

Column: Efforts utilizing a subsidy for the strengthening of regional countermeasures to the falling birthrate

Column: Efforts that the subsidy for the strengthening of regional countermeasures to the falling birth rate. For the purpose of offering “seamless support” on marriage, pregnancy, child birth and child-rearing, and in order to respond to our fertility crisis, a subsidy for the strengthening of regional countermeasure to the falling birthrate has been created in the FY 2013 supplementary budget. This was done to support local governments that are implementing advanced efforts unique to each region in order to respond to the needs and current conditions of the region. In order to offer “seamless support” on marriage, pregnancy, child birth and child-rearing that is in line with the current condition of the region, this subsidy supports a plan that includes the four points mentioned below, all of which will be formulated to implement the project.

1. Construct a mechanism for offering “seamless support” on marriage, pregnancy, child birth and child-rearing
2. Providing information about marriage
3. Providing information about pregnancy and child birth
4. Developing an environment in which no one has to worry about marriage, pregnancy, child birth or child-rearing.

Most of the prefectures have applied for the subsidy, which indicates increased momentum of regional countermeasures to the falling birthrate. This Column overviews the projects operated through practical use of the subsidy.

○ **Mie’s Future Center project for considering countermeasures to the falling birthrate (Mie prefecture)**

In regard to mid- and long-term challenges and the need for countermeasure to the falling birth rate, Mie prefecture created a place to exchange (*Future Center*) where many different participants, NPOs, companies, students, public administration and others, could learn about issues or come up with new ideas, through dialogue, so as to envision the future of Mie prefecture over the next 10 or 20 years.

At the *Future Center*, participants decide on specific themes for discussion, such as “How can the children pursue married life in the future without anxiety?” and “In the future, how can young people with jobs raise their children happily while working?” Participants work together to picture a scenario for realizing “Mie prefecture as a place where one need not worry about marriage, pregnancy, child birth or child-rearing.” They discover issues and problems, and come up with ideas to resolve them.

These ideas are to be further discussed in a prefectural conference on countermeasure to the falling birth rate, and are to consist of those who are involved in welfare and education, and representatives from industry, leading to specific efforts by various bodies in the prefecture.



Discussion at the *Future Center*

○ **Regional support project for matchmakers (Kagawa prefecture)**

Concerning the marriage problems of sons and daughters, the prefecture receives numerous inquiries from many parents with single sons or daughters in their late thirties to fifties, which indicates that there are many parents who worry about the limited marriage possibilities of their sons or daughters.

On the other hand, since the attitude and process of meeting a potential marriage partner is different from generation to generation, many parents cannot understand their sons' and daughters' attitudes toward marriage.

Therefore, information about what parents can do and about what the region can do for helping single people get married is provided along with a symposium to broadly inform people living in the prefecture, particularly those in the "parent generation," about the fact that this is an age in which "some actions are needed for getting married." In addition, as many people in the parent generation are not familiar with the Internet, a leaflet encouraging marriage will be created for parents to reference so they can give advice to their sons and daughters. This information is based on the contents of the symposium, and will be distributed by using community centers, concerned bodies and other methods.

○ **Project of enlightenment to deepen the understanding of pregnancy and child birth (Kochi prefecture)**

In Kochi prefecture, the employment rate of pregnant women is higher than the national level, and the smoking rate of men while their wives are in pregnancy is also high. In addition, the abortion rate due to unexpected pregnancy is higher than the national level, and an overwhelming number of males contact the "Counseling center for adolescents" to consult about sex in adolescence.

Therefore, a leaflet was created that describes the necessary considerations for relieving the burden of pregnant women, and enlightens males about how to be a father during pregnancy. For husbands whose wives are in pregnancy, a handbook has been created for distribution; it gives correct information about sex, birth control, points to consider in daily life, and information about necessary protections during motherhood.

○ **Positive program of child-rearing leader training seminar (Miyagi prefecture)**

Given the concern about the alienation of families with small children and the increase of parents and children who need mental healthcare, it is necessary to offer immediate supports for the parents during child-rearing, and to strengthen the support system of child-rearing within the region.

The "Child-rearing support leader training seminar" focuses attention on the peer counseling method, a mother-to-mother counseling method that is effective in forming desirable parent-child relationships. It also trains human resources (child-rearing support leaders) who are capable of instructing this method. By providing peer counseling continuously, an improved child-rearing environment will be promoted.

In addition, the "Positive child-rearing program and facilitator training seminar" develops human resources (positive child-rearing program facilitators) who have the knowledge and techniques necessary for a parental support program, so as to improve support projects and instructional techniques. Positive child-rearing program facilitators offer proper support and instruction that will strengthen the parental support system in this region.

Column: Opinion about Support on Marriage, Pregnancy and Child birth

In order to know about attitudes toward marriage, pregnancy and child birth, the Cabinet Office conducted a survey, for males and females aged 20 to 59, and for males and females aged 20 to 49 who had been pregnant within a three-year period, and males and females aged 20 to 49 who had got married within the same three-year period.

● Marriage support for single people

When asked, “What do you think is important for marriage support?” 47.3% of males and females aged 20 to 59 responded they would like “Support for a steady household by raising salary,” 45.8% said they would like to “Improve workplace environments so that both husband and wife can work,” while 45.7% felt the need to “provide stable employment through employment measures.”

When looking at the single males and females under 39 years of age by form of employment, in every category, the rate of females choosing “Improve workplace environment so that both husband and wife can work” is higher than that of males, and the difference is especially remarkable for students in which only 35.3% of males versus 62.6% of females felt this way.

Fig. 1 Support for single people

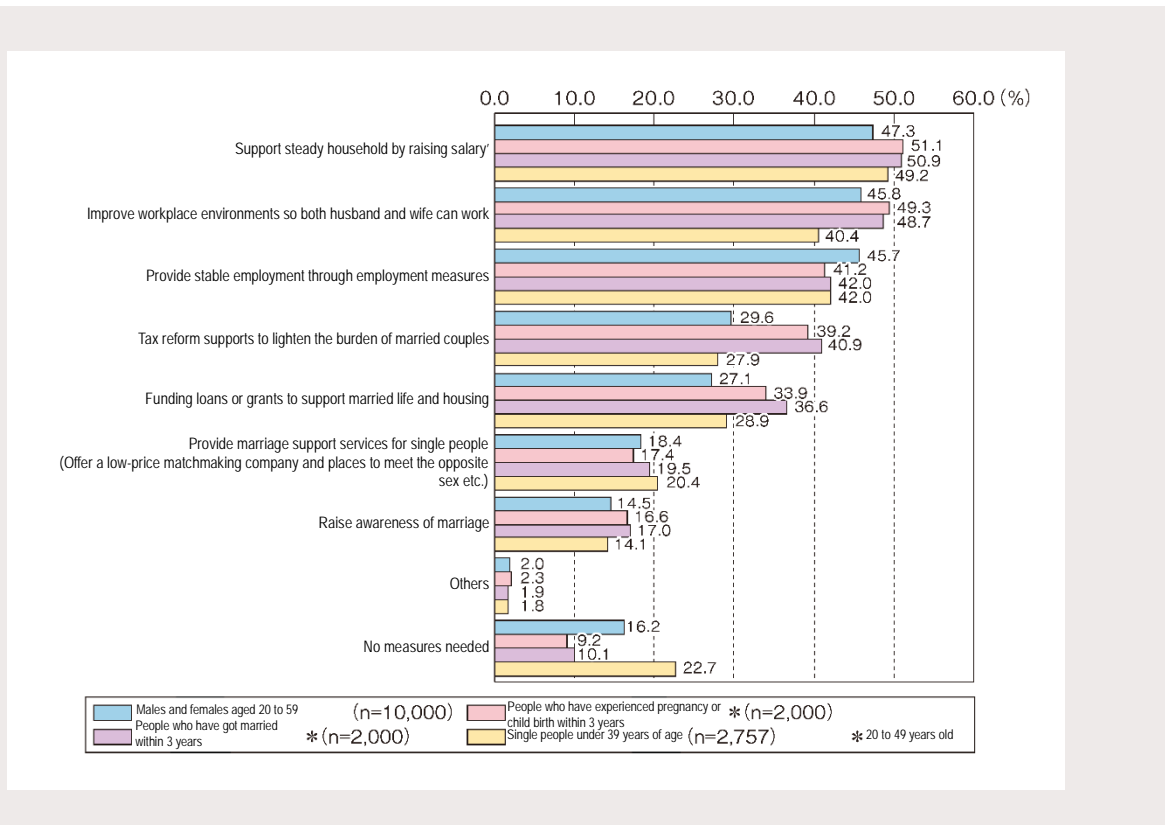


Fig. 1

(Continued)

Support for single people (single males and females under 39 years of age by form of employment)

(%)

	Support for a steady household by raising salary	Improve workplace environment so that both husband and wife can work	Provide stable employment through employment measures	Tax reform supports so as to lighten the burden of married couples	Funding loans or grants to support married life and housing	Provide marriage support for single people (Offer a low-price matchmaking company and places to meet opposite sex etc.)	Raise awareness of marriage	Others	No measures needed
Total (n=2,757)	49.2	40.4	42.0	27.9	28.9	20.4	14.1	1.8	22.7
Male (n=1,667)	47.2	33.8	39.1	29.6	27.2	19.6	13.3	1.7	26.4
Full-time worker (n=773)	48.1	35.1	33.4	30.1	30.7	21.3	13.8	1.8	24.5
Contract, temporary worker (n=93)	49.5	20.4	49.5	18.3	20.4	18.3	9.7	0.0	31.2
Part-time worker (n=186)	47.3	30.6	45.2	23.7	22.6	17.7	11.8	0.5	32.3
Self-owned business, freelance professional, side job and others (n=101)	38.6	34.7	40.6	31.7	24.8	19.8	14.9	0.0	24.8
Students (n=340)	47.4	35.3	41.8	36.5	25.6	19.4	14.7	1.8	24.7
Unemployed (n=173)	46.8	35.8	46.8	25.4	24.3	14.5	10.4	4.0	30.6
Females (n=1,090)	52.2	50.6	46.3	25.3	31.7	21.7	15.5	1.9	17.0
Full-time worker (n=405)	48.6	50.1	36.0	23.5	32.1	22.5	12.6	1.7	19.5
Contract, temporary worker (n=126)	57.1	43.7	57.1	27.8	36.5	21.4	23.8	1.6	7.9
Part-time worker (n=176)	58.5	47.7	51.1	30.7	31.8	26.1	14.2	2.3	16.5
Self-owned business, freelance professional, side job and others (n=40) *	52.5	47.5	50.0	37.5	25.0	22.5	27.5	5.0	15.0
Students (n=227)	47.1	62.6	46.7	25.1	30.4	15.0	17.6	0.9	15.4
Unemployed (n=113)	60.2	40.7	61.9	16.8	29.2	24.8	10.6	3.5	23.0

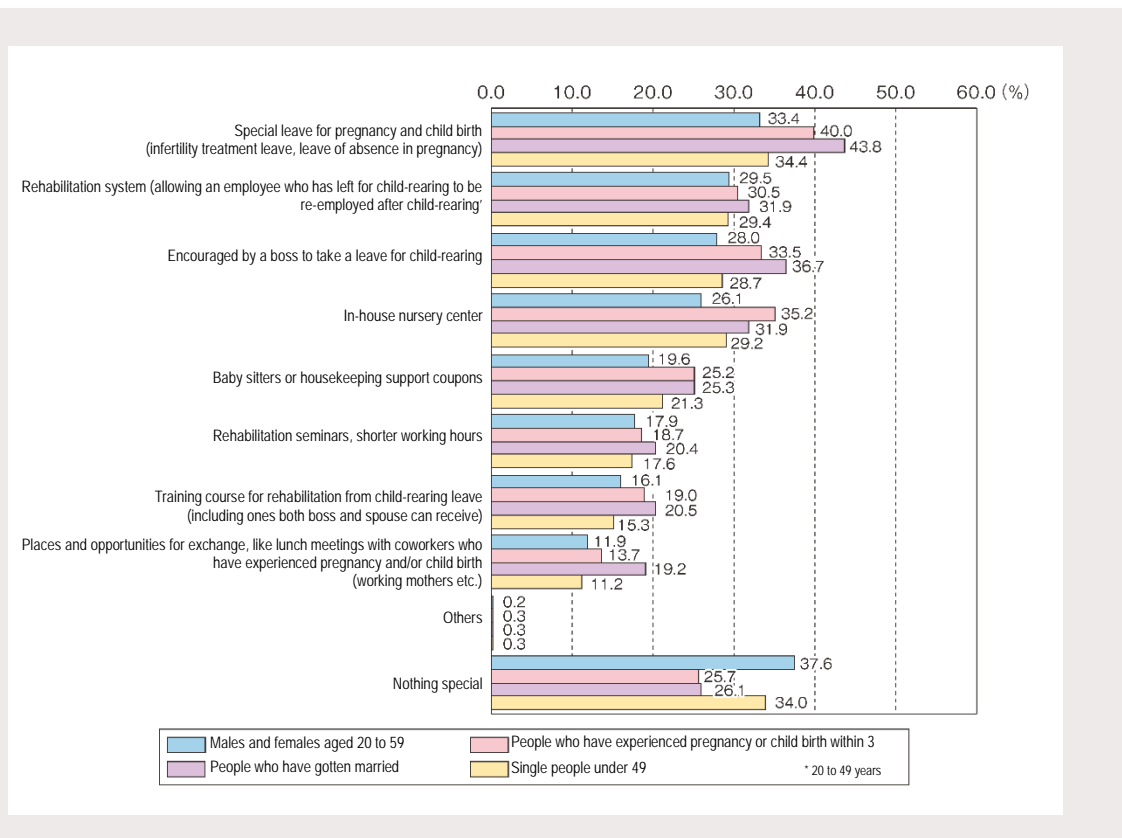
* Reference value as n number is under 60.

● **Work place systems and supports you would want to use in pregnancy and child birth**

When asked about desired work place systems and supports during pregnancy and child birth, 33.4% of males and females aged 20 to 59 who have or want to have a child, most desired “Special leave for pregnancy and child birth (for example, infertility treatment leave, leave of absence in pregnancy),” 29.5% wanted a “rehabilitation system in which an employee who has left for child-rearing is re-employed after child-rearing,” while 28% hoped they would be “encouraged by a boss to take leave for child-rearing.”

Fig. 2

Work place systems and supports you would want to use in pregnancy and child birth



(Note)

“Attitude Survey for reviewing a broad outline of countermeasures to the falling birthrate”

• Object of survey:

13,260 males and females aged 20 to 59.

Breakdown:

1. 10,000 males and females aged 20 to 59

2. 2,000 males and females aged 20 to 49, who or whose wives have experienced pregnancy, and/or child birth within 3 years.

3. 2,000 males and females who have gotten married within 3 years.

There are overlapping answers of 1 and 2, and 1 and 3.

• Method: Survey via the Internet for the registered monitors.

For details, visit the home page of the Cabinet Office,

<http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shoushika/research/cyousa>.

Column: Marriage, Pregnancy and Childbirth Support

“Urgent Countermeasures to break through the fertility crisis,” were decided in a “Meeting on countermeasures to the falling birth rate” held in June 2013, and a decision was made adding “Child-rearing support” and “Working style reform” to the “Supports on marriage, pregnancy and child birth.” Although, this has not been worked on so much, these “Three arrows” of countermeasures to the falling birth rate were decided upon. Introduced below are examples of local governments that have already been working on such efforts.

Marriage supports: the example of Ibaraki prefecture

Since FY 2013, Ibaraki prefecture has been working aggressively on marriage support as a countermeasure to the tendency of young people to not marry or to marry later. Slightly ahead of the nation, a comprehensive plan about countermeasures to the falling birth rate, the Angel Plan, was implemented so as to create a “Meeting place for single men and women.” At present, Ibaraki prefecture provides three marriage support programs, for means of meeting potential marriage partners: 1. supporting matchmaking through member registration, 2. holding an “Exchange party” or providing a place to meet, and 3. supporting matchmaking activity via marriage supporters (volunteers who supporting matchmaking activity). The “Ibaraki Matchmaking support center” (hereinafter referred to the “Center”) offers matchmaking support and holds “Exchange parties.” It was established by the Ibaraki Labors Welfare Council in June 2006, and it has five branch centers that serve as bases of operation in the prefecture.

1. Matchmaking is supported by member registration in which a member can use the search system to find a partner. A member uses a tablet-type terminal in the Center to search for someone to meet, and the selects him/her. A counselor in the Center then contacts the selected person to confirm if he/she is willing to meet the member, and if so, the counselor arranges a meeting that takes place at one of the five branch centers. Unless it is confirmed that both of them have an intention to date after the meeting, names and telephone numbers are not revealed so as to protect the privacy of members.

During the weekends, spaces for meetings are sometimes completely booked, which shows the success of this support project, and 1,162 couples throughout the prefecture have gotten married as of the end of March 2014. The reasons for success are attributed to a low admission fee, a wide operating area, collaboration with mass media (which reported data for every 100 couples that got married) and cooperation with municipal governments.

2. Other than holding “Exchange Parties” three times a month, the Center also co-sponsors parties held by other bodies like municipal governments, NPOs and agricultural cooperatives, and it aggressively publicizes them on its home page.
3. A marriage supporter is a volunteer commissioned by the prefectural governor of Ibaraki to act as an local intermediate between people looking for partners, and there are 699 such volunteers as of March 2014.

In addition to individual matchmaking for an individual meeting, as an activity of the Center, Marriage supporters also hold matchmaking parties for the whole prefecture, and do matchmaking activities at regular meetings held by each of the five regions. Furthermore, they act as PR agents for the Center by distributing pamphlets and other advertisements.

Support on pregnancy and child birth

As data for contemplating a life plan in which one can maintain good health throughout a life time, it is important to provide the knowledge about pregnancy, child birth and other subjects should be medically and scientifically correct.

Thus, efforts to provide correct information about pregnancy and child birth are being promoted. For example,

Hidekazu Saito, Deputy Head of the Medical Center for Perinatal Care and Motherhood, and the National Center for Child Health and Development, conduct “on demand lessons” at Keio University, the University of Tokyo and other institutions. This allows male and female students to access the correct information and gives them an opportunity to think about a life plan after they become working people.

Meanwhile, a maternity magazine has created a “Reading book on pregnancy for men” in which the information about pregnancy and child birth is included. This is done in cooperation with a popular comic in which a male obstetrician is a main character, and it is published in a weekly comic magazine for young people. Although “*Ikumen*,” which means a father who helps rear his children, has been recommended, the purpose of creating this book was to advocate for the idea that a husband (man) should understand the changes in the physical conditions or mental conditions of his pregnant wife, so he can sufficiently support her, and for him to understand that just becoming “*Ikumen*” after child birth is not enough. Along with explaining about a woman’s bodily changes and the risks of pregnancy, such as rubella, some information is introduced to help both husband and wife navigate pregnancy and the child-rearing period, including such advice as a “Lovely phrase book for making her smile with her husband’s tenderness” which can be used when a wife has bad morning sickness.

After-birth care: Efforts by the Setagaya ward and Musashino University

The Setagaya Ward of Tokyo has been working on various child-rearing support measures and child abuse prevention measures since FY 2007, adopting “No-child-abuse Setagaya” as an important measure. In these efforts, an after-birth care program was implemented as a support to respond to the anxiety of child-rearing parents, and an after-birth care center was created in March 2008.

Setagaya ward provides the land and commissions the business operation of the center to Musashino University, which offers support care for mothers after birth and offers consultation about child-rearing and other matters for mothers who are anxious about child-rearing and cannot receive support from families. Both short-stay and day-care services are provided and midwives are stationed in the center around the clock, so mothers can receive counseling from a clinical psychotherapist twice a week. There are fifteen rooms, ten of which can be used by Setagaya Ward residents, and five of which are reserved for the operations of Musashino University. About 90% of the usage fee for Setagaya residents is incurred by the Tokyo Metropolitan government and the Setagaya ward. Although a user should pay the actual costs when using the rooms reserved for Musashino University, these are almost always booked, which indicates that the needs of after-birth care are increasing.

Characteristics of the Setagaya ward include older parents giving child birth and families not living with or near grandparents, so many households with small children cannot receive support from their families. Given these situations, Setagaya ward is working on efforts to relieve the anxiety and isolation of child-rearing mothers so that they can raise a child with confidence.

Column: Child-rearing Support in Disaster Area

The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on the 11th of March, 2011, and did unprecedented damage. In the disaster area of the Great East Japan Earthquake, local governments, NPOs, volunteer groups and others continue to support children and people with children.

<< Maternity center network, and the Yurikago (cradle) program: Tono city, Iwate prefecture >>

Tono city, where medical institutions handling child birth had been nonexistent since FY 2002, has created the Tono maternity center called “Network Yurikago.” This public maternity center (hereinafter referred to as “Network Yurikago”) is an institution that conducts health instruction for pregnant women. “Network Yurikago” offers health consultations, health education and midwifery, and has established a network with thirteen medical institutions throughout the prefecture, implementing remote health checkups for pregnant women and around-the-clock emergency transportation. Pregnant women in remote areas can have a health checkup by her doctor by using ICT systems, such as mobile fetal heart rate device, perinatal medical information system called “Ihatovo” (hereinafter referred to “Ihatovo”), and teleconference systems via the Internet. In an emergency, a pregnant woman is to be transported by an ambulance, together with a midwife.

Right after the disaster, by using the electric data registered in the “Ihatovo” data base system, the support for examination by the doctors from inland areas, and additional referrals to hospitals in inland areas were offered to pregnant women who had evacuated from the coastal areas. At present, remote health checkups for pregnant women are being enhanced by ultrasonic image electric transmission systems which are further strengthening the projects.

Also, there were the cases in which pregnant women lost their maternity passbooks after the disaster; however, for those whose data had been registered in “Ihatovo,” their maternity passbooks could be recovered up to a certain point based upon their recorded histories. Having gone through this experience, the number of municipal governments that registered with “Ihatovo” has been increasing since the disaster, and the computerization of data is going forward.

<< Efforts by specified nonprofit organizations: Baby Smile Ishinomaki (Ishinomaki city, Miyagi prefecture) >>

A specified nonprofit organization entitled Baby Smile Ishinomaki (hereinafter referred to “Baby Smile Ishinomaki”) was established in May 2011 by the mothers of small children desiring to create a place for pregnant women and children before entering kindergarten. Since its establishment, they have continued to provide child-rearing support that child-rearing mothers feel is important.

As there are many pregnant women and parents with children who are isolated before their children enter kindergarten or who were isolated after the disaster, an event convention is held 10 to 15 times a month, and serves as a place where pregnant women can share their anxiety about child-rearing or child birth, and there are about 200 participants per month. At the convention, there are a variety of programs offered, such as *Tamahiyo* saloon (mothers’ class), aerobics for parent and child, eurhythmic, massage for babies and others.

The slogan, “Create a city excellent at child birth and child-rearing”, informs a purpose of resolution on many different issues, such as the prevention of abuse and securing play spaces. This is done in cooperation with parents; medical experts like doctors and midwives, child-rearing supporters; experts on child-rearing; and those involved in regional child-rearing support. In addition, the “Bond Born Café project” is being developed. “Bond Born Café” is a community café that is opened once a week, and is a place where mainly mothers with babies and infants gather. It has become a place to exchange information about child-rearing and other matters while letting children play. It is also working on providing information about the environment of child-rearing throughout the region; a leaflet called, a “Resource map for child birth and child-rearing” was issued in February 2014 to be distributed along with maternity passbooks.

<<Toho Wanpaku (mischief) Land: (Fukushima city, Fukushima prefecture)>>

Since FY 2014, Fukushima prefecture has implemented an “Indoor play space securing project” that supports the development of an indoor play space for children, and it was created as a result of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, owned by the Tokyo Electric Power Company.

A bank, whose headquarters is located in Fukushima City, Fukushima Prefecture, modified the indoor softball practice area at their training center to build an indoor playground called “Toho Wanpaku Land” in an effort to contribute to the community, and the bank has opened these facilities to the general public to use free of charge since July 2012.

The playground characterizes the use of contractions, such as a sandbox that contains varying elevations even though it is inside of a building. The structure is designed based on the fact that the softball practice area was already covered with soil, and based on expert advice indicating that playing in a sandbox helps to develop all five senses, therefore providing for the effective emotional development of children. Particular attention is paid to the hygienic management of the sandbox, and when spring begins, many children run and play barefoot on the soil.

The center is open weekday afternoons, excluding Wednesday, and Saturday, Sunday and national holidays. Kindergarten or nursery centers can also make reservations, for exclusive use on weekday mornings. It has become a valuable place for children to do physical activity while enjoying the touch of soil, and the total number of users exceeded 10,000 people in November 2013.