

Introduction – perception of issues

The shape of the Japanese family is changing considerably. The past ten years has witnessed a rise in single person households, populated not only by older people but also by the 20s to 40s age group. The proportion of married couples with no children is also on the rise, resulting in a halving of the number of households that are comprised of the hitherto standard pattern of two parents and two children.

The factors behind this include changes in the ways that the 20s to 40s age group perceives the concepts of marriage and family, changes in their set of values, and shifts in the economic and social environment surrounding them; it is possible that all of these factors are linked to the avoidance or postponement of marriage, childbirth and parenthood.

This year's *White Paper on the National Lifestyle* takes a look at the situation and the issues faced by the child-rearing generation — the generation whose composition ranges from young people considering marriage, to the parents of university students.

In Chapter 1, 'Changes in marriage and birth trends', we conduct an analysis of the changes in the child-rearing generation's perceptions of marriage and family, and their set of values. We confirm that in addition to the tendency to marry later or not at all, the decline in couples' willingness or ability to have children are factors behind the current declining fertility rate. We then examine the economic and psychological benefits and stresses that are cited as reasons for remaining single or for deciding not to have two or more children.

In Chapter 2, 'The environment surrounding the child-rearing generation's income', we focus on and analyze the generation's income and its gap. Considering the rising proportion of the younger generation who are employed in part-time or casual work, we examine the employment structure and the accompanying changes in income prospects, the income gap within the generation, and the impact that this has on child rearing. This chapter also examines private transfers of income from the parents of the child-rearing generation in the form of financial assistance and inheritances.

In Chapter 3, 'The cost and time of child rearing', we examine and analyze the various direct and indirect costs involved in bringing up children. We estimate the cost of bringing up a child by examining household's expenditure and the opportunity costs arising from leaving work to have a baby. Particular attention is paid to education and

housing costs, which account for a large part of the expenses involved in bringing up children. We go on to examine the relationship between people's free time, working time, and the time spent on child rearing.

Finally, we discuss the sort of support that the child-rearing generation needs according to the analysis above. We conclude that in order to create a society in which people are eager to raise children the keen participation not only of the child-rearing generation but also of their parents' generation, and indeed of society as a whole, is required.