

Another Work-Family Interface:
How Work Characteristics Shape Marriage and Fertility Intentions in Japan

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Abstract

Much previous research highlights the importance of job and workplace characteristics on work-family conflict for married people and parents. Nevertheless, we know little about how the specific context of work affects young adults' desires for marriage and parenthood. We use a representative sample of never-married men and women in Japan, a country well-known for not only rapid declines in marriage and fertility, but also high incompatibility between women's work and family roles, to examine how job features and workplace conditions are linked to individuals' intentions about marriage and childbearing. The analysis indicates that work characteristics conducive to greater work-family conflict, surprisingly, have little and occasionally positive effects on various indicators of intentions to marry and have children. It appears that working settings that are highly stressful and very demanding of time encourages women to more actively seek marriage as a way to exit their unpleasant working condition. Furthermore, job and workplace characteristics that signify better economic future have some positive effects on men's intentions about marriage and fertility. Workplace sociability, however, is the most relevant to marriage and fertility intentions. Especially for women, working in more collaborative and interactive environments is associated with their trying harder to meet potential marriage partners, their expressing desire for becoming parents, and their wanting a larger number of children. We argue that in more sociable workplaces, individuals are more likely to be subject to influences of the previous cohorts and the pressure of conforming to the "normal" life-course trajectory, thus more interested in marriage and parenthood.