Remarriage in Japan: A First Look

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Abstract

Our goal in this paper is to provide the first comprehensive analysis of remarriage in Japan. Using retrospective marital history data from the 14th National Fertility Survey (conducted in 2010), we model the risk of remarriage as function of educational attainment, presence of children, and other covariates. We find no evidence that remarriage plays a role in exacerbating the implications of divorce for poverty and inequality. In contrast to divorce, which is concentrated among women with lower levels of education, there are no significant educational differences in remarriage. We also find that remarriage is a potentially important policy target for efforts to promote fertility. Women without children from their previous marriage are much more likely to remarry than their counterparts with children. These results highlight the importance of further research on patterns of childbearing in second marriages.

Two demographic trends central to policy discussion in Japan are the prolonged period of below-replacement fertility and the more recent rise in divorce. The direct link between very low fertility and rapid population aging has motivated a wide range of policy efforts to promote marriage and family formation. Rising divorce rates have contributed to a rapid increase in the prevalence of single mothers, motivating both proposed revisions in public income support policies and growing concern about rising levels of poverty and income inequality. Although remarriage plays a potentially critical role both in shaping fertility trends and in ameliorating the economic impact of divorce for women, research on the prevalence, timing, and correlates of remarriage in contemporary Japan is very limited. We therefore know little or nothing about the extent to which children from a previous marriage influence the likelihood of remarriage, the extent to which remarriage is associated with childbearing at the individual level, or the extent to which remarriage and childbearing within remarriage influence fertility rates at the aggregate level. We also know nothing about the extent to which remarriage may ameliorate or perhaps exacerbate the stratification processes generated by the concentration of divorce and single parenthood among those with more limited socioeconomic resources. Recent studies have demonstrated a strong negative association between educational attainment and divorce (Raymo, Fukuda, and Iwasawa 2013) but there is no research on the relationship between educational attainment and remarriage.

The paucity of research on remarriage in Japan is surprising given the major efforts invested in understanding the correlates of divorce and patterns of stepfamily fertility in the U.S. and many European countries (see Sweeney 2010 for a review). To a large extent, the lack of information on remarriage in Japan reflects data limitations. Vital Statistics data allow for calculation of remarriage rates, but contain little information about the correlates of remarriage

risk. Sample surveys, such as the Japan General Social Survey, are characterized by either insufficient numbers to meaningfully estimate models of remarriage or insufficient information on the timing of marital dissolution and remarriage. Our goal in this paper is to utilize a new source of nationally-representative survey data to examine women's remarriage as a function of both the presence of children from the previous marriage and educational attainment. Results will provide an empirical basis for further research on relationships between remarriage and fertility and on the role of remarriage in shaping the links between divorce and socioeconomic stratification.

Data

We use data from the 14th Japanese National Fertility Survey (JNFS) conducted in 2010. Although the JNFS has long collected information on whether or not respondents experienced first marital dissolution and remarriage, the 2010 survey was the first to collect information on the timing of those transitions. The JNFS is conducted in two parts – a survey of married women age 18-49 and a survey of unmarried men and women age 18-49. Sample sizes and response rates for the 2010 survey were 7,847 (87%) and 10,851 (74%), respectively. Among the 8,562 women who reported ever marrying, 1,129 (13%) indicated that their first marriage ended in divorce or widowhood. A number of these women did not provide a year of first marital dissolution (n = 204) and are thus excluded from the preliminary analyses. These restrictions leave us with a sample of 925 women, 619 (67%) of whom were not remarried and 306 (33%) of whom were remarried at the time of the survey. Because respondents were asked only about the timing of first marital dissolution and entry into the current marriage, it is possible that some of the remarriages we observe are actually third or higher-order marriages, in which case we would miss earlier remarriages. Information on higher-order marriages is very limited, but tabulations

of data from the Japan General Social Survey suggest that third marriages are extremely rare in Japan.

Method

Using these data, we estimate Cox proportional hazard models for the transition to remarriage. Exposure to the risk of remarriage begins in the month of first marital dissolution and women are censored at either the month of entering their current marriage or the survey date (June, 2010).

Results

Preliminary results are presented in Table 1. The estimated hazard ratios indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in the risk of remarriage by women's educational attainment. The pattern of coefficients, however, suggests that education may be inversely associated with remarriage and it is possible that the relatively small numbers (even in the JNFS) preclude precise estimation of these coefficients. Survival curves based on these coefficients show that the proportion remarried within 15 years of first marital dissolution is .60 for women in the lowest education category (junior high school) but only .40 for university graduates. These preliminary results thus provide no evidence that highly-educated women are more likely to remarry, a pattern that would presumably exacerbate the stratification processes associated with the relatively high risk of divorce among women with lower levels of education.

With respect to the presence of children, it is clear that single mothers are much less likely to remarry than their counterparts with no children from their first marriage. This finding is not surprising and highlights the importance of incorporating remarriage into analyses of fertility. Women whose first marriage dissolved subsequent to motherhood have, on average, 1.8 children. Additional childbearing following remarriage would thus result in relatively large families among these women. Among those whose first marriage dissolved prior to having

children, the predicted proportion remarrying within 15 years from this model is nearly .80, twice as high as for women with at least one child from their previous marriage. These results highlight the potential importance of remarriage for policy efforts seeking to promote family formation and increase fertility.

Next steps

Building upon these preliminary analyses, we will examine a wider range of covariates including duration of first marriage, age of children, employment status, and region of residence. We will also consider alternative specifications of the baseline hazard of remarriage and evaluate possible non-proportionality with respect to educational attainment and the presence of children. Finally, we will compare the prevalence of divorce and remarriage in the JNFS with registration data from the Vital Statistics and evaluate the sensitivity of results to missing data and underreporting. Results will provide the first comprehensive evidence on the correlates of remarriage in Japan.

References

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Table 1: Estimated Hazard Ratios from Cox Proportional Hazard Model of Remarriage within 15 Years of First Marriage Dissolution

Variable	Hazard Ratio	z	P>|z|
Age at first marital dissolution	0.96	-3.53	0.00
Year of first marital dissolution	1.06	4.39	0.00
Children from first marriage			
No (omitted)	1.00	-	-
Yes	0.35	-8.71	0.00
Missing	2.52	1.77	0.08
Educational Attainment			
Jr. High School	1.30	1.50	0.13
High School	1.00	-	-
Vocational School	1.01	0.05	0.96
Jr. College	0.85	-0.95	0.34
University	0.72	-1.28	0.20
Missing	0.79	-0.32	0.75

N=931

degrees of freedom=9

log likelihood=-1840