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Fertility Decline among Married Couples and its Context in Contemporary Japan

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Over a few decades, the fertility decline in Japan is considered to be mainly caused by delaying marriage or expanding proportion of non-married women in their reproductive age. In recent years fertility among married couples is also declining, while it is still true that delaying marriage is a crucial determinant of Japanese lowering fertility.

In this paper, the contexts of fertility decline among Japanese married couples were examined. Utilizing the data from the 12th Japanese National Fertility Survey, the number of births by wives' age at marriage, and by wives' birth cohort through ten years after marriage was analyzed, and the demographical mechanisms of declining in marital fertility were clarified. The discussion was focused on three major phases: the influences of delaying marriage on higher parity births, the impacts of premarital pregnancy on reproductive behavior after marriage, and birth cohort differentials in post-nuptial fertility pattern.

The trend of increasing premarital pregnancy contributes to a higher fertility rate among wives who got married in their teens and early twenty's at the starting years of marriage. This means that the impact of premarital pregnancy on overall fertility rate is restricted within the younger age group at marriage and very early stage of marriage.

Among the 1950s birth cohorts, wives who got married before early 20's have a similar pattern of birth timing and the distributions of wives who gave the 2nd or 3rd birth after marriage are not different regardless of marital age. Whereas among the same 1950s birth cohort, if their marital age was later than mid-twenties, the percentages of wives with the 2nd and 3rd births are getting lower as later marriage. In the 1960s birth cohorts of mother, the relationship between later marriage and lower parity is much more prominent. This is a strong sign of reduction of completed fertility among younger married couples in current Japan where lifting marital age is norm.

Among wives who were born later than 1960, the sign of catch-up in birth timing with the previous birth cohort is not observed and the tempo is even more delayed and the level even looks lower. According to these phenomenon observed, the completed fertility among married couples will maintain its low level over the next decades and the decline in period and cohort TFR would be accelerated if the delaying marriage trend continues.