

# How Parents' Current Work Status Affects Youth Preferences for Women's Work-Life Choices: Evidence from a Student Survey<sup>1</sup>

Kazunori Fujimoto<sup>†</sup>  
Masaaki Fuse<sup>‡</sup>  
Greg Mardyla<sup>§</sup>  
Yoshitomo Ogawa<sup>\*\*</sup>  
Shunichiro Sasaki<sup>††</sup>  
Shoko Yamane<sup>‡‡</sup>

## Abstract

The dynamics of female labor supply is a pressing issue for Japan as it is facing rapidly aging population. In this paper we use student survey data to examine stated preferences, and their potential causes, towards women's future work-life choices. We find that both women's and men's preferences are related to their parents' current employment status but via different channels and to differing degrees. A female student's preferences tend to follow her mother's work status but not her father's, while a male student's preferences tend to be affected by both his mother's and his father's work status but in opposite directions. Thus, male students tend to expect their future wives to engage in more market work if their mother currently works relatively more, but tend to prefer that their future wives work less if their father currently works relatively more. We also find that the parents' educational background has no significant effect on either male or female preferences.

JEL Classification: J12, J16, J22

Keywords: gender norms, female labor supply, role models, Japan

## 1. Introduction

Female labor market participation in Japan has lagged behind other OECD countries, if not in quantity than certainly in quality. Vast fraction of those Japanese women who do work are employed in 'non-regular' and part-time positions which offer limited social benefit coverage while often requiring commitment and effort above and beyond the hourly rate. Economic empowerment of women was heralded as the third pillar of "Abenomics" championed by the prime minister Abe from 2012. Whether Japanese women will in time become more empowered indeed depends to a large degree on the Japanese youth's perceptions and expectations regarding women's roles in society. Gaining more understanding of young Japanese women's and men's preferences toward their own (for women) as

---

<sup>1</sup> This research has benefited from financial support by the *Kindai University 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research & Development Fund* (21世紀研究開発奨励金).

<sup>†</sup> Kindai University. kfujimoto@bus.kindai.ac.jp

<sup>‡</sup> Kindai University. fuse@bus.kindai.ac.jp

<sup>§</sup> Kindai University. greg@kindai.ac.jp

<sup>\*\*</sup> Kwansei Gakuin University. eyh63990@kwansei.ac.jp

<sup>††</sup> Kindai University. ssasaki@kindai.ac.jp

<sup>‡‡</sup> The Papalaka Research Institute, Ltd. evidence8money@gmail.com

well as their future partner's (for men) desired life course could lead to meaningful insights and policy proposals.

In this paper we attempt to shed light on these issues by uncovering a potential source of preference for choosing a particular future life course by the Japanese youth. Using data from a large student survey we examine how female students' preferred own future life course as well as men's preferred life course for their future wives depend causally on the respondent's parents' current work situation.

We show that both women's and men's preferences are dependent on their parents current outside-of-household workload but via different channels and to differing degrees. The mother's market workload positively correlates with both women's and men's preferences – if their mother is currently working relatively longer hours, then female students plan to work more in the future and male students want their future wives to work more – and the effect is especially strong for women. On the other hand, the father's market workload is uncorrelated with women's preferences but significantly and negatively correlated men's preferences for their future wives' market workload.

## 2. Data and Results

Our data comes from a student survey we regularly conduct (since 2016) at Kindai University among undergraduates of Economics and Business Administration departments. The survey itself is quite comprehensive and covers various academic and lifestyle topics such as subjective well-being, satisfaction from university life, interests, family background, among many others. We implement the survey with Google Forms. It takes an average of about 8 minutes to respond and the responses are incentivized with a gift certificate lottery.

For the purposes of this paper we use mainly the responses data to a few questions as listed below.

- (i) Female students' preferences for future life course as it pertains to their outside-of-household market workload.
- (ii) Male students' preferences for their future wife/partner's life course as it pertains to their outside-of-household market workload.
- (iii) Student's parents' current market employment format.
- (iv) Student's parents' educational background.
- (v) Student's current part-time job dummy.

We started including all of the above questions since the fall semester 2020. We use data from the spring 2021 semester as well, giving us a total of 1868 male and 1018 female respondents. The survey questions (iii) and (iv) and all the responses thereto used for independent variables are described in the appendix. The main survey question of interest – (i) and (ii) – along with all the available responses, which will serve as our dependent variable, are described in Table 1. It is mirrored from the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research "The Fifteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey" (2016).

*Table 1: The life course survey question*

The Life Course Survey Question: "Desired Lifecourse Workload"		
女子学生の方にお伺いします：卒業後、あなたが最も望む人生はどのタイプですか？		
男子学生の方にお伺いします：卒業後、結婚相手としてどのタイプの女性を最も望みますか？		
Available Responses	Designations	Level
就職して数年後、結婚あるいは出産の機会に退職し、その後を仕事をもたない	quit-shufu	1
就職して数年後、結婚あるいは出産の機会に退職し、子育て後に再び仕事を持つ	quit-ryoritsu	2
結婚し子供を持つが、仕事も一生続ける	ryoritsu	3
結婚するが子供は持たず、仕事を一生続ける	shigoto_kekkon_nokids	4
結婚せず、仕事を一生続ける	shigoto_nokekkon	5

## 2.1. Distribution of Responses

In Figure 1 below we report the distribution of responses to our main question of interest, for both female and male respondents. The fractions above the bars in the figure represent proportions of chosen options.

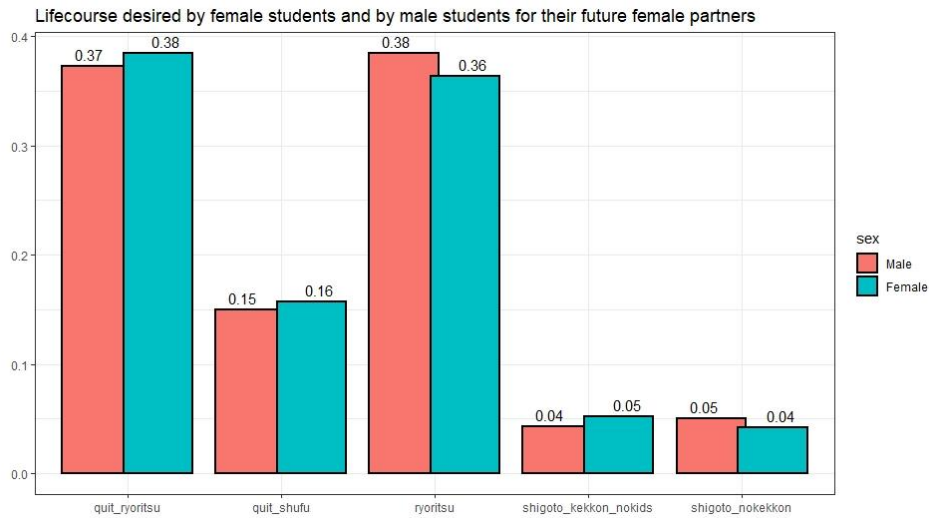


Figure 1: Preferred life course

We note how remarkably close to each other the female and male proportions of every chosen response option are. This observation makes the question of how those preferences are formed all the more interesting.

## 2.2. Preferred Life Course and Parents' Workload

It is conceivable that students might see both their mothers and fathers as role models for their own (their future wife's in case of male students) future careers. If that is indeed the case, a cause-and-effect relationship exists between a parent's current work situation and their child's preferences for their own future family and work. We thus first check how both parents' current work situation combined affects students' preferences for future employment.

We observe that for female students only parents' combined workload significantly affects future life course preferences. The regression lines in Figure 2 presuppose a linear relationship between the variables, which may not reflect the reality of the problem accurately. Results of ordinal logistic regressions reported below confirm that the positive relationship observed in the figure is also significant for male students, albeit the effect is smaller than for female students.

As reported in Table 2, the parents' (combined) educational background has no significant effect on either male or female preferences. We note, however, that female students who do work part-time are significantly less likely to opt for a heavier workload path in the future, compared to those who do not work part-time.

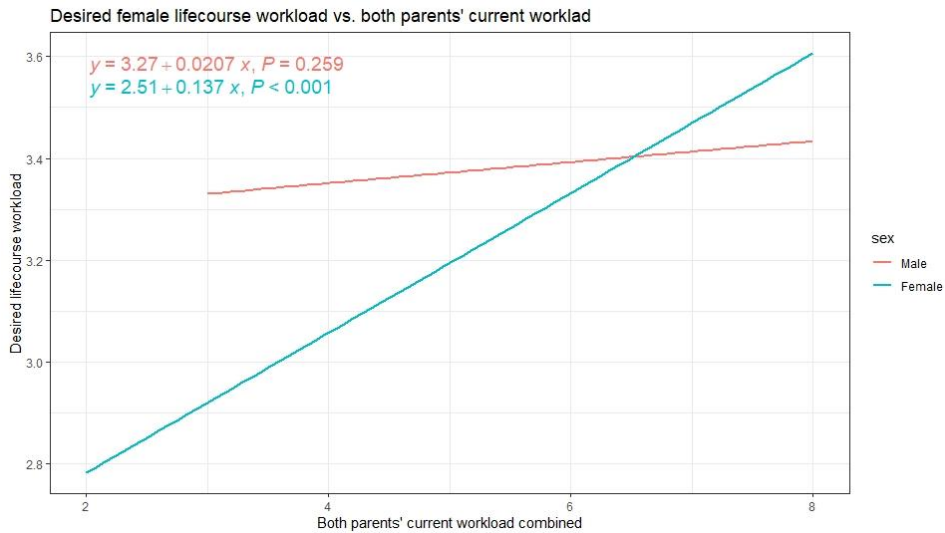


Figure 2: Preferred life course and both parents' combined workload

Table 2: Regression results on life course preferences vs parents' combined workload

Female				Male			
Coef.	Value	S.E.	t	Coef.	Value	S.E.	t
ryoshin_workload	0.30106	0.05584	5.3917	ryoshin_workload	0.0945	0.04164	2.2694
ryoshin_gakureki	-0.03812	0.04228	-0.9016	ryoshin_gakureki	0.01166	0.0312	0.3736
baito	-0.41665	0.14667	-2.8407	baito	-0.11741	0.10072	-1.1657
Residual DoF = 851				Residual DoF = 1539			
Intercept	Value	S.E.	t	Intercept	Value	S.E.	t
1 2	-0.3133	0.4669	-0.6711	1 2	-1.251	0.3549	-3.5247
2 3	1.5796	0.4715	3.3504	2 3	0.7136	0.3534	2.0192
3 4	3.7874	0.4871	7.7746	3 4	3.0134	0.3637	8.2844

Next, we break down the above into an individual parent's influences over their daughter/son's preferences.

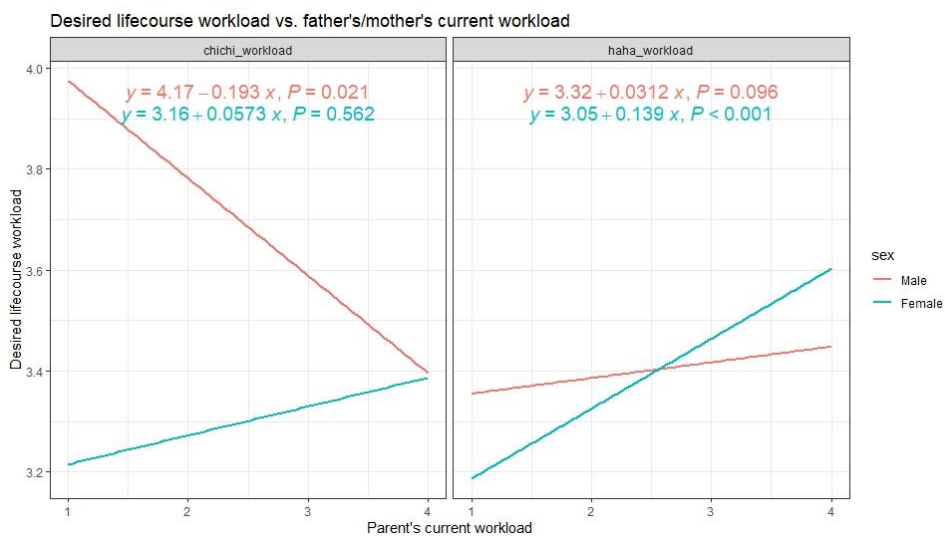


Figure 3: Preferred life course and each parent's workload

The regression lines in Figure 3, confirmed by ordinal logistic regression results in Table 3, point to an evident asymmetry between the influence either parent exerts on their son/daughter's preferences regarding their future household work-life situation. The mother appears to be a role model for both male and female respondents, though the effect is much stronger for female respondents. This is in line with the results for parents' combined workload reported above. The father's employment status and thus workload, on the other hand, appears to only affect male respondents' preferences in the direction opposite to the mother's influence.

*Table 3: Regression results on life course preferences vs each parent's workload*

Female				Male			
Coef.	Value	S.E.	t	Coef.	Value	S.E.	t
chichi_workload	0.2007	0.21634	0.9278	chichi_workload	-0.4052	0.19527	-2.075
haha_workload	0.3308	0.05566	5.9435	haha_workload	0.1015	0.04138	2.453
Residual DoF = 893				Residual DoF = 1624			
Intercept	Value	S.E.	t	Intercept	Value	S.E.	t
1 2	-0.0944	0.8752	-0.1079	1 2	-3.1477	0.7864	-4.0026
2 3	1.8207	0.8779	2.0739	2 3	-1.2424	0.7841	-1.5844
3 4	3.9585	0.886	4.468	3 4	1.0687	0.7844	1.3624

### 3. Discussion

The dynamics of female labor force participation is a pressing issue in many countries that face aging population and shrinking labor force base. When combined with long-established social norms and traditional gender roles, it becomes particularly important. This is exactly the sort of dilemma Japan is facing currently. On the one hand, women are encouraged to pursue full-time career paths and to compete with men in the labor market. On the other though, traditional gender stereotypes are still pervasive and undermine the ambitions and capabilities of Japanese women.

Our work adds to the empirical studies of Kawaguchi and Miyazaki (2009) and, more recently, Rodríguez-Planas and Tanaka (2021). Kawaguchi and Miyazaki (2009) test a theoretical model by Fernandez et al. (2004), in which men raised by full-time working mothers tend to have full-time working wives, and using the Japanese General Social Surveys data find that while men raised by full-time working mothers do not tend to have full-time working wives, they do tend to disagree with statements regarding traditional gender roles. Rodríguez-Planas and Tanaka (2021), using the National Family Research of Japan Survey data, focus on the effect of (non-) traditional gender roles on Japanese women's decisions to work. They report that as more women hold non-traditional gender role beliefs, more Japanese women decide to work full-time.

In this paper we take a slightly different approach and attempt to gain insight into this problem by directly asking the Japanese young about their preferences regarding the issue and try to figure out if and how these preferences are shaped by the parents' current work status. Both the father and the mother can be considered to be role models in this regard for their sons and daughters. Our findings suggest this is indeed the case. However, our findings also suggest that the influence parents exert on their children's future work-life preferences is not that clear-cut. A daughter's preferences tend to follow her mother's work status but not her father's, while a son's preferences tend to be affected by both his mother's and his father's work status but in opposite directions. Thus, male students tend to expect their future wives to engage in relatively more market work if their mother currently works relatively more, but tend to prefer that their future wives work relatively less if their father currently works more. In future research we hope to extend our admittedly limited sample to a wider range of respondent environments as well as to further investigate possible clues into the intricate landscape of work-life preference formation.

## References

1. Fernandez, R., A. Fogli, and C. Olivetti, 2004, Mothers and sons: preference formation and female labor force dynamics, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 119(4), 1249-1299.
2. Kawaguchi, D. and J. Miyazaki, 2009, Working mothers and sons' preferences regarding female labor supply: direct evidence from stated preferences, *Journal of Population Economics* 22(1), 115-130.
3. 国立社会保障・人口問題研究所, 2016. 第15回出生動向基本調査(結婚と出産に関する全国調査) [http://www.ipss.go.jp/ps-doukou/j/doukou15/doukou15\\_gaiyo.asp](http://www.ipss.go.jp/ps-doukou/j/doukou15/doukou15_gaiyo.asp)
4. Rodríguez-Planas, N. and R. Tanaka, 2021, Gender Norms and Women's Decision to Work: Evidence from Japan, IZA Institute of Labor Economics DP No. 14549.

## Appendix: Survey Questions

Respondent's Parents' Employment Status ("ryoshin_workload")		
あなたの父親の就業形態を教えてください。 / あなたの母親の就業形態を教えてください。		
Available Responses	Designations	Level
正社員	seishain	4
派遣・契約社員	haken	3
パート・アルバイト	parttime	2
自営業・家族従業	jieigyō	4
専業主夫	shufu	1
無職	mushoku	1
その他	-	-

Respondent's Parent's Educational Background ("rhoshin_gakureki")		
あなたの父親の最終学歴を教えてください。 / あなたの母親の最終学歴を教えてください。		
Available Responses	Designations	Level
中学校卒業	chu	1
高等学校卒業	kou	2
専門学校・短期大学卒業	senmon	3
大学・大学院卒業	daigaku	4
分からない	-	-