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The Influence of Government Policies on Fertility Rates: A Comparative Analysis Across Seven Countries

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines the influence of government fertility policies on total fertility rates (TFR) across seven culturally diverse countries: South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Russia, France, Sweden, and Canada, analyzing policy effectiveness and implementation patterns from 1970 to 2024. **Design/methodology/approach:** The research employs a dual methodological approach combining systematic literature review with comparative policy analysis. Fertility policies are categorized into material policies (financial incentives) and humanistic care policies (work-life balance support). The study analyzes policy implementation timing and corresponding TFR changes, utilizing longitudinal data from UN population statistics. **Findings:** The analysis reveals a consistent 10-year lag between policy implementation and observable TFR impacts. Material policies, including newborn bonuses and childcare allowances, show varying effectiveness across countries. Nations implementing comprehensive approaches combining material and humanistic policies (France, Sweden) maintained higher TFR levels compared to those focusing primarily on financial incentives (South Korea, Japan). Despite significant policy investments, East Asian countries continue struggling with sub-1.0 TFR, suggesting the influence of broader sociocultural factors. **Research limitations:** The study's focus on seven countries, while representing diverse cultural zones, may limit generalizability to other contexts. Additionally, some statistical data and benefit amounts cited in this study may not reflect the most recent policy updates, as government programs are frequently revised. Readers should consult official government sources for the latest figures. **Practical implications:** The findings indicate that successful fertility policies require both immediate financial support and long-term societal adaptation measures, emphasizing the need for policy patience in evaluating effectiveness. Specifically, countries that combine material incentives with humanistic care policies (e.g., France and Sweden) demonstrate higher TFR levels, while nations relying primarily on financial measures (e.g., South Korea and Japan) show limited success despite substantial investment. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the dual-dimensional policy framework (material vs. humanistic) and provides evidence-based recommendations for designing integrated fertility policies that address both economic barriers and sociocultural factors. **Originality/value:** This research uniquely categorizes fertility policies into material and humanistic approaches while establishing a clear temporal relationship between policy implementation and fertility outcomes. The study's longitudinal analysis provides valuable insights into policy effectiveness across different cultural contexts, contributing to evidence-based fertility policy design.

Keywords: fertility policies; total fertility rate; material policies; humanistic care policies; comparative analysis; demographic policy; family policy; reproductive behavior

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Влияние государственной политики на уровень рождаемости: сравнительный анализ по семи странам

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Одной из основных мировых проблем в развитых странах стало снижение рождаемости. Это привело к поиску различных политических мер, направленных на стабилизацию демографических тенденций. **Целью** настоящей работы стало изучение влияния государственной политики семи стран, отличающихся культурным разнообразием: Южной Кореи, Японии, Сингапура, России, Франции, Швеции и Канады, – на суммарный коэффициент рождаемости (СКР), а также оценка ее эффективности (с 1970 по 2024 г.) и рассмотрение моделей реализации. В исследовании был использован двойной методологический подход, сочетающий систематический обзор открытых источников со сравнительным анализом политики, в которой можно выделить две стороны (составляющие): материальную (финансовые стимулы) и гуманистическую (поддержка баланса между работой и личной жизнью). В ходе исследования был выявлен постоянный десятилетний лаг между итогами реализации мероприятий в рамках политики и их практическим влиянием на СКР. В странах, реализующих комплексный подход, в котором сочетаются обе составляющие политики (Франция, Швеция), уровень СКР оказался более высоким по сравнению с теми, что ориентируются преимущественно на финансовые стимулы (Южная Корея, Япония). Несмотря на значительные инвестиции, государства Восточной Азии продолжают бороться с СКР, величина которого ниже 1,0. Полученные **результаты** свидетельствуют о том, что успешная стратегия в сфере рождаемости предполагает как безотлагательную финансовую поддержку, так и долгосрочные меры социальной адаптации. Исследование вносит вклад в теоретическое понимание двухмерной политической рамки (материальная vs. гуманистическая составляющие) и предлагает рекомендации для разработки интегрированных подходов, учитывающих как экономические барьеры, так и социокультурные факторы.

Ключевые слова: политика в области рождаемости; суммарный коэффициент рождаемости; материальная политика; политика гуманистической заботы; сравнительный анализ; демографическая политика; семейная политика; репродуктивное поведение

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INTRODUCTION

The matter of national fertility has been a significant subject from ancient times, particularly in the modern era when the industrial revolution resulted in a substantial population growth followed by a consistent decrease. Therefore, governments initiated diverse fertility strategies to encourage the preservation of replacement fertility levels. Nevertheless, throughout the 21st century, there has been a consistent decrease in fertility rates, resulting in countries like Japan and South Korea having a total fertility rate (TFR) of approximately 1.

Implementing effective population policy strategies can help countries to sustain their populations at or slightly below the replacement level. A study conducted by Bonoli demonstrates that the degree of child protection and family wellbeing serves as a significant determinant of fertility [1]. Furthermore, reducing the expense associated with childbirth enhances individu-

als' inclination to become parents. Therefore, there exists a direct correlation between policy and fertility. This paper presents a case study that examines how policies implemented across many countries affect fertility rates. It does a comparative analysis of these policies in different countries to demonstrate the influence of fertility policies on the total fertility rate over a period of time. For choosing 7 countries in this article, the study provides an extensive analysis of global value orientation research [2]. It examines various cultural regions and encompasses a wide range of societal characteristics, such as egalitarianism, intellectual autonomy, mastery, and embeddedness. The main objective of the study is to comprehensively assess different policy approaches and their influence on fertility trends. The selection of these seven specific countries is based on their representation of distinct cultural zones as identified by Schwartz [2], ensuring diversity across egalitarianism, intellectual autonomy,

mastery, hierarchy, and embeddedness dimensions. This allows the study to capture a broad spectrum of sociocultural contexts influencing fertility policy effectiveness. Additionally, these countries were selected due to the availability of longitudinal data and the existence of well-documented fertility policy interventions, enabling robust comparative analysis.

This study also aims to category the policy measures implemented by the state into two main areas: material policies, which concentrate on providing financial, physical, and resource assistance, and human care policies, which prioritize the well-being, rights, and rights of individuals engaged in the reproductive process. Next, this study gives the years of initial implementation of policy and policy additions, due to the following complete analysis, which shows a whole picture of positive relationship between policy and reproduction rate in some extent.

LITERATURE REVIEW- FERTILITY SUPPORT POLICIES: CASES OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES

South Korea

Korea is among the nations grappling with significant birth rate challenges and has implemented two significant modifications to its fertility strategy. According to UN data, South Korea's TFR declined dramatically from 4.53 in 1970 to 2.83 in 1980, further dropping to 1.57 in 1990 and 1.48 in 2000, reflecting the impact of rapid industrialization and urbanization [3]. In 1962, Korea's fertility program was primarily focused on exerting control. The Korean government did not shift its policy from one of control to one of promoting reproduction until 2004. This move also involved a shift from a policy of having fewer children to one of having more children [3]. The "Social Committee on Low Birth Rate and Aging" was founded by the Korean government in 2005. It consists of 12 departments, including finance, labor, and education. In that same year, the agency implemented the "Comprehensive Measures to Address Low Birth Rate (2006–2010)" [3]. This initiative aims to establish a robust childcare system, foster a work environment that supports families, and increase social investment in the future generation [3]. In the same year, the Government introduced the Sprout Program, with the objective of augmenting household incomes to alleviate the financial strain on families and enhance the proportion of child allowances [3].

In 2008, the Ministry of Health and Welfare released the National Development Blueprint 2030

Health Investment Strategy. According to this strategy, the government will fully fund medical expenses for women during pregnancy and childbirth and will also waive medical expenses for children up to the age of one. Additionally, women will be entitled to a minimum of 90 to 120 days of paid leave and 12 months of parental leave, while men will have the right to take five days of paternity leave. The employer fully covers the cost of maternity leave for the initial 60 days, while the government provides financial assistance for the subsequent 30 days. Additionally, women who have taken professional interruptions can access training and internships opportunities [4.] In 2011, the government initiated the second iteration of the Low Fertility Program, aimed at promoting a balance between family and work. This program offers several incentives, including complimentary housing and schooling for couples with multiple children [5].

Korea's fertility policy does indeed influence the birth rate. The fertility rate experienced an increase from 1.1 in 2006 to 1.26 in 2012. However, this upward trend was short-lived, as Korea's fertility rate subsequently entered a decreasing trajectory once again, falling to 0.84 in 2020 and reaching a record low of 0.72 in 2023.¹ The Korean government created the fourth iteration of the Low Fertility Program in response to the consecutive decreases in the total fertility rate.² The program offers a monthly childcare stipend of \$ 225 and extends the exemption of tuition fees for large families up to the university level.

According to Korea JoongAng Ilbo, the South Korean government has augmented the amount of subsidies in 2024. Families with infants under the age of one will now receive a monthly sum of 1 million won, while families with babies aged one to two will receive \$ 375 per month.³ In December 2023, Mayor Yoo Jungbook of Incheon put forward the 100 Million + i Dream initiative (see Fig. 1). Under this program, newborns would receive \$ 75,000) in benefits from birth until they reach adulthood. The aim of this proposal is to

¹ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC; 2024. 124 p. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

² Presidential Committee on Ageing Society and Population Policy. The Fourth Basic Plan for a Low Birthrate and Aging Society (2021–2025). 2020. URL: <https://www.betterfuture.go.kr/> (accessed on 22.05.2024).

³ World Environment News. Announcement of Incheon-type birth policy "100 million + i dream". 2023. URL: <http://www.e-newsp.com/news/article.html?no=54756> (accessed on 23.03.2024).

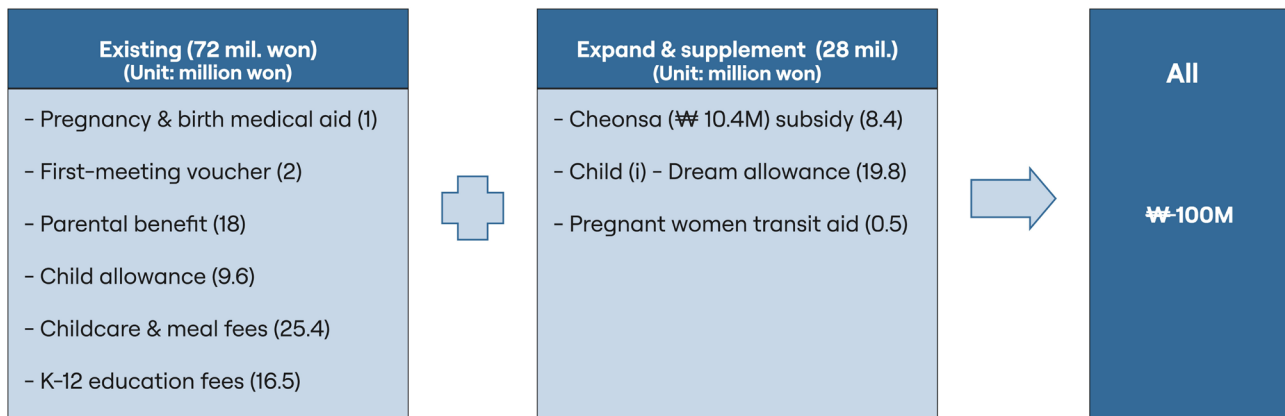


Fig. 1. 100 million + i dream program

Source: compiled by the authors based on URL: <http://www.e-newsp.com/mobile/article.html?no=54756>

Notes: World Environment News. Announcement of Incheon-type birth policy “100 million + i dream”. 2023. URL: <http://www.e-newsp.com/news/article.html?no=54756> (accessed on 23.03.2024).

incentivize people to have children and prompt the government to re-evaluate its policies in order to address the issue of declining fertility rates.⁴

Japan

Japan’s fertility rate decreased to a level of roughly 2.1, which is considered the replacement level for fertility, soon after World War II [6]. Subsequently, Japan’s fertility rate had a continuous decrease from 2.13 in 1970 to 1.91 in 1975 and 1.75 in 1980, ultimately reaching a value of 1.57 in the late 1980s [7]. The decline continued through the following decades, with TFR reaching 1.36 in 2000, partially recovering to 1.45 in 2015, before declining again to 1.20 in 2023.⁵ The main determinant behind the decrease in Japan’s fertility rate was the delay in individuals’ weddings [6]. Subsequently, the Japanese government has implemented a range of reproductive initiatives. The programs were structured into three primary elements: childcare services, parental leave, and financial aid in the form of child allowances [6]. Nevertheless, these efforts failed to provide a swift recovery in fertility rates. The Child-Raising Leave Law was enacted by the Conference of Japan in 1991. The legislation mandated uncompensated parental leave for both mothers and fathers, a policy that

failed to alleviate the burden on women to participate in the workforce and did not mitigate the financial expenses associated with raising children [8]. The Japanese government has initiated a new program called “Measures to Counteract the Decline in Fertility”. This program aims to enhance economic activities in the fields of employment, maternal and child health, psychological therapy, and education. Nevertheless, Japan’s overall fertility rate continues to decrease. In 2005, Japan’s overall fertility rate had declined to 1.26.

Following that, the Government of Japan has intensified its efforts on childbearing policies. The federal authorities have implemented a policy where individuals get 13% of their regular income during childcare and 67% of the childcare leave benefit,⁶ as mandated by the Labor Law and the Employment Insurance Law. In addition, the Japanese government has undertaken other efforts to encourage births. As an illustration, the government has implemented several measures to address the issue. These include augmenting one-time financial assistance, lowering tuition fees, and promoting private investment in childcare facilities.⁷ Additionally, there is the “Safe Child-Raising Program”

⁴ World Environment News. Announcement of Incheon-type birth policy “100 million + i dream”. 2023. URL: <http://www.e-newsp.com/news/article.html?no=54756> (accessed on 23.03.2024).

⁵ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC; 2024. 124 p. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

⁶ Japan’s Human Resources Department. The relationship between salary payments and childcare leave benefits during childcare leave, and the guidelines for salary payments. 2023. URL: https://jinjibu.jp/qa/sum/childcare_leave_payment_salary/ (accessed on 22.05.2024).

⁷ Child and Family Agency. Understanding the New System for Supporting Children and Child Rearing. 2016. URL: <https://www.cfa.go.jp/policies/kokoseido/sukusuku> (accessed on 22.05.2024).

which offers subsidies, job counseling, and other support to low-income families. As well, the Japanese government has actively encouraged men to take parental leave as part of their efforts to tackle the declining birth rate.⁸ Consequently, the Japanese government has implemented measures that have led to an increase in childcare assistance, the introduction of insurance coverage, and the expansion of the existing subsidy system to include insurance coverage. Due to these policies and others, the total fertility rate in Japanese society was brought down to 1.42 in 2015. Following this, the Japanese government implemented several measures, including the “Marriage and New Life Support Program” in 2021, to encourage an increase in the fertility rate. These policies aim to create a social environment that is favorable for childbearing and provide financial assistance and resources for infants and young children, among other initiatives. These policies are designed to encourage an increase in the birth rate by fostering a social environment that is favorable to childbirth, and by providing financial assistance and resources for newborns and early children.⁹

Currently, Japan is implementing several fertility policies to address the declining fertility rate. As part of these efforts, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) has revised its policy to increase the current childbirth allowance from \$3,300.¹⁰ Based on the optimization of policies, the Japanese government has developed a complete childcare support system as shown in *Fig. 2*.

Singapore

Singapore’s fertility policy implementation is similar to Korea’s, since both first adopted a policy aimed at curbing population increase. Subsequently, a policy shift occurred. Singapore’s TFR declined sharply from 3.07 in 1970 to 1.82 in 1980, and further fluctuated between 1.87 in 1990 and 1.60 in 2000, before drop-

ping to 1.15 in 2010 and reaching 0.97 in 2023.¹¹ In 1983, the Singaporean government-initiated efforts to promote childbirth among its residents, including the implementation of the Graduate Mother Program [9]. This program specifically targets women who have completed their university education, encouraging them to raise a family. If they had further children, they would get tax benefits and have precedence in selecting schools for their offspring. In 1986, Singapore’s societal motto was revised to “Having a second child is preferable to having three,” accompanied by the implementation of several cost-effective incentives aimed at promoting childbirth [10]. For example, tax rebates for childbirth, tax rebates for children of working mothers, subsidies for childcare, Medisave accounts to finance the expenses of giving birth, and government housing privileges allowing families with a third child to sell their property three years ahead of time at market rates, aiming to counteract the ongoing decline in fertility rates [10]. The Singaporean government implemented the Baby Bonus Cash Scheme (BBCS) in 2001 with the aim of promoting marriage and childbirth. The program offered parents a monetary incentive of \$6,000 for the first and second kid, which increased to \$7,500 for the third child. Additionally, it included the creation of a Child Development Account (CDA) and a 15% income tax exemption for the first child under the Parent Tax Relief System (PTRS) [10]. The objective is to promote and incentivize Singaporeans to initiate and establish families, enter into matrimony, and procreate. Furthermore, the Singapore government enhanced the incentives in 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2015 [10]. The Singaporean government initiated the “20–2020” initiative in 2017 with the aim of augmenting the rate of female employment [10].

In Singapore, mothers are granted a maternity leave period of 16 weeks, while males are granted a paternity leave period of 2 weeks. Additionally, both parents are entitled to 6 days of paid parental leave and 6 days of unpaid parental leave every year.¹²

The Government provides a monthly subsidy of up to \$600 for childcare services, specifically for sending children to approved daycare centers. As of 2024, the

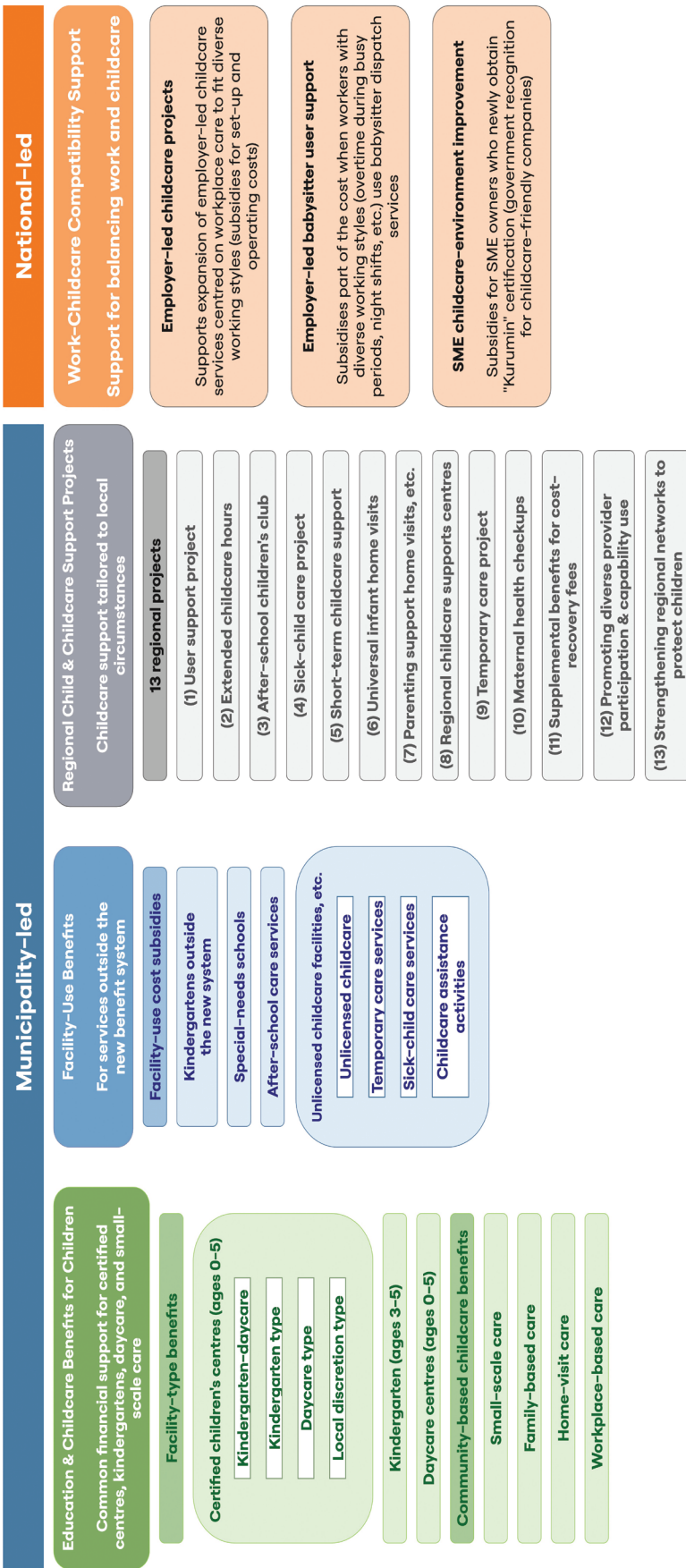
⁸ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan). Revision of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law — Promotion of male employees to take childcare leave, etc. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan), 2022. URL: <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/japan-employment-law-update-amendment-of-the-childcare-and-family-care-leave-act>

⁹ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan). Revision of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law — Promotion of male employees to take childcare leave, etc. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan), 2022. URL: <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/japan-employment-law-update-amendment-of-the-childcare-and-family-care-leave-act>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2024. 124 c. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

¹² Legislative Council of Hong Kong. Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region: ISE21/20–21. Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 2021. URL: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/en/>



Child allowance payment

| | | | | |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Under 3 years | Age 3 to end of elementary school | Middle school | Above income limit (~¥9.6M) | Above income cap (~¥12M) |
| ¥15, 000 / month | 1st & 2nd child: ¥10, 000 3rd child onward: ¥15, 000 | ¥10, 000 / month (flat amount) | ¥5, 000 / month (special benefit) | No payment |

Fig. 2. White Paper on Health, Labour and Welfare – A Connected and Mutually Supportive Community Society

Source: compiled by the authors based on URL: <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/wp/hakusyo/kousei/22/index.html>

Notes: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan). Revision of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Law – Promotion of male employees to take childcare leave, etc. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan), 2022.

Baby Bonus Cash Gift provides \$11,000 for the first and second child, and \$13,000 for the third and subsequent children. The Singaporean government aims to achieve a coverage of 80% for childcare institutions by 2025.¹³ In conclusion, housing will be prioritized for families with children, and couples requiring assisted reproduction would qualify for a government payment of up to 75%.¹⁴

Russia

Russia has the largest landmass in the world and exhibits the lowest population density. Due to the increase in births after World War II, Russia's overall fertility rate declined from 4.25 in 1940 to 2.13 in 1965 [11]. Historically, Russia's TFR stood at 2.00 in 1970 and 1.86 in 1980, before briefly rising to 2.05 in 1985. By 1991, Russia had a significant decline in its total fertility rate, which dropped to 1.15, resulting in a demographic catastrophe. The TFR further declined to 1.34 in 1995 and 1.21 in 2000 [11]. In general, the fertility rate in Russia has been consistently decreasing since 1960. To counteract the declining population growth, the Russian government implemented a strategy in 2006 to provide incentives for childbirth. The monthly stipend for families with children up to 1.5 years old has been raised from \$ 25 to \$55 (at 2006 exchange rates). For second and subsequent children, the payment has been increased to \$110 per month. Additionally, women are eligible to receive 40% of their earnings during their maternity leave.¹⁵ Further, in 2007, the Russian Government implemented the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the time frame until 2025.¹⁶ This program increased the quantity of several categories of allowances and implemented a minimum benefit of \$356 for women who had less than 2 years of work experience or are jobless, among other provisions. In the same year, the Maternal Capital Act was enacted, offering a monetary incentive of \$10,000 (at 2007 exchange rates) from the Government to women with two or more children [12]. In general, Russia's fertility strategy is more extensive. It includes various measures such

as the construction of childcare facilities around the country, provision of early education, financial subsidies, and support for assisted reproduction [13].

Due to these incentives, the fertility rate in Russia started to display a consistent recovery. In 2016, the Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation highlighted that the total fertility rate in Russia increased from 1.3 in 2006 to 1.8 in 2015. However, since then the TFR has declined again, falling to 1.50 in 2020 and 1.41 in 2023.¹⁷ As of 2024, the maternal capital program provides \$ 6,810 for the first child and \$8,999 for the second child (if the family did not receive the benefit for the first child) [14]. Therefore, it is evident that the Russian government has managed to implement a set of policy measures aimed at eliminating numerous factors affecting the decline in population.

France

Following two devastating wars that significantly reduced the population of the country, the French government initiated a campaign to encourage birth control. This included implementing a number of measures aimed at boosting the fertility rate of the nation. France's TFR declined from 2.47 in 1970 to 1.95 in 1980 and 1.78 in 1990, before recovering to 1.89 in 2000 and reaching 2.03 in 2010 — one of the highest levels in Europe. However, the TFR has since declined to 1.83 in 2020 and 1.68 in 2023.¹⁸

Following the conclusion of World War II, France implemented a comprehensive social security system that includes several forms of financial aid for families. These include maternity allowance, family allowance, single wage allowance, prenatal allowance, and more [15]. However, despite the adoption of this strategy, the fertility rate continued to decline. Following 1980, the government implemented further changes to the existing family policy, which included the introduction of measures like as paid parental leave, work coordination, and early childhood care [16].

Starting from 1995, the French government implemented measures to promote fertility among its citizens. These measures included enacting laws to provide rights and benefits for working women after giving birth, tying the amount of taxes a family pays to the number of children they have, and legally ensur-

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Message from the President of the Russian Federation. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/23819>

¹⁶ On the approval of the Concept of Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 9, 2007, No. 1351. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26299> (accessed on 22.10.2025).

¹⁷ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2024. 124 c. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

¹⁸ Ibid

ing that children born within or outside of marriage have equal rights.¹⁹ Furthermore, the French government has established a range of early childhood care and youth communities to address the challenge of balancing career and family responsibilities for parents, particularly working mothers. Additionally, they provide economic and policy support, such as living concessions, for families with multiple children.²⁰

France's incentive policy comprises three main elements: providing direct financial compensation to alleviate the financial strain of having children on families, implementing policies and creating social mechanisms to minimize conflicts between work and family life, and establishing diverse educational institutions to ensure the well-being and development of its citizens. Thanks to the implementation of these regulations, France has successfully achieved a total fertility rate that is close to replacement levels.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that France's economic advantages are substantial, as shown by the present policy of providing 60 percent of the average monthly pay per newborn kid.²¹ Regarding family allowances, as of April 2024, households with two children receive a monthly family allowance of \$ 161 which increases to \$ 400 for three children, with an additional \$ 175.8 for each subsequent child. Additionally, a supplement of \$ 88 is provided for each child aged 14 and above.²²

Sweden

Sweden is internationally recognized as a prominent welfare state. Following the 1930s, the Swedish Government implemented an initial family strategy and started enhancing material advantages to foster social fairness. In 1948, Sweden implemented a child allowance system; as of 2024, each child is granted a monthly stipend of \$ 138 until they reach the age of 16. Sweden's TFR has fluctuated notably: from 1.92 in 1970 to 1.68 in 1980, rising to 2.13 in 1990, then declining to 1.54 in 2000, recovering to 1.98 in 2010, and dropping again to 1.66 in 2020 and 1.45 in 2023.²³

¹⁹ FranceRelance. Ministère de l'économie, des finances et de la relance. FranceRelance; 2020. URL: <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/plan-national-relance-resilience-pnrr>

²⁰ Legal and administrative information department. Large family card. 2024. URL: <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F15292> (accessed on 22.05.2024).

²¹ Legal and administrative information department. Family and social benefits: new amounts as of 1 April 2024. URL: <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/actualites/A16506?lang=en> (accessed on 22.05.2024).

²² Ibid.

²³ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results.

In Sweden, the cost of childcare is determined by the parents' income. However, the community's public funds pay 80 percent of the cost [17]. In 1974, Sweden became the global pioneer in substituting maternity leave with parental leave. In 1995, the government granted dads of newborns a 12-month period of paid parental leave, specifically for one month, often referred to as Father's Month. Starting from 2002, parents are eligible to receive 80 percent of their regular wage as paid parental leave, regardless of whether they had a biological kid or adopted one [18]. During this time frame, each parent is entitled to a combined total of 480 days of paid maternity leave. Either parent may choose to take parental leave for a full day, half day, or four times the normal duration until the kid becomes 8 years old [19]. Furthermore, the Swedish government offers state study subsidies to individuals aged 16 to 20 who are enrolled in full-time education. The award amount begins at \$ 121 per person and will rise to \$144 per person from 2018 [20]. In Sweden, there is a housing subsidy policy in place. This policy allows individuals to apply for subsidies when their housing expenses surpass \$ 155 per month. Additionally, Sweden offers various services and initiatives, such as specialized day-care facilities, to cater to children under the age of seven [21].

The Swedish family policy has evolved and developed over many decades of thorough investigation and analysis. The implementation of policies aimed at fostering gender equality has led to the development of a supportive social and familial environment. This, in turn, has indirectly contributed to the promotion of fertility and has resulted in a consistently high and steady fertility rate in Sweden.

Canada

Canada's baby boom occurred after the Second World War, with total fertility rates ranging from a high of 3.94 to a low of 1.51 in 1959 and 2002, respectively, and then stabilizing between 1.61 and 1.68.²⁴ More specifically, Canada's TFR stood at 2.33 in 1970, declined to 1.74 in 1980 and 1.71 in 1990, reached 1.51 in 2000, partially recovered to 1.63 in 2010, before declining again to 1.40 in 2020 and 1.33 in 2023.²⁵ The peculiarities of

Stylus Publishing, LLC; 2024. 124 c. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

²⁴ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC; 2024. 124 c. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

²⁵ Ibid.

the Canadian government have led to cultural and policy variations from region to region. For example, the Canadian government introduced paid maternity leave in 1971, family allowances in 1974, and parental leave in 1996, which is shared by both parents, while Quebec expanded the duration of the leave and made it mandatory for men to take the leave as well, and also included self-employed home buyers, which increased benefits and lowered the threshold, covering more people than the federal grant [22]. The federal grant program covers more people than the federal grant program.

In 1988, for example, Quebec launched three programs to increase the fertility rate by paying a \$315 newborn allowance to women for their first child (\$192 from the federal government) and a \$5,040 maternity grant for their third child.²⁶ The high benefits and generous maternity leave allowed Quebec's fertility rate to rise from 1.49 in 1988 to 1.72 in 1990, but after 1990 the number of children born began to decline, and it was felt that although the policy favoured a third child, a third child would be counterproductive to the needs of the family, and the enthusiasm for childbearing was not sustained for long.²⁷

And while there are still slight differences in policy between the states in Canada today, federally, the Canadian government pays the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) to eligible families, with a maximum of \$5684.5 per year for children under 6 and \$4796 per year for children aged 6–17 (as of the July 2024 – June 2025 benefit year).²⁸

With regard to maternity leave, mothers are entitled to a maximum of 15 weeks' paid maternity leave and a shared parental leave of up to 35 weeks, with 55 per cent of the guaranteed income, which can be extended to a maximum of 61 weeks with a weekly benefit of 33 per cent of the average insurable income.²⁹

METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this paper involves the two key components of a literature review and comparative

²⁶ PRB. Quebec's Alternative to Pronatalism 2001. URL: <https://www.prb.org/resources/quebecs-alternative-to-pronatalism/> (accessed on 24.03.2024).

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Canada Revenue Agency. Having a child: benefits and credits. 2017. URL: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/campaigns/having-child-benefits-credits.html> (accessed on 24.03.2024).

²⁹ Employment and Social Development of Canada. Maternity and Parental Benefits. 2015. URL: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/reports/maternity-parental.html> (accessed on 24.03.2024).

analysis, hence it is dual-pronged. The first phase of this method includes looking into the available literature and policies that address the issue at hand for the population under study. In conducting the literature review, we adopt a systematic approach which ensures that all sources are captured comprehensively; these include peer-reviewed articles, books, policy documents, among other relevant publications. To support the longitudinal analysis spanning 1970–2024, TFR data were obtained from the United Nations World Population Prospects (2024 Revision) database, which provides consistent and comparable fertility estimates for all seven countries across the entire study period.³⁰

Simultaneously but separately, we embark on a comparative analysis on different policies through different countries. By doing this we are able to tease out commonalities, dissonances and new perspectives that may not be obvious when these sources are considered in isolation. This approach helps us to understand the material at a deeper level – to realize that different countries' policies may have different emphases, or to see that certain policies have inherent limitations despite their obvious advantages.

This study creates a framework of policy that splits material policies from humanistic care policies; the former concern tangible aspects while the latter focus on well-being and dignity of individuals in a rights-based approach. By adopting this dual classification approach, the article presents a synthesized structure of information – thus making it easier for readers to appreciate how different dimensions of policies relate to the same topic.

Furthermore, the seven countries chosen for this article are mainly based on Schwartz's research, where he presents the characteristics and influences of seven countries according to their cultural characteristics, and further he divides the world into a total of eight cultural zones, namely West European, English-speaking, Latin American, East-Central and Baltic European, Orthodox East European, South Asia, Confucian influenced and African and Middle Eastern [2]. However, based on factors such as the difficulty of obtaining relevant research and the small number of studies, this paper does not cover research in the three regions (Latin American, East-Central and Baltic European and African and Middle Eastern).

³⁰ World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. Stylus Publishing, LLC; 2024. 124 c. URL: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results>

Therefore, our study selects countries from the remaining five cultural zones and covers almost all of the seven traits proposed by Schwartz [2]. In West European, we chose Sweden for the egalitarianism trait and France for the intellectual autonomy trait. In English-speaking, Canada was chosen to tend towards the trait of affective autonomy, and Japan was chosen to tend towards the trait of mastery. In South Asia choose Singapore for the trait of (slightly) embeddedness. In Confucian influenced, South Korea is chosen for the hierarchy trait, and finally, Russia is chosen in the middle of the traits to represent the Orthodox East European cultural area. Thus, the study of population policy in these countries is sufficiently representative of the world to a certain extent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We have the capability to distinguish between two categories of instruments based on our analysis of demographic policies across several nations: material policies and humanistic care policies. Material policy refers to the provision of material and financial support with the goal of raising the birth rate, while a humanistic care policy prioritizes the provision of

compassionate and respectful care that upholds each person's dignity and individuality with the goal of increasing the birth rate.

As a result, each of the aforementioned nations has a unique birth policy, and *Table 1* and *Table 2* illustrates the minor variations in each nation's actual execution and impact.

Based on *Table 1*, we can observe that most countries offer some form of financial assistance for families with children, such as newborn bonuses, childcare allowances, educational subsidies, reproductive allowances, and tax deductions. These policies aim to alleviate the financial burden of raising children and encourage couples to have more children. However, the specific policies vary across countries. For instance, while South Korea, Russia, Canada, and Singapore offer newborn bonuses, other countries like Japan, France, and Sweden does not provide such bonuses. Similarly, housing security is provided in South Korea, Japan, and Singapore but not in other countries listed. It should be noted that direct comparison of financial benefits across countries is complicated by differences in national currencies and purchasing power. To facilitate cross-national comparison, future research should

Table 1

Analysis on Fertility Policies of Material Policy by Countries

| Project | South Korea | Japan | Singapore | Russia | France | Sweden | Canada |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Newborn bonus | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Childcare allowance | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Childcare services | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Educational subsidy | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Reproductive allowance | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Medical assistance | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Housing security | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Transportation subsidy | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Low-income or multi-child allowances | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Tax deductions | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Source: compiled by the authors.

convert all monetary values to a common standard, such as USD purchasing power parity (PPP). Furthermore, while *Table 1* captures material policy instruments, *Table 2* reveals that non-material (humanistic) support measures remain unevenly distributed, with countries like France and Sweden offering more comprehensive work-life balance policies compared to East Asian nations.

In *Table 3*, it is clear that all countries listed offer some form of maternity leave for women, recognizing the need for mothers to take time off work after childbirth. However, paternal leave policies for fathers vary, excerpt for Russia, others being more progressive in offering male parental leave. Policies like parental sickness/personal leave, delayed retirement age for families with many children, and preferential employment policies for such families are less common and present in only a few countries. Efforts to establish childcare institutions and improve public education services are seen in countries like Japan and France, aiming to provide better support for child-rearing. A notable distinction in demographic management

strategies emerges between Western European and East Asian approaches. France and Sweden adopt a comprehensive strategy that integrates generous parental leave, subsidized childcare, and gender equality measures, creating an ecosystem that supports both fertility and female labor force participation. In contrast, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore primarily rely on direct financial incentives (newborn bonuses, childcare subsidies) while giving comparatively less attention to structural work-life balance reforms. Russia occupies an intermediate position, combining financial incentives with infrastructure development (childcare facilities), though with less emphasis on gender equality policies. Canada demonstrates a decentralized approach with significant regional variation, as exemplified by Quebec's more generous policies compared to the federal baseline. These strategic differences help explain the varying degrees of policy effectiveness observed across countries.

Based on the *Fig. 3*, we can see that there was a baby boom in all countries after the Second World War. However, with the development of society and

Table 2

Analysis on Fertility Policies of Humanistic Care Policy by Countries

| Project | South Korea | Japan | Singapore | Russia | France | Sweden | Canada |
|--|-------------|-------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Maternity leave for women | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Male parental leave | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Parental sickness/personal leave | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Build social networking sites | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Families with many children have delayed their retirement age | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Preferential employment policies for families with many children | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Establishment of childcare institutions | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| Improving public education services | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Provide life and work training | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 3
Timing of Policy Implementation in Seven Countries

| Countries | Initial policy, years | Policy additions, years |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| France | 1939/1970 | 1995 |
| Sweden | 1974 | 1995 |
| Russia | 1981 | 1991 |
| Japan | No data available | 1991/1994 |
| South Korea | No data available | 1992 |
| Singapore | 1980 | 1986 |
| Canada | 1971/1974 | 1988/1996 |

Source: compiled by the authors.

industrialization countries experienced a decline in the number of births. In all countries, the inauguration of family planning policies was centered around 1970, with a second policy intensification at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Based on the Fig. 3, it generally takes around 10 years for fertility policies to start showing a noticeable impact on increasing total fertility rates after their initial implementation. This time lag can be observed across multiple countries. For instance, in Sweden, fertility policies were introduced in the 1974, but the total fertility rate did not begin its upward trajectory until around 1986–1987. Similarly, France saw a rise in its total fertility rate in the late 1990s, a few years after implementing fertility policies in the early to mid-1990s. This delayed effect could be attributed to the time required for couples to make decisions about having children, as well as for the policy incentives and support systems to take effect.

As shown in the above figure, it can be clearly seen that the implementation of the fertility policy leads to an increase in the total fertility rate. However, Korea, Japan and Russia still show a decline in birth rates after the implementation of the policy. This may be due to the fact that there is a short time lag of about 10 years between the announcement of the policy and its actual implementation. It is undeniable that there are factors other than policy that influence fertility, such as marriage rates, housing costs, wages and income, and social equity.

Countries where total fertility rises and then falls after the implementation of policies, such as Sweden

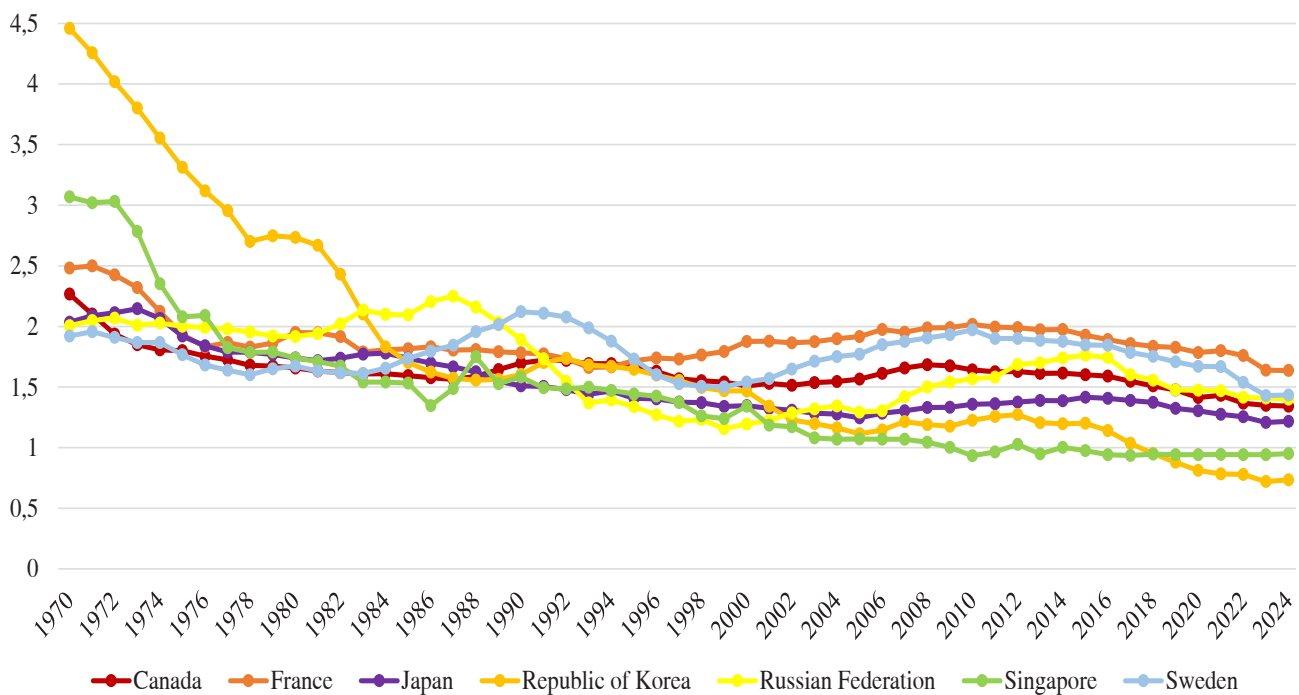


Fig. 3. Total Fertility Rates for Seven Countries

Sources: URL: <https://population.un.org/dataportal/>; <https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/31517>

and the Russian Federation, have seen fertility rise again after additional policies were introduced or existing policies were strengthened. However, the timing of the entry into force of these policies shows different results depending on national cultural factors and the implementation of policies in different countries. In Canada, for example, after peaking in the 1970s, total fertility began to decline and did not begin to rise again until the end of the twentieth century. This highlights the potential effectiveness of policy intensification and supplementation in restoring fertility. Although there are different time lags depending on the context and the policies involved, it is possible to identify a positive effect of policy intensification on fertility.

Although various policies have been implemented, countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore can be seen to be chronically challenged by a total fertility rate below 1. This suggests that the complexity of factors affecting the total fertility rate makes it difficult to address the issue with individual policies. Factors such as socio-cultural, work-life balance, economic conditions and the cost of parenthood all have a greater impact on fertility decisions. A sustained increase in fertility is more likely to be achieved through a combination of comprehensive policy measures and broad-based social change.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has made certain contributions to the theoretical development of fertility research and the formulation of practical policies. Through a systematic comparative analysis of the fertility policies of seven culturally diverse countries over more than 50 years (1970–2024), we have established a new two-dimensional theoretical framework that fundamentally reconceptualizes how governments influence population behavior. This framework challenges the traditional single-axis policy model, indicating that effective fertility intervention requires the simultaneous deployment of material incentives and humanistic care mechanisms — but it can be found from the text that after implementing fertility policies and family policies, the incentives for social business willingness in various countries are limited. This might imply that there are other factors in society that restrict people's willingness to have children. In future research, these factors can be focused on to enrich studies in related fields.

Our research advances theoretical science in three critical dimensions. First, we empirically validate and

quantify the temporal lag phenomenon in fertility policy effectiveness, establishing a robust 10-year implementation-to-impact interval. This temporal framework provides unprecedented precision for demographic forecasting models and challenges the immediate-effect assumptions that have long dominated policy evaluation methodologies. Second, we develop a comprehensive taxonomy differentiating material policies (financial transfers, subsidies) from humanistic care policies (work-life integration, gender equity measures), offering scholars a sophisticated analytical lens through which to dissect policy mechanisms. This categorization transcends simplistic economic rationality models by incorporating socio-cultural and institutional dimensions of reproductive decision-making. Third, our cross-cultural comparative design isolates the cultural embeddedness of policy effectiveness, demonstrating why identical material incentives produce vastly different outcomes across Confucian (East Asia), Nordic (Scandinavia), and liberal (North America) welfare regimes. These findings fundamentally reshape theoretical understanding of state intervention in private reproductive choices and establish new paradigms for demographic transition theory in post-industrial societies.

The practical implications of this research are transformative for policymakers worldwide grappling with sub-replacement fertility. Our findings provide actionable, evidence-based guidance that directly addresses the policy failures observed in East Asian nations, where despite massive financial investments exceeding hundreds of billions in USD equivalent, TFRs remain catastrophically below 1.0. The study reveals that fertility policy effectiveness is deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts [23], particularly regarding gender equity and institutional support structures. South Korea and Japan's predominantly material policy approaches have failed precisely because they ignore the deeper sociocultural constraints — including workplace discrimination against mothers, unequal domestic labor distribution, and rigid corporate cultures that penalize parental leave utilization [24]. In stark contrast, France and Sweden's integrated policy ecosystems, combining generous parental leave (up to 480 days in Sweden), universal childcare access, and systematic promotion of gender equity in both workplace and domestic spheres, have sustained TFRs near replacement level (1.8–2.0) despite similarly high costs of living and competitive labor markets. This empirical divergence validates our dual-dimensional framework and provides governments with a clear

policy blueprint: sustainable fertility recovery requires comprehensive social transformation addressing both economic barriers and gender inequality, not merely cash transfers or tax incentives.

In addition to direct policy application, this study has established a key methodological innovation for future fertility research. By recording the 10-year lag between policy implementation and measurable changes in TFR, we provide demographic researchers with the basic time parameters for longitudinal study design and policy evaluation frameworks. Our two-dimensional typology (material and human policy) provides a replicable analytical tool applicable to different national contexts, enabling cross-national comparisons of systems beyond cultural-specific implementation details. Furthermore, our research findings have urgent significance for the population forecasting models currently used by international organizations such as the United Nations and national statistics bureaus — these models must take policy and institutional types and cultural backgrounds as structural variables, rather than regarding fertility rates as a function of pure economic factors. Look-

ing ahead, the research agenda must be expanded to explore the intersection between fertility policies and emerging challenges, including adaptation to climate change, the disruption of the labor market by artificial intelligence, and the changing family structure (single-parent families, same-sex couples, and non-traditional families). The population crisis faced by developed countries is not merely a technical policy issue that can be resolved through gradual adjustments; It represents a fundamental understanding of gender equality, the integration of work and life, and social values related to fertility and care work. This article has not yet provided a theoretical basis and practical roadmap for policy-making, but success requires policy innovation and the courage to challenge the deep-rooted vested interests and habitual thinking, which currently make parenthood incompatible with career achievements, especially for women. Without a fair and just policy framework based on social structural adjustment, many countries will face irreversible population decline, shrinking labor force and fiscal sustainability crises within the next 20 years.

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