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**STATUS OF WOMEN WORKERS
IN JAPAN
1957**

佐賀婦人少年室

**WOMEN'S AND MINORS' BUREAU
MINISTRY OF LABOR
JAPAN**



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Status of Women Workers in Japan, 1957

1. Women workers

One of the most remarkable changes in the postwar Japan is the rapid increase of women workers, especially gainfully employed women. Physical increase of population and economic necessity after the war are certainly some of the reasons, but none are the stronger factors than the elimination of the legislative discrimination for women and their wish to achieve economic independence as free individuals. The traditional bias towards women in prewar years fairly completely shut out women from taking up jobs except for limited fields such as nurses, telephone operators, teachers, and others, or chiefly manual occupations, and the explosive increase of women workers with the shift of such obstacles is not strange. Equality in the educational opportunities for both sexes after the war produced many qualified women who naturally want to take up jobs in the various fields. On the other hand, the Japanese industry in its quick recovery and expansion after the fatal collapse at the end of the war also offered new job opportunities.

In 1957 women in labor force¹⁾ is 18 millions which indicates 4 millions increase during ten years and is almost doubled from 10 millions in 1930. (Table 1.) This increase in number has far exceeded that of female population of 14 years of age and over, and the percentage of labor force in female population (14 years of age and

1) Labor force includes the employed and the unemployed in the population of 14 years old and over.

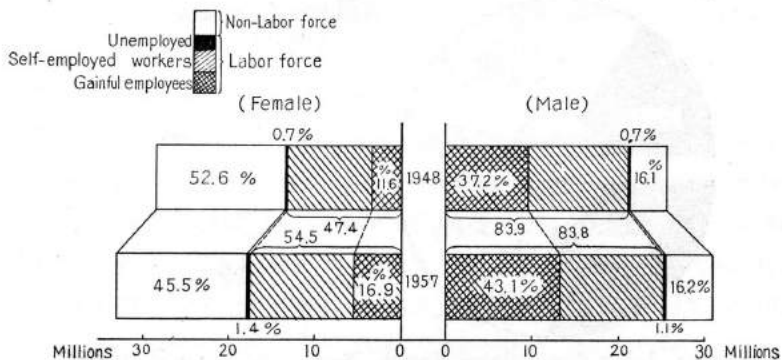
Table 1. Women in Labor Force

(Unit: millions)

	Population 14 years of age and over (a)	Labor force	Not in labor force	% of labor force as against (a)
1948	28.5	13.5	15.0	47.4%
1949	28.7	14.6	14.1	50.6
1950	28.9	14.2	14.6	49.3
1951	29.7	14.5	15.2	48.8
1952	30.2	15.0	15.1	49.9
1953	30.3	16.1	14.2	53.1
1954	30.9	16.4	14.4	53.2
1955	31.6	17.3	14.2	54.9
1956	32.5	17.6	14.6	54.5
1957	32.9	17.9	14.9	54.5

Source: Labor Force Survey—Census Bureau, Prime Minister's Office

Gr. 1. Trend of Labor Force & Non-Labor Force (1948, 1957)

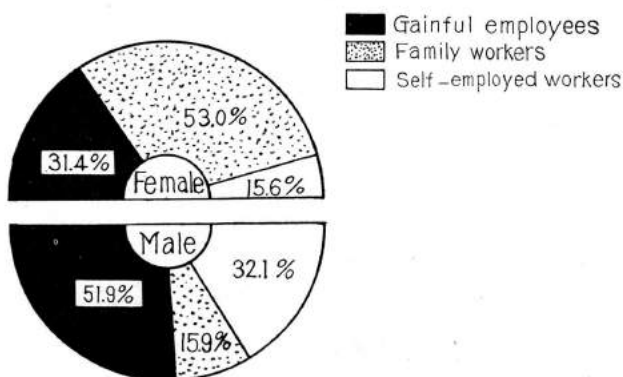


Source: Labor Force Survey, Prime Minister's Office

over) occupies 54.5% in 1957 as against 47.4% in 1948. (Gr. 1.) It signifies there are now more working women than those not in labor force²⁾ whereas the adverse condition was prevailing up to only a few years ago.

The characteristic pattern of women workers of Japan is shown in the big percentage (53%) of family workers who are family members and work without payment, while small in the number of gainful employees (31%). Especially the agriculture, which half of women workers are engaged in and is predominantly small in scale, owes much to the labor of women workers. The family workers occupy 85% of women workers engaged in agriculture and forestry. (Gr. 2.) This fact that many of women workers are unpaid family members and more or less unstable with seasons, especially women in agriculture and forestry, has influence on the status, particularly on the labor conditions, of gainful employees of women.

Gr. 2. Status of Working Men & Women, 1957



Source: Labor Force Survey, Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's Office

- 2) Includes persons except those in labor force, that is, those attending school, staying at home, of the old age, of the sickness, etc, who have no intention or are unable to work at present.

But recently a remarkable change has been introduced in this prevailing pattern. It signifies in the increase of gainful employees and decrease of family workers. And now the number of the women workers in non-agriculture industries precedes those of the agriculture and forestry which hitherto predominated in the women workers. That is, in 1957, out of 1,767,000 women workers those engaged in agriculture and forestry amounted to 831,000 and those in non-agriculture industries, 936,000 in which "wholesale & retail, finance, insurance, real estate", "manufacturing", and "service trade" far outnumber those in other industries.

On the other hand, the emancipation of women has produced many new types of women workers. According to the National Census in 1955 professional and technical workers, government officials, and administrative officers of women amounted to 630,000 in which judges, lawyers, administrators of governmental offices or mechanic technicians, etc. were practically non-existent in prewar years. And the same Census tells us that women are now found in every occupation except some types of jobs unfit or inhibited for women to take up by the Labor Standards Law.

Women in gainful employment

The number of the gainfully employed women is 5,550,000 in 1957, nearly 70% increase from 1948, and occupies 29.5% as against 25.8% in 1948 in the total number of gainful employees. (Table 2) This upward trend of women employees was especially sharp since 1955 when the Japanese economy expanded a great deal. The greatest number of women goes to the "manufacturing" which absorbs 2,020,000, 36.4% of the total women employees. Next comes "service trade" which employs 1,410,000 and then 1,180,000 of "wholesale & retail, finance, insurance, and real estate industries". (Table 3.) These three industries absorb 83% of total women employees

and nearly 90% of the increased number of women (430,000) since last year.

The number of women engaged in textile industry is 810,000 which is 40% of those working in "manufacturing", occupying 67% of total employees of the same industry. This indicates it is still one of the major industries specialized by women ever since the dawn of the modern industries of Japan. But in past few years the increase of their number has been sluggish whereas those engaged in other manufacturing industries have kept up the upward trend. It might well be, for one reason, due to the much advanced productivity caused by the introduction of the automatization in mills, or perhaps to the curtail of operation because of overproduction. On the other hand, the initiation of the various new manufacturing industries have opened up new opportunities for women. Some of them are fairly technical ones such as metal, machinery, electric machinery, scientific instrument manufacturing, or chemical products manufacturing, etc.

Occupationally speaking, women engaged in manual or comparatively simple labor occupy the greatest proportion of women employees and then comes "clerks" which includes general clerks, accountants, telephone operators, etc. According to 1955 National Census women engaged in the former type of occupations represent 35%, whereas those in the latter type 22% of all women employees.

Women in gainful employment are mostly distributed among the small establishments employing less than 100 persons, and two third of the total women are working in such establishments. When the status of women employees is classified as the officer (incl. managerial, clerical & technical workers) and laborer (incl. regular laborers & apprentices), the former type amounts to 1,730,000, the latter 3,180,000, whereas the day laborers are 640,000.

Table 2. Number of Gainful Employees (1948-57)

(Unit: 1,000 persons)

Years	Total	Female	Male	Percentage of women in total	Rate of Increase	
					Female	Male
1948	12,740	3,290	9,450	25.8%	100.0	100.0
1949	12,420	3,090	9,330	24.9	93.9	88.7
1950	12,650	3,170	9,480	25.1	96.4	100.3
1951	13,700	3,720	9,980	27.2	113.1	105.5
1952	14,210	3,900	10,310	27.4	118.5	109.1
1953	14,940	4,050	10,890	27.1	123.1	115.2
1954	15,400	4,240	11,150	27.5	128.9	118.0
1955	16,100	4,660	11,440	28.9	141.6	121.1
1956	17,440	5,120	12,310	29.4	155.6	130.3
1957	18,810	5,550	13,260	29.5	168.7	140.3

Source: Labor Force Survey, Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's Office

Table 3. Number of Gainful Employees by Industry and Sex (1957)

(Unit: 1,000 persons)

Industry	Female	Male
All industries	5,550	13,260
Agriculture & forestry	210	480
Non-agricultural industries	5,340	12,770
Fisheries	20	160
Mining	60	510
Construction	250	1,210
Manufacturing	2,020	4,400
Textile industries	810	400
Other manufacturing industries	1,210	4,000
Wholesale & retail, finance, insurance, real estate	1,180	2,070
Transportation, communication & other public utilities	250	1,810
Services	1,410	1,630
Government	160	980

Source: Labor Force Survey, Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's Office

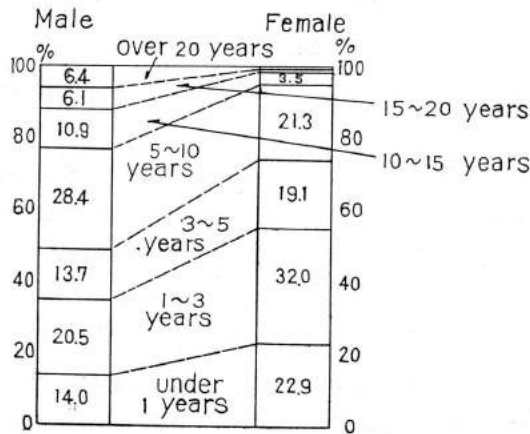
Speaking of women employees in general, there are several noticeable characteristics distinguished from men, and it can not be denied that they have considerable influence on women's labor conditions and the working status.

For one thing, women employees in general are quite young. The average age in 1954 was 25.4 years old which is remarkably low compared with 33.2 years old of men. More than 67% of women are under 25 years old whereas men in this category do not amount to 30% of the total. It has been a traditional fact for women who are supposed to be working out to ease the family living until they get married. Consequently the average duration of service is short. In the same year it was only 3.6 years, exactly half of that of men, and of the total women employees 74% retire within 5 years. (Gr. 3) From occupational point of view, generally speaking, the specific occupations for women, such as mill workers of textile products, clerical workers, saleswomen, bus conductors, or telephone operators find young women, whereas those in which women are rather scarce find more mature or older women.

But recently the general trend indicates both average age and duration of service of women have conspicuously extended. And more and more of mature women have appeared in the labor market presumably on account of economic necessity. In connection with this, the number of married women have greatly increased within these few years. Women tend to stay on in the job even after the marriage, and it gives another new problem for the employment of women.

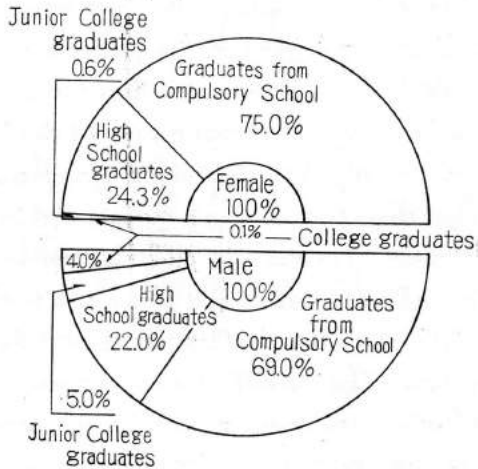
According to the yearly survey made by the Women's and Minors' Bureau of Labor Ministry, the percentage of married women in the total women employed in the establishments with 30 workers and over at the beginning of 1953 was only 9.8 which increased to

Gr. 3. Gainful Employees by Sex and Duration of Service in Ratio, 1954



Source : Survey on Individual Wage, Labor Ministry, 1954

Gr. 4. Gainful Employees in the Educational Status, 1954



Source : Survey on Individual Wage, Labor Ministry

17.4 in 1957. It is even 21% according to the National Census in 1955, and together with widows and divorcees more than 35% of women are supposed mature women.

As to the educational standard, more women are lower educated than men. Seventy five percent of women are graduated from compulsory school (middle school), whereas 69% of men are under the same category. And women and men graduated from high school occupy 24.3% and 22.0% respectively. While those graduated from the junior college contrast 1 woman with 23.5 men, and for the college graduates 1 woman with 119 men, which indicates women diminish with the higher educational standard. This fact suggests that a lot of problems still remain for women to become more skilled or professional labor force. (Gr. 4)

2. Wages and working hours of women

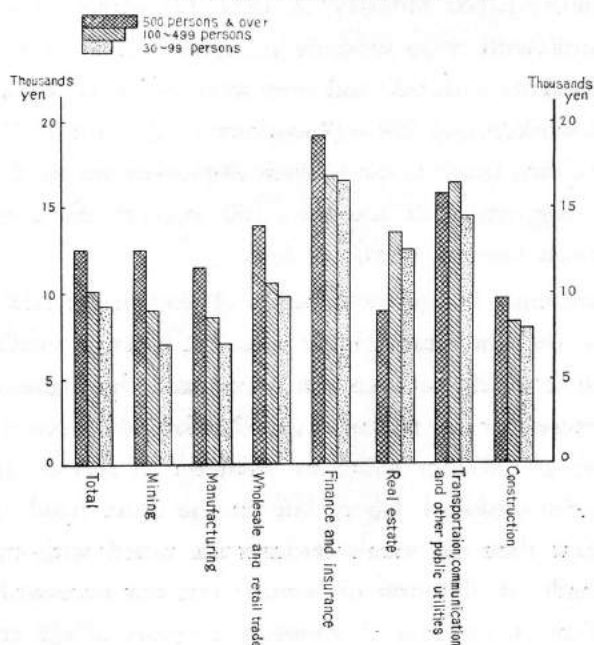
The Labor Standards Law regulates that there shall not be any differentiation in wage between men and women for equal work, thus protecting women from suffering unfair treatment by the employers, since women were left unprotected on this point in the prewar years. But there are still many difficult conditions for the application of this principle, although evident violation cases of this law have greatly decreased to minority since its stipulation. As to the average wage of women it is less than half of that of men. In 1957 the average monthly cash earnings of women in all industries in establishments with 30 workers and over was 10,638 yen which is 41.4% of 25,688 yen for men. (Table 4.) It, of course, does not always signify the violation of the law. The prevailing wage system in Japan put, as the standard of evaluation, more weight on personal conditions of workers such as age, duration of service, educational background, number of dependents, degree of responsibility required of job, etc. rather than qualities of jobs, and therefore the average earnings of

Table 4. Average Monthly Cash Earnings of Men and Women, 1948-57

Years	Female Yen	Male Yen	Percentage of women against men %
1948	2,640	6,133	43.0
1949	4,488	9,980	45.0
1950	5,184	11,143	46.5
1951	6,496	14,051	46.2
1952	7,533	16,782	44.9
1953	8,617	19,560	44.1
1954	9,252	20,825	44.4
1955	9,567	21,805	43.7
1956	10,160	23,954	42.4
1957	10,638	25,688	41.4

Source: Monthly Labor Survey, Labor Ministry

Gr. 5. Average Monthly Cash Earnings of Women by Industries and Size of Establishments, 1957



Source: Monthly Labor Survey, Labor Ministry, 1957

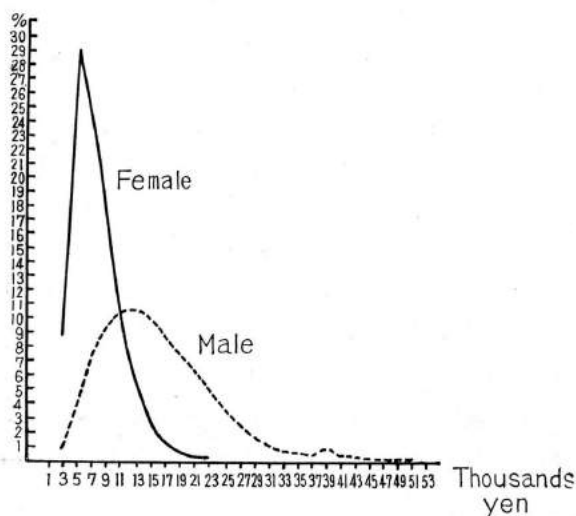
women become inevitably lower since they have characteristics stated in the previous chapters which are obviously unfavorable compared with men.

As to the wages by industry, according to the same source as stated above, the highest women get is in the "finance and insurance" which amounts to 17,279 yen while the lowest is 8,500 yen in the "construction". And in the "manufacturing", employing the largest number of women, the average wage is 9,156 yen and much lower than the average wage of women employees in general. Women working in the textile industries get, on an average, 8,254 yen, even lower than the average of the "manufacturing". (Gr. 5)

The size of the establishments also affects the earnings of women, and the smaller the size the lower the earnings. According to a survey made by Labor Ministry, in 1957, percentage of wage in the establishments with 5-29 workers occupies 64.2% of the wage in the establishments with 500 and over workers, while wages in those with 30-99 workers and 100-499 workers 73.2% and 80.7% respectively. Since two third of the women employees are working in the small establishments with less than 100 workers the average earnings of women become inevitably low.

As mentioned before the earnings of women are relatively concentrated in the low strata in the wage list whereas men's earnings are distributed widely between the lowest and the highest. (Gr. 6.) This is because, for one reason as stated before, the women in gainful employment are young, short in duration of service, and mostly engaged in the unskilled labor, but on the other hand, it depends upon the fact that the men's earnings are raised with maturity of age and length of duration of service, but not necessarily so with women. That is, earnings of women at 18 years of age are scarcely different from those of men in the same age according to the survey

Gr. 6. Wage Distribution of Men and Women, 1954



Source: Survey on Individual Wage, Labor Ministry

Table 5. Difference of Wage between Men and Women
by Age Distribution, 1954

	Female	Male	Percentage of Women as against Men
	Yen	Yen	%
Total	7,637	16,937	45
Under 18 years old	5,107	5,002	102
18 ~ 20 "	6,554	8,019	32
20 ~ 25 "	8,112	11,427	71
25 ~ 30 "	9,409	15,397	61
30 ~ 35 "	8,891	18,890	47
35 ~ 40 "	8,612	21,254	41
40 ~ 50 "	8,640	23,349	37
50 ~ 60 "	7,840	21,801	36
Over 60 "	6,128	15,119	41

Source: Survey on Individual Wage, Labor Ministry

in 1954. But afterwards the highest of earnings of men and women comes at 25-30 and 40-50 years old respectively when the indices of earnings designate 184 for women and 467 for men on the basis of 18 years old as 100. (Table 5.)

When the earnings of men and women are considered on the basis of educational background, it clearly shows that the higher the educational standard the sharper the rising rate of earnings for men, whereas for women it is different. For instance, when the college graduates of men after 20 years of duration get 4.4 times as much earnings as those of under 6 months of duration, the women graduates get only 2.1 times of earnings in the same category. This fact indicates women are not relatively in the responsible positions even when they worked long with highly qualified background.

All in all the gap of earnings between men and women becomes greater with years. In 1957 it is greatest in 10 years and is suggesting that this tendency is going to be strengthened in forthcoming years. In the present social status, in which a lot of backward notion for women still remain and the unemployed men are literally overflowed, women have much difficulties to secure highly responsible and administrative positions even if they are qualified and capable enough for them. Besides, employers tend to avoid putting women to the responsible positions reasoning that they have few expectancy of women in the duration of service, that is, more women workers in general quit the job on account of marriage or child-birth.

The working hours of women are 8 hours a day on an average and 189.8 hours a month while men work 8.4 hours a day and 201.4 hours a month. Women are characteristically long in regular working hours and short in the overtime working hours

such as early attendance, late leaving, call up, hours worked on holidays, etc. It is directly concerned with the articles in the Labor Standards Law which inhibits women to take up night work and to work in rest days, or regulate maximum working hours, etc. Incidentally the working hours of men and women are tended to become longer each year. And the monthly worked days are 23.6 days for women and 24.3 days for men respectively.

3. Labor union and women

Women membership of labor union has remarkably extended in the postwar Japan with the initiation of the Labor Union Law. Right after the war, in 1948, the membership of women and men was 1,510,000 and 5,030,000 securing almost half of the gainful employees respectively. Since then the number of women has kept on increasing to reach 1,630,000 in 36,000 unit unions in 1957, while the number of men gradually decreased to 4,970,000. And these women members correspond to 25% of the total women employees which is conspicuously decreased compared with 50% in 1948. (Table 6.) (Gr. 7) The same tendency is true to men, and one of the chief reasons might be that workers increased in such industries as commercial industries or service trades and in small establishments where organizing of workers is practically difficult. The another might be the increase of temporary workers who are not usually acceded to the membership of the union.

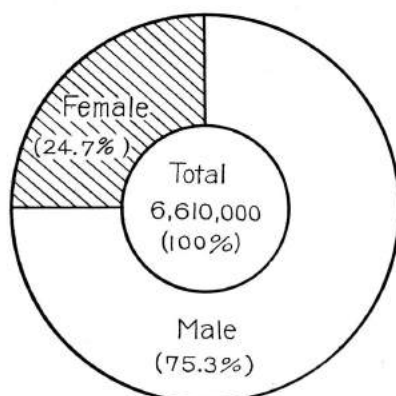
The industry which has the greatest number of women membership is the "manufacturing" and 40% (half of which belong to the textile industries) of the total women members are included in it. But the organizing rate in this industry, that is, rate of members against total women employees, is not high (35%), whereas the highest is 87% of the "government service", though its membership is not big, less than 10% of the total women membership.

Table 6. Membership of Labor Union of Women and Estimated Organizing Rate (June, 1948-57)
(Unit : 1,000 persons)

Years	Membership	Estimated rate ¹⁾
1948	1,510	45.7%
1949	1,520	51.0
1950	1,300	37.9
1951	1,350	37.4
1952	1,320	32.6
1953	1,360	33.5
1954	1,380	30.9
1955	1,470	30.8
1956	1,540	28.7
1957	1,630	30.0

Note : 1) Rate of members against total number of gainful employees
Source : Labor Ministry

Gr. 7. Membership of Unit Unions, 1957



Source : Labor Union Basic Survey, Labor Ministry

With the yearly increase of women members in the unions their contribution to the union activities cannot be overlooked. But still in the present situation they are scarcely in the influential position and weak in voicing their say. Therefore women members generally constitute women's division within each union in order to foster mutual understanding so that women's status as workers might be more improved than now. Chief activities of these women's divisions are, as a functional part of union activities as a whole, betterment of the working conditions by surveys or settlement of grievances, etc., together with various circle movements such as recreation, cultural, entertaining ones, or activities to improve the welfare conditions of women, and so force.

4. Legislation and women workers

The most remarkable changes in labor laws in postwar Japan were the extension of protection for workers and the guarantee of their rights of co-organization and collective activities. These protection and rights of workers are materialized in several labor laws.

A. the Labor Standards Law, covering all industries except for industrial home works and domestic service at home, promulgated in 1947, regulates the minimum standards of working conditions. It establishes principle of equal remuneration for men and women and contains some special measures for the protection of women and minors. Women are chiefly protected for their maternity. Some of these measures affecting women workers are stated in the following.

(1) Working hours and rest days: As a principle the employer must not employ the worker more than 8 hours a day excluding recess or 48 hours a week, and must provide at least one rest day per week to the worker.

(2) Prohibition of night work: The employer must not employ women between the hours of 10 p. m. and 5 a. m. in principle.

But this stipulation is not applied to the jobs like telephone operator, air-stewardess, etc. specified by Ordinance as not injurious to the health and welfare of women, and not applied to the agriculture, forestry, fishery etc.

(3) Restrictions on hazardous and injurious jobs: The employer must not employ a woman in the dangerous or harmful jobs specified by laws and ordinances, nor in jobs which require the conveyance of heavy weight goods beyond 30 kg.

(4) Ban on underground labor: The employer must not employ women in underground labor.

(5) Maternity leave: The employer must not employ a woman for 6 weeks before childbirth when she requests rest days during the period. The employer must not employ a woman within 6 weeks after childbirth. However, when the woman requests to work after 5 weeks, it is permissible to assign her to a job that doctor approves unharmed to her.

The employer must not dismiss a woman who are on maternity leave during the period and 30 days thereafter.

(6) Nursing period: A woman nursing a baby less than one year old may request nursing time, twice a day, each at least 30 minutes during the working hours, besides the ordinary recess.

(7) Menstruation leave: The employer must not employ a woman who suffers heavily from menstruation or a woman engaged in jobs injurious to menstruation if she requests a menstruation leave.

B. The Employment Security Law, promulgated in 1947, provides all people with opportunities to get jobs suitable to their abilities. For the enforcement of this law 426 Public Employment Exchange Offices are established all over the country, and women who got placements through these offices were 1,043,000 out of 1,504,000

applicants in 1957. In 1954 a Public Employment Exchange Office in Tokyo specific for women placement was established and it referred women to about 9,000 jobs a month on an average in 1957. In connection with this, the Public Vocational Training system has been introduced to provide workers enough training for the manufacturing and other industries since 1947. There are 292 Public Vocational Training Centers at present, including 6 centers specific for women, where workers acquire skills necessary for jobs of about 80 items such as radio and television engineering and repairing, accounting, typewriting, design of pottery, tensorial art, knitting, beauty art, wood-working, printing, painting, etc. according to their inclination.

C. The Labor Union Law, promulgated in 1945, aims to promote the status of workers by establishing equal standing for both workers and employers in their bargaining, and to protect workers on their collective activities. It stipulates that a worker is not punished by court or not pursued for the responsibility of compensation for damages by the employer for his having performed proper acts of a labor union.

D. Legislatures concerning social security for women workers
The welfare of women workers are also protected by other social insurance laws which cover all workers. These laws assure workers of benefits for accident, sickness, unemployment, old age, etc.

Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance Law, established in 1947, provides a worker with prompt and equitable protection against his injury, invalidity or death due to cause of occupational accidents or diseases for which the employer has an obligation to compensate according to the stipulation of the Labor Standards Law. The law also regulates to establish the necessary institutions for the welfare of the worker in occupational accidents or diseases.

The Health Insurance Law, established in 1922, provides for the

payment of benefits to insured persons and to persons supported by them in case of sickness, injury and death attributable to causes of sources outside of their employment. This law contains maternity benefit provisions as follows :

(1) When an insured person has been confined in bed because of giving birth to a child, she is paid an amount for confinement equal to 50% of her standard monthly remuneration. When an insured person is incapable to work because of confinement, she is paid an amount equal to 60% of her standard daily remuneration for a period of 84 days, covering 42 days preceding and 42 days on and after the date of birth.

(2) When an insured person has given birth to a baby and she nurses the same baby, she is paid 200 yen per month for six months as a nursing allowance.

The Unemployment Insurance Law, established in 1947, grants an unemployment insurance benefit to the insured person when he or she is out of a job for the purpose of her or his livelihood. An insured person who is out of a job and cannot be employed in spite of his or her will and ability to work, is paid 90 times in minimum, 270 times in maximum of 60% of his average daily wage in proportion to his or her length of service. For instance the total number of women claimants for this insurance was 1,597,988 in 1957.

The Welfare Pension Insurance Law, established in 1941, provides for the payment of benefits in case of old age, invalidity, death or retirement of a worker and attributes to the stabilization of livelihood and the promotion of welfare, of a worker and his or her survivors.

