

# Married Women's Conceptions of "Family": Defining Conditions, Functions and Constituents

Saori KAMANO

Based on the data from the Fourth National Family and Household Survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in 2008, this paper examined how currently married women conceptualize "family" with respect to: (1) conditions considered necessary for a unit to be a family, (2) functions a family performs, and (3) kin who are included in the family. The results showed that all the conditions specified in this analysis tend to be seen as important: the highest importance was placed on intimacy, as indicated by emotional ties and a space where individuals can be themselves, followed by blood ties and sharing daily life. As for the functions performed by a family, providing emotional comfort and bearing and raising children were recognized as important to the same degree. The findings on whether particular kin are included as family showed that unmarried children, respondents' parents and spouses' parents are seen by the largest proportion as family, regardless of whether they live together, while the grandparents of either side and the spouse's siblings were considered by the lowest proportion as family. Comparisons of responses by city size, age, presence and age of the youngest child, living arrangement concerning parents, and levels of education and income showed that age most consistently made a difference in the way in which the women conceptualize family. At the same time, even after controlling for the effect of age, other socio-demographic factors showed varying effects on these dimensions of family conception. The significant effects of age of the youngest children and living arrangement of parents on the ways in which women define a family suggested that the extent to which women are affected by the process of individualism of a family is mediated through the daily experiences or life situation of the women, in addition to the larger social circumstances shared by people of a particular generation. The analyses that extracted a few typical conceptions of a family showed that two types of conceptualization emerged as the most typical. The first type saw intimacy as a definitive quality and emphasized obtaining emotional comfort as an important function, which was displayed by 15% of the women surveyed, who tended to be young. The second type saw intimacy, joint activities and legal/biological ties as definitive qualities and emphasized raising children as an important function, which was shown in 11% of the respondents, who tended to be older.