

**Delayed Childbearing and the Changing Age Composition of Women
who Desire Children in Japan**

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Abstract

We identified women who desired at least one (additional) child using data from the Japanese National Fertility Surveys, and described changes in the size and composition of this group as a consequence of delayed childbearing. The number of reproductive age women desiring a child increased 17% between 1982 and 2005 - from 9.78 million to 11.47 million. Over the same period, this population aged, with the proportion at least 35 years old increasing dramatically from 5% to 15%. Because female fecundity declines with age, this aging of the population of women desiring additional children will presumably result in an increase in infertility. We estimated the number of women in Japan who are receiving examinations or medical care related to fertility, and these estimates show that 179 thousand women were receiving some infertility services at the survey time in 2005 (1.2% of married women of reproductive age).

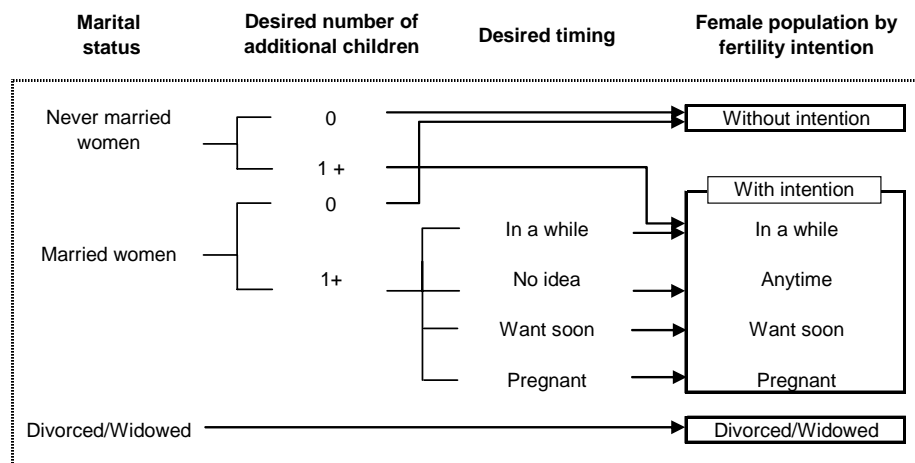
Introduction and methods

Japan's total fertility rate which has been declining since the mid 1970s, was 1.32 in 2006 and it is still low level among developed countries. However, the main cause of this low fertility is not an increase in the prevalence of women who do not intend to have any children but rather the postponement of childbearing. In this paper, I focus on the consequence of longtime trends in postponement of childbearing. We identified women who desired at least one (additional) child using responses to a question about fertility intentions in the Japanese National Fertility Surveys, and described changes in the size and composition of this group as a consequence of delayed childbearing.

Female population was identified by the desired number and the desired timing of additional children as shown in Figure 1. To obtain the number of women in Japan, we use weight variable based on female population from each census in Japan.

It might be possible that infertility is increasing due to aging of women having a desire for childbearing. However, since there has been little research on infertility at national level and the definition of infertility has not been consistent in various fields, little is known about size and trends in infertility women or couples. In this paper, I used responses to a question about experience of visiting a clinic to seek help in having a child and anxiety about infertility in the JNFS, and estimated the number of married women with experience as one of proxies for infertility women.

Figure 1: Structure of female population in terms of fertility intention



Results

Size and composition of women who desire children

The number of reproductive age women desiring a child increased 17% between 1982 and 2005 - from 9.78 million to 11.47 million. Most of increase was attributed to never married women

without children. Over the same period, this population aged, with the proportion at least 35 years old increasing dramatically from 5% to 15%, and average age of this group rising from 25.1 to 27.6.

Size and composition of women who are receiving infertility services

Because female fecundity declines with age, this aging of the population of women desiring additional children will presumably result in an increase in infertility. Focusing on women who report visiting a clinic to seek help in having a child, we use data from the National Fertility Surveys to estimate the number of women in Japan who are receiving examinations or medical care related to fertility. These estimates show that 179 thousand women (95% confidence interval, 139 - 220) were receiving examinations or medical care at the survey time in 2005. This is 1.2 % of married women of reproductive age. Among this population, 120 thousand women are childless, while another 50 thousand with one child are facing so-called secondary infertility.

Table 1: Size and composition of women who desire children

Size and composition	1982	1987	1992	1997	2002	2005
Population with fertility intention (million)	9.78	9.83	10.86	10.88	11.28	11.47
Proportion of women with fertility intention(%)	34.8 %	34.9	38.0	38.3	42.1	43.9
Age of women						
18 - 19	150	161	167	132	120	116
20 - 24	362	368	406	381	323	309
25 - 29	281	273	302	331	333	311
30 - 34	137	121	151	175	228	245
35 - 39	34	49	47	50	88	113
40 - 44	10	7	10	12	26	37
45 - 49	5	4	3	6	9	16
Parity						
0 (Never married)	625	693	731	756	789	808
0 (First married)	128	95	126	119	116	117
1 (First married)	177	151	152	153	159	153
2 (First married)	78	82	60	42	43	46
3 + (First married)	6	8	5	5	5	5
Number of additional intended children						
3 +	253	239	250	238	206	215
2	458	480	562	591	619	643
1	267	264	274	259	303	290
Total number of children desired^a	1,941	1,940	2,148	2,155	2,159	2,220
Desired timing of the additional child						
Pregnant	-	-	76	44	42	48
Want soon	-	-	117	106	117	132
No idea	-	-	47	51	67	63
In a while	-	-	836	875	898	900
Average age of women who desire children	25.1	25.0	25.1	25.8	27.0	27.6
Proportion at least 35 years old among women with fertility intention(%)	4.9	6.1	5.5	6.3	10.9	14.5

Note: Estimates among 18-49 aged women based on the Japanese National Fertility Surveys in the respective year.
 a Sum of the number of women who desire children weighted by the number of their additional children (3 substitute for 3+).