

# The Changing Tempo of Fertility in Korea

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Although there is evidence of an increase in pre-marital pregnancy in Korea (Song 1975), it is within marriage that nearly all childbearing takes place. Marital status defines the population at risk of bearing children. Thus, we concentrated our analysis of the timing of fertility among selected marriage cohorts. Focusing on marriage cohorts and using a measure of tempo which controls for duration of marriage has the advantage of controlling for the length and timing of exposure to the risk of childbearing among respondents of different ages.

Table 1 presents data on the characteristics of 12 marriage cohorts beginning with women first married in the calendar years 1936 to 1938 and continuing to include women married during three year periods through 1969-71. The data in Table 1 show several predictable trends. There is a steady increase in the age at marriage from a mean of 16.2 among those married between 1936 and 1938 to a mean of almost 22 among women married during the 1969-71 period. The total number of pregnancies and live births declines steadily as the year of marriage becomes more recent. Use of contraception and abortion is low among the oldest cohorts, peaks among those married the 1950s, who were entering the later stages of the reproductive period at the time of the 1971 survey, and then declines among women married more recently. The changing social environment can be seen in declining proportion of respondents who have lived in rural areas and the increasing proportion who have received at least a middle school education.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Ever-Married Women, by Marriage Cohort**

	Marriage Cohort											
	1936 -38	1939 -41	1942 -44	1945 -47	1948 -50	1951 -53	1954 -56	1957 -59	1960 -62	1963 -65	1966 -68	1969 -71
Mean Age Marriage	16.2	16.6	16.8	17.0	17.4	18.5	19.4	19.8	20.7	21.0	21.9	21.9
Mean Duration of Marriage	29.2	26.2	24.4	21.7	18.8	16.6	14.3	11.7	9.0	6.2	3.6	1.0
Mean Number of Live Births	6.6	6.3	6.1	5.5	5.3	4.9	4.5	3.9	3.3	2.6	1.7	1.6
Mean Age at Survey	50.0	47.4	44.6	41.8	39.5	37.5	35.5	32.9	30.8	28.1	26.0	23.4
Percent Currently Using Contraception	1.0	2.0	11.1	25.7	29.8	31.5	33.9	30.9	24.6	18.1	15.2	3.6
Percent Ever Using Contraception	3.7	12.2	27.7	46.7	53.8	58.4	59.6	52.9	50.3	40.8	29.9	8.7
Percent Rural (Longest Residence Before Marriage)	87.7	82.8	81.8	78.4	81.0	83.6	78.1	77.0	76.7	76.7	73.6	68.6
Percent Attended Middle School or Higher	2.7	4.5	7.5	12.1	9.8	16.2	17.7	20.3	27.1	34.1	41.2	56.8
TOTAL	301	378	479	413	421	464	567	582	558	549	595	449

One problem caused by limitations in the survey's sample frame must be mentioned. Since only women below age 55 in 1971 were interviewed, respondents married at age 20 or over between 1936-1938 are excluded from the study. Other data suggest that the number of women married at age 20 and over during the 1930s was small (Lapierre-Adamcyk and Burch 1974). Although it is unlikely that our results are seriously distorted, this factor should be kept in mind.

Change in the timing of fertility can be seen in the data presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 shows the percent of women in each cohort who have had a live birth by each specified duration of marriage. It is apparent that in time almost all married women in Korea have at least one live birth. There has been no change in the probability of a woman eventually having child. However, the percent the women who have had at least one live birth during the early years of marriage has increased dramatically. Whereas only 10 percent of those in the 1936-38 marriage cohort had had a live birth by the end of the first year of marriage, more than 40 percent of those in the 1966-68 cohort had a live birth within the first year after marriage. This pattern continues throughout the first five years of marriage and is remarkably consistent. Women married more recently were much more likely to have had a live birth at every marriage duration up to five years than women in earlier marriage cohorts. The magnitude of the differences between the oldest and youngest cohorts is substantial. Consider, for example, the experience of women after four years of marriage. Among those in the 1936-38 and 1939-41 cohorts, roughly two-thirds had a first birth by the fourth year of marriage. Among women married between 1942 and 1953, between 70 and 80 percent had a first birth during the first four years of marriage. For women married in 1954 and later, 90 percent had a first birth by the time

**Table 2. Percent of Ever-Married Women Having a Live Birth, by Marriage Cohort and Marital Duration**

Marriage Cohort	Marital Duration					
	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	10 Years
1936-38	10.0	31.2	47.5	65.1	75.4	98.3
1939-41	17.2	41.0	57.7	69.0	77.0	98.4
1942-44	10.6	35.1	54.9	72.0	82.5	98.7
1945-47	14.8	42.4	62.0	73.8	80.4	97.3
1948-50	18.1	49.2	64.8	75.1	81.9	98.8
1951-53	20.9	53.9	70.3	80.6	87.5	98.7
1954-56	28.9	63.5	81.2	89.8	93.3	98.4
1957-59	33.3	70.8	84.5	91.1	93.6	98.1
1960-62	34.1	73.8	87.5	94.4	97.0	(98.9)*
1963-65	40.6	77.0	88.0	92.2	94.5	(96.9)
1966-68	44.4	80.5	91.3	(93.8)	(94.1)	—
1967-71	(39.0)	(56.1)	(58.8)	—	—	—

\* Not all of cohort married for specified duration at time of survey.

they had been married four years.

A second aspect of the shift in the timing of fertility is shown in Table 3 which present data on the mean number of live births by duration of marriage. The data indicate that not only did women in the more recent cohorts have their first children more quickly after being married, but they also had subsequent children more rapidly. The two processes are related, of course, in that being slow to have a first birth limits the amount of time members of the earlier cohorts have available within the first n years after marriage to have additional births.

After three years of marriage, the average number of live births among women in the early cohorts (pre-1950) was substantially less than one. This continued until the late 1950s after which time women had, on average, more than one live birth by the end of three years of marriage. As in the previous table, the pattern of change is remarkably consistent. There is a regular increase by cohort in the mean number of live births at each marital duration. Even after five and ten years of marriage considerable difference exist among the various cohorts.<sup>1)</sup>

Many of the women married during the 1963-65 period may be thought of as the daughters

**Table 3. Average Number of Births to Ever-Married Women, by Marriage Cohort and Marital Duration.**

Marriage Cohort	Marital Duration					
	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	10 Years
1936-38	.100	.316	.515	.797	1.083	2.787
1939-41	.172	.415	.653	.910	1.180	2.828
1942-44	.106	.359	.614	.935	1.276	2.797
1945-47	.148	.436	.683	1.005	1.264	2.843
1948-50	.181	.494	.741	.981	1.254	2.995
1951-53	.209	.550	.834	1.183	1.483	3.289
1964-56	.289	.644	.986	1.344	1.703	3.365
1957-59	.333	.720	1.060	1.426	1.718	3.289
1960-62	.341	.756	1.077	1.511	1.801	(3.215)*
1963-65	.406	.780	1.115	1.483	1.860	(2.502)
1966-68	.444	.834	1.240	(1.545)	(1.689)	—
1969-71	(.390)	(.570)	(.624)	—	—	—

\* Not all of cohort married for specified duration at time of survey.

1) The changing reproductive pattern can also be viewed from the perspective of birth intervals. Increases in the speed of childbearing after marriage are associated with shorter intervals between marriage and the first and subsequent births. Among members of the present sample, the mean interval between marriage and the first birth decreased steadily from a high of 47 months for those in the 1936-38 cohort, to values in the high 30s for women married between 1939 and 1950, to between approximately 20 and 24 months for women married between 1954 to 1962, to a low of 17 months for those in the 1963-65 cohort, the last group for whom reliable birth intervals can be calculated.

of women in the 1936-38 marriage cohorts. The younger women apparently had almost one more child after five years of marriage than did their mothers. Nearly 90 percent of the younger generation had a live birth by three years of marriage whereas only half of their mothers had a live birth during the corresponding period. The data clearly indicate a rapid acceleration of childbearing among married women in Korea.