



The Impact of Age Difference on the Life Satisfaction of Wives in Specialized and Nonspecialized Households in Japan

Yaş Farkının Japonya'daki Uzmanlaşmış ve Uzmanlaşmamış Hanehalklarındaki Evli Kadınların Hayat Memnuniyetine Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

Using panel data from the Keio Household Panel Survey (KHPS) between 2005 and 2018, this study examines the impact of age difference on wives' life satisfaction in Japan and how age difference affects wives' life satisfaction over the duration of marriage. Considering the specialization theory, the effect of age gap over time is also tested by dividing the sample by wives' employment status. The results of the pooled OLS estimation show that wives married to younger men are satisfied with their lives, while no significant finding is observed for wives married to older men. On the other hand, the fixed effects estimation findings reveal that life satisfaction of wives married to older men increases with years of marriage, while there is no significant finding for wives married to younger men. The results also show that housewives representing specialized households are more satisfied over time, while there are no significant results for working wives representing nonspecialized households. It is also shown that the life satisfaction of housewives married to older men increases as the length of the marriage increases and is always significant, even when alternative specification is used.

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Araştırma Makalesi

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Bu çalışma, Keio Üniversitesi'nin 2005-2018 yılları arasındaki panel verilerini kullanarak yaş farkının Japonya'daki evli kadınların hayat memnuniyetine etkisini ve yaş farkının evlilik süresince kadınların hayat memnuniyetini nasıl etkilediğini inceler. Uzmanlaşma teorisi göz önünde bulundurularak bu etki evli kadınların çalışma durumlarına göre de test edilmiştir. Havuzlanmış en küçük kareler metodu sonuçları kendinden genç bir eşle evli olan kadınların haryattan memnun olduğunu gösterirken kendinden yaşça büyük eşle evli kadınlar için anlamlı bir sonuç bulunamamıştır. Diğer taraftan sabit etkiler modeli sonuçları kendinden büyük eşle evli kadınların zaman içerisinde hayat memnuniyetinin arttığını gösterirken kendinden küçük eşle evli kadınların hayat memnuniyeti için anlamlı sonuç bulunamamıştır. Sonuçlar aynı zamanda uzmanlaşmış hanehalkını temsil eden ev hanımı kadınların hayat memnuniyetinin arttığını gösterirken uzmanlaşmamış hanehalkını temsil eden çalışan kadınlar için anlamlı sonuç bulunamamıştır. Buna ek olarak alternatif tanımlar kullanılsa bile kendinden büyük eşle evli ev hanımlarının evlilik süresince hayat memnuniyetleri arttığı ve her zaman anlamlı olduğu bulunmuştur.

1. Introduction

Marriage, the institution in which two people commit to each other for a lifetime, offers individuals a variety of potential benefits, including high levels of well-being, good feelings such as gratitude, recognition, and physical and financial security (Stutzer and Frey, 2006: 328). In most countries, the generally observed marriage structure in terms of age consists of older men and younger women. However, high educational opportunities for women lead most women to postpone

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marriage to a later age, resulting in a shift from a typical pairing with an older man and a young woman to a pairing with no or a small age difference. Receiving education relaxes women's preferences regarding marriage, which is confirmed by the results of Utomo's (2014) study. In addition to the impact of education, the package of marriage, which includes strict family obligations and expectations, is becoming less attractive to the Japanese, especially women (Bumpass et al., 2009: 218; Raymo et al., 2015: 9). In return for the rising opportunity cost of marriage, marriage decisions have been postponed and even individuals have chosen not to marry (Bumpass et al., 2009; Raymo et al., 2015: 9-10). Therefore, in Japan, as in other countries, a change in the typical marriage structure can be observed. According to the Specified Report of Vital Statistics conducted in 2015 and published in 2016 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2016), the age difference was 2.5 years in 1975, while this difference decreased to less than 2 years after 2000. When both a man and a woman enter their first marriage, the average age of a man's first marriage in 2015 is 30.7 years and that of a woman is 29.0 years. Even though such a pairing, where there is still a slight age difference, is common, statistics show that the age difference between men and women is decreasing every year.

The international literature offers some theoretical and empirical models to explain the reasons for an age difference, especially between men-older couples, in marriage. They refer to evolutionary theory (Buss, 1989) and economic theory (Bergstrom and Bagnoli, 1993). Fitness and fertility are seen as factors that lead singles to choose a younger partner. As fitness declines, reproductive success inevitably declines with age (Buss, 1989: 2-3). According to Buss (1989: 2-3), physical attractiveness and fertility cause men to choose younger women. Unlike most men, who choose a younger partner to benefit from the woman's fitness, women value the financial situation, i.e., economic necessity drives women to be with an older, successful man (Buss, 1989: 12). A woman seeks a secure environment for herself and her (future) offspring, which is more likely to be provided by a man with high earning potential. However, it is worth to state here that as more and more women participate in the labor market, economic necessity plays a smaller role in women's lives than in previous decades (Kalmijn, 1998: 399).

Men spend a long year in the labor market to achieve this capacity in old age (Bergstrom and Bagnoli, 1993: 186). Older men married to young women are financially successful and have the highest gains from marriage (Bergstrom and Bagnoli, 1993). Pollet et al. (2013), who examines the age gap between ultra-wealthy men in the Forbes 400 and their wives, shows that wealthy men marry young women, and that these men marry much younger women than their first wives when they decide to remarry. On the other hand, Kurzban and Weeden (2005) testing mate preferences using online dating data shows that both sexes tend to have a partner who is physically attractive, young, and well-shaped. Coles and Francesconi (2011) suggesting support for Kurzban and Weeden (2005) reveal that both sexes prefer young partners, and the older partner is financially better off than the young one, regardless of gender. In other word, disutility that younger partner gets from being with the older person is compensated by the older partner's income, and the older partner receives a higher utility from being with the young partner.

The growing number of studies in the literature addresses how the differences between partners affect their lives. Studies focus on differences between sexes by various indicators to measure subjective well-being or other alternatives. Tao (2005) finds no effect of age difference on couples' marital satisfaction in Taiwan. In contrast to the results of Tao's (2005) study, Zhang et al. (2012) show that wives with an older husband are more likely to be satisfied in terms of marriage and sex in Hong Kong. The study by Kim et al. (2015) shows that wives living with younger men were more likely to have depressive symptoms in Korea. It is also showed that older wives caused their partners to have more depressive symptoms. Although the previously mentioned studies examine the effects of differences on couples' subjective well-being and mental health for three Asian

countries where a close culture is observed, their results differ. Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) that tests the effects of age and education differences on the life satisfaction of couples aged between 43 and 65 in the Netherlands prove the positive influence of age difference on life satisfaction of both men and women. Lee and McKinnish (2018), whose study is close to the present study, reveal that both husbands and wives with a younger partner are more likely to satisfy in their marriage in Australia. Their study also examines the change in marital satisfaction over time. The marital satisfaction of differently aged couples decreases with the duration of the marriage because they are more easily affected by a negative shock. A very recent study by Minocher and Ross (2022), which examined the issue for four Colombian communities from an anthropology perspective, shows that there is no negative relationship between couples with a large age difference and their mental health.

Considering the changing structure of the couple relationship, we address the question of how age difference between husband and wife affects wives' life satisfaction and how their life satisfaction change during the marriage. To examine wives' life satisfaction in relation to age difference, panel data from the Keio Household Panel Survey (KHPS) between 2005 and 2018 are used. This study contributes to the literature by some points. First, this study test not only the impact of age difference between husband and wife but also its effect over time in Japan. The change over time is worth testing because marriage is not an institution in which partners come together for a short-term purpose, but it changes over time. There are few previous studies showing that subjective well-being changes over time (Lee and McKinnish, 2018; Ma and Piao, 2019; VanLaningham et al., 2001). Second, unlike most previous studies, we use panel data that allow us to solve individual heterogeneity and observe the effects of age difference on wives' life satisfaction within marriage over time, which, to the best of the authors' knowledge, only Lee and McKinnish (2018) have examined the change over time by considering age difference. Third, the issue is also tested in the framework of specialization. The results show that wives married to younger men are satisfied with their lives, while no significant finding is observed for wives married to older men. The fixed effects estimation findings reveal that life satisfaction of wives married to older men increases with years of marriage, while there is no significant finding for wives married to younger men. It is also revealed that the life satisfaction of housewives married to older men increases as the length of the marriage increases and is always significant, even when alternative specification is used.

The division of the chapter is as follows. Following the introductory section, theoretical framework is reviewed in section 2. The estimation model and method are presented in section 3. This is followed by the data and sample selection in section 4. The estimation results are reported in section 5. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The specialization theory introduced by Becker (1991) is based on the division of labour within households. This theory states that a member with a comparative advantage in labour would specialize in market capital and another member of the household would specialize at home (Becker, 1991: 32-33). In the context of specialization theory, this means that if the wife specializes in work, the domestic work would be allocated to the husband. In this respect, both the husband and wife who specialize in certain areas would have higher life satisfaction. Accordingly, decreasing gender specialization may reduce couples' well-being (Mikucka, 2016: 760-761). On the other hand, in societies where specialization is common, women find it difficult to extricate themselves from unhappy marriages. It is therefore to be expected that specialization is more beneficial for men than for women (Mikucka, 2016: 761). However, the empirical results of the study by Stutzer and Frey (2006: 339) show that men are satisfied either with or without specialization, while for women specialization matters. They have greater life satisfaction than those without specialization.

Japan is one of the countries where specialization is visible (Lee and Ono, 2008). The employment structure in Japan is one of the reasons for the unclosed gender wage gap (Smith,

1987: 15). The wage system in Japan is essentially based on seniority. Since most women's careers are interrupted after marriage or the birth of a child, the seniority system benefits women very little (Smith, 1987: 15-16). Most Japanese women either care for their children at home and do housework (Kobayashi et al., 2016: 1-2). Working women are generally employed part-time, which results in women earning less than men. Accordingly, most women specialized in housework, childcare, and some in part-time and other unpaid work, while men specialized in their professions. Moreover, gender roles have already been fixed by Japanese culture. Although the beliefs towards gender roles are diminishing, there are still many who argue that the man should work and the woman should stay at home. In this sense, young women-older men both conform to gender norms and tend to specialize. Women can benefit from their husband's income, manage the household by taking advantage of their youth, and adhere to norms, which can make women happier in a male-dominated country.

3. Estimation Model and Method

To test the effect of age difference, we follow the regression model from Lee and McKinnish's (2018) study as in the following equation;

$$LifeSat_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AgeDif_{1i} + \beta_2 AgeDif_{2i} + \beta_3 MarDur_{it} + \beta_4 MarDur_{it}^2 + \beta_5 Age_{it} + \beta_6 Age_{it}^2 + \beta X_{it} + \theta_t + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

where *LifeSat* refers to the 0-1 dummy variable that takes the value 1 if a respondent *i* is rarely or never dissatisfied with his or her life in the year, and otherwise takes the value 0 in year *t*. *AgeDif₁* shows the actual age difference between a husband and a wife if a husband is older than a wife, and it is equal to the value 0 if there is no age gap or a wife is older than a husband. *AgeDif₂* shows the absolute age difference between a husband and a wife if a wife is older than a husband, and it is equal to the value 0 if there is no age gap or a husband is older than a wife. *MarDur* and *MarDur²* is the length and squared length of marriage of respondent *i* in year *t*. *Age* and *Age²* are the age and squared age of respondent *i* in year *t*. A vector of control variables represented by *X* is listed as follows: husband with full-time job (=1), husband's education in years, husband's squared education in years, working wife (=1), wife's education in years, wife's squared education in years, the log of the annual household income before tax deflated by the 2015 consumer price index, the number of children, the number of children aged 0 to 6, and 7 to 18, number of children living with their parents, owning a house (=1), the size of the city where the respondent *i* lives. θ_t are survey years, and u_{it} is a standard disturbance term.

The model in equation (1) is transformed into the fixed effects estimation equation by adding the interaction term of age difference with marital duration as presented below;

$$LifeSat_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (AgeDif_{1i} * MarDur_{it}) + \beta_2 (AgeDif_{2i} * MarDur_{it}) + \beta_3 MarDur_{it}^2 + \beta_4 Age_{it}^2 + \beta X_{it} + \delta_i + \theta_t + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

In doing so, we dropped the variables representing age differences (*AgeDif₁* and *AgeDif₂*) from the models, since these variables are constant over time. In addition, the linear term of age and marriage duration is also dropped, since there is perfect collinearity between these variables and survey years, as noted in the study by Lee and McKinnish (2018: 349). It is worth noting here that marriage is a serious event that generally lasts for many years. Over time, both the woman and the man invest in the marriage and experience various changes that affect their subjective well-being. In addition, following previous studies, VanLaningham et al. (2001) tested a U-shaped curve of marital happiness over time and found that marital happiness steadily declines or remains flat after a decline in years of marriage. Ma and Piao's (2019) study of married women's happiness also shows

that Japanese married women's happiness declines over the years. To the best knowledge of the authors, the study by Lee and McKinnish (2018) is the first to use fixed effects estimates to demonstrate how marital satisfaction changes within marriage by accounting for the age difference between husband and wife. Accordingly, it also aims to estimate the change in life satisfaction of couples with an age difference within marriage.

Following the idea of changing the slope at the age difference proposed in the study by Lee and McKinnish (2018), we also use the following an alternative specification in the following,

$$AgeDif = Husband's\ age - Wife's\ age \tag{3}$$

where *AgeDif* is the age difference between husband and wife. The form, which the slope at age difference equals to 1, is as follows,

$$AgeDif_1 = (AgeDif - 1) \text{ if } (AgeDif - 1) \geq 1; \tag{4}$$

$$AgeDif_1 = 0 \text{ if } (AgeDif - 1) < 1$$

$$AgeDif_2 = (AgeDif - 1) * (-1) \text{ if } ((AgeDif - 1) * (-1)) \geq 1; \tag{5}$$

$$AgeDif_2 = 0 \text{ if } (AgeDif - 1) * (-1) < 1$$

The interaction terms in equations (2) are also tested by replacing them with the alternative specification explained.

4. Data and Sample Selection

The Panel Data Research Centre of Keio University conducts The Keio Household Panel Survey (KHPS) since 2004 by among 4 005 households in Japan. The single and married respondents, who are surveyed in January each year, were selected through a two-stage stratified random sampling. The advantage of the KHPS is that information about a respondent and his or her spouse is collected at the same time, so we can obtain different information at the couple level.

The sample used in this study is selected in the following steps. First, respondents between 2005 and 2018 are selected because life satisfaction information is collected from 2005, except for 2007 when respondents were not asked about life satisfaction. Second, we restrict our sample to married couples because of the interest in this study. Third, we select wives who are 64 years old or younger, and working husbands who are 64 years old or younger. Fourth, we select households with positive income. The remaining number of observations is 24 231. To select the sample for wives, we eliminate all unavailable information required for the estimation. The remaining number of couples is 2 868, and the number of observations is 16 950. Table 1 shows the percentage of age difference categories. Most couples in the sample consist of an older husband and a younger wife, followed by those couples in which an older wife and a younger husband. The least observed category is the pairing in which the husband's age and the wife's age are the same.

The descriptive statistics of the selected sample for wives are shown in Table 2. More than half of the wives are satisfied with their lives. On average, wives have been married about 20 years. The shortest duration of marriage is observed among couples where the wife is older than the husband, and the longest among couples in which husband is older than the wife. The age of wives whose husbands are older than them or whose age is equal to that of their partners is 46 years, which is one year younger than the age of wives who are older than their husbands. Sixty-six percent of wives who are younger than their husbands work, while this ratio is 64 for couples in which the wives are older than their husbands. Regardless of couple type, the average education of wives is 13 years and 94 percent of husbands work full time, which is the highest compared to husbands in the other couple types. The couples that earn the least are made up of older wives and

younger husbands. The number of children is nearly 2. Eighty-three percent of couples in which the husband is the same age or older than the wife own their own home, while only 74 percent of couples consisting of an older wife and a younger husband own their own home.

Table 1: Categories of Age Difference

Categories	Percentage
Husband older than wife	66 %
No age difference	16 %
Wife older than husband	18 %
Number of observations	24 231

Source: KHPS

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Selected Sample

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	All	Older husband	No age difference	Older wife	t-test (2)-(3)	t-test (2)-(4)
Wife's life satisfaction (=1)	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.54	Insig.	Insig.
Marital Duration	20.38	21.05	19.87	18.30	*	*
Wife's age	46.47	46.38	45.87	47.36	*	*
Working wife	0.66	0.66	0.65	0.64		
Wife's education in years	13.22	13.18	13.36	13.24		
Full-time working husband (=1)	0.94	0.93	0.96	0.95		
Husband's education in years	13.71	13.80	13.71	13.36		
Before-tax household income (JPY)	801.91	812.46	800.29	763.59		
Number of children	1.78	1.77	1.87	1.69		
Number of children 0-6	0.28	0.24	0.36	0.35		
Number of children 7-18	0.83	0.82	0.88	0.80		
Number of children in the house	1.53	1.52	1.65	1.46		
Homeownership (=1)	0.81	0.83	0.83	0.74		
Gov-designated	0.29	0.28	0.29	0.30		
Other cities	0.60	0.61	0.57	0.61		
Towns	0.11	0.11	0.14	0.09		
Number of observations	16 950	11 260	2 705	2 985		

Note: Mean values are reported.

5. Estimation Results

The results of the pooled OLS regression and fixed effects model in equations (1)-(2) are shown in Table 3. The table also reports the results by difference slope for age differences. In column (1), the results show that wives married to younger husbands are more satisfied, while wives married to older husbands are less satisfied, but the coefficient is not significant. In column (3), the model with an alternative specification in which the slope equals 1 when there is an age difference also yields the same result as in column (1). More generally, women whose husbands are less than 1 year older than themselves are more satisfied, as indicated in columns (1) and (3). In contrast to the studies by Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) and Zhang et al. (2012), our result is consistent only with the results of the study by Lee and McKinnish (2018). As mentioned earlier, the institution of marriage is expected to be sustained over a long period of time. The structure of marriage changes

over time, leading partners to have different feelings. In columns (2)-(4), fixed effects estimation results are reported. Although the results from the pooled OLS model suggest that older women with younger husbands derive more life satisfaction from marriage, the FE estimation results in column (2) show that wives married to older men have higher life satisfaction over time than those married to men of the same age or younger. This result is also supported by the alternative form of the age difference. In column (4), the finding denotes that wives married to men more than 1 year older than them are more satisfied in life. Overall, these women's life satisfaction increases with years of marriage.

The study then asks the question, "*Who is more satisfied in life over time?*" Are employed women who are younger than men more satisfied with their lives, or is it the other way around? How does the life satisfaction of women whose age differs from that of their husbands change over the years of marriage as a function of household types such as specialized and nonspecialized households? The question is tested by forming subsamples according to women's employment status. The sub-sample for full-time includes full-time or self-employed wives. The second subsample includes only part-time employed wives. The final subsample consists of homemakers. The full-time subsample represents nonspecialized households, while the subsample that includes only housewives represents specialized households. As for the part-time subsample, these women fall in between. That is, they are neither specialized nor nonspecialized. Women who work part-time have time for unpaid work and other activities. On the other hand, they are not like housewives. It is therefore refrained from classifying these women in the subsample of full-time employees and housewives.

The fixed-effects estimation results showing how age difference over time affects wives' life satisfaction by employment status are presented in Table 4. The results in both the top and bottom panels show that in column (1), there is no effect of age difference on the life satisfaction of full-time employed wives over time. No significant change is observed in the fixed effects model in column (2). The results for housewives in column (3) show that housewives married to men older than them have greater life satisfaction over time. In addition, women whose husbands are younger than them are more satisfied over the course of marriage. However, the alternative specification, in which the slope is changed from 0 to 1, shows that women with older husbands perceive greater satisfaction over the years of marriage, whereas no significant effect is observed for women married to men less than 1 year older than them.

By and large, we found no significant results for the nonspecialized households, while for the specialized households we found supportive evidence that housewives married to older men experience greater satisfaction the longer the marriage lasts. Life satisfaction of wives who are younger than their husbands increases over time, especially among specialized households. In contrast, the life satisfaction of full-time wives who are younger than their husbands does not change over time. Consequently, specialization matters for households. Moreover, these results can also be explained by culture. In Japanese society, many women are still expected to stay at home and work part-time, even though women's labor force participation has changed significantly. Being stay-at-home wives is more in line with norms regarding gender roles and society's expectations than full-time working wives. They spend more hours on the job and are less likely than others to take care of unpaid chores. Homemakers who are younger than their husbands are a good example because they conform to traditional couple formation and societal norms. Last but not least, women with older husbands marry earlier than other women and have a child earlier. The lifetime spent on child rearing corresponds to the young age of wives, so wives face a big challenge when they are young, but when the children are grown up, wives still have enough time to enjoy life and marriage. So it takes a while to get used to the burden of marriage, but wives who are married to older men begin to enjoy their lives over time.

Table 3: Results of the Effect of Age Difference on Life Satisfaction of Wives

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Slope=0		Slope=1	
	Pooled OLS	FE	Pooled OLS	FE
Age difference_1	-0.002 (0.002)		-0.002 (0.002)	
Age difference_2	0.008** (0.004)		0.007** (0.003)	
Age difference_1*Marital Duration		0.002** (0.001)		0.002** (0.001)
Age difference_2*Marital Duration		0.002 (0.002)		0.000 (0.002)
Marital Duration	-0.002 (0.003)		-0.002 (0.003)	
Marital Duration(squared)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Wife's age	-0.002 (0.008)		-0.002 (0.008)	
Wife's age(squared)	0 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Controls	0	0	0	0
Years	0	0	0	0
Observations	16 950	16 950	16 950	16 950
R-squared	0.008	0.006	0.008	0.006

Notes: Standard errors are clustered at the individual level. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. All control variables and survey years are added to all models.

Table 4: Results of the Effect of Age Difference on Life Satisfaction of Wives in Nonspecialized and Specialized Households

Slope=0	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Full-time	Part-time	Housewives
Age difference_1*Marital Duration	0.000 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)
Age difference_2*Marital Duration	-0.000 (0.004)	0.000 (0.003)	0.007* (0.003)
Marital Duration			
Marital Duration(squared)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Wife's age			
Wife's age(squared)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001* (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Observations	4 895	6 544	5 511
R-squared	0.024	0.01	0.025
Slope = 1	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age difference_1*Marital Duration	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)
Age difference_2*Marital Duration	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)
Marital Duration			
Marital Duration(squared)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Wife's age			
Wife's age(squared)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001* (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Observations	4 895	6 544	5 511
R-squared	0.024	0.010	0.022

Notes: Standard errors are clustered at the individual level. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. All control variables and survey years are added to all models, except working wives in columns (5) and (6).

6. Conclusion

This study tests the effect of age difference between a wife and a husband and the change in life satisfaction over time. The results of the pooled OLS estimation show that women married to younger men are more satisfied in life. At the time of marriage, two individuals have limited information about the gains from marriage. The structure of marriage begins to change over time as new information is gathered (Weiss, 1997: 110). Considering this change, this study also tests how wives' life satisfaction changes over time. The results of the FE estimate show that wives married to older men perceive greater life satisfaction over time. It is also found that wives married to older men in specialized households are more satisfied over time. This is consistent with the theory of Bergstrom and Bagnoli (1993), who suggest that the quality of men increases with age and that women marry at an earlier age. This pairing yields the greatest gain by creating an environment for specialization.

Women, who were almost invisible in the past, have shown up in many different places in recent decades. The increasing visibility of women in the labor market increases women's power in many areas, including marriage. Although the greatest gains can be made from traditional marriage, most educated women have recently been postponing marriage and no longer have to look for a good nest for their families by marrying a man who contributes to the household income, as was the case in the past. The weakening of strictly separated gender roles may motivate women to be with a partner who is of similar age without regard to whether the man is financially strong. The finding that women are studied in specialized and nonspecialized establishments gives us a clue about marriage. Women with older husbands in specialized households enjoy their marriage over time. The possible reason could be that these housewives fully meet society's expectations in terms of age difference and employment status. In these households, resources for the members are provided by the breadwinner. Both the husband and the wife fulfill their roles. On the other hand, working wives do not benefit from the age difference. These women are more likely to have responsibilities both at home and at work, making it difficult to balance work and family. Given the social equality presented in Groot and Brink's (2002: 154) study, a smaller age difference between the sexes may improve subjective well-being in marriage. Assuming that couples with little or no age difference are less likely to support traditional thoughts that motivate women to work, working women earn more resources in the household, which may lead to greater satisfaction. If policies support the matching currently observed, working women can secure a happier place in the labor market. To this end, the Japanese government should adopt new policies to reduce the impact of traditional gender roles on couples' work patterns. As the population in Japan ages, higher participation of women in the labor market is needed to combat labor shortages. In addition, work-life balance policies can motivate couples to have more children, which is one of the solutions to slow down the effects of the aging of society.

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