

# Recent Trends in First Marriage and Divorce and their Effects on Fertility Change in Japan

Miho IWASAWA

In making assumptions about future fertility rates for Japan's National Population Projections released by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in 2006, we developed a model in which future fertility rates are predicted by trends in divorce, widowhood, and remarriage as well as first marriage. In this paper, this model was applied to show how changes in first marriage behavior and divorce behavior have contributed to the decline in period and cohort fertility rates. The estimated number of first marriages and divorces of Japanese women in the year of occurrence rather than the year of registration was used to obtain measures that best reflect these behavioral changes. Results showed that the downward trend in marriage rates continued while the incidence of marriages preceded by pregnancy, which dramatically increased in the late 1990s, came to a plateau after 2000. According to the simulation results, over 80 percent of the decline in TFR between 2000 and 2005 was explained by the change in first marriage behavior. The proportion of females with divorce experience by age 50 was estimated to increase from 18 percent for the 1955 birth cohort to over 30 percent for the 1970 birth cohort. However, the contribution of increase in divorce rate to fertility decline was relatively limited. The simulations also indicate that if divorce behavior had remained constant at levels observed for the 1960 birth cohort, the cohort TFR for the 1990 birth cohort would have increased by only 3 percent in comparison with the medium value used in the population projection.