

EDITORIAL

Japan's salary gap

White Day was celebrated March 14, but along with giving cookies and chocolates, men might have done better to give women the one-third of their salaries they are missing. According to new data, Japanese women are paid 33 percent less than men. A recent report on average salary gaps from the International Trade Union Confederation revealed that gender differences in salary persist, with Japan's gap one of the largest.

The study showed that among world economies, Japan's male-female pay disparity edges out even Asian neighbors, South Korea and China, and is double the world average. Japan often compares itself to the West in many regards, but the average pay gap of 14 percent in Europe and 22 percent in the U.S. betters Japan's by double digits. The continued wage difference in Japan would buy a lot of Valentine's Day chocolate.

Economic inequality continues for many reasons. Educational levels have become higher for women, with 33 percent of women advancing to university. However, compared to 47 percent of men who go to college, higher education has not yet become an entirely equalizing proposition. Once working, seniority systems at most companies, especially large-scale ones, ensure that men are promoted more often and receive extra allowances for dependents and housing. These fringe benefits, including higher bonuses, are often significantly less for women. Even more importantly, women make up over two-thirds of all part-time workers, where benefits are minimal or simply nonexistent.

Japan's economy has gone through many changes

over the last decade, but gender-equal pay scales is not yet one of them. Women resigning their jobs for reasons of marriage, childbirth or childcare is a worn-out excuse for what is clearly continued discrimination against women in the workplace.

In 2000, the Cabinet adopted the "Basic Plan for Gender Equality" while a bureaucratic restructuring established the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet Office. However, eight years later, even with women making up 40 percent of all paid employees, genuine improvements are shamefully minimal. A gender-equal society should be a source of pride and self-respect for any nation, but in Japan, it remains a goal not yet accomplished.

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