

# The Transformation of Partnerships of Japanese Women in the 1990s: Increased Reluctance towards Traditional Marriages and the Prevalence of Non-Cohabiting Couples

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The aim of this study is to describe the decline in the number of marriages in present-day Japan from the viewpoint of recent behavioral changes in intimate relationships between men and women. The so-called second demographic transition in developed countries since the mid-1960s has been accompanied by a series of changes in the relationships between men and women in the process of family formation. This research focuses on the recent trends in these relationships of Japanese women with regard to sexual behavior, the availability of a partner, and living arrangements with a partner.

The data set was derived from the 9th, 10th, and 11th Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted in 1987, 1992 and 1997 respectively. Two samples of never-married and married women between the ages of 18 to 49 were used in the analysis. Even though the number of marriages has declined steeply since the mid-1980s, the number of women who had engaged in intercourse and the proportion of women currently having intimate relationships with their partner has not changed significantly. In contrast, unlike the case in Western Europe, the number of women living with their partner has decreased radically and non-marital cohabitation has not prevailed.

These findings demonstrate that the recent nuptiality decrease among Japanese women has been accompanied with a shift in the partnership typologies, from the “traditional marriage (legally formalized and living together)” to “non-cohabiting couples (not being legally formalized nor living together).” This transformation should be distinguished from that observed in most western countries, where non-marital cohabitation (not formalized but living together) has replaced marriage to become the dominant type of partnership among younger people, with the exception of Southern Europe.