

The Effects of Countermeasures Against the Declining Birthrate

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“Universal Early Childhood Education and Adolescent Risky Behavior” (Ando, Mori, and Yamaguchi, 2023)

- Studies the effects of the 1964-1970 expansion of universal preschool education in Japan and finds:
 - Reduction in juvenile violent arrests, but no change in non-violent arrests
 - Reduction in rate of teenage pregnancy
 - No change in high school enrolment rates
- Additional findings:
 - Effects concentrated among high-education provinces
 - No effect on female (maternal) employment
- Interpretation: Improved non-cognitive skills as a result of access to high-quality preschool education

Comments I

- Impressive paper, important contribution to literature
 - Lots of specification checks to rule out potential confounders
 - Event-study specifications look quite good
 - Placebo test among older cohorts unaffected by the reform
- Some findings quite surprising, useful to explore further:
 - Educational outcomes: Rates of HS completion generally high (~80% pre-reform, increase to ~90% over the period), look at other measures of educational attainment (e.g., junior college/college completion)?
 - Female employment: Disaggregate by women's education level?
 - Any effects on fertility?

Comments II

- Possible extensions:
 - It would be useful to know how much the event-time coefficients change when controlling for the various sets of controls
 - Assess scope for potential confounders based on unobservables
 - Provincial growth in preschool enrolment could be correlated with changes in the quality/access to education
 - Include other time-varying proxies for education quality and access as controls (e.g., access to junior colleges, universities, spending on elementary/HS education)
 - Explore early labor market outcomes?
 - E.g., employment rates and wages among young adults

Countermeasures vs. Declining Fertility

- High-quality universal preschool education is one potential lever to help families balance childcare and work
- However, effectiveness of such policies depends on the institutional and social context as well as policy design
 - E.g., limited effects of universal preschool and childcare availability (Asai et al., 2015) even in a country like Japan with relatively low FLFP
- What are the main institutional and social constraints?
 - Women's economic advancement (lower gains from marriage)
 - Traditional gender norms
 - Work culture that penalizes couple equity
 - Increasing costs of parenthood, esp. motherhood

Gender Norms re. Maternal Employment

Q: Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time, or not at all under the following circumstances? (ISSP, 2012)

A. Child under school age

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Stay at Home
Japan	6.1	25.2	68.7
West Germany	4.8	68.9	26.3
UK	6.3	52.2	41.5
France	13.8	60.0	26.3
Sweden	25.4	62.8	11.9

B. Youngest child in school

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Stay at Home
Japan	17.1	65.1	17.8
West Germany	18.7	74.4	6.9
UK	30.9	66.8	2.4
France	51.3	46.8	2.0
Sweden	54.1	44.8	1.1

Who should primarily provide childcare for children under school age?

	Family Members	Govt Agencies	Private Childcare	Others
Japan	76.5	11.1	11.4	0.98
West Germany	50.3	33.0	9.2	7.5
UK	55.6	17.9	19.1	7.5
France	30.9	17.9	42.4	8.8
Sweden	10.4	82.5	6.0	1.03

Source: ISSP (2012)

When women's opportunities and norms collide...

- Intuition behind the models proposed in Feyrer et al. (2008) and Bertrand et al. (2018)
- Phase 1: Women earn low wages relative to men and shoulder all the childcare at home. Low FLFP, high fertility.
 - Less developed countries, 1950s and 1960s U.S.
- Phase 2: Women's labor market opportunities improve, but household status lags (e.g. conservative norms). Increasing access to market work increases opp. cost of children, low desirability of skilled women -> FLFP increases, but fertility falls.
 - Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany
- Phase 3: Women's opportunities start to become equal to those of men. Household status begins to catch up. Men participate more in household production. FLFP increases, fertility rates rise, skilled women more desirable as marriage partners
 - Scandinavian countries, France, U.S., Canada

Fertility, Female LFP, and Share of Childcare, 2000

Figure 4

Total Fertility versus Female Labor Force Participation in High-Income Countries, 1995

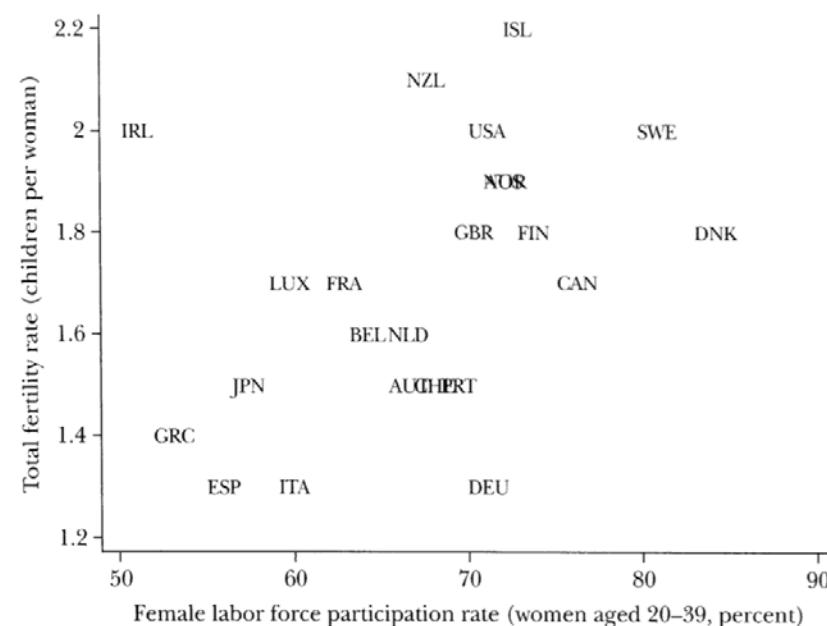
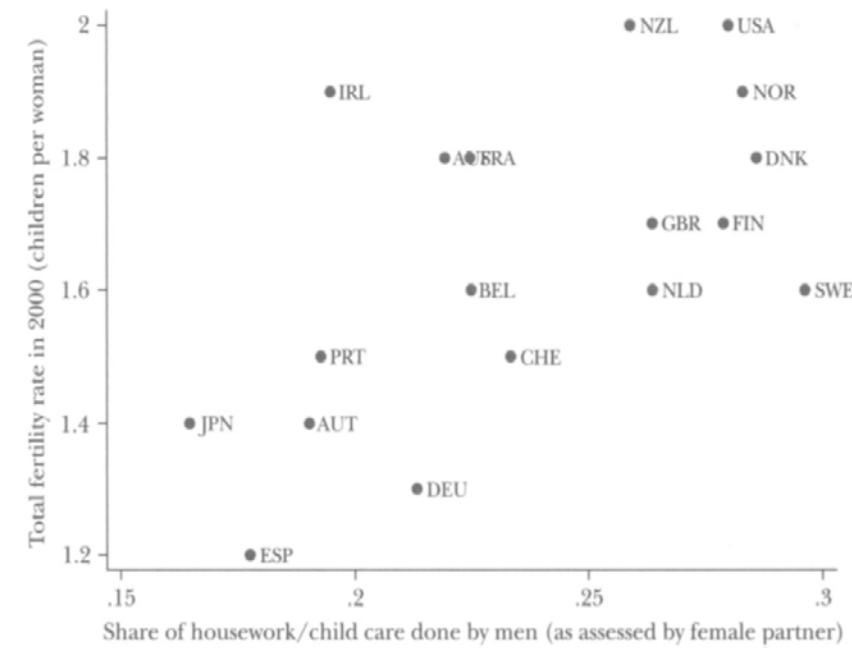


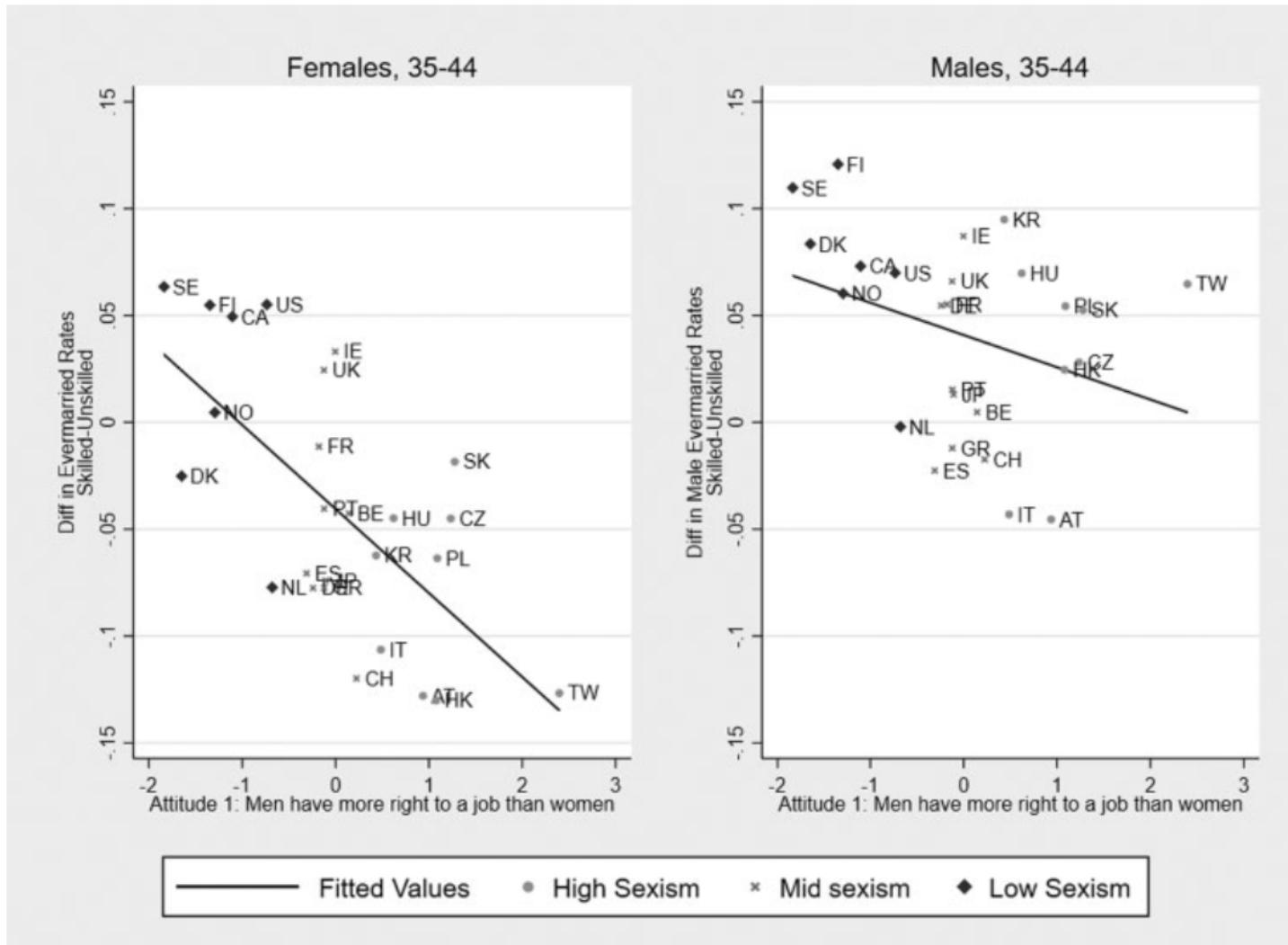
Figure 5

Total Fertility Rate versus Share of Housework/Child Care Done by Men in 2000



Source: Feyrer, Sacerdote, and Stern (2008)

Skilled-Unskilled Marriage Gaps and Social Norms by Gender, 2010



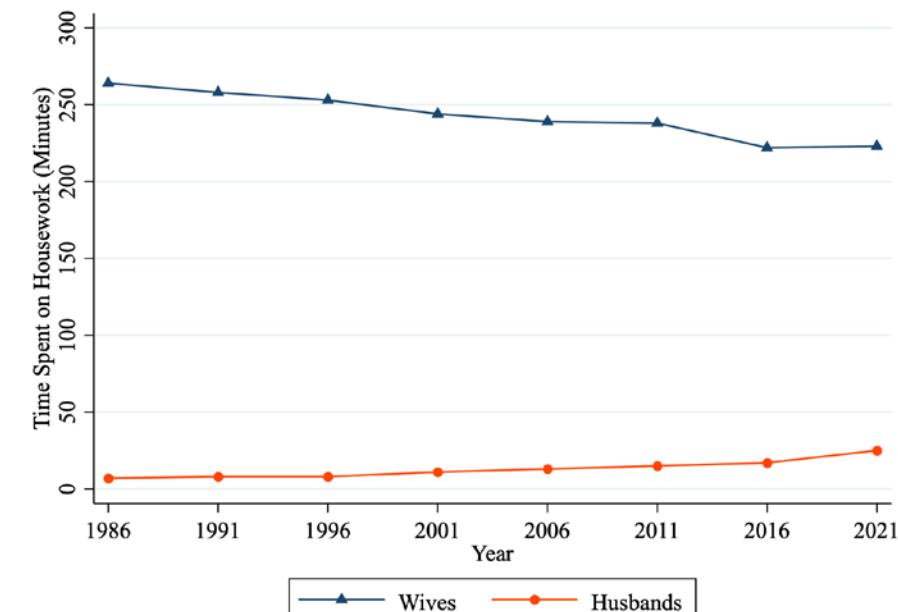
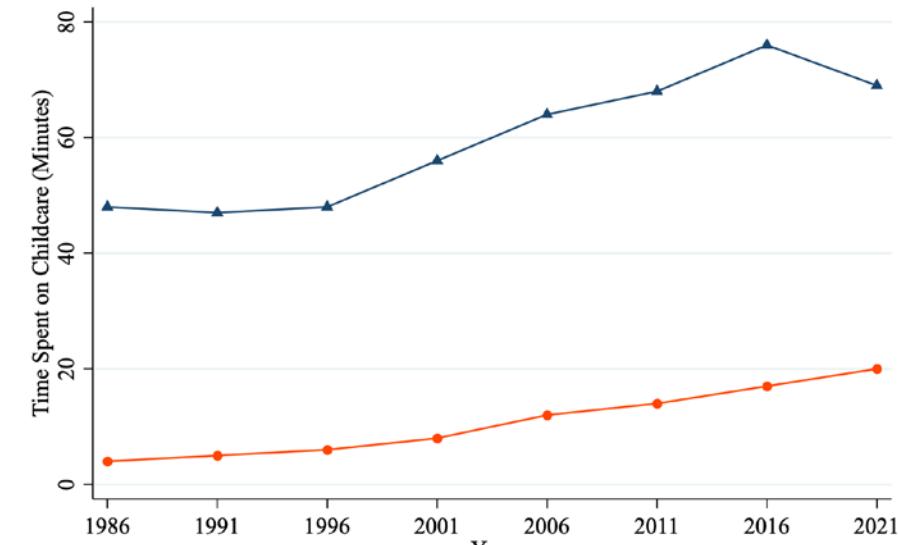
Source: Bertrand et al. (2020)

Potential Responses

- Changing entrenched gender norms crucial for easing tension of work-family for women
 - Compatibility of work and family: Changing the norm that women have to give up their career when they have children
 - Pro-family policies are a good start; but need to be careful that it doesn't further entrench gender roles (e.g., long parental leaves, short-term positions, flexible work arrangements mostly taken up only by women)
 - Gender-neutral policies: e.g., childcare/early education
 - Reducing labor market dualism in the labor market
 - Encouraging a more equitable division of labor within the households
 - Policies that promote counter-stereotypical behavior
 - E.g., Paternity/father-specific childcare leave (legislation is already quite progressive, need to encourage men to take the leave!)
- Also, persuasion by policymakers, leading by example, and provision of accurate information (esp. in the context of pluralistic ignorance and pressure to conform)

Amount of Non-Work Time

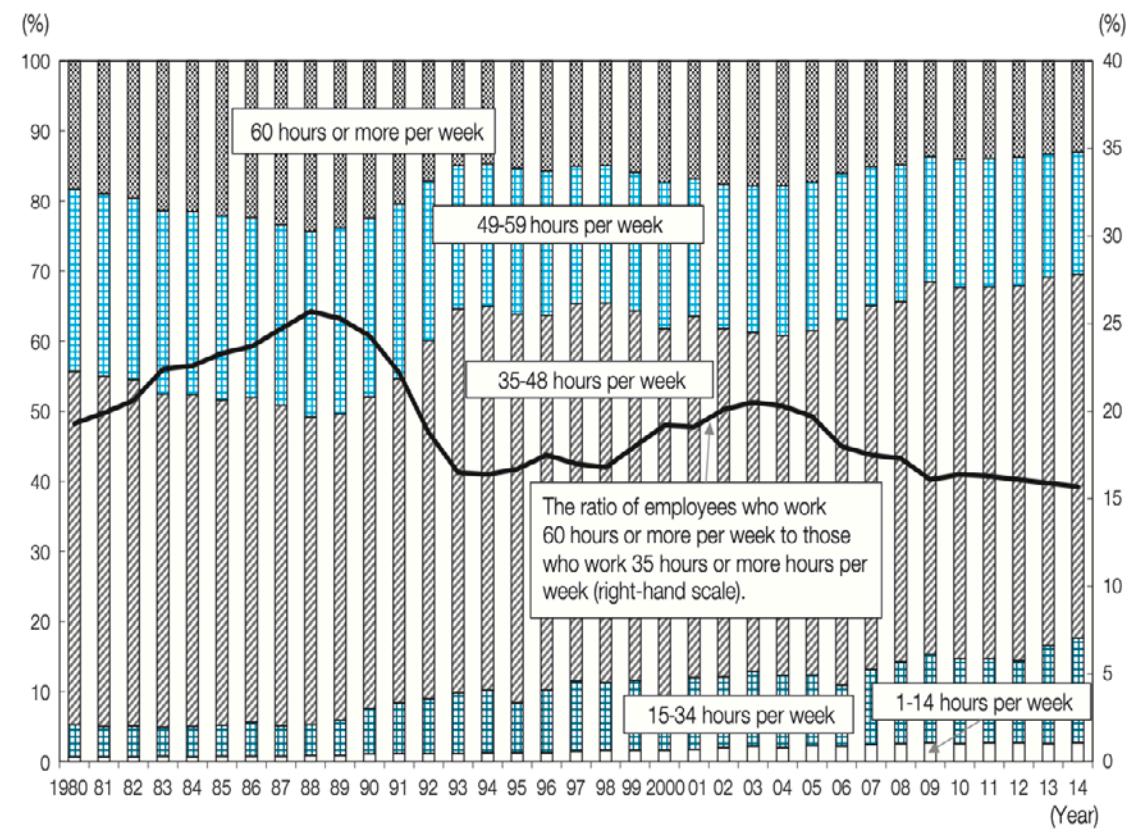
- Growing amount of time spent on parenting => greater demand on mother's time
- Rise in real or perceived returns to time spent with children perhaps due to rising inequality or highly competitive education system
- Large increase in time spent on childcare despite rising education and female labor supply



Source: Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities

“Greedy Work” and Couple Equity

- Long work hours are prevalent in the Japanese labor market
- “Greedy” work, long work hours promotes specialization within couples
- In the US, the rewards to working long (and inflexible) hours has increased considerably over time, especially among high-skilled workers (Kuhn and Lozano, 2008; Cha and Weeden, 2014)
- Changing work culture could promote couple equity
 - Induce more men to contribute to household production
 - Facilitate the entry of married women into the labor force/regular employment



Source: Takami (2019)