

The relationship among work–life integration, resource enrichment, and well-being in Japanese workers

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1. Introduction

The current working style has changed rapidly with the spread of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19). After the urgent introduction of telework, staggered hours, and flextime systems, practical challenges have become apparent, for example, the difficulties of working at home while taking care of children and family. On the other hand, the introduction of such flexible working methods has drawn attention to positive aspects that lead to the promotion of work–life balance as well as the positive aspects of having multiple roles.

The adaptive function of multiple roles, such as worker, father, mother, resident, student, etc., is referred to as “resource enrichment.” Resource enrichment suggests that a person playing many roles facilitates the acquisition of an abundance of resources and enhances physical and mental health. Meanwhile, the depletion function of multiple roles is referred to as resource depletion. Resource depletion assumes that when a person plays many roles, it consumes time and energy while impairing physical and mental health.

With the promotion of telework and other flexible styles of working, the boundaries between people's work life and personal life are gradually being blurred.

Furthermore, opportunities to simultaneously take on multiple roles, such as work and family roles, are increasing.

A concept related to these new ways of working and living is work–life integration (WLI). It is one step beyond work–life balance, a concept that aims to integrate work and private life with a high level of flexibility and fluidity and to achieve synergy through the fluid management of work and personal life areas to increase productivity and growth while achieving quality of life and a sense of fulfillment and happiness (Keizaidooyukai, 2008). Whereas work–life balance promotes separation consideration of work and private life, work–life integration unifies the two. The need to deal with the virtuous cycle of each domain and role will possibly be even greater in the future.

Based on the above discussion, this study investigates three psychosocial issues in Japanese workers: First, we compare flexible work use before and after the spread of COVID-19. Second, we examine differences in mental health between those who do and do not use flexible working arrangements currently, including gender-based differences. Finally, we examine the relationship between WLI coping, resource enrichment, and depletion associated with taking on multiple roles and with well-being.

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2. Methods

Participants and Procedure

Men and women ($n=439$) currently working at an online research company and aged between 25 and 59 years were asked to complete a survey. When conducting the survey, we explained in an online document that participation was voluntary and that privacy would be ensured when handling personal information. If participants gave consent, we proceeded with the survey. Accordingly, all 439 individuals agreed to participate and provided responses. Excluding those with missing information, 414 respondents (204 males, 210 females, mean age 41.07 ± 10.41 years) were used in the final analysis. The survey was conducted from July 20 to 27, 2020.

Measures

1) WLI coping checklist: Eleven items from Yazawa et al. (2018) were used, including "Collaboration and share plans with family members" and "Talking about work with family and friends".

2) Resource enrichment: The resource enrichment scale (Kirchmeyer, 1992) consists of questions investigating the beneficial functioning of the out-of-work domain. Ota (2006) extracted three items on status security and three on status enhancement.

3) Resource depletion: The resource depletion scale (Kirchmeyer, 1993) consists of items enquiring about conflicts and difficulties that arise between work and non-work tasks. Four items were selected (Ota, 2006).

4) Mental health: Using five items of the WHO-5 Mental Health Status Chart (Awata et al., 2007), respondents were asked about their status in the last two weeks. This scale was used to assess well-being.

5) Working style: Flexible working style was implemented before and during the spread of COVID-19.

6) Demographic information: age and sex.

3. Results

The results show that the percentage of those using flexible work systems increased from 35% before the COVID-19 crisis to 45% after. We conducted a chi-square test to determine the gender of those who did or did not engage in flexible work before and after the spread of COVID-19 (Table 1). The results showed no significant difference between the pre-expanding ($\chi^2(1) = .54, n.s.$) and current ($\chi^2(1) = .32, n.s.$) populations.

Table 1 Cross-tabulation table on the implementation of flexible working

	Flexible work styles	Men	Women	Sum
Before the spread of COVID-19	Existence	75 (18%)	70 (17%)	145 (35%)
	None	129 (31%)	140 (34%)	269 (65%)
Since the spread of COVID-19	Existence	94 (23%)	91 (22%)	185 (45%)
	None	110 (26%)	119 (29%)	229 (55%)
	Sum	204 (49%)	210 (51%)	414 (100%)

Then, we conducted a correlation analysis of WLI coping scores and WHO-5 scores. There was a moderately positive correlation between enrichment and WHO-5, but a weak negative correlation between depletion and WHO-5 (Table 2).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelation

	Mean	SD	WHO-5
WLI	25.70	6.56	.42 **
status security	9.43	2.54	.46 **
status enhancement	10.41	2.48	.38 **
resource depletion	12.74	3.07	-.12 *
WHO-5	16.37	5.42	

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

SD : standard deviation

We also conducted a two-way analysis of variance for the WLI coping scores, using flexible working style and gender as factors. The results show that the main effects were significant for working style ($F = 22.91$, $p < .01$, $\eta p^2 = .05$) and gender ($F = 7.30$, $p < .01$, $\eta p^2 = .02$). WLI coping scores were found to be higher in the flexible work group and in women compared to men (both $p < .01$). A similar analysis of WHO-5 scores revealed that the main effect tended to be significant in the presence or absence of flexible working practices ($F = 3.40$, $p < .10$, $\eta p^2 = .01$), and the WHO-5 scores were higher in the group with flexible working than in the group without flexible working and in men than in women (both $p < .01$).

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses showed that while sex was not significant, WLI coping and resource enrichment positively affected well-being. In contrast, resource depletion impacted well-being negatively (Table 3).

Table 3 Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis for WHO-5

	Step1	Step2	Step3
Step1			
sex	-.38	-.98 *	-.80 +
Step2			
WLI		.36 **	.25 **
Step3			
status security			.62 **
status enhancement			.30 *
resource depletion			-.41 **
R^2	.00	.19 **	.35 **
ΔR^2	.00	.19 **	.16 **

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

Values are non-standardized coefficients

4. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that flexible working patterns have increased due to COVID-19, but not as much as Japanese workers would want. Previous reports indicate that more than 60% of Japanese workers want to continue teleworking even after the end of the COVID-19 crisis (Japan Productivity Center, 2020), and therefore, the promotion and maintenance of flexible working methods will probably increase in the future. It can be speculated that the working style of Japanese workers is at a major turning point.

Although WLI and resource enrichment had a positive impact on the well-being of Japanese workers, resource depletion had a negative impact. It is conceivable that workers' access to flexible work arrangements may promote well-being. However, simply introducing and implementing flexible working practices is insufficient. The factors that lead to a decline in workers' mental health need to be examined in detail. Further research is needed to determine how to effectively deal with WLI in order to improve worker's mental health by creating an environment for the introduction of flexible working patterns in the future.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of this study could be useful in designing interventions to enhance skills associated with WLI and flexible thinking styles, including multiple roles, in order to promote well-being.

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