

Research in Brief



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Newly Married Couples: Their Employment Status, Housing Tenure and Number of Children

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Introduction

Korea recorded a fertility rate of 0.84 in 2020, an all-time low for the country and possibly the lowest in the world. The figure represents a far cry from the ideal number of children (2.16) or the intended number of children (1.92) that married Korean women want. This calls for looking into why married women do not give birth to the number of children they consider ideal.

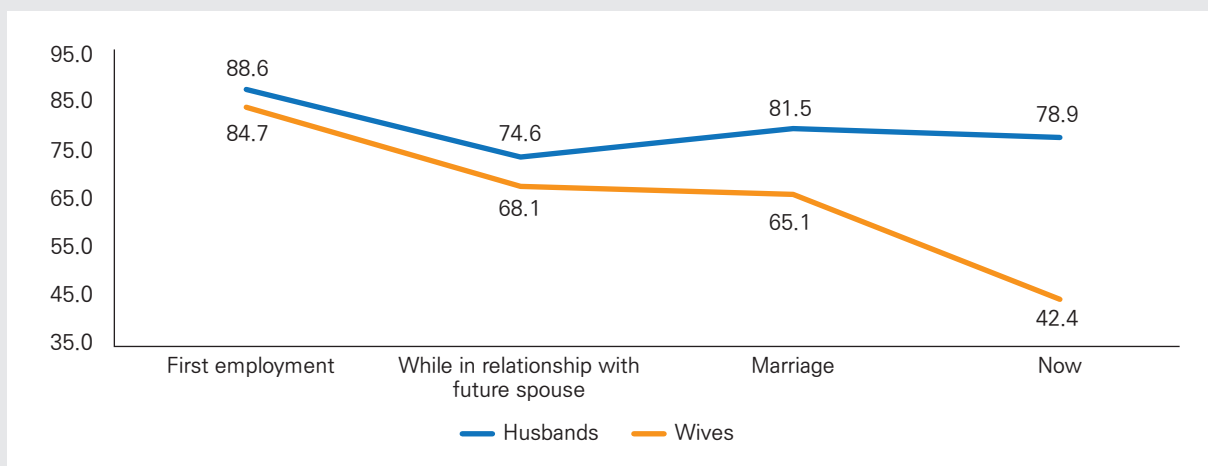
Earlier studies conducted of fertility among married women suggest that childbearing is affected negatively by “being in work” and positively by “having homeownership.” Against this background, this study examines couples in their early years of marriage, during which most marital births occur, in terms of the number of children, occupational status and housing tenure types. Whereas Statistics Korea has been producing statistical data on the current population of newlyweds, this study examines changes in the housing and employment of young married couples across life course milestones including “graduating from last school,” “being in a relationship with future spouse,” “marriage,” “birth of the first child,” and “birth of the second child.” In order to have a grasp of the characteristics of newlyweds’ employment before and after marriage through comparison, this study uses data on a group of unmarried men and women of comparable age. Statistics Korea defines newly married couples as couples in their first five years of marriage. Newly married couples for this study are those in the first seven years marriage. The number of children here means the number of children born to couples in their 6th and 7th years of marriage.

This study used data from “A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults”. The sample of this study consists of a total of 1,779 pairs (3,558 men and women) aged between 18 and 49 who were in their first 7 years of marriage. The couples were surveyed via retrospective questions asking of the changes they had in their employment and housing at such life-cycle milestones as graduation from the last school attended, starting a relationship with one’s future spouse, marriage, and birth of children.

Changes in occupational status

Of the husbands surveyed, 88.6 percent reported having had a job before the survey¹⁾; 74.6 percent said they had a job while in a relationship with their future spouse. At the time of marriage, 81.5 percent of the surveyed husbands had a job; at the time of the survey, 78.9 percent had a job. Of the wives, 84.7 percent reported having had a job before the survey; 68.1 percent were in work while they were in relationship with their future spouse. At the time of the survey, only 42.4 percent of the wives were in work. Data from the 2018 National Survey on Fertility and Family Health and Welfare found that unmarried men of comparable age had an employment rate of 60.1 percent. For unmarried women of comparable age, the employment rate was 62.9 percent. Compared to their unmarried peers, the newly married men and women had higher employment rates before their marriage.

[Figure 1] Trends in the percentage of newly married husbands and wives in work



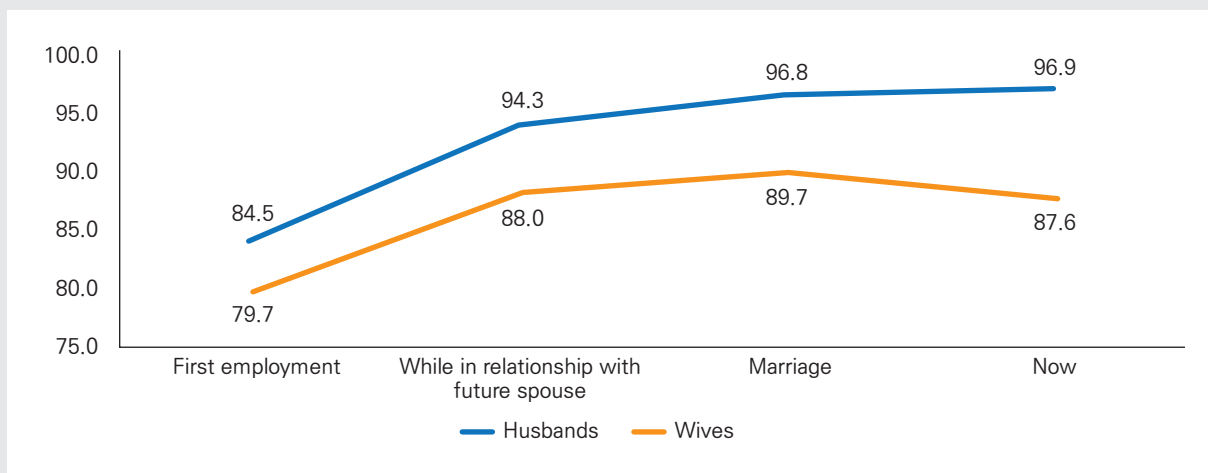
Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

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1) “Having a job” here means working more than an hour per week for income or more than 18 hours unpaid for a family business.

For the husbands, regular employment as a proportion of total employment trended up over time, from 84.5 percent at the time they landed their first job to 94.3 percent when they were in a relationship with their future spouse to 96.8 percent at the time of marriage and to 96.9 percent at the time of the survey. For the wives, meanwhile, the proportion of those in regular employment was 79.7 percent at the time of their first employment and rose steadily to 88.0 percent when they were in a relationship with their future spouse to 89.7 percent at the time of marriage. Those in regular employment accounted for 87.6 percent of the wives who were in work at the time of the survey. In comparison, regular employees accounted for 63.6 percent of unmarried men and 62.6 percent of unmarried women in employment aged 20 to 44.

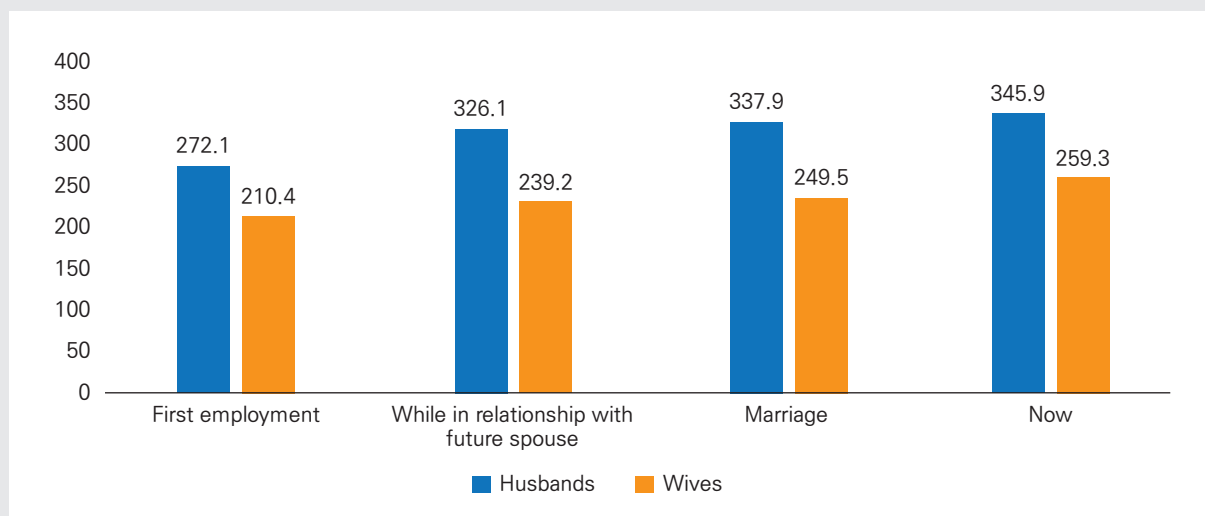
[Figure 2] Regular employment as share of total employment for newly married couples



Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

The husbands reported having an average monthly income of 2.721 million won from their first job. Their income increased steeply to 3.261 million won while in a relationship with their future spouse, and kept increasing to 3.379 million won at the time of marriage and further to 3.459 million won at the time of the survey. The wives on average had an income of 2.104 million won from their first job, marking a difference of 0.617 million won relative to their husbands. Their income increased steadily overtime, to 2.392 million won when they were in a relationship with their future spouse, to 2.495 million won at the time of marriage and to 2.593 million won at the time of the survey. In comparison, the average monthly income of unmarried people aged 20 to 44 was much lower at 2.392 million won for men and 1.479 million won for women.

[Figure 3] Trends in income for newly married couples



Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults



Residence

The proportion of husbands who prior to marriage had lived with their “parents and/or grandparents” trended down from 80.8 percent at the time they graduated from their last school to 76.3 percent at the time of their first employment and to 69.3 percent at the time they were in a relationship with their future spouse. It was much the same trend with the wives, although with a difference of around 5 percentage points overall relative to the husbands.

Those who before marriage had lived alone as a proportion of the husbands increased over time, from 15.0 percent at the time of graduation from the last school attended to 19.4 percent at the time of first employment to 27.2 percent while in a relationship with their future spouse. Those who had lived alone before marriage as a share of the wives increased in much the same way, although their proportion was 3 to 7 percentage points lower relative to the husbands’.

[Table 1] People with whom newly married couples had lived prior to marriage

	People with whom they had lived before marriage	When they graduated from their last school	While in their first job	While in a relationship with their future spouse
Husbands	Parents and/or grandparents	80.8	76.3	69.3
	None (lived alone)	15.0	19.4	27.2
Wives	Parents and/or grandparents	84.3	81.0	75.5
	None (lived alone)	12.3	15.1	20.9

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

The proportion of husbands who before marriage had lived in an apartment (or a mixed-use apartment) varied slightly across different points of time, from 44.1 percent at the time of graduation from the last school attended, 43.9 percent at the time of first employment to 46.3 percent when they were in a relationship with their future spouse. For the wives, the proportion trended in a similar pattern, though at a slightly higher level.

The husbands surveyed were found to have lived in a multi-family housing unit in various proportions across different points of time, from 10.4 percent at the time of graduation from the last school attended to 12.0 percent at the time of their first employment and to 12.4 percent while they were in a relationship with their future spouse. For the wives, the proportion of those who before marriage had lived in a multi-family housing unit increased in a similar pattern, from 9.1 percent at the time of graduation from their last school to 10.3 percent at the time of first employment and to 11.5 percent when they were in a relationship with their future spouse.

[Table 2] Types of housing where newly married couples had lived before marriage

	Type of housing	At the time of graduation from the school last attended	At the time of first employment	While in relationship with future spouse
Husbands	Apartment; mixed-use apartment	44.1	43.9	46.3
	Multi-family housing unit	10.4	12.0	12.4
Wives	Apartment; mixed-use apartment	50.1	50.3	52.0
	Multi-family housing unit	9.1	10.3	11.5

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

As a proportion of the couples surveyed, those who lived in an apartment (or a mixed-use apartment) accounted for 64.7 percent at the time of marriage, 70.4 percent at the time of their first child’s birth and 69.9 percent at the time of the survey. Condo dwellers as a proportion of the surveyed couples declined from 12.6 percent at the time of marriage to 12.2 percent at the time of the first child’s birth and to 11.4 percent at the time of the survey. Those who had lived in a “multi-family housing unit” at the time of marriage accounted for 12.6 percent of the couples surveyed; 12.2 percent lived a multi-family housing unit at the time of their first child’s birth, and 11.4 percent at the time of the survey.

[Table 3] Types of housing for newly married couples, from the time of marriage onward

Housing type	At the time of marriage	At the time of the first child’s birth	At the time of the survey
Apartment; mixed-use apartment	64.7	70.4	69.9
Condo	12.6	12.2	11.4
Multi-family housing unit	10.7	7.9	8.4

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

The couples surveyed had a homeowner-occupancy rate of 29.7 percent at the time of marriage, 34.7 percent at the time of the first child’s birth, and 35.1 percent at the time of the survey. *Jeonse* rental tenants as a proportion of the couples surveyed accounted for 53.7 percent at the time of marriage, 51.8 percent at the time of the first child’s birth, and 50.0 percent at the time of the survey. The percentage of those living in a monthly rental home also trended down from the time of marriage to the time of the first child’s birth to the time of the survey. There was a tendency in the newly married couples to move from *jeonse* and monthly rental occupancy to homeowner occupancy, and from multi-family housing and condos to apartments.

[Table 4] Types of housing tenure for newly married couples, from the time of marriage onward

Housing tenure type	At the time of marriage	At the time of the first child’s birth	At the time of the survey
Owner-occupied	29.7	34.7	35.1
<i>Jeonse</i> rental (lump-sum deposit)	53.7	51.8	50.0
Monthly rental	8.6	6.1	7.4

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

Homeowner couples among the newlyweds surveyed were found to have spent 261.88 million won on average on homebuying. *Jeonse* tenant couples put down 181.71 million won in lump sum deposit. Monthly renter couples put down 52.82 million won on average in lump-sum deposit and were paying in addition a rent of 0.207 million won. There were substantial regional disparities in how much the newly married couples spend on their housing. The difference in the average cost spent on housing between Seoul and Gyeonggi regions on the one hand and other regions on the other was 231.45 million won in the case of owner-occupied tenure and 117.66 million won in the case of *jeonse* tenure.

[Table 5] Cost spent on housing by newly married couples

	Owner-occupied	<i>Jeonse</i> rental (lump-sum deposit with no monthly rent)	Monthly rent with deposit		Monthly rent	Other
	Homebuying	Security deposit	Security deposit	Monthly rent		
All	261.880	181.715	52.822	0.331	0.207	0.479
Region						
Seoul and Gyeonggi	404.819	217.534	76.236	0.377	-	0.424
Metropolitan regions	230.522	150.314	56.778	0.292	0.300	-
Other	173.364	99.874	26.399	0.309	0.182	0.522

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

Of those couples in their first year of marriage, 2.1 percent had one child; 89.6 percent of those in their fifth year of marriage had one child or more; 93.8 percent of those in their seventh year of marriage had one child or more.

[Table 6] Number of children by the number of years married

	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year	7th year	Total
No child	97.9	71.8	47.8	29.3	10.4	9.0	6.2	38.2
One child	2.1	26.9	49.6	54.2	59.7	45.3	37.7	38.2
Two or more children	0.0	1.3	2.7	16.6	29.9	45.7	56.1	23.6
Total	13.3	16.8	12.6	11.5	12.4	12.5	20.9	100.0

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

As married women in most cases complete their childbearing in their first five years of marriage, this study looks at the average number of children in couples in their sixth and seventh years of marriage. This study found that 53.9 percent of the couples where the husband was in a permanent position and 52.2 percent of the couples where the husband is in self-employment had two or more children. The couples whose husband was in a permanent employment position on average had 1.31 children. The average number of children the couples with the husband in a temporary employment position had was 1.46. The couples with the husband self-employed had an average 1.27 children.

[Table 7] Number of children by the husband's occupational status

	No child	1	2 or more	Total (N)	Average number of children
Permanent	6.3	39.9	53.9	100.0 (416)	1.48
Temporary	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0 (3)	1.00
Self-employed	7.5	40.3	52.2	100.0 (67)	1.45
Total (N)	6.6	41.0	52.4	100.0 (546)	1.46

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

[Table 8] Number of children by the wife's occupational status

	No child	1	2 or more	Total (N)	Average number
Permanent	11.7	45.5	42.9	100.0 (154)	1.31
Temporary	7.7	38.5	53.9	100.0 (13)	1.46
Daily	0.0	66.7	33.3	100.0 (3)	1.33
Self-employed	15.2	42.4	42.4	100.0 (33)	1.27
Unpaid family work	0.0	33.3	66.7	100.0 (3)	1.67
Total (N)	7.1	40.3	52.7	100.0 (509)	1.46

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults

Of those living in an owner-occupied home among the couples surveyed, 56.8 percent had two or more children; 50.0 percent of those living in a *jeonse* rental home had one child; 60.5 percent of those living in a *wolse* (deposit plus monthly rent) had two or more children; 57.1 percent of those living in rent-free housing had two or more children. The average number of children born to the couples surveyed varied with the type of tenure, from 1.50 for owner occupants to 1.37 for *jeonse* renters, and from 1.53 for monthly renters to 1.46 for rent-free dwellers. Under the assumption that people tend to transition from monthly renting to a *jeonse* rental home to homeownership, those living in an owner-occupied home should be the ones with the highest asset levels and therefore with the most average number of children. However, couples among the those surveyed who had the most average number of children were

monthly renters, while it was couples living in a *jeonse* rental home who had the least average number of children. In this respect, *jeonse*-renter couples can be thought to choose to refrain from having children as a way of transitioning to homeownership. In addition, monthly-renter couples, considering that they had the highest number of children despite having low incomes, may well be thought to be less driven to move on to homeownership.

[Table 9] Number of children by housing tenure type

	No child	1	2 or more	Total (N)	Avg. no. of children
Owner-occupied	7.1	36.1	56.8	100.0 (310)	1.50
<i>Jeonse</i>	6.6	50.0	43.4	100.0 (212)	1.37
Monthly rent	7.0	32.6	60.5	100.0 (43)	1.53
Rent-free	10.7	32.1	57.1	100.0 (28)	1.46
Total (N)	7.1	40.6	52.3	100.0 (593)	1.45

Source: KIHASA. 2019. A Survey Study of Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Young Adults



Concluding remarks

This study examined couples in their early years of marriage, as to how many children they had and how their occupational status and housing tenure varied in different points of time. The employment rate of the husbands did not much vary across different points of time, from the time of their first employment until the time of the survey. However, the wives saw rapid declines in employment rate since the time of their first employment before marriage, and the decline was especially marked after marriage. Women who withdraw from the labor market mostly do so after marriage. The fact that the M-shaped pattern of women's labor supply has smoothed the way it has in recent years may be attributed to the increased population of unmarried women and their labor force participation. Therefore, work-family balance policies need to be implemented with added driving force to help married women stay in the labor force.

The overall quality of employment, as measured in income and occupational status, was found to be higher in newly married couples than in unmarried men and women. As illustrated in Figure 1, the percentage of wives who are in work is low, which may imply that it is mostly married women whose opportunity cost of leaving their job is high who are staying in the labor force. This in part explains why the quality of employment is higher for married women than for unmarried women. Considering that the quality of employment is higher also for married men than for unmarried men, the matching of men and women is assumed to have become increasingly polarized in the marriage market.

As mentioned earlier, newly married couples tend to move from monthly rent to *jeonse* rent and on to homeownership, and from multi-family housing to a condo to an apartment. The average cost newly

married couples spend on their housing differed markedly across regions. The difference was especially pronounced between the Capital Region (Seoul and Gyeonggi regions) and the rest, revealing the need to focus policy support on homebuyers among newly married couples living in the Capital Region.

Of the newly married couples surveyed, those with the most average number of children were where the husband was in a permanent employment position and the wife was in a temporary position, a finding that highlights job security and sufficient time to look after children as two important factors for childbearing.

This study found that it was those living in a *jeonse* rental home who, as compared to those living in an owner-occupied home or monthly renters, had the least average number of children. What this implies is that couples living in a *jeonse* rental home are more prone than monthly renter couples to refrain from having children in order to transition to an owner-occupied home.

Housing is as highly important for couples in their early years of marriage as it is for those about to transition to marriage. In a country like Korea where having children remains strongly correlated with marriage, housing is a highly significant factor in fertility decisions. In this regard, housing policies need to help couples where both the husband and wife are first-time homebuyers, regardless of their income and debt levels, have easy access to loans they need to transition to homeownership. As upward mobility in housing tenure type tends to occur in step with the birth of a new child, it might well be worthwhile considering enhancing incentives that come tied with the number of children married couples have.