

Women's Attitudes toward Marriage, Family and Gender Relationships since the 1990s in Japan: Analysis of Overtime Changes and Determining Factors

Saori KAMANO

In this paper, I provided an overview of women's attitudes toward marriage, family and gender relationships since the 1990s, based on the analysis of women's responses in the 10th (1992) through the 14th (2010) National Fertility Survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. The attitudinal items examined include attitudes toward having sexual relationships before marriage, cohabitation, staying single, divorce, imperative of having children upon marriage, mothers with young children working outside, having own goals apart from one's family, and sacrificing one's way of living for the sake of marriage. I first explored the pattern of changes in the proportion supporting conventional attitudes each year and the relation between the proportion and birth cohort (1942 to 1992), age (18 to 49), as well as socio-economic characteristics, such as level of education, employment status, partnership status, divorce experience, number/presence of children, and geographic area and size of city one resides in. In all items, the support for conventional attitudes decreased between 1992 and 1997, but the changes after 1997 varied among items. A decreasing trend (i.e., a move toward liberal attitudes) continued throughout for attitudes toward mothers working outside and imperative of having children upon marriage. For other items, a reverse in the trend towards more conventional attitudes occurred in 2002 or later. There were differences among birth cohorts in the year such reversal occurs in some items.

Next, I undertook logistic regression analysis for each item with having a conventional attitude as a predictor variable, and survey year, birth cohort and socio-economic characteristics as explanatory variables. The analyses showed that controlling for socio-economic characteristics, in most items, being unmarried and having a partner, presence of child(ren), and not being employed increased the chance of having conventional attitudes, while having university education, having experienced divorce, and living in urban area decreased the chance of having conventional attitudes. Finally, in an attempt to understanding the impetus of change in attitudes through the years, I utilized logistic regression decomposition method to examine how cohort replacement and intracohort change contributed to changes in these attitudes: first without any covariates, and second, by adding the aforementioned socio-economic variables in the model. The results of decompositions show that in most items, changes occurred during this period are attributable to intracohort change rather than to cohort replacement, with some exceptions: cohort replacement accounted for about 60% of the change in attitudes toward having sexual relationships before marriage, and about half of the change in attitudes toward divorce between 1997 and 2010. Some contribution of cohort replacement was also found in changes in attitude towards mothers with young children working outside (about 30% contribution), toward cohabitation and toward self-sacrifice for the sake of marriage (about 40% contribution respectively). In all other items, it was mostly intracohort change that brought about the change in attitudes. The findings indicate that the various social and economic circumstances and ideological climate regarding marriage, family, and gender relationships, rather than generational differences, affect attitudes of women similarly for young and the old, whether it is toward being less conventional or more conventional.