

Japanese mayor says men should grocery shop during pandemic as women 'take a longer time'

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Tokyo (CNN) The mayor of Japan's third-largest city is facing a public backlash after he suggested men are better suited to grocery shopping during the coronavirus pandemic, because women take too long and contribute to overcrowding at supermarkets.

The number of confirmed cases of the virus in Japan has spiked in recent weeks -- dashing hopes that the government's initial virus response had succeeded in controlling its spread. As of Thursday, Japan had 11,950 confirmed cases, including 299 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University. On March 1, the country had 243 cases. That spike has seen a raft of new restrictions put in place nationwide. On Thursday, Osaka mayor Ichiro Matsui implied male grocery shoppers would reduce the potential spread of the virus as they would spend less time in stores.

"Women take a longer time grocery shopping because they browse through different products and weigh out which option is best," Matsui told reporters at a coronavirus press conference in Osaka on Thursday.

"Men quickly grab what they're told to buy so they won't linger at the supermarket -- that avoids close contact with others," added Matsui.

Women account for 51% of the Japanese population, according to World Bank data. But Japan is ranked 110th out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's index measuring the degree of gender equality.

The mayor's comments prompted popular Japanese journalist Shoko Egawa to tweet that "people who know nothing about daily life shouldn't make comments."

Egawa's tweet gleaned over 3,000 retweets, with one social media user tweeting that Matsui had probably never done the shopping himself.

Japan remains a largely male-dominated society. The country is ranked 110 out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) latest global gender gap index. The country also ranks bottom among the G7 countries for gender equality, despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's pledge to empower working women through a policy called "womenomics."

Osaka has been under a state of emergency since April 7. Matsui's comments came after he suggested supermarkets limit the number of people entering stores where possible, and recommended the public only shop for groceries once every two to three days.