

## 1. The stagnating numbers of double-income households

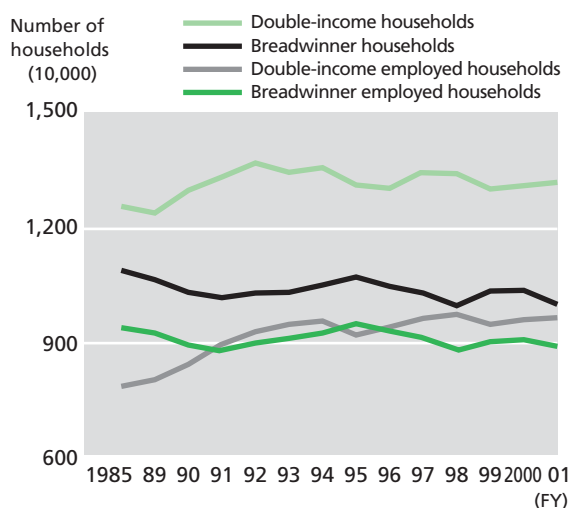
The number of “double-income households”, households with both working husbands and wives, currently exceed 13 million. This clearly surpasses the number of breadwinner households (full-time housewife households, or only working husband households). Among employed households, there have been rising trends in the number of double-income households. However, there has only been a marginal difference with breadwinner households, and antagonistic trends have been appearing within the last ten years. In other words, breadwinner households and double income households are now equally divided (see Figure 2-1).

Sociologist K. Davis analyzed the historical changes in families, and stated that breadwinner household was very fragile as a system, and was merely a dominant family unit during a certain time in history (Note 1). In the US, the sixty years from 1860 to 1920 was the period when breadwinner

households became common. Furthermore, the percentage of working married women during this period was less than 10%. In England, these types of households had already been established during the Victorian Era, when the number of breadwinner households was increasing not only for the upper and middle classes, but for the working classes as well. This took place from around 1840 until the early stages of World War I.

One common point between these two examples is that they both took place during unprecedented periods of economic prosperity. Therefore, it has been suggested that securing a high income would be necessary for the household budget to be maintained by one man’s earnings. In order to achieve this, an economic foundation that had high productivity or other such means would be necessary. In both countries, more married women began to work after these periods had ended, transfiguring the image of households. K. Davis points out that this transfiguration arose from changes in economically related factors, as well as the instability of breadwinner households as systems. In a breadwinner household, with the husband (father) as the only family breadwinner, both wife and children would be equally fully dependent on him. However, the husband, or the family breadwinner, would have a very heavy responsibility in supporting everyone in the household during their entire life. In addition, the division between workplace and household would limit the time for interaction between husband and wife, or father and children, and so it can be said that there is a low level of cohesiveness as a system. Therefore, the breadwinner household is an unstable system that structurally contains a lot of weak points. This is why a strong ideology is needed (standards or values for dividing labor between the sexes) in order to support this system. Due to this reinforcing factor, the system was able to be maintained for a certain period of time, but the powerful waves of industrialization gradually forced the system to change.

## 2-1 Transitions in households by working condition of couples



Source: “Special Survey of the Labour Force Survey,” Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Statistics Bureau.

What is the situation for Japan? Unlike America and England, Japan never had a period where breadwinner households were prevalent. In Japan, married women have always traditionally worked, which has not dramatically changed today. According to Davis's theories, breadwinner households have not yet shown economic prosperity as much as it could have due to their universalization. However, looking only at the households of employed, as shown in Figure 2-1, breadwinner households (working husband households) were prevalent around 1985. Afterwards, the numbers of double-income households began to rise, showing a reverse phenomenon in 1992. Transitions to similar directions taken in the US and England can be seen in this data alone. However, as stated in the beginning, the rise in the number of double-income households afterwards has been sluggish, with the decrease in the number of breadwinner households also slow. Double-income households today do not have a dominating presence.

In other words, Japan has clearly taken a different path from the US and England, where the prevalence moved from breadwinner households to double-income households. As will be examined afterwards, these circumstances have become part of the contributing factors to a uniquely Japanese problem, and carry close ties with the declining birth rate. When comparing breadwinner households to double-income households, there have been arguments stating that the securing of a good child-raising environment makes upholding this household type an advantage towards the strategies for combating declining birth rates. However, actual circumstances show otherwise. As will be explained afterwards, no universalization of double-income households is taking place. In addition, the continuing antagonism with breadwinner households is encouraging the declining birth rate trends, not applying the brakes.

## 2. Is there such a thing as a standard model for a double-income household?

Two years ago, during the escalating arguments over pension reform, a report was presented which labeled the future of the Japanese pension system as "a pension system arising from the contributions made by women." Basic points were presented in the report,

giving a basic perspective and overview of the social security system, and designated six challenges. The first challenge proposed the notion that it would be important to change the current system which standardized single working parent households, and to establish pension standards based on the model of the double-income household. This notion attracted much attention.

In the above report, it makes note of the expectations for the increasing of employed women through the diversification of the lifestyles of women, and included diversification of household categories into the picture. Under these circumstances, the report declared (proposed) that in the designs of the future pension system, the double-income household, not the conventional breadwinner household, should be set as the standard household that would be the base for that system. The declaration recognized that setting the double-income household as the standard model was reasonable for conducting sound pension management. This declaration could perhaps make a big impact on strategies and policies for double-income households. This is because until now, the argument was that the main issues for a double-income household were working women-related issues, from the perspectives of balancing work and family, family responsibilities, child-rearing responsibilities, etc. Or, the fact that these positions are firmly in place from the perspectives of the pension system can be taken up as a great turnover in ideology.

The importance of the double-income household as the standard model, from the perspectives of working women, raising children and sound pension management, could open up the path for investigating and responding to these problems in an integrated manner, and can be said to hold large significance.

## 3. Is it hard to work and raise children at the same time?

As stated in the beginning, while double-income households are being recognized as the standard model, the transitions towards these households are showing stagnating trends. It is commonly known that the percentage of married women in their 40s is about 70%. Despite these circumstances, why are the numbers of double income households not rising?

This is because it is closely related to the problem of balancing both work and child care, which will be expanded upon later in this article.

How difficult is it to give birth and raise children, while continuing work at the same time? I made some provisional calculations using the working history data of women in life events such as marriage, the birth of a child, or freedom from childcare (Note 3). I was interested in finding out whether or not changes had occurred in working history during a life event, or whether the percentages of working women increased at life events, and what had defined those changes. When I analyzed the results, I found that the percentages of married working women were certainly rising, and there were many young cohorts remaining in the working market. However, at the birth of their first child, the working percentages suddenly dropped, with any changes barely to be seen between the cohorts. This was especially true for the youngest of the subjects, who were the first Equal Employment Opportunities Law generation, born between 1962 and 1966, and showed the most promise for rising percentages from system reform. But there were almost no differences with the old cohorts, with 20% at best remaining in the work market one year after childbirth.

We can grasp a better understanding of the current circumstances for more recent trends with the “Longitudinal Survey of Babies in 21st Century” (Note 4). Because the targets of this survey were people who had given birth to their first child in 2001, the women were younger than the targets for the previous study. As shown in Figure 2-2, 24% of the mothers who had given birth to their first child had jobs, while 74.3% did not have jobs. When looking at the changes just before and after birth, 73.5% of the women had jobs up to one year before birth, but within half a year after giving birth 67.4% of those women resigned their jobs. In other words, three out of four women who had given birth did not have jobs half a year after giving birth, and most of these women quit their jobs because of childbirth. When comparing this with the results of the analysis I conducted (20% at best still working after childbirth), there are not very great differences to be seen. Of course, there are many different reasons for leaving.

Many factors are involved, including situations where the mother herself wants to devote full time to her children, the will of the family, customary regulations at the company, or it may have become impossible to perform both work and child care at the same time. The result is a combination of these factors, and changes may have occurred to the reasons over time. Whatever the case may be, many women are leaving the workplace after childbirth. For working women, it is not a matter of doing work and raising a child at the same time. In many cases, it is a choice regarding childbirth or child care, with the choice coming down to leaving work.

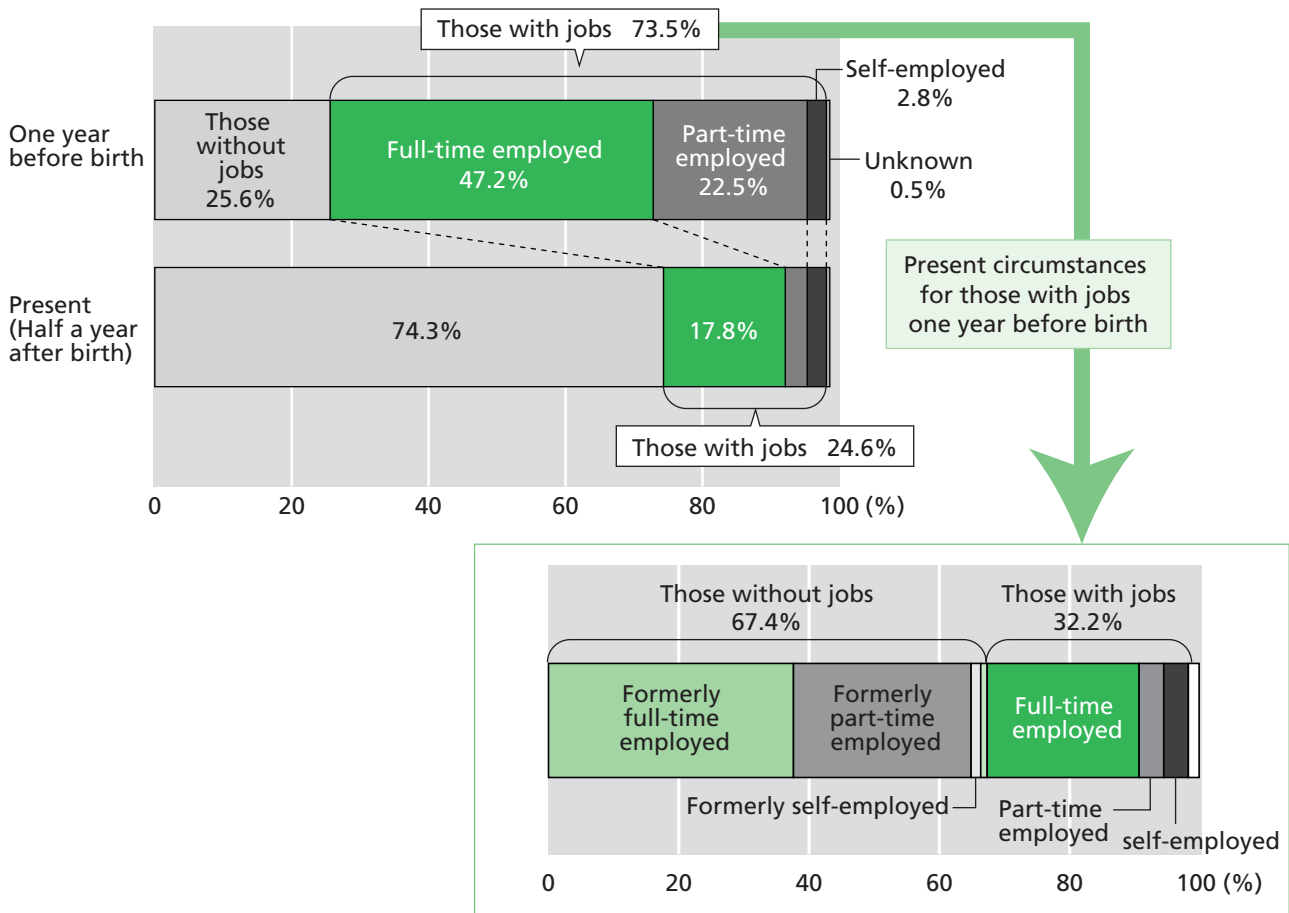
#### **4. Work or child care: Breaking away from the notion of “one or the other”**

After the enforcement of the “Equal Employment Opportunity Law,” the government implemented various supporting policies, such as: support for both work and the household activities, especially for work and raising children, child-care leave systems, limitations on graveyard shifts, limitations on overtime work, reducing working hours, and policies which involved company employment management, such as the encouragement of “family-friendly” companies. According to the “Basic Survey for Women Employment Management”, those who benefited from the child-care leave system amongst women who had undergone childbirth had increased 64.4%. And after the enactment of the Child-care Leave Law in 1991, it can be said that the system became securely established as a child care support measure for working people. Furthermore, the child care leave system plays a great role for those continuing work after childbirth. However, as shown in Figure 2-2, there are many numbers of women leaving work for childbirth reasons, and no significant changes can be seen in the practice of leaving work after childbirth.

In short, supporting policies for both work and childcare that are concentrated in child-care leave systems can be seen as beneficial on both aspects of work and child care for those continuing work. But it does not go as far as persuading people to stay at work for those leaving for child care reasons (for those who must leave work).

The reality of many people leaving work for

## 2-2 Working circumstances of mothers with one sibling (just self)



Source: "Longitudinal Survey of Babies in 21st Century (2001)," Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Statistical Information Department.

childbirth implies for working women that it is either "one or the other" choice between continuing work, or marrying and later giving birth and raising children. Those who choose to raise children become full-time housewives after leaving work. Although it has been noted earlier that the numbers of breadwinner households are not decreasing, it is also known that a large percentage of these households comprise of those who left work after childbirth. On the other hand, many of those choosing to continue work also chose not to give birth, or even marry. Therefore, with the option for conducting work and child care at the same time not universal, the career choice for continuing work means that one cannot have children. The rise in unmarried rates and the dropping of birth rates in couples are the results of those circumstances.

Because breadwinner households are good envi-

ronments for raising children, there are viewpoints stating it may be effective for curbing the declining birth rates. However, this is not true when looking from an overall perspective. Because of the tendency to become a housewife after childbirth, there is pressure for those continuing work not to give birth to children. This results in encouraging the declining childbirth rates. If there is no option for continuing work and raising children, the declining birth rates cannot be stopped in the end.

### 5. Seeing additional support for balancing work and child care

The Japanese government has been producing various birth rate policies after the "1.57 Shock" in 1989. Many different efforts have been taken, including system reform and law establishment. Supportive measures for balancing work and child care as well as

child care policies were provided one after another, such as the enactment of the Child Care Leave Law (1991) and its reinforcements including the revision of the Employment Insurance Law (child care leave benefits added in 1995), the “Angel Plan” in 1994, the new Angel Plan in 1999, and the “Plus One Proposal to end the Low Birth Rate” in 2002. However, none of these served to curb the declining birth rates. In 2002, the total birth rate extraordinarily dropped to 1.32%

The lowered birth rates are unavoidable trends which are the results of industrialization. In every industrialized society, lowered birth rates are occurring uniformly despite differences in standards. Although this phenomenon arises from many different factors, in simple terms the benefits of having children have dropped for parents, while the materialistic and mental costs of raising children have gone up. The problem for Japan is that birth rates have drastically declined, and that the decline cannot be stopped. In addition, the middle-aged and elderly people are forming the bulk of the human population, which has started to take on a backwards pyramid shape. Because of this, the declining birth rates have become deeply imbedded even from the structural points of human population.

As has been stated so far, the declining birth rates are partly due to the employment environment for women, where the choice comes down to “one or the other” regarding work or child care. Furthermore, in order to curb the progressively declining birth rates, the “one or the other” option must be done away with, and universalization of the options allowing for both work and child care is key. In other words, the rise in the number of couples that marry, have children, and become double-income households where both sets of parents work while raising children, would be successful in the long run to declining birth rate policies.

Double-income households, as was touched upon earlier, are not only policies for declining birth rates, but are also deeply involved in the issues for equal employment for men and women as well as for the pension system. It is believed that trends towards double-income households will play strategic roles for future societies as well. It can be said that support for double-income households, especially how to cre-

ate a system for supporting both work and child care, is an urgent issue.

## Conclusion

Although there are many different forms of supporting policies for double-income households, the central themes can be seen in the following three points.

The first is improving both work and household (childcare) support, which make up the core of the child-care leave system.

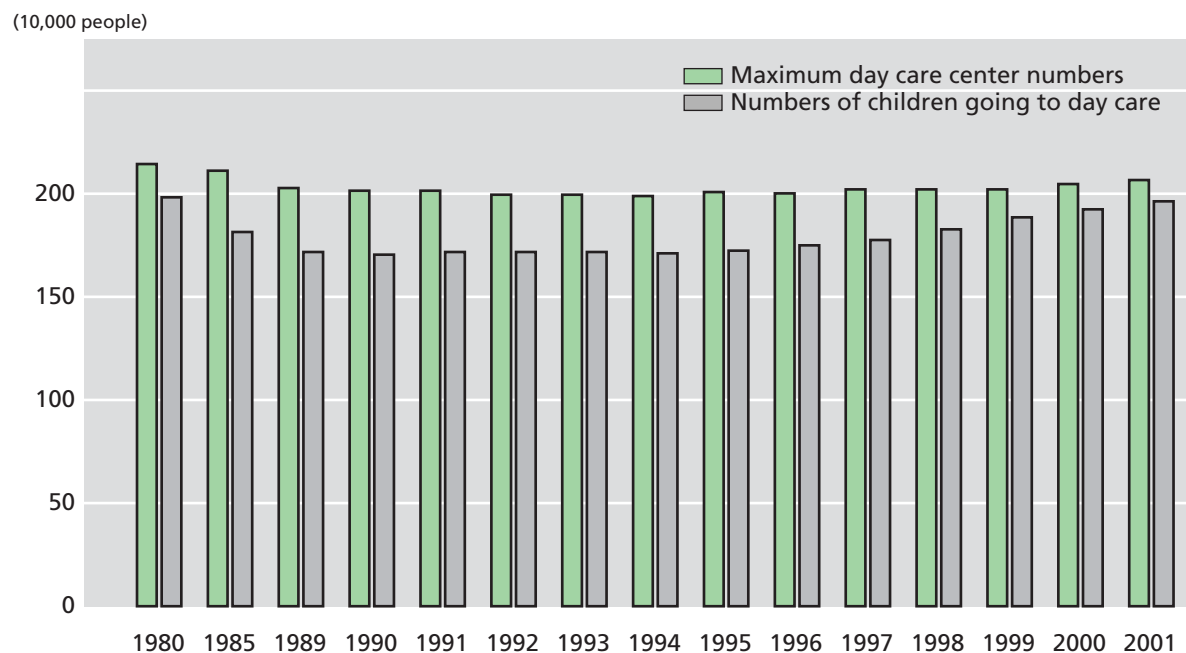
The rates of those making use of the child-care leave system are steadily growing. However, even if the system can be assessed as being beneficial for supporting work and child care in this aspect, it mainly affects those continuing work. The problem is that up until now, the effects have been doubtful for those leaving work for child birth reasons. As support measures for those forced to leave work, it is necessary to reform the system and make it user-friendly by incorporating the many various items concerning child care leave from both work and household aspects.

The second is improving the day care system, which is at the heart of the matter for upgrading day care centers.

Although the objective is to have a zero-waiting list regarding the day care center problem, transitions can be seen in Figure 2-3 for maximum day care center numbers versus the numbers of children going to day care centers. In 2001, the maximum number was 1,936,881 children, while the number of children going to day care centers was 1,828,225, showing that maximum day care center numbers were not achieved (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Statistical Information Department: “2001 Social welfare administrative operations report.”) In reality however, there were many children who could not go to day care centers. Although there are a variety of different factors, in particular children in urban areas, especially very young children, could not go to day care centers. With what could be termed as a “children waiting list” problem, those numbers reached 35,000 in 2001. At their peak, the numbers exceeded 40,000 in 1997. Although improvements have been seen, an immediate solution is necessary.

The third is the improving the support network for child care.

## 2-3 Transitions in maximum day care center numbers and numbers of children going to day care



Source: "Statistical Reports on Social Welfare Administration Services (Welfare Administration Services Example)," Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Statistical Information Department.

After coming home from the day care center, the parent must make dinner, see that their children take baths, and put them to bed. These actions are repeated again and again everyday, in the middle of a hectic schedule. Support is needed for this process. A system providing child service tickets could be beneficial, so long as it provides a variety of different services. It is expected that activities by NPOs and volunteers will be encouraged for promoting child-rearing abilities in each region.

As countermeasures for declining birth rates, the new "Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation" (July 16, 2003) was issued, which are the policies needed for action from this perspective. Creating an environment that can support both work and child care serves as the pillar for these policies. This Promotion Act establishes the responsibilities of national and local governments, business proprietors and citizens, and lays down the obliga-

tions for formulating detailed action plans. With the continued upholding of policies mentioned earlier, comprehensive and integrated effects may be realized from all of these various policies. Hopefully, we can see results which will prove effective for bringing out a balance between work and child care.

Notes: (1) Davis, K. "Wives and Work: The Sex Role Revolution and Its Consequences," *Population and Development Review*, 10:3 pp. 397-417, 1984.

(2) Committee for the review of pension correlating to changes in women's lifestyles "Report - Pension System Arising from Contributions made by Women" November, 2001.

(3) Imada, Sachiko. "Women's Employment and Job stay," *The Monthly Journal of The Japan Institute of Labour*, No. 433, 1996.

(4) "Longitudinal Survey of Babies in 21st Century," Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Statistical Information Department, 2001.