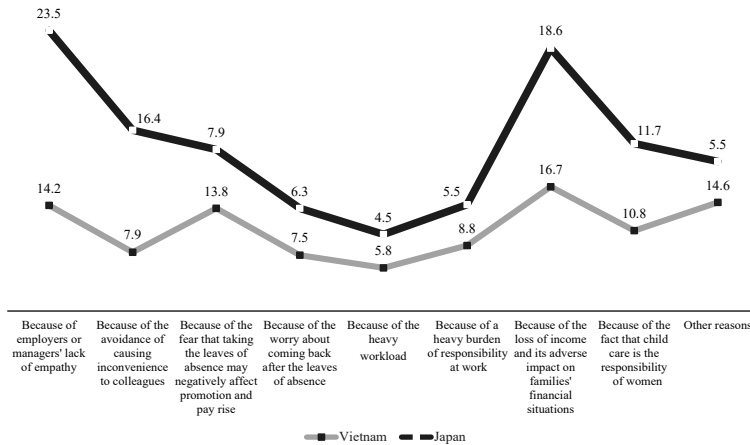
19.5%, Female: 63.2%; Vietnam: Male: 16.5%, Female: 66.39%) (Figure 1).

men taking leaves for child care was lower than that of women due to various objective and subjective causes.

**Figure 1: Gender-role attitudes towards work (Unit: %)**



**Figure 2: Reasons for the lower rate of men taking leaves of absence for child care compared to that of women (Unit: %)**



While the option of “Other reasons” was most chosen among the Vietnamese participants (14.6%), among the Japanese participants, the most common reason for this phenomenon was “Because of employers or managers’ lack of empathy” (23.5%). Nonetheless, the main shared reason between Vietnamese and Japanese ones was “Because of the loss of income and its adverse impact on families’ financial situations” (Vietnam: 16.7%, Japan: 18.6%) (Figure 2).

*(ii) Promotion of female staff in the elderly care industry*

When it comes to the reasons why the number of female managers in elderly care facilities is still low given their potential, we found that the percentage of

Table 2 shows the mean values of questionnaire items, which include “Getting promotion and pay rises” (Japan: 2.79; Vietnam: 2.87), “Undertaking difficult and extra tasks” (Japan: 3.01; Vietnam: 2.90), “Getting opportunities to accumulate work experience “ (Japan: 2.93; Vietnam: 2.85),... In general, it can be stated that there is no major difference in the gender-role attitudes of the staff working at elderly care facilities in both Vietnam and Japan. Our findings also point out that the rate of

respondents choosing the reason “Because women find it difficult to maintain the work-life balance (e.g. between work and child care, etc.)” was the highest (Japan: 25.2%, Vietnam: 34%). Nevertheless, it is a fact that the “traditional gender division of labor” still imposes a significant influence on gender-role attitudes of people in the labor force, leading to the number of female managers being limited. The rate of respondents choosing reasons in line with the “traditional gender division of labor”

**Table 2. Gender-role attitudes towards specific work-related issues**  
(Japan: JP, Vietnam: VN) (Unit: %)

	1. In favor of male employees		2. Fairly in favor of male employees		3. Gender-neutral		4. Fairly in favor of female employees		5. In favor of female employees		Mean		Standard deviation (SD)	
	JP	VN	JP	VN	JP	VN	JP	VN	JP	VN	JP	VN	JP	VN
Getting promotion and pay rises	2.3	3.3	20.3	11.7	73.8	80.8	2.3	2.5	1.2	1.7	2.7969	2.8750	0.57202	0.57339
Undertaking difficult and extra tasks	0.8	1.7	8.2	13.3	81.3	78.3	8.2	5.8	1.6	0.8	3.0156	2.9083	0.50851	0.53446
Getting opportunities to accumulate work experience	1.2	3.3	5.9	10.8	92.6	84.2	0.4	0.8	0	0.8	2.9219	2.8500	0.32199	0.51286
Assuming responsibility for working overtime and during holidays	0	2.5	5.5	6.7	91.8	85.8	2.7	5.0	0	0	2.9727	2.9333	0.28566	0.46261
Taking leaves of absence	0	1.7	0.8	5.0	95.3	87.5	3.1	4.2	0.8	1.7	3.0391	2.9917	0.26279	0.47626
Taking leaves of absence for childcare	0	2.5	0.8	5.8	66.4	80.8	21.5	9.2	11.3	1.7	3.4336	3.0167	0.69978	0.56484

was still considerably high. These reasons include “Because men have always been dominating managerial positions” (Japan: 15.2%, Vietnam: 8%), “Because there is no expectation of women being able to become leaders” (Japan: 11.6%, Vietnam: 8.4%), and “Because the number of prevailing female managers is so small that it is not possible to set further goals and directions.” (Japan: 10.4%, Vietnam: 5.9%) (Figure 3).

As for measures to increase the participation of women in leadership positions at elderly care facilities, Japanese staff expected their employers to provide early training to those with leadership qualities (23.3%) and long-term support for childcare programs (16.8%). On the other hand, Vietnamese staff have highest hope for “training and encouraging female staff for

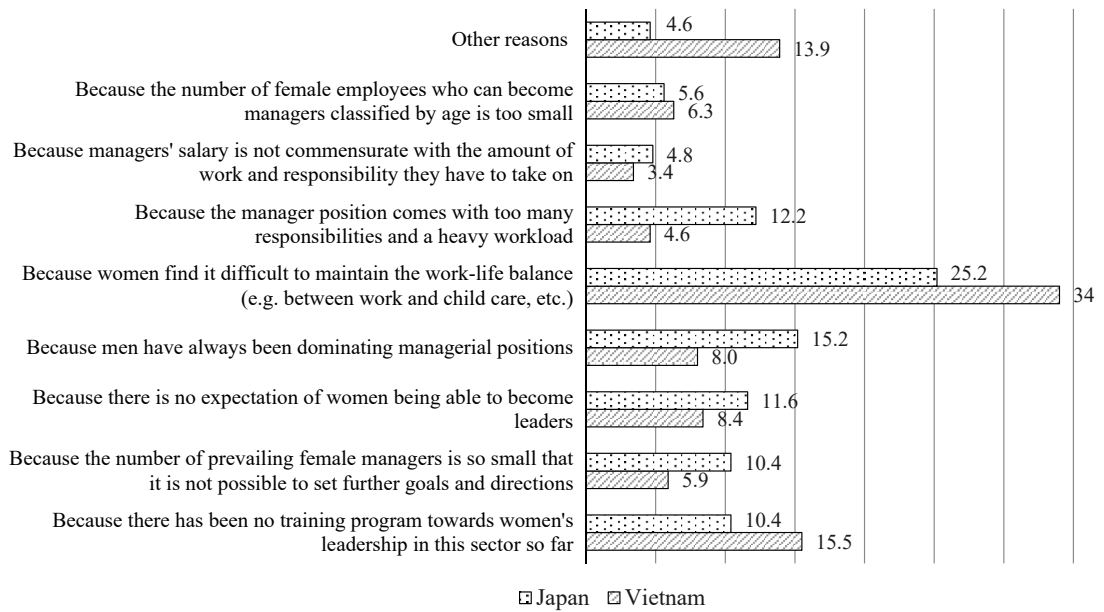
their advancement and improving their leadership skills in a gender-equal working environment” (22.5%) (Figure 4).

#### **4. Suggestions for improving the working environment and training female staff and female leaders for the elderly care industry**

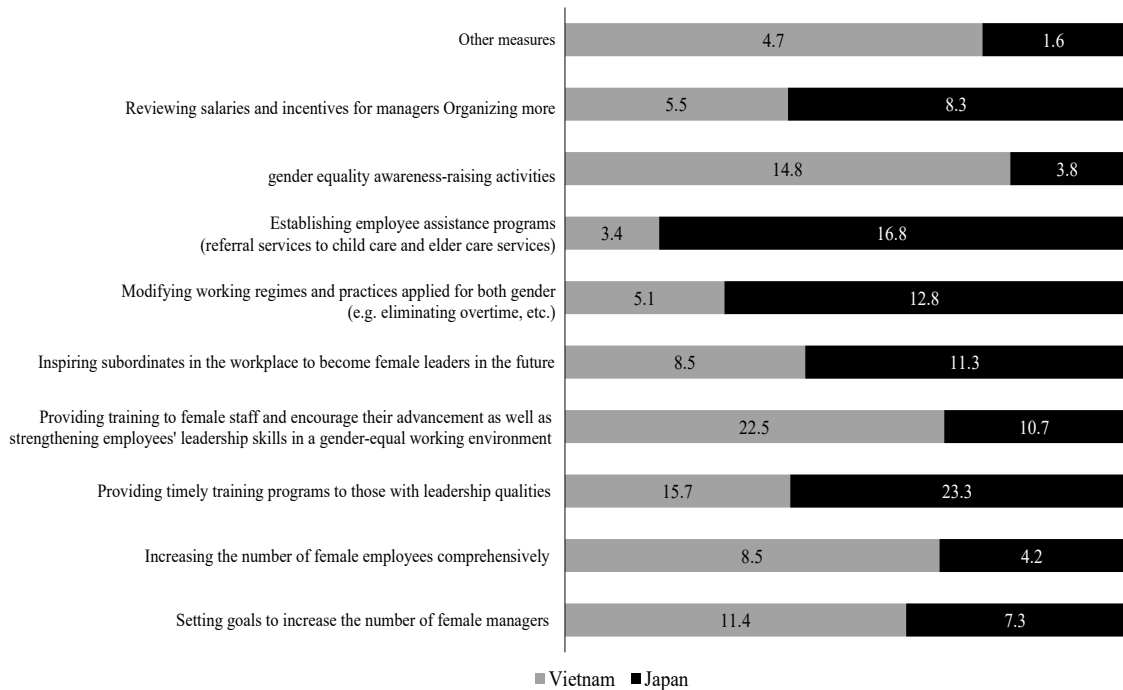
Female respondents accounted for a high percentage (Vietnam: 80.0%; Japan: 76.6%) because their attributes, according to Hisada (2017: 19), like gentleness, ingenuity, meticulousness, patience, and diligence match the requirements for elderly care. Nevertheless, in both Japan and Vietnam, women’s burden of family care for children and the elder affects greatly their career development and advancement.

Statistics in 2019 showed the proportions of managers in the healthcare and welfare sectors were 52.9% for female against

**Figure 3: Reasons for the small number of female leaders in the elderly care service industry (Unit: %)**



**Figure 4: Measures for increased participation of women in leadership positions (Unit: %)**



47.1% for male in Vietnam (Mai Lan, 2019) and 54.4% and 45.6% respectively in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labor and

Welfare of Japan, 2020: 7). It is estimated that the increase of women entering labor markets would add US\$28 trillion to the

global annual GDP in 2025, closing the gender gap at work accordingly (Mackinsey Global Institute, 2015: 2). Therefore, it is essential to promote gender equality at the workplace, especially in the division of labor and to reduce the prejudice about women's sole responsibility towards family care and nursing work. One measure is to reform and improve maternity policies and regimes, allowing more ease on both men and women in sharing family care. Another could be raising awareness of both male and female workers on the issues.

It is also crucial to develop the female workforce, both leaders and staff, in the elderly care service sector through improving working environment to enable and encourage women's active participation at their full potential. We thus propose that:

(i) One characteristic of the elderly care service sector is "people-oriented"; therefore, the pre-requisite for a person to be employed is to have "a sharing mindset" and "the passion for work" (Japan National Council of Social Welfare, 2017). It is necessary to encourage and create conditions for female staff to improve their skills and qualifications and their work relationships as a way to increase their job satisfaction and engagement with care receivers.

(ii) It requires raising awareness of both managers and female staff on leadership development.

(iii) In order to ensure "work-family balance", there should be not just maternity leave for women but family care leave for both men and women as well.

(iv) It is necessary to encourage employee work-life balance.

(v) There should be training for employees in team management and workplace communication skills. It is imperative also

to motivate female staff's creativeness for improving elderly care services and developing further of elderly care facilities.

## 5. Conclusion

Vietnamese and Japanese care workers share many similarities in gender-role attitudes and gender equality perceptions. Therefore, it is essential to understand the recruitment criteria regarding required individualities and qualifications for female workforce in the sector. Investigating individual characteristics in associations with this working environment, as well as their perceptions and influencing factors regarding gender division of labor would contribute to the quality improvement of labor training and the development of a friendly and productive working environment for both genders. Those would help promote development of nursing workers in general and female caregivers in particular to acquire and sharpen the qualities needed for the job such as communication skills, empathy, the willingness to share, determination for self-improvement, and thoughtfulness towards colleagues and elderly persons □

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