

The State of Women's Life Courses in Contemporary Japan: Focusing on Never-married Women's Prospects

Miho IWASAWA

This paper attempts to demonstrate the state of women's life courses focusing on the gap between the "ideal" life course and the "anticipated" life course as possible outcomes of never-married women, and to examine the determinants of these inconsistencies, that is, those who give up trying to realize their ideal life course by using multinomial logistic models. The data used in this study was obtained from the 9th (1987), 10th (1992), and 11th (1997) Japanese National Fertility Survey.

In contemporary Japan, about seventy percent of married women with children aged less than six are not working. The question is to what extent those women are satisfied with their current situation. For never-married women, the possibility of realizing an ideal life course is becoming higher in this decade. Even in 1997, however, two thirds of never-married women foresaw that they would pursue a disagreeable life course. Especially over seventy percent of women whose ideal life course would be "combining work and family" and eighty percent of women whose ideal life course would be "remaining as a housewife" end up abandoning their ideal.

For women whose ideal would be "combining," such characteristics as expecting to be promoted, mother's success in combining, and being a government employee have significant positive effects on their desires being realized. On the other hand, when women are working at large companies, or their mothers were not working while they were in their childhood, they are apt to suppose that they would stop working for raising their children. Then women who are in the higher-age bracket or can not maintain an adequate balance between work and private life tend to continue working without getting married or having any children.