

How is gender gap related to life satisfaction? A comparative study between Japan and France

Yoshiro Tsutsui (Kobe International University)

Tomo Nishimuwa (Kwansei Gakuin University)

Daisuke Ishikawa (Fukushima University)

Anne Bustreel (University of Lille)

Abstract

This study investigates why Japanese housewives report higher life satisfaction than female workers and even men, despite Japan's large gender gap. Using web-based surveys conducted in Japan (2024) and France (2025), the authors compare how gender norms, income, work hours, and psychological factors shape life satisfaction across women, men, housewives (HW), and female workers (FW). Japan ranks low in global gender equality, yet Japanese housewives show notably high satisfaction. The authors hypothesize that this paradox arises because housewives embody traditional gender norms in Japan, gaining psychological benefits from fulfilling socially valued roles. In contrast, France—where gender equality is more advanced—may show the opposite pattern.

The study applies Oaxaca decomposition to quantify how gender-related perceptions and socioeconomic factors contribute to differences in life satisfaction. Results show that in Japan, HW have higher satisfaction than FW, while in France HW tend to be less satisfied. Across both countries, perceptions of a “male-dominated society” strongly influence satisfaction: they decrease women's satisfaction but increase men's, and in Japan they raise HW's satisfaction while lowering FW's. Income and work hours have relatively small explanatory power compared to gender-related variables. Differences in satisfaction are driven more by differences in emotional responses to gender issues (Coefficient effects) than by differences in actual conditions (Endowment effects).

Overall, the findings suggest that gender norms and identity play a central role in shaping life satisfaction, and that Japan's pattern may reflect its unique social structure rather than universal mechanisms.

Keywords: gender gap; housewives; life satisfaction