

Honors Capstone:
Depopulation and Pro-Birth Policies in Russia, Spain, and Japan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the pro-natal policies that countries implemented when faced with extended population decline. This study focused mainly on determining the causes of each country's depopulation, what policies the government chose to implement, and how these policies did or did not affect the Total Fertility Rate. Unfortunately, despite the general accuracy the TFR provides in estimating future population, there are so many political, social, economic, and health factors that influence birth rate and make it difficult to attribute any changes in the TFR to the pro-natal policies alone. The results of the study indicated that Russia's pro-natal policy—that gave families money, appliances, and patriotic medals for the number of children born—was the most effective of the three countries. However, the study speculated that so many factors contribute to birth rate decline that it would be more effective to implement pro-natal, developmental, and employment-based policies in tandem to provide enough incentives for couples to want and be able to have children. Although the only countries studied in depth in this project were Russia, Spain, and Japan, depopulation is a widespread trend among the “developed countries” of Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. The general decline in birth rates has lasted for decades and is now starting to occur in other countries around the world. The “less developed” countries are beginning to exhibit the same trend, which has troubled demographers considering their predictions always projected in the past that high birth rates in these “less developed” countries would supplement the low birth rates of the West. The significance of this study is that if there was ever a universal pro-natal policy found, it could be used by nations around the world to reverse the aging and decline of populations.

Introduction

In the last four decades, the Western and developed worlds have been experiencing a pervasive population decline. This “depopulation” was attributed to an aging population and birth rates that had been falling steadily for decades. Despite many initial estimates from analysts that the decline would be short term and that these populations would eventually resurge, in 2002 the UN finally released a study stating that their analysts believed that the birth rates in Western Europe, Japan and many other countries were unlikely to bounce back to replacement levels. Instead, for the first time, the UN report predicted that the depopulation would continue and was, in fact, a serious threat to the sustainability of nations. The fact that the UN had changed its years long stance on the world’s depopulation trends is significant in that it has brought more attention to the issue and encouraged governments to treat the problem as one requiring policies to sufficiently address it.

In response to the falling Total Fertility Rates, many governments have implemented pro-birth policies. Pro-birth or pro-natalist policy refers to policies that encourage higher fertility rates through monetary benefits, childcare incentives, or actual awards. Although it is often difficult to judge the effectiveness of these policies due to the many factors involved in parents deciding to have a child, countries that have implemented these programs have seen some response. Often the true issue is identifying the reasons behind the population decline and then formulating a policy response that best addresses the problem. However, considering how often certain pro-birth policies like monetary benefits (through tax breaks or lump sum payouts) are implemented, an important question is if there are specific policies that are more effective and universally

applicable. If so, this policy would be an automatic response that policymakers could choose to implement in order to increase Total Fertility Rates. In this paper, I will be focusing on studying the circumstances behind depopulation in Spain, Russia, and Japan and how effective pro-birth policies implemented in these countries have been in increasing Total Fertility Rate.

Literature Review

There have been times in past history when the birth rate in some countries has fallen below replacement level (2.1). However, since the bubonic plague struck, earth's population has only gone up. But in the last four decades, many developed nations have been threatened by the fall of their birth rates below replacement level and the possibility that the birth rates would not recover. "Never have birth and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so low, for so long, in so many places, surprisingly."¹ This persistent trend was first noted a couple of decades ago by several demographers and researchers, including Ben J. Wattenberg. Wattenberg released a novel, *The Birth Dearth*, in 1987 that noted the decreasing Total Fertility Rate that had persisted in falling in the "Developed Regions" for thirty-five years. Wattenberg warned that the persistent decline, not seen before except in times of catastrophe, would affect commerce, pensions, and the geopolitical balance of power and influence. Yet despite some reviews, his assessment was generally ignored. Another fifteen years passed before leaders in government began to truly admit that there might be a problem. Up until 2000, the UN Population Division had noted the declining birth rates but had projected that the birth rates in Europe and Japan would drift back up to the 2.1 replacement level over the course of the next half-century despite

¹ Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 5

having no solid reasoning to back that projection. Those that disregarded the falling birth rates as a temporary trend also felt that the decline would be mitigated by higher birth rates in less developed countries. However, in 2002 the UN Population Division “bit the bullet” and showed a medium projection that the Less Developed Countries would mimic the more developed nations in falling below replacement level.² “Simply put, the UN had announced that henceforward it would assume that average fertility in the poor countries would fall not just to 2.1 children per woman, as it had rigidly assumed through the 2000 volume. For the 2002 volume it would fall to 1.85 children per woman.”³ These new projections also included the possibility that there would be a decline in the world’s total population in the latter part of the twenty-first century. At the meeting of UN demographers to discuss the matter, many countries shared information regarding their own TFRs that supported the report. Both the Iranian and Brazilian delegates volunteered that their countries had fallen below replacement levels, and the Mexican demographer said that their TFR would fall below replacement by 2005. These statements were shocking considering that these were countries expected to continue to have birth rates well above replacement level, yet they were already beginning to suffer the same downturn as Europe and Japan. However, the key sentence in the UN’s 2002 report was the last, where it states that the trend “will lead first to a slowing of population growth rates and then to slow reductions in the size of world populations.”⁴

² Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 14

³ Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 15

⁴ Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 17

To understand the magnitude of a potential “slow reduction in the size of world populations”, it is necessary to examine the effects that an aging population has had on many nations in Europe and especially in Japan. As Wattenberg mentioned, one of the most obvious impacts of an aging population is that on the economy. As Japan and possibly China can attest, having a population that is skewed towards the elderly creates a heavy burden on the young to support the old. With most developed nations having social security systems in place meant to support the old in their retirement, there is a certain amount of capital needed to fund the systems. But with a lower number of workers to pay the taxes funding social security and pensions, it is difficult to cover the strain of providing for the elderly, especially if there are more old than young. Japan is lucky in that its pension program is relatively small and the culture encourages children and grandchildren to house and care for the elderly. Yet this is an issue that becomes a larger concern as more and more countries are affected by the fears of an aging population, especially in the United States as the baby-boomers generation begins to retire.

The second major concern related to the potential of declining world populations is how the decline would affect immigration, currently one of the standard policy responses to declining working populations. Countries that require more workers already use immigration to bring in workers. Yet often immigration is limited to workers without allowing for the entrance of the workers’ family. With declining populations, many countries may choose to encourage permanent immigration to supplement the declining population. But this would bring up more issues, specifically that of national identity. Already, there have been clashes in Europe over Muslim immigrants, who many fear threaten their national (European) identities. A greater volume of immigration could

create more turmoil and clashes between native citizens and new immigrants. On the other hand, in nations like Japan barriers to immigration are so intrinsic to Japanese society that it is unlikely that they would open their doors to immigration. If such nations did accept more immigrants in response to declining population, there would still remain the potential for racial and national discord.

Although immigration is a tactic often used to boost both the working population and number of citizens, there are several other potential policies that the literature on depopulation suggests would more directly impact birth rates. These proposed pro-birth policies fall under three basic categories; pro-birth policies that directly award parents for the number of children they have, employment policies that encourage women to marry and have children, and developmental policies that facilitate the raising of children. The first category of pro-birth policies is the type of policy first thought of when pro-birth initiatives are discussed. These policies focus on providing rewards for couples that have children. The rewards used by governments in pro-birth policies are usually monetary, whether in the form of lump sums given to parents with a certain number of children or as tax breaks offered to families with a certain number of children. Pro-birth policies rewards have also included special medals given to parents who have a high number of children (as in Russia) or appliances to aid in the raising of a baby.

Employment policy refers to policies that are meant to implement changes in the workplace environment that make it easier for singles to marry and have children.

“Policies that help women (and men) balance jobs and children are the lynchpin of any

effective prenatal strategy.”⁵ In *The Graying of the Great Powers*, Jackson and Howe propose limiting part-time work options, implementing parental leave policies, and providing for affordable daycare in countries with low fertility rates and low rates of female work-force participation.⁶ Jackson and Howe propose that “more broadly, all countries will need to move toward more flexible career patterns that allow parents to move in and out of employment to accommodate the cycles of family life.”⁷ Kokkonen in *Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies* emphasizes, “generous family policies, and especially dual-earner policies, should increase the likelihood of women living in unions”.⁸ The need for more flexible work options is evident in most countries. Although there are increasingly more women becoming involved in the workplace, many countries have done little to provide more benefits to women that need time off to start a family. There remains a sort of prejudice in many developed nations that women must choose between a full-time career and starting a family, and the work environment reflects that. Some nations force women that take maternal leave to re-enter the company at the lowest level. Other companies do not offer any maternal leave. Such policies directly contribute to the low birth rates as they discourage women from entering unions or even having children.

⁵ Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

⁶ Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

⁷ Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

⁸ Vanhuysse, Pieter. *Ageing populations in post-industrial democracies: comparative studies of policies and politics*. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.

Developmental policy is often harder to argue as directly affecting birth rates because it would seem to have less of an impact on the initial decision to have a child as compared to pro-birth and employment policies. However besides the possibility that a potential parent may choose to have a child due to the opportunities developmental policy provides, developmental policy also serves as a way to ensure the children that are born grow safely to adulthood. Policies that fall under developmental policies include health programs to cover children of low-income families, family support policies to help parents of children care and support for their children, and educational programs to give all children access to the quality education they need. The family support policies would seem to conflict with the employment policies because they often directly aid parents in getting their education. However, developmental policies focus on bettering the lives of children after their birth, which includes helping their parents secure better lives in order to support the children. Even if developmental policy does not have a direct impact on TFR, it is important as a supplement to pro-birth policies and to ensure the survival of children to adulthood.

Country Analysis

Russia, Spain, and Japan are three countries that are similar in that they have been facing declining Total Fertility Rates for decades. However, each country has unique circumstances that seemed to have contributed to their decline. Accordingly, each nation implemented its own policies meant to reverse the decline. To evaluate the success of each country's policy, the most essential number to evaluate is the Total Fertility Rate. "TFR is the keystone calculation of demography, and...it is the single most important

measurement of humankind.”⁹ The TFR provides a solid glimpse into the future because the number of births gives demographers a fairly precise idea of how many young adults will be alive in twenty years to carry on the next generation.

Russia

Russia is a country that has considerable experience with depopulation. During the transformation of the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union, there was significant loss of life that caused the population to fall. Similarly, from 1933 to 1934, collectivization of Soviet agriculture resulted in mass famine that killed two percent of the total population. Then the Second World War took 13 million Russian lives. The recent depopulation in Russia began in the 1990s and continues to the present. However, the current decline in Russian population differs from these past events because it is longer, the decline is taking place under orderly social and political circumstances, and the trend is gradual and routine, compared to the temporary nature of past depopulations.

To understand the severity of the depopulation it is necessary to look at the figures. From 1976 to 1991 (prior to the decline), there were 36 million births and 24.6 million deaths in Russia. Yet from 1992 to 2007, there were 22.3 million births and 34.7 deaths. There has been a complete reversal in the ratio of births to deaths, with deaths now greatly outnumbering births. Projections by the United Nations Population Division estimate Russia’s 2025 population to lie between 115 and 133 million, a sharp decline from the current population of roughly 143 million. The Total Fertility Rate fell sharply after 1989 below 2.0 and has not yet recovered, although there has been some recovery in recent years. At the present, the TFR stands at 1.61.

⁹ Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 9

There are many factors that are believed to have contributed to this sharp decline. First, the risk of death in childbirth was six times higher in Russia than in Germany in 2005. Illegitimacy rates in Russia have risen since 1991, along with divorce rates. Meanwhile, fewer people are getting married. More youths are choosing to cohabit yet fewer are getting married after cohabiting. Most developed countries experienced birth decline early in their history but the decline was associated with a better material environment for the children. However, this has not been seen in Russia. School enrollment for primary-school-age children has decreased in Russia from 99 percent in 1991 to 91 percent in 2004. One in 70 children live in children's homes, orphanages, or state boarding schools. The number of street children is also rising, with over 100,000 children being abandoned by their children each year since 1996, which is seven percent of the total children born each year.

The increasing death rate has also contributed to the depopulation. Life expectancy in Russia today is actually lower than it was half a century ago. Also, life expectancy is much lower for men than women. Currently, male life expectancy is 64.04 years while a female's is 76.02. By 2005, male life expectancy at birth the in Russian Federation was fifteen years lower than in Western Europe. Reasons for the low life expectancy in Russia have been attributed to the high number of AIDS victims, high CVD mortality, deaths from injury and poisoning, suicide rate, and heavy drinking. UNAIDS stated in 2008 that around one million Russians were living with AIDS. Cardiovascular Disease has historically been high in Russia and has only grown since the 1990s. Mortality from injury and poisoning is 5.3 times higher than in Western Europe, and the figure is closer to that of post-conflict countries like Angola and Congo rather

than any Western country. Both CVD and mortality from injuries and poisoning can be associated with alcohol abuse, which is understandable considering Russia in 2003 was Europe's heaviest per capita spirits consumer.

Despite the low birth rate and high death rate, Russia was able to experience positive population in 2009 and 2013 for the first time in decades. However, the population increase was small and depended wholly on immigration. Even with the extreme disparity between birth and death rates, many immigrants from post-soviet nations have kept population from declining as much as it would have without the influx.

In response to the declining birth rates, in 2007 the Russian government declared September 12 national Day of Conception, with women giving birth on Russia's national day (June 12), having the chance to win refrigerators, money, or even cars. On May 13, 2008, the Russian government amended an older statute concerning the Soviet Order of Maternal Glory to create a new award called the Order of Parental Glory. The Order of Parental Glory is an award given to Russian parents who have successfully raised seven children. A second medal, the Medal of the Order of Parental Glory was established on September 7, 2010 to be given to parents of four or more children. In 2011, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that he plans to boost Russia's dwindling population by encouraging high birth rates and immigration. He pledged to spend 33 million Euros to boost the birth rate by 30 percent over five years. The new government incentives offered to new mothers includes a \$9,200 payout to mothers who have a second child and a \$10,000 payment to mothers who have three or more children.

Since the pro-birth policies were instituted in 2007, there has been an increase in the TFR. However, all of the policies that were implemented were pro-birth policies

focusing on encouraging the mothers to have children by offering monetary incentives. However, one of the main concerns for the low birth rate in Russia was that the initial decrease in birth rate did not signify an improvement for children's circumstances as other developed countries' experienced. With the focus of the Russian government's birth policies being on the number of babies rather than the quality of the baby's life, it is doubtful whether the increase in birth rate is actually sustainable. Part of the reason for the initial success of the pro-birth policy is most likely due to how well advertised it was. But it also might have created problem. Following the competition to have a child on June 12 to win appliances or cash, there were many reports of women having their labor induced earlier, to ensure their child was born on June 12. The hospitals were overcrowded at the time with pregnant mothers, which caused more problems. Despite the seeming success of the policies or at least the attention paid to the policies, the other policies need to be further strengthened by developmental policies. Considering the poverty that many of the young mothers experience, the government should now focus on creating policies that will help raise the children so that they survive and flourish to adulthood.

Spain

“The Spanish population will decrease by 9.4 million in the next 50 years, according to a report released last month by the United Nations' population division. This represents a 24% net loss in its current population.”¹⁰ Also, Joseph Chamie, the director of the UN Population Division, projected that by 2050 Spain would have the highest percentage of old people in the world. In 2000, the percentage of elderly was 17% in

¹⁰ "Spain faces massive decline in population | BMJ." *Spain faces massive decline in population | BMJ*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2014. <<http://www.bmj.com/content/320/7239/891.1>>.

Spain and was projected to rise to 37% by 2050. Besides the aging population, Spain's birth rate remains one of the lowest in Europe, a region already experiencing low birth rates across the board. The country's Total Fertility Rate fell below replacement level (2.1) in 1981 and has declined significantly since then. The TFR hit an all-time low in the mid-1990s to early 2000s when it was at 1.2. Currently, it stands at 1.3, which is an improvement from the 2000 level. The birth rate has been supplemented by births from immigrants from Latin America and North Africa, but despite this there has been a continuing downward trend of deaths slowly beginning to outnumber births. This trend has been called "desnatalidad" and was evident in 2005, when births only exceeded deaths by about 78,000. With the desnatalidad and the increased emigration, it is no surprise that the depopulation of Spain is occurring so quickly.

There are two factors behind the depopulation in Spain. The first factor is the low birth rate. The second factor is the high level of emigration. In 2012, there were 160,000 more emigrants from Spain than immigrants.¹¹ The high emigration is a result of the long recession being experienced in Spain and the continued shrinking of the economy. In 2013, unemployment in Spain was at 24.6 percent and went over 25 percent during the course of the year. Youth unemployment alone was over 50 percent. With more than one-fourth of the working age population unemployed it is not surprising that so many foreign workers and native citizens are emigrating from Spain. The recession means that if Spain intends to increase its population, it will have to turn towards natural births rather than relying on immigration.

¹¹ Coy, Peter. "Spain's Population Declines in Sign of Europe's Woes." *Bloomberg Business Week*. Bloomberg, 25 June 2013. Web. 4 May 2014.
<<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-06-25/spains-population-declines-in-sign-of-europes-woes>>

Factors contributing to the low birth rates in Spain include the high cost of raising children and the frequency of abortions. It is estimated to cost over 100,000 Euros to raise a child in Spain. This cost is compounded by the fact that the Spanish government does not offer as many aids to families with children as other developed countries. In fact, “according to 2004 Eurostat data, Spain spends less on family and childhood programs than any other country in the EU. Such programs account for only 0.7 percent of Spain's Gross National Revenue while Europe as a whole averages 2.1 percent.”¹² These programs also count as taxable income, meaning that even as the programs award some monetary benefits, money is also taken away. Also, abortion is widespread in Spain despite the Catholic Church’s religious strictures that discourage it. In 2008 1 in 6 pregnancies in Spain ended in abortion. This is despite the fact that Spanish law states that abortion is only to be allowed in cases of rape, “fetal defect”, or physical or psychological danger to the mother. There was recently a scandal uncovered in Barcelona when police had to shut down several abortion clinics after they found medical abuses beyond description. Despite the recent scandal and general horror over the news, recent legislation has moved to facilitate abortion rather than limit it.

Most significantly, however, many parents or couples that plan to have children have cited the uncertain economy in Spain to be their reason for limiting the number of children they have or keeping them from having children at all. With such a high percentage of unemployment, many couples do not think they can afford to take time off to have a child and then pay to raise their child. The recession along with the lack of

¹² "Spain's Government Sees Folly of Falling Fertility." *Population Research Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2014. <<http://www.pop.org/content/spains-government-sees-folly-of-falling-1942>>.

government aid make it even more difficult for couples to afford a child. There has also been a growing tendency of couples to wait until they are older before starting a family, which has also hampered their ability to have children. Some social and cultural norms have also contributed to the low birth rates. More and more young people are remaining unemployed and continue to live with their parents, with over 70 percent of men between 25 and 29 still living at home. Couples tend to marry later in life and are cohabiting relatively less than in many other developed countries.

In 2008, the Spanish government adopted a pro-natal policy. Each newborn receives a check for 2,500 euros. If the child is born into a family with three or more children, the amount is raised to 3,500 euros. This was the first truly pro-natalist policy made by the socialist government and was surprising considering the general avoidance of family policies. There is a surprising lack of general family policy in Spain, which has been attributed to backlash following the ending of the Franco-era, during which contraception was banned.¹³ This has led to a lack of government support for children and families. There was a National Family Policy implemented in 2003 that was a three-year initiative to coordinate family policy measures in different ministries and regional administrations and to enhance their coherence. It worked mainly to help balance work and family life, yet did not provide much in the way of monetary benefits to families. Since the beginning of the birth rate decline in the 1980s there have been some other smaller pieces of legislation enacted, including 16-week maternity leave (1989), 10-week paternity leave (1999), possible reduction of hours if an employee has a child, and educational authorities being given responsibility to look after under-3s (mid 1990s). Yet

¹³ "Clearinghouse Countries: Spain." *Clearinghouse Countries: Spain*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2014. <<http://www.childpolicyintl.org/countries/spain.html>>.

these have been relatively small actions that seem to have had little impact on the birth rate.

The TFR remained at 1.2 from 1994 to 2002, only beginning to slowly rise again in 2003. It reached a relative peak of 1.5 in 2008 (after the pro-natalist policy was enacted), before falling again to 1.3 in 2012. It is hard to say with certainty that any of the policies implemented were successful especially as the birth rates fell again after 2008, possibly due to the worldwide recession that hit that year and that would have worsened the situation in Spain. However, the increase in 2008 could indicate that the policy was mildly successful. Much of the fertility problem in Spain has been attributed to economic troubles and due to this, it is hard for the government to enact pro-birth, developmental, or employment policies that would impact the birth rate as it lacks adequate funds to do so. On the international bond market, Spanish government bond rates continue to rise due to the continued economic strain on the government making it less likely that they can enact the reforms needed. Essentially, the government is hampered by the recession in that it has contributed to the depopulation in that it has encouraged emigration from Spain and the recession prevents the government from easily creating and funding adequate developmental and employment policies to encourage parents to have children.

Japan

Japan is one of the countries that is acknowledged to be experiencing the worst of the depopulation trend. Many reasons have been speculated to be responsible for the declining population, including declining fertility, rising life expectancy, almost zero net immigration, a feminist revolution, and long-term economic deflation. There has even been speculation that there is a social trend moving in the direction of asexualism,

referring to the tendency of Japanese youths to be disinterested in having any romantic relationships at all. All of these elements have most likely had at least some impact on the continuing depopulation in Japan and are probably the reason why the decline has been so long lasting and difficult to combat.

In *The Graying of the Great Powers*, Jackson and Howe claim that “Japan’s massive age wave is the result of a perfect demographic storm: plunging fertility, soaring life expectancy, and negligible net immigration.”¹⁴ The Japanese fertility rate is at just 1.3, one of the lowest fertility rates of the developed countries, even with the general depopulation being experienced by the majority of developed countries. This decline has continued for longer in Japan than anywhere else in the world, being at or beneath the replacement level for the past half-century. “Meanwhile, since the early 1950s, Japanese life expectancy has risen by an impressive 18 year, a bigger gain than in any developed country except Portugal. Life expectancy in Japan now stands at 82, making it the world leader by a comfortable margin.”¹⁵ Other countries have yet to experience the period of rapid aging that eventually occurs in all aging populations, but Japan has been experiencing it for years. This period of rapid aging further intensifies the issue by making the aging population more and more skewed towards the elderly. With Japan also being historically closed off from accepting too many immigrants, it is difficult for Japan to bring in young foreign workers to support the aging population. The society itself is mostly homogenous, with foreigners being liked but not necessarily accepted as being

¹⁴ Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

¹⁵ Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

Japanese, no matter how long they remain a resident of the country. This hampers foreigners from gaining Japanese citizenship and becoming permanent citizens of the country.

In regards to the “feminist revolution”, more and more Japanese women have begun to enter the workplace, challenging their traditional roles in the society and the male-dominated business and bureaucratic elite. However, the growing number of women in the workplace has resulted in fewer marriages and children. “In Japan, women who work and do not marry have been referred to by sociologist Masahiro Yamada as ‘parasite singles’.”¹⁶ In contrast to the more flexible mindset of more western nations, the choice of a career or family has become a dilemma in Japanese society, as women are forced to choose one or the other. The question is whether or not it is the woman’s choice or if the system is structured in a way that prevents women from having both. European and North American countries have employment policies requiring companies to offer maternal leave, childcare facilities for pre-kindergarten children, and flexible work hours for parents. However, the work environment is a lot more rigid in Japan. Females who take time off work to have children often must quit and start over from the lowest tier jobs if they choose to return to the company. There have been numerous articles over the overbooking or lack of childcare facilities available to working moms to take care of their children during the workday. In fact, many Japanese women choose to work overseas during their children’s earlier years in order to take advantage of foreign maternity leave programs and more affordable child care. Also, in Japanese companies employees are expected to work long hours including overtime without much leniency. This is

¹⁶ Wattenberg, Ben J.. *Fewer: how the new demography of depopulation will shape our future*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004. Print. 28

obviously difficult to manage for a family with two working parents who may have trouble having time to spend looking after their children. Around 70% of Japanese women leave their jobs after their first child, mostly due to the long hours being unmanageable with a child to care for.¹⁷ A woman's chances at promotion also stop after marriage because the boss assumes that she will get pregnant. As for the long-term deflation in the Japanese economy, similar to Spain, it makes the raising of children even more costly. It also induces young couples to be more wary about starting a family if they are unsure whether or not they will still have the finances needed to support a child in a year's time.

Finally, in regards to the growing "asexualism" of the Japanese youth, there have been numerous surveys to follow the trend. Pop-culture columnist Maki Fukosawa coined the phrase "herbivore men", referring to Japanese males that have rejected the society's definition of masculinity and eschew relationships with the opposite sex. A survey conducted in 2012 by the Japanese Family Planning Association found that 36% of males ages 16 to 19 and 59% of females ages 16 to 19 were uninterested or averse to sex.¹⁸ Some of the "herbivore men" claim that being in a relationship takes up too much effort, while other analysts believe that the trend could be a result of Japanese males being too involved in virtual worlds. The number of single people has also reached a record high with a survey in 2011 finding that 61% of unmarried men and 49% of women aged 18-34

¹⁷ Haworth, Abigail. "Why have young people in Japan stopped having sex?." *The Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 20 Oct. 2013. Web. 4 May 2014.

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/young-people-japan-stopped-having-sex>>.

¹⁸ Hanrahan, Mark. "Japan Population Decline: Third Of Nation's Youth Have 'No Interest' In Sex (VIDEO)." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 30 Jan. 2012. Web. 3 May 2014.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/30/japan-population-decline-youth-no-sex_n_1242014.html>.

were not in any kind of romantic relationship, up 10% from five years earlier.¹⁹ Another study found that a third of people under the age of 30 had never dated at all.²⁰ Fewer babies were born in 2012 than any other year on record, and in the same year, more adult incontinence pants were sold than baby nappies for the first time. There has been speculation (not necessarily serious) that the Japanese population might actually become extinct. The trend is likely to continue considering that an astonishing 90% of young Japanese women believe that staying single is preferable to their idea of marriage. With marriage ultimately costing a woman her career, it is not a surprise that the dating, marriage, and birth rates are so low.

In response to the low birth rates, the Abe administration proposed plans to increase female economic participation by improving conditions and daycare in order to stimulate the economy and fertility rates. The improvements include extending child-care leave, expanding day-care facilities and asking companies to hire female board members. The administration also considered the creation of “Women’s Notebooks” to “warn of the evils of postponing marriage and motherhood.”²¹ The Japanese government has been implementing similar pro-natalist policies since the 1990s that focus on providing child allowances, day-care support, and childcare leave. But although these policies may provide better conditions for women already planning to have children and may raise awareness of the need for women to have children, the recent Abe plans also further

¹⁹ Haworth, Abigail. "Why have young people in Japan stopped having sex?." *The Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 20 Oct. 2013. Web. 4 May 2014.

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/young-people-japan-stopped-having-sex>>.

²⁰ Haworth, Abigail. "Why have young people in Japan stopped having sex?." *The Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 20 Oct. 2013. Web. 4 May 2014.

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/young-people-japan-stopped-having-sex>>.

²¹ "Sexism Stands in Way of 'Abenomics' Saving Japan." *BloombergView.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2014. <<http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2013-05-26/sexism-stands-in-way-of-abenomics-saving-japan>>.

perpetuate the notion that it is the female in the marriage that needs to sacrifice her career to take care of the children. A final policy Japan's government has undertaken has been a series of campaigns to encourage couples to have more children, including making companies have their staff leave work at 6 pm to encourage couples to spend more time together and possibly have children—yet the “celibacy syndrome” Japan is currently experiencing makes it difficult to believe that the initiative will actually raise the birth rate.

Despite the long-term pro-birth policies that the Japanese government has implemented, there has been little change in the Total Fertility Rate. It has vacillated between 1.3 and 1.4 for the past two decades with no clear pattern to indicate the effectiveness of any of the policies. However, the fact that there seems to be little response to the policies indicates that the policies have not been effective. Part of the problem behind the policies is that despite the employment-related policies to make it easier for Japanese women to have children, the plans have not actually changed the job market and a lot of the cultural pressure to choose between career and family remains. Women remain the expected primary caregivers of children and despite the new proposal to have maternal leaves last three years; it would be three years taken from the mother's career. Even if the maternal leave is protected under law it will continue to prevent male superiors from encouraging women's promotions because they would anticipate losing the mother for three years. The recent emergence of the “celibacy syndrome” only compounds the issue because along with the lack of equal opportunity for women, there is a general loss of interest in pursuing romantic relationships. In conclusion, although the Japanese seemed to be addressing the most problematic issue of allowing Japanese

women to balance work and family, the reforms are not enough. Also, the recent decline in romantic relationships may prevent any new reforms that are implemented from having as quick an impact as would have been experienced without the syndrome. However, it should also be noted that Japan has a little more leeway in solving this issue despite the long-term and severe nature of the depopulation. The aging population issue is mitigated by the cultural tradition of the elderly living with their children and the relatively low pensions, thus reducing the strain of the aging population on the government. Also, the traditional Japanese culture, stresses consensus building and shared sacrifice, which could make adjusting the social contract to accept these new reforms easier than in Western Europe or the United States.²²

Analysis

Of the policies examined in Russia, Spain, and Japan, the policies that seemed to have the most immediate effect were the pro-birth policies that offered monetary rewards or awards given by the government for families with more than three children. It is not certain whether the success of these policies was due to the parents' knowledge of the reward offered but Russia was the most successful of the three nations in bringing back up the Total Fertility Rates. This is especially surprising in light of the fact that Japan has been trying to adopt some measure of employment reforms since the 1990s to try to make the job market more flexible for females having children. Spain's policies could be conjectured to have been effective in part, considering the spike in TFR following their pro-natal policy. However, Spain's policy results were also uncertain considering they dropped soon after. Japan's pro-birth policy seems to have been the one that showed the

²² Jackson, Richard, and Neil Howe. *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008. Print.

least effect as the TFR continued to decline with no seeming reaction to the policies. However, it should be noted that despite Russia's apparent success in implementing their pro-natalist policy, in all three countries there were many factors that contributed to the birth rate decline. A change in the health crisis in Russia, the 2008 recession in Spain, and the advent of the "celibacy syndrome" in Japan could all have contributed in affecting the birth rate despite the implementation of the policies. The fact is that although TFR is very concrete in predicting population size and growth, the factors that influence parents in deciding whether or not to have children are many and varied.

One issue that was made clear in the analysis of each of these country's pro-birth policies is that no matter which policy is implemented, it is more effective to implement several pro-birth, developmental, and employment-based policies rather than sticking to one type of pro-natalist policy. Although Russia stuck mainly to pro-birth policies that offered money or patriotic awards, the health crisis in that country, the general economic troubles and the decline in educational standards for youth all indicate that even with a higher birth rate it is also important to ensure that the children that are born live until adulthood and are educated sufficiently to contribute to the country's economy. In Spain, the focus on monetary policy is straightforward but also limiting in that it does not ensure a more permanent improvement to the country's long-term benefit as developmental policies would. The 2,500 Euros checks take money from an already struggling government. Tax breaks and family support programs, also monetary in nature, offer more extensive support for families considering raising a child and cost a lot more than 2,500 Euros. As for Japan, the government seems to have focused on the right area in trying to change employment structures to help women not have to choose between work

and a family. But the reforms were not extensive enough and should have also focused on addressing cultural norms that limit women in marriages to traditional roles.

Finally, one of the common solutions to depopulation that was not touched on a lot is immigration. In Russia immigration has succeeded in creating a slightly positive population increase in 2009 and 2013, despite the fact that the TFR is still well below replacement. In the United States, immigration continues to drive population increase even though America's TFR is also below replacement. Although Spain's economic recession has hurt its ability to encourage immigration, Russia has succeeded in using this tactic and Japan has the potential to do so as well though both have some issues that may make the policy difficult. Although Russia is currently succeeding in using immigration to increase the population, the practice may not be necessarily long-term. Currently, Russia draws its immigrants primarily from ex-Soviet Union countries. These immigrants are ethnic Russians that are allowed special dispensations to make their immigration into Russia easier. Yet if Russia were to need other immigrants, its native population could express the same discontent that other European countries have felt with the influx of Muslim immigrants. Japan faces the same problem now. It is hard for foreign immigrants to be accepted in Japan, especially as there are fewer ethnic-Japanese living in countries that frequently immigrate back into Japan. Those ethnic-Japanese born and raised in these countries that do immigrate find that they too are not considered Japanese. Although no nation needs an influx of immigrants more than Japan, to stimulate the economy and TFR, Japan has been historically closed to large numbers of immigrants. The culture itself is not inclusive towards outsiders. Although Japan could solve its economic issues by allowing foreign workers temporary work visas, this does not change the fact that the

nation needs the population to increase. Yet accepting more immigrants could change the Japanese culture, which has always been jealously guarded and protected. This makes immigration one of the least likely policies to be implemented in Japan in response to depopulation. However, if the reforms of the work environment do not effect change in the TFR, Japan may need to learn to adapt to the presence of non-Japanese immigrants or continue to lose millions of their citizens each year.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although Russia seems to have had the most effective policies in increasing the Total Fertility Rate, there are many factors contributing to TFR decline in Russia, Spain, and Japan and thus, there are many potential solutions. Pro-natalist policies that offer monetary awards have proven fairly effective, but countries should try to tailor their policies to fit the environment, as many factors can both encourage and discourage couples from having children. Also, policies are more effective if they are implemented in tandem as having many incentives has a better chance of convincing prospective parents to have children. A good example of this is the United States, which despite its TFR being below replacement level, is still doing much better than the rest of the developed countries. The United States offers fairly equal opportunity in the workplace, plenty of childcare to parents, tax breaks to families with children, and most of all, is historically more accepting of immigration. Essentially, it is important to keep pro-birth policies along with immigration flexible to have the greatest chance of success.

Appendix

See attached excel document (Data from World Bank World Development Indicators)

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