

PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY POLICIES IN JAPAN: AN OVERVIEW¹

Barbara HOLTHUS

INTRODUCTION

Japan spends 10.7 percent of its GDP on the elderly, but it only spends 1.3 percent on families (OECD 2018). Given that Japan is the most rapidly aging country in the world, it is not surprising that Japan's "generational coefficient," which relates all public expenditure on families to spending on people in old age, was one of the lowest among 36 OECD countries in 2013. Not only does Japan spend comparatively little of its GDP on family policies (OECD 2016a), its monetary transfers for paid maternity leave and paid leave rate for mothers also fall significantly behind Germany. For example in the equivalent 14 weeks of maternity leave, German mothers receive 100 percent of their income, Japanese mothers however only 67 percent (OECD 2017a). Furthermore, the share of children under the age of three enrolled in formal childcare and pre-school services passed the 40 percent threshold only in 2015 (MHLW 2017: 22). As late as 2009, Japan's enrolment rate was only about 30 percent, far less than the 40 to 60 percent range for countries such as Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, and France (OECD 2017b, see also Bujard 2011).

Despite nearly three decades of deep concern about Japan's low fertility rate and the subsequent proliferation of family policy plans with cute names like "Angel Plan", "New Angel Plan," or in recent years the "New System" (*shin shisutemu*), not much has been achieved to reverse the fertility trend (MHLW 2017: 185). Hence recent news reported that "the number of children born in Japan has fallen for the 37th straight year in a row" (CNN 2018). It was in 1990 that the so-called "1.57" shock awakened both Japan's public and policy makers. This value replicated the historic low of the fertility rate from 1966, when many withheld giving birth to children due to popular belief that women born in that year of the 'fire

¹ This chapter is in large parts taken from Holthus et al. (2015: 57–73), Holthus and Lützelner (2018) and Holthus (forthcoming), some of those parts are taken verbatim without additional quotation notification. For additional and extensive discussions on the topic, see also Holthus (2010) and (2011), as well as Holthus (2008a) and (2008b).

horse' bring misfortune to their marriage. Fertility before and after 1966 was significantly higher, making it a one-year dip only. Japan's fertility rate once again fell below the threshold of 1.57 in 1990, but this time in a decades' long continuous decline. The shock spurred the media and politicians to finally discuss Japan's declining fertility rate and the demographic shift extensively.

Japan's family policies have also seen certain shifts in emphasis over time (see also Rockmann 2011): in the 1990s, the government placed its focus on infrastructure-related policies through the expansion of day-care centers, whereas in the years 2005 to 2012, a shift to work-life balance related policies became visible. Furthermore, during the short interval of Democratic Party rule between 2009 and 2012, monetary transfers in the form of child allowance became one of the main policy agendas. Much research has focused on the development of these policies (e. g. MHLW 2009; Zhou et al. 2002; Peng 2002; Rosenbluth 2007; Boling 2008, Atoh and Akachi 2003; Tokoro 2012). Lambert (2007), for example, points to the needs of the labor market and the developments of the fertility rate as the primary catalysts behind these shifts. Since 2012, with the conservative Liberal Democrats (LDP) back in power, both the focus and generosity of money policies has declined in favor again of infrastructural provisions, the improvement of childcare leave policies for women, and overall conditions for maternal employment.

Daycare centers as the epitome of infrastructural family policies are a necessary prerequisite for mothers in order to rejoin the job market after childbirth. Even though overall female employment has risen steadily over the last decades, from 35.9 percent among the total employment rate in 1985 to 43.9 percent of women among all employees in the year 2015, childbirth remains to be a major "turning point" (OECD 2017c: 170) in female labor market participation (MHLW 2017: 178). Maternal employment in Japan still falls below the average of 31 OECD countries (see OECD 2016b).²

An and Peng (2016) have analyzed family policies in four Asia countries, Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan, about whether they tend to support "familiazation" or "defamiliazation". They "consider defamiliazation to occur in cases where childcare intervention relates to non-familial care provisions, and familialization to result when intervention focuses on the provision of care by the family" (An and Peng 2016: 544). The authors argue that Japan's family policy intentions are unclear and conflict

² The Japan data does not distinguish, like other OECD countries, between part- and full-time employment of Japanese mothers (OECD 2018).

with each other. They identify Japan as a country of “mixed messages”: some policies, such as monetary policies, express high values for family care and are thus promoting familialization; others, such as policies for daycare centers and work-life balance policies, are trying to ease the lives of parents, and in particular mothers, for managing both outside employment and parenting and childrearing, which therefore are expressions of defamilialization. These mixed messages could very well be a contributing factor why Japan’s family policies overall can be said to be successful on only a limited scale.

Despite the existence of ample studies on family policies in Japan, no standardized procedures for measuring the effects of such policies have been developed. Moreover, few scholars have evaluated these family policies from the perspective of their primary beneficiaries—i. e., parents (with some laudable exceptions such as Poms et al. 2009, Buffardi and Erdwins 1997, Schober and Schmitt 2013, Stahl and Schober 2016). Existing studies on parenthood and happiness often do not include Japan, such as in the case of Glass et al. (2016), who analyze parenthood and happiness by comparing parents with non-parents. As a result, we know very little about Japanese parents’ opinions about different family policies, the challenges they face when using work-life policies, their experiences with daycare centers, and their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their country’s family policy regime.

This chapter addresses these issues by using data from the 2012 Japan Parental Well-being Survey (JPWS) of about 2000 mothers and fathers that have at least one child of pre-school age (for more on the survey itself and its methodology, see Holthus et al. (2015) and Huber (2018) in this volume). The next section briefly surveys the trajectories of Japan’s family policies. Then I present the findings from the data analysis in regards to the usage of policy measures as well as the satisfaction of parents with the three main pillars of family policies: time, money, and infrastructure. I conclude with some policy recommendations.

DEVELOPMENT OF JAPAN’S FAMILY POLICIES

Fleckenstein and Lee (2017) in their overview of the changes in family policies both in Japan and Korea argue that in the early stages of Japan’s industrialization, “social policy was considered incompatible with economic development” (ibid: 3) and solely instrumentalized for the country’s economic growth (ibid: 4). In a way, instrumentalization has continued until today, as the neo-liberal “Abenomics” program by the second

Abe Cabinet seems to be putting effort in increased provision of childcare centers for the purpose of utilizing family policy measures for raising female employment and boosting the economy. Socially conservative Japan has failed to develop a coherent family policy. The mixed messages to Japan's parents oscillate between familization and defamilization and draw a "mosaic of conflicting priorities and initiatives" (Boling 1998: 183), having an adverse effect on the fertility rate.

In total, Japan's family policies are mostly implemented to fight the country's demographic problem, next to improving the welfare of the economically most vulnerable and fighting the labor shortage problem. Yet the country's population continues to decline (*Japan Times* 2017), more than half of all single mothers live below the poverty line (Raymo 2017: 117), and work-life balance is still a dream come true for the larger share of the workforce (Kingston 2016, Ryall 2017). I am not aware that the government so far has evaluated their family policies by focusing on the well-being of parents, who are at the core of these measures. As findings of my analysis will demonstrate, a lack in strategic focus on the improvement of the well-being of parents and their children as the ulterior motive of family policies could very well be the fundamental element blocking the success of family policies – particularly in Japan.

Family policies in Japan have seen many changes over time, but notwithstanding twists and turns, can be categorized into three main types, the so-called pillars of the "family policy triangle": money, time, and infrastructure (Adema 2012; Bertram and Bujard 2012; Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella 2017).

Money policies

Money policies have changed significantly over the decades. The child-rearing allowance system started in 1972 in the form of income support limited to low income families with multiple children at the time. Since then, the monetary amounts and the eligibility criteria (children's age, number of children) have been repeatedly revised. Particularly in 2009, when the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) ran its successful election campaign with the proposal of raising childrearing allowance (the German equivalent to *Kindergeld*) and granting it to everyone without income limitations, the issue was in the public eye. Yet after the defeat of the DPJ by the conservative LDP in 2012, the allowance payments were eventually scaled back again.

Paid childcare leave measures were first implemented in 1995, with workers in the beginning receiving only 25 percent of their wages during

leave. By 2010, this had increased to 50 percent, and by 2016, it reached 67 percent. A child's birth is not covered by Japanese health insurance, and the expenses for the doctor and hospital services are to be paid in full by the new parents. However, to counteract these high costs of starting a family, Japan instigated a "new baby birth allowance" in 1994. This lump-sum amount has risen from originally 300,000 Yen to 420,000 Yen by the year 2010.

Time policies

In regard to time policies, the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law (*ikuji kaigo kyūgyōhō*) is of particular importance. First steps had already been taken in 1975 with the implementation of the Child Care Law (*ikuji kyūgyōhō*), but at that time the policy only supported childcare leave of female teachers, doctors, and nurses. Numerous revisions of the childcare leave law followed in 1991, 1995, 1999, 2010, and 2012. Despite clear policy goals to increase the number of fathers taking childcare leave to 10 percent or more, the numbers remain around the 2 percent mark (2.65 % in 2015). And as a side note: in Japan, even taking three days off to be with wife and newborn child can be considered "childcare" leave if filed accordingly. 56.9 percent of working fathers in Japan who took parental leave in 2015 were absent from work for less than five days (Mainichi Shinbun 2017), despite of one of the world's most liberal sets of parental leave laws and generously paid father-specific entitlement (OECD 2017a: 6). So the formal policies are implemented but not made use of. And what falls under the category of "childcare leave" in Japan would often not even make it into German statistics.

The term and issue of "work life balance" became a "hot" topic for the government in 2008 with the signing of the so-called "Work life balance charter", requiring companies to implement work-life balance measures for their employees. Both the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare as well as the Cabinet Office drew up independent campaigns in support. Work-life balance policies in fact are dependent on company-size – the policies are only mandatory for companies with more than 300 employees. Since the majority of Japanese companies however are small to mid-size companies with less than 300 employees, the forced implementation of these policies reaches only a part of Japanese employees, adding to divided workforce conditions and inequalities. Also, the policies lack "bite", as non-compliant companies are not forced to offer these policies nor do they face any retribution. Thus, as summarized by Holthus (2008b: 1), those were "ambitious goals" coupled with "deficient implementation".

Infrastructure

The most noteworthy aspect of Japan's childcare infrastructure is its diverse forms: daycare centers (*hoikuen*) and kindergarten (*yōchien*) are the most prominent. Less popular forms of institutionalized care are those of privately run baby hotels as well as *kodomoen*, which is best described as a mix between daycare center and kindergarten. Other, informal, non-familial care options are childminders (*hoiku mama*) and babysitters.

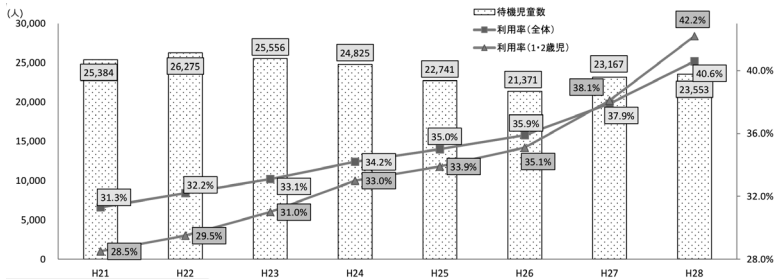
The history of the institutions *hoikuen* and *yōchien* dates back to the early Meiji period (1868–1912). In 1876 the first kindergarten was privately founded, exclusively targeting well-off families. Thereafter, the number of kindergarten quickly increased, totaling already 1,066 by the year 1926. The year 1900 sees the founding of the first daycare center, named *Futaba yōchien*, later renamed *Futaba hoikuen*. Contrary to the target group of kindergarten, this daycare facility was labelled a *hinmin yōchien*, a kindergarten for the poor, and particularly for those working in the factories in Japan's growing urban areas due to the country's high-speed industrialization. *Hoikuen* remained mostly limited to large urban centers in the first decades. In the year 1921 the first public daycare (at that time termed *takujiba* in Japanese) opened its doors. Two years later, a total of 273 daycare centers were in operation (for a much more detailed description on the history of childcare institutions in Japan, see Uno 1999). Daycare centers remained stigmatized as welfare institution for the working class until the 1970s and into the 1980s. Only slowly did middle-class families make use of daycare centers. Despite the fact that entry into daycare is determined on a point system, whereby poor or single parent homes get preference to enroll their children into a daycare center, this stigmatization has more or less disappeared by the 2010s.

Today, the main differences between kindergarten and daycare centers are: (1) Daycare centers (*hoikuen*) operate under the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, whereas kindergarten (*yōchien*) are under the auspices of the Ministry of Education; (2) Daycare centers offer care for children as young as the 57th day after birth, whereas kindergarten provide for children from age 3 onwards; (3) Daycare centers target working parents, with care being provided for full days, usually six days a week, and with some centers even operating 24/7. Even though, in recent years, kindergartens have been extending their operating hours (formerly, their usual hours were from 9 a. m. to 2:30 p. m.), in most cases kindergarten care hours still do not allow for the parents to be working full-time. Kindergartens have an educational aspect to

them, making them more comparable to what in the German and U. S. context would be called “preschools.” (4) Kindergarten attendance nationwide has fallen over the last decades, whereas the percentage of children cared for in daycare centers has seen a steady increase (see Figure 1 below).

As the number of daycare center places cannot keep up with the rising demand, there is a significant waiting list nationwide for children to get into public daycare centers – despite a low fertility rate. As Figure 1 shows, in 2016, there remained more than 23,000 children on the waiting list. This discrepancy between demand and availability and thus the resulting waiting list for daycare (*taikijidō*) is a major policy concern. A “zero-waiting list” was promised already by prime minister Koizumi Junichirō (2001–2006), to no avail, and continues to be also of great policy concern for the current prime minister Abe Shinzō (2012-).

Figure 1: Daycare attendance and number of children on the waiting list for public centers



Source: MHLW 2017: 22.

Note: The y axis marks the number of children. The chart shows the years 2009 (H21) to 2016 (H28) on the x axis. The bars symbolize the number of children on the waiting list for getting into daycare. The squares identify the total percentage of children enrolled in daycare centers. The triangles identify the percentage of all children aged 1 and 2 attending daycare.

Finally, an important element of Japan’s daycare system is that it is both market- and state-based. The existence of both public and private daycare facilities also influences for example pricing structures, opening hours, and the number of caregivers per child. Furthermore, whereas all public daycare centers are licensed centers, private daycare centers are either licensed or unlicensed. All these elements weigh in on parents’ considerations as to where they decide to try to enroll their children into, as my years of fieldwork in Tokyo have revealed.

In the following, the usage by parents with small children in regards to monetary, time, and infrastructure policy measures is presented, as well as their evaluation of and their satisfaction with these measures. This is to help understand if there is a potential mismatch between the needs of the parents and the available policies, and thus can shed light on potential reasons of why family policy measures, despite their in parts highly generous conditions, do not seem to bring the “desired results”, such as usage rates in childcare leave, higher maternal employment, and an improved fertility rate.

DATA AND METHOD

The dataset for analysis is the Japan Parental Well-being Survey (JPWS), conducted in 2012. It is a quota sample (based on gender, marital status, region, and household income) of parents nationwide with at least one child aged 0 to 6 years old. In total 1,031 fathers and 1,103 mothers participated in the survey. For more details about the methodology of the survey, see Huber (2018, in this volume) as well as Holthus et al. (2015), which is the book-length survey report of the JPWS.

Of the 61 questions and question batteries, respectively 416 variables, 10 specifically pertain to family policy matters, namely the actual use and availability of, knowledge of and opinions about, as well as satisfaction with particular family policy measures and family policies in general. It is these questions that are part of the analysis here in this paper. I conducted (a) a descriptive analysis of the nature of parental use and opinions on childcare measures, as well as (b) cross-tabulations, ANOVA calculations and regression analyses for understanding which factors are related to parents' family policy satisfaction. The dependent variables are three: the satisfaction with time, money, as well as infrastructural family policies. The respondents answered these questions on an 11-point standard life satisfaction scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the least satisfied, 10 the most.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 below shows both the demographic information on the parents surveyed, and the subsequent Table 2 lists the frequency distributions (percentages or means) of all variables relevant in this analysis. I will discuss them in the following subsections, in which I provide also more detailed information on some of them. First, regarding the parent's demo-

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic variables, by gender

Variable	Total	Male	Female
Age***			
	36.19 (SD 5.316)	37.71 (SD 5.105)	34.77 (SD 5.113)
Education***			
no univ. educ.	40.8% (886)	31.6% (325)	49.6% (541)
university educ.	59.2% (1254)	68.4% (704)	50.4% (550)
Savings***			
yes	42.6% (904)	54.3% (557)	31.7% (347)
no	57.4% (1218)	45.7% (469)	68.3% (749)
Employment***			
not employed	34.8% (738)	1.9% (20)	65.6% (718)
employed (part/full/temp)	65.2% (1385)	98.1% (1008)	34.4% (377)
Age of youngest child***			
birth up to age 2	43.2% (921)	46.9% (484)	39.7% (437)
ages 3 to 6	56.8% (1211)	53.1% (547)	60.3% (664)
Number of children			
1 child	41.9% (856)	41.4% (405)	42.4% (451)
2 or more children	58.1% (1185)	58.6% (573)	57.6% (612)
Regions			
Kanto and Kinki	48.8% (1041)	48.8% (503)	48.8% (538)
all other regions	51.2% (1093)	51.2% (528)	51.2% (565)
Company size (of those employed)***			
1-9 people	20.3% (285)	15.9% (158)	31.1% (127)
10-99 people	26.9% (377)	25.4% (252)	30.6% (125)
100-299 people	13.8% (193)	14.5% (144)	12.0% (49)
300-499 people	6.5% (91)	6.8% (68)	5.6% (23)
500-999 people	4.8% (67)	5.7% (57)	2.5% (10)
over 1000 people	22.2% (311)	25.2% (250)	15.0% (61)
government office employee	5.6% (78)	6.5% (65)	3.2% (13)

*** indicates a statistical high significance in gender differences.

graphics, we see significant gender differences in age (mothers are on average about 3 years younger than the fathers), in education (a larger percentage of fathers have a university education than mothers), a larger share of fathers report having savings (a better indicator than household

income for social stratification; see Holthus forthcoming for more detail), and fathers are to a much higher degree employed and much more often work in large companies. No significant gender differences are to be found in regards to their place of living. About half of parents live in the urban metropolises in the Kantō and Kinki areas (Tokyo and Osaka). In regards to their children, 56.8 percent of the youngest child in the family is between the ages of 3 and 6, and 58.1 percent of parents report to have 2 or more children.

As can be seen in Table 2, overall life satisfaction as well as the satisfaction with either of the three pillars of family policies were measured on an 11-point Likert scale. Whereas overall life satisfaction in this study lies at 5.9 for Japanese fathers, it is significantly lower for mothers at 5.6. The satisfaction with any of the three pillars of family policies is even lower than parents' overall life satisfaction. The satisfaction with time policies is particularly gendered, with mothers displaying the lowest average satisfaction at 3.8. As the labor market remains extremely gendered, and work-life-balance still being a very recent policy agenda, this might not come at a large surprise.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on family policy relevant variables

Variable	Total	SD	n	min	max	Fathers	Mothers
Level of satisfaction (0=least satisfied, 10=most satisfied)							
Overall life satisfaction	5.75	2.273	2133	0	10	5.9	5.6**
Satisfaction with money policies	4.23	2.446	2130	0	10	4.1	4.3
Satisfaction with time policies	4.00	2.303	2130	0	10	4.2	3.8***
Satisfaction with infrastructural family policy	4.86	2.426	2130	0	10	5	4.8
caregivers (other than family, friends, neighbors) (multiple answers possible)							
			1962				
Kindergarten (<i>yōchien</i>)	31.7% (640)						
Daycare facilities							
public licensed daycare center	15.6% (311)						
private licensed daycare center	9.4% (186)						
non-licensed daycare center	1.8% (35)						
certified daycare center	1.4% (27)						
daycare centers in companies or hospitals	0.9% (18)						
<i>kodomo-en</i>	0.7% (14)						
daycare room (<i>hoikushitsu</i>)	0.6% (12)						
baby hotel	0.2% (4)						
childminder (<i>hoiku mama</i>)	0.8% (15)						
family support center	0.7% (13)						
babysitter	0.2% (4)						

Variable	Total	SD	n	min	max	Fathers	Mothers
monthly cost for institutionalized childcare (Yen)							
	25,892	14734.984	1176	0	120,000		
degree of difficulty finding childcare institution for youngest child (1=very difficult, 5= very easy)							
	3.65	1.124	1187	1	5		
very difficult	3.8% (45)						
difficult	15.6% (185)						
neither nor	17.1% (203)						
easy	38.7% (459)						
very easy	24.9% (295)						
Opinions on childcare support measures (1=not important, 5=important)							
Financial support (Money)							
pay the childcare allowance on a sliding scale	3.76	.966	2124	1	5		
pay the childcare allowance on a sliding scale based on the household income	4.04	1.028	2124	1	5		
pay the childcare allowance on a sliding scale based on the age of the child(ren)	3.55	1.057	2124	1	5		
pay the childcare allowance on a sliding scale based on the number of children	3.73	1.044	2124	1	5		
tax breaks for families with children	4.31	.811	2124	1	5		
have employers pay childcare allowance, etc.	3.95	1.002	2124	1	5		
Work-life balance policies (Time)							
being able to freely decide on flex time or shortened work hours	4.18	.791	2124	1	5		
being able to work from home	4.03	.890	2124	1	5		
to decide on a set day without overtime	3.78	.981	2124	1	5		
to make childcare leave both for men and women mandatory	3.68	1.077	2124	1	5		
payment of 100% of their income for men and women during childcare leave	3.94	1.052	2124	1	5		
to make it easier for parents with children to take time off in emergency situations, e.g. when a child gets sick	4.55	.670	2124	1	5		
Infrastructure							
increase the number of daycare institutions	4.11	.869	2124	1	5		
increase the number of child-minders	3.58	.864	2124	1	5		
more flexible care hours	4.14	.837	2124	1	5		
increase programs to improve quality	3.96	.804	2124	1	5		

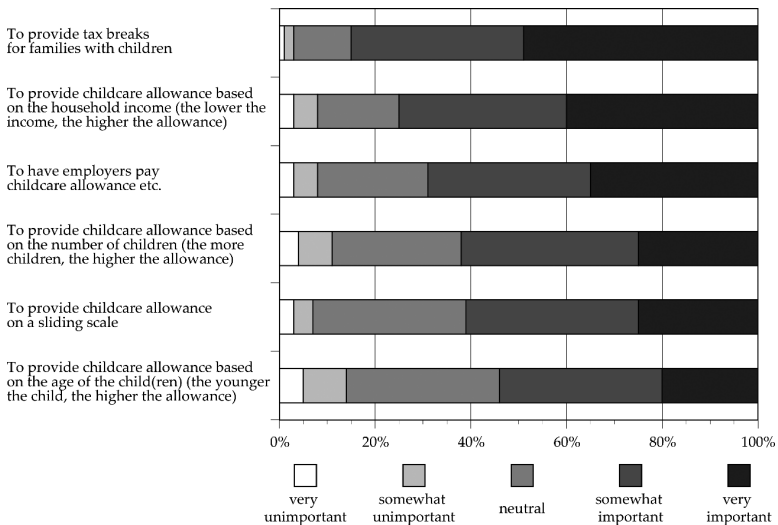
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Variable	Total	SD	n	min	max	Fathers	Mothers
improve support for special needs children	3.03	.798	1186	1	5		
improve support for parents with limited financial means	3.22	.730	1186	1	5		
increase after school care	3.06	.732	1186	1	5		
Satisfaction with childcare institution of youngest child (1=dissatisfied, 4=satisfied)							
hours of care	3.2	.881	1186	1	4		
the institution's closed days	3.18	.816	1186	1	4		
costs	2.6	.955	1183	1	4		
number of daycare providers per child	3.15	.786	1186	1	4		
handling of the unexpected, e.g. illnesses	3.03	.798	1186	1	4		
play and learn program	3.22	.730	1186	1	4		
dealing on an individual level with each child	3.06	.732	1186	1	4		
educational principles and ways of thinking	3.21	.670	1186	1	4		
opportunities for parents' input	3.09	.700	1186	1	4		
contact/communication with other parents	3.00	.712	1186	1	4		
atmosphere of the institution	3.34	.647	1186	1	4		
Provisions available at own workplace (0=not existent, 1=existing)							
Provision of shortened work hours for employees with children under age 3	24.6% (348)		1413				
Release from overtime work for employees with children under age 3	15.6% (220)		1412				
Nursing time off in case children are sick	26.9% (380)		1412				
Flexitime (being able to decide on ones beginning and end of work)	20.7% (292)		1413				
Flexibility from company side and superiors to handle emergencies	65.3% (922)		1412				
Company's in-house daycare center	4.4% (62)		1413				
Provision to work from home (other than self-employed, home workers)	6.0% (84)		1396				
Degree of workplaces being considerate to employees 1=not at all considerate, 7=very considerate							
	4.24	1.694	1388	1	7		
Has taken maternity/childcare leave							
	8.8%		1413			3.3% (33)	21.9% (91)

PARENTAL OPINIONS ON MONETARY POLICIES

Offered a list of six monetary policy measures, most in regards to different criteria for providing childcare allowance, parents were asked to evaluate the importance of said measures. We found in particular that tax breaks for parents with children were considered important (see Table 2 above, and Figure 2 below for details).

Figure 2: Importance of monetary policies



Looking for gender differences in the importance of tax breaks for families with children, a Mann-Whitney U-test finds that this policy is significantly more important to fathers than mothers (519, $p < .001$). Different income groups, however, do not differ significantly in their opinions in regards to monetary policy issues.

PARENTAL VALUES ABOUT AND USAGE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

In regards to “time policies” or work-life balance policies, the parents were provided with a list of seven measures that their workplaces might have implemented and which are geared particularly towards parents with young children. These measures are (see also Table 2 above):

- Provision of shortened work hours for employees with children under age 3
- Release from overtime work for employees with children under age 3
- Time off in case children are sick
- Flextime (being able to decide on starting and finishing times)
- Company's in-house daycare center
- Provision for work from home (other than self-employed, home workers)
- Flexibility granted by the company or superiors to handle childcare emergencies.

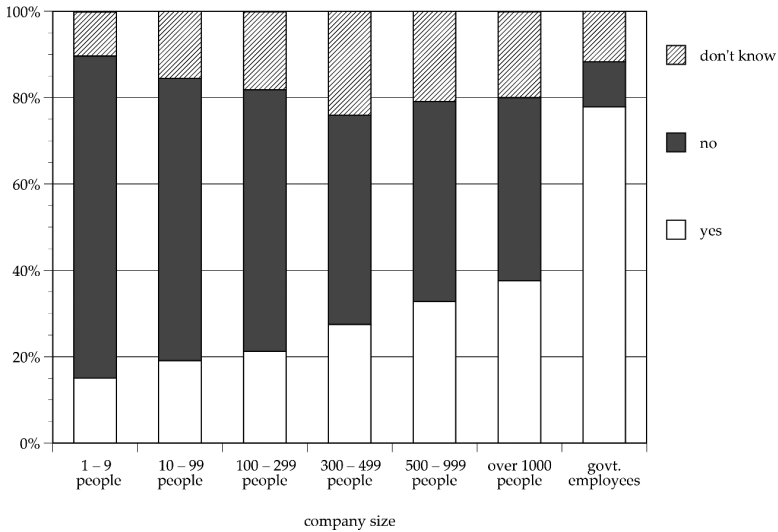
All provisions could be regularly implemented as contractual measures, except the last one ("flexibility"), which is a non-contractual courtesy by employers, a measure that cannot be claimed or demanded by employees as it is rather given on a voluntary basis, but which could also easily be restricted, if not formally regulated. As Table 2 shows, it is this non-contractual provision of flexibility from the side of the company for family emergencies that was most often named by parents to exist at their workplaces. Formal, contractual provisions are much less common. This divide certainly stands out. Provision for work from home and in-house daycare centers are least provided to the parents participating in the survey.

Company size matters

As stated above, work-life balance provisions are only mandatory for companies of 300+ employees. This is clearly reflected in the answers by employed parents. For example, sick child leave provisions increase in frequency with company size and are most frequent among government office employees, of which close to 80 percent report that it is possible at their workplace. In comparison, less than 20 percent of parents working in companies of 1 to 9 employees report the possibility to take time off if their child is sick.

Even though government employees do not have the benefit of an in-house daycare center or the possibility to work from home (compared to private-sector companies), they do have, to a higher degree, the possibility to avoid overtime work or have shortened work hours when their children are under the age of 3.

Parents were also asked about their level of satisfaction with their companies' consideration for working parents, rating their satisfaction on a 7-point Likert-like scale ranging from 1 ("least satisfied") to 7 "most satisfied". Government employees, who enjoy the highest number of time

Figure 3: Possibility to take time off when child is sick, by company size

policy measures, are quite satisfied. Yet, surprisingly, fathers and mothers working within the smallest companies, with a size of up to 9 employees, are almost equally satisfied. Why companies, which do not provide many work-life balance measures and objectively do not provide much support for parents, can still be considered satisfying in that respect, can only be speculated about. Possibly it has something to do with the informality and flexibility of a small workplace, both of which supersede formally implemented policy measures.

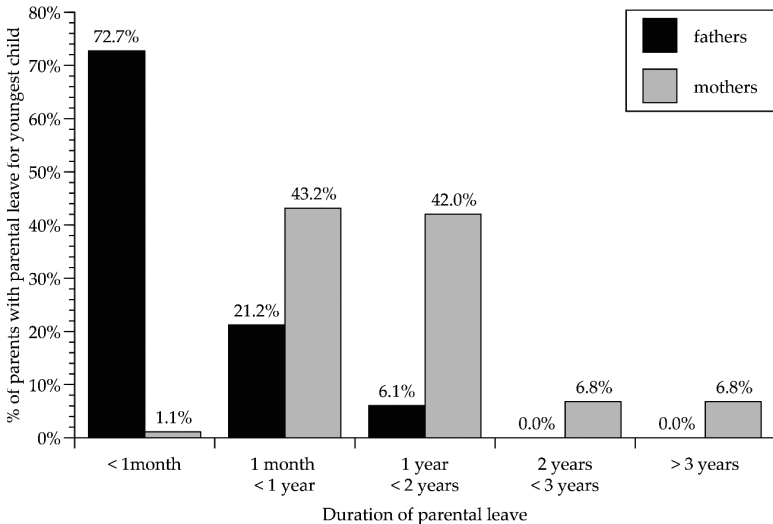
Asking parents not only about the existence of time measures, but also which they consider important, we find that working parents with young children are extremely time constrained and thus greater flexibility in order to balance work and family life is the most important for the surveyed parents (see Table 2 above for more details).

Childcare leave

The ability to take childcare leave is a fundamental time policy measure. The gender difference in the frequency of taking childcare leave (we asked about childcare leave for the youngest child only) is highly significant. The rate of employed mothers and fathers that have taken maternity/childcare or parental leave is 21.9 percent among mothers, whereas the rate among fathers is as low as 3.3 percent (see Table 2 above). Compared

to nationwide statistics, the percentage of fathers in this survey is slightly higher than among the overall population, whereas the percentage of mothers is significantly lower. This can only be explained by the comparatively high number of unemployed mothers in the sample, as well as the fact that this group of mothers has very young children. As this question in the survey was limited to only those currently in employment, we did not account for those mothers who might have first taken maternity/childcare leave and then eventually dropped out of the labor market entirely rather than returning to work. Other significant gender differences can be found also in the length of childcare leave. As can be seen in Figure 4, the majority of fathers take less than one month of childcare leave, often even less than one week.

Figure 4: Length of parental leave by gender



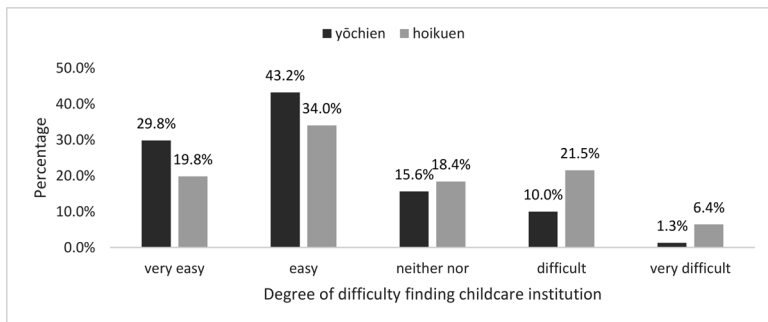
OBSTACLES IN USING INFRASTRUCTURAL FAMILY POLICY PROVISIONS

31.7 percent of parents report to have their youngest child attend kindergarten (see Table 2), making it the most frequent form of childcare institution. Daycare centers are attended by 24.5 percent of the parents (15.6% in a public, and 9% in a private yet licensed institution).

Enrollment into daycare

63.6 percent of the parents in this survey describe finding institutionalized childcare as easy or even very easy. Only 15.6 percent thought it difficult (185), and only 3.8 percent (45) found it very difficult (see Table 2). Since the nationwide waiting list for children to get into daycare is an often publicized issue, as described above, this surprising observation warrants a more detailed look. Distinguishing the findings by the type of childcare institution that the parents are using for their youngest child sheds an greater light on the severity of finding a daycare center slot in comparison to finding a place in a kindergarten. As can be seen in Figure 5 below, 27.9 percent of parents found it difficult or very difficult to secure a place for their child in daycare, yet for kindergarten it was only 11.3 percent. Vice versa, 73 percent of parents with their child in kindergarten report finding a slot easily, whereas it is only 53.8 percent of parents with their child in a daycare center. Part of the reason why it is easier to secure a place in a kindergarten than a daycare center lies in the fact that the number of kindergarten children has been declining for a long time, whereas the number of children in daycare continues to increase more quickly than new places are created. This has resulted in the described mismatch of excessive kindergarten places and insufficient daycare places, which adds to parental stresses.

Figure 5: Degree of difficulty of enrolling the youngest child into a childcare institution



Note: The question was limited to parents who actually have a child in regular care. A Chi-Square test of independence indicated a highly significant association between difficulty finding childcare institution and the type of childcare institution ($\chi^2(4, n = 1187), p < .001$).

Costs for childcare

Costs for institutionalized childcare vary greatly. We asked parents about their approximate total monthly costs for childcare for all their children below elementary school age, including babysitter costs. The majority (56.7 %) of parents pay between 20,000 and 40,000 yen per month; yet for some, the costs are as high as 120,000 yen (about 930 euros as of May 2018). Almost 50 percent of parents are dissatisfied with the cost of their youngest child's childcare institution, turning costs for childcare into the highest factor of dissatisfaction and only outlier among all other aspects of institutionalized childcare facilities – both in regards to their “quantitative” care aspects (such as care hours) as well as their “qualitative” (educational) aspects (see Table 2 above).

What is important to whom?

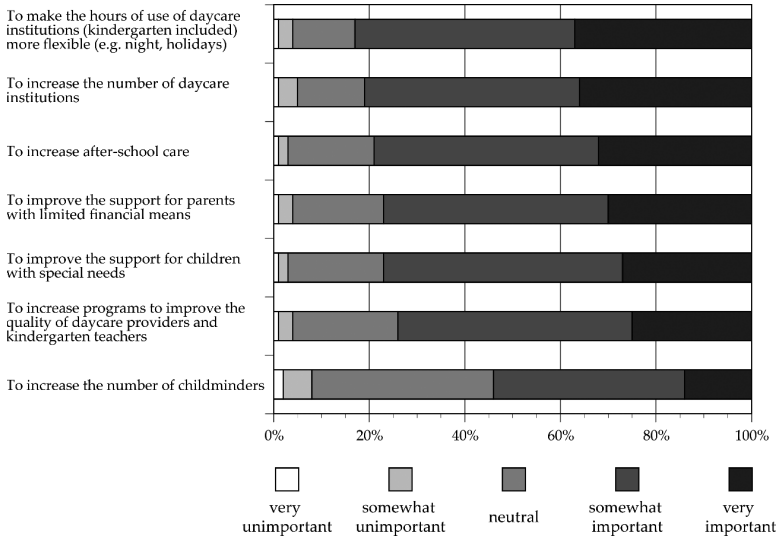
Parents were asked to evaluate seven infrastructure policy measures, which in one way or another all have been discussed in recent years as policy recommendations or goals. Respondents could answer on a 5-point Likert-like scale ranging from “very unimportant” to “very important”. As Figure 6 reveals, the most important elements for parents are (1) to increase the number of daycare institutions and (2) to make the hours of childcare institutions more flexible. An increase in the number of daycare centers aids with easing the waiting lists and increasing the opening hours for daycare helps full-time working parents, who often have very long working hours and – particularly in the Kantō region – often also have long commutes.

A measure discussed in public discourse as a possibility to solve the problem of persistently long waiting lists for entry into daycare was to increase the number of childminders (*hoiku mama*). Yet, as our survey reveals, parents find this the least important of all infrastructure policy measures (see Figure 6).

Distinguishing these findings by gender, we find that some of these policy measures differ significantly in importance between fathers and mothers. For mothers, the increase of after-school care ranks highest, whereas for fathers, it is the flexibility of care hours. Furthermore, both the increase of after-school care and the improvement of support for children with special needs rank significantly higher in importance for mothers than the fathers.

Another important question is whether income or employment status influence the opinions on infrastructure policy measures. For example access to public daycare centers as important infrastructure policy measure

Figure 6: Importance of infrastructure policy measures



is limited to those families where both parents are employed or, in the case of a single parent, when that parent is employed. Private daycare centers have a little more leeway in that regard but are generally more costly than public centers. Data show that household income does have a partial effect. Some policy measures gain in importance with higher income, while others decline. Among the measures growing in importance by a rise in income, the increase in the number of childminders is the only significant factor; and even though it proves to be least important for all income groups, this measure is significantly more important for the highest income group. On the other hand, the measures to “Improve the support for children with special needs” and “Improve the support for parents with limited financial means” also show significant differences in income levels but are most important for the lowest income groups.

Distinguishing the opinions on infrastructure policy measures by employment status, it becomes visible that employment status affects the values on policies. Those unemployed rate “Increase after-school care” and “Improve the support for children with special needs” significantly more important than the regularly employed or even the part-time and temporarily employed.

PARENTAL SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION WITH FAMILY POLICIES

Above I presented the diverse opinions of parents regarding the many potential and existing family policies in all three fields, money, time, and infrastructure, as well as their uses and satisfaction with individual policy measures. Now the question remains what exactly influences parents' overall satisfaction with family policy. As also mentioned above, family policy satisfaction falls well below the average life satisfaction scores for both mothers and fathers. This in itself should be alarming policy makers and be a call to action, but unfortunately it is not yet. Particularly time policies are low for mothers and can easily be identified as an area in need of improvement. Yet what are the influencing elements?

In the following, I am presenting the findings of separate regression analyses for each of the three dependent variables: time, money, and infrastructure policy satisfaction. Table 3 below summarizes these findings. Some astonishing findings are visible through this. One certainly is the weight of gender as explanatory variable. Whereas there are gender differences for policy satisfaction, within a regression analysis, the explanatory value of gender fades against the importance of other variables. The concluding remarks will touch upon the potential reasons for that.

Only in regard to monetary policy satisfaction does gender make a small, yet significant contribution to the model. This model overall has the least explanatory power with only 5.8 percent of the variance explained. The two variables with the highest significance are (1) if the person reports being able to save, and (2) believing tax breaks to be an important policy measure. The variable "saving" is a substitute for household income and has proven to be a much better indicator than individual or adjusted household income. The connection between money policy measures and the parents' financial situation is easily explained. Having savings has a highly significant positive influence on parents' situation – as fiscal help by the government is less urgently needed. The variables on the importance attached to certain money policy measures all show negative relationships, but only tax breaks are highly significant. What this tells us is that having any opinion on policies needed will reduce the satisfaction with money policies overall, and if the opinion is strong, it will greatly reduce the satisfaction.

Last but not least, the region of living, which here is dichotomized into the two large metropolitan areas of the Kantō and Kinki regions, versus the rest of Japan, is showing to be a significant, and in the case of satisfaction with infrastructure policies, highly significant influence on parental satisfaction with family policies. In all cases, the influence is negative for

the metropolitan areas (see Holthus and Lützel 2018 for more details on issues of the regional diversity in satisfaction).

The regression analysis with time policy satisfaction as dependent variable explains 14.7 percent of the variance in satisfaction. Also here, adding the opinions on time policies to the model shows their negative influence throughout, with one variable, the opinion on making childcare leave mandatory to both men and women, being highly significant. As explained above, childcare leave is a legal option yet so little taken, that those that believe this to be an important measure have highly unrealistic values. It could very well be the large gap between reality and desires that result in a decreased level of satisfaction. Those being more “realistic” seem to fare better, at least in terms of their personal satisfaction.

On the other hand, being employed at a considerate workplace has a highly significant positive effect on policy satisfaction. This points to the fact that one’s personal experiences influence parent’s satisfaction with policies overall. The same can be seen with the third dependent variable, infrastructure policy satisfaction. The more satisfied parents are with their experiences with daycare centers for their own children, the more satisfied they are with infrastructural family policies in general. The satisfaction with the opening hours and the costs of daycare centers remain highly significant even in the regression analysis here.

Table 3: Regression analyses for satisfaction with family policies

Variable	DV: money policy satisfaction	DV: time policy satisfaction	DV: infrastructure policy satisfaction
Gender	.062*	.033	.009
Number of children	-.006	.018	.045
Age of youngest child	-.056*	.039	.026
social stratification			
employed (vs. Not employed)	.019	.032	.018
has savings (vs. No savings)	.100***	.046*	.065*
university education (vs. No univ. edu)	-.010	-.032	-.051
Region (Kanto+Kinki) (vs. rest of Japan)			
	-.073**	-.045*	-.116***
opinions on financial support measures			
pay childcare allowance on sliding scale	-.017		
pay childcare allowance on sliding scale based on income	-.008		
pay childcare allowance on sliding scale based on age of children	-.005		
pay childcare allowance on sliding scale based on number of children	-.014		
tax breaks for families with children	-.158***		
have employers pay childcare allowances	-.077**		

Parental satisfaction with family policies in Japan: An overview

Variable	DV: money policy satisfaction	DV: time policy satisfaction	DV: infrastructure policy satisfaction
opinions on work-life balance measures			
being free to decide on flextime or shortened workhours		-.024	
being able to work from home		-.060	
to decide on a set day without overtime		-.006	
to make childcare leave mandatory for men and women		-.139***	
payment of 100% incoming during childcare leave		-.046	
to make it easier to take time off in emergency situations		-.023	
Provisions available at workplace			
shortened work hours for employees with young children		.058	
release from overtime work for employees with young children		.007	
Nursing time off in case children are sick		.060	
Flextime		.002	
Flexibility to handle emergencies		.038	
Company's in-house daycare center		-.031	
Provision to work at home		-.017	
Considering the workplace as considerate to employees		.205***	
Has taken maternity/childcare leave		-.005	
own experiences with institutionalized childcare			
child in private daycare (hoikuen)			.014
child in public daycare (hoikuen)			.121**
child in kindergarten (yochien)			.088
approx. Monthly cost for childcare			.029
degree of difficulty finding daycare (easy)			.067
satisfactions with different elements of institutionalized childcare			
hours of care			.175***
the institution's closed days			.041
costs			.137***
Number of teachers per child			.075*
Handling of the unexpected, e.g. illness			.059
The play and learn program			.049
Dealing with child on individual level			.007
Educational principles			-.040
Parental input opportunities			-.002
Communication with other parents			.034
Atmosphere at institution			.056
N	1997	1999	1120
Adjusted R2	.058	.147	.179

Note: p<.05*, p<.01**, p<.001***

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The continuing low fertility rate in Japan, coupled with high ageing and the government's continuing refusal to have migrants fill the void in the labor market is a severe problem for Japan's social welfare system and its economy. Family policies have been largely implemented with the objective of trying to tackle the low fertility rate, as well as trying to improve the lives of families with children through numerous means. However, these policies are not designed with the goal of increasing the level of satisfaction of the 'recipients'. I argue that if the Japanese government would shift its focus and be more attuned to the needs, opinions, and wishes of the parents, the policies would "naturally" have the desired effect.

The regression analyses have shown that the importance of gender differences in satisfaction with family policies, pales in comparison to issues of social class as well as to issues of region and place of residence, in particular the stark contrasts of family lives in Japan's larger metropolitan areas around Tokyo and Osaka versus the rest of the country. Policies need to take into account the stark differences between the lives in urban and rural areas. Whereas populations decline in rural areas but tend to grow in urban and particular in metropolitan areas, people raising their children in the countryside or big cities need area-specific support. This chapter thus calls attention to these fundamental demographic indicators, which of course are again tied in to issues of gender. Thus the Japanese government is called into action to ease the gap between its disparities in class and region.

Money is tight for most parents with young children. Fiscal policies to help parents are part and parcel of all three pillars of family policies. We see that clearly in parents concern for the costs of daycare. A solution here could very well be completely free access to daycare centers – with high quality care and with long, adequate hours for both parents to be able to combine full time jobs with potentially long commuting hours.

Flexibility in emergency situations such as children's illnesses is a huge factor based on the voices of the parent's surveyed here. Despite efforts of the government to improve and aid parents, it still seems to be the biggest factor in parents' dissatisfaction of family policies. Most certainly, to make work-life balance policies mandatory for all companies, large and small, would be a first step.

And last but not least, the best and most ambitious policy goals and implementations will not do any good if not actually used, as in the case of childcare leave for Japanese fathers for example. Workplace norms and

economic constraints of companies certainly are a significant hindrance, but are not the entire story.

Improving Japan's family policies, both from the government's perspective as well as its recipients, in this case parents of young children, is a multifold problem. Paying greater attention to how parents fare with these policies and their thoughts about these policy measures would be an important step in the right direction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my research assistants Peter Fankhauser and Stefan Hundsdorfer for their invaluable support for the entire project, Andreas Eder and Bente Tils in assisting with the literature review, and Maki Matsuda and Signy Spletzer for their assistance in researching Japanese family policy statistics. Thanks for reading and commenting on my drafts go to Wolfram Manzenreiter, University of Vienna. Furthermore I am indebted to the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) Tokyo and Benesse Corporation for survey funding, and the German Research Foundation (DFG) for funding the data analysis (grant HO 5249/2-1, 2014-2017).

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