

Japan's Declining Birth Rate

Overview:

Japanese society is facing a modern day crisis. Over the course of the last few decades Japan's birthrate has been declining steadily, with the potential for serious repercussions in national economic growth and social security. The purpose of this lesson is to identify trends in Japanese population statistics and to closely examine the impact of Japan's declining birth rate. Students may also wish to compare Japan's situation with other countries.

Objective with curriculum:

Unit Three: Social and Technological change.

Global History 12 Department of Education, Nova Scotia, Canada

Resources:

1. Keizai Koho Center. Japan: An International Comparison 2009. December 2008. Editor Hideaki Tananka.
2. Oshio, Takashi "*The Declining Birthrate in Japan*" Japan Economic Currents. Volume 69, March 2008. Keizai Koho Center.

Directions:

Students are asked to examine the graphs provided (Japan: An International Comparison 2009.) and answer the questions provided. Students will then read the article "*The Declining Birthrate in Japan*" and answer the questions provided.

1. According to chart 1-1, what will happen to Japan's population by 2050?
2. How does this compare with Canada? What factors might account for these differences?
3. What information is provided in chart 1-3? How does Japan compare with other nations?
4. Using information from charts 1-1 and 1-3, what problems may occur for Japan's social structure?
5. Examine chart 1-4. What factors might explain the increase in life expectancy in Japan? What impact does a longer life expectancy have for Japanese society?

6. What information is revealed in chart 1-5 for Japan? When viewed with information provided in chart 1-4 what potential concerns may there be for Japan?
7. What information is listed in chart 1-6 and how might this information affect Japan? How does Japan compare with Canada?
8. What potential concerns may be noted from statistics provided in chart 1-7?

1. What is the central issue of this article?
2. Why is the decline in population a major concern in Japan?
3. What is the relationship between working women and the decline in childbirth?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages that working women face in having children?
5. What new ideas have been proposed to reverse the decline in childbirth?
6. Are factors preceding marriage or following marriage more responsible for declining birth rates in Japan?
7. What factors might explain why Japanese women are waiting longer to have children?
8. How does Japan compare with other nations in regards to children born out of wedlock? Does this strong social belief contribute to the declining birth rate?
9. Why are Japanese women marrying late or choosing to remain single?
10. According to surveys conducted in 2005, what were the most popular answers for why women were reluctant to have children?
11. How can the government make employment and child bearing more compatible?
12. What are the three points that the author suggests attention be paid to?
13. What is family policy? What is the author's opinion on this policy in Japan?
14. How are children good for the economy?
15. Is this issue a concern in Canada? Why or why not?

Conclusion:

Students can share their responses in groups or as part of a class discussion.

This issue is deemed to be of such great concern in Japan that the Japanese government has created a ministerial position to address the declining population in Japan.

As a follow up activity, students could assume the roles of government officials and propose ideas to address this crisis. They may also visit business and industry websites to see how corporations are developing new policies to balance work and home life in Japan.

1-1 Population and Density

	Population						Area		Density	
	(A) Mid-Year Estimates 2008 (1,000)	Forecast for Year 2010 (1,000)	Forecast for Year 2030 (1,000)	Forecast for Year 2050 (1,000)	Increase FM2010 TO2030 (%)	Increase FM2030 TO2050 (%)	(B) Total Area 2006 (1,000km ²) ^(a)	(%)	Agricultural Area 2005 (%)	(A/B) (population per km ²)
World	6,749,641	6,906,558	8,317,707	9,191,287	20.43	10.50	136,127	100.0	10.4	50
China ^(b)	1,336,311	1,351,512	1,458,421	1,408,846	7.91	-3.40	9,597	7.1	14.9	139
India	1,186,186	1,220,182	1,505,748	1,658,270	23.40	10.13	3,287	2.4	48.6	361
US	308,798	314,692	366,187	402,415	15.58	9.89	9,629	7.1	18.1	32
Indonesia	234,342	239,600	279,666	296,885	16.72	5.09	1,905	1.4	12.1	123
Brazil	194,228	198,982	236,480	254,085	18.84	7.44	8,515	6.3	6.9	23
Nigeria	151,478	158,313	226,855	288,696	43.30	27.26	924	0.7	34.6	164
Russia	141,780	140,318	123,915	107,832	-11.69	-12.98	17,098	12.6	7.1	8
Japan	127,938	127,758	118,252	102,511	-7.44	-13.31	378	0.3	11.5	339
Mexico	107,801	110,293	128,125	132,278	16.17	3.24	1,964	1.4	12.7	55
Philippines	89,651	93,001	122,388	140,466	31.60	14.77	300	0.2	19.0	299
Germany	82,534	82,365	79,348	74,088	-3.66	-6.63	357	0.3	33.3	231
Egypt	76,840	79,537	104,070	121,219	30.84	16.48	1,002	0.7	3.0	77
Thailand	64,316	65,125	69,218	67,376	6.28	-2.66	513	0.4	27.7	125
France	61,946	62,507	66,605	68,270	6.56	2.50	552	0.4	33.6	112
UK	61,019	61,517	66,162	68,717	7.55	3.86	243	0.2	23.6	251
Italy	58,946	59,032	57,519	54,610	-2.56	-5.06	301	0.2	25.7	196
Korea	48,388	48,673	48,411	42,327	-0.54	-12.57	100	0.1	16.3	485
Spain	44,593	45,108	46,682	46,401	3.49	-0.60	506	0.4	27.1	88
Argentina	39,934	40,738	47,534	51,382	16.68	8.10	2,780	2.0	10.3	14
Poland	38,022	37,902	35,353	30,260	-6.73	-14.41	313	0.2	38.8	122
Canada	33,170	33,752	39,105	42,754	15.86	9.33	9,985	7.3	4.6	3
Malaysia	27,027	27,920	35,270	39,631	26.33	12.36	330	0.2	5.5	82
Australia	20,951	21,362	25,287	28,041	18.37	10.89	7,692	5.7	6.4	3
Sweden	9,160	9,242	10,012	10,481	8.33	4.68	450	0.3	6.0	20
Singapore	4,490	4,592	5,202	5,026	13.28	-3.38	1	0.0	0.0	6,507
New Zealand	4,215	4,285	4,895	5,209	14.24	6.41	270	0.2	5.5	16
EU	493,716	495,207	496,116	479,464	0.18	-3.36	4,331	3.2	25.5	114
ASEAN	578,642	592,945	708,318	763,149	19.46	7.74	4,480	3.3	14.8	129
NAFTA	449,769	458,737	533,417	577,447	16.28	8.25	21,578	15.9	11.4	21
Mercosur	243,751	249,554	296,087	318,976	18.65	7.73	11,878	8.7	7.8	21

(a) 1,000km²=386.1 miles²; (b) Excluding Hong Kong and Macau

Sources: Social Indicators, 2008; UN; World Population Prospects, 2006; UN; ResourceSTAT-Land, 2007; FAO; Demographic Yearbook 2006; UN

1-2 Population of Major Cities

(2007)

Country	City	Population (1,000 persons)
China	Beijing	11,106
	Shanghai	14,987
	Hong Kong	7,206
India	Delhi	15,926
US	New York-Newark	19,040
	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana	12,500
Brazil	Sao Paulo	18,845
Russia	Moscow	10,452
Japan	Tokyo ^(a)	34,826
	Osaka	8,812
Germany	Berlin	3,406
France	Paris	9,904
UK	London	8,567
Italy	Rome	3,339
Korea	Seoul	9,796
Australia	Sydney	4,327

(a) Total population of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, and Saitama Prefectures
Sources: World Urbanization Prospects, The 2007 Revision, UN; Statistics Bureau data, MIC (as of October 1, 2007)

1-3 Percentage of Urban Population

(%)	1985	1995	2005	2030
World	40.9	44.7	48.6	59.7
Africa	29.9	34.1	37.9	50.0
Egypt	43.9	42.8	42.6	49.9
Asia	29.0	34.4	39.7	54.1
China	23.0	31.4	40.4	60.3
Japan	60.6	64.6	66.0	73.0
Europe	69.4	71.0	71.9	77.8
UK	88.6	89.0	89.7	92.2
France	73.7	74.9	76.7	82.9
North America	74.7	77.3	80.7	86.7
US	74.5	77.3	80.8	87.0
Oceania	70.7	70.5	70.5	72.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	67.9	73.0	77.5	84.6
Brazil	71.3	77.8	84.2	91.1

Source: World Urbanization Prospects, The 2007 Revision, UN

1-4 Average Life Expectancy at Birth

(years)	Male			Female		
	1950-55 ^(a)	2000-05 ^(b)	2045-50 ^(b)	1950-55 ^(a)	2000-05 ^(b)	2045-50 ^(b)
Japan	61.6	78.3	83.3	65.5	85.2	90.9
Australia	66.9	77.9	84.1	72.4	82.9	88.0
Sweden	70.4	77.8	83.5	73.3	82.3	87.0
Canada	66.8	77.3	83.2	71.7	82.3	87.5
Italy	64.3	76.9	82.1	67.8	82.9	87.9
Spain	61.6	76.6	82.3	66.3	83.4	88.6
UK	66.7	76.1	81.9	71.8	80.7	86.4
France	63.7	76.0	81.8	69.5	83.2	88.5
Germany	65.3	75.7	81.4	69.6	81.5	86.8
US	66.1	74.7	80.4	72.0	80.0	85.7
Korea	46.0	73.5	79.9	49.0	80.6	87.1
China	39.3	70.5	77.4	42.3	73.7	81.3
Egypt	41.1	67.7	76.2	42.7	72.0	80.9
Brazil	49.3	67.3	76.0	52.7	74.9	83.0
India	38.1	61.7	73.4	36.6	64.2	77.9

(a) Estimates; (b) Projections
Source: World Population Prospects, The 2006 Revision, UN

1-5 Fertility Rate

(%)	1950-1955 ^(a)	2000-2005 ^(a)	2045-2050 ^(b)	Japan Eras of Significance
India	5.91	3.11	1.85	1947-1949 (First baby boom) 4.42
US	3.45	2.04	1.85	
France	2.73	1.88	1.85	1966 (Year of "Hinoeuma") 1.58
China	6.22	1.70	1.85	
UK	2.18	1.70	1.85	1971-1974 (Second babyboom) 2.12
Sweden	2.21	1.67	1.85	
Armenia	4.49	1.35	1.76	1989 (Recorded below that of 1966) 1.57
Germany	2.16	1.35	1.74	
Russia	2.85	1.30	1.71	
Japan	2.75	1.29	1.60	2007 (Marked record-low births) 1.34
Korea	5.40	1.24	1.54	

(a) Estimates; (b) Projections
Sources: World Population Prospects, The 2006 Revision, UN; Population Projections for Japan, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research; Demographic Yearbook, MHLW

1-6 Marriage and Divorce Rates

(per 1,000 persons)	1995		2000		2005	
	Marriages	Divorces	Marriages	Divorces	Marriages	Divorces
Australia	6.10	2.75	5.90	2.61	5.40	2.60
Belgium	5.10	3.45	4.40	2.63	4.10	2.90
Canada	5.50	2.64	5.10	2.32	4.70 ^(a)	2.20 ^(b)
China ^(c)	—	—	6.70	1.00	6.30	1.40
France	4.40	2.05	5.10	1.94	4.50	2.50
Germany	5.30	2.07	5.10	2.37	4.70	2.40
Italy	5.10	0.47	4.90	0.65	4.20	0.80
Japan	6.30	1.59	6.30	2.08	5.60	2.10
Korea	8.80	1.43	7.10	2.55	6.60	2.60
Netherlands	5.30	2.21	5.50	2.18	4.40	2.00
Singapore	7.20	1.19	5.60	0.68	5.30	1.50
UK	5.50	2.89	5.10	2.58	5.10 ^(a)	2.80 ^(a)
US	—	—	12.50	6.20	11.20	5.40

(a) 2003; (b) 2004; (c) Excluding Hong Kong and Macau
Sources: Demographic Yearbook 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, UN; Statistical Abstract of U.S.: 2008, U.S. Census Bureau

1-7 Population Aged 65 or Over

(%)	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Japan	12.0	17.2	22.5	28.4	30.6
Germany	15.0	16.4	20.5	22.4	27.3
Italy	15.3	18.2	20.6	23.2	27.0
Korea	5.0	7.4	11.3	15.7	23.4
France	14.0	16.3	16.5	20.2	23.2
Sweden	17.8	17.2	18.4	21.1	22.8
UK	15.7	15.8	16.6	18.9	21.6
US	12.2	12.3	12.8	15.8	19.4
China	5.4	6.8	8.4	11.9	16.2

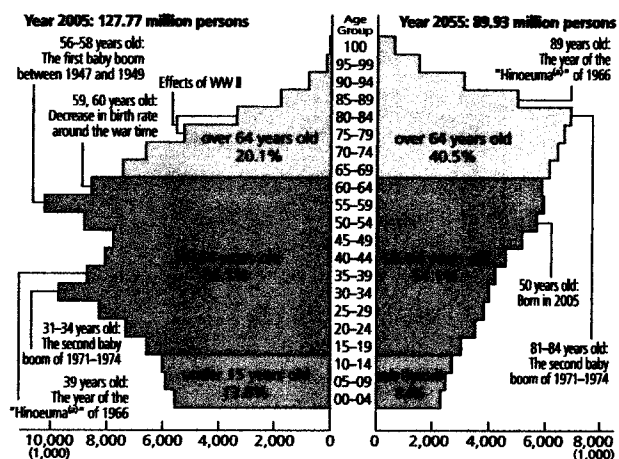
Source: World Population Prospects, The 2006 Revision, UN

1-8 Population by Age and Gender: Japan (2008)

Age Group	Total			Total (%)		
	(1,000)	Male (1,000)	Female (1,000)	(%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Total	127,662	62,236	65,425	100.00	48.75	51.25
0-4	5,420	2,777	2,642	4.25	51.24	48.75
5-9	5,836	2,992	2,844	4.57	51.27	48.73
10-14	5,980	3,063	2,917	4.68	51.22	48.78
15-19	6,220	3,186	3,034	4.87	51.22	48.78
20-24	7,164	3,678	3,486	5.61	51.34	48.66
25-29	7,696	3,921	3,775	6.03	50.95	49.05
30-34	9,132	4,632	4,500	7.15	50.72	49.28
35-39	9,517	4,811	4,706	7.45	50.55	49.45
40-44	8,290	4,176	4,114	6.49	50.37	49.63
45-49	7,758	3,893	3,865	6.08	50.18	49.82
50-54	7,887	3,936	3,951	6.18	49.90	50.10
55-59	10,049	4,971	5,078	7.87	49.47	50.53
60-64	8,785	4,287	4,498	6.88	48.80	51.20
65-69	7,880	3,769	4,112	6.17	47.83	52.18
70-74	6,977	3,222	3,755	5.47	46.18	53.82
75-79	5,682	2,461	3,221	4.45	43.31	56.69
80-84	3,981	1,529	2,452	3.12	38.41	61.59
85 and over	3,406	931	2,476	2.67	27.33	72.70

Source: Statistics Bureau data, MIC (as of May 1, 2008)

1-9 Population in 50 Years: Japan



(a) Bad year for having a baby according to oriental zodiac-based superstition.
Sources: Population Census of Japan, MIC; Japan's Future Population (December 2006), National Institute of Population and Social Security Research

JAPAN ECONOMIC CURRENTS

A COMMENTARY ON ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS TRENDS

The Declining Birthrate in Japan

BY TAKASHI OSHIO, KOBE UNIVERSITY

Japan has entered an age of full-fledged population decline. The nation's total fertility rate, which is the average number of children a woman will bear over her lifetime, was 1.32 in 2006. While this is slightly above the 1.26 rate for 2005, the upward shift appears to be largely due to temporary factors, not to a bottoming out of the decline. Indeed, the government's population estimates are based on the assumption that the rate will continue to fall and that even in 2055, it will only recover to the 2005 level at the most. Because Japan's economic and social institutions, such as its social security system, were structured on the premise of population growth, a population decrease endangers them. Still, if only the birthrate could be returned to a growth trend, problems of this sort would greatly diminish. For this reason, a growing number of people are calling for measures to put the falling number of children back on the growth track.

The relationship between working women and the childbirth decline

One of the debated points in the discussion of measures to promote fertility is the relationship between female participation in the labor force and the birthrate. The conventional thinking is that when the rate of participation goes up, the opportunity cost of bearing and raising children also rises, and so if other factors remain unchanged, the birthrate is likely to go down. When we examine the actual situation in the developed countries, however, we find that there is instead a mild tendency for birthrates to rise when female participation in the labor force moves up.

Japan is low in the ranking of both the fertility rate and the female employment rate. This makes it possible to argue that if more women were to join the labor force, more children would be born. Those making this assertion have, however, received a great deal of criticism. One of the rebuttals is that the people making international comparisons tend to arbitrarily limit the sample to certain

Editor's Note

One of the gravest problems facing Japanese society today is the declining birthrate. It is both the hardest to solve and the one with the greatest impact. The birthrate is a fundamental factor that affects Japan's economic growth and security, and the premise that underpins our social security. In this issue, we present a commentary based on a detailed analysis of how this phenomenon is viewed in Japan and what aspects of it are problematic for Japanese people. With the causes yet to be fully illuminated, there are no magic solutions to the birthrate issue. An objective analysis of possible countermeasures is provided.

We also feature an American perspective on likely trends and qualities of Japanese society that may help Japan to cope with this challenge. It is a refreshing suggestion that characteristics regarded by many Japanese as "backward," such as strong family ties and the tendency for seniors to continue working, may in fact be strengths of Japanese society.

We hope these articles will help increase understanding of the issue of Japan's declining birthrate and offer insights when considering other Asian countries that will soon face similar challenges.

countries. If instead the analysis includes Mexico, Turkey and other countries with relatively low income

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Meeting Japan's Aging Challenge

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By Richard Jackson and Keisuke Nakashima, Center for Strategic and International Studies

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levels, and also excludes Iceland, which has extremely high childbirth and female employment rates, the positive correlation becomes hard to discern. Another problem is that it is not easy to come up with theoretical reasons why women should have more children when they hold jobs. One more point is that the relationship between work and the total fertility rate is not static. Back in 1970 the correlation was generally negative, while in the mid-1980s it was virtually nonexistent.

When we look at changes by country over time, we find that the birthrate has clearly bottomed out in a number of countries, such as France, the Netherlands and the United States. The overall trend, however, has been for female employment to rise and the birthrate to decline at the same time. Japan in the 1970s had a relatively high level of female participation in the labor force, but thereafter it rose little, while the birthrate fell sharply. Judging from this record, we cannot confidently proclaim that getting more women into the labor force will result in more children. To be sure, an upward trend in female employment could lead to changes in social arrangements that make it easier for working women to raise children, thereby lifting the birthrate. However, such an outcome is not necessarily assured.

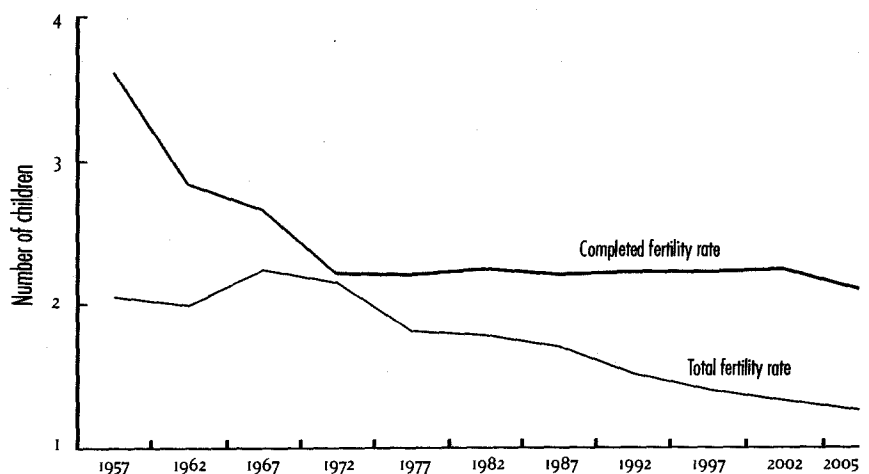
Behind lower birthrates: People who marry late or remain single

Among the measures commonly proposed to reverse the decline in the number of children are hiking the allowance for children, improving child-care centers and increasing the allowances for childbirth and child care. These are all means of providing support to married couples. When thinking about ways to promote fertility, people generally start from the idea that the reason more babies are not being born is that bringing up children is too expensive. It can be persuasively argued, however, that the main causes of the falling number of children are to be found before marriage, not after it. If the trend

toward men and women marrying later or remaining single is the chief culprit, measures to assist existing couples can have only an indirect effect.

So which are more important, factors preceding marriage or factors following it? Here our attention is drawn to data on the average number of children a couple will have up to 15–19 years from the start of their marriage, or the "completed fertility rate." The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research conducts a National Fertility Survey on a regular basis, and as shown in Figure 1, the results indicate that there was little change in the completed fertility rate from the early 1970s to 2002. On the average, each couple had 2.2 children. The total fertility rate, by contrast, steadily

Figure 1. Japan's Total Fertility and Completed Fertility Rates



Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, National Fertility Surveys.

declined over this period. We may say that when young Japanese men and women do marry, most eventually have two children.

There has been a slight change in the situation recently. The completed fertility rate dropped sharply to 2.09 in 2005, provoking concern about a loss of capacity of couples to produce children. But another factor was probably influential: the tendency among young Japanese to marry later and postpone having children. The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare reports that the average age of women on first marriage was 27.8 years in 2004, up by 2.4 years from the average age 20 years earlier, while their average age on the birth of their first child was 28.9 years, up by 2.3 years. When women begin bearing children at that late age, giving birth to and raising two or three children is physically hard on them.

From this perspective, we find that the dwindling number of children can be largely explained by factors that precede marriage rather than factors that follow it, especially by the tendency of young people to marry late or remain single. Still, a persuasive rebuttal can be advanced. That is, this tendency among young people can be observed in many countries and is not peculiar to Japan. When we consider, for instance, the average age of women

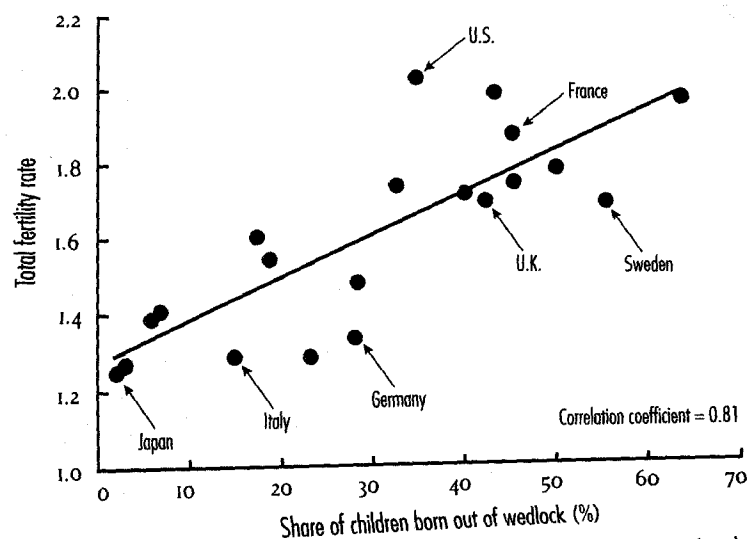
on first marriage, the age in Japan is not notably advanced. And yet the birthrate has continued to fall in Japan, as in some other countries, whereas it has rebounded in yet other countries.

The point to note is the relationship between marriage and childbirth. Japanese women rarely bear children before getting married. Of all children, only some 2% are born out of wedlock (and are not legally legitimate). By contrast, the share of children born out of wedlock has climbed above 40% in Britain, France and nations in Scandinavia, where birthrates have recovered. There are even countries like Sweden, where the parents

of more than half the children are not legally married. Japan differs substantially from other members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in respect to this relationship between marriage and childbirth. And as Figure 2 demonstrates, a clear positive correlation exists between the share of children born out of marriage and the total fertility rate.

In countries with a large share of children born out of wedlock, it is common for couples to live together for some time in what is essentially a marriage before they legally marry. In addition, children born out of wedlock

Figure 2. Children Born out of Wedlock and Fertility Rates in OECD Countries



Source: Compiled from data including Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, Jinko datai takei tokushu hakoku (Special Report on Vital Statistics), 2005.

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are granted virtually the same rights as legitimate children, and couples with de facto marriages receive the same child-raising assistance as legally married couples. In such a situation, there will not necessarily be any direct connection between the number of children and the tendency to marry late or remain single. In Japan, by contrast, late marriage can throw off the timing for having children, and remaining single can eliminate the chance altogether. In this very different situation, marriage trends impact directly on the number of children born.

A variety of factors lie behind the tendency to marry late or remain single. Japanese women are strongly inclined to reject prospective marriage partners without equal or higher levels of education, and as they acquire advanced educations, it becomes harder for them to find a suitable partner. Another factor, one that has shown signs of receding recently, is the large number of financially unstable young people who are "freeters" jumping from job to job or are "NEETs," those who are "not in employment, education, or training." To such youngsters, marriage is something far from their reach. In Japan's case, marriage has to come first before

other life decisions are addressed. This sort of thinking can also be seen in Southeast Asian countries, albeit with differences in degree.

Can birth promotion measures boost the number of children?

Views differ sharply within the government on what to give priority among measures to boost the number of children. In one camp are those who say that the emphasis should be placed on economic assistance, such as financial support through child benefits, medical-care subsidies, child-care and education assistance. There are solid grounds for holding this position. For instance, in 2005 the Cabinet Office conducted an opinion poll among women on parenthood policy measures, and when the surveyed were asked what was most important to reverse the fertility decline, by far the most popular response, picked by 69.9%, was "economic assistance measures." Again, in its 2005 basic survey on births, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare asked why they had fewer than what they saw as the ideal number of children. The top reply, picked by 65.9%, was "because raising and educating children is too expensive."

Another camp within the government wants priority placed on making employment compatible with bearing and raising children, using the promotion of child-care centers, improved maternity leave, the facilitation of reemployment after raising children and other similar measures. In the Cabinet Office opinion poll, a fairly large group of respondents favored such measures for balancing children and work. In double-income families that earn a fair amount of income, these measures are more important than financial support. We need to note, though, that the positions of the two camps are not antagonistic. Perhaps equal weight should be placed on both sets of measures. But in any event, attention should be paid to the following points.

1. First, support to balance children and work influences choices people make as a matter of individual freedom. From the policy perspective, such support is more fundamental than economic support and is of greater urgency. Bringing up children is a very human act. No matter how it is viewed, it would be unnatural to place restrictions on this human behavior and force women to make a choice