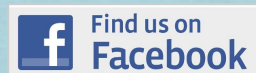


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Mixed messages on how to increase the birth rate

VOCABULARY

White Paper =

A government report giving information or proposals about an issue

Worrisome =

Causing anxiety or concern

Designated =

Officially given a particular status

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Are you surprised by the results of the White Paper? Why? Why not?
2. Do you think spending money on helping single people to meet is a good idea? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think the government should give more support to single parents? If yes, what kind of support should they give? If no, why not?
4. What do you think about the revised worker dispatch law? Is it a good idea? Do you think it will make workers lives easier or harder?
5. Do you think there is anything that the government can do to increase the birth rate? What? If not, why not?

VOCABULARY

Eligible =

Having the right to do something or obtain something

Corellation =

A relationship or connection between two things

Civil Servant =

A government employee, including local government

Burden =

A heavy load

The recently released government **White Paper** on the declining birthrate touched on the younger generation's **worrisome** attitudes toward romance and marriage. According to the Paper, the less money a person has, the less interest, or expectations, he or she has in terms of love or romance.

The latest survey was of 7,000 people between the ages of 20 and 39 from all around the country. It found that 28.8% of unmarried respondents said they did not have a romantic partner. Among this group, 37.6% said that they did not want a partner, and what's more, 50.3% said they had no prior experience of having a steady partner.

This decline had already been in evidence for several years, and the government, decided to throw money at the problem. In fiscal 2013, budgets of 60 million yen were allocated to Japan's 47 prefectures. In addition, **designated** metropolises, core cities and areas were **eligible** for 20 million yen. Smaller administrative units, such as wards, towns or villages, could receive up to 8 million yen. These funds were to be used for activities such as events aimed at helping young singles get together.

"During 2013, these funds were given to all of the prefectures and 244 administrative areas," said the Cabinet office. "In the budget 2014, the same figure—3.01 billion yen—was also allocated."

Meanwhile, the survey responses to the White Paper suggested a strong **correlation** between low income and disinterest in the opposite sex. 37.5% of males earning 4 million yen or less per year said that they had no particular interest in a romantic partner. 46.5% of females earning less than 2 million yen per year said the same thing. Which makes one wonder: what was all that money spent on?

"**Civil servants** have got some really dumb ideas," remarked Hiroko Ogiwara, an economic journalist. "The problem is not that young people have few opportunities to get together. The problem is that people are anxious about their future so they don't want the responsibility of marriage. Look at France, which recognises children born outside of marriage. France gives generous support for single mothers. They arrange for these kids to receive free education and child support. The result is that France has been successful in increasing its birth rate."

"In Japan, on the other hand, children are perceived as a **burden**. The Diet is passing new legislation like the revised worker dispatch law which will make things more difficult for workers. At the same time, it is throwing money at stupid measures to try and fix the birthrate"

"The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing."