



Women's Vulnerability During Natural Disasters: A Feminist Perspective on COVID-19's Impact in Japan

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Abstract

Female vulnerability during disasters is a significant issue, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan, as a developed country, exemplifies how women faced increased economic vulnerability and instability during this crisis. The pandemic intensified existing social structures, leading to greater instability and insecurity, with these effects being especially pronounced when viewed through a gendered lens. This article argues that, despite the Japanese government's efforts to mitigate economic instability, the absence of a gender perspective in policy-making perpetuated women's economic vulnerability, ultimately undermining human security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Japan.

Keywords: Japan, COVID-19, Human Security, SDGs, Feminism.

Doğal Afetler Sırasında Kadınların Kırılğanlığı: Japonya'da COVID-19'un Etkisine Feminist Bir Bakış Açısı

Öz

Afetler sırasında kadınların kırılğanlığı, özellikle COVID-19 pandemisi sürecinde dikkat çeken bir sorun haline gelmiştir. Japonya gibi gelişmiş bir ülkede, kadınlar bu kriz döneminde artan ekonomik kırılğanlık ve istikrarsızlıkla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Pandemi, mevcut toplumsal eşitsizlikleri daha da derinleştirirken, bu durum toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden bakıldığında daha belirgin hale gelmiştir. Bu makale, Japon hükümetinin ekonomik istikrarsızlığı azaltmaya yönelik çabalarına rağmen, politika yapım sürecinde toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinin eksikliğini kadınların ekonomik kırılğanlığını sürdürdüğünü savunmaktadır. Bu durum, insan güvenliğini tehdit etmekte ve Japonya'daki Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedefleri'ni (SDG'ler) zayıflatmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Japonya, COVID-19, İnsani Güvenlik, Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedefleri, Feminizm.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a range of traumatic consequences worldwide, with vulnerable groups bearing the brunt of its effects, encompassing not only health outcomes, but also severe economic ramifications. Women who have been subjected to extensive scrutiny by researchers worldwide are among the most vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic. Although much of the research conducted thus far has focused on the experiences of women in underdeveloped or developing countries, it is clear that this pandemic has caused more significant harm to women in these areas than in developed countries. This empirical evidence establishes the overwhelming vulnerability of women to the pandemic's consequences, necessitating targeted interventions to alleviate their plight. By focusing on the case of Japan, we argue that women in developed countries also experience economic instability and a lack of social assistance from the government. Despite Japan's historical reputation for low levels of gender equality, it is imperative to elevate the visibility of Japanese women and gender-related issues in the academic literature.

Due to economic conditions being highly heterogeneous across individual women, it is difficult to consider women as the unit of analysis in a particular study; here we focus on two sub-groups within Japanese women: those who are not head of the household, and those working part-time jobs or in jobs where the wage is low. As Kikuchi et al. (2021:5) stated, the COVID-19 pandemic dangerously threatened females—especially when low skilled and those without stable jobs—causing more income inequalities for them in Japan. One of the criticisms of Feminist Studies of the COVID-19 pandemic is that they have not given proper attention to an intersectional analysis, focusing on women as a uniform demographic group (Berkhout and Richardson, 2020:49; Maestriperi, 2021:2).

This study takes into consideration that women's vulnerability in Japan has roots going far beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them closely related to the traditional family structure and gender norms. The research question asks how the lack of social assistance policies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan has contributed to the increased vulnerability of women. We employed the case analysis as the research method to analyze women's economic and social status through social structure. This article further introduces women's vulnerability in Japan and its link with gender norms, and then addresses the negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic occurring due to emergency restrictions implemented by the Japanese government and how they especially affected women who were working part-time and/or in low-wage jobs. Although the Japanese government promotes human security and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with

particular emphasis on gender equality, its policies during the COVID-19 pandemic lacked an explicit gender focus. This oversight potentially neglected the unique challenges faced by women, particularly in the context of employment, domestic responsibilities, and the economic vulnerability exacerbated by the crisis.

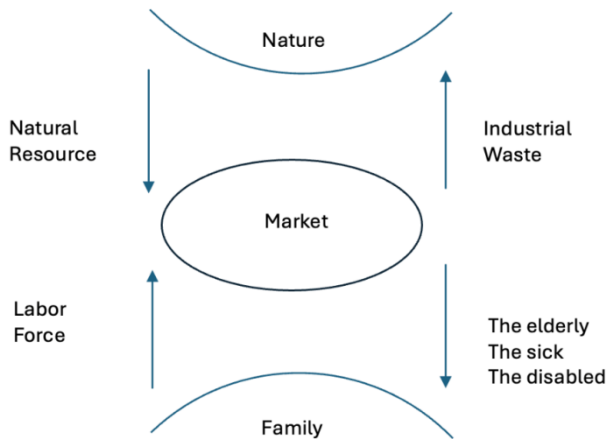
Disaster, Marxist Feminism and COVID-19

Disasters increase the already-existing gender inequalities that place women at heightened risk of calamities. These vulnerabilities are deeply seated in pre-existing social inequalities such as discrimination and poor access to opportunities and resources (Moreno & Shaw, 2018). The question of addressing these vulnerabilities calls for an all-inclusive approach that takes into consideration the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the complex relationship between the two (Donner & Rodriguez, 2011). An all-women team developed technology equipped with interactive spatial visualization to combat the floods, which had been very instrumental, especially in helping vulnerable communities in Indonesia (Okai, 2022). This helped build national resilience to disasters through gender equality. In Colombia, women were trained in managing water canals, which allowed the return of 900 wetland hectares, thus increasing community-level resilience to climate change. In Gaza, where the health system has been decimated and has collapsed, delayed access to care is posing significant health risks to pregnant women and their children amid the severe crisis (Medecines Sans Frontiers, 2024). Women in Turkey are particularly vulnerable during earthquakes owing to pre-existing social inequalities, which limit their access to resources, safe shelters, and emergency services. This vulnerability is exacerbated by traditional gender roles that often leave women responsible for children and the elderly, further increasing their risk during disasters (Yakıt Ak & Uyrdağ, 2024). This practice shows the dual benefits of promoting gender equity and improving disaster preparedness (Okai, 2022). Attempts to deal with the vulnerabilities of women in disasters should focus on incorporating gender perspectives into strategies on disaster risk reduction and creating access opportunities to all health services. Disaster mitigation and response programs are the most effective if implemented through community-based initiatives and gender-sensitive approaches (Donner & Rodriguez, 2011). Women with limited access to resources, including physical, financial, human, social, and natural resources, are an important hindrance to implementing a useful reaction towards disasters (Yavinsky, 2012). How these challenges are to be met certainly calls for a great effort to challenge and change the inequalities that put women in a more vulnerable position against natural disasters. Handling the vulnerability of women will naturally call for critical planning and quick action. It will likewise empower women and ensure their

full participation in disaster preparedness, response, rehabilitation, and recovery efforts (Petraroli & Baars, 2022).

Marxist theory posits that society is fundamentally structured by the relations that people establish through their productive activities, which are essential for human survival. Work is seen as a social process that not only shapes and transforms both the material and social worlds but also forms individuals as social beings in the process to connect the “nature” with “market” (MacKinnon, 1982). At the end 1960s during the countercultural movemet, radical feminism recognized the existence of “family” outside the “market” (See figure 1). The logic of the relationships in the "market" is similar. First, the "family" is based on the "natural" nature of humanity. The "market" uses people as resources from the family as labor input, while those who cannot become laborers—such as the elderly, the sick, and disabled—are considered "industrial waste" output. To the "market," people are merely labor resources, and only healthy adult men are considered valuable (Ueno, 2009).

Figure 1¹ Marxist Feminism Social Structure

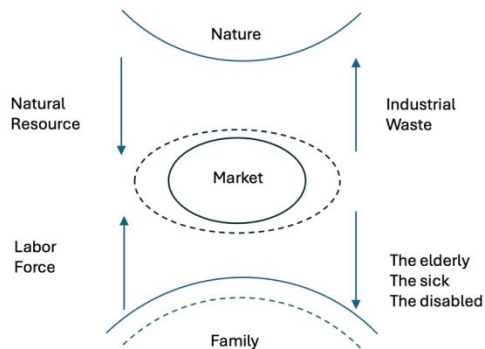


COVID-19 as a nature disaster reemphasized the importance of women’s vulnerability in the social structure. The impact of natural disasters is not equal on people. The vulnerability analysis of natural disasters states that inequalities are not only limited to the risks of exposure to disasters but are also related to equal access to social resources (Terry, 1994). Neumayer and Plümper (2007) found that natural disasters lower the life expectancy of

¹ Figure translated from Ueno, C. (2009). 家父長制と資本制: マルクス主義フェミニズムの地平. (Patriarchy and Capitalism: A Marxist Feminist Perspective). 岩波書店 (Iwanami bookstore). p6

women more than that of men which strengthens the inequalities and vulnerability of women. Mainstreaming gender often ignores women's contribution to environmental management (Dento, 2002), and the policies designed during and after climate disasters are aimed at 'building resilience in individuals and communities' (Alston, 2013: 292). Different social and economic variables, besides cultural issues, influence the vulnerability of women to a disaster. Vulnerability can be defined as "the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influences their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard" (Donner & Rodriguez, 2011). It is a complex problem that varies greatly among different populations, centering on factors such as gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, income, and geographical location (UN Women n.d.). Women in developing nations bear the brunt due to cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and inequitable distribution of roles, resources, and power (Ginige et al., 2014). In disaster situations, mortality is generally greater for women than men in most countries where women have a lower status in relation to men (World Bank, 2021). For instance, Cyclone Gorky of Bangladesh in 1991 led to the deaths of 14 women for every man (World Bank, 2021). In the event of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean of 2004, out of the fatalities 250,000 were women (Fan & Huang, 2023). Cultural norms and the economic dependence of women deepen their sufferance in disasters because women form a majority of the poorest people in the world and rely more on nature for survival. Efforts to address these disparities include post-disaster equity initiatives aimed at reducing disparities in outcomes related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation/gender identity (EDA, 2023).

Figure 2 Social Structure during COVID-19 Pandemic



Natural disasters often precipitate significant shifts in social structures, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The imposition of stringent lockdowns and quarantine measures led to a contraction of the market, with eco-

conomic activities largely coming to a standstill. This pause in market functions was accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the number of individuals falling ill, which, in turn, reduced the available labor force and intensified economic disruption. Consequently, the "family" unit assumed a more prominent role within the social structure, as the care for the sick and the reliance on household resources grew. These changes collectively contributed to an alteration in the social structure during the pandemic.

Women and Crisis in Japan

The gender issue is especially exaggerated in Japan as a country that frequently encounters earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters. The 2011 East Japan Disaster reinforced the traditional gender role in Japan, and most of the policies are failing in incorporating gender perspectives in the Japanese system of administration (Saito, 2012). In Japan, vulnerability is constructed by social and community norms, values, and public discourses on gender in the face of natural disasters (Petraroli & Baars, 2022). Some other variables contributing to this vulnerability include inadequate levels of education on disasters and public discourses rendering women to their traditional gender roles and obligations at the expense of full participation in preparedness and response activities (Petraroli & Baars, 2022). Although Japan, since the 1960s, has installed comprehensive disaster-prevention measures that have reduced casualty counts due to natural disasters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.), disaster risk reduction schemes must integrate gender perspectives to increase resilience and decrease gender disparities (Gerster, 2024).

The social status of women in Japanese society remains an important issue today. In the United Nations Development Programme Gender Inequality Index (2020), Japan ranked 19th as a country with very high human development, which suggests that Japanese females and males have similar political and educational rights, however low in aspects of participation in the National Parliament and medium in the labor pressure participation rate (Assmann, 2014:3). Japan ranked 120th among 156 countries in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report in 2021 and is the lowest among the G7 countries. Furthermore, the ranking indicates disparities between the genders in the areas of political participation and employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic, classified as a natural disaster, warrants a broader examination of its consequences, beyond the realm of public health. Although research has shown that men have higher infection and death rates than women (Global Health 5050, 2022), women have experienced more economic problems caused by COVID-19 (Alon et al., 2020), resulting in higher economic insecurity and instability. To mention only a few, Sahin et al. (2010:2) find that the Great Recession of 2008 negatively expanded the employment gender gap, and Davies and Bennett (2016:1044) show similar

findings when studying the economic consequences of the Ebola and Zika pandemics. International organizations share the same perspective; for example, according to the United Nations (UN) Policy Brief (2020), the pandemic has deepened the economic gender inequalities that have been targeted since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. As Kabeer et al. (2021:23) stated, the pandemic hit economic sectors with higher female representation, which translated into larger declines in employment for women than men in numerous countries. OECD (2020) also highlighted this situation as an increased risk of women's poverty due to COVID-19.

The issues stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic are not restricted to women in the workforce. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated problems that were already being addressed by the feminist economic approach before its emergence. Take for example the prevalence of unpaid work within the home (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Waring and Steinem, 1990; Waring, 1999). Since most of countries experienced lockdowns during some part of the pandemic, research showed that women's unpaid work within the home increased during COVID-19 (Bahn et al., 2020:696). However, this situation is not considered an important problem for policymakers in every country, and women's economic invisibility within the home has irremediably increased despite the fact that UN Women (2020) published a report highlighting the vulnerability of women in underdeveloped countries. In addition to that, a recent CNN poll conducted by Edwards-Levy et al. (2022) showed that an average of more than 60% of women living in G7 countries whose lives were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic say their governments did not provide them with much of the support they needed. It is critical to see women economically influenced by the pandemic in global aspects; even before the G-7 Summit 2020, UN-Women (2020) gender equality experts recommended key actions or COVID-19 response and recovery for G7 leaders. Consequently, it could be said that the financial results of COVID-19 influenced women globally and caused a rising risk to women's economic position and stability not only in the short run but also in the long run. One of the ways to overcome women's economic instability is governments' economic policies toward women or sectors which have high female workers representation. Different countries experience the economic instability of women at different levels and according to different dynamics, but the female economic vulnerability during the pandemic is claimed as a global phenomenon.

COVID-19 swiped the world at the beginning of 2020, and on April 7, 2020, the Japanese government declared *Kinkyū jitai sengen* (a state of emergency) under Article 32, paragraph 1 of the Act on Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020). As the outbreak de-

veloped, the Head of the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters issued the state of emergency four times between April 2020 to September 2021. Two stages of *Man'en bōshi-tō jūten sochi* (priority measures to prevent the spread of disease) from April 5, 2021, to Sept. 30 2021 and January 9, 2022, to March 21, 2022, are also be released to further strengthened the spread of the COVID-19. These two policies aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19 are specifically formulated to minimize its adverse effects on the economy. The state of emergency aims for the most severe infectious stage and is restricted in the scope of nation-wide prefectures by prefecture. The priority measures to prevent the spread of disease transferred the power to the prefectural governor and narrowed its scope within municipalities to control diseases in relatively minor stages (Sugimoto, 2021). Since the priority measures to prevent the spread of diseases were determined by the local government, there were no common regulations overall to define how to regulate the behavior of citizens. Declaring a state of emergency was a Japan-wide policy that specifically requested residents to not leave their homes except for emergency needs after 8 p.m. and to try and avoid crowded places. The government also requested businesses like museums, and sports centers to shut down their services; restaurants shortened their business hours from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. and refrained from providing alcohol after 8 p.m. The government did not impose lockdown measures on the entire country and residents could still travel freely (Disaster Prevention Information, 2021).

Japan, Human Security and SDGs

Human security is a concept that broadens the scope of security beyond military threats and encompasses economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (Persaud 2016). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10), are intrinsically linked to the notion of human security (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.). These goals emphasize the importance of ensuring that all individuals, especially vulnerable groups like women, have access to resources, opportunities, and protections necessary to lead dignified lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted human security, particularly in Japan, where women have faced heightened economic and social vulnerabilities. The crisis exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, leading to significant setbacks in achieving the SDGs. The section "Women and Crisis in Japan" highlights how the pandemic reinforced traditional gender roles and deepened economic insecurities for women, thus undermining their human security.

In Japan, the pandemic's impact on women is seen through increased economic instability, particularly among those in low-wage or part-time

jobs, which are predominantly held by women. The SDGs aim is to promote economic inclusion and equality, but the pandemic revealed how these goals remain distant for many women in Japan. Government social assistance programs have failed to adequately address the unique needs of women, particularly due to the patriarchal structure embedded in the Japanese family system. The "head of household" model used to distribute financial aid often left women without direct access to crucial resources, thus limiting their ability to secure their economic well-being.

This paper also discusses how the lack of gender-sensitive policies during the pandemic led to a continuation of the vulnerabilities faced by women. This situation conflicts directly with SDG 5, which seeks to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities for women in all areas of life. The failure to incorporate gender perspectives in policy-making during the crisis highlights the persistent challenges in achieving gender equality in Japan.

Moreover, the pandemic highlighted the critical need for health security, a key component of human security, as outlined in the SDGs. The economic and social disruptions caused by COVID-19 disproportionately affected women, particularly in accessing healthcare and social services. The increased burden of unpaid care work and the reduction in income due to job losses among women further compounded their vulnerability, making it difficult for them to recover from the crisis.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed significant gaps in the realization of human security and the SDGs, particularly concerning gender equality in Japan. The crisis has underscored the importance of integrating gender perspectives into all aspects of policy-making to ensure that women are not left behind in times of crisis. Achieving the SDGs requires a concerted effort to address these vulnerabilities, ensuring that women have equal access to resources, opportunities, and protections necessary for their security and well-being.

Market

As mentioned in previous sections, Japan shows high gender inequalities in various areas; not surprisingly, one of them is the wage gap between male and female workers facing the same labor load and responsibilities. According to Japan's Statistics Bureau 2022 yearbook and according to the Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare, 16 sectors ² are compared with regards

² The industries are 1-mining, 2-construction, 3-manufacturing, 4-electricity, gas, heat supply, and water, 5-information and communication, 6-transport and postal activities, 7-finance and insurance, 8-real estate, 9-scientific research, professional and technical services, 10-accommodations, 11-eating and drinking services, 12-living related perso-

to total monthly income based on gender. The average monthly earnings of male employers are 405,865¥. Conversely, the average female employer's monthly earnings are 218,981¥ (Statistics Bureau Japan, 2021a). Unfortunately, males are approximately two times more likely earned than females. It could be asked if the situation is limited with these 16 sectors chosen by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Another research on the gender wage gap was conducted by OECD (2021), and reported the gender wage gap in Japan to be 22.1 percent. This is an obvious disadvantage and discourages female employees in various industries for transiting to full-time employment. It caused more fragile economic stability for females in Japan, as they receive a lower income, even while working in the same position and industry as men.

An additional consequence of the unequal payment via gender, and family culture is that women's jobs are rooted in their family realities and responsibilities for household work and children (Wu, 2009). The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare publishes statistics regarding the number, age, and hourly scheduled income for female working part-time, categorized by the size of enterprise, and industry (Statistics Bureau Japan, 2021c). A noteworthy observation is that women in Japan continue to hold the majority of lower-earning, part-time positions, comprising 56 percent of such jobs (Inagaki, 2020). According to Kotera and Schmittmann (2022:22-23), part-time workers were disproportionately affected by employment outcomes because of COVID-19 in Japan, especially since women, young, and low-income workers account for a large share of part-timers. There are no specific data on male part-time workers in the official statistics. Although the part-time work reduction is small, the people who are working part-time are adversely influenced by wage decreases or job loss (Kotera and Schmittmann, 2022:10). The control and restrictions on individuals and businesses all lead to a downfall in employment, especially part-time jobs. Most restaurants and convenience stores hire part-time workers in order to lower the labor costs they face. In May 2021, over one million people suffered from unemployment due to the spread of COVID-19. A significant decrease in part-time jobs was observed in 46.8% of females and 47.9% of males. Also, 68.2% of females out of 2403 people did not receive support or benefits from the government, either because they decided not to apply for it, or they did not know about such policies (Nomura Research Institute, 2021). Although there are no significant differences in the proportion of unemployment between genders, the large number of non-regular employees reflects the operational structure of the Japanese system.

Data from the World Bank (2022) shows 44.4% of women were in the workforce. In addition to that, according to the Statistics Bureau of Japan (2021), the labour force status shows that in the population aged 15 years old and over, more than 19.5% of females are doing lower wage part-time jobs, while only 6% of males are engaging with non-regular employment (2021b). The traditional role of women in Japan is to raise children, which makes it difficult for them to maintain their future career paths. Furthermore, the number means men and women are equally participating in the workplace.

The reduction in working hours during the pandemic had a particularly pronounced impact on non-regular employees, predominantly affecting the female workforce. Although they continued to be counted as part of the labor force during this period, these workers were disproportionately affected by the contraction of the market. As a result, many were compelled to retreat from the workforce and return to traditional family roles, becoming direct victims of the shrinking economic landscape.

Family

The traditional family formation observed in Japanese society undoubtedly exerts a profound impact on the gender disparities that exist in the workplace (Nishitani and Kawaguchi, 2023). Japanese women's status is elevated in the global scenario while their personal development is halted due to unbalanced roles in the labor market and in the family (Marshall, 2017:272). The current Japanese *koseki* (family registry) is a system inherited from prewar times, customs, and ideologies that shows an inclination toward patriarchal orientation (North, 2009:23). Traced back to the Meiji era, Japan's gender role is strongly shaped by Confucianism. Women were expected to stay at home as "good" wives, as opposed to their husbands who should work outside the home to support living expenses (Belarmino and Roberts, 2019:273). Under these circumstances, married women, mainly if they have, or if they choose to have children, are anticipated to restrict their professional aspirations to areas that accommodate their fundamental position of caring (Dalton, 2017:13). People do not work voluntarily, and the capacity to manage "industrial waste" from the output side is limited. At the same time, the substantial burden of supporting the "family" outside the "market" largely falls on women, who express their dissatisfaction and protest against this unfair burden.

To sum up, because of unequal payment and the traditional family structure of Japan, Japanese women tend to work in part-time or low wage jobs. In COVID-19 circumstances; these two groups' employees experience more economical instability. The shrinking job market has led to a decrease in part-time employment opportunities, disproportionately affecting women. The pandemic also increased the demand for domestic labor, as more pati-

ents and extended periods of staying at home added to household responsibilities. As a result, women's roles have shifted increasingly toward family-oriented duties, reinforcing traditional gender roles within the household.

Japan and COVID-19 Policies

The Japanese government enacted a series of social assistance for supporting people who were facing economic and health issues due to the spread of COVID-19. From the beginning of the first state of emergency, the Japanese government decided to hand out a Special Cash Payment to its residents as compensation for restricting social movement and working commutes. Social assistance policies aimed to help people and decrease the disparity created due to the decrease in job opportunities as COVID-19 developed (Yamamoto et al., 2021:14), while it is worth scrutinizing the implied gender inequalities under the surface of the social atmosphere.

According to the "Survey Report on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Gender Equality" conducted by the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office in Japan (2020), 40.1% of women and 33.0% of men received some form of benefit, with the percentage of women being 7 percent higher. The most commonly received benefits for both genders were related to child-rearing, with 22.3% of women and 14.0% of men receiving such benefits, showing an 8-point difference. While the Special Cash Payment was not designed as a gender-specific policy—being available to anyone holding proof of residency in Japan—government data indicate minimal differences between women and men in terms of benefit receipt. The data suggest that the distribution of financial assistance was largely equitable across genders.

The data also lends evidence to the observation from the “market” and “family”. In the “market” sphere, over 30% of both employed men and women reported a decrease in individual annual income. This decline was more prevalent among non-regular employees compared to regular employees, and among women in non-regular employment, more than 50% reported that their individual income decreased. While in the “family” sphere, the division of household chores is 70% women / 30% men in households with a spouse, and in households with children under third grade of elementary school, the division of childcare is about 70% women / around 35% men.

In Japan, the pre-pandemic social structure already indicated a tendency for women to occupy lower-waged positions within the labor market, while placing greater emphasis on their roles within the family sphere. The onset of the pandemic exacerbated this situation, as the contraction of the labor market and the expansion of domestic responsibilities heightened the vulnerability of women's social positions. Due to the existing societal dynamics, women were more likely to lose their jobs and experience an increase in household responsibilities. Although the government advocates for human

security and the SDGs, with a particular emphasis on gender equality, its policies during the pandemic were not explicitly gender-focused, potentially overlooking the specific challenges faced by women.

Conclusion

This article analyzes Japanese social assistance in the context of COVID-19 pandemic from a gender perspective. In the framework of a pandemic that spread rapidly, the Japanese government implemented a series of policies to contain contagion. These policies had an impact on daily economic activities. The Japanese government provided financial assistance for the public to survive the epidemic. These policies and assistance were not gender specific, as a result, they did not reduce the economic gender equality between men and women and actually reflected the traditional thinking of Japanese society.

Gender roles in Japan have resulted in women being more financially vulnerable to the pandemic. As previously stated, since most female employees are involved in part-time jobs and some low wage jobs, their wages have a direct relationship with working hours. A series of government restrictions have reduced working hours of part-time jobs during the epidemic that influenced their incomes. Although the government has provided a series of financial subsidies to reduce the burden on people's lives, people have to apply themselves. Many women working part-time are unaware of these benefits, and as a result, they are not able to actually receive this governmental assistance.

The intersectional nature of these challenges is critical in understanding the broader impact of the pandemic on women in Japan. Women who are part-time workers, or employed in low-wage jobs faced unique and compounded vulnerabilities that were not adequately addressed by the government's one-size-fits-all approach. This highlights the importance of considering intersectionality in policy-making to ensure that all vulnerable groups receive the support they need.

Japan must adopt more gender-responsive policies that address the specific needs of women during crises. This includes reforms to the household registration system and targeted social assistance programmes. Moreover, Japan's response highlights the broader issue of how gender inequalities undermine human security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in times of crises.

In general, we argue that the Japanese government has actively responded to control the economic instability of the development of the epidemic and has provided various forms of social assistance for residents on this basis. But in reality, this assistance, although not gender-oriented, did not reduce the existing gender inequality in Japan. The division of roles in the house-

hold and salary instability of Japanese women in the context of COVID-19 led to greater economic vulnerability in general. The lack of gender perspectives on Japan's government assistance programs targeting economic instability caused the continuation of women's vulnerability in Japan during the pandemic.

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