

Gender and the Sense of Burden Regarding Childrearing: A Comparative Analysis of Japan, Germany and Italy

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This article explores how married men and women think their life would be better or worse if they were to have a child or another child in the next three years, and what factors affect these anxieties and expectations in Japan, Germany and Italy from a gender perspective.

Using the data from the Generation and Gender Survey, I first examined, through ANOVA, the relationships between gender and the expected improvement or worsening of each of the following areas in their lives: financial situation, the possibility to do what they want, employment opportunities, sexual life, what others around think of them, and joy and satisfaction from life. In all three countries, the largest gender gap is found in expected changes in employment opportunities, followed by those concerning the possibility to do what they want, with women expecting their situations to be worse than their male counterparts do. On the other hand, the joy and satisfaction in life expected from having a child shows different gender effects across countries: there is no gender gap in Germany, but women in Japan anticipate less and women in Italy anticipate more joy and satisfaction from having a child or another child.

Secondly, a regression analysis on the anxiety for their employment opportunities yields the following results: 1) women have stronger anxiety than men in all three countries, even after controlling for various factors such as age, education, household incomes and family values and so on; 2) whereas younger people have more anxiety about employment opportunities in Japan, younger people have less anxiety in Germany; 3) the higher the household income is, the more anxiety Germans express, 4) although people who have secondary education have more anxiety in Germany, people with only primary education have more anxiety in Italy; 5) people who accept cohabitation tend to think that it is difficult to combine employment and child-rearing in Japan; 6) the more children they have, the stronger anxiety for losing employment opportunities they have in both in Japan and Italy.

Thirdly, the results of a regression analysis on the expectation to get joy and satisfaction in life by having a/another child indicate that 1) men tend to expect more joy and satisfaction both in Japan and Germany; 2) the younger generation tends to have such expectation in all three countries; 3) people with having more children tend to think that having another child will lessen their joy and satisfaction to get from life.

These results show that if Japan were to develop policies to address the problem of the declining birth rate, it is important to improve employment conditions so as to reduce the anxiety people have with regard to employment opportunities, which was especially strongly expressed by women, the younger generation, people with more children and those who have unconventional views about the family.