

# Health Literacy and Education

The first steps to maintaining health are education and awareness. This is particularly important for women as awareness would not only prevent disease, but would also empower women to make better informed decisions about their life plans and to further achieve their career aspirations.

The GOJ can empower women by providing specific and appropriate health education tailored to specific stages of women's lives. This would allow women to better plan their lives and achieve a more holistic work-life-health balance, thus ultimately contributing to women's advancement in society.

## Educational Intervention to Improve Health Literacy and Support Women's Advancement

### Current Situation

While women's advancement in business is ever more anticipated, balancing work and family presents challenges. In a country ranked 101 out of 142 in the Global Gender Gap Index, however, many Japanese women do not have the support needed to pursue these critical dual roles. Today's working women must balance career development opportunities, the timing of childbearing and the female-specific health risks that may arise during their lifecycle, such as endometriosis, cervical cancer and osteoporosis. Shockingly, in a study of 79 countries, Japanese women scored the lowest among all the very high HDI countries with regard to comprehensive fertility knowledge; Japanese women's comprehensive fertility knowledge score of less than 40 percent is far below the average score of 64.3 percent for very high HDI countries. Japanese women's knowledge was even below the 44.9 percent average

for non-very high HDI countries.<sup>1</sup> This lack of fertility knowledge has serious implications. For example, more than 40 percent of women in Japan mistakenly believe that a woman in her 40s has a similar chance to conceive as a woman in her 30s.<sup>2</sup> A separate survey of Japanese adolescents revealed that 82 percent did not know that menstrual disorder and dysmenorrhea may be attributed to endometriosis.<sup>3</sup> This broad lack of fertility knowledge reinforces the social stigma Japanese women face both in seeing a gynecologist, and in openly discussing the health challenges they face.

### Current Policy

Education policies have not kept up with the needs of modern society where the GOJ aims to accelerate women's participation in the workforce and women tend to delay childbearing. In many cases, primary and secondary school education does not place sufficient focus on health-related topics, especially women's health risks and fertility decline.

### Recommendations for Government

- Offer appropriate women's health education depending on each woman's life stage at schools and universities to enable women to be more aware of, and better manage, changing health risks.
  - » The GOJ should ensure that women's health education is included under the School Health and Safety Act.
  - » Leverage the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's

1 Bunting L, Tsibulsky I, Boivin J. 2013. Fertility knowledge and beliefs about fertility treatment: findings from the International Fertility Decision-making Study. *Human Reproduction*, 28: 385-397

2 Maeda E, et al. 2015. A cross sectional study on fertility knowledge in Japan, measured with the Japanese version of Cardiff Fertility Knowledge Scale (CFKS-J). *Reproductive Health*, 12: 10

3 Bayer Yakuhin, Ltd. Survey about women's health in 2,083 students aged 15 to 18 years. Nikkei Inc. October 29 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZ092975150Z11C15A000000/>

Assistance Program to Address School Health Issues to deliver a women’s health education program. Reproductive health education, including use of OCs and available fertility treatments, should be included in the curriculum.

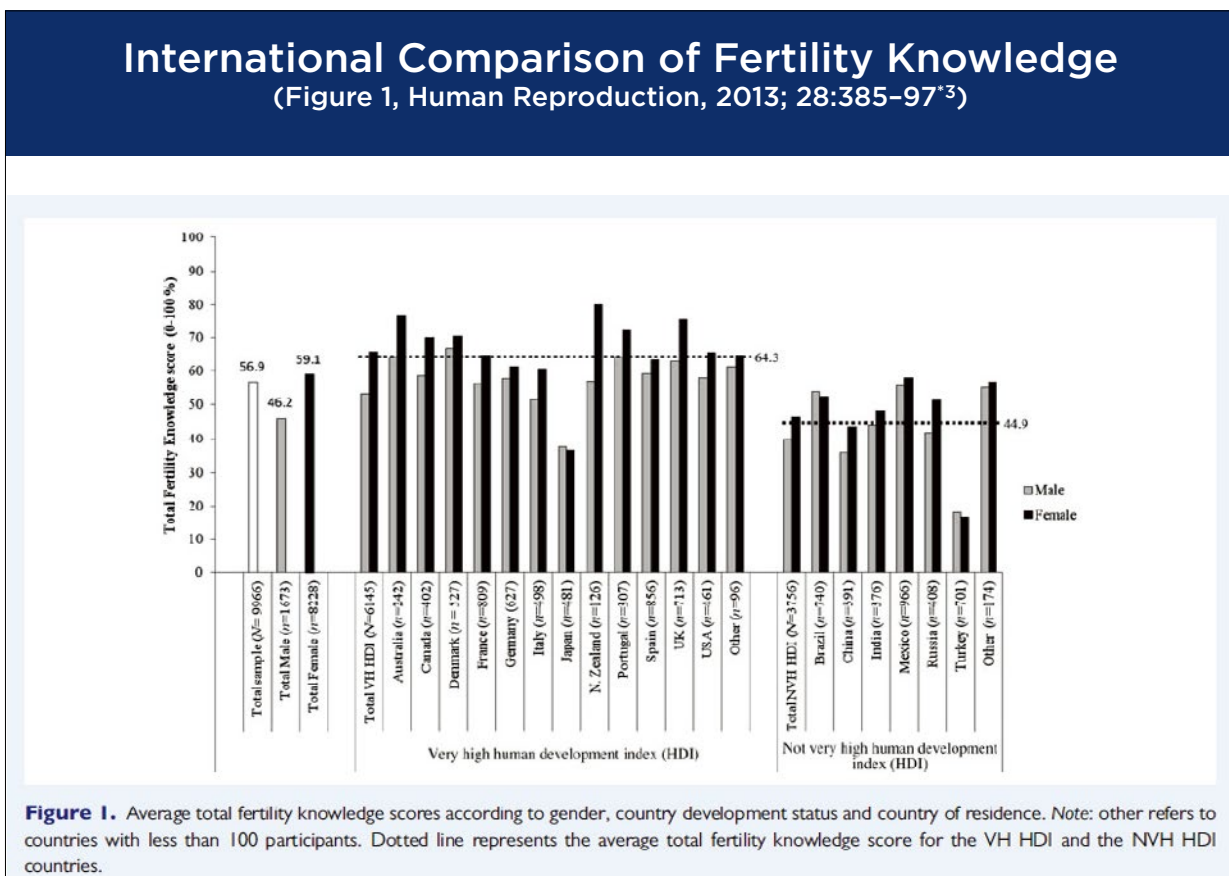
- » Not only nursing teachers and health teachers, but also gynecologists should play a key role in providing women’s health education.
- Enhance women’s health awareness and encourage women to take action to better plan their lives and improve their work-life-health balance. For example, the GOJ should encourage employers and municipalities to promote women’s health through the issuing of new guidelines adopted under the Women’s Advancement Promotion Law, and encourage employers to provide training to employees to enhance women’s health

literacy under the Industrial Safety and Health Act.

- All women’s health education programs should contain a strong component of preventative gynecological care and education designed to eliminate the social stigma surrounding both regular care and disease. Programs should seek to reduce the stigma associated with women’s health issues and to promote open dialogue among families, educators, and healthcare providers and their patients.

#### Recommendations for Business

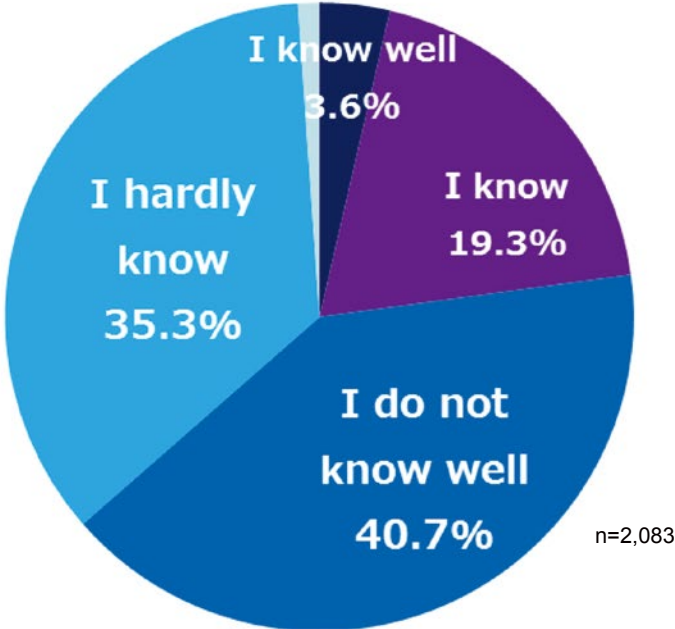
- Offer employee training on career development that incorporates life and family planning.
- Provide frequent and comprehensive training programs on women’s health related topics to female and male employees.



# Limited Women's Health Literacy in Adolescents

(Survey on 2,083 students aged 15 to 18 years<sup>5</sup>)

Do you know endometriosis may lead to infertility?



# Limited Women's Health Literacy in Adolescents

(Survey on 2,083 students aged 15 to 18 years<sup>5</sup>)

Do you know menstrual disorder and dysmenorrhea may be attributed to endometriosis?

