

The Postponement of Marriage in Japan and the “Single Lifestyle”

Akiko IWAMA

The postponement of marriage is of strong concern in Japan because of its consequences for fertility. This study focuses on the lifestyle patterns of never-married adults to explain the variation in their attitude toward marriage as well as their desire for marriage, using the 11th Japanese National Fertility Survey, which uses a nationally representative sample conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in 1997. To avoid biased results, the analyses are restricted to never-married men and women aged 18-49 who have jobs outside of the primary industries .

The results of cluster analysis show four lifestyle patterns among men and five among women. These lifestyle patterns differentiate the ideal type of spouse; for example, the women having a stronger career-orientation prefer a husband who understands their work situation. Generally, persons who are fulfilled in their public and private life expect a more superior spouse.

Using regression models by sex and cohort, the effects of lifestyle on the desire for marriage are estimated. Men tend to consider themselves to be the breadwinner and their marriage desires depend on their socioeconomic status; the higher the status is, the stronger the marriage desire. The effects of lifestyle are stronger than socioeconomic status among women. In addition, men with a fulfilled life have a stronger desire for marriage, while a fulfilled life is a disincentive to marry among women. These findings indicate that there is a gender difference in the relationship between lifestyle and the desire for marriage and that the perceived costs of marriage are especially high to women who enjoy their lives as singles.