

Why Do Married Couples in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area Have Fewer Children Than Those in the Rest of Japan?

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In Japan, the total fertility rate (TFR) varies by region. While the TFR in Japan has been below replacement level since the latter half of the 1970s, the TFR in large urban regions such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Area (TMA) has been lower than smaller urban or rural regions. In 2010, the TFR in the TMA was 1.24, 0.21 points lower than the TFR in the Non-Tokyo Metropolitan Area (Non-TMA, defined as all the regions outside the TMA). This TFR gap was related to not only the difference in proportion married, but also the difference in the average number of children married women have. According to major national surveys conducted from 1994 to 2010 by academic societies and the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), married women aged 45-54 in the TMA had 1.8-2.0 children on average and 0.2 children fewer than those in the Non-TMA.

In this study, we investigated why married couples in the TMA have fewer children than those in the Non-TMA. We used microdata from the Fourth and Fifth National Survey of Family (NSF) conducted by IPSS in 2008 and 2013, respectively.

First, we examined the parity of married women who were born in 1948-62 and aged 45-64 during the Fourth or Fifth NSF period. We discovered that married women in the TMA have 0.2 fewer children and lower probability of transitioning from parity two to three than married women in the Non-TMA. It could be argued that fertility variation between the TMA and the Non-TMA is related to contextual effects or the impact of local environment on childbirth behavior. We also found that the parity of married women is strongly related to women's age at marriage, regardless of region.

Second, we compared the fertility schedule of married women born in 1948-62 with that of married women born in 1963-77. We found that married women born in 1963-77 have lower probability of transitioning from parity zero to one or from parity one to two than those born in 1948-62, and that this difference is more apparent among women who got married by the age of 27. Since this difference is common to both the TMA and the Non-TMA, it could be concluded that marital fertility for younger birth cohort is decreasing in both regions, thereby maintaining the pre-existing difference in regional marital fertility.