The Ageing Society and Declining Birthrate

Introduction

I researched about The Ageing Society and Declining Birthrate around the world. My hometown, Akita, has been suffering from the ageing and the declining of the number of children. In Akita, the number of jobs is very few and many shops have gone bankrupt. I realized that the ageing society problems are very severe and I have thought “How can we solve these terrible situations?” In this report, first I will look at the ageing society of EU countries. The ageing problems of EU countries are very severe. Second, I will show some policies of European countries aiming at stopping the ageing and the declining birthrate. Third, I will deal with Norway’s welfare policy. This is one of the most succeeded welfare policy. Then, in my conclusion, I will discuss what is needed for Japanese ageing society and declining birthrate referencing other countries’ examples.

1. The Ageing Society of EU countries

The ageing of Europe and the declining birthrate affect the economic future of EU countries. In EU countries, the birthrates are falling rapidly and the number of working-age (15~64 years old) people is declining. To keep a population the same size, 2.1 babies are needed per woman (BBC News Online, 2006), but many European women do not have this number; in France it is 1.90, in Germany it is 1.37, in Italy it is 1.33 (BBC News Online, 2006). So, EU countries are worried about the economic decline. If the number of young people decreases, it will be difficult for young people to pay the pension costs.

Another problem is connected with economic competition between the EU and the US. Now, the population of the US is smaller than the EU. However, by 2050, the
population of Europe and that of the US will have equaled (BBC News Online, 2006). So, EU countries are worried that the economic gap between the EU and the US will grow and they will lose the economic competition with the US. It is clear that the unemployment will grow if the EU loses this competition with the US.

2. Policies of some EU countries

In order to stop the declining of birthrates, many EU countries have set up their policies. France uses financial measures, for example, reduction in tax and payment as encouragement for people to have more babies. Poland, where the population has fallen by 500,000 from 2000 to 2006, has passed a law to give women some money according to the number of babies. In Italy, where the population could be one third smaller by 2050, one town has started giving 10,000 euros for each newborn baby (BBC News Online, 2006). However, it is not clear if these approaches are effective or not. One study said that even if the supports of money are increased by 25%, the birthrate won’t be increased so much: only 0.6% (BBC News Online, 2006). Moreover, some people think falling birthrates are good thing, in other words, it is the evidence that women have choices that they work or they become wife completely. Research from Germany shows many women don’t want to have more than 2 children; they want one or no child (BBC News Online, 2006). More and more women seem to be interested in playing important roles in business and they may be worried about losing their jobs because of their children.

3. The policy of Norway

Norway is the one of the greatest welfare countries and Norwegian policy has had very good influences on people. In 1956, the National Insurance Action was started and
people can take leave with pay when they have their babies. Since 1993, people can take 10~12 month leave with 80~100% salary (BBC News Online, 2006). This is paid by the government, so employers haven’t to be worried about any costs. As a result of the policy, the average number of birth per women was raised to 1.8 and the rate is higher than most European countries. Moreover, over 80% of 30~39 year old women are working (in Japan, women in their 30s usually stop working). In fact, the government set up the policy not because they tried to increase the birthrate, but because they aimed at creating better gender equality. In Norway, fathers must take leave for 4 weeks at least when their wife has a baby. We can say that the gender equality has the key to the increase in the birthrate.

However, in Sweden, which carried out the policy like Norway, the birthrate declined. This is because the Swedish economy was bad at that time and the unemployment rate was increased. So people couldn’t afford to bring up children. It seems that the economic situation is connected strongly with the birthrate.

**Discussion**

On the basis of these comparisons, let me discuss about what is needed for Japan in order to stop ageing and declining birthrate. By 2025, 28% of the Japanese population is over 65 year-old people. This is very high percentage comparing other developed countries; in Britain it is 15%, in the US it is 12%. Why the percentage of Japan is much higher than other countries? This is because Japanese people may still have old thinking that men should work outside and women should do housework and bring up children strongly than other developed countries. Of course, Japan has set up some policies to equalize men and women, but it is women who mainly look after their children and do their housework and many women resign when they have baby. In such
situation, women who love their jobs and want to continue working can’t have babies.

Nowadays, we often heard one word “ikumen” in Japan. This means the men who bring up children and do housework. Such men help make the more comfortable environment for women to manage to do housework and office work at the same time. Moreover, if the Japanese economy recovers from the recession, the birthrate will probably increase.

Conclusion

Many countries have been trying to solve the ageing society problem with giving parents some money support, but it is clear that money support is not enough to increase the number of children because women have not children just for money. I think money support will get effective for the first time when the gender gap is equalized and the economic situation recovers. After all, in order to solve the ageing problem and stop the declining the birthrate, first we need make stable economic situation and second we need create the gender equality with passing some laws which encourage men to do housework and bring children. (1103 words)

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