

## Factors and Consequences of Life Course Inequalities in 21st-Century Japan



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|------------------------|---|------------------------------|
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### Purpose and Background of the Research

#### ● Outline of the Research: Analyzing Life Courses through Panel Surveys

This study investigates the life courses individuals follow in 21st-century Japan, focusing on the inequalities embedded within them and analyzing the causes and consequences of these disparities (Fig. 1). To achieve this objective, we will convert the Japanese Life Course Panel Surveys for the Youth and Middle-aged Groups (JLPS-YM) to an online format, tailoring questions to respondents based on their previous responses and employing experimental methods (Fig. 2).

By doing so, we aim to provide a comprehensive and accurate explanation of people's life courses and the disparities within them, considering both changes in socioeconomic structures and individual choices. Based on our findings, we will also derive policy implications to address the challenges facing Japanese society.

#### ● Background of the Research: Diversification of Life Courses

In today's Japan, the standard pattern of life courses has been significantly disrupted due to changes in the labor market structure, such as the weakening of traditional Japanese employment practices, as well as various transformations in family structure.

As a result, a significant gap has emerged between those who continue to enjoy stable employment and career continuity and those who do not, resulting in disparities in family formation and social life. However, few studies have examined such changes and disparities in life courses over a sufficiently long time span, and even fewer have investigated their causes and consequences.

#### ● Purpose of the Research

This study addresses the following three questions by converting the paper-based panel survey (JLPS-YM) into a web-based format with questions designed to meet research objectives.

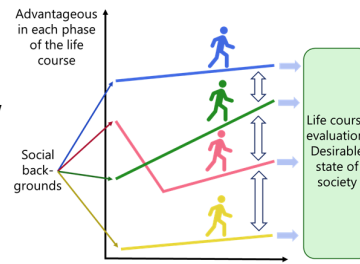


Figure 1. Life courses and disparities within them

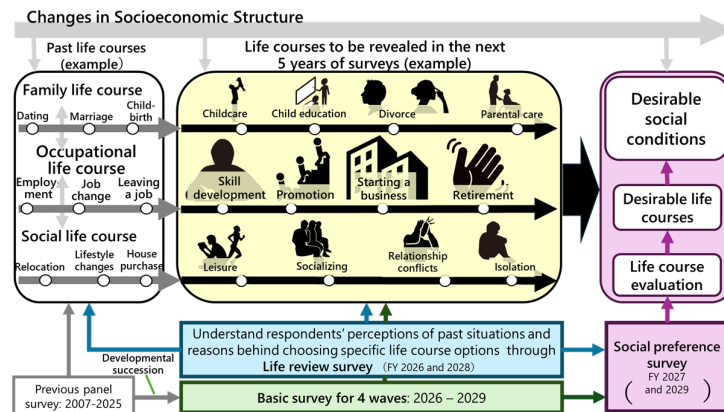


Figure 2. Subjects of this study and planned surveys

- (1) What kinds of life courses are people following in terms of occupational, family, and social life amid changing socioeconomic structures, and what kinds of disparities have emerged among them?
- (2) What kinds of situational perceptions, judgments, and choices contribute to disparities in people's life courses?
- (3) What kinds of life courses and social conditions do people consider desirable after reflecting on their own life courses?

This study also contributes to the public good for social science research and education on Japanese society by extending the large-scale panel survey, which has been conducted for nearly 20 years, for an additional five years, and by making the data publicly available at an early stage.

### Expected Research Achievements

#### ● Survey Plan: Three Web-based Surveys and an Online Interview Survey

The following three web surveys will be conducted as part of this research (Fig. 3).

- (1) Basic Survey (every fiscal year): This survey continues from the previous panel survey (JLPS-YM) and has been transitioned to a web-based format. It aims to capture respondents' current life courses in a detailed manner.
- (2) Life review survey (FY2026 and FY2028): This survey is customized to respondents' occupational, family, and social life course patterns. It will investigate their perceptions of past situations, the decisions they made, and the reasons behind their choices regarding life course options to date.
- (3) Social Preference Survey (FY2027 and 2029): Using experimental methods such as conjoint surveys, this survey will explore respondents' preferences for desirable life courses and the social conditions that support them. It will also explore how they evaluate their own life course.

Additionally, an online interview survey will be conducted with selected respondents who have agreed to participate, supplementing the above surveys.

|  | FY2025                      | FY2026           | FY2027              | FY2028           | FY2029                    |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Respondents of JLPS-YM (Surveyed for up to 19 years) | Transition to online survey | Basic survey w20 | Life review survey1 | Basic survey w21 | Social preference survey1 |
|  |                             | Basic survey w22 | Life review survey2 | Basic survey w23 | Social preference survey2 |
|  |                             |                  |                     |                  | Basic survey w24          |

Figure 3. Five-year survey plan

#### ● Main Research Topics

##### (1) Identification of Life Course Patterns and Elucidation of Disparities

Utilizing multi-channel sequence analysis and group-based trajectory modeling, we will identify respondents' life course patterns and analyze the socioeconomic disparities among them, considering the interrelationships among occupational, family, and social life courses. We will also investigate the impact of the weakening of traditional Japanese employment practices on workers' occupational careers.

##### (2) Analysis of Factors and Consequences of Life Courses and Their Disparities

We will examine the respondents' situational perceptions and decisions made at key turning points (e.g., job changes, unemployment, and marriage) within each life course pattern. By doing so, we aim to provide a comprehensive and accurate explanation of people's life courses and the disparities among them. Furthermore, we will explore how individuals' life courses shape their evaluation of their life courses and preferences for desirable social conditions.