Understanding the Barriers to Paternity Leave-Taking: Evidence from Japan

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Motivation

- Despite women's progress, persistent gender disparities in the labor market remain.

- Linked to women's role as the dominant providers of childcare and household work, even when they have careers.
    - Varies across countries: In Japan, women spend > 5 times more time on household work than men (c.f. 1.9x average across OECD).

- Possible fertility consequences
    - Strong positive correlation between TFR and men's share of household work (Feyrer et al., 2008; OECD, 2021)
    - In Japan, positive correlation between men's hours involved in housework and childcare on days off and having > 1 children (Cabinet Office, 2018)

- Paternity leave policies important first step in encouraging men to contribute to household work, and promote shift in gender norms.

Motivation

- Japan has one of the most generous paternity leave provisions in the world. Yet, take-up remains low.
  - Up to 4 weeks of flexible paid paternity leave within 8 weeks of child's birth, and up to one year of leave until the child turns one.
  - Wage replacement rate: 67% of pre-tax salary for first 6 months and 50% for the next 6 months. Benefits are not taxable.

- Government has set ambitious targets to increase the rate of paternity leave-taking to 50% by 2025, and 85%.
  - Mandatory disclosure for firms with $> 1,000$ employees from April 2023. Plan to include those with > 100 employees from April 2025.

- Recent surveys indicate a large increase in paternity leave-taking, especially in large firms, but duration of leave still remains quite low.
  - In 2023, 24% have taken leave vs. 9.6% in 2019; among those taking leave, average days of leave increased from 2.4 to 23.4. 55% take less than 1 month (Sekisui House Ltd).

This Paper

Q1: Why are Japanese men reluctant to take leave?

- Are they informed about paternity leave provisions? YES

- Do they want to take leave? YES

- What are some of the perceived barriers to leave-taking?

- Do firms actively encourage paternity leave-taking? YES

Q2: How to increase paternity leave-taking among Japanese men?

- Focus on the role of misperceptions regarding extent of support among groups that matter

- Information interventions targeting misperceptions (in progress)

Pilot Survey of Expectant Fathers

- Sample: Married men 25–49 who were eligible for paternity leave who are expecting or planning to have a baby one year ago.
  - Survey conducted in Nov 2023 ($N = 344$)
  - 74% had a child in the past year, 5% currently expecting, 9% actively trying

- Includes questions on paternity leave take-up/intentions, attitudes toward paternity-leave, and perceived barriers.

- Policy awareness: *"What percentage of face value wages do you think is guaranteed by law for the first 6 months (next 6 months) of paternity leave?"*

Awareness of Paternity Leave Provisions
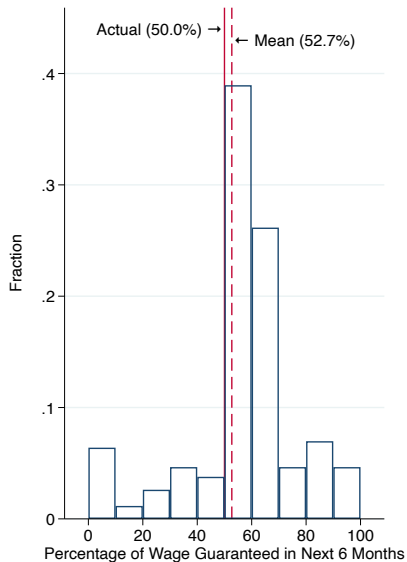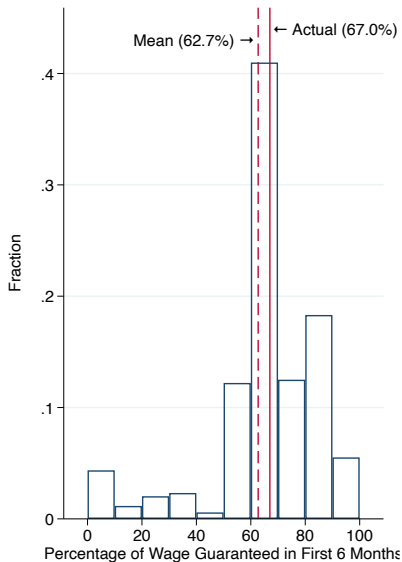
Ideal vs. Actual Take-Up of Paternity Leave

Actual/Ideal take-up of Paternity Leave
(conditional on having a child in the past year)
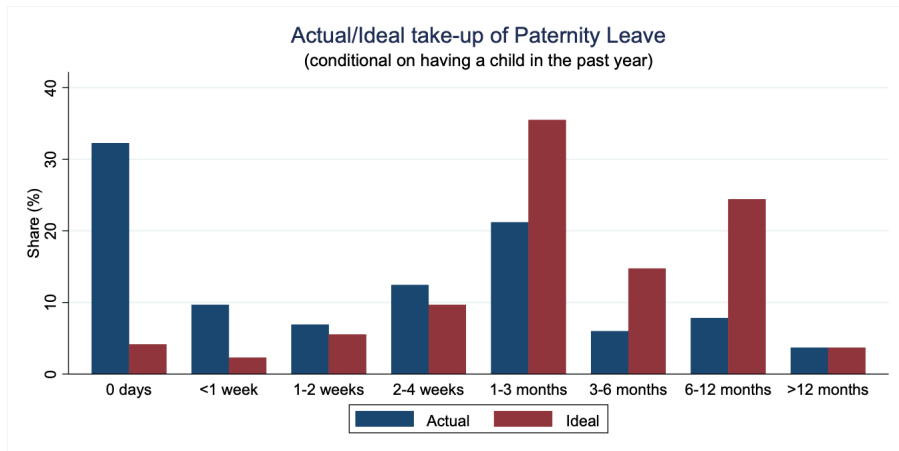
- *"In an "ideal" scenario/setting, how many days of paternity leave would you have liked to take take within the first year of your child's birth?"*
- (Median) actual take-up: 10 days vs. ideal take-up: 30 days
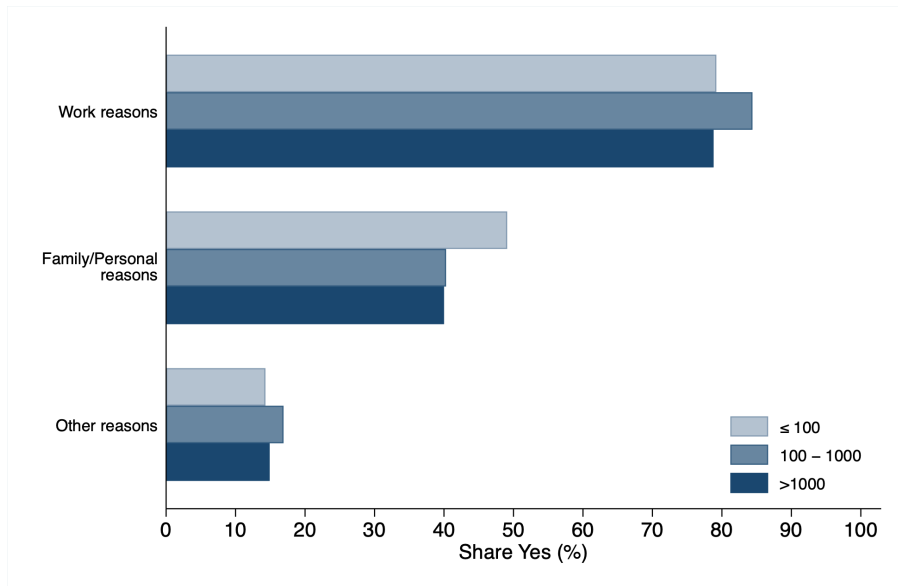- ∼ 80% took less leave than they would have liked.

Perceived Barriers to Taking Leave

- *"Why did you take (or plan to take) fewer days of paternity leave than you would have liked?"*
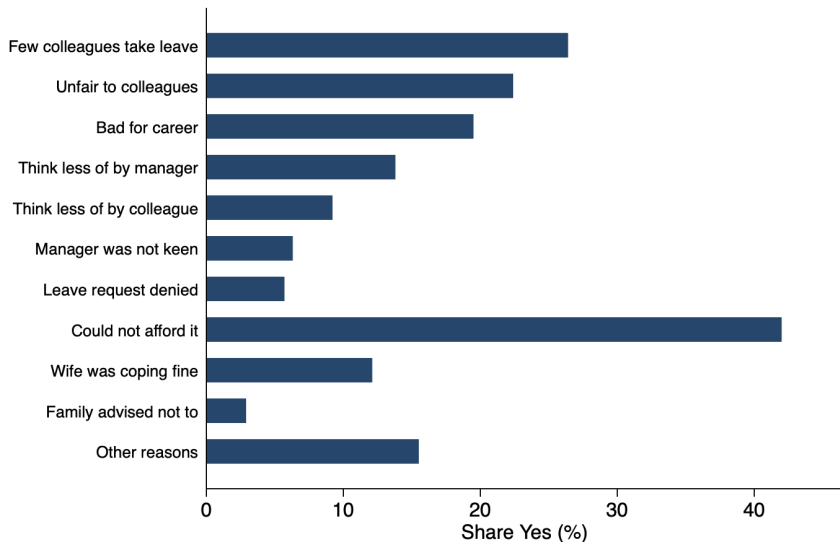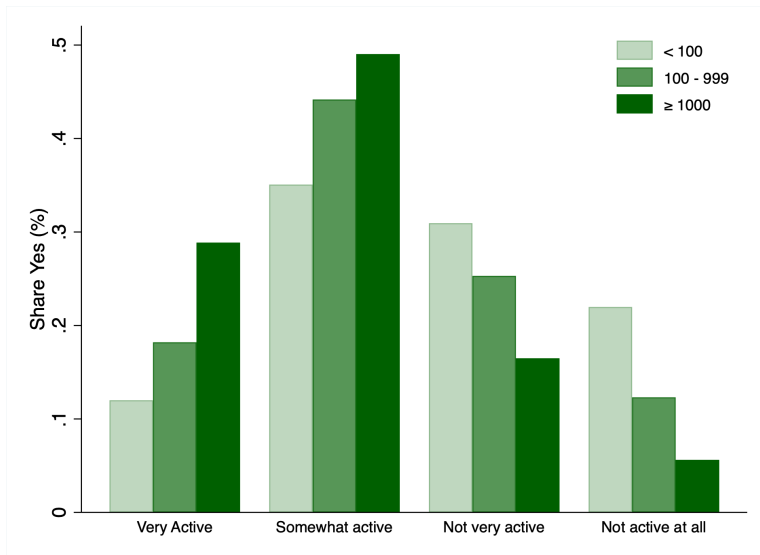
Perceived Barriers to Taking Leave

Firms Generally Active in Encouraging Fathers to Take Leave

Source: Married men survey

# Why is it so Difficult to Encourage Fathers to take Leave?

- **Our answer**: Misperceptions could be a key explanation
    - Even as social norms change, individuals may actively enforce a perceived norm, even if they privately reject the norm because they incorrectly believe that most other people continue to support the norm.
        - Applications to women's labor supply: Burzstyn et al. (2020) Cortes et al. (2023), Cameron et al. (2023)
    - Rapidly shifting beliefs and attitudes can contribute to the prevalence of misperceptions. Absent credible information about others' beliefs, behavioral change is limited $\Rightarrow$ stickiness of norms.

- **Approach**: Use specially designed surveys to study actual and perceived norms surrounding paternity leave-taking in Japan.
    - In addition to peer attitudes (e.g., Miyajima and Yamaguchi, 2017), also study attitudes of managers and other social groups.
    - Examine both support for paternity leave-taking and perceived career impacts.

Data Collection: Baseline Surveys

- Married men aged 25–49 working in companies or government positions ($N = 5,000$)

- **Managers:** Middle and upper managers in companies or government positions
  ($N = 2,000$ each)

- **Peers:** Married women, unmarried men, unmarried women aged 25–49 working in companies or government positions
  ($N = 1,500$ each)

- **Older generation:** Men and women aged 65 and above
  ($N = 2,000$)

Support for Paternity Leave-Taking is High

- *"Are you supportive of a male employee expecting a child soon taking [2 weeks] of paternity/childcare leave to care for his child?"*
  - *I am supportive/ No, I am not supportive/ I don't know*
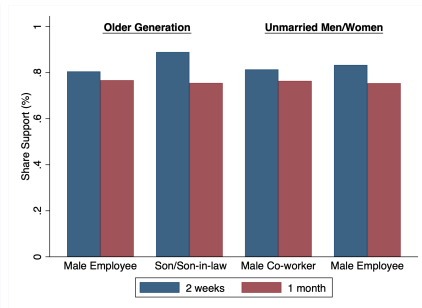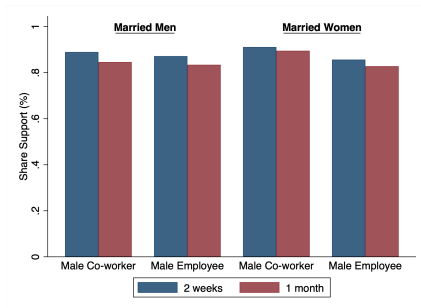
Support Among Managers
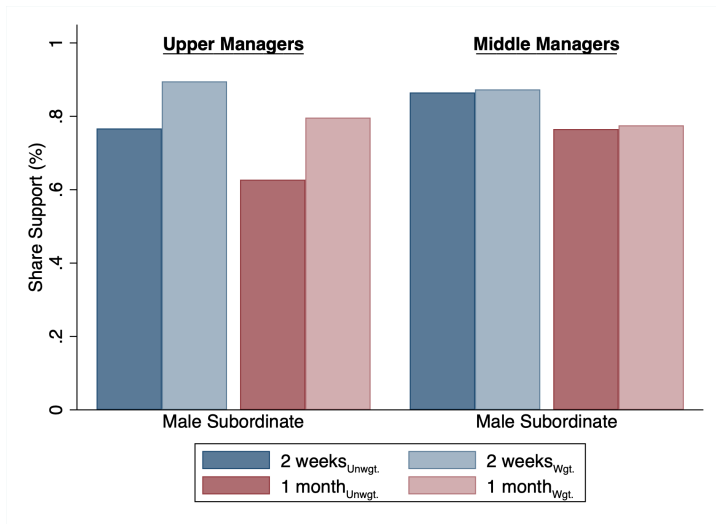
Second-Order Beliefs

- We elicit second-order beliefs after asking about first-order beliefs.

- Respondents are asked to guess (out of 100) how many peers/managers they think will say that *"they are supportive of a male employee/male subordinate expecting a child soon taking the following durations of paternity/childcare leave to care for his child."*

| 育休の期間 (Duration of paternity/childcare leave)	100 人中何人が支持するか (Out of 100, how many men do you think are supportive):
2 週間(2 weeks)	100 人中（　　）人
1 ヶ月(1 month)	100 人中（　　）人

  - Peers: Those who work for a company/organization similar to yours and similar to you in terms of gender, age, education level, and employment.
  - Middle managers: In companies/organizations that are similar to yours.

- **Misperception**: Difference between (average) perceived support and the actual share.

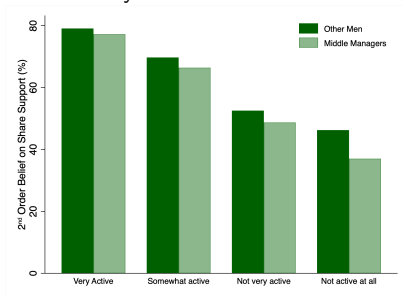# Misperceptions in the Extent of Support (2 Weeks)

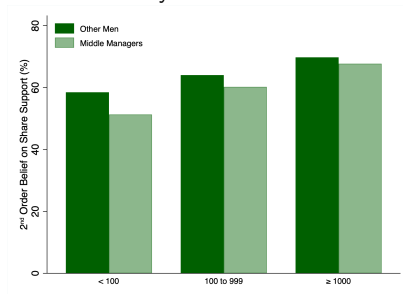# Misperceptions in the Extent of Support – 1 Month Leave
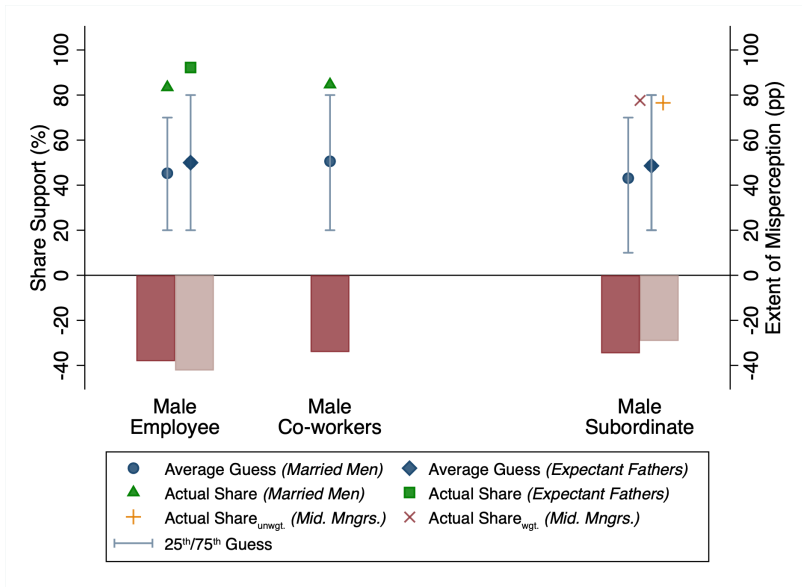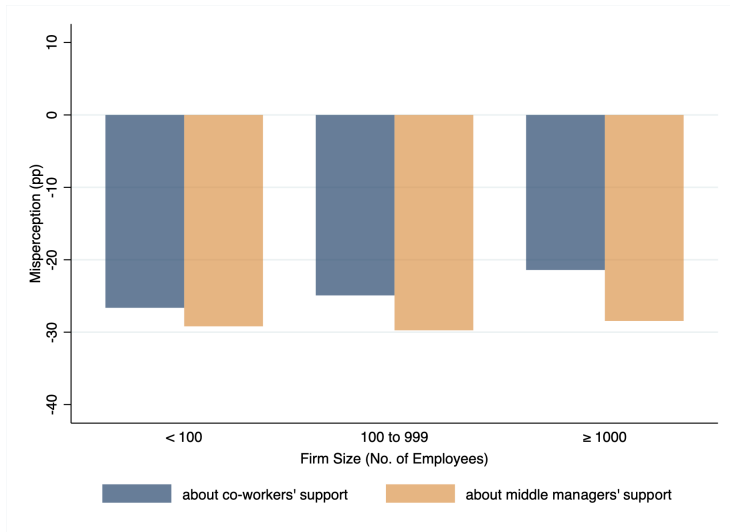
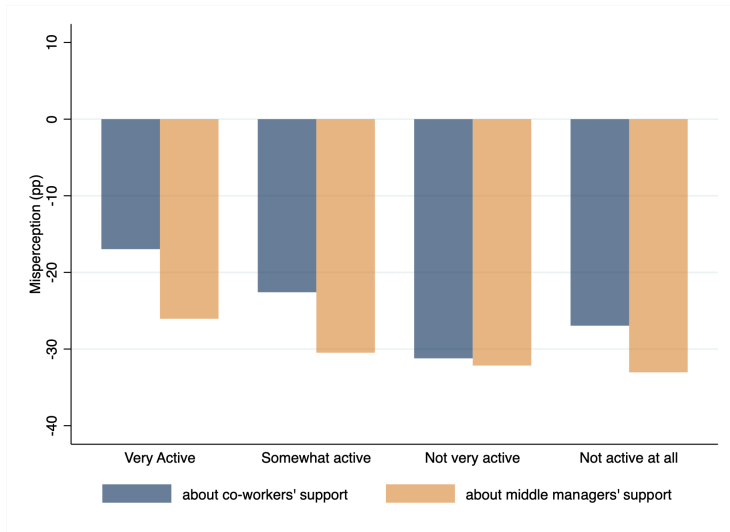# Beliefs of Others' Support (2 Weeks)

By Firm Activeness

### By Firm Size

Misperceptions by Firm Size (2 Weeks)

By Firm's Activeness in Encouraging Leave (2 Weeks)

Social Desirability Bias

- To what extent is our measure of misperception driven by social desirability bias (SDB)?
  - E.g., Respondents' reported support higher than it really is.

- Two Approaches:
  1. Elicit first-order beliefs using either **direct elicitation** and **randomized elicitation**.
     - For randomized elicitation, respondents answer based on a die throw which provides a high degree of "cover"/plausible deniability

  2. Elicit second-order beliefs using either an **"actual"** version or a **"truthful"** version.
     - Truthful version: *"how many of these men do you think are **truly (honne) supportive** of a male employee/male subordinate..."*
     - If there is a high degree of SDB, respondents should anticipate that others are distorting their answers. Truthful version prompts respondents to factor this in.

SDB: Beliefs About Middle Managers' Support (2 weeks)
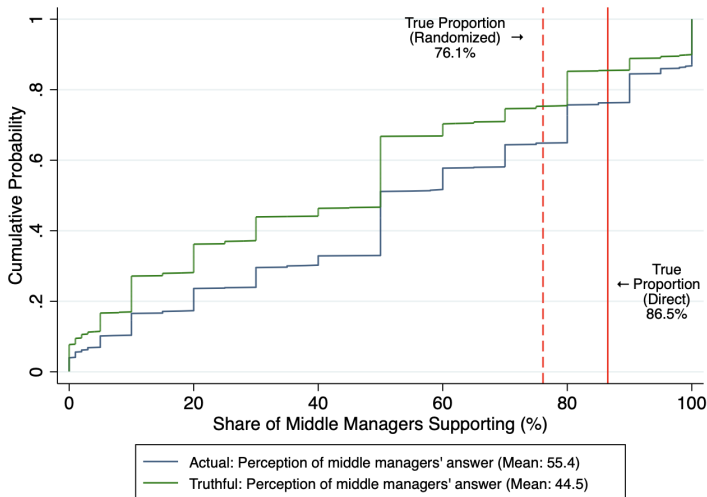
Do Misperceptions Matter?

Leave-taking intentions among those who plan to have child next year:

- **Own accord**: *"Suppose you have a child next year, what is the % chance that you would take the following durations of paternity leave to help care for the child?"*

- **Manager supportive**: *"Suppose that your direct manager indicates that he is supportive of you taking <u>1 month</u> of paternity leave. In this scenario, what is the % chance that [...]"*
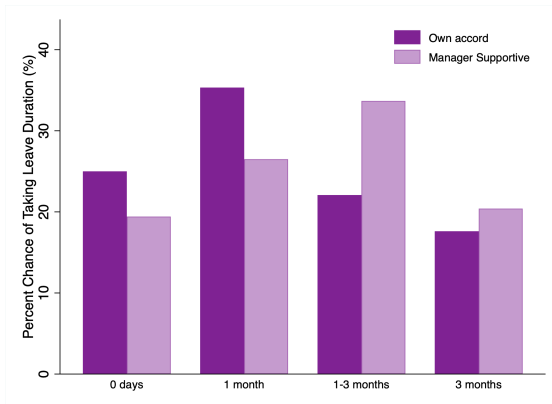
Own Support vs. Second-Order Beliefs

Supportive of co-workers taking ≥ 2 weeks leave
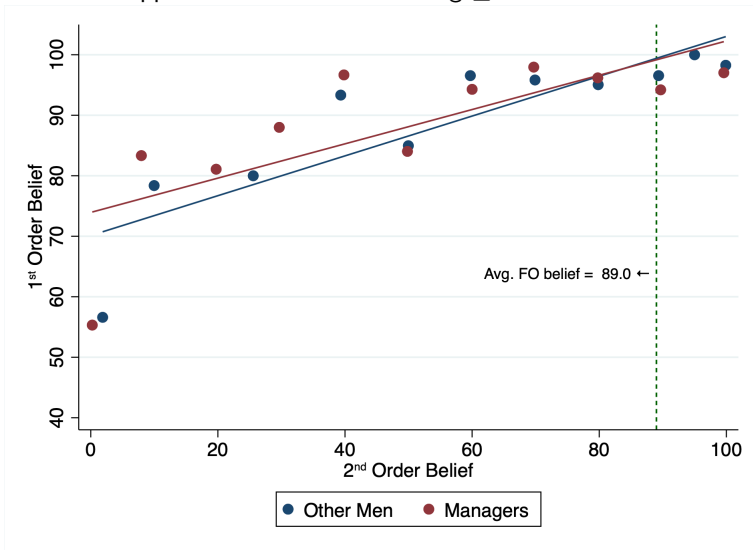
Leave-Taking Intentions vs. Second-Order Beliefs

Intend to take ≥ 1 month of paternity-leave
(among those who plan to have a child in the near future)
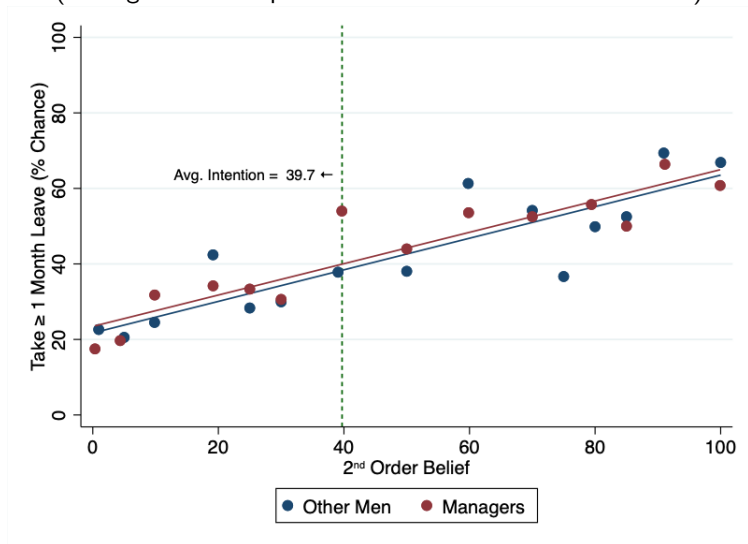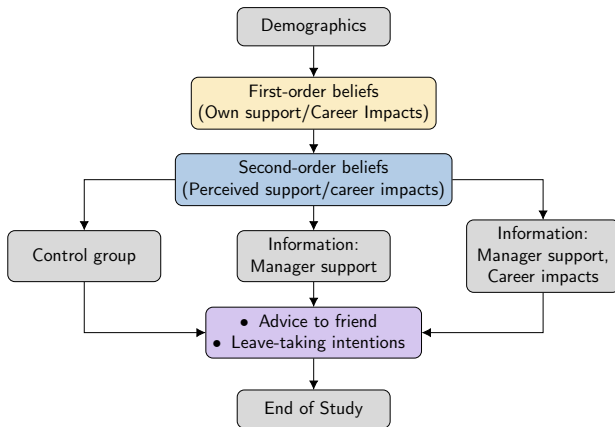
Pilot Information Treatment

- Conducted in April 2024 on a sample of 1,500 married men who are employees of companies/government.
    - 3 Treatment arms ($N = 500$ each)

- Survey structure:

Information Treatment

In a previous question, we asked you to estimate how many out of 100 middle managers in Japanese companies/organizations are supportive of a male subordinate with a newborn child taking the following durations of paternity/childcare leave. Below, we show your estimate the actual share of middle managers who are supportive according to the nationally representative survey.

QTAINFO1.
前述の質問では、日本の会社/組織の中間管理職が、近々子どもが生まれる男性部下が以下の期間の育休を取得することを「支持する」と答えた人は、100人中何人いると思うか、あなたに予想していただきました。
以下は、あなたの予想した値と、私たちの代表的な調査に基づく実際の割合です。

男性部下の2週間の育休取得を「支持する」と答えた中間管理職の割合

あなたの予想した値
2週間 **[QTa2a(1)]**%

実際の割合
2週間 **86.5**%

男性部下の1ヶ月の育休取得を「支持する」と答えた中間管理職の割合

あなたの予想した値
1ヶ月 **[QTa2a(2)]**%

実際の割合
1ヶ月 **76.5**%

Outcome: Advice to Friend

- **Scenario:** Suppose that you have a male friend who is similar in age and education as you and is working in a similar position for a similar type of company. Suppose this friend is about to have a child and is deciding about whether to take paternity leave. Under the current legislation, he is eligible for up to four weeks of paid paternity leave (*papa kyuka*) within the first 8 weeks of the child's birth, and up to one year of childcare leave (*ikuji kyugyo*) before his child turns one (on average at 80% of take-home pay for the first 6 months, and about 60% of take-home pay for the next 6 months).

- What advice would you give your friend? Specifically, what is the percent chance that you would encourage him to take: 0 days, < 2 weeks, 2 to 4 weeks, 1 to 3 months, > 3 months of paternity leave

Impact of Info on Advice to Friend

	Full Sample	Accurate Sample		
		All	Underest.	Overest.
A. 2 weeks				
Manager Support Info	5.80*	9.60***	10.56***	2.13
	(2.27)	(2.78)	(3.04)	(6.10)
Constant	56.47***	56.47***	53.25***	74.94***
	(1.60)	(1.60)	(1.73)	(3.68)
B. 1 month				
Manager Support Info	4.24	5.81*	7.27*	-4.23
	(2.23)	(2.73)	(2.88)	(7.33)
Constant	34.78***	34.78***	31.41***	54.09***
	(1.58)	(1.57)	(1.64)	(4.42)
Observations	1038	775	654	121

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Impact of Info on Gender Attitudes

	Less career-committed if patern. leave (1 = Disagree)	Hb should contribute eq to childcare (1 = Agree)	Hb are the breadwinners; wf homemakers (1 = Disagree)	Hb shld support wf's career goal (1 = Disagree)
Treatment A	0.087**	0.075*	0.055	0.058
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.038)
Constant	0.239***	0.602***	0.299***	0.510***
	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Observations	775	775	775	775

Next Steps and Conclusion

- Widespread misperception in the extent of support for paternity leave-taking among peers and managers.

- Beliefs about others' support is correlated with support and willingness to take paternity-leave.

- Information gaps could explain low rates of leave-taking despite high levels of support and encouragement from firms.

- Suggestive evidence that providing information about support of middle managers can shift attitudes and beliefs.
  - However, recall accuracy is not great; is the information credible?
  - Unclear if this will translate to actual changes in behavior

- Challenge is how to correct misperceptions in a credible, meaningful, and scalable way.
  - Embed social-norm interventions in the context of group processes (Prentice and Paluck, 2020)
  - Social proof and reality-testing (e.g., through videos, employee-manager communications, group discussions)