

apan has experienced two fertility transitions. The first, a

Apart from household tasks, parenting in Japan tends to be particularly intensive, and it is overwhelmingly the mother who is responsible for looking after children and making sure they succeed in the highly competitive education system.

In 2009, Japanese wives at reproductive ages spent an average of 27 hours per week on household tasks, while husbands spent only 3 hours per week. Roughly 60 per cent of these wives were employed, and about one half of those who were employed worked 35 hours or more per week. Given that many of these employed wives were also mothers, they undoubtedly faced difficulties in balancing their work and family responsibilities.

**Government response growing but still inadequate**

Apart from improving gender relations in the home, the most promising option for reversing the downward trend of marriage and childbearing seems to be through policies and programmes that help couples balance their work and domestic roles. Since the early 1990s, the Japanese