

# Gender Analysis on Fertility Decline in Japan

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This paper aims to analyze the phenomenon of a fertility decline from the perspectives of women's social role and gender relationships within the family, to elicit their implications and provide direction for policymaking.

In this paper, the phenomenon of a decline in the number of children is regarded as the result of avoidance of marriage and childbearing. The following three factors contributing to this avoidance are discussed herein: (1) Social system, (2) Sense of values and awareness, and (3) The belief that marriage and childbearing is costly. The relationships between these factors are analyzed based on various data, and the following results have been obtained.

(1) Social system: Since World War II, a corporation-centered lifestyle has become popular and a stereotypical modern family in which the husband serves as breadwinner while the wife is a full-time homemaker has become common. As a gender policy, a system in which preferential treatment is given to full-time homemakers has been established. However, this paper has revealed that factors inconsistent with the conventional framework are emerging, such as diversification in women's lifetime events, social orientation toward women's independence and accountability, and a global concept of reproductive rights.

(2) Sense of values and awareness: Gender awareness changed in the 1980s. However, men's awareness hardly changed, leading to a significant gender gap and generation gap. The results of an interview survey are summarized as follows:

- (i) Advantages of marriage are decreasing to both men and women, but women in particular feel disadvantages of marriage.
- (ii) As a marriage partner, women are searching for a man who does not make them sacrifice themselves. In other words, women consider marriage as an equal partnership. On the other hand, men do not have a specific image of a marriage partner.
- (iii) In regard to childbearing, women are greatly concerned about the effect of childbearing on their job, while men are indifferent.

(3) Feeling that marriage, childbearing and childcare are costly: Analysis of various survey data shows that women are more discouraged about childbearing because household chores become more burdensome on women. Moreover, the less a husband shares the load of household chores and childcare, the more discouraged women become.

Based on the analysis of factors in the phenomenon of a fertility decline, the following suggestions for policymaking are indicated.

The analysis of gender relationships and fertility indicate that it is essential to mitigate the belief that "marriage, childbearing and childcare are costly." To achieve this goal, it is suggested that the following three measures should be promoted:

- (i) To incorporate the concept of reproductive rights/health into the childbearing/medical systems, in order to reorganize the system from the perspective of women's lifetime health, and to establish a childcare support system corresponding to the actual situation in each region.
- (ii) To transform the gender system, which has been based on the stereotypical gender roles, that is, the husband serves as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker.
- (iii) To propagate the new gender awareness and the concept of reproductive rights/health through the school system and civic education.