

# Social security and divorce in Japan

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain variations in the divorce rates across prefectures in Japan over the 20-year period between 1982 and 2002. This paper examines the various factors which may affect divorce rates including: the effects of the generosity of social welfare; the income of females relative to males; the female employment rate; the vacancy rate; a shift to no-fault divorce; and social stigma. There are three major findings of this paper. First, the generosity of a particular prefecture in approving the livelihood protection benefits (LPBs) has a statistically negative impact on the divorce rate. Moreover, social stigma has negative impacts both on the divorce rate and the generosity of social security benefits. Finally, political conservatism has a negative impact on the proportion of needy people who receive LPB. The findings of this paper imply that in order to become eligible for the social security benefits, married couples may be more likely to dissolve their marriage in those prefectures where the provision of the LPB is not so generous.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past 60 years, family structure in Japan has changed remarkably. One of the important changes relates to the number of divorces and the divorce rate. As in many other developed countries, the Japanese divorce rate has gradually increased.

There is large literature relating to divorce in the United States (for example, Refs. [2–4,19,20]). In contrast, despite the attention that has been given to divorce in the Japanese media in recent years, there are very few empirical studies relating to divorce in Japan [10,11,16,17].

One of the interesting aspects of Japanese divorces is that there is great deal of diversity in divorce rates across regions and prefectures in Japan. An examination of the divorce rates across prefectures over time shows that particular prefectures (for example, Fukuoka and Hokkaido) consistently appear to have high divorce rates (see Table 1a). This trend is not so pronounced among those prefectures with the lowest divorce rates (see Table 1b). A key question for economists is whether these regional differences are caused by differences in culture across regions or are caused by

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