

## An Analysis of Changing Pattern of Female Participation in the Workforce of Japan (2005-2015)

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**Abstract:** In Japan, female's participation in the workforce has not progressed as much as that in other developed countries. It always remained below 50%. The age-group specific labor force participation rate is highest in the age group 25-29. Female workers are not evenly distributed in every sector. Most of female workers work in clerical related, services or sales sector. There is very low percentage of females in the administrative and managerial posts. Companies don't want to promote females to higher posts. Women mostly work as part-time worker on contract basis. In Japan, the employment pattern of females changes throughout their lives. In the beginning maximum females join the work force as regular employee. But with increasing age, the percentage of regular female employee decreases while non-regular employee increases. Regular female employees leave their job when they got married and give birth to their first child. Later they join the work force when their children grow up but as non-regular workers. The government of Japan needs to be careful about its female labor force. Because, during the phase of declining and aging population, females are the only hope of Japan to maintain its economic growth.

**Keywords:** Female Labour, Economic Development, GDP, Fertility Rate, Population Pyramid.

### INTRODUCTION

Females historically played an important role as agricultural workers in Japan. With the beginning of industrialization in the Meiji period (1868-1912), females entered the labor force as factory operatives, particularly in light industry. The typical female manufacturing worker was in the textile and was employed only on a temporary basis. As heavy industry expanded during the early twentieth century, over two-third of female workers were employed in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry, and fishing), another 18 percent in the secondary sector (mining, construction, and manufacturing), and 15 percent in the tertiary sector (sales, finance, insurance, services etc) [1].

Before First World War, Japanese women held part-time jobs in the cities and the countryside. There was steep increase of Japanese women in the workforce after 1950. At that time, the only possibility for a young women looking for white-collar office work was to become an "office lady" or secretary. She was expected to "cater to the needs of men". Japanese women could work only for few years before getting married and after having a child they become professional house wives. During the 1970s, there was a shift toward the professionalization of the housewife. After 1973 oil crisis, Japanese industries began to restructure, shifting to software and services. Heavy industries were now declining, replaced by light industries such as banking

and finance, and the Japanese economy entered the post industrial age. This shift opened up new opportunities for women through part-time jobs. In the 1980s the full-time housewife pattern began falling apart as women stayed in their jobs even after marriage and childbirth. The 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law was intended to support women's full-time employment in the workforce and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women [2].

With the collapse of Japanese economy, the lost decade of the 1990s was labeled as a hopeless period in Japanese history. The unemployment rate ran high and job openings were scarcer than ever. The economic recession, coupled with neoliberal policies has been largely negative for men but positive for women. At that time prospects for men were disappearing and university educated women went on to establish career rivaling those of men. During the early twenty-first century companies and mass media of Japan began to encourage women to attempt careers, as they might provide the necessary boost to stimulate the sick economy.

In Japan, female's participation in the workforce has not progressed as much as that in other developed countries. According to Global Gender Gap Report, Japan ranks 105<sup>th</sup> among 136 countries. About half of Japan's women do not work. This is a big

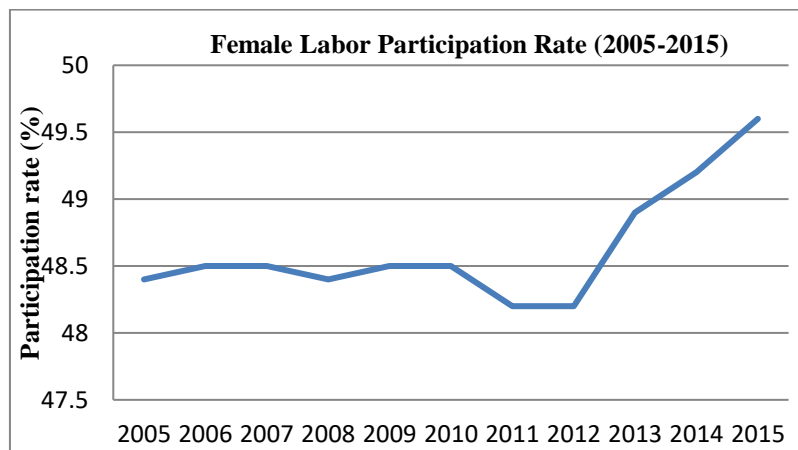
disadvantageous situation compared to other developed countries. There exists substantial scope of increasing the participation of Japanese female in economic activity. Higher level of female participation would solve the problem of labor shortage. Japan is going through a difficult phase of aging population and declining birth rate. It is only females who can take Japan out of its problem of declining population and decade long deflation.

**Female labor participation rate in japan**

We know that Japan is considered as an aging population country. According to population projection of Japan about 40% of total population will be 65 years old by 2060. So participation of females in the labor force will be very important in Japan [3]. The female labor participation rate refers to the percentage of total female population older than 15 years who are

economically active. According to U.S. Bureau of Statistics data 2012, female labor participation rate of Japan is 47.7 (Table 1). It is much lower compared to other developed countries. So there is room for females to fulfill their potential.

The female labor participation rate between 2005 and 2010 remained between 48% and 48.5%. There were slight ups and downs in the trend. But after 2012 it has increased steadily and reached 49.6% in 2015. It is assumed that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “Womenomics” strategy lying behind this sudden increase. Abe administration encouraging females to join the workforce since 2012 by providing facilities like extended child care leave and expanded public day care facilities so that they can work without much worries.



**Fig-1: Female Labor Participation Rate in Japan, 2005-2015**

Japanese society is traditional and conservative in nature. In Japan, it is still expected that females should stay at home as housewives after their marriage. They should take care of family rather than taking a job. So a large percentage of females leave their job when they get married and start family life. They engage in

child rearing and family responsibilities for decades. They again join the workforce when their children grow up and starts going to school. So the percentage of female labor participation starts increasing in the age group of 40-44.

**Table-1: Female labor participation for different age group**

AGE	Participation Rate										
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
15-19	16.5	16.6	16.2	16.2	16.2	15.9	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.7	16.8
20-24	69.8	70.1	69.5	69.7	70.2	69.4	69.2	68.7	70.3	69.4	68.5
25-29	74.9	75.7	75.8	76.1	77.2	77.1	77.0	77.6	79.0	79.3	80.3
30-34	62.7	62.8	64.0	65.1	67.2	67.8	67.5	68.6	70.1	71.0	71.2
35-39	63.0	63.6	64.3	64.9	65.5	66.2	67.0	67.7	69.6	70.8	71.8
40-44	71.0	71.4	72.0	71.1	71.7	71.6	71.2	71.7	73.1	74.3	74.8
45-49	73.9	74.0	75.6	75.5	75.3	75.8	75.7	75.7	76.1	76.8	77.5
50-54	68.8	70.5	70.8	71.6	72.5	72.8	72.6	73.4	74.9	75.7	76.3
55-59	60.0	60.3	60.8	61.6	62.5	63.3	64.0	64.6	66.5	67.9	69.0
60-64	40.1	40.2	42.2	43.6	44.6	45.7	45.7	45.8	47.4	48.7	50.6
65 and above	12.7	13.0	12.9	13.1	13.1	13.3	13.2	13.4	13.8	14.5	15.3
Total	48.4	48.5	48.5	48.4	48.5	48.5	48.2	48.2	48.9	49.2	49.6

Source: Statistics Bureau, Govt. of Japan, 2016

The age-group specific labor force participation rates from 2005 to 2015 are summarized in the Table 1. The figures show that female participation increases sharply from the age group 15-19 to 20-24 and reaches its peak in the age group 25-29. The reason behind this sharp increase is that a huge number of new graduates join their first job. There is slight decrease of participation in the age group 30-34 and 35-39. In the age group 40-44, female labor participation again starts increasing because of re-entry of mothers in the workforce and continues to increase up to age-group 45-49. From age group 50-54 it again starts decreasing and continues onward.

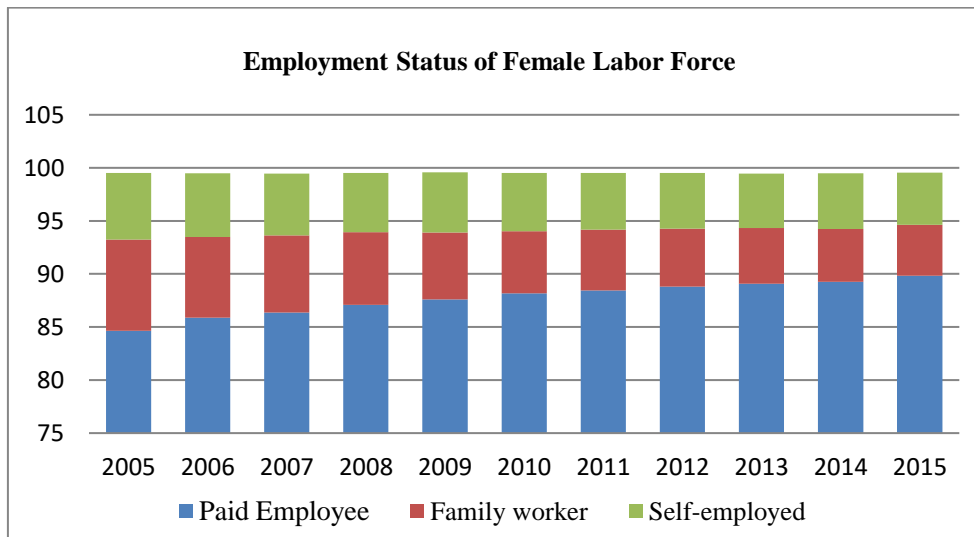
**Employment status of female labors**

Before Meiji period, females in Japan usually worked as agricultural workers and their work place limited to their families only. During Meiji period, as industrialization began, females started working as industrial labors. In the beginning they employed in textile industries on temporary basis. In most cases,

employment was governed by a contract signed between the employer and the women’s father or brother. With the expansion of heavy industry, a high share of female labors entered in manufacturing and service sector. Now women work as fulltime as well as part-time worker. Nowadays women in Japan run their own business i.e. presently they are self employed also.

Female labor force in Japan is divided into three categories viz. paid employee, self-employed, and family worker. Paid employees are those who are hired to perform a job. Self-employed are work for themselves, like business man or employer. Family workers work for their family without any payment.

It is observed from the employment status data for 2005 to 2015 that there is a change in the scenario. This is shown with the help of bar graph. We can see from the figure 2 that percentage of paid female employee is gradually increasing. It has increased from 84.65 in 2005 to 89.83 in 2015.



**Fig-2: Employment status of female labor force in Japan**

Percentage of family worker in 2015 has declined almost half (4.79) of what it was in 2005 (8.58). In the self-employed category, a very little change has been observed during the period. So it is clear that more and more females are participating in the labor force rather than working as a family worker.

**Occupational structure of female labor force**

Occupational structure refers to the distribution of workers in different sectors. There are various industrial sectors like managerial, clerical, sales, services, transport, manufacturing work where women work. The participation of females in these sectors is different. A huge transformation has been occurred in the occupational structure of women in Japan. Japanese women traditionally have worked as family enterprise workers. Now the situation has changed. Nearly two

third of the family enterprise workers are now involved in service and manufacturing work.

There are a higher percentage of females in services, skilled manufacturing and unskilled occupations. Japanese women have not made greater inroads into white collar jobs [4]. There is a general cultural ‘lag’ in Japanese clerical work. Women only occupy about one third of the clerical job in the country. Whereas in other developed country, maximum clerical related jobs are occupied by females. It has been seen that there is very few number of females in the administrative and managerial posts in Japan [5]. There are various factors behind this. Majority of companies thinks that females are mainly short-time workers and they cannot handle such important positions. Secondly, females leave their job when they got married. When they rejoin their job after a gap of few years, they held lower post rather than managerial post. Private

companies don't want to promote females to managerial post. They hire young, single women with the expectation that they will "retire" into marriage and motherhood within a few years without being promoted

to higher rank. There is social taboo also in Japan. Families traditionally encourage women to get the type and level of education that will help them to marry managers, rather than to become managers themselves.

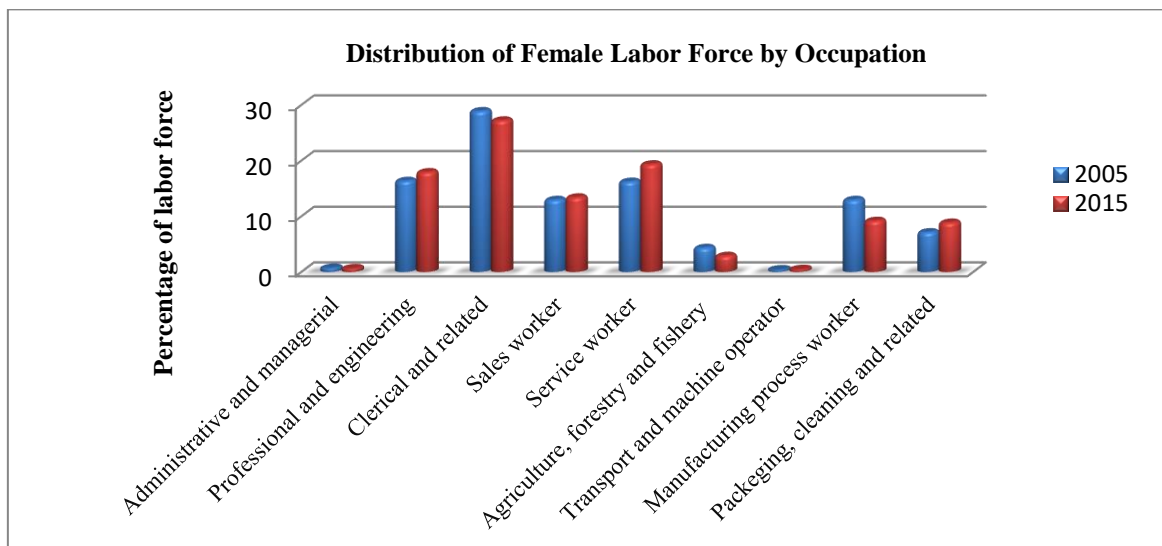
**Table-2: Distribution of female labor force by occupational structure**

Occupations	Percentage of labor force			
	2000	2005	2010	2015
Administrative and managerial	0.72	0.72	0.64	0.65
Professional and engineering	14.94	16.37	17.78	17.93
Clerical and related	29.55	28.90	29.41	27.23
Sales workers	12.97	12.95	12.45	13.40
Service workers	14.41	16.22	17.60	19.34
Agriculture, forestry and fishery workers	5.28	4.33	3.63	2.90
Transport and machine operation	0.41	0.42	0.45	0.49
Manufacturing process workers	15.78	12.95	11.01	9.19
Other laborer (carrying, cleaning, packaging and related workers)	5.94	7.14	7.03	8.87

Source: Statistics Bureau, Govt. of Japan, 2016

The percentage of females in unskilled or lower-level manual occupations in Japan is overwhelming compared to other developed countries. A unique characteristics of Japanese women workers is the higher proportion of married women employed in the manufacturing as part-time workers which dominates the overall trend of women's labor force participation. The distribution of female workers by occupational categories is given in table 2. A comparative analysis of participation of females in different category for 2005 and 2015 is shown in figure 3.

In 2005, the highest proportion of female labor force was in clerical and related work (28.90). Next to it was service workers which accounted for 16.22 of total female labor force. Then comes sales worker category comprising 12.95 percent of all female workers. It is notable that a very negligible percentage of female workers were in transport & machine operation (0.42) and administrative & managerial post (0.72).



**Fig-3: Distribution of female labor by occupation**

In 2015, there is slight change in every category but the noticeable change observed in Service worker, manufacturing process worker and agriculture, forestry & fishery workers. There is a decreasing trend of female participation agriculture, forestry, fishery and manufacturing process work. Contrary to this, the proportion of females is gradually increasing in service, sales, professional and engineering category. This

indicates the fact that occupational preference of female is moving from agriculture and industrial sector to service sector.

**Employment pattern**

There are two types of employee - 1) Regular and 2) Non-regular. Regular employees are full-time workers who are employed more than a year.

Non-regular employees are temporary or part-time workers. In Japan, the employment pattern of females changes throughout their lives. In the beginning maximum females join the work force as regular employee. But with increasing age, the percentage of regular female employee decreases while non-regular employee increases [6]. Regular female employees leave their job when they got married and give birth to

their first child. Later they join the work force when their children grow up but as non-regular workers [7].

The employment pattern of females in Japan has been shown here with the help of line graph. The blue line shows regular employment pattern and the red line shows non-regular employment pattern.

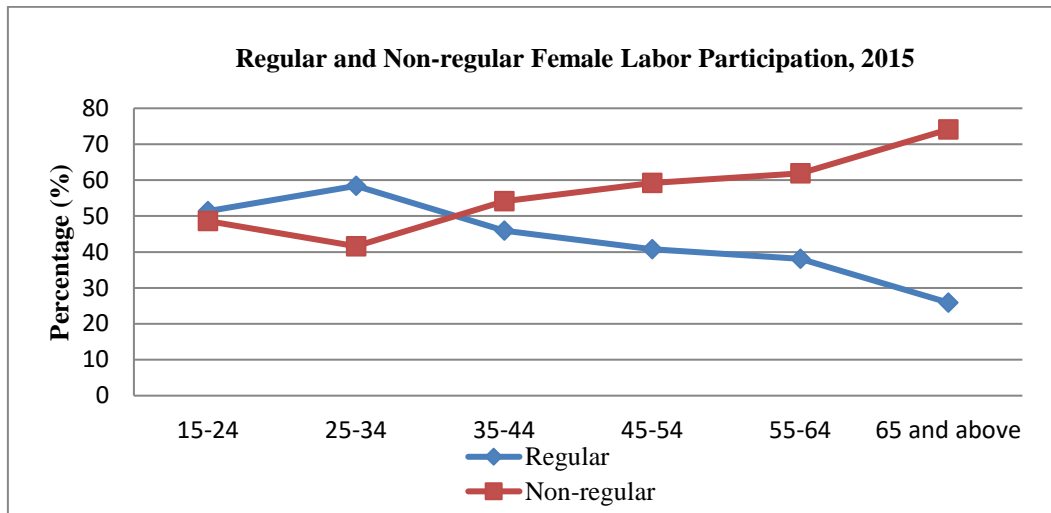


Fig-4: Employment pattern of female labor force in Japan, 2015

From the figure it is clear that in the age-group 15-24, the regular and non-regular participation of female labor is almost equal. In the age-group 25-34, the participation of regular female labors increases and reaches the highest level while non-regular participation reaches its minimum. From the age group 35-44 onward there is continuous increase of non-regular workers and reaches 74.1% at the age group 65 and above. Contrary to this, participation of regular workers gradually decreases and reaches 25.9% at the age-group 65 and above.

**Labor force participation and level of education**

The labor market of Japan is highly differentiated by education. Total labor force is divided into three categories based on level of education, viz. 1) Primary school, junior or senior high school, 2) Junior college, and 3) College or university including graduate school. It has been seen that labor force participation of women in Japan do not affected by their educational qualifications i.e. there is no positive relationship between female labor participation and female’s education in Japan. This relationship has contributed to lowering highly educated women’s employment rates.

The government of Japan enacted Equal Employment opportunity law (EEOL) in 1985 to minimize the inequality in the labor force on the basis of gender. But the companies responded by dividing women into two groups viz. Management track (Carrier track position) and Clerical track (Non-carrier track).

The advent of the dual-track system involves women’s education. By 1985 more women were graduating from university; more women had high-level skills and a strong desire to work. Companies attempted to satisfy these women’s ambitions by offering them management-track position. At the same time, many women were content with clerical work- they did not desire a career but only wanted to work until marriage and children. To effectively respond to this dichotomy in women’s life plans, companies adopted the policy of placing the first group in management track and the second group in clerical track [8].

There are two key differences between the management track and the clerical track: work duties and work transfer. Those in management track position are involved in comparatively high level work, much of which relies on the judgment of the employee. Internal promotions are open to managerial-track workers but corporations sometimes request employees to transfer to another location and they must accept such requests. In contrast, clerical-track workers engage in comparatively simple and routine support work, there are limited opportunities for promotions. Those in clerical-track positions are usually not asked to transfer.

The differentiation of the labor market in addition to two-track recruitment system created educational differences in women’s work. The university graduate females follow career track option and find a standard job or remain in academics. But the school graduates follow non-career track option and chose non-standard job.

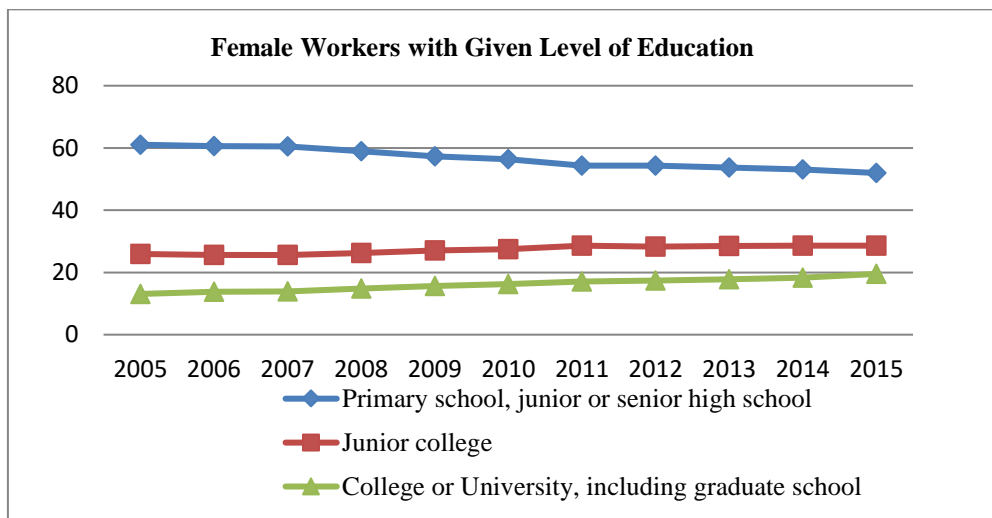
**Table-3: Percentage of female labors with given level of education**

Year	Percentage		
	Primary school, junior or senior high school	Junior College	College or University, including graduate school
2005	61.04	25.88	13.08
2006	60.57	25.63	13.80
2007	60.48	25.60	13.92
2008	58.92	26.26	14.82
2009	57.29	27.10	15.61
2010	56.33	27.45	16.22
2011	54.32	28.57	17.11
2012	54.34	28.31	17.35
2013	53.73	28.48	17.80
2014	53.05	28.60	18.31
2015	51.95	28.57	19.52

Source: Statistics Bureau, Govt. of Japan, 2016

Education wise female labor participation in Japan is given in the table 3. It is clear from the table that more than half of female labors are primary, junior or high school graduates. For 2005 it is 61.04 percent and for 2015 it is 51.95 percent. There is very low participation rate of college or university graduates in the female labor force. It is only 13.08 percent for 2005 and 19.52 percent 2015.

Education wise trend of participation is depicted in the figure 5. It shows a decline trend of participation of school graduates from 2005 to 2015. At the same time the participation rate is increasing for junior college and university graduates. In 2005, labor participation of junior college graduates was 25.88% and it increased to 28.57% by 2015. Same is the case for college or university graduates. In 2005, participation rate of university graduates was 13.08 and it increased to 19.52 by 2015.



**Fig-5: Female labors with given level of education in Japan**

**Life-cycle pattern of Japanese female labor**

The ratio of labor force according to age stratification against total population reveals changes in the characteristics of women’s employment and testifies to the various underlying problems. These ratios show typical pattern in each society in terms of industrial structure, education, employee rate, part-time work rate, marriage rate and birth rate. There are basically three types of pattern-

- Early peak: In this type there is substantial participation of women in the labor force prior to

marriage and childbearing, followed by a sharp decrease.

- Double peak: In this there is substantial female participation prior to marriage and childbearing, a drop off during childbearing years, an increase after childbearing has occurred (but before children are grown), and a final tailing off.
- Single peak: It is like the male pattern, with an increase in participation until the thirties and forties and then a tailing off, but with lower ratios than males of the same age.

The pattern of labor forces ratio against the total population of Japanese women represents a double peak, namely the “M”-pattern [9]. This M-pattern is shaped by the low labor force ratio in three age groups: school-age teens, 25-34 age range corresponding to marriage and childbearing years, and 55 years old and above; and by the relatively high labor force ratio in two age groups, that is, the early twenties and 35-54.

The first peak of M-pattern is maintained by entry of new graduates in the labor force and the second peak is maintained by such women who re-enter the work force after a fixed period of complete absence from the labor market [10]. The ‘M’-shaped pattern of labor participation in 2015 is shown in figure 6. It depicts the life-cycle pattern of female labor participation in Japan.

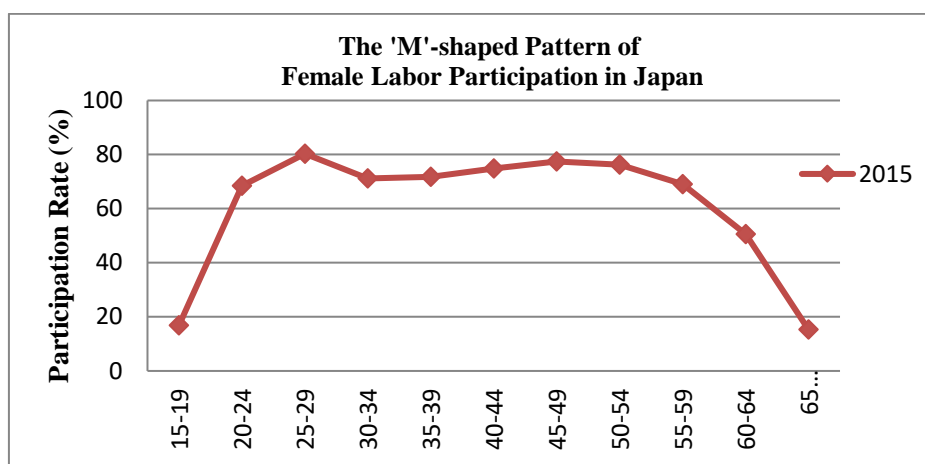


Fig-6: Life cycle pattern of female labor participation in Japan

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis of labor force data for 2005 to 2015, we came to know that the trend of female labor participation in Japan has not progressed much. Female labor participation is much better in countries like New Zealand, Canada, Netherlands, Australia compared to Japan. Female workers are not evenly distributed in every sector. Most of female workers work in clerical related, services or sales sector. There is very low percentage of females in the administrative and managerial posts. Companies don't want to promote females to higher posts. Women mostly work as part-time worker on contract basis.

The government of Japan needs to be careful about its female labor force. Because, during this phase of declining and aging population, females are the only hope of Japan to maintain its economic growth. Government of Japan needs to formulate women friendly policies so that they can work without much worrying about their family responsibilities.

Abe administration looking after this matter since 2012 and encouraging females to participate in the labor force. They are providing more child care leave, day care facilities, tax concession for working women etc. Only because of these, female labor participation is increasing from 2012. It is hoped that more and more female will join the labor force in near future and make Japan's economy much stronger.

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