

Fertility Rate and Family Policies in English-Speaking Countries: Qualitative Analyses of Women's Experience and Perception

Saori KAMANO

In comparison with other Western industrialized countries, English-speaking countries can be characterized as having relatively high fertility rates and high labor force participation rates of women; and yet, at the same time, they are also known to be countries where national policies aimed at helping people balance family and work lives are underdeveloped. To understand this apparent contradiction, in this paper, I explore the general social environment for having and raising children in these societies, using the results of interview studies conducted in the four English-speaking countries of New Zealand, Australia, Britain and the United States. Particular attention is paid to how women perceive and experience the social environment with respect to having and raising children. Aspects of such perception and experience explored here include: (a) work arrangement; (b) subjective evaluation of workplace and labor market conditions in general; (c) perception of 'costs' of having and raising children; and, (d) evaluation of their society as a place to raise children. Interview data show that despite the lack of policies that enable them to negotiate the balance between work and family lives, the women were not conscious of the economic costs incurred in raising children, and even when they were, the majority of them did not find such costs a burden. In addition, many women considered their country a good place to bring up children, and such feelings were especially strong in New Zealand and Australia.