

JAPAN FALLING BIRTH RATE A MAJOR CONCERN

Most countries especially less developed ones strive to reduce birth rates, but for Japan it's a whole different story. Japan has seen a decline in birth rate over the past years. The total fertility rate in the late 80s was 1.57 and was dubbed 1.57 Shock. This rate continued to decline and in 2005 the TFR was 1.26 and this rate is estimated to decline to 1.16 in 2020. The declining fertility was mainly attributed to economic reasons. Women failed to balance work and looking for children and the expenses brought by children made people to remain single or without a child.

Effects of declining birth rate

- ❖ Acute rise in ageing population
- ❖ Acute drop in working population
- ❖ Paying retirement benefits
- ❖ Low production which results in GDP drop

Response to declining fertility

The acute drop in birth rate has created new policies and initiatives in Japan which encourage people to have children. The Angel Plan initiated in 1994 under a 5 year run and the New Angel Plan initiated in 1999 aimed at :

- ❖ Increasing child and day care centers.
- ❖ Improving working conditions that reconcile childrearing
- ❖ Improving public facilities for families with children
- ❖ Ease the economic cost of having children
- ❖ Improving educational facilities
- ❖ Improving maternal and child health services.

❖ Promoting child development

Another policy introduced in 2009 was the Plus One which encourage families to increase by one. It also aimed to improve parent-friendly working conditions.

Outcome

The results has improved very slightly. TFR reached to 1.37 in 2008 and 1.42 in in 2015 and still below replacement level. Women labour decreased to 76% for 25-29 age groups and to 65% for those in their 30s. Lack of funds has impeded daycare establishment and other services to be put in place.