

# Unmarried Cohabitation in Japan

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In most Western countries, family changes over the past 40 years are so remarkable that it is often referred to as the second demographic transition. Most dramatic change would be increase in cohabitation and non-marital births. Prior to the 1970s, cohabiting couples were statistically and socially invisible, but cohabitation has grown to the majority experience. Concerning below-replacement fertility, prevalence of cohabitation (and non-marital birth) and fertility seems to have a positive relationship. Indeed, Japan has been characterized to be a low-cohabitation society, as well as the lowest-low fertility country, and little is known about cohabitation in Japan, especially on the quantitative aspect.

I examine a trend and characteristics of unmarried cohabitation in Japan based on data from a national representative sample survey, the 1st Survey on Population, Family and Generation (SPFG), conducted in 2004. Data consists of 2,421 women aged 20-49. I show that the number of partnerships and how this has changed over time. Among females aged 25-29, those currently cohabiting is less than three per cent (Table 1), but more than one in five have some unmarried partnership experience including premarital cohabitation. I then focus on the type of first partnership in terms of whether it commences with marriage or cohabitation and, if the latter, whether it converts into first marriage. Among females with a first partnership and aged 20-39 at the time of the survey, one-fourth of them are first cohabited (Table 2). The median duration of most recent cohabitation is about 15 months. According to the multivariate analysis, the likelihood of unmarried cohabitation experience is higher in less educated groups and the 1970s birth cohorts (Table 3).

Table 1. Partnership distribution among Japanese women in 2004

	N	Total	Partnership Distribution						
			Marriage	Cohabitation	Having a	Having a	No lover,	No	DK
				n	fiance	lover	but have	relationship	
							had one		
Total	2,421	100.0%	66.9%	1.2	1.0	9.9	12.9	5.3	2.9
20~24	260	100.0	13.1	1.9	2.3	33.9	30.4	14.6	3.9
25~29	368	100.0	37.8	2.5	3.3	22.3	19.0	10.6	4.6
30~34	455	100.0	68.8	1.5	0.9	7.0	14.3	5.1	2.4
35~39	446	100.0	79.8	0.5	0.2	3.6	10.1	3.4	2.5
40~44	454	100.0	86.3	0.2	0.4	2.0	6.0	1.5	3.5
45~49	438	100.0	87.9	0.9	0.0	2.7	6.2	1.4	0.9

Table 2. Type of first partnership amongst women with a first partnership and aged 20-39 at the time of the Survey

	Year	Married directly	Cohabited and Married	Cohabited
Sweden	1992/93	8%	36	57
Noway	1988/89	33	31	35
Finland	1989/90	21	46	33
France	1994	27	26	46
Austria	1996	24	36	40
Swizerland	1994/95	23	48	28
West Germany	1992	30	32	38
East Germany	1992	20	25	55
Great Britain	1992	49	26	25
Italy	1994/95	88	7	5
Spain	1995/96	85	6	9
Japan	2004	74	17	9

UN ECE Fertility and Family Surveys and BHPS(Kiernan 1999).  
For Japan, Survey on Population, Family and Genelation.

Table 3. Relative risk of cohabitaion experience

	Experience of cohabitation (cohabitation=1, other=0)	Experience of cohabitation ( cohabitation lasting over one year=1, other=0 )
	exp(b)	exp(b)
Birth cohort ( 1970-74 )		
1954-59	0.328 ***	0.381 **
1960-64	0.394 ***	0.401 **
1965-69	0.749	0.971
1975-79	0.868	1.006
1980-84	0.215 ***	0.136 **
Residence in childhood ( Rural )		
Urban	0.837	0.849
Education ( High school )		
Junior high school	3.605 ***	4.012 **
Technical school	0.987	1.146
Women college	0.541 ***	0.531 **
University	0.596 *	0.633 #
Father's education ( High school )		
Junior high school	1.010	0.673 *
Technical school	3.633 ***	2.351 *
University	1.397 #	1.199
Months of exposure	0.994 ***	0.992 **
N	2,248	2,248
-2 Log L	1761.824	1202.707

\*\*\* p<0.001 \*\* p<0.01 \* p<0.05 # p<0.10

( ) shows reference categories.