

Intergenerational Coresidence and Married Women's Life Satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Demographers have long recognized the importance of family context, and associated norms and expectations, for a wide range of life outcomes (e.g., Hajnal 1965; Reher 1998). Intergenerational coresidence in “strong family countries,” in particular, has been linked to patterns of nest-leaving and union formation (e.g., Dalla Zuanna 2001; Raymo and Ono 2007). It has also been the focus of research on intergenerational transfers of financial, instrumental, and emotional support and their role in promoting the well-being of vulnerable groups including the elderly (Brown et al., 2002) and single mothers (Shirahase and Raymo 2014). The potential downsides to intergenerational coresidence, including loss of privacy and conflict, have also been recognized (Lebra 1985; Long & Harris, 2000; Traphagan, 2003), but research on this aspect of well-being in familistic societies is scarce. Our goal in this paper is to address this limitation by examining the association between intergenerational proximity and married women’s life satisfaction in Japan.

Intergenerational coresidence has declined over time and is no longer common immediately after marriage, but remains a distinguishing feature of Japanese family relations (relative to other wealthy countries). Of particular importance is the continued salience of normative expectations that the eldest son maintain the family lineage and care for aging parents, often in the context of intergenerational coresidence (Kureishi & Wakabayashi, 2010; Lebra, 1985; Long & Harris, 2000; Martin & Tsuya, 1991; Traphagan, 2003; Wakabayashi & Horioka, 2009). Demographers and

sociologists have described the ways in which this “traditional” aspect of family organization has been adapted to meet the needs of families in contemporary Japan, emphasizing the importance of financial support for young couples, childcare support for working mothers, and care for aging, frail parents (e.g., Johar, Maruyama & Nakamura, 2015; Kato 1988; Morgan & Hiroshima 1983). Far less attention has been paid to the ways in which tension and stress generated by the incompatibility of these established family norms and expectations with contemporary needs and attitudes may be detrimental to the well-being of family members, especially wives. This is surprising in light of a long and rich history of anecdotal depiction of the trials and tribulations of women coresiding with their husband’s parents – the so-called *yome-shutome mondai* (daughter-mother-in-law problem). A Google search on this well-known Japanese phrase generated over eight million items, the oldest dating back to the 1880s.

The surprising lack of empirical information on intergenerational coresidence and married women’s well-being in Japan motivates us to address the following questions: (1) Is coresidence with husband’s parents negatively associated with married women’s life satisfaction? (2) To what extent is (1) explained by the quality of relationship with the husband’s mother? (3) Do (1) and (2) differ by socioeconomic status? We examine these questions by comparing married women who live with their husband’s parents to otherwise similar women who do not. Recognizing that intergenerational proximity has grown in prevalence while coresidence has declined, we construct

two different categorical measures of living arrangements. As described below, the first of these measures collapses proximate residence with coresidence and the second separates the two arrangements. The distinction between coresidence and proximate residence is an important contribution of this study. While there are good theoretical reasons to view proximate residence as an arrangement that provides many of the benefits of coresidence without the posited downsides, there is no existing empirical evidence with which to support (or refute) this claim.

METHOD

Data

To evaluate the relative well-being of married women who coreside with their parents(-in-law), we use data from the 2003 and 2008 rounds of the National Family Research of Japan (NFRJ).

Conducted by the Japan Society for Family Sociology, the NFRJ is a large, nationally representative survey of 28-77 year-old Japanese men and women in 2003 and 28-72 year-old Japanese men and women in 2008. Response rates were 63% in 2003 and 55% in 2008 and the total number of respondents to the two surveys was 11,505. We eliminated men, non-married women, and women whose husband's mother was deceased at the time of the survey. After also eliminating observations with missing data, the total analytical sample is 2,573 married women.

Variables

The dependent variable is a measure of life satisfaction. Values of life satisfaction range from 1

(most satisfied) to 4 (least satisfied), with response options of “satisfied,” “somewhat satisfied,” “somewhat dissatisfied,” and “dissatisfied.” Based on the results of preliminary analyses, we constructed a dichotomous variable of life satisfaction that differentiates “satisfied” (coded as 1) from the other three responses (coded as 0).

We use two types of variable for living arrangement. First, our three-category measure of living arrangements describes the distance between respondents and their parents or husband’s parents: (1) coresiding with own parents or husband’s parents, (2) living proximate to either own parents or husband’s parents, and (3) distant residence. We classify respondents as distant from parents if they report requiring longer than hour to reach both own and husband’s parents.

“Proximate residence” describes respondents who are able to reach their parents’ and/or husband’s parents’ houses within one hour (a definition that we will revisit in subsequent revisions).

“Coresidence” was defined as sharing a home with either own parents or husband’s parents. We also constructed a six-category measure of living arrangement that distinguishes proximity to wife’s parents and husband’s parents: (1) distant residence, (2) proximate to own parents, (3) proximate to husband’s parents, (4) proximate to both own and husband’s parents, (5) coresiding with own parents, and (6) coresiding with husband’s parents. We do not differentiate between living with husband’s mother and husband’s father because the proportion of women living with husband’s father but not husband’s mother is small. In our analytical sample, only 7 of 364 (less

than 2%) married women coresiding with husband's parents do not live with husband's mother.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables included in the multivariate analyses and their association with the measure of women's life satisfaction. The first column shows that nearly one-third of married women live with parents(-in-law) and that the large majority of them coreside with their husband's parents. The second and third columns show that the proportion of married women living with either their own or their husband's parents who report being 'satisfied' is lower than that of those living apart from both own and husband's parents. Descriptive statistics of life satisfaction with the detailed measure of living arrangements shows that the proportion "satisfied" is lowest among married women living with husband's parents.

The results of multivariate logistic regression models of married women's life satisfaction are presented in Table 2. All models include measures of wife's age, wife's employment status, rural residence, husband's occupational status, the presence of child(ren) in the household, and the respondent's relationship with husband's mother, all of which may be associated with both living arrangements and married women's life satisfaction, as well as the respondent's relationship with husband's mother. Column 1 shows that married women living with either their own parents or husband's parents are significantly less likely to report being satisfied with life than those living proximate to or distant from own parents or husband's parents. The difference between married

women coresiding with their own or husband's parents and those living proximate to either their own parents or husband's parents is weakened, but remains statistically significant, in Model 2. Auxiliary analyses indicate that the observed attenuation of the difference in life satisfaction is due primarily to differences across living arrangements in husband's occupational status. Results of models using the detailed measure of living arrangements (columns 3 and 4) show that life satisfaction is significantly lower for women coresiding with in-laws relative to those in the other types of living arrangements. Model 2 illustrates that lower life satisfaction for women coresiding with in-laws, relative to proximate to in-laws, is partially explained by family characteristics. Interestingly, change across Models 1 and Model 2 in the difference between coresidence with own parents and in-laws primarily reflects lower quality relationships with husband's mother among those coresiding with in-laws. It is important to note that, while the difference between women coresiding with own parents and with in-laws is no longer statistically significant in Model 2 (column 4), the odds ratio remains large (1.53), pointing to the difficulty on precisely estimating coefficients given the relatively small proportion of women coresiding with own parents.

NEXT STEPS

These preliminary analyses provide some suggestive evidence consistent with anecdotal characterizations of the stress and strain associated with one "traditional" feature of Japanese

family organization – patrilocal intergenerational coresidence. They also suggest that poor relationships with the mother-in-law contributes to lower levels of life satisfaction among women in this living arrangement. Of particular importance is evidence that the difference in life satisfaction between women living close to in-laws and women coresiding with in-laws is attenuated when we control for the quality of the relationship with the mother-in-law and husband's occupational status. In subsequent research, we will (1) identify other theoretically relevant individual and family characteristics that may account for the remaining relationships between living arrangement and wife's life satisfaction, (2) empirically determine a meaningful threshold for defining intergenerational proximity (i.e., identify the distance at which life satisfaction for those classified as proximate differs from those classified as distant), and (3) assess the sensitivity of our findings to our use of life satisfaction as a measure of emotional well-being by replicating our analyses using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale as the dependent variable.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics of wife's life satisfaction

<i>Independent Variable (Wife's life satisfaction)</i>	Univariate Statistics	Bivariate Statistics	
		Satisfied	Somewhat satisfied or Dissatisfied
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
<i>Living Arrangement</i>			
Coresiding with either own parents or in-laws	0.29	0.08	0.92
Proximate to own parents or/and in-laws	0.53	0.12	0.88
Distant from both in-laws and own parents	0.18	0.13	0.87
<i>Detailed Living Arrangement</i>			
Coresiding with in-laws	0.23	0.07	0.93
Coresiding with own parents	0.06	0.12	0.88
Proximate to in-laws	0.24	0.11	0.89
Proximate to own parents	0.16	0.12	0.88
Proximate to both in-laws and own parents	0.13	0.12	0.88
Distant from both in-laws and own parents	0.18	0.13	0.87
<i>Wife-Husband's Mother Relationship</i>			
Good	0.44	0.15	0.85
Below good	0.56	0.07	0.93
<i>Wife's Age</i>			
Mean	43.20	-	-
Standard Deviation	9.28	-	-
<i>Wife's Employment Status</i>			
Regular	0.19	0.13	0.87
Non-standard	0.31	0.06	0.94
Self-employed	0.10	0.10	0.90
Unemployed/Housewife	0.40	0.13	0.87
<i>Wife's Rural Residency</i>			
Urban residence	0.64	0.12	0.88
Rural residence	0.36	0.09	0.91
<i>Husband's Occupational Status</i>			
Professional	0.21	0.16	0.84
White collar	0.30	0.13	0.87
Sales/Clerk/Blue collar	0.45	0.07	0.93
Unemployed	0.05	0.08	0.92
<i>Child in Household</i>			
No child in household	0.17	0.12	0.88
One or more child(ren) in the household	0.83	0.11	0.89
N	2,573	278	2,295
Proportion of total N	1.00	0.89	0.11

Table 2: Estimated odds ratio from ordered logistic regression model of wife's life satisfaction

Variable	Living Arrangement				Detailed Living Arrangement			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<i>Living Arrangement</i>								
Coresiding with parents / in-laws (omitted)	-	-	-	-				
Proximate to parents / in-laws	1.50	0.24 *	1.32	0.22 #				
Distant from parents / in-laws	1.68	0.32 **	1.32	0.27				
<i>Detailed Living Arrangement</i>								
Coresiding with in-laws (omitted)					-	-	-	-
Coresiding with own parents					1.69	0.50 #	1.53	0.46
Proximate to in-laws					1.62	0.33 *	1.43	0.30 #
Proximate to own parents					1.82	0.40 **	1.53	0.35 #
Proximate to both in-laws and own parents					1.72	0.40 *	1.48	0.37
Distant from both in-laws and own parents					1.91	0.40 **	1.48	0.33 #
<i>Wife-Husband's Mother Relationship</i>								
Good			2.28	0.30 **			2.27	0.30 **
Below good (omitted)			-	-			-	-
<i>Wife's Age</i>								
			0.99	0.01			0.99	0.01
<i>Wife's Employment Status</i>								
Regular			0.97	0.16			0.97	0.16
Non-standard			0.50	0.09 **			0.50	0.09 **
Self-employed			0.90	0.21			0.90	0.21
Unemployed/Housewife (omitted)			-	-			-	-
<i>Wife's Rural Residency</i>								
Urban residence (omitted)			-	-			-	-
Rural residence			0.85	0.12			0.86	0.12
<i>Husband's Occupational Status</i>								
Professional			1.22	0.20			1.23	0.20
White collar (omitted)			-	-			-	-
Sales/Clerk/Blue collar			0.58	0.10 **			0.58	0.10 **
Unemployed			0.57	0.21			0.57	0.21
<i>Child in Household</i>								
No child in household			0.84	0.15			0.84	0.15
One or more child(ren) in the household (omitted)			-	-			-	-
N	2,573		2,573		2,573		2,573	
Prob > chi2	0.01		0.00		0.03		0.00	
log-likelihood	-876.41		-828.28		-874.76		-827.27	

p<.10, * p<.05, **p<.01

OR: Odds Ratio, SE: Standard Error