

Recent Developments in Household Formation in Japan

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This paper examined changes in household formation behavior using The Fifth National Survey on Household Changes. The survey was conducted for nationally representative sample by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in July, 2004. Life table measures revealed that the delay in home-leaving continued, although the proportion of young women that leave by the age 20 did not show an apparent trend recently. In spite of the younger age at marriage for women, Japan sustains a singular pattern that men leave earlier than women. This pattern was formed by the significantly higher proportion of men that leave before marriage than women.

A logit model showed that unsuccessful career achievement and late marriage promoted returning parental household. This result suggests that returning home increased during the long-term recession in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Unlike in Italy and other western countries, premarital home-leaving had a positive impact on fertility. This might be another sign of Japan's uniqueness in home-leaving behavior.

It was observed that, during the economic recession, female first marriage rates and fertility rates under age 20 increased. Logit models revealed that such very early marriage and childbearing are connected with rural residence and low educational and occupational achievements. The change during the recession could be understood as the spread of an attitude similar to working class in Britain and other Western Europe. It was inferred that, as Japan changed toward a hierarchical society, more and more teenagers became reckless and irresponsible. They rejected the life style of middle class that postpones marriage and childbearing to secure the satisfactory level of human investments on children. After 2002, however, marriage and fertility rates started declining again as the economy recovered and the labor market condition was improved. The change during the recession raised the issue of trade-off between fertility and economic equality, as well as that between the quantity and quality of children.