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Japan firms start to reconsider asking for resumes to specify gender

Kyodo News (15.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/362CSKq> - The requirement by many of Japan's firms that job applicants indicate their gender and even provide a photo on resumes has left the country out of step with the international norm, but that may be about to change.

An internet petition campaign stressing that such practices can lead to discrimination has collected over 10,000 signatures, while at least one major company has altered its rules to scrap both requirements and even stop asking for applicants' first names.

Identifying gender on resumes is particularly problematic for transgender people -- often leading to obstacles in getting hired, experts say.

Minori Hori, a 31-year-old resident of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, northeastern Japan, is among those who have joined the signature drive organized by Posse, a nonprofit that offers free job-related consultations, among other services.

"For someone like myself who is unable to circle male or female on a resume, I often face hardships about my ideal situation. Gender should have nothing to do with my job," said Hori, who is legally a woman but feels as if "I am neither male nor female."

While in college, Hori would leave the gender section blank when applying for part-time jobs. If pressed in interviews, Hori asks to "work as a man" but on one occasion, an interviewer was dismissive, saying, "You're a woman! We won't hire a woman."

In all, Hori was rejected by as many as 10 companies due to problems over indicating gender on resumes.

In an employment examination to be hired as a teacher, Hori marked "female" as instructed by the board of education but was again rejected after showing up to the interview in a necktie. Hori gave up dreaming of becoming a full-time teacher after being questioned repeatedly about gender on the application forms.

"Getting rid of the gender section on applications will help prevent discrimination," said Manabu Sato of Posse. In the United States, it is illegal for an employer to discriminate against a job applicant because of race, color, religion or sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation and pregnancy).

The signatures calling on eliminating gender on resumes were submitted to the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry and the Japanese Standards Association, whose resume

format had been referred to by stationery makers until being deleted from the association's official website in July.

Major stationery manufacturer Kokuyo Co. plans on selling resumes without a gender section. Some companies, such as Unilever Japan, no longer require photos or gender specifications -- going as far as to ask job applicants to only list their surname to prevent bias recruitment based on sex.

Toyota Motor Corp. has also jumped on the bandwagon, eliminating curriculum vitae gender sections to respect diversity, it says. The company still requires photos, however.

Even so, some argue that information on gender is sometimes essential, at least as a way of demonstrating equal opportunity.

Kirin Holdings Co. has made it voluntary to provide gender since it hired new college graduates to join the company in the spring, explaining that the practice has not been wholly dissolved as it seeks to hire the right balance of employees and promote women in the workplace. This also helps with its public relations image, the company argues, when asked about gender ratio quotas.

The Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation, which supports sexual minorities and has launched a petition for an LGBT equality law, welcomes the elimination of gender sections on job application forms, but it is also apprehensive about "not being able to calculate the ratio between men and women in the workforce, putting women at a disadvantage" in Japan's male-dominant work environment.

Yuichi Kamiya, secretary general of the Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation, said, "It is desirable to ask for gender identity rather than (legal) gender that does not respect the person's perception. We also need the option of neither."

But Kamiya added: "Some gender information needs to be known. We need to listen to and consider the opinions of experts about its necessity for hiring and how people should be asked."

3 in 4 LGBT people want legal rights for same-sex couples

By Yuki Nikaido

The Asahi Shimbun (01.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32hTMmk> - Three in four LGBT people in Japan want a government policy that guarantees the legal rights of same-sex couples, according to a recently released online survey.

Lifenet Insurance Co. commissioned Yasuharu Hidaka, a professor of social epidemiology at Takarazuka University, to conduct the survey between September and December last year.

Valid responses were received from some 10,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people ranging in age from 13 to 79.

The survey results were released on Aug. 31.

Sixty percent of respondents said they want to have same-sex marriages legally recognized the same as heterosexual marriages. Sixteen percent said they want the central

government to introduce a national civil partnership program that would grant them the same rights as a marriage.

Same-sex marriages are currently not legally recognized in Japan.

The survey also found that younger generations are more likely to seek a same-sex marriage.

Seventy-seven percent of those in their teens said they want to marry their same-sex partner, while the figure drops to 66 percent for those in their 20s, 59 percent of those in their 30s, 51 percent of those in their 40s and 53 percent of those in their 50s or older.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they think more people respect diversity in sexual orientation and identity now than five years ago.

But 79 percent said they have heard discriminatory remarks made against sexual minorities at their workplaces or schools. That is up 8 percentage points from the previous survey conducted in 2016. A quarter of respondents said their sexual orientation or identity was revealed by other people without their consent.

"While there is a positive move toward embracing diversity in sexuality, discrimination against sexual minorities still remains rooted in society, and it may have become more visible because of that change," Hidaka said.

Outing LGBTQ individuals is now banned in this region of Japan

Forcing someone to come out is never okay.

By Miran Miyano

Vice (09.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2YetjUV> - In a step to protect the LGBTQ community, Mie became the first prefecture in Japan to ban people from outing others. On Wednesday, June 3, Governor Eikei Suzuki announced that under a new ordinance, it is now illegal to force someone to reveal their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Suzuki said that this ordinance was influenced by the second wave of coronavirus cases in South Korea, which was linked to the LGBTQ community after a COVID-19 patient was found to have visited gay bars. Many slammed the media for sensationalising reports. As part of their contact tracing process, the South Korean government also initially urged those who visited the bars to come forward, forcing them to come out. Through this new ordinance, Suzuki hopes to eliminate discrimination against LGBTQ people in their region, should they be affected by the coronavirus as well, Tokyo Shimbun reported.

Suzuki said that they are still discussing the penalties for violators.

In June, Mie became the fourth prefecture to implement regulations against LGBTQ discrimination, following Tokyo, Osaka, and Ibaraki.

Japan has been criticised for lagging behind when it comes to protecting LGBTQ rights. It has not legalised same-sex marriage and has no national law against discrimination in employment and housing based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Public outings are a problem in Japan, where many LGBTQ people say that their identities were revealed without their consent. In August 2015, a student from Hitotsubashi University took his own life after being outed by classmates for being gay.

According to a survey conducted by Dentsu Diversity Lab in 2018, 54.5 percent of 60,000 individuals aged 20-59 said that there were no sexual diversity support systems in their workplace. Only 23.5 percent said that they understand LGBTQ issues.

However, Japan has been making efforts to protect the LGBTQ community. In 2018, Tokyo passed a law banning LGBTQ discrimination, in preparation for the now-postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In 2017, Japan updated its National Bullying Prevention Policy and introduced new policies that protect students who are part of sexual and gender minorities.

Japanese netizens are now praising Mie Prefecture's efforts to protect the LGBTQ community.

"I am for the Mie Prefecture's New Law. I hope more prefectures take this into account in their laws too. Coming out is not something that should be forced. People should always feel free to talk, but also free to hide it if they feel uncomfortable." (@mArU_maaarru)

"This is simply amazing. It is great to see local governments implementing specific laws that save people's lives." (@kickthemout2)

LGBT people in Japan worry getting coronavirus may result in outing

The Mainichi (21.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2xc3vhs> - Many members of sexual minorities in Japan worry that catching the novel coronavirus could mean their sexual orientation is revealed against their will as authorities probe infection routes, a supporters' group has found.

A survey by Marriage for All Japan also showed they worry about whether they or their partner will be able to receive important medical information that hospitals provide to family members if one of them becomes infected with the pneumonia-causing virus.

About 180 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people among others had responded to the survey by Friday.

A 34-year-old man who lives with his same-sex partner in Fukuoka, southwestern Japan, has chosen not to be open about his sexual orientation at his office. But he worries it may be revealed if he becomes infected with the virus as he would have to tell a public health center about his partner when asked about people he has had close contact with.

Even those who are open about their sexual orientation are worried about being excluded from important decision-making processes on treatment if their partner is hospitalized with COVID-19.

Kohei Inagaki, 28, and his partner have been recognized by the city of Saitama as partners equivalent to a legally married couple. But he said, "I may not be notified of my partner's health condition and may not be able to be involved in making decisions on treatment."

The same survey revealed that there is also a misperception among some LGBT couples that they are not eligible for government compensation for parents who take leave from work to look after children due to the school closures prompted by the virus outbreak.

Haru Ono, who is raising three children together with her partner, said the government has not clarified that the program targets all people with kids.

"There are many (LGBT) people who have given up on applying for it without knowing" it applies to them, too, said Ono, adding, "I want them to state that same-sex couples are also covered."

Gon Matsunaka, who heads a nonprofit organization for supporting LGBT people, warned that minorities who are often left out in normal circumstances tend to suffer even more during crises, and urged the government to help them.

"We understand that the government's top priority is protecting the lives of the people, but we want it to take a look at LGBT and other people who have serious problems regarding privacy and take measures so that they don't fall through the safety net," Matsunaka said.
