



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWSLETTER

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New Coronavirus and Population Issues

The new coronavirus (COVID-19), the cause of today's global pandemic, continues to wreak havoc across the world as the number of infected persons and deaths rapidly rises. There are also grave concerns that the economic fallout from COVID-19 may be comparable to that of the Great Depression. According to estimates of the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, as of April 16, there were 2,064,668 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and 137,124 deaths due to SARS-CoV-2 (causative virus of COVID-19).ⁱ In Japan as of noon April 15, there were 8,100 cases of COVID-19 confirmed by PCR testing, 119 deaths, and 901 patients discharged from hospitals.

This COVID-19, which has the potential to infect anybody regardless of age or gender, is causing widespread fear among people as an illness that can cause rapid deterioration in the condition of persons infected. Responding to the virus also requires an extremely high level of emergency medical care, and our healthcare systems are on the brink of collapse as the number of patients sharply increases. At the same time, following basic preventive measures such as wearing masks, washing hands and gargling as well as practicing social distancing is proving to be effective, and rapid progress is being made in the development of a vaccine.

The spread of infectious diseases is closely related to the population issues. It can be said that the spread of infection increases exponentially relative to population density, and population growth and denser populations over broader areas have had a significant impact in the 20th century.ⁱⁱ It can be said the initial outbreak and spread of the virus in Wuhan, a mega city with a population of 11 million was a major cause of the current pandemic. From an epidemiological viewpoint, we believe that more advanced mathematical models will eventually be available.

The Ebola hemorrhagic fever is another infectious disease that caused global fear due to its high death rate. This Ebola virus epidemic intermittently gripped regions of Africa from 1976 to March 2019 in more than 30 regional outbreaks. Until its outbreak in West Africa in 2014, however, the majority of the outbreaks occurred in rural areas and were restricted to areas with relatively small populations.

The current COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the densely populated Wuhan, is far greater in scale, and the significant difference in the size of the population, which set the parameters of the infection source, was also a major factor giving rise to this pandemic. Moreover, today's globalization also means that a problem which occurs elsewhere inevitably becomes our own problem. With this understanding, it is imperative that we change our awareness.

On the other hand, while COVID-19 has caused widespread fear in the world, there are problems that attract little attention despite the enormous tragedies they cause. For example, because efforts to deal with population issues such as reproductive health (RH) and family planning are sorely lacking, little is known about the extent of the devastation this problem causes every year.

Although it is not possible to verify how universal the following 1994 US data is, bearing in mind that there are no results from other studies of a similar scale, we would like to cite this data as one representation of current world averages. Of note here are the birthrates from planned pregnancies and unplanned pregnancies, and the rate of abortions, which were 50.4%, 23.0%, and 26.6% respectively. This data shows that about half of the

number of lives born into the world were planned, while the other half were unplanned, and about the same number of lives as the number of all births were lost to abortion.

Breakdown of Planned Births, Unplanned Births and Abortions in the United States Based on a 1994 Studyⁱⁱⁱ

Age	Actual No.	Planned Births		Unplanned Births		Abortions, etc.	
		Actual No.	Ratio (%)	Actual No.	Ratio (%)	Actual No.	Ratio (%)
Up to 15	25,100	4,593	18.3	8,333	33.2	12,174	48.5
15-19	781,900	172,018	22.0	333,871	42.7	276,011	35.3
20-24	1,479,500	613,993	41.5	387,629	26.2	477,879	32.3
25-29	1,405,200	847,336	60.3	241,694	17.2	316,170	22.5
30-34	1,111,400	743,527	66.9	162,264	14.6	204,498	18.4
35-39	482,400	285,581	59.2	86,350	17.9	110,952	23.0
40+	98,300	48,462	49.3	17,596	17.9	32,242	32.8
	5,383,800	2,715,509	50.4%	1,237,738	23.0%	1,429,925	26.6%

In a mere exercise in numbers, if we do a simple calculation by applying statistical data of the UN Population Division^{iv} to these ratios, the annual average number of births will be 139.53 million based on estimations from 2020 to 2025. Of the children born into the world during this period, the number of planned children will be 95.81 million, the number of unplanned children will be 43.72 million, and the number of lives lost to abortions will be 50.57 million. In the field of population, tragedies like this are occurring every year.

COVID-19 has instilled a genuine fear in society in the sense that we never know when we ourselves may fall victim to the disease. On the other hand, it can be said that the problem of unplanned pregnancies and abortions evoke only a sense of indifference, no matter how serious the problem is, because of the notion “It has nothing to do with me”, and thus fails to arouse a sense of social concern.

After COVID-19, the world will be significantly altered. People will have a firsthand understanding of the fact that when it comes to infectious diseases, there is no such thing as “someone else’s problem”. However, the principle is the same whether the problem concerns the environment or the population. People will perhaps understand that no matter how many weapons they stock, those weapons will not protect a country. Where the issue of population is concerned, however, it may be difficult for people to sense any change in a short period. From a long-term perspective of decades, however, it will have a decisive impact on our world. As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) clearly demonstrate, we must have a keen awareness that we are all interdependent in today’s world, and we must make rational choices from this viewpoint.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, we have no choice at present other than to comply with rules on social distancing, and these arrangements are perhaps contributing to the creation of a framework for working from home. In the future, the singularity of AI is also likely to accelerate separation in production and labor and precipitate changes that are more far-reaching than the capitalist revolution. In the completely free market brought about by the information revolution, an oligopoly of wealth represented by GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon) has emerged. However, the consumers with purchasing power, who are the very source of that wealth, may well disappear. Likewise, if social norms that underpinned our society until recently are lost, such as the notion of “being able to have a rewarding life by working diligently”, social disorder may occur.

In many ways, COVID-19 is forcing our society to change. We believe that we must view this misfortune as an opportunity to rise to the occasion to build new society that will achieve the SDGs.

For back issues, please visit: <http://www.apda.jp/en/index.html>



ⁱ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

² <http://vege1.kan.ynu.ac.jp/forecast/COVID-19/COVID-19.htm> Forecast on the Spread of Alien Organisms (Yokohama National University Graduate School of Environment and Information Sciences, Koike Research Lab)

³ Source: Stanley K. Henshaw, Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, pp. 24-46, “Family Planning Perspectives”, Volume 30, Number 1, January/February 1998, Guttmacher Institute. Recalculation by APDA.

⁴ <https://population.un.org/wpp/> (April 9, 2020).