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are not family-friendly and do not provide flexible work conditions; (3) support from family members such as grandparents and other relatives has been weakened as more couples live in nuclear households; and (4) there is a shortage of centre-based childcare.

About 50 per cent of working women quit their jobs when they have their first child, resulting in an M-shaped curve for women's labour-market participation by age. Women tend to work during their young-adult years, leave employment to stay home and raise children, and then return to work later in life. Yet women who quit their jobs to raise children are severely disadvantaged when they seek to re-enter the work force.

What can the Government do?

In 1996, the Government of the Republic of Korea abolished its family planning programme and adopted a new policy emphasizing population quality. Two decades later, in an attempt to raise the fertility rate, the Government adopted three strategies: improving support for childbirth and child-rearing; fostering a family-friendly and gender-equal culture and society; and raising a healthy future generation.

To improve support for childbirth and child-rearing, the Government provides either fees for centre-based childcare