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Analysis of factors affecting fertility rate in modern Japan

This article analyzes the following factors affecting birthrate in modern Japan: national-cultural factor (gender inequality in Japanese society), economic factor (increase of share of temporary workers in labor market, high cost of childrearing), social factor (increase in women's educational attainment, increase of average age at first marriage and first birth) and psychological factor (phenomenon of «hikikomori», parasite-singles, «herbivore» men). Also a set of measures, designed to improve the reproductive behavior of Japan's population, is proposed in the article.

Key words: Japan, demography, childbirth, total fertility rate, women.

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Қазіргі Жапонияның ұрықтылық коэффициентін анықтайтын факторларының талдауы

Берілген мақала қазіргі Жапониядағы туу көрсеткіштеріне әсер ететін келесі факторлар талдауына арналған: ұлттық-мәдени фактор (Жапон қоғамындағы гендерлік теңсіздік), экономикалық фактор (еңбек нарығындағы уақытша жұмысшылардың бір бөлігінің өсуі, балаларды асыраудың қымбатқа түсуі), әлеуметтік фактор (әйелдердің білімінің өсуі, тұрмысқа шығу және алғашқы баланың дүниеге келу орташа жасының өсуі) және психологиялық фактор («хикикомори» феномені, жалғыз-паразиттер, «шөпқоректі» еркектер). Жапония тұрғындарының репродуктивті, яғни ұрпақ келтіру кезеңінде сауықтыруына бағытталған шаралар жиынтығы келтірілген.

Түйін сөздер: Жапония, демография, туу, жалпы туу коэффициенті, әйел.

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Анализ факторов, определяющих коэффициент фертильности в современной Японии

Статья посвящена анализу факторов, влияющих на рождаемость в современной Японии: национально-культурный (гендерное неравенство в японском обществе), экономический (увеличение на рынке труда доли временных работников и дороговизна содержания детей), социальный (повышение уровня образования женщин, повышение возраста вступления в брак и рождения первого ребенка) и психологический (феномен «хикикомори», паразиты-одиночки, «травоядные» мужчины). Приведен комплекс мер, направленный на оздоровление репродуктивного поведения населения Японии.

Ключевые слова: Япония, демография, рождаемость, суммарный коэффициент фертильности, женщина.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING FERTILITY RATE IN MODERN JAPAN

Japan's population has begun to decline notably since 2010. The proportion of the elderly (those aged 65 and above) in the total population was 26 percent in 2014 [1]. There has never been a peacetime period (time without crises and upheavals such as wars, famines, and epidemics) in the country's recorded history in which the population declined continuously for a long duration of time. Once the population begins to decline, however, it is projected to continue during the lifetime of, if not all, a large majority of Japanese men and women alive today [2].

In a span of a little over one decade, the birth rate was cut by more than one-half from the Total Fertility Rate (TFR – the average number of children that a woman can expect to bear over her lifetime at current age-specific fertility rates, assuming that she survives to the end of her reproductive age span, which is defined as years) of 4.5 children per woman in 1947 to 2.0 in 1957. After this dramatic decline, Japan's fertility rate stabilized at a level of 2.0 to 2.2 children per woman – at around the replacement level – until 1974, when it began to decline again [3, p. 3]. Since 1990s, the TFR has never recovered the 1.50 level, decreasing further to 1.3 to 1.4 children per woman. The TFR stood at 1.41 children per woman in 2012 [3, p. 3]. Although the fertility rate decline to below-replacement levels since the mid-1970s was less dramatic and slower than that of the earlier postwar decline, its demographic and socioeconomic consequences are much more important and serious, because it has resulted in the rapid and extreme aging and decline of Japan's population. Thus, it is very important to analyze why this rapid decline has occurred. There are some factors below which influence on fertility rate declining.

National-cultural factor. *Role of Women in Japanese Society.* Advanced societies today provide considerable freedom and gender equality to women as individuals. However, women are keenly aware that these gains will be distinctly compromised once they have a baby. This is especially the case in labour markets where little or no provision is made for the combination of work and family [4, p. 20].

Needless to mention, the position of women had been historically low in Japan for many hundred years. Modernization was indeed one of the turning points in increasing women participation

in social and political activities in Japan. The role of women as modernizers was in fact «at the core of the campaigns to improve daily life during 1920s and 1930s» and furthermore, «Japanese bureaucrats prompted the modernization of women's roles with an eye toward strengthening the nation» [5, p. 56].

The Japanese government has been concerned about the future economic decline of the country, and has been encouraging women to have more children. Although the Japanese government has been supporting women financially, it has not focused on gender equality, making it more difficult for women to be able to pursue their chosen careers. Japanese patriarchal social structure still compels women to rely on men and all but eliminates their independence. The Japanese male-dominated society is resistant to change. Family ties are still very strong, and women are expected to take care of the household and do unpaid work, while men work outside the home and earn a paid salary. In the labour force, women do not enjoy the same level of equality and opportunity as their male counterparts, as it is naturally marry, have children, and take care of the family.

Japan is criticized for the highly gendered split between regular and irregular employees. «The wages of women in Japan, as in other advanced economies, are considerably less than those received by male workers, and in fact the wages of women in Japan are notoriously low». The statement concerning low wages of Japanese women is based on the survey of sixteen countries by the International Labour Organization in 1986 and the survey shown that Japan was the only one among the countries surveyed where the difference between the salaries of men and women had widened between 1975 and 1984 [5, p. 53]. Increase of female labour-force participation and the unchanging earnings differentiation between the sexes may have contributed to Japan's fertility rate decline over the past few decades.

Social factor. Women's Educational Attainment. Today more women are pursuing higher education than ever before. Parents want their daughters to have the same educational opportunities as their sons, which could either lead to better career opportunities, or more opportunities for their daughters to meet men who are educated. In Japan in 1950, the class system was abolished and replaced by a system based on skill, allowing people to be promoted in the work place. As the economy began to grow more, women began pursuing higher education. In 1950, 34.6 % of Japanese men were attending colleges and universities; for women, the percentage was 17.2% [6]. By 1966, this education gap between men and

women had significantly shrunk; the percentage of men attending colleges and universities at that point was 28.2%, and the percentage of women attending was 20.6%. By 2000, the gap had been reduced even further, with 30.8% of men attending colleges and universities, compared to a percentage of 25.2% for women, and by 2010, the overall percentage of men attending college or university was 36.8%, and for women the percentage was 32.2% [7, p. 27].

Parents are doing all they can for their daughters to open up as many options for them as possible. However, they realize that the odds are against them and that they will face difficulties in their professional lives when they decide whether to struggle to keep their jobs or to quit altogether. It is as if women's potential capacity and ability have been ignored and put aside in the corner.

Delayed Marriage And Childbearing. In Japan and some other Asian countries, childbearing is closely linked with marriage and the rise of average age of the first marriage straightly affect childbirth decline. Births usually take place among married couples in Japan and the percentage of non-marital births was remarkably low. The significance of low rate of non-marital births can be observed from statistical data done in 2000. According to the result, 55 percent of births in Sweden are non-marital births and «the share is 43 percent in France and 40 percent in the United Kingdom. Spain and Italy have relatively low percentages but still the share is 18 percent in Spain and 10 percent for Italy» [5, p. 39]. In the same year, the proportion of non-marital births in Japan was only 1.6 percent [2].

The average age of the first marriage had been rising in Japan since 1971. In 1971, average age of first marriage for men was 26.8 and for women 24.2. In 2015, the percentage rose for men to 30.5 and for women 28.8 [6]. There is also an increasing trend of the share of married couple with one child in Japan. «In 1977, the share of married couples with one child was 11 percent for those with marriage duration of 10-14 years». The share of married couple with one child show an increasing trend in recent years with the rate being 12 percent in 1997, and 16 percent in 2002 [5, p. 39].

The number of children a woman might have in her life is heavily dependent upon her age at the first birth. For example, if a woman has her first child when she is 16, then theoretically, if her child follows the same path, she would become a grandmother at the age of 32, and could possibly still have more children herself. However, if a woman delays having her first child until the age of 32, and her child has her own child at a later age, the window of

time is much smaller. This shorter window of time for childbearing means that couples might not even have a second child, resulting fewer children being born. Age of mother at 1st child birth in Japan is 29.9, age of father – 32 [6].

Psychological factor. *Phenomenon of «Hikikomori».* Hikikomori are young people, mostly males, that totally cut themselves off from society, and sometimes even cut the connections with family members, and stay in their rooms for at least 6 months. Depending on their parents, usually the mother, they stay in their room all by themselves, not even facing or talking to their parents. In the typical hikikomori situation, the mother of course dislikes her child's gloomy behavior, but keep leaving food outside her child's door to keep her hikikomori child alive, which in a way, can be seen as a way of supporting this reclusive lifestyle. The hikikomori stay in their room or house spending time alone, afraid of contact with the «real» world. Some engage in Internet activities and some read books and manga (Japanese comics). According to the psychiatrist Tamaki Saito, the phenomenon of social withdrawal started in Japan in 1970, and has been gaining increasing attention since then [8].

According to the Japanese Cabinet Office there are in Japan one million hikikomori throughout Japan. Since these people might be categorized in more than one category, the numbers might fluctuate slightly. According to a research done by the parent established organization «Oya no kai (親の会)», the average hikikomori has passed the age of 30, and a research made by the Japanese Cabinet shows that 60% of hikikomori are men and 40% became reclusive in their twenties [8]. Some investigators have argued that «hikikomori» is not part of a psychiatric disorder, but a social and psychological phenomenon, resulting from a complex interaction between the challenges of adolescence and rapid social and family changes in Japan, calling such cases «primary hikikomori» [9].

Parasite single. The word «parasite-single» was named by Professor Masahiro Yamada, Tokyo Gakugei University, in 1999 [10, p. 1]. «Parasite-singles» mean the persons who are 20-34 years old, never married, and living with parents. They are saving living expenses to travel overseas during holidays, to discover the world, or shopping and spend money on themselves. The number of «parasite-singles» in Japan was 8.17 million persons and accounted for 29.5 % of population aged 20-34 in 1980. In 2003, it increased up to 12.11 million persons and 45.4%, that is, came to nearly 10% of the total population of Japan [10, p.1].

Young Japanese women and men experience greater enjoyment and stay single longer to enjoy their freedom, more than previous generations, possibly because they are spoiled by their parent. The period of time in which women and men choose to remain single has been increasing, because they are choosing to take more time to pursue their education and prefer to enjoy their single lives. Japanese young people find the single life very comfortable, and are staying single as long as they can. Many Japanese singles live for free or pay very low rent to their parents. 60.4 % of single men and women between the ages of 25 and 34 who still live with their parents contribute an average of ¥ 35,000 (approximately £273) a month to the household, and 53.7% of single women and men between the ages of 35 and 44 contribute ¥ 46,000 (approximately £359) [7, p. 30].

Herbivore men. From 2008 to 2009, «herbivore men» became a trendy, widely used term in Japanese. It flourished in all sorts of media, including TV, the Internet, newspapers and magazines, and could even occasionally be heard in everyday conversation [11, p. 1]. The term was created by columnist Fukasawa Maki. She coined the phrase in 2006, when she wrote an article for Nikkei Business magazine. In this article she describes a new type of Japanese men, that are not proactive in relationships (although they do care about romance and sex) and are not aggressive in their romantic conquest (which does not mean that they are unpopular with women). They also have no problem with developing friendly relations with women and would not try to seduce their friend or partner even when sleeping in the same room.

Media Shakers, a consulting company that is a subsidiary of Dentsu, the country's largest advertising agency, estimates that 60 percent of men in their early 20s and at least 42 percent of men aged 23 to 34 consider themselves grass-eating men. They are more likely to want to spend time by themselves or with close friends, more likely to shop for things to decorate their homes, and more likely to buy little luxuries than big-ticket items. They prefer vacationing in Japan to venturing abroad. They're often close to their mothers and have female friends, but they're in no rush to get married themselves [12, p.1].

Economic factor. *Financial Costs.* There are direct and indirect financial costs for women of raising children. At one time, it was believed that children would contribute economically to a family, but today children are regarded as a financial burden rather than an asset, due to educational and time costs. Expenses for raising a child are exceptionally high in Japan.

Recently the delay of childbearing of young married couples is said to account for more than half of this fertility decline. The high cost of children is said to be one of the causes of this delay. According to the data from the National Fertility Survey (11th, 1997), among the many married women who answered that they plan to have smaller number of children than ideal number, more than 30% chose the reasons that educating children is too costly or raising children (in general) is too costly. The average total cumulative expenditure (excluding housing expenses) for the first child from birth through age 18 was approximately 16.5 million yen in the period 2004–2008. Furthermore, when there are two or more children in a household, the average expenditure per child substantially lower; for example, in households with two children, it was approximately 11 million yen, partly reflecting economies of scale in child rearing activity [13, p. 46].

Changes in Lifetime Employment System. Traditional Japanese «lifetime employment» model was deeply entrenched. It is often said that this model is now collapsing and that the era of «jobs for life» has come to an end [14]. Mid-career job changes, once unheard of, are no longer quite such a rarity. The strict seniority system is giving way to a greater emphasis on performance-based pay and promotion on merit. And the number of «non-regular workers» (a term that encompasses temporary, part-time and contract workers) is increasing. But much of this reflects efforts by Japanese companies to shore up the lifetime employment system for its «regular workers», involving necessary concessions to keep the old system going. Useful though the reforms have been, they have also raised concerns about the growing inequality between regular and non-regular workers.

Under the traditional system, companies hired graduates and then invested heavily in their training and development. To keep workers loyal and protect their investment, they offered lifetime employment on steadily increasing pay, with generous fringe

benefits and a lump sum on retirement. Employees worked their way up through the ranks, so age and seniority were tightly intertwined. This made it hard for people to switch companies in mid-career. Women who left to have children found they could return only to more junior, part-time positions. People competed fiercely for jobs at the best companies – but once they were in, their performance made no difference to their pay.

The solution to demographic problems in modern Japan, which were mentioned above, is possible through an integrated approach, which includes a number of tasks:

- Introduction of gender quotas in political institutions;
- Establishment of special institutions, which will monitor the execution of the requirements of the gender legislation;
- Expansion of the preschool institutions network that allow women to combine work and family;
- Transition to a system of free higher education in public universities in order to reduce the parents' financial burden;
- Increase of full employment by investing to the economy, that is the main condition for the creation of new jobs;
- Enter into educational process at schools special psychological seminars in order to improve communicative skills of teenagers.

An urgent requirement exists to inform and educate Japanese citizens to understand the needs for changes regarding welfare policies targeted for family and children and prepare for the actual changes. There is also a need to highlight in detail in the ways in which the welfare policy can actually decrease social concerns of the family. Key points to communicate these issues to the government and citizens are to clarify the background factors of declining fertility rate and possible social problems caused by declining fertility rate.

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