Factors in Balance

Japan's Declining Birth Rate & How the Government Has Responded

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INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that Japan has been struggling with a continuous declining birth rate for decades now, and Japanese media and academic audiences worldwide alike are no stranger to the phenomenon. The total fertility rate reached its 'shocking' low of 1.57 in 1989 and has been in decline for nearly every year ever since, reaching a rate of 1.37 in 2008. With only 12.9% of the total population being under the age of 14, and 24.7% being over the age of 65 as of 2013 (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2013), Japan is officially an aging society. In fact, Japan's situation is the most extreme in the world, coming out on top over countries such as Italy, Germany and France, among others (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2011). It is often predicted that the numbers for people over the age of 65 and people under the age of fifteen will only continue to grow further apart, thus worsening both issues at hand. It has also been predicted that from as early on as 2015 onwards, the population in its entirety will begin to decline (Cabinet Office 2012). These numbers and the discussions surrounding it often "evoke a sense of crisis" (Ezawa 2011, 105) and the government has, especially since the 1990s bubble economy burst, made numerous attempts at understanding and providing a solution to this demographic issue. Yet, the birth rate has kept on declining, and the government's policy responses have often been criticized as ineffective. Not only because the birth rate's decline has continued, but also because these policies have often taken gender inequality or more specifically working women's work-life balance problems as a focus but not actually managed to provide a solution for this, either (e.g. Huen 2007, Schad-Seifert 2006, Starich 2007). However, as we will see down below, it would be unfair to completely disregard what these policies *have* achieved. Therefore what I want to examine is the following, as I believe both the government's efforts as well as criticisms to it to be of value. Not so much whether the government has been effective in solving the declining birth rate and/or gender inequality, but *in what way* they have approached the problems, and what *character* their policy responses have had? How have they envisioned helping women, and how have they imagined

providing a solution for the country's declining birth rate? I will examine how the government has taken working women's work-life balance issues to be a major factor in the declining birth rate, and has subsequently implemented various measures attempting to tackle these. I will first off all describe how the declining birth rate and its causes, particularly working women's balancing issues, have been discussed up until now, followed by a statistical analysis of Japan's demographic circumstances and description of government policy responses. Lastly, I will look more closely at these policies and examine what their character is – what aspects of the issue have they approached, and how? Consequently, what aspects of the issue have they managed to help solve, and what aspects have they not focused on and therefore perhaps not helped to solved? What are the areas that could yet do with improvement?

What I hope to show is that the government's focus has been rather gender-based – what they first imagined doing was providing equal opportunities in the workforce and a safe place of work for women, followed by various measures aiming to help people (women especially) balance their career and their family, such as providing financial aid, opportunities for leave, and encouraging cooperation between partners as well as employers and employees. This is a gendered issue because, as will be mentioned later, housework and childrearing are still very much assumed to be women's tasks (as working outside the house has historically been assumed to be men's) and gender roles still play a part in people's daily lives. And while all these measures have certainly helped in women's work-life balancing issues, the birthrate is still on the decline, showing (as I will cover), that what the government has done so far has not been wrong but maybe just not quite *enough*. As in, more rigorous and concrete measures could help all parties involved. The constellation of policies as it is now of course does aid to quite an extent, but is still dependent on women taking on care work, more often than not against no compensation. A more active stance that might break away from this might just be what is needed to help both couples' work-life balancing difficulties, as well as aid the country's declining birth rate.

CHAPTER I

EXPLANATIONS CONCERNING THE DECLINING BIRTH RATE

With the issue of the declining birth rate being such a hot topic in Japanese media and the international academic world alike, it has been examined thoroughly and from different angles and perspectives over the course of the past few decades. As such, what I would like to examine first is *how* exactly the issue has been examined and discussed up until now. What factors have been seen as contributing to the declining birth rate? What has been seen as the problem behind it? Basically, I will provide an overview of the literature and examine what explanations have been offered in order to obtain a better understanding of the various existing arguments in the discussion so far. Rather than focusing on Japan alone, I will include literature pertaining to a declining fertility in general as well, as a declining or decelerating birth rate is something that many countries in the developed and developing world are also struggling with.

A large part of the discussion, if not the majority of it, surrounds the work-life balance issues of particularly women (although there has been some about men as well – Ishii-Kuntz 2003, Mathews 2003, Van der Bie 2012), which is therefore also what I will deal with here. There are, however, also other contributing factors as demonstrated in, for instance Ezeh et al. (2012), Mills et al. (2011), and Sobotka et al. (2011), and it is therefore relevant and important to incorporate these into an overview of the discussion as well. In general, we can break it down into three subsections: general modernization of society; economic recession and financial circumstances; and the struggles in people's, particularly women's, work-life balance.

While Japan's circumstances are of course Japan's alone, a declining birth rate in itself is not a phenomenon unique to Japan. Most of the developed world, at least, is coping with low to no growth

or even population decline (Ezeh et al. 2012). Clearly, there are factors to a declining fertility rate that affect countries other than Japan as well. One such factor are developments that have come with modernization of society in general, such as the accessibility of contraception and abortion, higher educational attainment for women as well as an increase in their labor participation, and a change in norms and values with regards to matters such as family size preferences, the role and position of children, partnerships, and individualization (Mills et al. 2012). This point, however, should be considered carefully, as modernization and development did not take place during the same period or in the same way in Japan as it did in Europe or America (Ochiai 2011, 2013, 2014). For example, contraception wasn't available at the same time or used in the same way as it as in Western societies. The contraceptive pill wasn't legalized in Japan until 1999 after Viagra was – in contrast to for instance America where it was introduced in the 1960s and for a while, methods such as withdrawal, periodic abstinence, and even induced abortion were preferred (Castro-Vázquez & Kishi 2007, Ogino 1999, Sato & Iwasawa 2006). Nowadays, condoms are the most used form of contraception, and the total rate of use of any contraceptive method for married couples stands at 60%, relatively low for an industrialized country (Matsumoto et al. 2011). In either case, seeing as the fertility rate begin to fall from the 1970s onwards, and even before that in the beginning of the postwar period people were having less children (see further), it is doubtful how much contraception has contributed to the declining birth rate in Japan, specifically.

Other aspects of modernization are more relevant here. Higher educational attainment and labor force participation rate for women, for instance, have played a role. Raymo & Iwasawa (2005, 801) state that "the trend toward later and less marriage in Japan is most pronounced among highly educated women". Shirahase (2010, 61-62) also shows that both the mean age at first marriage and non-marriage rate has been going up both sexes in all age groups. However, this only shows that educational background has an influence on age at first marriage and marriage rate in general. This of course does not necessarily mean that a rise in educational attainment or work force participation also directly influences the declining birth rate. Shirahase (2000) argues that while women's

"educational background is of great importance in reaching the life stage of marriage, the decision of whether to give birth or not, which is directly reflected in the declining birth rate, is strongly influenced by age at marriage" (Shirahase 2000, 47). Furthermore, couples that are already married, too, experience a decline in fertility (Shirahase 2010). It could be said that because the age at first marriage is going up, and age at first marriage does influence the decision whether to give birth or not, that these two factors might be indirectly rather than directly related. Increased labor force participation is relevant because women find it difficult to balance both a career and a family, resulting in them often having to choose between one or the other. Therefore, more women in the workforce without sufficient support from the state to enable them to harmonize their work with their family life could contribute to a lower fertility rate as women might opt for a career rather than a child, even if they do express a desire to get married and have children.

Value shifts associated with modernization, such as individualization, are somewhat different in Japan than they are in Europe and America. It is not so much that these shifts have not occurred in Japan, it is more that these shifts are different, as they are in every different society. Individualization, for instance, has played a big role in Western societies (Mills et al. 2011). It is important to keep in mind, though, that modernization took place in Japan in a different period than the West, or the rest of Asia (Ochiai 2011, 2013, 2014), and also in a different way. That is, of course, not to say that this different time frame or these different circumstances made it so the changes that occurred as Mills et al. (2011) describe them did not occur at all, only that they occurred later and more rapidly rather than gradually – in fact, Suzuki et al. (2010, 536) claim Japan's individualization move away from company-centrism and developmentalism to be influenced or even caused by "globalization and neoliberal policies". Ishida et al. (2010), too, speak of rapid individualization and overall change in the 1990s, which brings me to the next point, namely that of economic recession.

Some of Japan's most important shifts (at least for the focus of this thesis) occurred in the 1990s after the bursting of its bubble economy. Economic recession in general is another contributing factor to a declining fertility rate, one that we also see in for instance Sobotka et al.

(2011), as well as in literature specifically about Japan (e.g. Dasgupta 2009, Hayashi & Prescott 2002, McCormack 1998). During the postwar period the country went through what is now referred to as its economic miracle, a period during which there was rapid economic growth, and greatly inflated real estate and stock prices, especially so in the so called 'bubble economy' of the late 1980s. However, stock averages plunged in 1992 and the bubble burst, leaving Japan in a period of economic recession known as the Lost Decade. Aside from prices and unemployment rates going up, there was also a more ideological shift. Turbulent economic times such as these called for the inclusion of women and foreign workers in the workforce that up until now consisted mostly (though of course not exclusively) of men, specifically in white-collar circles. There was also a rise in different forms of employment such as 'freeters' (a portmanteau of the English 'free' and German 'Arbeiter', indicating a person engaged in temporary, part-time or freelance work) and NEETs ("Not in Education, Employment or Training") (Kosugi 2006). These changes in employment itself brought with them ideological changes such as family values and gender identity as well (Roberson & Suzuki 2003). That is not to say there aren't still certain ideas about gender roles, a point we will focus on later. In either case, economic and financial insecurity and unemployment can contribute to the decision whether or not to have children at that time, especially considering the cost of having and raising children is high to begin with. It's even the most common reason for people to not have (more) children (Shirahase 2010). The 1990s were quite a while ago and Japan has long since recovered from that particular recession, but fell back into another in 2008 when it was hit by the global financial crisis, and again experienced a great financial setback after the 2011 triple disaster. So with the country's economy not having been in a favorable condition for such a long time, people might think twice about starting a family considering the costs that come with it.

Thirdly, the factor that comes up most in literature concerning Japan's declining fertility rate, namely that of work-family balance issues, particularly for women. While increasing numbers of women have entered the workforce, the environment in many workplaces is still one that does not allow harmonization of career and family life. There are several aspects to the issue of work-life

balance. Firstly, there is women's increased labor force participation, especially since the 1990s recession as mentioned before. Then there is the persistence of gender roles that place the burden of childrearing and care for the elderly on women, something that puts pressure on women. It is also worth mentioning that men, too, face pressure in the workplace about conforming to ideas of traditional masculinity, and this in part explains their reluctance to dedicate more time to things such as housework and childrearing – only a very small percentage of men actually take advantage of parental leave, for instance – which in turn increases the burden on women. With relatively little support from the state, especially for elderly care (Ochiai 2009), this makes it hard for women to both conform to these traditional values and make a career for themselves at the same time. These difficulties in balancing work and family cause postponement of marriage and/or childbirth, as well as job separation (where women quit their jobs in order to start a family). And it is not as one-sided as saying it is just singles who experience difficulty in having to choose between marriage and career. Shirahase (2010) notes that couples already married, too, are having fewer children. In fact, even couples who already have children do not always have the amount of children that they would like to have. Clearly it is not simply a matter of choice, of people actively refusing to have children in favor of a career. Many people *want* to have children, or more children than they currently have, but find themselves unable to (Shirahase 2010, 64; see also National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010b). Dividing the work-family balance issue into subsections, I will examine the following aspects: the aforementioned issue of job separation that women experience when wanting to balance work and family; the role that the persistence of traditional gender roles plays; and the support or lack thereof families receive from both their direct environment and the state when it comes to childrearing.

As briefly mentioned before, job separation refers to quitting one's job, in this case, the fact that there is a tendency among working women to exit the workforce upon childbirth, spend a period of time focusing on childrearing, and return to the workforce when their child is older. While there has been an increase in women who combine work and family, the majority still quit their job. In fact,

there has been an increase in job separation at time of the birth of the first child – from 37.4% in the period 1985 – 1989 to 43.9% in the period 2005 – 2009 (MHLW 2011, 47). In qualitative research, too, we see women (especially those with a higher educational background) express reluctance to forgo career in favor of family (e.g. Nagase 2006, Nakano 2011, Nemoto 2008), indicating a certain inability to harmonize the two. However, most people not only express the desire to get married at some point in their lives (see Kaneko et al. 2008a), they also ultimately do (Shirahase 2010). Furthermore there has been a decline in fertility among married couples as well (ibid.). So if higher educational attainment influences age of marriage which in turn influences decisions concerning childbirth as Shirahase (2000) describes, it is possible that the postponement of marriage could have some impact on the declining birth rate, yet it would not do to assume it is the most important factor and that people getting married at a younger age would stop or decelerate it.

As described above, modernization in general as well as the rapid changes in the economy and workforce after the 1992 collapsing of the bubble economy brought with them changes in gender roles as well, but that is not to say that there aren't still certain prevalent ideas about gender roles that still have an effect. There are still remnants of the idea that within a family, the wife is to take care of the children while the husband works to provide for them. We see manifestations of this in various aspects, for instance in some men's hesitance to take advantage of parental leave. Pressure from colleagues about how a 'real man' should work and not stay at home with family causes scorn to those who do take leave, and many men therefore express hesitance in taking leave because they do not wish to risk their position in the workplace or even their job (Ishii-Kuntz 2003, Mathews 2003). North (2009) demonstrates that gender roles also play a part in the domestic environment, with fathers contributing only minimally to childrearing and housework, especially the more children the couple had and the closer grandparents lived. Furthermore, the wife's occupation seems to have little impact on father's contribution to housework or childcare – wives' working hours had no influence as to an increase on husbands' involvement (ibid., 35). North also observes that while some of the gender role conformity was done for the sake of keeping up appearances towards

neighbors and family, both men and women also experienced some degree of fulfillment and validation from performing gender-defining tasks. Nevertheless, as help from husband or other relatives is the most commonly cited form of help in childrearing, and 54.3% of couples indicate not making use of services like childcare leave or daycare centers at all (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010b), one can see how ideas about gender roles that cause husbands to not do housework or childrearing might influence people's decision concerning childbirth. Speaking of help in childrearing, a lack of support from not just husband's but also the state's side herein is also often stated as a contributing factor to the declining birth rate. With the economy changing like it did in the 1990s, and fertility declining, the government set up support systems to try and ease the burden of childrearing and make it easier for people to balance work and family – which we will look at in more detail in a later chapter. These measures have been criticized for being ineffective (Huen 2007, Schad-Seifert 2006), or at least as insufficient or having flaws (Lam 1993, Roberts 2002) however, and it's been subject to debate on how the problem of the (continually, even with these measures in place) declining birth rate could or should be solved. Before we delve more deeply into concrete measures the government has taken to try and solve the declining birth rate, though, let us first examine its situation in more detail, as well as working women's circumstances, which we just established are related. How have childbirth and marriage patterns changed over the decades, and what about employment trends? Is there a correlation between changes in these matters and the declining birth rate? This is important to examine in order to later gauge how the government might connect these issues, and therefore how this might define their policies' character.

CHAPTER II

THE SITUATION OF THE DECLINING BIRTH RATE

Now that we have had a closer look at what have been seen as contributing factors to not only Japan's but any declining birth rate, we should examine what exactly the situation of Japan's declining fertility and changing demographic trends on the whole entails altogether – that is, now that we've looked at the *why*, we should now turn to the *how* has Japan's birth rate declined these past few decades? And how have marriage and employment patterns, which we have established to be relevant, changed? What I wish to do here is to explore the relationship between marriage, childbirth and employment by examining their trends and changes therein over the years, and how these in turns have affected and continue to affect the declining fertility rate and government responses to it.

CHILDBIRTH AND MARRIAGE PATTERNS

First, let us have a closer look at the declining fertility rate. The TFR (total fertility rate, i.e. the number of children per woman) reached 1.57 in 1989 and has been in decline for nearly every year ever since, reaching an all-time low of 1.26 in 2005 and climbing back up only slightly to 1.37 in 2008. This decline started in the 1970s, some say in 1973, the year of the global oil shock, which "led to major changes in women's employment patterns" (Lee et al. 2009, 349). Where the fertility rate used to stand at 2.14 at that point, changes in the economic environment led to demographic changes as well, hence the start of a continually declining fertility rate. To make a comprehensive overview, let us compare data from throughout the decades to show how much and in what way the fertility rate has declined.

As Ochiai (2011, 2013, 2014) has described, we can distinguish two periods of modernization in societies, First and Second Modernity, which come with the similarly named first and second

fertility declines, with the first being a drop from high to low fertility and the second being a drop below the replacement level. In Japan we can see these demographic transitions as well: the first drop in fertility occurred in the postwar period, where fertility dropped sharply after the postwar baby boom ended in 1949. Ochiai (1997) calls this the 'two-child revolution' because the average number of children per woman shifted from 4 to 2. Most women born between 1890 and 1915 had 4 children or more – the percentages for women with 4 or more children lay well above 60%, a number which suddenly dropped to 29.6% for women born between 1921 and 1925 (ibid., 41). Given their year of birth, we can assume these women had children during World War II, a period which not only has vastly different economic circumstances than a period of peace, but also had many men off to war, which would temporarily put a damper on family planning. But after this period and the baby boom that followed, we can still clearly see a more permanent change in average number of children, with roughly half of women born between 1928 and 1947 having an average of 2 children (ibid.). The second drop in fertility, the drop below the replacement level, came in the 1970s and is the one that attracted and continues to attract much attention from media and academic audiences alike, and in the previous chapter we established the various reasons why the birth rate may have been on the decline since then. Having looked at childbirth, let us now examine how marriage patterns changed in the same period. This is relevant because of the fact that only a very small percentage of children are born outside of wedlock in Japan – 2.1% in 2009 (MHLW 2010), only a marginal increase from 2.0% in 2004 (MHLW 2005), compared to for instance the United States' 39.7% in 2007 or Sweden's 54.7% in 2008 (MHLW 2010). A decrease or postponement in marriage therefore has a connection to a decline in fertility.

Marriage, as well as marriage patterns, have probably unsurprisingly changed over the course of the decades as well. Before World War II, the mean age for first marriage hovered around 23 for women and 27 for men (Ochiai 1997, 55). From the 1950s onwards, especially from the 1970s, the age has been on the increase for both sexes, going from 25 for women and 28 for men in 1975 to 29 and 31, respectively, in 2005 (Shirahase 2010, 62). There have been changes to marriage patterns

other than just the mean age at first marriage going up, as well. A growing number of unmarried singles and never-marrieds, for instance. The total percentage of unmarried singles, both male and female, between the ages of 18 and 34 actually shows a continuous decrease: from 91.4% for women and 85.2% for men in 1997 to 79.7% and 72.8%, respectively, in 2010 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2002, 2010a). However the number for unmarried singles between the ages of 35 and 49 is going up little by little, from 14.7% for men and 8.7% for women in 1997 to 27.3% for men and 20.3% for women in 2010 (ibid.). So while it is not the case that people do not marry at all or do not marry at a young age at all, there is a growing number of never-marrieds on the whole. The non-marriage rate, too, has gone up for all age groups and both sexes over the past few decades, especially in the age groups 25-29, 30-34 and 35-39 (ibid., 61). So the mean age at first marriage went up, as well as the total amount of never-marrieds.

How about the fertility rate amongst those who *do* marry? This group is, after all, still the majority, and counting the fact that most people do express a desire to marry at some point in their lives (Kaneko et al. 2008a), it would be wrong to assume these changing trends are the sole contributors to the declining fertility rate considering the fact that more people getting married does not necessarily mean the birth rate's decline will stop. As described above, in the postwar period the average number of children per couple dropped from 4 to 2, what Ochiai (1997) calls the 'two-child revolution'. After that, however, an average of two children remained the norm. Shirahase (2010) as well shows that while there has been a steep decline in average number of children married couples had in the period 1940 to late 1960s from about 4.3 to around 2.5, the number has hovered above 2.0 from the early 1970s onwards – even as late as 2005 in which it stood at 2.09, still fairly close to the replacement level. So the average family size has remained relatively unchanged over the past 30 or so years.

So what can we conclude from all of this? The problem is not so much that the postponement of marriage causes the decline in the fertility rate, as the average family size has not declined since the so-called 'two-child revolution', and most people do end up married at some point

in their lives. The changes lie in the fact that there is an increasing number of already married couples who postpone or forgo childbirth, and that there is a certain increase in unmarried singles and never-marrieds which counts as contributing factor because of so few children being born out of wedlock. We can say that this makes marriage a precondition for having children – even with a growing number of single parents, most of whom are actually not never-marrieds with children born outside of marriage but rather divorced or widowed parents who had their children while still married (Fujiwara 2007). In the previous chapter, we established that work-family balance issues are a contributor to the declining birth rate, and one that has garnered much attention in Japan as well. With women's work participation being of relevance here, that is what I will be examining next.

GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT IN POSTWAR JAPAN

Again, what I wish to examine here is, similar to the previous section of childbirth and marriage, how women's employment patterns have developed over the decades. I want to examine how women's employment ties in with women's marriage and childbirth patterns and how these are all allocated within the issue of the declining birth rate.

A phenomenon frequently, if not nearly always, mentioned in discussions surrounding Japanese working women's work-family balance troubles is the M-curve of female labor participation. For decades now the graph of female labor participation in Japan has been in the shape of an M, as displayed in fig. 2. What this represents more concretely is that on average, women start working after finishing their education, then stop mostly temporarily upon pregnancy or childbirth, only to return later (albeit usually part-time) when their children are more independent. So we see an upwards curve up until around the mid-twenties, followed by a dip between late twenties and early forties, and an increase again after that which then slowly tapers off as women grow older and retire, as in any labor participation graph. Firstly, let us examine the history and development of female labor participation and the M-shaped curve. According to Ochiai (1997, 16), the M-curve intensified during and after the second World War. After the war, the nation's industrial structure shifted from

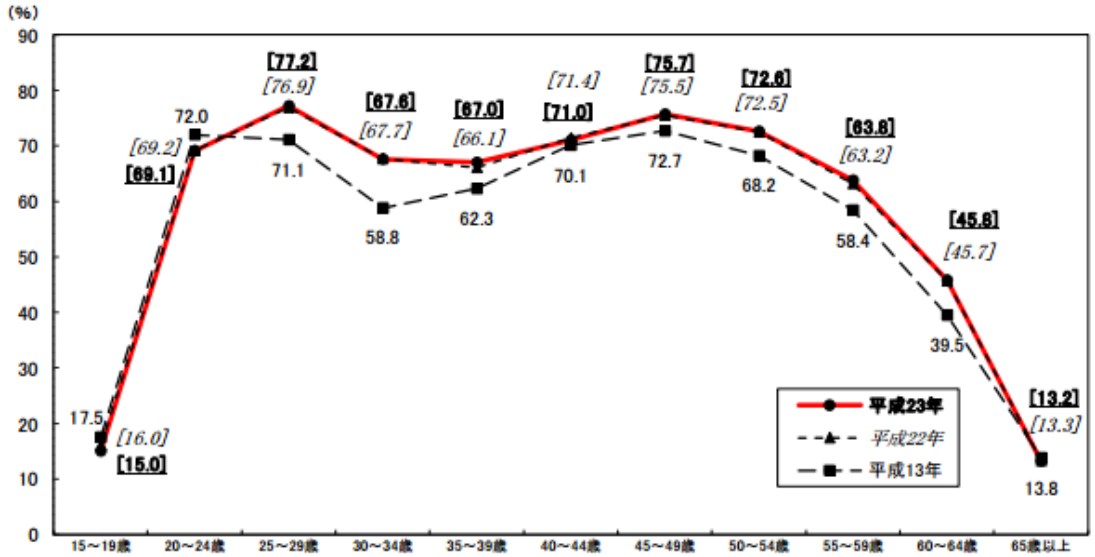

Fig. 1: Female labor participation rate by age group. Source(s): Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) 2011.

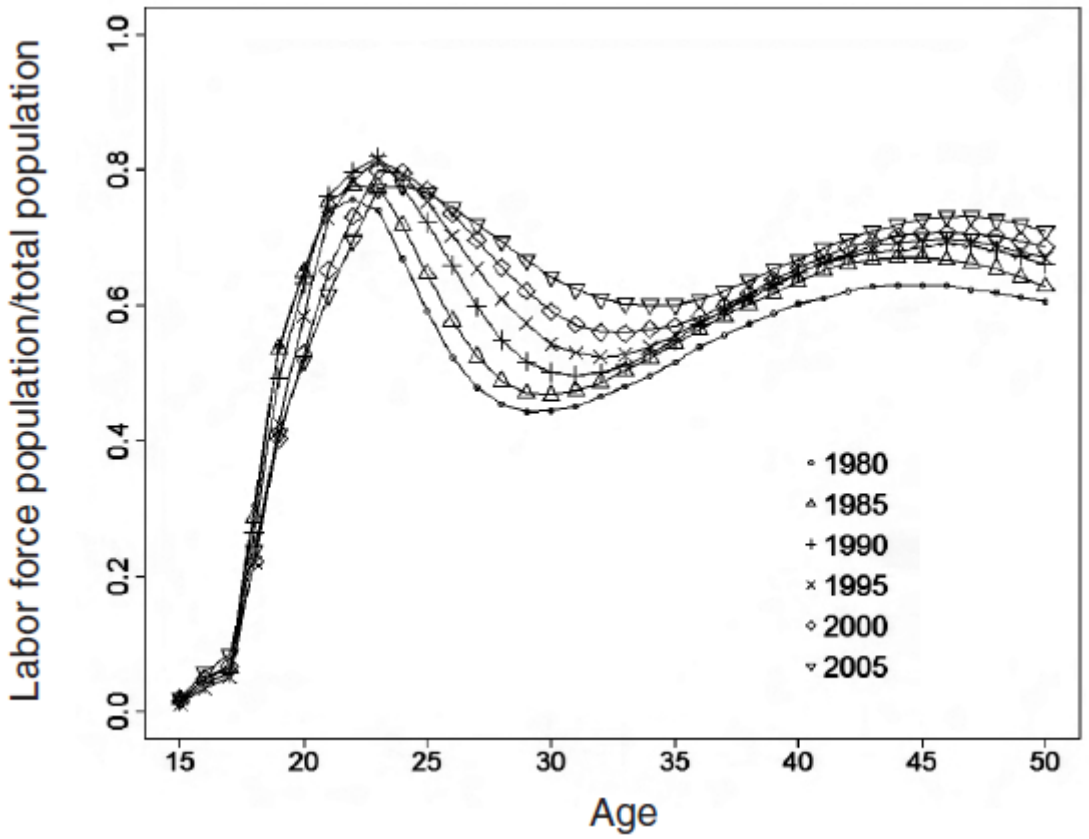

Fig. 3: Time-Series Comparison of the M-Shaped Curves. Source(s): Unayama 2012.

being focused on farm work and small businesses to the 'salaryman' or white-collar company employee. Their wives were mostly housewives, which accounts for the hardening of the M-curve in this period. After this period, however, the economy kept on growing and it became less uncommon for women to have a high education and a want for a career, thus gradually flattening out the M-curve again. During the course of the more recent few decades the curve has shifted slightly, with both peaks being higher, and the valley being more to the right, higher, and flatter than before (Huen 2007, 367). Fig. 3 clearly displays this gradual flattening out of the M-curve. Average female labor participation has increased in general, and job separation has lessened with the lowest point of the graph having gone up from just over 0.4 to around 0.6 – an increase of just a little under twenty per cent. Of course, the M-curve graph represents the average labor participation rates, and as such, lumps together both the high employment rate among singles and the low employment rate among married women. It also does not distinguish between fulltime or part-time employment, an important feat as most women return to the workforce as non-fulltime employees after a break, even when having worked as fulltime regular employees before their temporary resignation. To better understand the relation between women's working patterns and their decisions with regards to their family life, especially childbirth, it is therefore important to look at these figures separately.

In fig. 4 we see the employment rates for married and unmarried women separately. The labor participation for single women resembles an upside-down U shape, similar to that of male labor participation, while the figure for married women is low to begin with and only climbs up slightly in later age groups, although it does not reach the same rate as single women at any point. Although there is a slight increase in labor participation for both groups compared to ten years ago, the overall shapes of both time periods are roughly the same. It is important to note this difference, and keep it in mind for the duration of this work. We already saw that employment rates for married women are fairly low, while rates for single women are very high. In Fujiwara (2007), too, we see the work participation rate of single mothers in the 1990s being the highest in the world with 87%, versus 54% of working mothers. Of course, these figures are not representative of all working women,

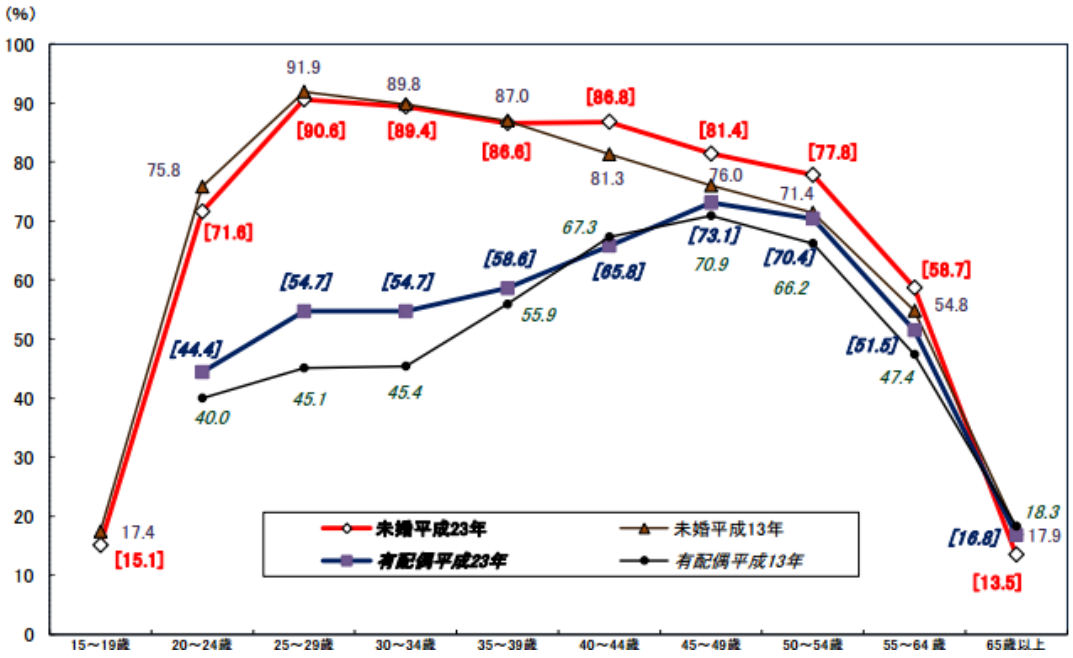

Fig. 4: Female labor participation by marital status and age group. Source(s): MHLW 2011.

even if they are not so vastly different that they cannot provide us with useful information on women's working patterns in general. Nevertheless, let us turn to the types of employment women of different marital status and/or educational background are in.

First, in general, according to the MHLW, most women work as office workers (29.7%), followed by work in health and welfare (21.4%), wholesale and retail (20.5%), and the service sector (18.7%) (MHLW 2011). Furthermore, between different types of employment, regular and non-regular employment do not differ too much at 45.3% and 54.7%, respectively – although there is quite a gap between genders here, with only 19.9% of men working non-regular. Within non-regular employment, the figures for women are as follows: part-time work or side jobs 42.2%, temporary/dispatch worker 2.6%, contract and commission work 7.1%, and 2.9% for 'other' (ibid.). Concerning educational background (there are three degrees one can obtain in Japan – high school, junior or technical college, and university, with education up to junior high school being mandatory), the figures are as follows. The figures for these three levels of education for women are 49.7%, 28.4%, and 17.2%, respectively. Among senior high school graduates, many women get jobs in manufacturing (27.2%), health and welfare (18.0%) and wholesale and retail (15.8%) in the industrial

sector; within the business sector, most women get jobs in service sector (30.7%), the production process (22.7%), office work (19.9%) and marketing (14.1%). Junior or technical college graduates tend to gravitate towards health and welfare (45.6%), education (14.0%) and wholesale and retail (11.8%) in the industrial sector and professional/technical work (58.4%), office work (20.6%), and marketing (9.7%) in the business sector. For university graduates, the most common jobs for women are in health and welfare (20.5%), wholesale and retail (14.4%) and education (12.1%) in the industrial sector and office work (35.9%), professional/technical work (35.8%) and marketing (17.5%) in the business sector (all MHLW 2011).

This says very little about education and work according to marital status, however. Fujiwara (2007) observes that single parents are more likely to have only finished junior high school compared to (see fig. 5). In addition, table 1 gives us some idea of what kind of jobs single and married mothers married parents, who have a greater tendency to have completed either junior college or university tend to have according to educational background. Percentages are highest for 'from permanent employees to permanent employees', indicating that most women, regardless of educational

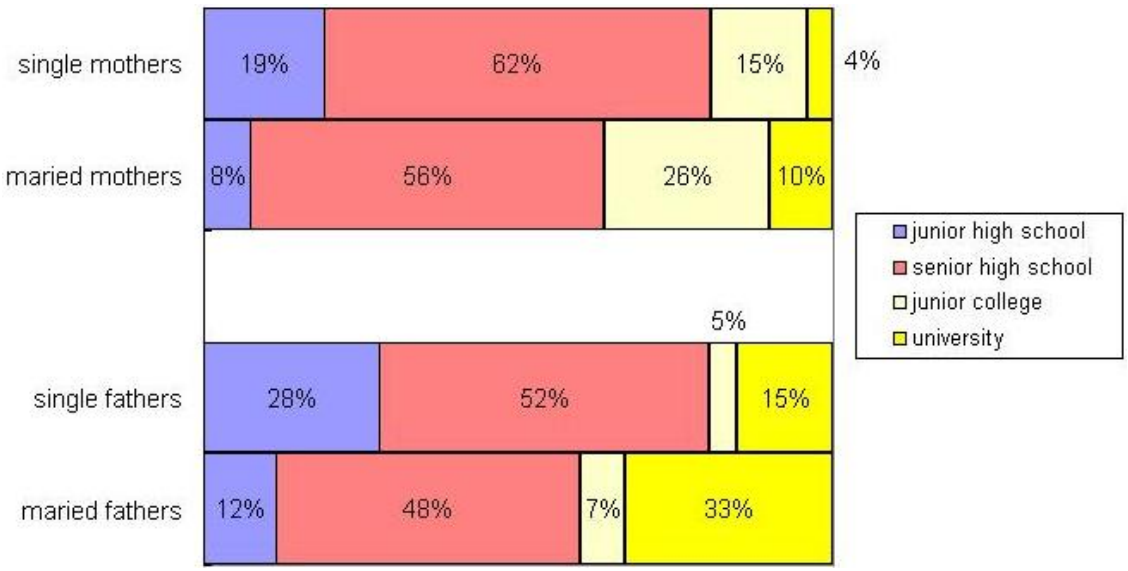

Fig. 2: Educational attainment of single parents and married parents. Source(s); Fujiwara 2007.

	from not-working to permanent employees	from 'paato' to permanent employees	from permanent employees to permanent employees
junior high school	8.6%	14.6%	66.7%
senior high school	19.8%	15.2%	73.5%
junior college	23.2%	18.4%	89.2%
university	19.1%	37.5%	91.7%

Table 1: Change of work status immediately after becoming single mothers. Source(s): Fujiwara 2007.

background, already worked as permanent (regular, full-time) employees. Percentages for not-working to permanent employees are on the lower side, suggesting a high labor participation rate among married mothers in general, except for junior college graduates. Switching from part-time to regular employment was only rather high in the case of university graduates, suggesting that these women probably have a low rate of job separation upon childbirth.

With job separation being a common phenomenon in Japan's female labor participation, how many women, preferably looked at by type of employment and educational background, make use of childcare leave or quit their jobs altogether? The most common life course women take is that of quitting employment upon childbirth at 43.9% for women whose first child was born between 2005 and 2009, followed by a life course involving balancing work and family (i.e. not quitting upon pregnancy or childbirth, and continuing work either taking childcare leave or not) at 26.8% for the same period (MHLW 2011). Fig. 6 shows that after the birth of their first child, a total of 62.2% of women continue working, 24.2% while making use of childcare leave and 38% without. Of note is that whether people take childcare leave or not differs per employment status. We see quite a high amount of childcare leave taken in regular employment, which is understandable given the stricter

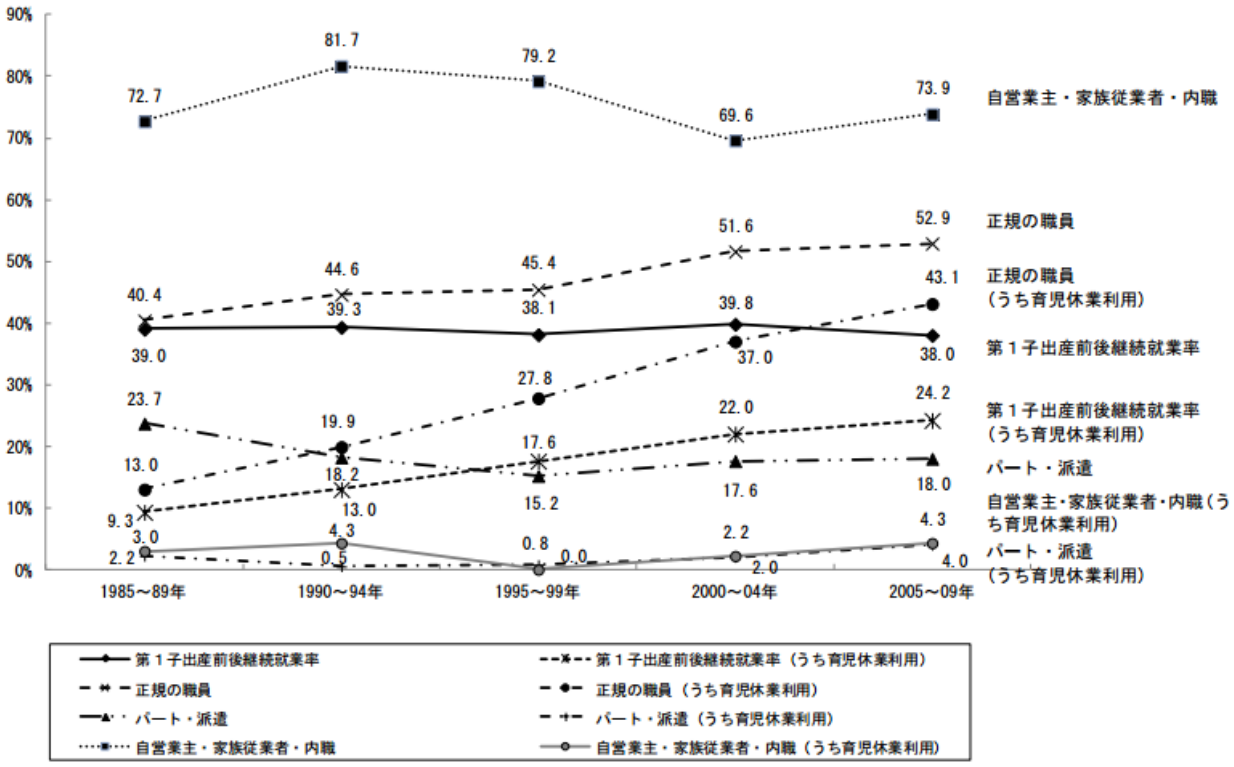

Fig. 3: Percentage of married women continuing their jobs after childbirth and percentage of childcare leave, divided by form of employment. Source(s): MHLW 2011.

circumstances than, for instance, family business or self-employment, and the risks that come with quitting altogether (for leaving and re-entering also means a loss of benefits, like seniority), whereas employment forms like self-employment and family businesses have more flexibility, which could account for the low amount of childcare leave taken in these types of business. Surprisingly, while one could presume part-time and contractual work offers more flexibility and therefore not so much of a need to quit upon childbirth, only 22% of women in this branch keep working, 4% while taking childcare leave (again in the period 2005 – 2009).

In short, regular employees show the highest tendency to continue working with a total of 96%, followed by self-employment/family business/working from home with 78.2%, and part-time and contractual work's percentage of 22% being the lowest. This does of course not say anything about what these women do after the birth of any other children, which, with the average family size still being above 2.0, could be quite different. For first time mothers, however, those are the figures.

Regarding educational attainment, single mothers' work participation rate is highest for university graduates and lowest for junior high school graduates, while the opposite is the case for married mothers (Fujiwara 2007). Fujiwara explains as follows: "What this means is that highly educated married women tend not to work because their husbands bring home an ample salary. Japanese social policies in the areas of tax, insurance and pensions encourage married women to limit their outside paid work and remain dependent on their husbands. Consequently, many women stopped working when they were married." (ibid.). This partially explains the lower labor participation rate of married mothers compared to the very high rate of single mothers we saw.

With trends regarding to demographics and marriage and employment now discussed, it is time to, without getting into debates just yet, examine what measures the government has taken to try as countermeasures to the declining birth rate and its issues.

WORK-FAMILY POLICIES

As mentioned before, with fears of falling productivity and other economic or even international disadvantages (although it is debatable how warranted some of these fears are – see Coleman & Rowthorn 2011), it is small wonder why any government would want to find a solution to its country's demographic issues. Japan, too, has taken several measures to try and counter its declining birth rate, especially since the bursting of the bustling bubble economy in the early 1990s. I will describe the most important of these measures, and, in a later chapter, assess their character in more detail to determine how their makers envision to be helping women and solving the problem. For now, though, I will explain how first there was a focus on equal opportunities for both sexes in the workplace, which was later continued by policies that focused on providing support for the period of childbirth and -rearing (think maternity leave and daycare centers), as well as continued campaigns and the like aimed at softening persistent gender roles that provide both women from focusing on career and men from focusing on family.

First of all, in 1986, there was the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, or EEOL for short. With women's employment patterns changing in post-war Japan, especially with the steadily growing economy, from being employed in family business and working on the family's land to emulating more traditionally masculine employment patterns of working for salary outside the house (Ochiai 1997), workplaces had some adjusting to do. There was a tendency to see women's employment as merely temporary, lasting until they would marry – as such, they were "excluded from the core career jobs" by being defaulted into the clerical track rather than the managerial and "treated as a single group of short-term temporary work-force" (Lam 1993, 198). The EEOL, as its name implies, was a law specifically aimed at eliminating sexual discrimination in the workforce. While before its implementation, there had been other measures to try and incorporate female workers into companies, the EEOL exhorted employers to extent equal treatment to both their female and their male employees. Discrimination was to be discouraged in the following five stages: "(1) recruitment and hiring; (2) job assignment and promotion; (3) education and training; (4) employee benefits; and (5) mandatory retirement age, retirement, and dismissal" (Starich 2007, 557). Additional adjustments made in 1997 changed the law's wording from having companies 'endeavor' to not discriminate, to 'prohibiting' discrimination, as well as taking action against sexual harassment in the workplace. Further revisions in 2006 expanded the law's application to men as well as women, brought recognition for indirect discrimination (such as the low amount of female managers in Japan: 8.9% compared to 46.0% in the USA and 30.5% in Sweden – Koshal et al. 2004, 137), and provided greater protection for women who take maternity or childcare leave (Starich 2007). The EEOL, even with its many revisions, takes not so much a proactive, but rather a passive approach to eliminating sexual discrimination, relying on individual's cooperation, which has near always been a point of criticism (Huen 2007, Lam 1993, Schad-Seifert 2006, Starich 2007).

In either case, during the '90s, with the bursting of the bubble economy bringing further changes in employment such as having to hire more female and foreign employees, there have been numerous attempts at providing a solution for either gender equality, the declining birth rate, or

both. Such as the Council for Gender Equality's Vision of Gender Equality (1996), the Plan for Gender Equality 2000 adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), as well as several seminars and ministry initiatives concerning childrearing, reemployment, and other issues in the work-family balance (see Roberts 2002; Huen 2007). While in and of themselves not laws or policies, they laid the foundation for many other legislations such as amendments to the EEOL, the Law for Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protections of Victims, as well as other revisions to for instance the Civil Code (Huen 2007, 373). In June 1999, The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society, or Basic Law for short, was enacted, with its purpose being the actual formation of such a society by "laying out the basic principles in regard to formation of such a society, clarifying the responsibilities of the state and local governments and citizens, and also stipulating provisions to form the basis of politics related to promotion of formation of a gender-equal society" (Huen 2007, 371). Its principles are much the same as aforementioned Vision of Gender Equality which came five years before it, namely "respect for the human rights of men and women, consideration to social systems or practices which have as neutral an impact as possible on this selection of social activities, joint participation in planning and deciding policies, compatibility of activities in family life and other activities, as well as international cooperation in formation of a gender-equal society" (ibid.).

Aside from providing equality of opportunity and seeking to eliminate sexual discrimination and rigid gender roles, there were also other measures to ease work-life balance issues. The Childcare and Family Care Leave Law of 1999, an improvement of the Maternity Leave Law of 1992, allowed a total of one year of leave after childbirth by either parent or by both parents shared, during which period 40% of the salary is paid by social insurance (25% prior to the 2001 revision). Day workers are not eligible for childcare leave. Leave may be extended up until the child is one year and six months if parents wish to enroll the child in nursery school but there is no availability, or if one of the parents' responsibilities in childrearing are compromised by death, sickness or injury. There are also the options to get leave of up to 5 days a year for when a child is sick as well as flexibility in and shortening of working hours in order to take care of children under three, following the 2005 revision.

Employers are prohibited from making employees who have claimed leave do more than 24 hours a month or 150 hours a year of overtime, and from making them work late at night (between 10PM and 5AM), although not from enforcing transfers onto them, in which case they are merely urged to consider their employees' circumstances (MHLW 2014a).

Now regarding daycare centers. In 1995, the Japanese government issued the so-called Angel Plan in response to the declining birth rate, which aimed to increase and improve daycare facilities to lighten the burden of combining work and childrearing. More concretely, the plan's aim was to "increase the number of centers offering extended daycare (2,230 to 7,000), temporary daycare services (450 to 3,000), daycare for children recovering from illnesses (30 to 500), and after-school clubs for school children in the lower grades (generally grades 1-3)(4,520 to 9,000), to refurbish daycare centers for multi-purpose activities, and to create local childrearing centers for giving advice and support to childrearing (236 to 3,000)" (Roberts 2002, 57). Its follow-up the New Angel Plan in 2000, too, had the goal of providing support during childrearing, but included the eradication of rigid gender roles as well, specifically "the corporate culture [exemplified by] a fixed division of labor by sex that assigns priority to the workplace" (ibid., 84). Nowadays, the situation concerning daycare centers is as follows. In 2002, there were 22,268 daycare centers, which slowly increased to 22,925 in 2009, followed by a more rapid increase to 24,038 in 2013 (MHLW 2009, MHLW 2013). Capacity in these years went from 1,957,504 to 2,132,081 to 2,288,819, and take up rates show a continuous increase as well, even if ever so slightly slower (ibid.). Between 2007 and 2010, the number of children on waiting lists show a rapid yearly increase, going from 17,926 in 2007 to 26,275 in 2010, although since then the number has gone down again to 22,741 in 2013 (MHLW 2013). In this same year, 26.2% of children below the age of 3 and 43.7% of children older than that were enrolled in daycare (ibid.). It is curious to see how the total capacity seems to always be more than the number of children actually enrolled in daycare (almost 2,29 million capacity versus a little over 2,2 million take up in 2013), considering there are still big waiting lists, and the fact that availability or lack thereof is an issue often discussed in literature on daycare in Japan (Kawabata 2014, Lee & Lee 2014,

Wada 2007). However, criticism is not so much on the number of daycare centers or capacity in itself, but more on issues like costs, quality, or insufficient extended hours and services. Availability also seems to be quite an urban issue, with Tokyo skyrocketing above all other prefectures with a waiting list number of 8117 children, followed by Okinawa with 2216, Kanagawa with 1462, and Osaka with 1390 (MHLW 2013; see also Wada 2007). In either case, it is clear demand is higher than supply. Cost for daycare varies, being calculated according to family's income and the child's age. The maximum monthly fee is approximately 80,000 yen, but most people pay somewhere along the lines of 20,000-30,000 yen per month, and the price for second and third children is discounted (Kawabata 2014, Wada 2007). It must be noted that these fees are for licensed (i.e. subsidized) private and licensed public daycare centers – for non-licensed, the cost tend to be much higher, even around 100,000 yen a month in central Tokyo (Oishi 2002). Regarding the kind of services daycare centers provide, most facilities seem to provide relatively basic care only and lack more extensive services such as night care, interim care, or extended hours – all services that are more available in the private sector (Wada 2007), which as we saw is more expensive.

Besides these, are there other resources and services parents can rely on for help and support with childrearing? There is child allowance, which has been as follows from April 2012: for couples with an income below the limit of 9.6 million yen (for households of parents and 2 children); 15,000 yen/month for children below the age of 3 and third or subsequent children above the age of three in elementary school, and 10,000 yen/month for first and second children above three in elementary school and for junior high school students. Persons with an income not below the limit may receive 5000 yen/month (MHLW 2012). Alternative forms of childcare are services like baby sitters, nannies, child minders (*hoiku mama*), however these are not government issued services, and moreover these are services that still play a very limited role, as many parents express reluctance and anxiety over entrusting their child and their house to a stranger (Holthus 2010).

What we have seen is this chapter is that there is a correlation between employment, marriage, and childbirth. The fertility rate experiences two declines – one from an average of four

children to an average of two in the postwar period, and then one that made the rate fall below the replacement level in the 1970s. Predictably, marriage patterns changed during these years as well, with both the mean age at first marriage and the amount of never-marrieds having gone up. However the average family size has not changed from this two-child model, and so while the difficulties of balancing work and family most certainly contribute to women's decisions to put off marriage and childbirth in favor of career and therefore Japan's fertility issues, marital fertility is on a decline as well, showing us that the postponement of marriage is not the sole or even primary factor in the equation. Trends in employment give us an idea how this ties in to the issue, because while the much-discussed M-shaped curve of female labor participation has grown less stark, and female labor participation in general has gone up, we do still see differences in the type of employment women are engaged in (fulltime or part-time, different sectors, etc.), and educational background and marital status have an influence on this as well. This shows a correlation between employment and marriage, and by extend childbirth.

So with employment, or more specifically women's life course with regards to family and work, being so relevant, it's to be expected the government has been trying to tackle this issue in their plans to counter the declining birth rate. As such, many of the countermeasures the government has taken are mostly to try and relieve the burden of childrearing and making balancing work and family easier. These include many plans and councils to soften rigid gender roles by both enforcing measures against sexual discrimination in the workforce, as well as encouraging men to get more involved in childrearing and housework. More practical measures were those that provide financial aid such as childcare allowance, and the installment of more daycare facilities, as well as laws concerning parental leave. In what way are these countermeasures helpful, and to whom? To answer this, we must look at policies' character. In what way does the government envision their policies and other measures to help women, or to solve the declining birth rate? And are there discrepancies between this vision and what these policies are actually doing? Are there areas in which more or different action might be needed? This is what I will examine in the next, final chapter.

CHAPTER III

POLICY RESPONSES' CHARACTER

Now that we have taken a look at factors contributing to the declining birth rate and its situation, and also at the specifics of some of the government's major policy responses to it, we can examine in more detail just what kind of character these policies that the Japanese government has made in response have had. What factors do they stress? What do they characterize as the primary problem that they need to solve, and how do they propose to solve it? How do they envision helping women?

Over the years the focus of the government's countermeasures seems to have shifted from providing equal opportunities (i.e. the EEOL) to providing support during the period of childbirth and childrearing (i.e. maternity leave, day care centers, etc.). The focus of many if not most policies lies on the gendered divide in both the workplace and family life, and there have also been many campaigns and other initiatives aimed at gender issues, specifically, such the Sam campaign that aimed to get fathers to spend more time doing child care (Roberts 2002) and the continually revised EEOL, all in an attempt to create both more leeway for women to focus on their career and for men to become more involved in family life. I will now discuss in more depth to what extent and in what way individual policies are focusing on gender equality. Following that, I will try and gauge to what extent that vision has translated into reality – in other words, in what way have these policies helped women in their difficulties to balance work and family life, and in turn, how has this affected Japan's demographic circumstances? So – in what way are these policies contributing to the solution? I will do so by incorporating into my discussion take-up rates as well as criticisms of these policies, and hopefully I will be able to provide a springboard for future research and possibly even further policy revisions.

The EEOL was, of course, specifically targeted towards elimination of sexual discrimination in the workforce, albeit with a few revisions for clearer phrasing and more inclusive measures over the years. It prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination in recruitment, promotion, education,

benefits and retirement, and sexual harassment as well. At the time of the EEOL's implementation in 1986, the birth rate had already been on the decline for over a decade, but it was not yet the major issue it would become from the 1990s onwards. As such, at least the early version of the EEOL did not specifically target this declining birth rate, and was aimed more at sexual discrimination in general without having roots or motives tied into women's employment or childbirth patterns. What the EEOL envisioned doing was exactly what its name implied – providing equality in career opportunities (career tracks, promotion, benefits, etc.) and eliminating sexual discrimination in the workplace. Nevertheless it contributed to a larger discussion on gender and employment, which became very relevant to the discussion surrounding the declining birth rate from the 1990s' bursting of the bubble economy onwards, and is therefore in itself also relevant. The EEOL's vision started out as providing women with opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts, and over the years, specifically after the 2006 revisions, the law now also "address[es] indirect discrimination, adverse treatment for taking childcare leave, and provide new enforcement measures for sexual harassment." (Starich 2007, 561). If we're talking about how much of the law's vision translated into reality, we can say the following. Labor participation of women between the ages of 20-59 has gone up from 57.7% in 1980 to 68.5% in 2007 (Abe 2011, 40). Of course, whether this increase and the EEOL are causally related is difficult to say, especially if we consider the dramatically changing economic and social changes that happened in the years after the law's implementation. However Abe also argues that the EEOL did not advance regular employment for either single or married women, and the higher female labor participation rate is correlated to the decline and delay in marriage (ibid., 52). Neither does this increase say anything about the fact that many women, especially those returning to the labor market after a period of childrearing, hold part-time rather than fulltime positions. It should also be said that, especially prior to its 2006 revisions, the EEOL lacked definite steps to eliminating sexual discrimination, and there were little to no concrete consequences for companies who did not follow through with the law's guidelines, which as mentioned before is a recurring point of criticism. Nevertheless, it wouldn't be fair to blame the fact that women's work-family balance issues and the

declining birth rate are still an issue on ineffectiveness on the EEOL's part alone, as it does target issues of sexual discrimination, harassment and, however minor, work-life balance issues as well. The EEOL seems to envision helping women by creating a safe and equal working environment for them, with the additional goal of solving the declining birth rate (which became a point after the 2006 revisions – Starich 2007, 561). The Basic Law, too, stressed gender equality, or rather 'joint cooperation' between men and women in order to form a 'gender-equal society'. As its description implies, and like the (yet unrevised) EEOL before it, it relied on cooperation and voluntary compliance to achieve its goals. It created incentive, even if not so much rules with concrete measures and consequences in case of failure to comply to those rules. Many of these plans and policies place emphasis on gender equality, equal opportunity, and cooperation of both genders as well as individuals and companies alike to strive for a society without discrimination based on gender together. Gender inequality was seen as a factor contributing to women's marriage postponement as a rigid work environment would cause them to have trouble making a career, and balancing that career with a family life once it came to that. So by trying to create a gender-equal society as they themselves called it, the government must have envisioned helping women in their work-life balance struggles, which in turn they thought would help solve the issue of the declining birth rate.

Apart from creating such an environment, many of the government's other responses seem to be aimed specifically at easing the burden of childrearing and making it easier for both men and women to balance work and family. Measures like these include the Childcare and Family Care Leave Law, laws about childcare allowance, and the Angel Plan and New Angel Plan's goals to vastly increase available daycare facilities described above. These kind of measures were mostly practical, aimed at providing financial relief and the opportunity to take leave as well as enroll children in daycare centers, but here, too, we can see that trying to get rid of rigid gender roles plays a part. For instance, aside from a plan to increase the amount of daycare facilities, the government also put out the so-called 'Sam campaign' in 1999, which urged fathers to take leave and spend time with their families instead of merely focusing on work (see Roberts 2002). The New Angel Plan, too, recognized

the need to change the 'corporate culture [exemplified by] a fixed division of labor by sex' (ibid., 84). In addition to this continued incorporation of the role that gender plays in the equation, there's also the focus on more practical, financial issues that are stressed in these kinds of measures, which is not so surprising seeing as we saw financial circumstances to be a major contributing factor in the decision to have children or not. Child allowance is an explicit example of this. Things like the right to taking leave and the availability of daycare centers are not so much financial aid (quite the contrary, perhaps even, as daycare costs money and leave is only partially compensated), but practical support aimed at easing the balancing of work and family nonetheless.

If, again, we look at how much of how these measures are envisioned to be helpful to women's work-life balance actually translate into reality, let us consider the following. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 41.9% of couples of whom the wife works make use of some form of childrearing support system, and the number is far higher in case the wife works in fulltime regular employment at 92.3%. High on the list of services used are leave, shortened hours (particularly in the wife's case), and licensed daycare centers. Also of note is the fact that around half of working mothers (51.7% for couples married up to 9 years, and 44.5% for couples

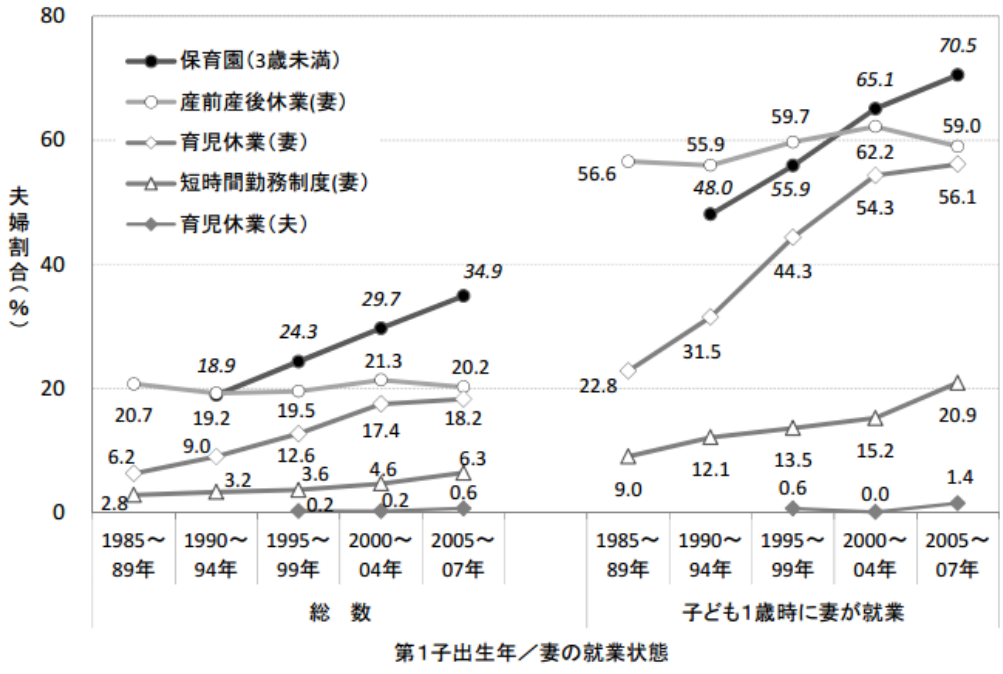

Fig. 4: Usage of childrearing support systems. Source(s): National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010b.

married 10 – 19 years) receive help from the child's grandmother in childrearing. It is an improvement from 1997, when the most relied on source of help was family (husband, parents, in-laws, other family) and only 2.8% took childcare leave and the figure for daycare centers was 4.4% (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 1997). Fig. 7 also demonstrates that there is an increase in leave taken, although the numbers for men and women are disproportionate. Compared to only a minimal amount of men taking parental leave, much larger amounts of women do so. The only time men's percentage exceeds one percent is during the first year after childbirth when the wife is also working, and then, too, wives have a far greater tendency to take up leave at 56.1%. As we also see in fig. 7, usage of daycare facilities has almost doubled, and is in general the most used service as well. It should be noted, however, that not only are daycare centers historically aimed at the working class (Ezawa 2011, 114-115), but they also leave much to be desired according to for instance Wada (2007), who lists problems such as the limited supply of daycare centers, waiting lists (possibly due to low capacity), inflexible times, and lack of services such as extended hours or care for ill children. The general notion seems to be that daycare centers are "high quality and affordable, but scarce and inflexible" (Wada 2007, 159), although especially for urban mothers daycare centers can be expensive as well (ibid., 168). Nevertheless, we do see an increase in usage – the high usage rate among regular employees in particular raises this figure.

Clearly, gender (in)equality was seen as a major issue that influenced women's lives, including their choices regarding work and family, which was seen to be of influence to the declining birth rate: if women postponed or even forewent marriage or childbirth for their career, that would mean fewer children would be born and the fertility rate would continue to drop. Therefore, government policy makers sought to resolve these work-life balancing issues by removing what they saw as its obstacle, namely gender inequality in the workforce.

So on the one hand we can see that there have definitely been improvements following the installment of all of these government policy responses. Female labor participation has gone up, as have the take-up rates for both childcare leave and daycare. On the other, we also see continual

criticism towards the fact that for instance the EEOL and Basic Law lack concrete steps towards gender equality as well as repercussions, or that having leave and daycare available is all good and well but will only have limited effect if gender roles are still in place and money is still an issue. What we see is that the government stresses gender equality as a major issue, and has put forward responses to both gender role issues (EEOL, Sam campaign) and more practical concerns (leave, daycare). Criticisms have often focused on the fact that the measures the government has taken are never quite enough: the EEOL and Basic Law lack strong wording or repercussions and rely on voluntary cooperation; daycare facilities are expensive and do not have enough availability or high enough quality; gender roles do still play a part and therefore any practical measures might not be taken advantage – see how very few men actually take advantage of available childcare leave; etc. What I propose is that perhaps the government is simply not quite striking the right *balance*. We have seen very clearly that both persistent ideas on gender roles and time and money are an issue in work-life balance, which in turn one of the contributors to a declining birth rate, as we have also discussed. In other words, there's work-life balance in general as a major contributor the declining birth rate, which in turn has two underlying factors of its own: the issue of gender on one hand, and financial circumstances on the other. Perhaps the question is in what way these two factors need to be addressed. The fact that the birth rate has yet to climb back up suggests that the criticism on the government's various responses may have a point – are policy makers approaching the problem in not the 'right' way per se but a suitable way? As in, are they addressing what suits working women? Or what suits the fertility rate? Or perhaps both, or even neither. As Catherine Hakim has repeatedly pointed out, there is no one-size-fits-all model for gender equality because different women have different work-life preferences, there is no single 'family model', and therefore no single social policy that will provide a single, one-for-all solution (Hakim 2003, 2006, 2008). Huen (2007, 374) is one of the people who have argued that the government only started battling gender inequality because of international pressure, and will therefore if necessary sacrifice it in favor of solving the declining birth rate, which is their primary concern. This is partially because the state relies heavily on women's

unpaid care work for both children and the elderly (ibid.; see also Garon 2010, Soma & Yamashita 2011, Sugiura et al. 2009). So on one hand the state benefits from women's unpaid care work, on the other, it is contributing women's work-life balancing difficulties and therefore the country's declining birth rate. Is there a way for policies to address financial aid and gender roles in a sufficient balance so that both parties (the government and working women) can come out satisfied? In what way should practical measures and gender issues be balanced for that to happen? Getting more women into the workforce and lifting stigmas surrounding men taking childcare leave is one thing, but if a primary barrier in people's decision whether to have children or not is financial in nature, how much will it help? Similarly, if leave laws and daycare centers are available but people are reluctant to make use of them because of peer pressure or anxiety over entrusting children with strangers, how much good do these measures do?

There are many questions here and of course it would not be possible for them to be answered fully and definitely right here and now. We can only review what we have learned so far and speculate, and hopefully provide a springboard for further research and revisions. As we saw in Shirahase (2010), money is the biggest reason why couples refrain from having children. In Kaneko et al. (2008b, 32), too, we see that at 65.9%, 'too high a cost' is the biggest reason for couples (with wives between in ages of 25-49) to not have the amount of children they desire. Daycare centers can be expensive especially for urban mothers (Wada 2007), and childcare leave only compensates part of the taker's salary (and job separation of course removes an income altogether). There is child benefit in Japan, but compared internationally, Japan tends to be at the bottom, with education particularly being a item of expense (Bradshaw 2006, Bradshaw & Finch 2002). Then on the other side of the coin, we have seen that there are persistent ideas on gender that manifest themselves in, for instance, the fact that men face pressure at work and tend not to take childcare leave, the gendered division of housework (North 2009), and the social obligation of care work (both of elderly parents and own children) that falls particularly on women's shoulders and interferes with their work-life balance.

Merely reviewing these factors however might result in circular reasoning – gender equality will only be effective in combination with financial aid and other practical measures, which will only be effective if gender roles are eradicated, et cetera. Therefore let's take into consideration the criticisms aimed at policies thus far, which, while sometimes not being quite fair in dismissing what these policies *have* accomplished, do make a valid observation which has recurred in much research and I have also mentioned above: many policies are just not quite enough. So rather than it being a question of which side of the coin should be focused on (as both evidently should), perhaps it's simply necessary for *more* to be done for both. Not so much more in the sense that there should be more money put into these measures, but for instance more concrete definitions, clearer steps as well as repercussions for failure to comply in the case of the EEOL and the Basic Law. Rather than campaigns such as the Sam campaign *urging* individual people and companies alike to put in their best effort and work towards a more equal future together, what about, for instance, affirmative action or benefits for family-friendly companies – an example of which is the Kurumin certification, awarded to companies with family-friendly policies (MHLW 2014b).

All in all, there is little wrong with the character of government's policy responses themselves, as they do focus on gender issues and financial and practical aid, both of which as we saw in chapter one are important factors in the declining birth rate. The government has taken into consideration both women's difficulties in obtaining a career in the first place, and made efforts for both men and women to be able to harmonize work and family, and has also taken several steps in providing financial aid and other practical opportunities for e.g. childcare leave and enrollment in daycare. The government is tackling the issues that we have seen in chapter one, and is not extensively favoring either over the other. The issue lies with the fact that they also tend to have a *hesitant* or *passive* character, resulting in little action and therefore not a result as effective as there could be. As mentioned before, the government is still benefiting from and in a way reliant on the current system, namely that of women doing unpaid care work, and the way they've taken countermeasures not only reflects this but keeps it in place. But with the population decline going strong, more affirmative

action is a step that is needed, having the potential to satisfy both parties by contributing to solving the problem of the declining birth rate as well as working women's issues, and providing some balance to the issue on the whole.

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