

2000. 4. 26

国立社会
保障
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研究所

Working Paper Series (E)

No.9

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Increased Reluctance towards Traditional Marriages
and the Prevalence of Non-Cohabiting Couples

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Acknowledgements:

The author gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of Dr. Shigesato Takahashi and Dr. Gijs Beets, as well as three anonymous referees, and would like to thank Dr. Makoto Atoh and Dr. Ryuzaburo Sato for their comments at an earlier stage.

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to describe the decline in the number of marriages in present-day Japan from the viewpoint of recent behavioral changes in intimate relationships between men and women, and to determine which among the above changes have the closest correlation to the marriage decline. The so-called *second demographic transition* in developed countries since the mid-1960s has been accompanied by a series of changes in the relationships between men and women in the process of family formation. This research focuses on the recent trends in these relationships of Japanese women, with regard to sexual behavior, the presence of a male partner, and living arrangements with the partner.

The data set was derived from the 9th, 10th, and 11th Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted in 1987, 1992 and 1997 respectively. Two samples of never-married and married women between the ages of 18 to 49 were used in the analysis. Even though the number of marriages has declined steeply since the mid-1980s, the numbers of women who have had sexual experiences and currently have intimate partners have not changed significantly. In contrast, unlike the case in Western Europe the number of women living with their partner has decreased radically and non-marital cohabitation has not prevailed. Decomposition of decrease in the married population showed that the current marriage decline in Japan is explained by avoiding living with partner rather than stagnation in dating activity.

These findings demonstrate that the recent nuptiality decrease among Japanese women has been accompanied with a shift in the partnership typologies, from the “traditional marriage style (legally formalized and living together)” to “non-cohabiting style (not being legally formalized nor living together).” This transformation should be distinguished from that observed in most countries in Northern and Central Europe, where non-marital cohabitation (not formalized but living together) has replaced marriage to become the dominant type of partnership among younger people. While the pattern in Japan in 1987 was one of high proportions of both marriage and cohabiting with partners, resembling Eastern Europe, it changes over a 10-year period to resemble the Southern European pattern in which both are low.

I. Introduction

Since the 1970s there has been a drastic drop in the birthrate in Japan, as well as a sharp decrease in the married population, and attempts have been made to identify the causes for this decrease in nuptiality from a variety of perspectives. At present, it is difficult to point to specific reasons for the increase in the proportion of never married people. Instead, various images concerning single people have been revealed through the researches. For example, as the position of women in society continues to rise, women are likely to reject the current system of marriage, which forces an excessive burden on the female (Ohashi, 1993). A pampered life at home with financially secure parents has further raised expectations about their married life in the future (Miyamoto *et al.*, 1997). A dating culture to replace arranged marriage styles is still not fully developed, so singles are passive about the finding a partner (Atoh, 1998). The widening the range of social interaction is working to delay decisions to marry (Yamada, 1994).

Because no corresponding decrease in the desire of individuals to get married is observed (Takahashi *et al.*, 1999), the recent increase in unmarried population does not indicate the appearance of a group making a conscious decision to avoid marriage. Instead, this supports the explanation that the shift is the result of delays due to a passive attitude of "letting events take their natural course" (Ehara, 1994; Meguro, 1998).

Nevertheless, some ambiguity remains in the image of the non-marrying society. It is not just that (a) "more people do not want to get married," but that (b) "the meaning of marriage is changing for more people," and it is on this point that I focus in this paper. In order to interpret this nuptiality decrease from these viewpoints, it is necessary to step away from the binary classification of married/not married, because the concept of marriage are assigned a variety of meanings across generations. In this study marriage is reconsidered as one of the male/female partnerships. In order to gain an understanding of the overall changes of partnerships, it is effective to use behaviors for which the significance is comparatively stable. The indicators related to these partnerships have been chosen to be sexual experience, experience of childbearing, presence of an intimate male partner, and living arrangements (living with or separate from the intimate partner). Throughout this paper, these indicators are referred to collectively as "relational behavior." In other words, the term partnership in this paper encompasses the intimate behavior between men and women as related to family formation. The process of family formation is thought to include a variety of factors, such as existing social systems, economic circumstances, and demographic factors like sex composition of society. As love marriages become the norm, personal and emotional factors in mate selection and marriage are expected to become more important and there will be an increasing effect of relational behavior on family formation.

The ultimate goal is to determine which phenomena among these behavioral changes have the closest correlation to the marriage decline. Finally, comparisons are made with data from other countries, particularly other advanced nations in Europe and North America, to help identify the Japanese characteristics of the recent partnerships.

II. Background

In the latter half of the twentieth century, many developed nations have experienced total fertility rates (TFR) falling below the population replacement level. However, it has been pointed out that the current low fertility differs in several respects from the fertility transitions experienced in advanced countries in Europe and North America at the beginning of the century. Cliquet (1991) has used the concepts such as reproductive behavior and relational behavior to argue that fertility transitions in Europe completed by the 1930s can be adequately explained by the changes in the reproductive behavior of married couples (the ideal number of children, contraception, induced abortions, and completed fertility). However, the drop in fertility in and after the 1960s¹ is affected by significant changes in relational behavior (sexual behavior, cohabitation, single household, divorce, and remarriage), which must be re-examined in order to gain a true understanding (Cliquet, 1991). This latter fertility drop is called the “second demographic transition” (van de Kaa, 1987) in order to differentiate it from the earlier phenomena.

Different researchers have emphasized different points in explaining the causes of these changes in the Western societies, including the widespread use of modern contraceptive methods including the Pill, changes in the environment for women, and the appearance of value systems in which having children is prioritized for couples' and individuals' circumstances (Westoff and Ryder, 1977; Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1986; van de Kaa, 1987; Atoh, 1997a).

In Japan too, there is typically a separation between the fertility drop in the 1950s, which can be explained by a drop in marital fertility, and the decrease in fertility since the 1970s, which is largely the effect of a drop in proportion of persons getting married (Atoh, 1997b; Ogawa, 1998). Under such circumstances, with the shift toward a society with fewer children looming in the background, the fall in nuptiality in recent years has become the focus of attention. Based on indicators like the proportion of married people in the population and the mean age of first marriage, it can certainly be claimed that in Japan since the so-called “golden age of marriage” in the early 1970s, there has been a consistent trend away from marriage.² Reasons offered for the decrease in nuptiality in Japan are those related to the development of society including urbanization, increasing educational levels of women, and the increasing participation of women in the labor force.

However, since the 1980s it has not been possible to fully explain the decrease in nuptiality by the changes in socioeconomic attributes and social structure. Rather, the changes in behavior patterns and values that come about as a result of all the societal attributes should be considered important indications that are significant to the decisions not to marry (Kaneko, 1995; Hiroshima, 1999). The increase in negative attitudes toward conventional marriage and family styles including specific gender-based roles in family and marriage as a “matter of course,” is observed in western societies as well as in Japan, and there is some indication that there is a relationship between these value systems and the level of desire to marry (Iwasawa,

1999a). Should these changes be accounted for in the same way as the second demographic transition in Europe, or is this the appearance of something completely different? The answer to this is also important to verify the applicability of the second demographic transition in Japan.

It is a fact that people are marrying later, and that the number of unmarried people is increasing. At the same time, it is significant that this current decrease in nuptiality is accompanied by changes in the meaning of marriage itself. Decades ago, for a woman, marriage used to represent an overlapping of several life events, including the beginning of a regular sexual relationship (preparation for childbearing), leaving the parental home, living with an intimate partner, and leaving the occupation held as a single woman (Manting, 1994). In the 1970s, the linkage among romantic love, sexual relationships and marriage, the intimate relationship between men and women and reproductive behavior were tightly bound to marriage. In this period, it is fairly easy to identify the meaning of the marriage. In today's society, these links are weaker, leading to a diversification in the meaning of marriage. Furthermore, there is a danger that the trends in societal behavior cannot be adequately revealed with marriage as an indicator, since there is such change in the meaning of the institution. In such an era, in order to grasp the overall phenomenon of the decrease in nuptiality, it is important to consider marriage trends while at the same time looking at the changes in reproductive behavior and sexual intimacy between men and women, and to clarify the deep relationships between these behaviors and marriage as the institution.

In this paper, the term "partnership" is used as a general term for intimate relationship behaviors. Partnership also includes connections made on equal footing between individuals, such as dating and marriage. In fact, the changes in relational behavior that characterize the second demographic transition (fertility decline with growing popularity of cohabitation, increase in divorce, and so on) are said to be closely related to changes in the male/female role recognition and the appearance of the recognition of partnerships between equal individuals, so that there are even researchers who call the "second demographic transition" the "partnership transition" (Prinz, 1995).

In the following sections, the changes in sexual behavior and dating members, and reproductive behavior, while the former is often reported for never-married people and the latter is done for married people, are studied here specifically for all females to clarify these changes in this population. In this study, a partner is defined as a male lover, fiancé, cohabitant, or husband³, and when I use such expression as "women who have an intimate partner," they are considered to be currently involved in sexual relationships with their partner.

III. Data and Methods

The data are taken from the three most recent Japanese National Fertility Surveys (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 1987; 1992; 1997) from the responses submitted by married couples and singles, in an attempt to identify the trends in

sexual experience, childbirth experience, existence of partnership, and living arrangements for the partnership for the entire female population, including both married and unmarried women. This paper focuses on the partnership formation process, including marriage. Therefore, the subjects of this analysis were limited to currently married and never married women; and those who have been separated from a spouse by divorce or death have been excluded. For reference, Figure 1 shows the breakdown in the population by marital status and age, based on the data from the 1995 national census. The percentage of women (age 18 - 49) who are either widowed or divorced was 4.3 percent. There was no differentiation made between the first marriage and the second or later marriage, and all those in intact marriages were handled as one group "married." According to the data from the 11th National Fertility Survey (1997), 3.3 percent of wives among married couples (women age 18 - 49) are re-married, and the proportion of re-married is 2.0 percent for the entire female population (age 18 - 49).

When the proportions out of the combined samples of never married and married are displayed, estimates are made based on the population structure by marital status from the national census (the ratio of married females to never-married females). Figure 2 presents a year-to-year comparison of the proportion of married females by age for women between the ages of 18 and 49, based on the census data (total is sum of married females and never-married females). It is clear that since 1980 there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of married women in their mid to late 20s. Based on this breakdown of population by marital status, the patterns in intimate relational behavior by age for the female population are reported.⁴ A moving average was used for the distribution for each age group, using the values for 3 years before and after the center value for each age.

At this point, the definition of the term "married" should be stated. For both the National Census and the National Fertility Survey, the question of whether a couple is married is based entirely on the couple's submitted response, so it is possible that the married group includes those in consensual marriages (marriage-in-practice). However, Ishikawa has suggested the likelihood that the majority of these marriage-in-practice in the census of Japan are temporary situations (delayed official registration) (Ishikawa, 1995). For this study as well, the reported consensual marriages are regarded as effective marriages for which the official registration is delayed, and the data from these responses is handled in basically the same way as that from couples in officially registered marriages. Therefore, for "cohabitation", the data is based on the response of the submitting person, and includes only those who claim to be single and "currently living together." According to the wording of the questionnaire for single participants, the definition of "cohabitation" is "living together with a member of the opposite sex to whom you are not officially married."

If intimacy is claimed as the basis of sexual behavior, there is no intrinsic necessity to limit this to exclusive relationships between members of the opposite sex. It is possible to find same-sex couples as well as persons with multiple intimate partners. However, since the purpose of this study is to ultimately identify the relationship between intimacy and reproductive behavior, only the relationships between men and women are considered. Furthermore, cases

of lovers are assumed to be mutually exclusive relationships.

The sample was limited to females over 18 and less than age 50 (only for the 9th survey, up to age 35) for whom experience with marriage was identified. For the married sample, whether or not they had borne children was known, while for the unmarried, the existence of an intimate partner as well as desire or intent to marry that partner were clarified. The number in the sample was 11,788 from the 9th survey, 13,216 from the 10th survey, and 11,534 from the 11th survey.

IV. Changes in Patterns of Relational Behavior by Age Group

1. Sexual behavior and childbearing

(1) Trends of sexual behavior

There is not a great deal of reliable data on the historical trends on premarital intercourse. It is believed to have been increasing steadily throughout the 20th century in Europe and America, and since 1980, many countries are reporting that the age is dropping for sexual experience (age at first sex) (Cliquet, 1991). There are also indications in Japan that sexual experience among unmarried persons (premarital intercourse) is increasing in younger age groups (JASE, 1994; Wagatsuma, 1998; Sato *et al.*, 1999). However, with the recent decrease in the proportion of married people in the population, this raises the question about what kind of changes can be found in sexual experiences (experiences of intercourse) of the female population as a whole, including both married and unmarried women.

Single respondents have been asked about their sexual experiences since the 9th Japanese National Fertility Survey (1987). Figure 3 shows a comparison for each survey of the patterns of sexual experience by age for all women, including both married and unmarried respondents. There were no questions regarding the sexual experience of married subjects, but all married respondents were included in the calculations in the category of "sexually experienced."

Between 1987 and 1992, the younger age groups, up through the early 20s, show an increasing proportion of sexually experienced members. Between 1992 and 1997 there is a further increase in the early twenties age groups, as well as a simultaneous expansion of the increased range through the age 27 group. For example, in 1987, 29 percent of 20-year-old women have experienced sexual intercourse. This rose to 37 percent in 1992, and to 46 percent in 1997, showing a 17-point increase in 10 years. However, in the early 30s age group, there was a slight decrease in the proportion of those with sexual experience. For the older age groups, there was no significant change observed in the approximately 95 percent proportion.

What is significant in addition to the above numbers is the change in attitude toward premarital sexual activity. Even in Japan, the trend toward increasing tolerance grows stronger each year. The proportion of those who agree that premarital intercourse is acceptable if "there

is love” between the partners⁵ has reached 82 percent of unmarried men under the age of 35, 81 percent of unmarried women, and 87 percent of married women (The 11th survey (1997)).

(2) Experience of childbearing

Let us continue by considering the trends in childbearing. Here, childbearing experience for a married person means one or more children produced in the current marriage. In this study, data on the experience of childbearing was not obtained for unmarried women, or for married women with offspring produced prior to the current marriage. However, since extra-marital births account for only about 1 percent of all childbearing in Japan, it is not likely to cause any difficulty to assume that there are basically no unmarried subjects with childbearing experience. Since proportion of re-married women is about 3 percent for all age groups, it is likely that the percentage of re-married individuals with children only from the prior marriage is even lower.

Figure 4 shows the pattern of proportion of all females with childbearing experience by age. It can be clearly seen that there is a significant drop for women in age groups from the late 20s through the late 30s. In 1987, the percentage of 30 year-old women with childbearing experience was 79 percent, dropping to 66 percent in 1992, and to 56 percent in 1997.

There is very little change in the actual proportion of women who have had sex. There is a trend toward a lower age of first sexual intercourse. However, since the percentage of those with childbearing experience is remarkably low, it is possible to infer that the majority of those with sexual experience have been practicing intentional birth control before experiencing childbearing. Contraception is not only practiced by married couples that have produced the desired number of offspring. It is also practiced by a large proportion of unmarried people, as well as by married couples before they produce children. Thus, contraception is not simply used to avoid conceiving a third child; rather, a large percentage of contraceptive behavior is likely to be intended to ensure that the first child arrives at the desired time. Does the widespread “self-fulfilling conception” in European society as identified by van de Kaa (van de Kaa, 1987) now also describe the situation in Japan? It is widely known that the data regarding methods of contraception is quite different in Japan in comparison to western societies. In Europe and America since the 1960s, highly effective modern contraceptive methods, such as oral contraceptives (the “Pill”), the IUD, and sterilization procedures, have become widely used, and are said to play a large role in the decrease in fertility (Westoff and Ryder, 1977). In particular, marriages that are considered to take place due to premarital pregnancy (dependent marriage) have decreased (Bourgeois-Pichat, 1987). In Japan even today, the use of modern contraceptive methods other than condoms is rare.⁶ In light of this, it is likely that there has been an increase in unplanned pregnancies in Japan in conjunction with the increasing premarital sexual activity. Since there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of children born out of wedlock, or in abortions,⁷ it is possible to conjecture that there has been an increase in the number of marriages motivated by a premarital conception. In fact, it has been pointed out that the proportion of those experiencing

pregnancies before marriage among all marriages has been increasing with each subsequent marriage cohort (Otani, 1993; Iwasawa, 1999c). Naturally, this is probably strongly related to a weakening in the negative attitudes toward “bridal pregnancies.”

In any case, in the event of a dependent marriage, there is a strong probability that the pregnancy is an unintentional result. Therefore, in order to make the assumption that there are no unintentional premarital pregnancies reflected in the data, only post-marital pregnancy was considered as childbearing experience. This leads to the childbearing experience distribution shown in Figure 5, clearly showing even further decreases overall.

The author then considered the trends in sexual activity and those in childbearing experience separately. Figure 6 shows sexual experience overlaid with childbearing experience for each of the surveys. The portion contained between the sexual experience line and the childbearing experience line, which is the area corresponding to the group that is sexually experienced, but has not produced children, grows larger in each subsequent survey. A closer inspection of the detailed breakdown reveals that between 1987 and 1992 there is an increase in unmarried women with sexual experience, an increase in married women with no childbearing experience, as well as an increase in dependent marriages. Between 1992 and 1997, there is not a large change in the proportion of married women with no childbearing experience, nor in the proportion of dependent marriages, but there is a further increase in never-married women with sexual experience.

As this demonstrates, there has been a remarkable advance in the separation between sex and reproduction over this 10-year period. Nevertheless, an expression like “increasing activity in the sexual behavior of unmarried women” makes it easy to overlook the fact that the data also shows that there is a constant proportion of women who have not engaged in sexual intercourse.

2. Existence of partner and living arrangements

(1) Presence of partner

The focus of in this section is the presence of an intimate partner and living arrangement in relation to one’s partner. I am interested in exploring what changes, if any, have occurred since 1980 in the proportion of women who have a male partner.

Figure 7 shows the proportion of all women who have a partner in each age group in 1987, 1992 and 1997. There is no change over time in the proportion for early 20s age group, while a slight decrease is noted for the late 20s to late 30s age groups. Figure 8 shows the proportion of women who have had sexual experience and have a partner, that is, who are considered to be currently in sexually intimate partnerships. Sexual experience of never married in this case does not necessarily mean that there is a sexual relationship with the current partner. Nevertheless, at least, those dating a member of the opposite sex with no sexual relationship are excluded from these intimate partnerships, and from the result of the 11th survey that 96.6 percent of those women agree that the premarital intercourse is acceptable if there is

love, we can believe there is a high probability of a sexual relationship with the current partner.

This figure shows an increase in the proportion of women with a partner in the early 20s age group. For the around 30 year-old group, however, there is a slight decreasing trend at 88 percent in 1987 to 84 percent in 1992 and 81 percent in 1997. One might ask whether this indicates increasing ease in finding a partner in the younger age groups and increasing difficulty in doing so in the older age groups on account of age effect. This distribution pattern by age group only shows the situation at a specific point in time, however, there is another probability that when the women currently in their early 20s reach their 30s, they will show a higher proportion of partnerships than the current group of those in their 30s.

While there is a noticeable trend by age with regard to the presence of a partner, the change observed are small compared to changes in the percentage of women who are married over time as shown in Figure 2.

(2) Living with partner

To continue, the proportion of women cohabiting with a male partner are considered. "Cohabitation" refers to married and unmarried women living in the same household with their male partners. Figure 9 shows that in each subsequent survey there is a large decrease in the proportion of women cohabiting with a partner. For example 86 percent of 30 year-old women reported cohabitation with a partner in 1987, but the figure dropped to 80 percent in 1992, and to 73 percent in 1997.

To clarify the distinctions and connections among the existence of a partner, cohabitation and officially registered marriage, a detailed breakdown of the data for each survey is shown in Figure 10. Although there is a slight increase in the proportion of non-marital cohabitation, the increase is not large enough to explain the decrease in marriages.⁸ To understand the trend more deeply, we can look at the intention of marriage among unmarried women who have a partner, but are not cohabiting. In the 10th and 11th National Fertility Surveys, unmarried respondents with partners were asked about their intention to marry the current partner. Differentiating between respondents who intend to marry their current partners and those who do not intend to marry their current partners, we can see that the latter group is larger among those in their mid-20s or younger. Furthermore, the 11th survey shows a slight increase in this group even among those in their late 20s. The decrease in the women cohabiting with a partner almost equals the decrease in the women who are married.

To summarize, it has been demonstrated that although the linkage between the presence of a partner and cohabitation with that partner or the intention to marry the partner is weakening, there is still a strong linkage between living with a partner and formal marriage.

A Remaining related question concerns the living arrangements of unmarried women who do not cohabit with their partners. It has been noted that in Japan, most unmarried young adults live with their parents (Miyamoto *et al.*, 1997). Those people are popularly called "parasite singles" in recent years, since they are usually supported by their parents (Yamada, 1999). Figure 11 shows the breakdown of living arrangements for the 18 to 24 year-old group

as well as for the 25 to 34 year-old group of unmarried women, with each group further divided into those who have a partner (including lover, cohabitant and fiancé) and those who do not have a partner. Distinctions are made among different living arrangements: “living with parents,” “living apart from parents, but not with a partner (including those whose parents have died),” and “cohabiting with a partner” for each of the surveys. In 1997, 73 percent of the 18-24 unmarried group and 77 percent of the 25-34 unmarried group live with their parents. The corresponding percentages of all surveys are even higher among women who do not have a partner. However, among those who have a partner, there is a slight increase in the percentage of those who are cohabiting with the partner in the 18-24 group. In this same age group, 18-24, there is a decrease in the proportion of those living with their parents over the 10-year period of the three surveys, while there is an increase in the corresponding proportion in the 25-34 age group, even among those who have a partner.

In a society where more than 70 percent of unmarried women live with their parents, one wonders what effect this has on the family formation. A survey of earlier research on Europe and North America indicates that since those who live with their parents are likely to be influenced by their married parents and have less of a sense of independence than those who live on their own, they are more likely to marry than to enter into non-marital cohabitation with a partner (Liefbroer, 1991). There is also evidence, however, indicating that living with one's parents has a negative effect on both marriage and cohabitation (Manting, 1994). The 11th survey in Japan showed that the age at first marriage tended to be lower (early marriage) for women who lived in their parental home prior to the marriage, but this was not found to be statistically significant (Iwasawa, 1998). It is necessary to obtain more detailed data, including that of the never married, in order to determine whether living with one's parents hinders cohabitation with an intimate partner.

A review of the characteristics of unmarried women currently cohabiting with a partner revealed that nearly all of them (more than 90 percent) wanted to get married at some point, either to their current partner (70 percent), or somebody else (30 percent). Furthermore, approximately 1 out of every 5 women cohabiting with a partner is engaged to marry that partner (Iwasawa, 1999b). Based on the observation that cohabitation is relatively high among women in their early-20s, one can say that cohabitation in Japan is less a completely new life style that replaces marriage, than a step towards marriage. Indeed, 10 percent of women currently engaged to marry are cohabiting with their fiancé (11th survey).

3. Changes in the partnership pattern

In the early sections, we have looked at the changes related to sexual experience, reproduction, and living arrangements. These results can be presented differently with a focus on delineating the changes in patterns related to intimate partnership.

1) First, we can infer about the relationships from the behavioral data presented above.

For example, if one is cohabiting with a partner, then this implies the presence of a partner; however, the presence of a partner does not necessary imply cohabitation. In other words, it is possible to infer relations like the following: (a. Married) \subset (b. Cohabiting with a partner) \subset (c. Have a partner).⁹ Women who have partners include both who have had sex and those who have not had sex. In the following illustration, only women who have had sex and have a partner are defined as the women who have an intimate partner. The criterion used here is (c. Have an intimate partner).

2) Using these criteria (a,b,c), groups differentiated by varying degree of physical intimacy can be constructed.

First, the group satisfying all criteria (a, b, c) can be called “marital cohabitation,” typically considered the “traditional” form of marriage. Another group—“non-marital cohabitation”—includes those who are cohabiting but not formally married (only b and c). This category includes both cohabitation and consensual marriages. Then there are people who are in a sexual intimate partnership, but are neither married nor living together (c only), which can be called a “non-cohabiting couple.” Common to these groups is the presence of an intimate partner. In other words, women in these groups are considered to have chances of pregnancy in the current intimate partnerships. Respondents who do not fit any of these three groups do not have an intimate partner, and the last group can be called “no intimate partner.” These people include never-married people who do not have sexual experience and who do not have a partner, those who have sexual experience but do not currently have a partner, and those who do not have sexual experience but are currently dating.

Table 1 and Figure 12 show the changes in five-year increments in the relative distribution of these categories for each age group. The evidences in the above sections have indicated that while there has been comparatively little change in the proportion of women with sexual experience or with a partner, the proportion of those living with a partner has decreased. The same phenomenon can be observed here in the increase of non-cohabiting couples. There is a small increase in the percentage of women over 25 without an intimate partner, while there is a decrease among those under the age of 25. In all age groups there is an increase of non-cohabiting couples. On the other hand, there is the large decrease of married couples.

The above results can be presented more clearly by a components analysis (decomposition method). Figure 13 shows the changes over a 10-year period in the proportion of married women in the entire female population for each age group. Using the decomposition method to examine these changes allows us to extract the two effects on the decrease of married women; the effect of “changes in the number of women with partners” (hereafter abbreviated as PP effect) and the effect of “changes in the proportion of married women in the group with partners” (hereafter, PM effect).¹⁰ In other words, it will make it possible to gain a better understanding of the factor relating to the decrease in the number of people getting married in recent years, whether due to a stagnation in dating, or because there is an increase in the number of people who choose not to marry, even though they are dating or cohabiting. Figure 14 and Table 2 show the results of the PP effect and the PM effect relative

to the changes in the proportion of the married women over the 10-year period covered by the last three surveys. The 18 to 19 year old group shows the least change in the overall proportion of married women with the PP effect being positive, and the PM effect, negative. For the 20 to 24 year old group, there is an overall decrease in the proportion of married women; although the PP effect is actually positive, it is cancelled by the negative effect of PM. Both the PP and PM effects are negative for the 25 to 29 year old group, with the PM effect contributing more to the overall decrease in marriage. For the 30 to 34 year olds, in the beginning of the 1990s, the PP effect, that is, the increase of those who do not have a partner is considered to be the primary factor contributing to the decrease of married women. In recent years, however, the increase in the number of women who have partners but choose not to marry are more contributing.

In other words, decreasing nuptiality cannot be explained entirely by stagnation in sexual relationships or an increase in the number of people who do not have intimate partners. On the contrary, there is an increase in the proportion of women with intimate partners in the younger age groups. The changes contributing to the sharp drop in the proportion of married are the increase of women who have intimate partners but do not live together, and then many of whom continue living with their parents. This indicates that the decrease in nuptiality in the 1990s represents a shift from marital cohabitation partnership to non-cohabiting partnerships in which couples are sexually involved, but neither live together nor have legal ties to one another.

Considering the patterns in other countries, we can see that the decrease in nuptiality in Western Europe and North America since the 1960s has been accompanied by an increase in cohabitation. This differs from the situation Japan where there is a decrease in nuptiality without a popularization of cohabitation (Atoh, 1997b). The next section will present a cross-national comparison of changing patterns of intimate partnerships more systematically.

V. Comparison with Other Countries

Figure 15 shows the data from various countries on the proportion of the female population between the ages of 25 and 29 who are married and those cohabiting with a partner.¹¹ The white bars in the graph represent the proportion of women who are cohabiting with a partner. The black bars represent the proportion of women who are formally married. The difference between white and black bars is the proportion of unmarried cohabiting couples. For Japanese data, gray bars are added to represent the proportion of women who have intimate partners (both who have had sex and have a partner).

We will first look at the characteristics of the data from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand. The data show that there is not as much difference among countries in the proportion of women living with a partner as in the proportion of women who are married. Countries can be roughly divided into three groups: (a) countries in which both proportions are high, (b) countries in which the proportion of women living with a partner is high but that of the formally married is low, and (c) countries in which both are low. This classification

corresponds to the geographical distribution as well, where (a) is Eastern Europe plus Belgium, and (b) is Northern and Central Europe. Canada and New Zealand fall into the (b) pattern. Various countries in Southern Europe, like Italy and Spain, can be grouped (c).

The data for Japan show that over the reported 10-year period, both the proportion of those living with a partner and the proportion of those married dropped at a similar rate to comparable levels. We can not see a considerable increase in the difference which represents the proportion of unmarried cohabiting couples. In 1997, the proportion of married women in Japan was slightly higher than that of various Northern European nations, but the proportion of those living with a partner was the lowest among all 21 countries shown in the figure. In other words, while the pattern in Japan in 1987 was one of high proportions of both marriage and cohabitation, resembling Eastern Europe, it changes over a 10 year period to resemble the Southern European pattern of low proportions of both marriage and cohabitation.

In both Europe and Japan, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of early marriage and extremely high marital rate. As an illustration, the proportion of never married at age 50 in the 1930-40 birth cohorts in Europe is less than 5 percent (Festy, 1980). In the 1980s and 1990s, there is a decrease in the proportion of married women in both Europe and Japan. However, the increase in non-marital cohabitation partnerships that accompanied the decrease in marriage in Northern and Central Europe is not seen in Southern Europe or Japan. In Japan, a unique pattern is found whereby marital cohabitation is being replaced by non-cohabiting non-married couples.

It was noted in the earlier sections that the overall proportion of women with a partner has not decreased much over the 10-year survey period. However, in many other countries more than 70 percent of women are living with a partner, which means there is possible that the proportion of women who have a partner, whether or not living together, is even higher. Japan is assumed to have the lowest overall level of interaction between men and women. Nevertheless, even in Japan each subsequent survey shows an increase in the proportion of the younger age groups that has an intimate partner (figure 8), so it is reasonably likely that the differences with other nations in dating activity will shrink in the future.

Finally, there is another trend in Europe that should be mentioned. It has been pointed out that as the cohabitation has become widespread, there is an increase in the number of unmarried couples who maintain separate living arrangements. These arrangements have been called LAT relationships (living apart together) (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1987). The concept of the LAT relationships recognizes that the people in question are, in fact, steady partnerships, where cohabitation is not necessarily a requirement. A trend of increase in LAT relationships in Europe will suggest a shift in the pattern of intimate relationships towards the pattern in Japan. In any event, it is necessary to have a more in-depth understanding of young adults who maintain a non-cohabiting intimate relationship to determine the future trend of intimate relationships in Japan: whether non-cohabiting intimate relationships will decrease or whether such relationships will remain a permanent pattern like the LAT relationships in the West.

VI. Conclusion

Today, it is not just that the number of married people is decreasing; there are also changes in the linkage between women's intimate relationships and marriage. In order to gain an overall understanding of the modern phenomenon of decreasing nuptiality, the author have stepped away from the binary married/not married classification and have considered the trends in the pattern of women's relationships (relational behavior). The results here, however, only reflect a consideration of the woman's side. The findings for the 10-years period since 1987 are summarized below.

Although there is some increase among the younger age groups in the proportion of women who have had sexual experience, the overall percentage remains unchanged.

- There is a decrease in percentage of women who have experienced childbearing, and a separation between sexual activity and reproduction among younger women.
- Although there is a slight decrease in the proportion of women with a partner at around age 30, there is not much change overall. On the other hand, there is an increase in the proportion of women in the younger age groups who have sexual experience and who currently have a partner.
- There is a large decrease in the proportion of women cohabiting with a partner, whether married or unmarried.
- Although the proportion of non-marital cohabitation as represented by the difference between the proportions for married and living with a partner shows an increasing trend in recent years, it still only represents a very small segment of the population.

These findings show a decrease in percentage of women living with a partner, which can be interpreted as equivalent to the decrease in marriage, given the near equivalence of being married and living with a partner. This occurs without much change in the dating and sexual experience of women in the 10 years considered. In other words, the current decrease in nuptiality does not mean that there are fewer people finding partners due to a stagnation in dating and social interaction; instead, it can be claimed that the partnership patterns are in the process of shifting from a cohabiting style to a non-cohabiting style. Comparing these results with those from various countries in Western Europe and North America where there is also a drop in the proportion of the population that is married, the replacement of marriage with non-marital cohabitation found in Northern and Central Europe is a point that differs greatly from the situation in Japan. In comparison, the low proportions of both marriage and living with a partner in Southern Europe suggest that on this point, these countries have a pattern similar to that in Japan.

Since increased dating activity can be seen in the younger age groups, it is reasonably likely that the gap between Japan and Western countries in the presence of intimate partner will shrink in the future. However, this does not necessarily mean that there will be an increase in married couples. There may be an increase in non-marital cohabitation, or a continuation of

the current characteristic of increases in the proportion of unmarried, non-cohabiting couples. For males, there are comparatively fewer mates of the same generation, so it is reasonable to expect that the composition of their partnerships differs from that of the women. This paper focuses on the presentation of descriptive account of the changes over time. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of these trends it is necessary to further investigate the regulating factors that cause each of these partnership behaviors.

The unmarried, non-cohabiting style of partnership is considered to be less stable than marital cohabitation in terms of permanence of the relationship. Nevertheless, there is probably the advantage of making it easy to avoid friction between the partners as a result of the members of non-cohabiting couple allowing each other their own personal space, as in the LAT relationships in Europe. In Japan, specifically, there seems to be a strong relationship between never-married young adults and their parents. In order to predict the future trends in the decrease in nuptiality in this period of increasing non-cohabiting couple partnerships in Japan, it is necessary to make a more detailed analysis of the circumstances of the types of the parent-child relationships as well as male-female relationships.

¹ In Eastern Europe, fertility remained at relative high and stable level until mid-1980s when strong declines occurred (Coleman, 1996).

² For example, the first marriage rates (the number of the first marriage relative to the total number of never-married for 25 to 29 year old women) was 250‰ in 1970, and fell to 143‰ by 1995. The mean age at first marriage for women was steady at a relatively low level of 24.2 years between 1970 and 1972, and has been steadily rising since that time (26.6 years in 1997). Census data show that the percentage of never-married female between ages 25 to 29 reached at a low level of 18.1 percent in 1970, and has risen continuously since then, reaching 48.0 percent in 1995. The percent never married by age 50 for the cohort born between 1935 and 1944 is a little over 4 percent, and this is expected to rise to 13.8 percent for the cohort born in 1980 (Takahashi *et al.*, 1997)

³ It is assumed the women and her partners are involved in an exclusive relationship. The questionnaire for single respondents included questions about the existence of friends of the opposite sex, but these were not included in the definition of partner because it is often the case that friendships with members of the opposite sex are not exclusive.

⁴ The 9th survey (1987) referred to the population composition by marital status of census in 1985. In the same way, the 10th (1992) referred to the 1990 census, and the 11th (1997) referred to the 1995 census. In the 9th survey, the target group for single subjects was only those between the ages of 18 and 35. Therefore, in order to make the calculations for the 35 to 49 year old group for the 9th survey data, it is assumed that there is no change in the breakdown within the never-married group over age 34.

⁵ The original wording is “It doesn’t matter if a man and a woman have sexual intercourse even prior to marriage, as long as they love each other.” The percentages are the total of those who responded either “completely agree” or “agree more than disagree.”

⁶ The results of the National Fertility Survey indicate that only 8.6 percent of all married couples utilize modern contraceptive methods (other than condoms).

⁷ Based on *the Report on Maternal Protection Statistics* by the department of statistics of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, although there has been a recognizable increase in the number of abortions performed on women in their teens, there is a decreasing trend overall (Sato, 1997). The percentage of children born out of wedlock has been steady for about 30 years at approximately 1 percent; but, since the beginning of the 1990s, it has been gradually increasing, reaching 1.43 percent in 1998 (*Vital Statistics*).

⁸ However, there is a trend of increasing cohabitation in the higher educational group in Japan of today (Iwasawa, 1999b). This is similar to the situation seen in the United States in the mid 1960s, when cohabitation became widespread (Wiersma, 1983).

⁹ The case in which partners (husbands) live separately after marriage is not considered here.

¹⁰ The proportion of married females (PMF) in each age group is given by

$$PMF = \frac{MF}{N^F} = \left(\frac{Pt}{N^F} \right) \left(\frac{MF}{Pt} \right) = PP \cdot PM,$$

where N^F represents the total number of females in that age group, and MF is the number of married females, and Pt stands for the number of females with an intimate partner. PP represents the proportion of females with intimate partners in the total female population and PM is the proportion of married females out of females with partners.

According to the decomposition method (Rethford and Cho, 1973), the difference between PMF and PMF' at two different time points is shown to be

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta PMF &= PMF - PMF' \\ &= (PP - PP') \left(\frac{PM + PM'}{2} \right) + (PM - PM') \left(\frac{PP + PP'}{2} \right), \end{aligned}$$

where the first term means the effect of change in the proportion of females with partners, and the second term means the effect of change in the proportion of married females in the group of those with partners.

¹¹ The data for Japan is taken from the Japanese National Fertility Survey, and the data for all other nations is from the European Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) (Klijzing and Macura, 1997).

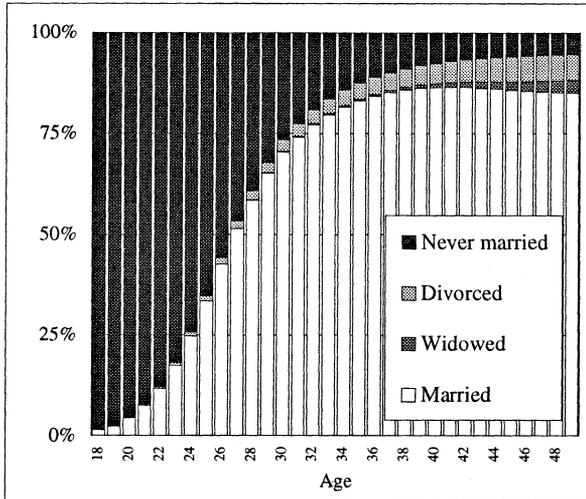
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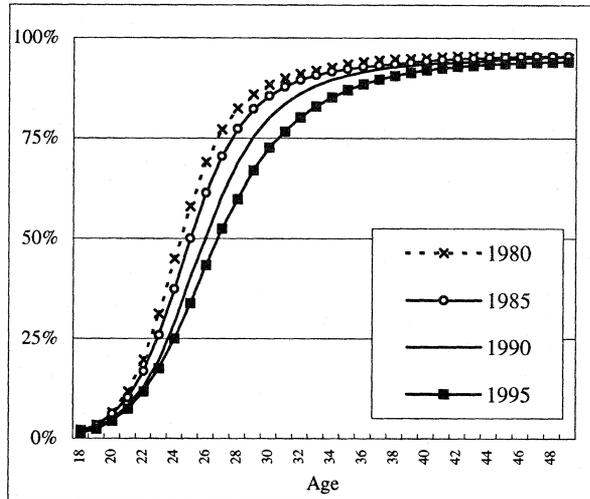
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Figure 1 Marital status of women by age, 1995



Source: Census of Japan, 1995

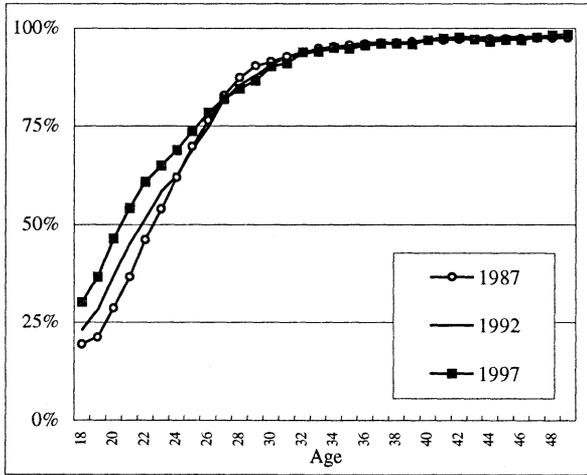
Figure 2 Percentage of married women by age



Source: Census of Japan, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995

Note: Percentage of married women out of the total number of women including both married and never married. In order to generate a smooth graph, moving averages are calculated from the data for the three years on each side of each target age.

Figure 3 Percentage of women who have had sexual experience by age



Source: National Fertility Surveys, the 9th (1987), the 10th (1992), the 11th (1997)

Figure 4 Percentage of women with childbearing experience by age

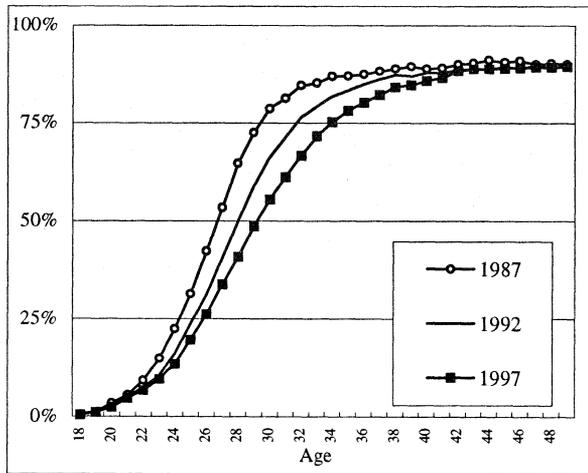
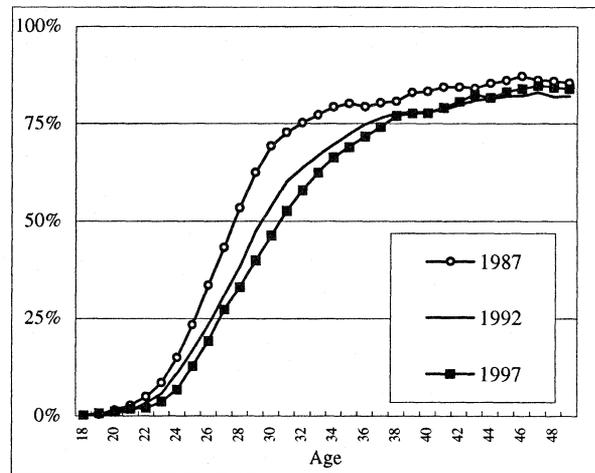
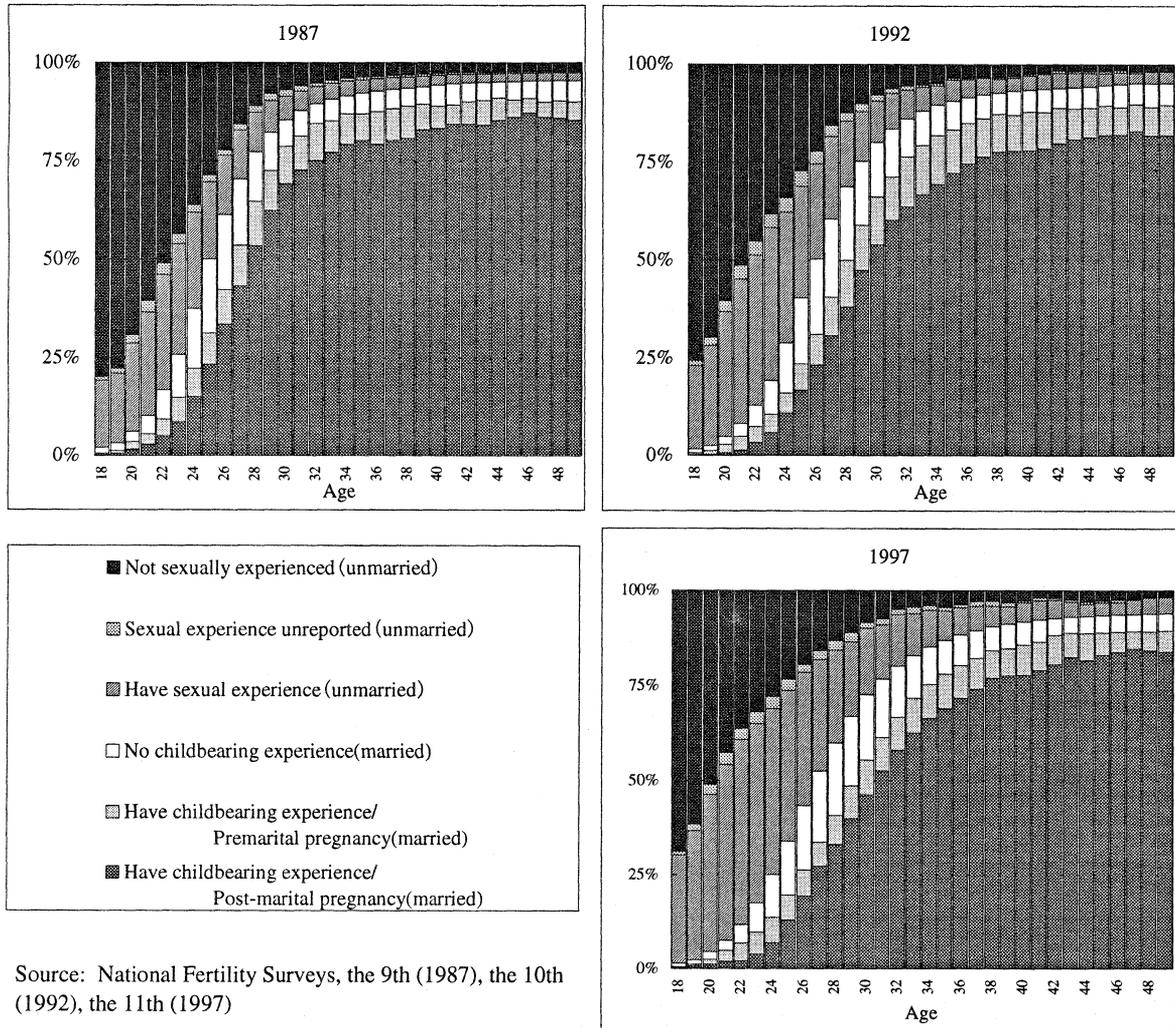


Figure 5 Percentage of women with post-marital childbearing experience by age



Note: For those got pregnant after their marriage.

Figure 6 Sexual experience and childbearing experience of women by age, 1987-1997



Source: National Fertility Surveys, the 9th (1987), the 10th (1992), the 11th (1997)

Figure 7 Percentage of women who currently have a partner by age

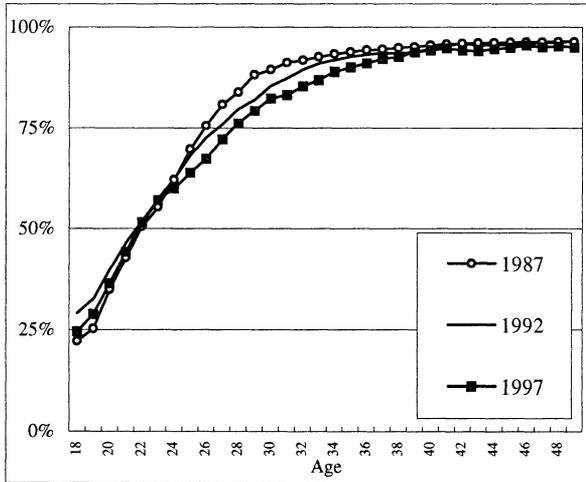
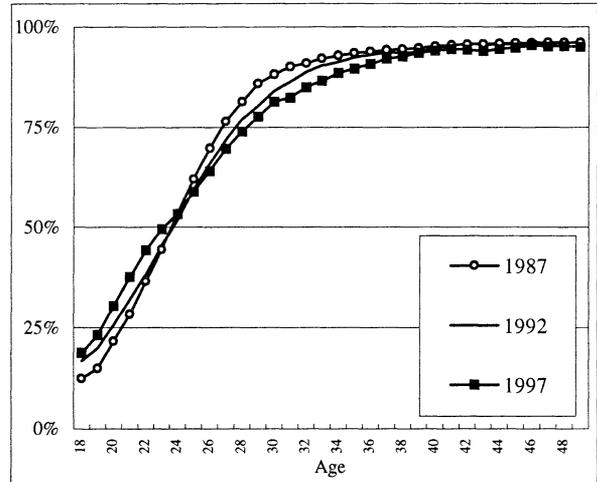


Figure 8 Percentage of women who have had sexual experience and have a partner by age



Note: Partners include lovers, cohabitants and husbands.

Figure 9 Percentage of women who live with their partner by age

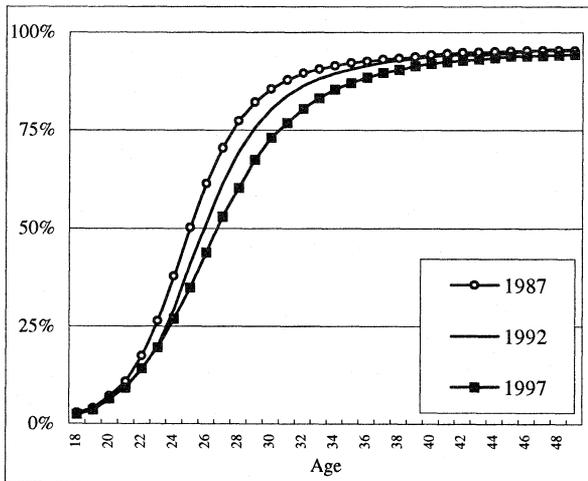
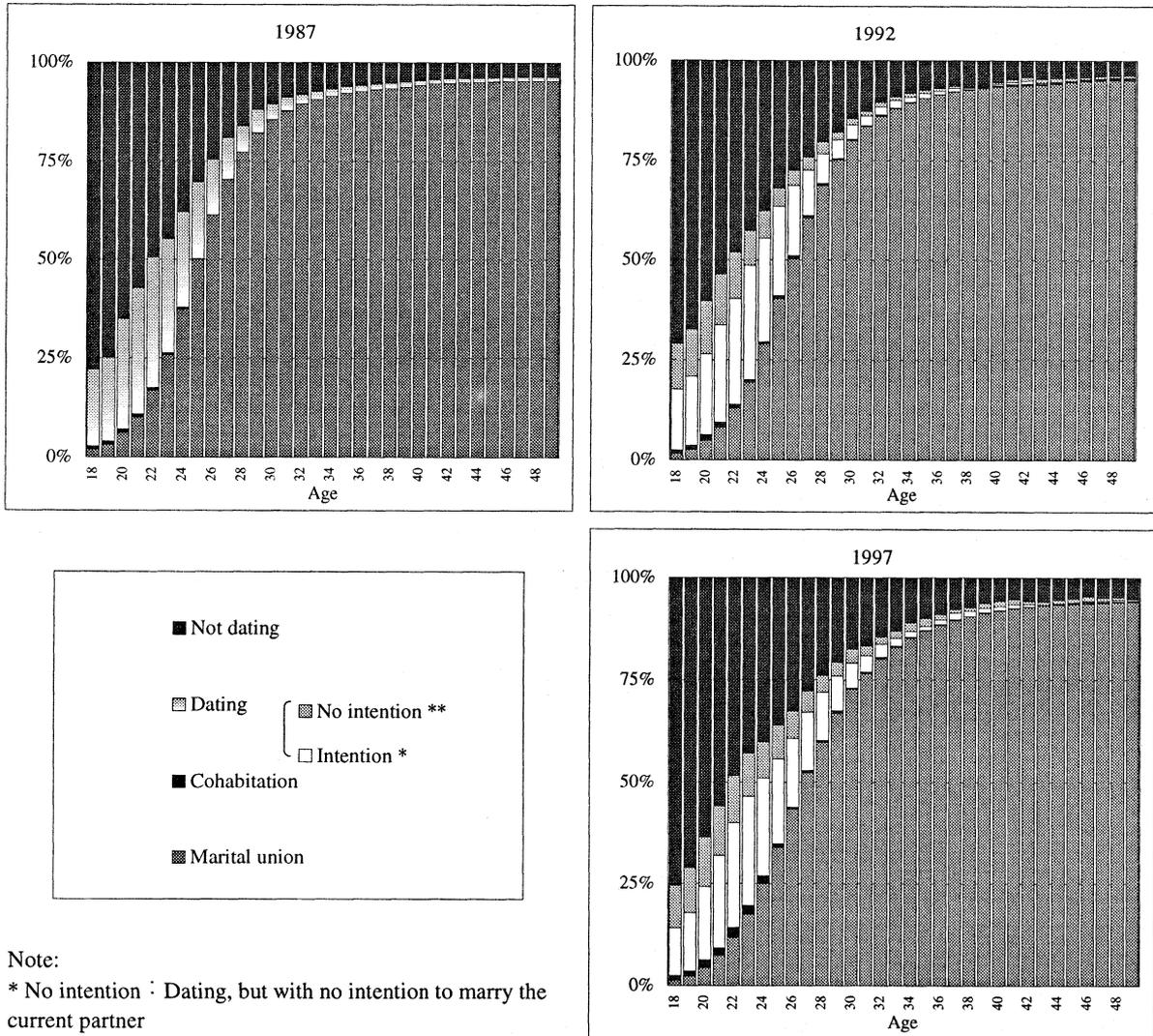


Figure 10 Presence of partner and living arrangements by age

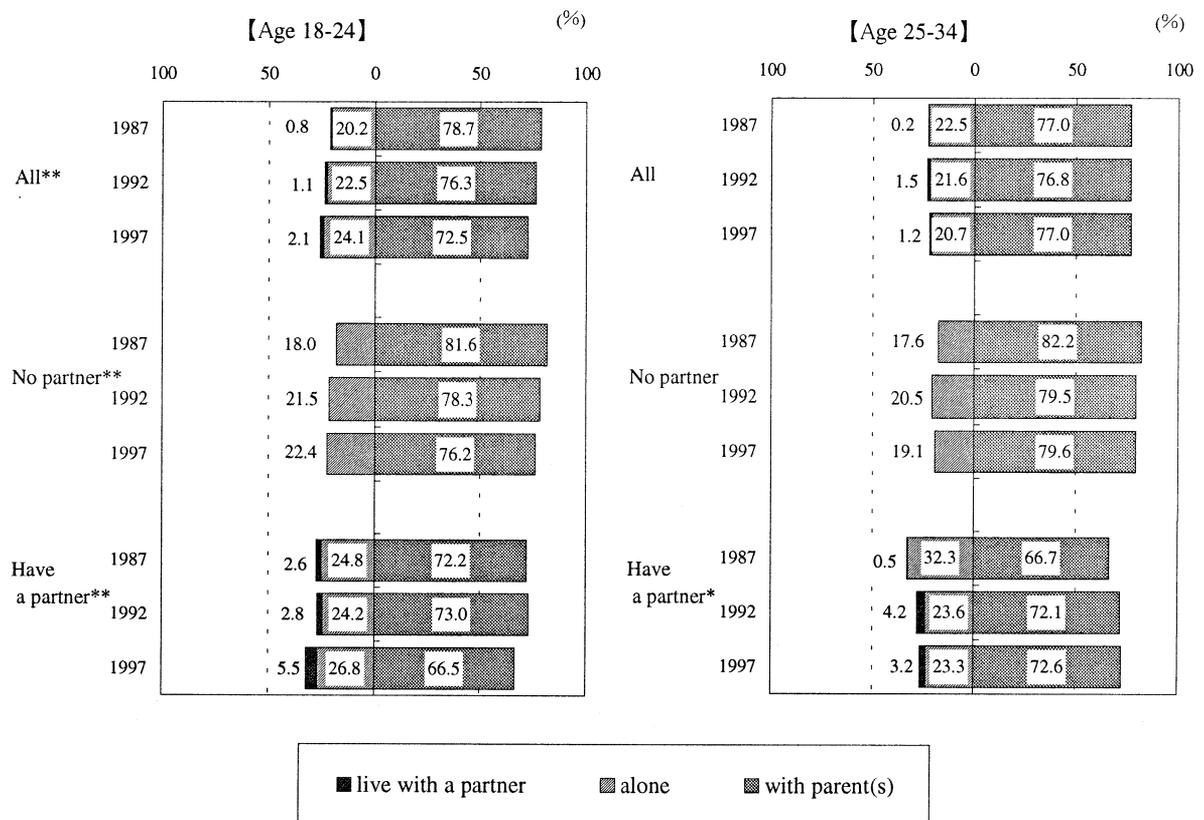


Note:

* No intention : Dating, but with no intention to marry the current partner

** Intention : Dating, with desire to marry the current

Figure 11 Living arrangements of never-married women by presence of partner and year of survey

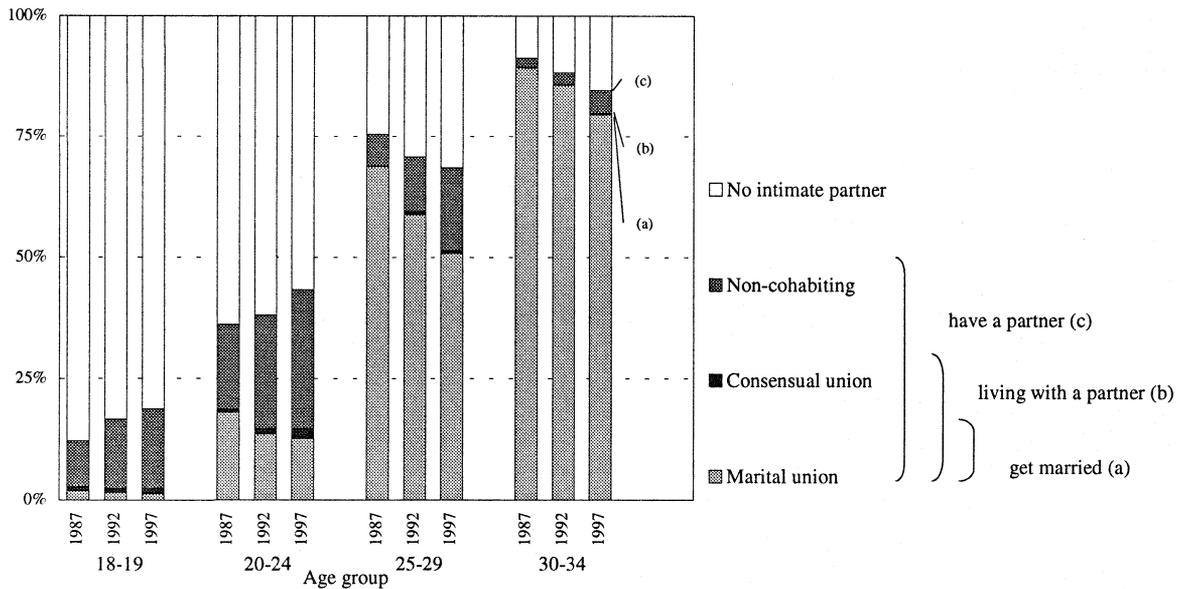


Note: *** p< 0.001, ** p< 0.01, *p<0.1 (Chi-square tests for the difference by survey year)

Table 1 Composition of Partnerships

Age Group	Year of Survey	N	No intimate partner (not a·b·c)	have a partner (c)			Total (%)
				Non-cohabiting (c)	Consensual union (b·c)	Marital union (a·b·c)	
18-19	1982	634	87.7	9.5	0.8	2.0	100.0
	1992	828	83.3	14.2	0.8	1.6	100.0
	1997	579	81.3	16.3	1.0	1.4	100.0
20-24	1982	1,601	63.8	17.4	0.7	18.1	100.0
	1992	1,974	61.9	23.4	1.0	13.7	100.0
	1997	1,857	56.6	28.6	2.1	12.7	100.0
25-29	1982	1,682	24.6	6.6	0.0	68.9	100.0
	1992	1,910	29.2	11.3	0.6	58.9	100.0
	1997	1,788	31.5	17.2	0.5	50.8	100.0
30-34	1982	1,971	8.7	2.0	0.1	89.2	100.0
	1992	1,975	11.8	2.3	0.2	85.7	100.0
	1997	1,747	15.4	4.8	0.3	79.5	100.0

Figure 12 Composition of Partnerships



Note: The "No intimate partner" group includes women who have a partner but have not had sexual experience.

Figure 13 Change of the percentage of married women, 1987-97

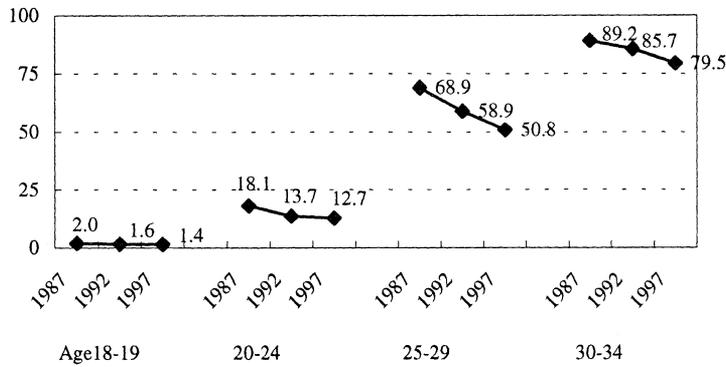


Figure 14 Decomposition of Marriage Decline, 1987-97

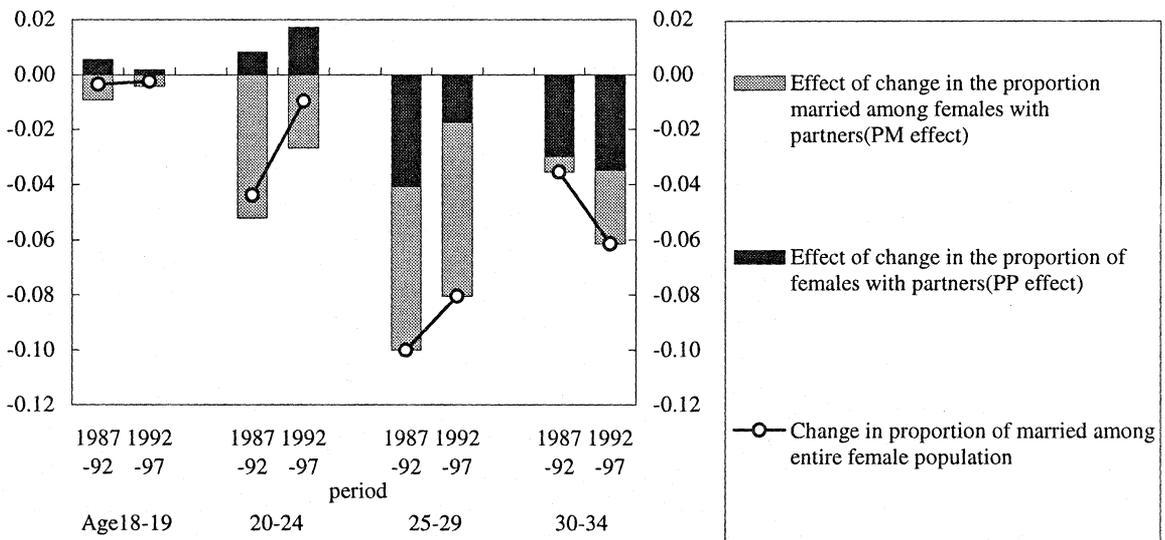
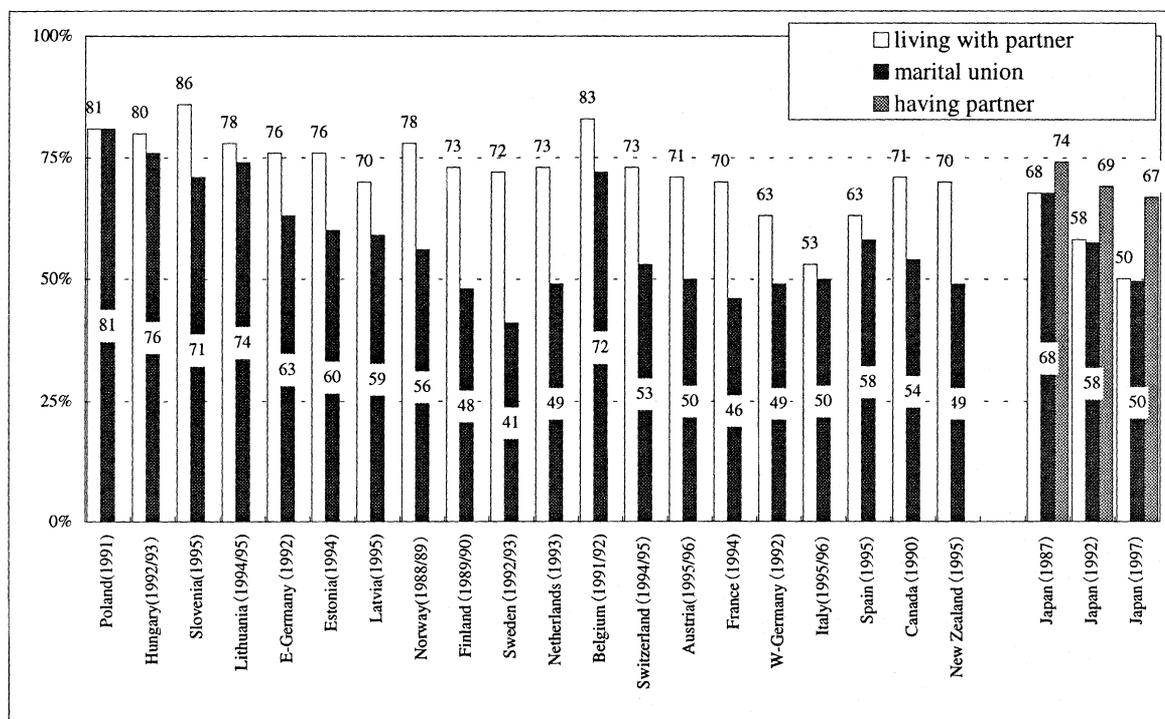


Table 2 Decomposition of Marriage Decline, 1987-97

	Age 18-19		20-24		25-29		30-34	
	1987-92	1992-97	1987-92	1992-97	1987-92	1992-97	1987-92	1992-97
Effect of change in the proportion married among women with partners (PM effect)	-0.0092	-0.0042	-0.0521	-0.0267	-0.0592	-0.0630	-0.0057	-0.0266
Effect of change in the proportion of women with partners (PP effect)	0.0056	0.0018	0.0083	0.0171	-0.0408	-0.0174	-0.0298	-0.0348
Change in proportion of married in the entire women population	-0.0036	-0.0024	-0.0438	-0.0096	-0.1000	-0.0804	-0.0355	-0.0614

Figure 15 Proportion of women living with their partner and women in marital union (age 25-29)



Sources: European Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) (excluding Japan)
National Fertility Survey(Japan)

Note: Proportion relative to total population of women between ages 25 and 29. The "living with a partner" group includes both married women and those living with an intimate partner to whom they are not married. The "not living with a partner" group includes never married women as well as single women with children (single parent). The numbers in parentheses indicate the year of survey. The values for Europe, Canada and New Zealand are taken from the European Fertility and Family Survey (Klijzing and Macura,1997).

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