

Changes in Marital Fertility and Their Determinants in Japan

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This document makes an analysis of changes in marital fertility in recent years in Japan. Since couples who were married in the mid-1980s or later cannot be evaluated by their completed fertility, a comparison among marriage cohorts was made to clarify changes in birth timing for those couples. We also made a multi-variate analysis of the influence of various socioeconomic factors which seem to define marital fertility in recent years, and also tried to review the influence of population shift in proportion of the socioeconomic attributes, and the specific characters that the cohorts include.

The analyzed results, in brief, are as follows:

1. It was found that the birth timing of the first child was defined by residence, matrimonial form, wife's age at marriage, final school background, occupation, living with or without parents, and so on.

Recent ongoing social phenomena such as urbanization, the decrease of arranged marriage, trends toward later marriage and higher education for women, and a decline in the proportion of those choosing to be a housewife or live with parents, have shifted attributive distribution such that first child birth timing tends to be delayed. Even though the influence of variables other than years of marriage was controlled, there was still disparity among marriage cohorts in first child birth timing.

2. The birth timing of the second child was also likely to be affected by the same socioeconomic factors as with the first child. For the birth timing of the second child, there was no significant difference in years of marriage, which demonstrated that the recent tendency toward delayed birth timing of the second child could be explained by the change in proportions of the attributes.

3. We can infer that the third child birth is defined by various factors which differ from those of the first or second child birth, since the proportion of married couples who produce three children or more is fairly low.

As far as the current results are concerned, each variable affects birth timing in various ways, depending on each parity. However, age of wife and living with or without parents affect the timing in the same way for every result. This suggests that an increase in late marriages has a major impact on fertility trends, and implies that the assistance given by parents has a great effect on today's child-care in Japan. When the influence on overall fertility is considered, the signs such as a rapid tendency toward delayed first child birth timing and a decline in proportion of the final birth of pertinent order will give the biggest impact on future fertility.