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Infrastructural Family Policy in Japan: Parental Evaluation

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Abstract

The continuing low fertility rate in Japan, coupled with high ageing is a severe problem for Japan's social welfare system and its economy. One important element of family policies is to provide affordable and good quality childcare institutions. In international scholarship on the evaluation of family policies, surveying parents specifically in regard to their satisfaction with family policies is rare. For the case of Germany, studies find daycare expansion positively associated particularly with maternal subjective well-being, with some differences between parents in West and East Germany, as well as that parents' education, their income, and the age of the child all impact their levels of satisfaction with family policies. Mirroring the study by Camehl *et al*. (2015) and applying this to the case of Japan, I conducted a quantitative analysis of the JPWS 2012 (Japan Parental Well-Being Survey) data. Findings are that Japanese mothers' and fathers' own experiences are an important indicator for their satisfaction with family policies. If they managed to secure a childcare space, in particular in a public daycare center, they are more likely to be satisfied with family policies. A place in a public daycare center in contrast to any other childcare institution contributes most significantly to the parents' satisfaction with family policies. Furthermore, the region of living is a highly significant factor. Parents in the urban metropolitan areas of Kanto and Kinki are significantly less satisfied—due in part to the fact that in these urban areas daycare spaces are more difficult to get than in anywhere else. In regards to infrastructural family policy satisfaction, gender differences in satisfaction pale in comparison to regional differences. it is hoped that policy makers will acknowledge the importance of evaluating the "success" of family policies by the level of satisfaction of parents with family policies, and that the diverse conditions and needs of families in different regions be adequately addressed.

Keywords: Family policy, satisfaction, regional differences, gender, daycare, childcare institutions

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1. Introduction

Family policies are part and parcel of Japan's larger social- and welfare policies (Rockmann 2011). Many of the policy measures have been implemented to tackle Japan's demographic crisis. Some of these measures for raising the fertility rate have such illustrious names as Angel Plan and New Angel plan. So far these attempts have not proven as 'successful' as hoped, since the ratio of children to Japan's overall population continues to decline (*Japan Times* 04/05/2017). The government lays out its efforts in its yearly *White book for the society with few children* (*Shōshika shakai taisaku hakusho*), and in its 2017 edition, measures addressed are manifold, with the numerous efforts about daycare institutions (*hoikujo*) at the forefront (CAO 2017).

Daycare centers are also an essential element of the current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's efforts under the umbrella term of "Womenomics", which are to bring larger numbers of Japanese women back to the labor market after having given birth. The motivation for increasing slots in daycare centers is thus purely economic, as they are instrumentalized to tackle the labor shortage at a time when the Japanese government continues to resist allowing foreign migrants to fill the void. As mothers remain the primary caregiver for their children, daycare centers are a necessary prerequisite for mothers in order to rejoin the job market.

Besides fighting the low fertility rate, the governmental goals for family policies also include raising the welfare of its citizens (particularly that of single parents, as 51 percent of single mothers live below the poverty line, despite the fact that 85 percent of them are working parents (Raymo 2017: 117), as well as fighting the country's labor shortage. This diversity in goals makes the evaluation of these policies challenging at best: Is it first and foremost to be an economic evaluation, or rather a study of a change in demographics and birth rate statistics (e.g. Ma 2009; Riphahn and Wiynck 2017)? Or should something else be the focus of the evaluation? In international scholarship on the evaluation of family policies, attempts have been manifold: Dehos and Paul (2017) for example evaluate family policies for after-school programs by the rate of maternal employment.[1] They find that additional after-school places have neither an effect on working hours nor the probability of mothers returning to work. Yet interestingly enough, they point to the possibility of the use of family policies for increase in parental well-being, not just the well-being of the child (see Garfinkel and

[1] Maternal employment patterns are also the measure for successful family policies in the studies by Fagnani (2012) and Yamaguchi (2017).

Waldfogel 2012). The Japanese government so far has not to a large extent evaluated their family policies by focusing on the well-being of parents, those who are at the core of these measures. This could potentially explain why the existing family policies have seen rather limited success in economic as well as in demographic terms until now.

Academic research combining family policy and parental well-being for the study of Japan is limited. One notable exception is Kawano (2013), who looks in her qualitative study at how so-called drop-in centers for young children and their parents relate to mothers' well-being. She finds that those institutions can counteract maternal social isolation in urban areas where the family might lack other types of active support. In a U.S.-based study, Payne, Cook and Diaz (2012) find that satisfaction with childcare institutions (daycare) has a positive relationship to life satisfaction, and for Canada, Brodeur and Connolly (2013) argue that it is particularly the existence of childcare subsidies, effecting childcare (daycare) costs, which positively influence parental well-being. Other authors use what can be called indirect measures of well-being for their evaluations. Huebener *et al*. (2016) for example take parental labor market participation, household share between partners, and fertility as measures for family well-being. Surveying parents specifically in regard to their well-being and their satisfaction with family policies is rarely done, and thus a shortcoming of the existing literature.

For the case of Germany, a few relevant studies exist: Schober and Schmitt (2013) as well as Stahl and Schober (2016) use SOEP (socioeconomic panel) data to analyze parental satisfaction with childcare facility expansion for children under the age of three. They find daycare expansion positively associated particularly with maternal subjective well-being, with some differences between parents in West and East Germany. Camehl *et al*. (2015) also focus on childcare institutions. They investigate parental satisfaction with the many facets of daycare centers, such as their costs, activities with the children, care personnel, etc. and specifically look for alterations in satisfaction among parents of different socio-economic backgrounds. They find parents generally quite satisfied with daycare center provisions, yet lowest satisfaction is reported regarding the possibilities for parental input into the institutions and the costs for daycare. Parents' education, their income, as well as the age of the child all impact their levels of satisfaction.

For this chapter, I mirror the study by Camehl *et al*. (2015) about their evaluation of infrastructural family policies and the effect on parental well-being, and apply this to the case of Japan. In particular, my research questions are:

- To what extend do parents use childcare institutions, how do they evaluate them, and what do they deem important?
- How satisfied are parents with the existing daycare center provisions? Do the satisfaction levels with family policies vary between different socio-economic groups, like in the case of Germany? Are parents with children above age 3 more satisfied or rather those parents with very small children up to age 3?
- How does the satisfaction of Japanese parents with policies for childcare infrastructure compare with that of German parents, based on the findings in the study by Camehl *et al.* (2015)?

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the existing family policies and particularly the different forms of childcare that exist in Japan. This precedes the quantitative analysis of the JPWS (Japan Parental Well-Being Survey) data from the year 2012. Its descriptive analysis helps to understand the many facets of childcare facilities and parental opinions about them. Parents who have their children in childcare facilities have very educated opinions on the institutions.

The following bivariate and multivariate analyses give insights into the use and parental evaluation of childcare facilities as well as explain the satisfaction of Japanese mothers and fathers with the existing family policy measures. Japanese parents show many similarities in their evaluations and degrees of satisfaction with the policy measures in comparison to the findings in the international literature—despite some smaller, but significant differences. These are discussed in a comparative perspective, concluding with policy recommendations.

2. Japan's family policy triangle[2]

Family policies in Japan have seen many changes over time. Nonetheless, they can be categorized into three main types, the so-called pillars of the "family policy triangle":

[2] See Holthus, Huber and Tanaka (2015: 57–73) for a more extensive discussion on the topic.

money, time, and infrastructure (Adema 2012; Bertram and Bujard 2012; Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella 2017).

2.1 Money

Money policies have seen important and widely discussed changes over time in Japan. The child-rearing allowance system started already back in 1972, yet the monetary amounts and the limits of children's age and number of children benefitting from the system have been repeatedly revised. Paid childcare leave measures were implemented in 1995, with workers receiving 25 percent of their wages during leave. By 2010, this had increased to 50 percent. In Japan, a child's birth is not covered by health insurance, so the expenses for the doctor and hospital services are to be paid in full by the new parents. However, to counteract these high costs, since 1994, Japan has implemented a "new baby birth allowance". This lump-sum amount has risen from originally 300,000 Yen to 420,000 Yen by the year 2010.

2.2 Time

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 *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 were then seen in 1995, 1999, 2010 and 2012. Work-life balance became a "hot" topic for the government in 2008 with the signing of the so-called "work life balance charter", however lacking "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".

2.3 Infrastructure

One of the main differences when comparing Germany and Japan is the fact that Japan offers several forms of childcare infrastructure: daycare centers (*hoikuen*), offering care for children as young as the 57th day after birth, and kindergarten (*yōchien*), which offer care only for children from the age of 3 onwards, are the most prominent. *Hoikuen*, in existence since 1900, however, need to be distinguished further into public and private daycare centers. Furthermore, whereas all public

daycare centers are licensed centers, there are licensed as well as unlicensed private daycare centers, a fact that weighs in on parents' considerations as to where they decide to enroll their children into. But also smaller, less frequented childcare institutions exist: baby hotels, daycare rooms (*hoikushitsu*), and the newest form, a merger between *hoikuen* and *yōchien*, called *kodomo-en*, offering educational, *yōchien*-type aspects, yet with extended care like *hoikuen*. They are often placed in former *yōchien*-buildings, as numbers of kindergartens are declining, while demand for daycare center slots is still on the rise.[3]

While daycare centers target working parents, with care being provided for full days, kindergartens have an educational aspect to them and usually only provide significantly shorter opening hours, not allowing for full-time employment of both parents.[4] As demand for places in *hoikuen* remains higher than the available slots, many thousand children are on waiting lists for public daycare centers, despite continued efforts by the government to expand daycare center care. With the Abe government pushing so hard for getting mothers back into the workforce with its "Womenomics" program, providing institutionalized childcare facilities is an absolute must and prerequisite and thus seems to be on the forefront of the public discourse on family policies in 2017.

Public discourse in Japan's mass media in the first months of 2017[5] focuses heavily on the continuing existence of parents on the waiting list for enrolling their child into daycare, but also other topics are discussed. Among them, and related to the push for a further massive expansion of daycare center places, is the lack of daycare center staff (*hoikushi*) to provide care. This goes hand in hand with quality concerns due to the quick expansion of daycare places. Quality problems are also an issue in articles during that timeframe, such as the reporting of an increase in deaths in daycare centers. In addition, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper reported on outbreaks of illnesses at daycare centers, like the neuro- or rota-virus, on accidents occurring on site, on food served at *hoikuen*, the opening of a 24-hour daycare center, as well as quality standard violations by private daycare centers. The way the reporting is done gives the impression that the public discourse leans towards portraying the negative sides

[3] For more information on early childcare institutions in Japan, see Holthus (2011) and Zhou (2007). For other forms of childcare institutions, such as the recent addition of so-called *kodomo-en,* see Holthus (2008a).

[4] For additional details see also Holthus (2011).

[5] I conducted an analysis of *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper articles from January to May 2017.

of institutionalized childcare, focusing on the dangers lurking for the children outside the safety of the maternal care environment.

3. Method and data

The analysis is based on data from the Japan Parental Well-Being Survey (JPWS), which I, as principal investigator, conducted in early 2012. JPWS is a nationwide, representative, postal survey of 1,031 fathers and 1,103 mothers from non-identical households throughout the country. Selection criterion was for participants to have at least one child below the age of entry into elementary school. The survey was conducted through quota sampling, based on gender (of the parent), residence, percentage of single parents (oversampling) and class (based on household income levels) (see Holthus, Huber and Tanaka 2015 for more details).

Of the 61 questions of the survey, nine specifically pertain to family policy matters, namely the actual use and availability of, knowledge about, as well as satisfaction with family policy measures. It is these questions that are part of the analysis here in this chapter. I conducted three analyses: (1) a descriptive analysis of the nature of parental use and opinions on childcare institutions, (2) cross-tabulations and ANOVA calculations to understand the differences in opinions on and satisfaction with childcare institutions by age of the children, as well as parents' socio-economic status, and (3) regression analyses for understanding which variables are related to parents' overall infrastructural family policy satisfaction.

3.1 Dependent variable(s)

The main dependent variable is the overall satisfaction with infrastructural policies. The question presented to respondents was: "How satisfied are you presently with the following area of your life: The provision of institutional childcare support (e.g. daycare, kindergarten, etc.)?" The respondents answered on an 11-point standard life satisfaction scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the least satisfied, 10 the most. Table 2 shows that the mean score lies at 4.86. This is significantly lower than the mean score for the parents' overall life satisfaction, which lies at 5.75 on the same 11-point scale. In addition, eleven questions pertain to the satisfaction with numerous elements of the childcare institution of the youngest child. These are listed in Table 2. Answers

were on a 4-point scale from 1 to 4, from dissatisfied to satisfied. Mean satisfaction scores, discussed below in more detail, vary between 2.6 and 3.34.

3.2 Independent variables

Independent socio-economic and demographic variables are gender, matters pertaining to social class (education, living situation, savings [as substitute for income], employment situation), as well as age of youngest child and number of children. Further variables included are the childcare situation of the parents, the monthly individual costs for childcare, the perceived difficulty for parents to enroll their youngest child into a childcare institution, as well as the parents' opinions on the importance of certain childcare support measures. Those seven questions, listed in Table 2, are under the heading of: "What do you think about the following childcare support measures?" Answers are on a scale from 1 to 5, from "not important" to "important."

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptives

The fathers and mothers exhibit significant differences in most of the demographic indicators, except marital status, educational levels, and number of children. Almost all men (99.5%) and women (96.4%) are married. Fathers are significantly older than mothers with a mean age of 37 as compared to mothers' mean age of 34.[6] The educational level of parents is high with 59.2 percent of parents being university educated. However gender differences are significant here as well, as 68.4 percent of the fathers but only 50.4 percent of the mothers have a university education. In regards to financial means, I lean on Raymo's (2017) evaluation that the ability to save money is a better indicator for social class than the household income. Among the mothers and fathers of the JPWS, only 42.6 percent say that they can save money. Again, gender differences are telling, as many more fathers report to be able to save money (54.3%), whereas 68.3 percent of mothers say they cannot. The living situation,

[6] This is in line with typical patterns: Japanese women's mean age at first births at 29.9, second births at 31.8, and at the time of the third child to have a mean age of 33.2 (CAO 2011: 29; data from 2010).

namely if one's place of living is rented or owned, is another indicator for social class. More people participating in the survey own their place as opposed to paying rent, and here again we find gender differences, with more fathers than mothers owning the place they live in (64.5% versus 53.6%). This socio-economic divide is perpetuated by the gendered employment patterns, with 98.1 percent of fathers being employed in some form or other, whereas only 34.4 percent of mothers are, with many more fathers also being regularly employed and working much longer hours as well.[7] In terms of regional variation, we have an almost equal distribution of parents living either in the two major metropolitan areas of Japan, the Kanto region (with Tokyo) plus the Kinki region (with Osaka and Kyoto) with 48.8 percent, versus all other regions, where 51.2 percent of all survey participants reside.

The majority (58.1%) of parents have two or more children. As the selection criterion for a parent to participate in the survey was to have at least one child between ages 0 and 6, it could very well mean that some of the respondents have not concluded their childbearing phase just yet. Thus no deduction about the sample populations' birthrate can be made at this point. At the time of the survey, the mean number of children of the respondents stood at 1.77. In Japan overall, the birthrate stands at 1.39 (CAO 2011: 24, data from 2010), and among married couples, the birthrate was rather steady between 1972 and 2002, but declined to 2.05 by 2005 (Oshio 2008: 2–3). In the case of 56.8 percent of parents in the survey, the age of the youngest child is between the age of 3 and 6, whereas in only 43.2 percent, the youngest child is below age 3.

[7] For more details, see Holthus, Huber and Tanaka (2015).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

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)	
Living situation				***
renting	41.2% (876)	35.5% (365)	46.4% (511)	
owning	58.8% (1252)	64.5% (662)	53.6% (590)	
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)	

Parents using family policies

Asked about the main caregivers for their youngest child, parents were presented a long list of options, from family members, friends, neighbors, to childcare institutions. Multiple answers were possible. It is often the case that for example grandparents either help on a regular basis, or on short notice jump in to help: for example when the parents have to work longer than usual or when the child is sick and thus has to be picked up from daycare and be brought home, even though on regular days, it might be one of the parents. Also there are parents who have their child in a kindergarten until the early afternoon for educational purposes, but then, to cover the rest of the afternoon, have their child cared for in another childcare institution, such as for example by someone from the family support center. For those children who are enrolled in some form of childcare institution, the majority, namely 31.7 percent, are enrolled in kindergarten (*yōchien*), followed by 15.6 percent of parents who have their child in a public licensed daycare center and 9.4 percent in a private, yet licensed daycare center. All other forms of daycare centers, as well as options such

as childminders (*hoiku mama*) or family support centers are only rarely used. Only four parents report having used a babysitter, showing the strong tendency for institutionalized care in Japan in comparison to more informal support measures.[8] See Table 2 for details.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, continued

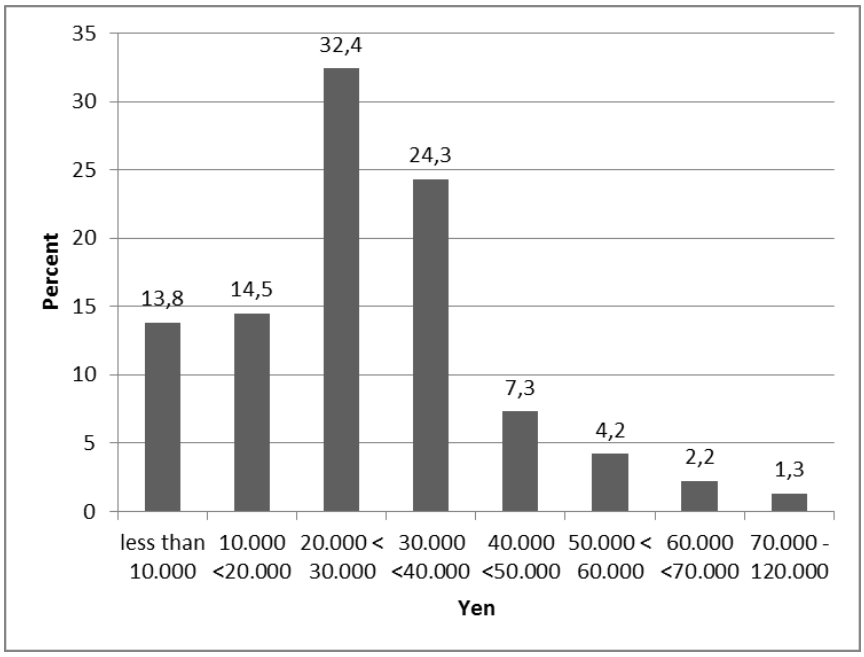
Variable	Total	SD	n
Satisfaction with infrastructural family policy (0=least satisfied, 10=most satisfied)	4.86	2.426	2130
Overall life satisfaction (0=least satisfied, 10=most satisfied)	5.75	2.273	2133
caregivers (other than family, friends, neighbors) (multiple answers possible)			1962
Kindergarten (*yōchien*)	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)		
kodomo-en	0.7% (14)		
daycare room *(hoikushitsu)*	0.6% (12)		
baby hotel	0.2% (4)		
childminder (*hoiku mama*)	0.8% (15)		
family support center	0.7% (13)		
babysitter	0.2% (4)		
monthly cost for institutionalized childcare (Yen)	25,892	14734.984	1176
degree of difficulty finding childcare institution for youngest child	2.35	1.124	1187
very easy	24.9% (295)		
easy	38.7% (459)		
neither nor	17.1% (203)		
difficult	15.6% (185)		
very difficult	3.8% (45)		
Opinions on childcare support measures 1=not important, 5=important			
increase the number of daycare institutions	4.11	.869	2124
increase the number of childminders	3.58	.864	2124
more flexible care hours	4.14	.837	2124
increase programs to improve quality	3.96	.804	2124
improve support for special needs children	3.03	.798	1186
improve support for parents with limited financial means	3.22	.730	1186
increase after school care	3.06	.732	1186

[8] For more on parents' arguments for or against (employing) babysitters, see Holthus (2011).

Satisfaction with childcare institution of youngest child 1=dissatisfied, 4=satisfied			
hours of care	3.2	.881	1186
the institution's closed days	3.18	.816	1186
costs	2.6	.955	1183
number of daycare providers per child	3.15	.786	1186
handling of the unexpected, e.g. illnesses	3.03	.798	1186
play and learn program	3.22	.730	1186
dealing on an individual level with each child	3.06	.732	1186
educational principles and ways of thinking	3.21	.670	1186
opportunities for parents' input	3.09	.700	1186
contact/communication with other parents	3.00	.712	1186
altmosphere of the institution	3.34	.647	1186

The average monthly costs for some form of childcare outside the family was about 26,000 Yen (approx. €220). Yet the variance is significant, as costs can range from less than 10,000 up to 120,000 Yen. Separating the costs between costs for kindergarten versus daycare center show that the extreme costs, either very low or very high, are mostly for those who have their child in a *hoikuen*, a daycare center (see Holthus, Huber and Tanaka 2015: 62 for further details).

Figure 1: Monthly costs for institutionalized childcare for all children per family



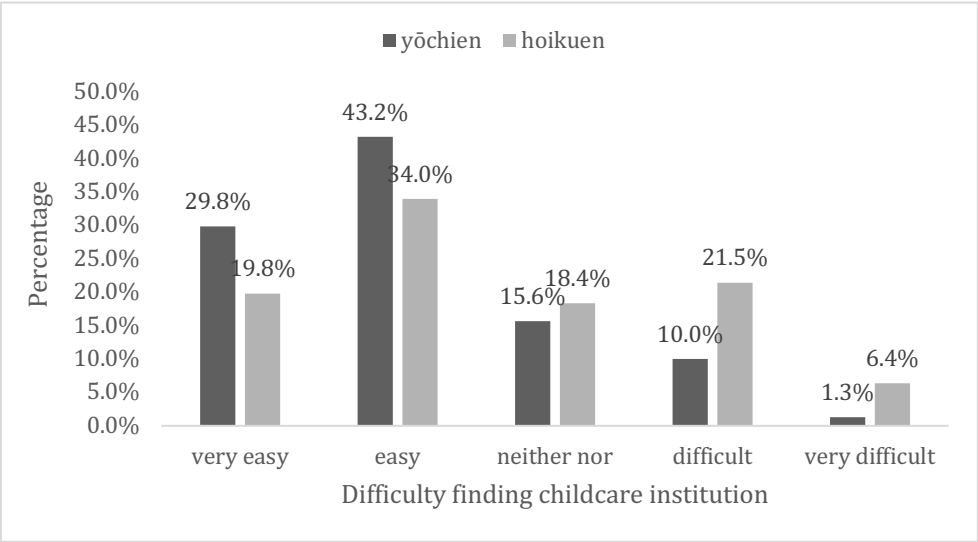
Note: The question was limited to parents who actually have a child in regular care. Source: JPWS 2012, author's own calculations.

Regarding the youngest child's regular daycare schedule, of the 1,184 parents answering this question (55.5% of all parents), 86.2 percent stated that their child goes to daycare five days a week. An additional 8.1 percent (96) have their youngest child attend daycare six days a week.

Since the nationwide waiting list for children to get into daycare is an often publicized issue, as described above, it is surprising to see that 63.6 percent of the parents in this survey thought it was easy or very easy to find a daycare place. 15.6 percent thought it difficult (185), and only 3.8 percent (45) found it very difficult (see Table 2). This 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 even 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 2 below, 27.9 percent of parents found it difficult or very difficult to secure a place for their child in daycare, yet it was only 11.3 percent of those parents with their child in kindergarten. 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 resulted in the described mismatch of excessive kindergarten places and insufficient daycare places.

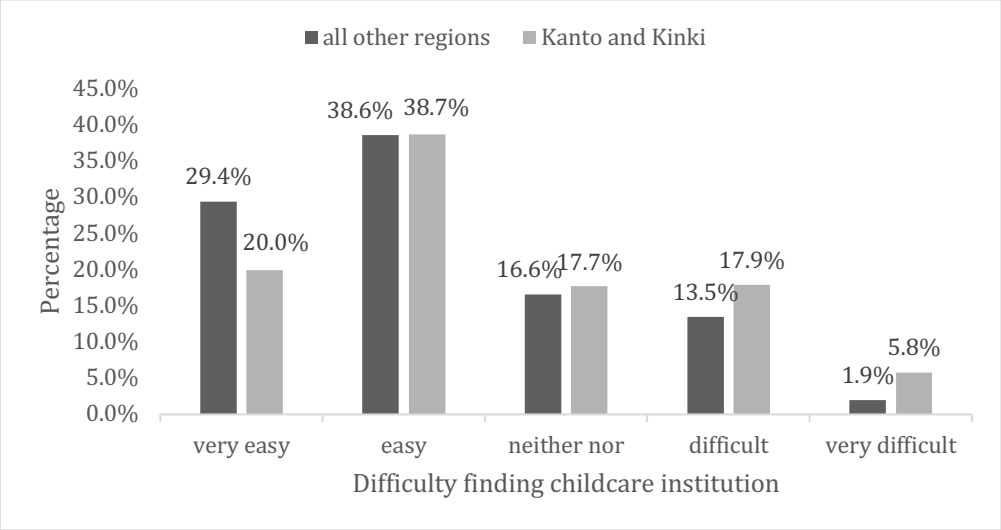
Figure 2: Difficulty finding childcare by type of institution



Note: 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), $p < .001$.
Source: JPWS 2012, author's own calculations.

Kukimoto (2014) has pointed to the fact that the large increases in female employment since the mid-1970s have mostly occurred in urban areas. Thus the resulting greater demand for daycare places resulting in a drop in the use of kindergartens but on the other hand in a shortage of licensed daycare centers in the metropolitan areas, have created a situation Kukimoto has termed as "territorial injustice". And this is exactly what the experience of the parents in the survey here supports as well: Figure 3 below points to the regional differences in the distribution and demand of childcare places: Parents in the metropolitan areas (23.7%) report finding a childcare place to be much more difficult than in the other regions of Japan (15.4%).

Figure 3: Difficulty finding childcare by region



Note: A Chi-Square test of independence indicated a highly significant association between difficulty finding childcare institution and the region in Japan. $\chi 2$ (4, n = 1187), $p < .001$. Source: JPWS 2012, author's own calculations.

Parental opinions about infrastructural family policy measures

As shown in Table 2 above, parents were asked to voice their opinions on several childcare measures. Answers range from "not important" (1) to "important" (4). Questions pertain to issues of 'quantity' on the one hand, such as the number of daycare institutions, after school programs, or childminders (*hoiku mama*), and the hours of care, as well as on the other hand to issues related to the quality of care. Furthermore, two questions ask about the equality of care and care options, namely for minority groups such as parents with limited financial means or with children with special needs (such as a disability). Parents consider the greater flexibility of care hours (mean 4.14) as the most important childcare support measure, followed by the increase in the number of daycare institutions (mean 4.11). Thus, concerns for quantity are more important to parents than quality aspects. Least important in their view is the improvement of support for children with special needs. This points to a possible ignorance on the side of the parents in regards to the difficulties for parents of children with some form of disability and the proven elevated stress-level experienced particularly by mothers of children with disability, as compared to children without disabilities (Yamaoka *et al*. 2016). Indeed, as Kayama has noted,

"[t]he idea of disability rights, such as equal opportunity and full participation […], is not yet common in Japan." (Kayama 2010: 122).

4.2. Parental satisfaction with infrastructural family policies

Parental satisfaction with family policies regarding childcare infrastructure overall is significantly lower (mean 4.86, SD 2.4) than parents' overall life satisfaction on the same 11-point Likert scale from 0 to 10 (mean 5.75, SD 2.27). An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the satisfaction scores for mothers and fathers. Gender differences can be found, as mothers report lower scores than fathers both for their overall life satisfaction and the satisfaction with infrastructural childcare policies.[9]

In a second step, one-way between-groups analyses of variance, ANOVA, and t-tests were conducted to explore the impact of all independent variables on levels of satisfaction with infrastructural family policies. Statistically significant findings are the following:

- Those parents with lower education are more satisfied with family policies on childcare infrastructure than those with higher education. For Germany, findings are not as clear-cut and show only highly educated mothers to be more satisfied (Camehl *et al.* 2015: 1112).
- Those financially better off show higher satisfaction with family policies on childcare infrastructures: Those parents owning their dwellings are more satisfied than those that only rent their houses or apartments. And those parents who manage to save money from their incomes are more satisfied than those who cannot save anything. Internationally, the well-off equally show higher scores in satisfaction with family policies, as they naturally have to rely more heavily on institutions to assist with childcare, whereas people with more financial means have more options available to them on the market place, such as private, more costly daycare centers or nanny services.

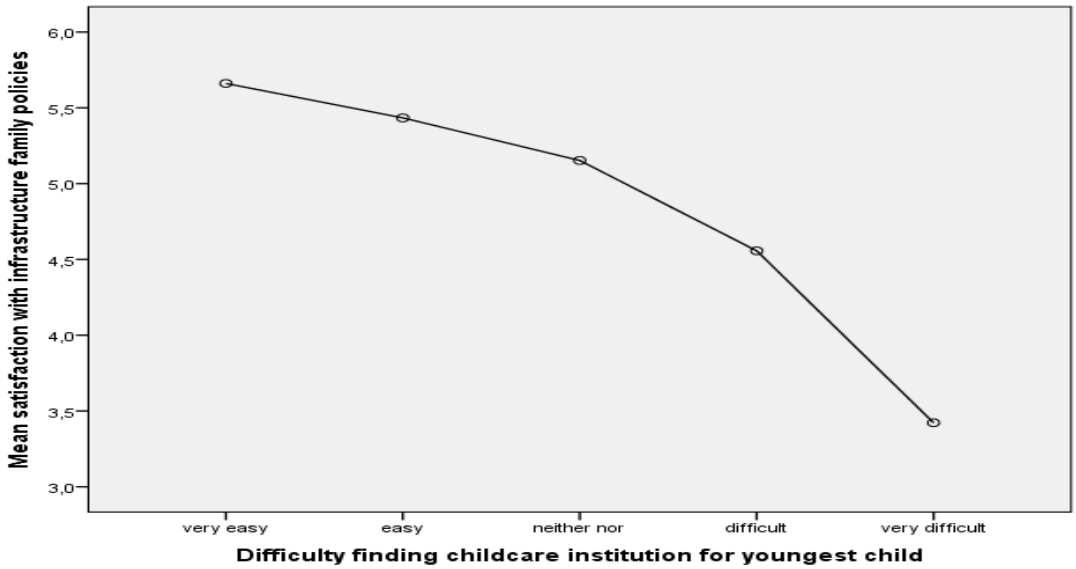
[9] Overall life satisfaction: fathers: M=5.87, SD 2.18, mothers M=5.64, SD 2.35 t(2131)= 2.33, p=.02. Satisfaction with infrastructural family policies: fathers: M=4.95, SD 2.36, mothers M=4.78, SD 2.48 t(2128)=1.68, p=.09.

- Those residing in the Kanto and Kinki regions, Japan's two largest urban conglomerates, are less satisfied with the infrastructural family policies. In Germany, Camehl *et al.* (2015: 1110) also identify living in larger urban areas to reduce parental satisfaction levels with family policies. So this urban-rural divide is not unique to Japan but is likely to be a pattern of industrialized countries with an accumulation of industry and wealth and employment opportunities in fast-growing urban hubs.
- Satisfaction with infrastructural family policies increases with the age of the child, meaning that the older the child, the higher the level of satisfaction with the policies. It is my assumption that an important reason is that once the child is three years of age or older, there is a wider range of childcare options available, most importantly the option of a kindergarten (*yōchien*), despite the fact that due to their limited hours they are not designed for full-time employment of both parents. Even though *hoikuen* are licensed to care for babies from their 57th day after birth, enrolling one's child into daycare before the age of one still is very difficult due to the few available places for this most care-intensive group of children, which requires a smaller child-caregiver ratio than is necessary for the older children in daycare.
- Those parents whose youngest child attends a *yōchien* are significantly more satisfied with infrastructure policies than those who have their youngest child in a *hoikuen.* This is closely related to the point above, as children in *yōchien* are at least age 3, while those in daycare can start care from two months after birth.
- Those parents with two or more children are more satisfied with the infrastructural family policies than those with only one child. The large hurdle for parents seems to be the ability to enroll their first child. Once the parents have one child in *hoikuen*, then enrolling its younger siblings is made significantly easier by the government.
- Those parents without employment are less satisfied with the infrastructural policies. In Japan, one has to be employed to be able to get a daycare center place for one's child. Those mothers actively job-hunting feel discriminated against, even though efforts have been made in recent years to make it easier for those mothers actively trying to rejoin the labor market to find a care place in a daycare center as well. Yet the point system, which ranks the importance

of parents to get a daycare center place, still awards more points for having full-time employment and thus makes it more likely for working parents to receive a daycare center place.

Above I discussed the importance of the parents' own experience with finding a childcare institution for their child(ren). This also has a significant impact on the overall parental satisfaction with infrastructural family policies. Data show a linear decrease in satisfaction, the more difficult it is to find a daycare place for one's child, as there is a statistically significant difference at the $p < .001$ level for the five levels of difficulty (M=5.23, SD 2.33) F (4,1182)= 14.711, $p <.001$) (see Figure 4). Thus parents' evaluation of family policies is strongly reflected upon through the prism of their own personal experiences.

Figure 4: The impact of parents' own experiences finding childcare on their satisfaction with family policy



Source: JPWS 2012, author's own calculations.

<u>Parental satisfaction with institutionalized childcare conditions and provisions: The relevance of parental financial means, education and number of children</u>

In a battery of eleven questions, the survey asks in greater detail about the satisfaction with diverse elements of institutionalized childcare, all part and parcel of

the overall evaluation of family policies for childcare infrastructure (see Table 2 above for more details). The questions pertain to the quantitative as well as qualitative elements of institutionalized childcare. Quantitative in this respect means the opening hours and days of daycare centers, as well as their costs. Regarding the quality of care, questions ask for the satisfaction with the number of daycare providers per child, the handling of unexpected events such as illnesses, the communication with the parents and parents' input, the atmosphere of the institution, the play and learn program, the educational principles, and how well the institution deals with the children on an individual level. These questions are measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 4. The analysis shows that the satisfaction with all but one element is rather high, ranging from mean scores of 3.00 to 3.34—a surprising finding considering the high level of media reporting on the quality deficiencies in *hoikuen*. The exception here is the satisfaction with the costs for the childcare institution, with a mean score of only 2.6. This corresponds with the findings by Camehl *et al*. (2015) for the case of Germany. The authors argue that the cost for daycare is the most influential factor in impeding the satisfaction with infrastructural family policies. Compared to Germany however, childcare costs are significantly higher in Japan in case parents have to use private daycare centers, often due to the unavailability of much more affordable places in public daycare centers. This two-tier childcare system with public, subsidized daycare on the one hand and a widely used market-based model of daycare on the other is still a significant difference between the two countries.

In particular, Camehl et al. (2015) identified parents' financial means and education as well as the age of the child as influencing factors for the satisfaction with institutionalized childcare provisions, as mentioned above also for the overall satisfaction with infrastructural family policy. For the case of Japanese parents here, t-tests were conducted; identifying that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the university educated versus the not-university educated parents. The analysis produces no evidence that the level of education affects the levels of satisfaction with particular elements of institutional childcare. For Germany, on the other hand, Camehl *et al*. (2015) identified in particular mothers with university degrees to be significantly more satisfied with the childcare costs than everyone else.

There was only one statistically significant difference in the mean scores for those with (M=3.17, SD .72) and without (M=3.26, SD .74) the ability to save money from their monthly income, namely for the evaluation of the play and learn programs (t(1176)=2.06, p=.04). Those with more limited financial means are more satisfied than those with greater financial means. Regarding the costs for daycare, parents with the ability to save some of their earnings are more satisfied, which supports the findings in Germany, yet the difference is not statistically significant in Japan.

In one aspect, however, the findings in Germany and Japan run opposite. For Germany, Camehl *et al*. (2015: 1112) find parents with children ages three and up to be less satisfied with the quality of childcare institutions than those with children below that age. The authors argue that the German government had in recent years focused on childcare for the young, below age three, with declining attention to the care of children above age three. In Japan, on the other hand, for eight of the eleven elements of institutionalized childcare parents with older pre-school children were statistically significantly more satisfied than those parents with younger babies and toddlers up to age three. In 1996, Germany implemented a new law providing the legal entitlement for all children aged three and older to a kindergarten place. In 2013, the law expanded, as since then every child from the age of one has a guaranteed slot in a daycare center. These rather recent changes obviously also had an impact on parents and their views on institutionalized childcare. Japan does not have any comparable laws so far and with a reported 23,500 children officially on the waiting list for a public daycare space (Japan Times 09/02/2017), the situation is quite different in the two countries.

4.3. Regression models to explain parental satisfaction with family policies concerning the infrastructure of institutional childcare

Results for the five models for analysis of the overall levels of parents' satisfaction with family policies for childcare infrastructure are presented in Table 4 below. Each subsequent model adds further variables, thereby improving the explanatory value of the models. The first model shows that the age of the youngest child and the number of children are strongly related to family policy satisfaction of the parent. Gender contributes to it as well, as mothers show lower satisfaction scores, as already mentioned at the onset of this chapter. Yet this model only has an explanatory value

of 2.6 percent (adjusted R^2). In model 2, the socio-economic background of the parents strengthens the explanatory model, with all three variables, employment, having savings, and education significantly contributing. We see that higher education diminishes the satisfaction with family policies. In the subsequent column for model 3, parents' own experiences with institutional childcare are added, showing that the monthly costs for institutionalized childcare, by themselves important, however do not make a significant contribution to the whole model. Nonetheless, it shows that positive experiences the parents had with finding a childcare place and also having a child attending public daycare both are associated with significantly higher levels of satisfaction with infrastructural family policies.

Model 4 adds the region the parents are living as contributing factor, showing that location has a highly significant negative influence on parental satisfaction with family policies, meaning that parents in the two urban, metropolitan areas are significantly less satisfied than those parents living anywhere else within Japan. In the final model 5, the inclusion of the parents' levels of satisfaction with the eleven different elements of institutionalized childcare for their own child contributes to the reduction in magnitude and statistical significance of the ability to save and the degree of difficulty finding a childcare space. This Model 5 shows significant contributions through six variables and explains 17.9 percent of the variance in satisfaction, which is high with such a large population. Thus, it provides a good explanation of the factors influencing parents' satisfaction with family policies on childcare infrastructure. The six variables of importance, as seen in Table 4, are: the satisfaction with the hours of care and the satisfaction with the costs for the child (but not the actual sum paid) as the two important quantitative elements of institutionalized childcare, and the number of teachers per child as signifier for the quality of care, together with the region of living. The ability to save money as well as having one's child in public daycare continue to make a significant contribution to the model.

Table 3: Regression analysis for satisfaction with infrastructural family policies

Regressions for satisfaction with infrastructural family policies
p<.05*, p<.01**, p<.001***

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	-.046 *	.015	-.011	-.015	.009
Number of children	.066 **	.063 **	.043	.031	.045
Age of youngest child	.137 ***	.128 ***	.051	.056	.026
social stratification					
employed (vs. Not employed)		.079 **	.038	.031	.018
has savings (vs. No savings)		.084 ***	.077 *	.071 **	.065 *
university education (vs. No univ. edu)		-.065 **	-.058	-.049	-.051
own experiences with institutionalized childcare					
child in private daycare (hoikuen)			-.007	-.003	.014
child in public daycare (hoikuen)			.110 **	.104 **	.121 **
child in kindergarten (yochien)			-.031	-.022	.088
approx. Monthly cost for childcare			-.039	-.032	.029
degree of difficulty finding daycare (easy)			.157 ***	.147 ***	.067
Region (Kanto+Kinki) (vs. rest of Japan)				-.129 ***	-.116 ***
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	2039	2028	1120	1120	1120
Adjusted R2	.026	.039	.075	.081	.179

Source: JPWS 2012, author's own calculations.

5. Discussion

The continuing low fertility rate in Japan, coupled with high ageing 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. One important element of family policies is to provide affordable and good quality

childcare institutions. Public discourse both focuses on the difficulties for parents to find a daycare center place and on the alleged quality decline of childcare places, as the government struggles to meet the continuously rising demand.

For governments, evaluating the users' level of satisfaction with their policies is a much needed, welcomed, but still new, trend. Even though the Japanese government, under the short-lived rule of the DPJ, had implemented a commission to research the well-being of its people—disassembled again shortly after the LDP took up power in 2012—I am not aware that the Japanese government has yet conducted a specific evaluation of parents' satisfaction with family policies. Therefore, this study fills a much-needed gap and identifies three main findings:

(1) Mothers' and fathers' own experiences are an important indicator for their satisfaction with family policies. If they managed to secure a childcare space for their child, in particular a place in a public daycare center, they are more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied with family policies. A place in a public daycare center in contrast to any other childcare institution contributes most significantly to the parents' satisfaction with family policies.

(2) The three pillars of family policies, time, money, and infrastructure, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, are overlapping in various ways. On the one hand, the costs for institutionalized childcare are of particular relevance, pointing to the financial restraints parents are under, something that is supposed to be covered through "money family policies". On the other hand, the opening hours of daycare centers impact parents', respectively in most cases the mothers' work-life balance. Both aspects are significantly influencing parental satisfaction with infrastructure-related family policies, yet point to monetary and time-related needs of the parents as well. In future studies, a joint investigation of all three pillars of family policies and parental satisfaction with aspects belonging to these pillars should be in order.

(3) The region of living is a highly significant factor influencing the satisfaction with policies on childcare infrastructure. Parents in the urban metropolitan areas of Kanto and Kinki are significantly less satisfied—due in part to the fact that it is in these urban areas that daycare spaces are more difficult to get than in any of the other regions surveyed. As the regional divide between rural and urban areas is growing in Japan,

due to continued rural to urban migration, and the resulting higher concentration of wealth, higher education and better and more employment opportunities in urban areas, will the regional divide in satisfaction with family policies also continue to grow? Future investigations should focus on a more detailed analysis of the regional differences of family policies and parental satisfaction with them, particularly since numerous such policies are implemented and done only on the local level and not on the national level. In addition, the current study distinguishes only between two regions. Yet this cannot let us fully understand what the differences are to communities in smaller cities, suburban cities or rural areas, so a more fine-grained regional distinction would shed more light on the issue.

Even though this edited volume focuses on the challenges for the implementation of a gender sensitive family policy, the fair and balanced implementation of family policies throughout the different regions of Japan with their distinct challenges is also of importance. We know that well-being and the satisfaction with different areas of parents lives significantly differ between fathers and mothers, such as in regards to their partnership well-being or even the well-being with time-related family policies (Holthus, Huber and Tanaka 2015). Yet at least in regards to infrastructural family policy satisfaction, gender differences pale in comparison to regional differences. It is hoped that policy makers will acknowledge the importance of evaluating the “success” of family policies by the level of satisfaction of parents with family policies, and that the diverse conditions and needs of families in different regions be adequately addressed.

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