



## News

Established in 1974, JPPF is the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development.

In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various challenges, JPPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentary caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

In every issue of JPPF Newsletter, we will carry "News" on activities and initiatives related to population and development issues.

### News:

○ *JPPF Study Meeting on the Impact of COVID-19 on Low Fertility*

[Editorial responsibility: JPPF secretariat]

### JPPF Study Meeting on the Impact of COVID-19 on Low Fertility

On 12 May, the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF) hosted a study meeting on the theme, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Low Fertility". The meeting was co-hosted by the "Alliance on SDGs, Human Security, and Population", which was set up at the proposal of JPPF Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa to more efficiently promote awareness-raising activities on issues of population and reproductive health (RH) through collaboration. It is composed of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), JOICFP, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA).

#### [Address by Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPPF]

Even though vaccines are being distributed around the world, the global spread of COVID-19 has had a serious impact in a variety of fields. That impact is particularly evident among those vulnerable in society, and girls who have lost social protection in developing countries have been forced into a vulnerable situation. JPPF was established in 1974 as the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary caucus on population and development. It has contributed substantially to addressing the issues of population in developing countries by transferring Japan's experience, and, as a result, much progress has been made in respective countries.



Population ageing through improved health of the elderly is a successful outcome of social policy and is something to celebrate. At the same time, however, we are faced with the need to address the issues of fertility rates that have decreased to levels unthinkable before and high rates of non-marriage. The media have reported an increase in the number of people seeking consultation about unwanted pregnancies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of correct sexual knowledge and appropriate access to RH services may lead to unwanted pregnancies and births, resulting in tragic issues in the lives of each person as well as for the society. The issues of population were considered as a matter of helping developing countries, but these are our own issues as well. To create a society in which human dignity can be protected, Japan must be dedicated to tackling our own population issues.

#### [Summary of Lecture by Dr. Kunio Kitamura, President of the Japan Family Planning Association (JFPA)]

**"How Did Covid-19 Change the Everyday Lives of the Japanese People: From a Survey on Sex Among 10,000 Japanese People during the Coronavirus Pandemic"**

*During stay-at-home requests, has the number of pregnancies increased?  
Has the number of cases of violence increased?*

- (1) The media have reported a large number of young people calling the "Pregnancy Hotline".
- (2) The number of notifications of pregnancy declined substantially over the previous year, with a 17.1% decline from a year earlier particularly in May 2020.
- (3) The media also reported about frequent acts of violence between unmarried couples and within families during stay-at-home requests. According to a UN WOMEN report, close to 18% of women around the world aged between 15 and 49 were sexually or physically assaulted by partners in close relationships in the last 12 months.
- (4) As the effect of the coronavirus continues over the long term, the number of suicides has increased due to poverty caused by unemployment and temporary suspension of business and due to loneliness. The National Police Agency published data showing a marked increase in suicides particularly among women.



**Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JFPF)**

Established 1 April, 1974

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*Survey of 10,000 men and women aged between 20 and 69*

A survey was conducted as a shared research of “Effect of Stay-at-home Requests during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Fact-Finding Survey on Unexpected Pregnancies and Research for Building an Appropriate Support System for Women’s Health”, which was funded by a grant from FY2020 Health, Labour and Welfare Administration Promotion Survey Project. The survey asked 10,000 Japanese men and women aged between 20 and 69 to recount their experiences between late March and late May in 2020, around the time when the first state of emergency was declared. After excluding inappropriate responses, the final tally of samples collected was 9,990.

*More than 60% of men and women did not “live a full life”*

Asked about their emotional state during the pandemic, more than 60%, among both men and women, replied they “did not live a full life”. There were also men and women who replied that they “lived a full life” (lived a full life + more or less lived a full life) at 37.2% and 38.7%, respectively.

Common features among men and women who said they “lived a full life” were that they were married or

had partners, had good relations with their partners, experienced an increase in their incomes, had more sex, and had sex with those other than their regular partners. For men, “having their own children” was a feature that showed statistically significant difference. It may be that avoidance of isolation during the stay-at-home requests contributed to living a “full life”.

*Acts of violence during the period under the survey*

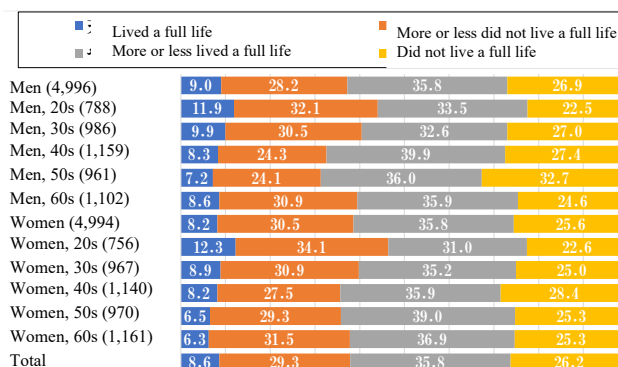
Asked whether “there were any acts of violence (physical, sexual, or emotional abuse) with your partner during this period (late March to late May, 2020)”, 4.0% of all respondents (4.3% among men, 3.8% among women) replied “Yes” (the violence continues today + it has stopped now). Of those who were subjected to violence, 52.0% said that it was from their “partners”. The breakdown shows a high percentage of violence used by men against women at 65.6%, but use of violence by women against men also accounted for 38.2%. Asked about changes in the frequency of acts of violence during the stay-at-home requests, 55.6% replied that it was “unchanged”, 26.6% replied that it “decreased”, and 17.7% replied that it “increased”, contradicting the hypothesis that violence would increase during stay-at-home requests.

*Changes in sexual behavior*

Asked whether “there was any change in the frequency of sex during this period”, 39.0% replied it was “unchanged”, 49.8% replied they “had no sex” (39.5% among men, 59.8% among women), 7.9% replied that it “decreased” (9.4% among men, 6.4% among women), and 3.3% replied that it “increased” (3.9% among men, 2.7% among women). The tendency of having fewer sex was commonly observed for each of the groups who are unmarried, who are in their first marriage, who are in their second or more marriage, and who are divorced.

As for reasons for “having fewer sex”, the largest percentage, at 44.2%, replied they “refrained from going out” (45.7% among men, 42.1% among women), followed by, for men, “did not have the opportunity” at 26.4% (20.9% among women), and, for women, “were not in the mood of having sex” at 28.8% (22.6% among men). The percentage of those who replied that he/she or their partner “had COVID-19” was 0.4%. The hypothesis that if people refrained from going out and stayed at home, the frequency of them having sex would increase did not hold.

**Fig. 1. Emotional State during COVID-19 Pandemic (%)**



**Q3. Which of the following best describes your emotional state during this period? (SA)**

\*\*This period\*\* refers to the time around the declaration of a state of emergency (late March to late May, 2020).

While there has been much talk about the decrease in the number of notifications of pregnancy in 2020 and the possibility of this causing the birth rate to fall, it is highly likely that because people are not having sex or having fewer sex, this has caused the decrease in pregnancies.

As the respondents to this survey were men and women aged between 20 and 69, this survey cannot give a precise explanation about the media reports about young people calling “Pregnancy Hotline” in large numbers. From my experience of hosting telephone consultation service for many years, I can say that there may be a relation between people having more time during the stay-at-home requests to make calls to the hotline and the actual increase in the number of people making the calls.

*Interpersonal ties are important even during stay-at-home requests*

Even though vaccination has started, it is far from clear when the vaccination will be given to all citizens. Even after COVID-19 comes to an end, people may be forced to stay at home due to unexpected man-made or natural disasters. Needless to say, it is extremely important that the results of this survey are put to good use on such occasions. My recommendations are as follows:

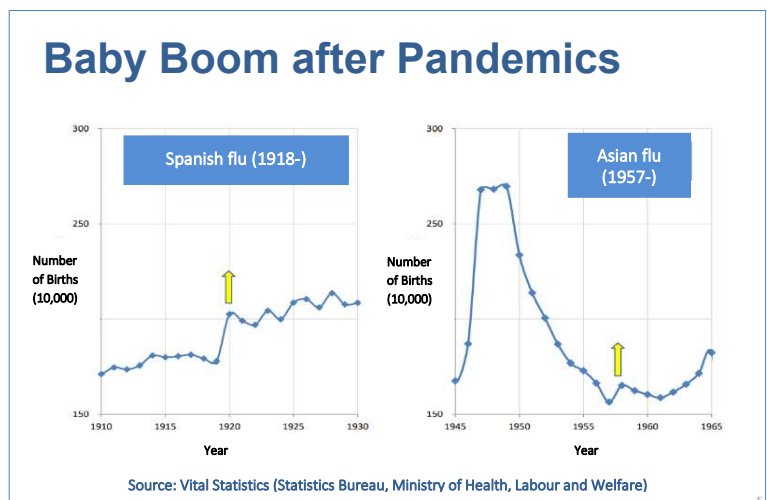
1. To enable people to live a full life in the event they are forced to stay at home, it may be important to implement measures to make it possible for people to secure a certain amount of income and to prevent people from becoming isolated or severing ties with other people.
2. Considering that violence between partners is related with “an increase in time spent at home” and “an increase in holidays”, measures will be needed not only to promote work from home, but also to maintain communication between families to prevent violence.

**[Comments by Dr. Reiko Hayashi, Deputy Director-General, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS)]**

It was rumored that the New York blackout resulted in an increase in pregnancies, which was later disproved on examination. The COVID-19 stay-at-home requests also gave rise to a theory that unintended pregnancies would result in an increase in births, but such was not the case as shown by the survey. Cases of pneumonia, influenza, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease as well as the number of deaths decreased during this period.



Clearly, the number of registered pregnancies decreased during this period, and probably the number of births would decrease as well. However, we need to look at the contributing factors underlying them over the longer term. In recent years, the number of centenarians is rapidly growing as a demographic phenomenon. A hundred years ago, many lost their lives from the Spanish flu pandemic. This was followed by a baby boom, and it is this increase in the population that a hundred years later today has become apparent in the form of an increase in the number of centenarians. A similar phenomenon can also be observed from the Asian flu of 1957. The circumstances then and now, however, are different. There is a possibility that because people who postponed pregnancy and giving birth due to the coronavirus pandemic cannot wait indefinitely, there may be an increase in the number of births, but because the percentage of unmarried people is high unlike at the time of the Spanish flu, it is not clear at this stage if the number of births will actually increase. While the trend of a population decrease is expected to continue, you can see there are short-term fluctuations.



**[Report from Mr. Yasunobu Nanba, Director on Gender-Based Violence, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office]**

According to “Changes in the Number of Consultations Nationwide at One-Stop Support Centers for Victims of Sexual Crimes and Violence” for FY 2020, the number of consultations exceeded those in the previous fiscal year with the number increasing by a factor of 1.3 in the second half of FY2020 year-over-year and by a factor of 1.2 for the year as a whole. As for consultation on domestic violence, the number of consultations between April 2020 to February 2021 was 175,693 cases, which was an increase by a factor of 1.5 year-over-year and a far greater number than 119,276 cases reported for all of the previous fiscal year (FY2019).

**[Report by Mr. Masazumi Uwai, Director, Self-reliance Support Office for Fatherless Families, Childcare Support Division, Children and Family Policy Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare]**

In “Response at Women’s Consultation Centers under the Coronavirus Pandemic (April to September 2020)”, a year-over-year comparison of the number of consultations that women’s consultation centers received (the actual number of women calling or visiting the center) during the period under the state of emergency as well as from April to June immediately after the state of emergency was lifted, showed increases of 7.3% and 5.1% in April and June, respectively, but returned to the same level as the previous year after that. In terms of comparison of the number of consultations provided to women visiting the centers (actual number of women) for each type of complaint, the cases on “domestic violence” increased by 22.8% in April but returned to the same level as the previous year after that. The number of cases involving “no place to live” as the chief complaint increased by 31.1% in April, but the accumulated total number of cases between May and September subsequently returned to the same level as the previous year.

©Q&A Session

**[Hon. Takao Ando]**

Are there any surveys conducted specifically on natural disasters or infections? It may be that the coronavirus pandemic has made women busier because children are staying home but made men have more free time. These gender differences may also be reflected on the results of your survey. The media have reported about the prospect of a similar pandemic occurring in the future, which raises concerns about a future pandemic’s effect on the birth rate. This means that we need to have the capacity to develop vaccines in Japan and be able to vaccinate people. How would you comment on this?



**[Dr. Kunio Kitamura, President of JPPF]**

Clearly more women than men are victims of domestic violence. Globally the topic of domestic violence is often talked about in the context of men using violence against women, but we need to recognize that there are also cases of women using violence against men. As for the future birthrate, results of surveys conducted in the past on the awareness of men and women show that there is little prospect of an increase in the birthrate. We have not conducted surveys for specific categories like natural disasters or infections.



**[Dr. Reiko Hayashi, Deputy Director-General, IPSS]**

The difference in the results between the government reports and the survey on 10,000 people may be explained by the differences in the periods and objectives of the surveys. By conducting the surveys continuously, we will be able to analyze the effects and factors.



Lastly, Hon. Karen Makishima, Vice-Chair of the JPPF Gender Issues Committee, who served as the moderator, thanked the lecturers and closed the study meeting.



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