

## **American and Japanese University Students' Views on Having Children**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, both Japanese and American overall birth rates have been decreasing, and have now descended below the birth rate ratio necessary to maintain the country's population. There are several factors contributing to this, but one of the main factors is thought of as being Japan's social structure with attitudes from business and family views towards women's roles. These roles have been seen as greatly affecting attitudes of having children among women. In my capstone I will discuss the views present American and Japanese people hold on having children. To more thoroughly get data on this, I performed a survey on the university students' opinions on having children and the factors that influence those opinions. In the results, despite Japan's more drastic drop in the child birth rate, Japanese students seem to want to have children more than American students. I also found that Japanese students seem to be more affected by outside pressures. So they felt this pressure from family and friends' expectations. Also Japan's society still favors the idea of men working and women focusing on child rearing after having children. I also found that on the other hand, it didn't seem like American students were really feeling the same pressures that were felt by the Japanese students.

### **Introduction**

This paper is going to discuss the decline in birthrate of both the United States and Japan. There are a various number of factors that are attributing to the drop in birthrate, but this paper is going to briefly discuss the factors existing in society. Then, it will go over personally completed research done on university students of both America and Japan. The research consisted of going over what the student's views on having children are, and what factors are influencing those views. As for personal thoughts, I think that Americans are going to end up not wanting children, and not having anything that particularly influences their views. Then the Japanese views are most likely to be most influenced by social factors.

## **1. Significance of the Study**

When I lived in Japan as a missionary, I was able to meet with Japanese families and interact with many different households. While there I had only met good families, so I was surprised when I entered community college after coming home to America and found out that both the United States and Japan was in a child rate decline. For this reason I thought to research why this decline existed through surveying American and Japanese university students to find out what sort of views they hold on having children.

## **2. Research Questions**

1. What are the views on having children among university students?
2. What outside influences affect opinions of having children among Japanese and American university students?

## **3. Background Research**

### **3.1. Japanese vs. American Birth Rates**

There are several different methods to show the drop in America and Japan's birth rate. The first method for showing this decline is to look at the crude birth rate. First, to explain what the crude rate is or how it is found, the crude birth rate is a comparison of a country's population that was born that year in a scale of 1000 people. Starting in 1973 Japan's crude birth rate has dropped from 19,600 and has been dropping steadily since then. Then in America the birth rate drop has been occurring since the 60s. Then the next method of calculating the birth rate is the total fertility rate. This total fertility rate is the average number of children a woman will have throughout her lifetime. Then for a country to be able to maintain its population, it is thought that the country has to keep a total fertility rate of 2.1 (Hales, 2014). If looking at the total fertility rate of recent years, America has been below 2.1 since 2008, and Japan has been maintaining its place under 2.1 for the past 10 years.

### 3.2. Potential Influencing Factors on Childbirth

There are a variety of factors affecting the birth rate, but I will first go over the factor of employment among women. In Japan there is this “M shaped trajectory.” Japanese women have a high employment rate before giving birth to children, during child rearing ages the employment rate drops, then when the children enter school the employment rate increases again. If you show this on a chart it gives an “M” appearance, so it’s called this “M shaped trajectory.” If we compare this trajectory with America, Japan’s problem becomes much clearer. Women working with preschool aged children are about 22% in Japan, while America has 60% of the mothers working. Then when the children grow to adolescent years both countries go to 52% and 59% where they start getting closer in comparison. In Japan, the second “hump” is “not just different than the first hump, but it is also lower in quality.” For example, there’s the case where most house-wives are part-time workers and get a lower salary than they previously had (Holloway, 2010). In Japanese society there’s still the idea that men should be doing the work, while if women have children they need to focus on childrearing (Holloway, 2010). This idea rising the average age of women getting married to about the late 30s is just one of the problems affecting the amount of child births (Rosenberger, 2013). Then, when women get married there seems to be a time at work where they feel they shouldn’t have children. For this reason, the amount of women who feel guilty and quit their job when she gets pregnant is high (Holloway, 2010).

The next factor that is affecting the birth rate is the dropping of coupling. The amount of children a couple has decreasing is only one problem. Other than that, the amount of people that either don’t get married or get married at an older age increasing can also be seen as a problem. If couples get married later on in life, having children becomes a lot more difficult. Also, another reason for the decrease is the drop of people dating with the goal of getting married. From 1990 the percentage of people who have a lover has been below 40%, but from 2010 men fell to 25% and women fell to 35%. Then a

lot of young Japanese still have the thought that love leads to marriage, which leads to having children (Yamada, 2012).

### 3.3. Government's Influence on Family Starting Decisions

I found that suggestions made by the government also have an influence on people's decision to starting a family. In 2009 the Japanese government put forth an idea of giving new parents \$3,300 a year until the child reaches fifteen years of age. Then in order to make the idea of having children more attractive, they also suggested increasing state run daycare and giving tuition waivers. However, government incentives can only be an aid to a certain amount of homes. It can't become a real solution to the problem (Wakabayashi, 2009). Then in America these sort of incentives don't exist, and can only receive tax write-offs for the children they have. The American government can't make the people have children they *don't want*, but they can make it easier to have the children that they *do want* (Hales, 2014). If the government would give higher tax breaks to parents and exempt them from having to pay into Social Security until the child reaches 18, it should influence couples on if they want children or not.

## 4. Research

### 4.1. Research Target

In this research 24 Japanese and 23 Americans participated for a total of 47 people. Within that there were 15 female and 9 male Japanese participants, and there were 9 female and 14 male Americans.

### 4.2. Research Method

The survey was completed online with Google Forms.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. What are views on having children among university students?

For this research question I gave a variety of questions in the survey. When asking the participants about what they feel is their “ideal family” Americans and Japanese participants both mostly felt that a “two working parent household” was their “ideal family.”

Next, I asked about how both countries university students felt about young parents. There was only about 20% of Japanese participants that felt good towards parents from their teens to mid-twenties, but only around 40% of Americans even felt this way. Then when further researching opinions on young parents, 25% of both Americans and Japanese thought “not very well,” but in the “don’t feel good about” section, only Americans answered.

The next question was on if the participants want children or not. As a result, 89% of Japanese and 70% of Americans want children, but 22% of Americans thought that they probably wouldn’t have children with a few Americans that answered they absolutely don’t want children.

Then the last question used to support this research question was on what the university student’s current life priorities are. As a response, about half of Americans and Japanese participants answered *school, work, marriage, and having children* in that order. Then for priorities after graduation both Japanese and Americans put work as their top priority with having children at the bottom. Interestingly, a lot of Americans put promotion as second, but most Japanese put marriage as second.

### 5.1.1. Summary of Research Question 1's Results

Since long ago, Japanese society has held the idea that men work while women are to focus on raising children, but participants from both countries chose two working parent household as their ideal family. Then a good amount of Japanese saw parents from their teens to mid-twenties as not very good, but I was surprised that Americans seemed to be quite the opposite. Even though there is a child birth rate decline in Japan, not a single Japanese participant answered they didn't want children. Then both countries expressing that work is important, so that was the top priority, but having children being the bottom priority was quite interesting.

### 5.2. What outside influences affect opinions of children having among Japanese and American university students?

The first survey question that I used to answer this research question was if they felt pressured to have children. For this question both Americans and Japanese felt slightly pressured, but around half of the Americans felt that they didn't have any pressure at all. Then if they answered they felt pressured I asked if that pressure had a positive, negative, or no affect at all. More than half of the Americans felt that the pressure wasn't giving them any affect at all, but the Japanese felt that their pressure was giving a positive influence.

Next, I researched which factors give what type of influence to their opinions. As a result, Americans seemed to be most influenced by economic factors. Then society, religion, and friends seemed to be the least influential. Then for the Japanese side, family seemed to be the most important factor, while economic factors came second. Religion had very little influence.

Next is about how government incentives influence the respondent's opinions. About 70% of Japanese seemed to be influenced by it, but Americans were the opposite

with government incentives not affecting them at all. About half of Americans and Japanese answered that they would have children whether they had government incentives or not.

When talking about children, daycare must also be a topic of conversation. So I saw how Americans and Japanese think about an increase in state run daycares. Most of Japanese answered that an increase would influence their opinion, while Americans thought that it wasn't really relevant.

#### 5.2.1. Summary of Research Question 2's Results

Japanese feel pressure towards having children, but they seem to be thinking that the pressure is providing a positive influence. Economic factors are important to Americans, but on the other hand Japanese seem to feel answering their family's expectations is most important. Then for government incentives, Americans aren't really influenced by it, but Japanese find it to be a viable reason for deciding to have children or not

### **6. Conclusion**

As a conclusion, if Japanese students can obtain a stable lifestyle then they see absolutely no problem with having children. Then about 70% of Americans want children, but there are also those who absolutely do not want children. While being a student, having children really is not all that important. After graduation, Americans want to be economically stable, but Japanese students found not only economic stability as being important, but being able to answer their families expectations was also very important for having children.

## **7. Limitation of the Study and Future Research**

For this research, the biggest limitation was that there were too few respondents to the survey, so it can't be accurately generalized. Then for future research, I want to spread the survey to working people, and also see how people's priorities change as time passes. Lastly I want to see how opinions differ between men and women.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want acknowledge my advisors Dr. Yoshiko Saito-Abbott and Dr. Shigeko Sekine for aiding with my capstone. I'm very grateful for that. I also want to express gratitude for my Japanese friends that helped with translation, Hina Iwata, and my family.



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