

Methodological Issues regarding Household Projections for Japan

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The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research published the latest household projections for Japan in March 2013. The projections had various methodological problems due to deficiencies in the census of Japan. First, unlike the previous censuses, the 2010 census included an "unknown" category for family types of households. This led to a new problem in determining the initial population of the household projections. Second, cohort changes in the percentage of single men and women between the 2005 and 2010 censuses suggested a drastic change in the actual composition of "unknown" marital states. In order for the percentage of single women aged 40-44 in 2005 to decline between 2005 and 2010, the proportion of single among those whose marital status was "unknown" had to drop significantly between two censuses.

Despite a continual deceleration in the growth of one-person households since 1990, growth of this household category suddenly accelerated between the 2005 and 2010 censuses. The acceleration was so unnatural that it did not match the projected growth rates of one-person households. On the other hand, the accelerated decrease in other private households (neither one-person nor family nuclei) in the household projections was consistent with the 2005—10 period. A comparison of transition matrices in Household Changes Surveys in 2004 and 2009 suggested that there was a behavioral change that accelerated the decrease in other private households. However, the degree of acceleration was possibly exaggerated by the census results.

The percentage of institutionalized population was projected to increase continuously up to 2035. An analysis of projection results showed that the main cause of this is population aging and that the percentage is increasingly dominated by the growth of the elderly population aged 85 years and older.