



RESEARCH PAPER

Working Hours Patterns in Pakistan and Japan: A Policy-Oriented Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the working hour regulations in Japan and Pakistan. The study compares both countries in order to find why labor policies failed in practice and how it can be improved. The study is conducted by using an analytical approach and qualitative methodology. Secondary sources are consulted to provide a thorough grasp of the laws governing working hours in both nations. The results find that both countries are facing a similar problem of excessive working hours, but the underlying causes are different. In Japan, the reasons behind extended working hours are cultural factors and social norms while in the Pakistan unemployment and weak enforcement are the main causes. The study suggests that strong enforcement of working hour regulations requires not only strong legal framework but also encouraging cultural, social, and economic conditions. Recommendations include strong enforcement and harmonizing culture with legislation.

KEYWORDS Enforcement, Harmonizing Culture, Legal Framework, Labor Policies, Unemployment

Introduction

The global labour market is becoming more dynamic; in this regard, labour policies on working hours are crucial to understand. They indicate the economic efficiency, workforce productivity and also workforce well-being. Analysing these trends is critical, as it shapes the daily life of labourers and also the economic well-being of a country.

Pakistan and Japan both present the opposite pictures of labour policy patterns, in which Japan has a long history of extended working hours and working on the reduction of overwork through various policies. However, Pakistan presents an opposite picture in which unemployment and informal employment result in extended working hours. Comparing these two countries helps to understand the crucial role of policies in managing the working times for labourers and in mitigating the negative impacts.

This study aims to identify the lessons and strategies that can be taken to improve the economic efficiency and labour well-being by providing a comparative policy perspective on working hours in Japan and Pakistan. This study seeks to contribute to planning a sustainable workforce and labour management through evidence-based policymaking by comparing labour policies and enforcement mechanisms in Japan and Pakistan.

Literature Review

Japanese labour laws on work time and overtime begin with the basic rules, which include a normal workday should not be longer than 8 hours and a workweek should not exceed 40 hours, in order to protect the rights and well-being of workers. Culture and business pressures are also considered in these laws; for this purpose, regulations on overtime are also provided, known as 'zangyo', which state that the employees must be paid extra (for example, 125 per cent of the normal pay) for overtime and working on holidays. Many reforms have also been introduced in recent times in order to protect the health of the workers, such as the Work Style Reform Law that sets caps on overtime hours. (Global People Strategies, 2024).

Pakistan follows international principles for labour, especially those which are promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in order to protect the worker's safety, rights and health. Including the breaks for meals and prayer, a normal workday should not exceed 9 hours, and a workweek should not exceed 48 hours in Pakistan. If the workers agree to give some extra time, working hours can be extended to 12 hours per day and 56 hours per week, but in this case, the worker should be rewarded with double pay. If the workers worked during the public or festival holidays, they should be compensated at triple the normal rate. The aim behind these laws includes that the employees are not overworked and they must receive proper compensation and rest. Overall, these laws contribute to the working productivity and well-being of labourers. (Khan, 2020).

Shorter working hours have become the core concern for the government of Japan; for this, the government has passed various legislation. In addition to this, the companies have also modified salaries to assist the labourers for a better work-life balance. However, even after such efforts, the long working hours for labourers have not changed. The main reason behind this is not the government regulations but the following reasons:

- Social norms
- Workplace culture
- Unclear roles of jobs
- Traditional gender division of labour

As in Japan, the employment system works together with the culture values. These cultural values create a lot of problems which result in the extended working hours for the working class. (Ono, 2018). The labour laws in Pakistan only existed on paper but were not followed in practice. Pakistan contains many regulations related to working hours, safety and the rights of workers, but the outdated regulations, weak enforcement and lack of accountability make the regulations very poor. These inefficient working mechanisms of the labour policies generate many problems for the working class. The incident of the Ali Enterprises factory fire, which happened in 2012, indicates the major failures of labour policy on the safety of workplaces and working hours of labourers, putting the lives of the workers at risk. However, labour laws are also ignored by the employers due to the limited monitoring and weak penalties. The working conditions in Pakistan cannot only be improved by the strong labour policies alone but also by their effective enforcement as well. (Iqbal, Xuan & Xianbing, 2025). In Japan, long working hours create more problems for women as compared to men. 64 In-depth interviews are conducted at financial and domestic companies with the workers, which shows long working hours are more challenging for women as compared to men. In companies the managers often prioritise work over family life, due to which balancing family and working life becomes difficult for women. As a result, many women who are not on a career track quit their jobs as they lose

the motivation. When the family and work life seem unbalanced, mostly the young women quit their jobs in order to properly manage their domestic chores. This non-cooperative behaviour creates a lot of problems for the mother especially, as they often feel guilty for leaving work early and earning less money due to salary reduction. It also reduces the chance of promotion for the mothers. Long working hours strengthened the gender inequality, as due to this, only two options were left for a woman: either to copy workplace masculinity or to quit her job. (Nemoto, 2013).

Long working hours create a lot of challenges for working women in Pakistan. Balancing the family and working life becomes difficult as more women join the workforce. Long working hours cause many problems for women; one of them is lack of time for the family. This problem results in mental stress, as the women find it difficult to manage the household responsibilities. Women working in healthcare, education, and banking sectors are being consulted to find out how the long working hours create problems for them; as a result, it has been found that long working hours and demanding work schedules often weaken the family relationship, which leads to work-family conflicts. Overall, long working hours create heavy pressure on women in Pakistan, which not only affects their working life but also their personal life as well. (Faiza, Ali, Majeed, & Abbas, 2023). The aim of this study is to provide a comparative policy perspective on working hours in Japan and Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on institutional theory; it contains both the formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions contain laws, regulations and regulatory mechanisms, while the informal institutions contain cultural practices and social norms. According to the institutional theory, the mere existence of formal institutions is not enough for making progress; rather, the formal institutions have to interact with informal institutions for compliance. Applying this theory, the study examines the working hour regulations in Japan and Pakistan. Japan, even having strong working hours regulations, is struggling with long working hours due to informal norms of workplaces. While in Pakistan the practical implementation is affected by weak institutional enforcement. The study demonstrates that the effective implementation of working hours regulations is based upon both the formal and informal institutions, supporting the core concept of institutional theory.

Conceptual Framework

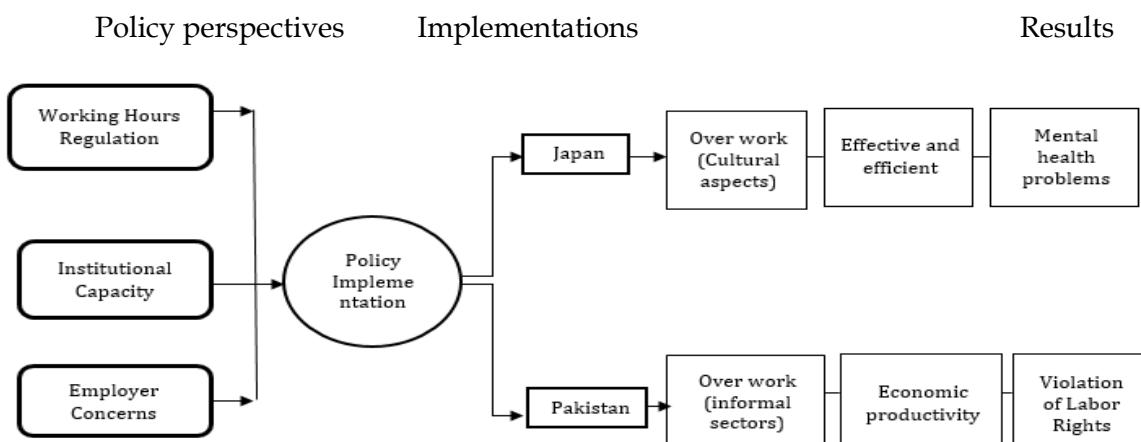


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Material and Methods

The research has been carried out by applying an analytical approach. For the completion of the research, the qualitative method is used. Secondary sources are reviewed to analyse the study. The researcher has integrated the recent articles from renowned journals in their publications. In addition, the researcher has also utilised internet material for the completion of the research.

Results and Discussion

A comparison of policy perspective on working hour in Japan and Pakistan is given below:

Legal Regulations on working hours in Japan

Legal regulations on working hours in Japan were initially established in 1947 through the Labour Standards Act. This act contains the regulations on working hours, overtime, breaks, holidays and related conditions. (Ministry of Justice, Japan, n.d.) . According to this act:

Standard working hours

Standard working hours in Japan should not exceed 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week. However, some small sectors are allowed to have employees work up to 44 hours per week; these sectors include beauty care services, restaurants, businesses related to health and hygiene, entertainment businesses and cinemas. All these sectors must contain less than 10 regular employees.

Overtime Agreements

In case the employer wants workers to work overtime, an agreement must be signed between the employer and the worker; this shows both have agreed to overtime work. Employers submit a Notification of Agreement on Overtime and Work on Days Off to the chief of the relevant labour standard inspection office. If the employer, without submitting this notification, makes his employee work more than legal working hours, he must face legal penalties.

Extra Wages

Companies must pay extra wages to employees who work in excess of statutory working hours, work on off days or work late at night.

Breaks, rest days and paid leaves

Breaks, rest days and paid leave must be given to the employees. In order to ensure workers' health and welfare, employers must provide one day off per week and at least four days off in four weeks.

Check and balance

In order to maintain checks and balances, trained government officers called Labour Standards Inspectors, who worked under Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, visited various workplaces such as factories, offices and other business sites. (Japan External Trade Organization, n.d.).

Legal Regulations on working hours in Pakistan

The Factories Act, introduced in 1934, and the Shops and Establishment Ordinance, introduced in 1965, provide supporting laws on working hours in Pakistan. According to these laws

Standard working hours

An adult worker should not work more than 9 hours per day or more than 48 hours per week.

Overtime Regulations

If an adult worker works more than these normal hours, it is considered overtime. The employer must pay double the normal wage rate to the employee for the extra work.

Breaks for meals, rest and prayer

Including overtime and all the breaks for meals, rest and prayer, the total working hours should not exceed 12 hours per day.

Regulations for factory workers

A factory worker is normally not allowed to work more than 48 hours per week. In case the factory is seasonal, the worker can work up to 50 hours per week. For technical reasons, the worker may work up to 56 hours in a week. The workers must be given extra wages for working beyond the normal hours.

Regulations on holidays

Every worker is allowed to have paid holidays on the days which are officially declared by the provincial government to be festival holidays. If the worker has to work on festival holidays, he must be given an extra paid holiday and a substitute day off. This becomes three times the normal daily wage (Khan, 2020).

Legal Punishments

If the employer breaks the act under the Factories Act, 1934, about working hours, overtime, or other conditions, he must face legal punishments. According to Chapter VIII: Penalties and Procedure, if the employer breaks the law once, he must be fined up to a certain amount. But if the same employer breaks the law twice, he should be fined even more (The Factories Act, 1934, n.d.). However, the fine fixed as a punishment for breaking the law is relatively low because these punishments were fixed quite long ago (Dawn, 2006).

Challenges in implementing working hour's regulation in Japan

Although Japan has strong regulations regarding the working hours of labourers, factors like culture and social norms still greatly influence the working of these laws. As long working hours have remained a great challenge in Japan for a long time, a number of efforts have been made in order to reduce them. In 2014, an act was introduced against overwork-related diseases. After the implementation of this act, nearly 26 per cent of diseases related to overwork, such as cerebrovascular and cardiovascular diseases,

declined (Iwasaki, Takahashi, & Nakata, 2020). Even after such efforts, the problem of long working hours still exists in Japan due to the following reasons:

Firstly, the availability of fewer numbers of workers to handle the workload. Secondly, the strong belief of the companies in never making the customers wait. Thirdly, Japanese work culture demands a high quality of work at all times (Hiroyuki, 2023). Fourthly, the expectation of the culture is not to leave the office until their boss leaves; it is considered a dedication of the worker and hence contributes to the perseverance of overtime (Global People Strategist, 2024). Fifthly, the work culture of Japan expects the workers to put their work first, even more than their personal life; workers have to work for unpaid overtime when the given task is not completed. Sixthly, the workers are expected to handle a wide range of work, as the jobs are not clearly defined often (Takami, 2019). Even after the legislative interventions, breaking these deep-rooted practices is still a great challenge for Japan.

Challenges in implementing working hour's regulation in Pakistan

Similarly, in Pakistan maximum working hours and mandatory rest breaks are set for the labourers by the legislature, but the implementation in practice is still weak. Shifts of 10-12 hours or more are common in Pakistan without overtime pay or proper rest. In Pakistan the enforcement of labour laws is much weaker than in Japan. The reasons behind this weak enforcement are Firstly, the labour departments are understaffed. According to a Human Rights Watch report in 2019, there were only 547 labour inspectors for inspecting more than 350,000 factories. It is nearly impossible, as each inspector has to cover hundreds of workplaces. Secondly, if the law is violated, the workers often feel afraid to report the issue. The reason behind this fear is the risk of losing their jobs; also, labour departments require union representation for registering any report. This creates even more difficulties for the workers (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Thirdly, Pakistan's workforce mostly contains the informal sectors. The employees of these informal sectors often work longer than the legal working hours because these sectors often remain outside the legal enforcement mechanisms. Fourthly, there is a lack of awareness in many workers and even in enforcement officials regarding the labour rights and the mechanisms of their enforcement. This lack of awareness also contributes to the violation of labour laws on working hours. Another reason is weak punishment mechanisms (International Labour Organization, 2019). In violating labour law, the employer only has to pay a little amount; due to this, the working hours regulation is often violated. Another reason is that the laws on working hours are outdated, and also less effort is made in this regard.

Comparison of working hour regulations: Japan vs Pakistan

In Japan the working hours regulation was set under the Labour Standards Act and introduced the reforms like Article 36 Agreements for limiting the working hours. But due to social and cultural effects, the implementation of such a law is not much stronger, but it's improving with time. In Pakistan the working hours regulation was set under the Factories Act 1934 and Establishment Acts, but due to structural and economic problems, the implementation of such laws is largely ineffective.

Table 1
Comparison of working hour's regulations between Japan and Pakistan

Elements	Japan	Pakistan
Legal Working hour	Clearly defined under Labour Standard Act, 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week	Clearly defined under labour law, 9 hours per day and 48 hours per week
Central problem	Long Working hours	Weak enforcement

Causes of Violation	Social norms and Cultural aspects	Weak inspection and penalties, informal sectors
Regulatory Bodies	Active regulatory bodies but not fully effective	Regulatory bodies are understaffed
Penalties	Penalties are strong and increasingly monitored	Penalties are weak and fail to deter the employer
Implementation	Implementation is partial but improving with time	Implementation is largely ineffective

Repercussions of Long Working Hours: Challenges Faced by Labors

“Long working hours led to 745,000 deaths from stroke and ischemic heart disease in 2016, a 29 per cent increase since 2000, according to the latest estimates by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) published in Environment International.” (Dawn, 2021)

“In 1969, a 29-year-old man died of a stroke while working in the delivery department of Japan’s largest newspaper. As the tragic details of his death emerged, it became clear that grueling work conditions had played a deadly role.

Logging dozens of hours of overtime each week, the man had become physically ill from overwork. But instead of reducing his workload, he was forced to work even longer and more demanding hours, eventually resulting in his death.

It became the first documented case of “karoshi” – a Japanese word meaning “death by overwork.” Tragically, it was far from being the last.” (Chang, 2024).

Working overtime creates a lot of challenges for labourers and companies due to many reasons. Working more than 50 hours reduces the quality working capacity of the labourers. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), working for long hours reduces the creativity of the workers and makes them less alert. Working for long hours becomes more difficult for the workers who also have family responsibilities. Another problem caused by overwork is the increasing numbers of absenteeism; mostly workers also quit jobs, and it causes even more pressure on the remaining workers and raises costs for companies. If the productivity does not improve, extending working hours also lowers the profit, as it increases the electricity and machine oil cost.

Another major problem created by long working hours is major stress. Labours remain connected with their bosses through phones; even after work, bosses often demand to stay connected. It disturbs the family life of the workers. Working for long hours also causes various health problems such as high blood pressure, lack of sleep, diabetes and heart diseases, etc. A study was conducted in 2015 by Stanford professors in the US that shows that overwork accounts for about 48 billion dollars of these costs.

Apart from health and productivity losses, families also suffer when men work long hours. Research from countries like the US, Norway, and developing nations shows that children benefit greatly when fathers spend time with them, especially during the first year of life. Children develop better when fathers interact positively with them in a relaxed and stress-free way. Older children also face behavioral and health problems if they do not spend enough time with their fathers.

Working long hours not only makes the workers less productive and causes health issues but also disturbs their family life. According to the research conducted in the US, Norway and other developing nations, children benefitted a lot when their parents spent quality time with them, especially during the early years of life. When the parents interact

positively with their children in a relaxed and stress-free way, it helps them to develop better. If the parents do not spend enough time with their older children, they also face behavioral and health problems. In a society where men work for long hours, this causes many challenges for women at home, as all the household responsibilities are carried out by women alone.

It shows that working for long hours creates more problems; carried it affects the workers' physical and mental health and also disturbs the family relations as well (Riaz & Majid, 2018).

Findings

The findings of the study are as follows:

- The study finds that both countries, Japan and Pakistan, have formal legal frameworks that limit the working hours in order to protect the health and welfare of labourers, but both countries suffer in implementing these regulations effectively.
- The study finds that Japan contains a strong legal framework on working-hour regulations as compared to Pakistan, but long working hours are still a great challenge for Japan due to informal institutions such as workplace culture, social norms and organisational expectations.
- The study also finds that the regulation on working hours clearly defines the daily and weekly working hours, but the enforcement of these regulations is weak and inconsistent. Reasons are many; mainly it is due to weak inspection, and the workers mostly felt the fear of losing their jobs. This fear restrained them from demanding their legal rights.
- The finding also reveals that the punishment for violating laws and social norms also plays a crucial role in regulatory mechanisms. In Pakistan, fines are really low for violating labour laws; due to this, employers feel less fear about breaking any law. In contrast, even Japan has strong regulatory mechanisms; still, social norms normalise extended working hours for the labourers.
- The study finds that strong working regulation cannot be effectively implemented without strong deterrence and social changes.
- Findings show that working for long hours disturbs the mental and physical health of the workers and also disturbs their family life as well.
- The findings reveal that working hours regulation is not only affected by the legislation; power relations between employers and workers also play a key role, such as in Japan, where the internal labour market, and in Pakistan, where the dominance of the informal sector, play a crucial role in extended working hours.
- Finally, the study finds that the effective implementation of the working hour regulations is only possible if formal and informal institutions support each other. In Japan, the main need is to work on informal institutions in order to change the norms about extending working hours. While, in Pakistan, the main need is to work on formal institutions, and it requires strong enforcement mechanisms and higher penalties.

Conclusion

By comparing the working hour regulations of Japan and Pakistan, this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of labour working hours regulation does not merely depend on legal regulations but also on the environment in which these laws operate.

Japan, despite having a comprehensive legal framework on working hour regulations, is struggling with extended working hours due to social norms and cultural expectations. While, in Pakistan, the working-hour regulations are not effectively implemented, mainly due to structural problems such as unemployment, the dominance of informal sectors and weak inspection by the regulatory body. By taking the examples from both countries, the comparative findings underscore that effective working-hours regulation requires an integrated approach combining both the formal and informal institutions. This study offers practical insights for designing labour policies which are not only legally sound but also socially enforceable as well.

Recommendations

Strengthen Regulatory Mechanisms

Laws can only make change if they are effectively implemented, and this implementation mostly depends on the regulatory bodies. The government needs to focus on the strong regulatory mechanisms for bringing positive change in the society. This can happen through regular inspections, digital monitoring systems and accountability mechanisms. This ensures that the laws do not merely exist on paper but are also implemented in practice.

Impose stricter penalties for violations.

Working hour regulations are mostly violated due to low penalties. Low penalties should not discourage the employers from breaking the regulation. Stricter penalties should be strongly imposed for violating laws. This discourages the employer from violating the labour laws on working regulations.

Improve the labour inspection department.

The labour inspection department should be improved in order to put laws into practice. The government needs to invest in the labour inspection department for the better implementation of the policies. The department must not be understaffed; for this, the government needs to hire enough officers, and for effective implementation, officers must be trained in the rightful way. This step will help to improve the monitoring coverage, especially in the high-risk sectors.

Address the workplace. Culture and social norms in Japan

In Japan, the effective implementation of working hour regulation is possible if the policy reform should focus on workplace culture and social norms regarding the extended working hours. Such reforms should be introduced that discourage the long working hours, unpaid overtime and excessive loyalty and rather glorify the standard working hours.

Clarity in job roles

Ambiguous tasks take a lot of time to fulfil; rather, clarity in job roles would help to reduce the extended hours. As the clear task can be fulfilled easily on time

Encourages Work-Life Balance Policies

In order to protect the physical and mental health of the labourers, the work-life balance policies must be encouraged. The masses should be educated that their health is

equally important compared to their wealth. Such policies should be strictly adopted by the government and contain limited working hours along with rest times.

Increase Job Opportunities in Pakistan

Increased job opportunities help the labourers to demand their legal rights from the employer without the fear of losing their jobs, as they have many options ahead. Mostly, labourers remain silent even after the violation of labour laws by the employer due to the high rate of unemployment in Pakistan.

Providing legal protection to the informal labour sector

Mostly the working hour regulations are violated in the informal sectors. As they are considered outside of the legal protection. Thus, bringing informal sectors under legal protection is essential to protect the working hour regulations.

Labour Rights Awareness

Awareness campaigns should be conducted by the government in order to make the labourers aware of their legal rights regarding working hours, holidays and overtime payment. In case any employer breaks their legal rights, they must know how to legally report a complaint against them.

Ensure accountability

Accountability must be ensured in order to protect the labour rights. For this, the labour-staffed department must be trained and contain enough number of officers who can easily inspect all the factories. Increasing accountability would restrain the employer from breaking any working hour regulation.

Incorporate legal regulations with culture change.

Laws can only be implemented accurately if both efforts are done equally, including legal policies and cultural change. By doing this, laws are easily accepted by the society and can be implemented more easily.

Taking lessons from comparative best practices

Pakistan can take a lesson from Japan about its structured legal framework, while Japan can also learn from the countries that give more priority to worker wellbeing as compared to extended long hours.

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