

## 10. 'Abuse of Love' and Gender Pay Gap

ONISHI Sachiyo

Now that Valentine's Day is drawing near, store shelves are filling up with a wide range of tasty chocolate. In recent years, both women and men have been buying whatever chocolate they like for themselves as a reward for their own hard work. Although there are many Japanese-style confectionery stores in my neighbourhood, there are also quite a few stylish chocolate shops. I enjoy this festive mood each year, within the limits of my budget.

Occupations are important for people not only to make a living but also to achieve self-fulfilment, realise their potential and play a role in society. It is essential for both women and men to earn a good wage for the jobs they do and the hours worked, if we are to lead a healthy life both physically and mentally. The advancement of women has to be accompanied by an increase in women's wages and the elimination of gender pay gap. Would we get many 'likes' if we called for 'sufficient power and wages for women to buy whatever chocolate they like'? Or, would we have to give priority to dieting?

Many companies across the globe have taken the initiative in ensuring equal pay for equal work. In the United Kingdom, the government has been working with businesses to eliminate male-female wage discrepancies under the Equality Act 2010. In view of the slow progress, however, in December 2016 the government launched a website<sup>1</sup> that provides industry-specific data on gender pay gap. This revealed that construction site supervision is the most gender-discriminating occupation, with a discrepancy of 45.4% (i.e. women earn only 54.6% compared with their male colleagues).

In addition, the Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations, adopted under the Act, will require some 8,000 firms to publish and 'make visible' four gender-specific data sets, effective from April 2017. The four data sets include: (1) mean rate of pay; (2)

median rate of pay (both of which are intended to identify the distribution of female and male employees in the lower and higher wage brackets within the firm); (3) proportion of male and female employees according to pay bands (designed to identify the areas where the advancement of women is stalling); and (4) gender bonus gap.

The gender pay gap in the UK has shrunk considerably, dropping from 27.5% in 1997 to 18.1%<sup>2</sup> in 2016. Indeed, annual earnings rose 54% for men and 70% for women between 1999 and 2016.<sup>3</sup> According to the government's analysis, however, wage inequality remains significant because of the greater burden of housework on women, effectively curtailing their paid working hours and preventing them from using their skills, from being promoted, or from fulfilling their potential at work.

Closing the gender pay gap was identified as one of the top priorities in promoting the national economic growth strategy, as well as business opportunities for firms, as it is estimated that the gross domestic product (GDP) will increase by £150 billion (about ¥210 trillion) by 2025, creating 840,000 jobs for women, if their wages come to fully reflect their performance. Committed efforts in Japan would have an even greater impact, given that the gender pay gap currently stands at 27.8%.<sup>4</sup>

Szégyen a futás, de hasznos ('Running is a shame, but useful'), a blockbuster TV drama aired in the autumn of 2016, depicted various styles of love and work. It included the line: "Housework is an 'abuse of love' – When you do it for someone else, you get paid, but when you do it for your husband, you get no money."

Japan faces serious labour issues including long working hours and unpaid overtime. A business model based on the abuse of 'love for work' or 'love for the company' among employees is not sustainable. I hope that 2017 will be the year when 'love' is correctly rewarded both at work and at home.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-website-reveals-gender-pay-gap-by-profession>

<sup>2</sup> <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-gender-pay-gap-what-is-it-and-what-affects-it/>

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2016 provisional results.

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet Office, White Paper on Gender Equality in Japan, 2016.