

**Fertility Intentions and Behavior in a Lowest-Low Fertility Country:  
Findings from Korea**

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While there has been a growing literature on low fertility in developed Western countries, little is known about the phenomenon in Asian countries. It is a question of great interest whether the findings from the former apply to the very different context in the latter. In particular, the fertility rate in Korea in the last decade has been one of the lowest in the world but has received little attention by scholars, in part due to lack of data.

The Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families (KLoWF) is the first nationally-representative longitudinal survey that contains information both on women's fertility behavior and on their fertility intentions in Korea. Three waves of data were collected from women aged 19 to 64 in 2007, with follow-ups in 2008 and 2010. The first two waves have been released, while the third is scheduled for release in October 2011.

Using data from the KLoWF, first, I assess to what extent Korean women achieve their fertility intentions over time, providing some clues about whether the lowest-low fertility in Korea is driven by a delay in having children or by a decline in total number of children that women want to have during their lifetime. Regarding fertility behavior, the first wave asked how many children had ever been born to the respondent. The second wave asked whether respondents had given birth since the previous wave. The third wave asked the same question.

As for fertility intentions, the KLoWF, except its first wave, asks whether and, if so,

when the respondent intends to have a child,<sup>1</sup> and how many children a woman intends to have during her lifetime. Accordingly, this paper uses the second wave as the baseline, which includes 8,666 women. Table 1 presents the summary of women's achieved parity and intended parity in the baseline year 2008.

To the question of whether a woman intended to have a child, 906 women chose 'yes,' 7,124 women chose 'no,' and 636 women chose 'don't know' in 2008. Among the 906 women who intended to have a child, 320 women planned to have a child within the next two years (Table 2). By comparing fertility intentions with fertility behavior between 2008 and 2010, I will assess to what extent women achieved their intended fertility over the two-year period.

Second, I investigate various factors at home and at work that may correlate with the match between women's intended and achieved fertility, and draw implications for other Asian countries with low fertility rates. I will examine possible correlates such as respondents' (and their husbands' if married) educational attainment, employment status, income, family-friendly workplace policies, household labor division, and child-care assistance by the extended family (including co-residence status with parents and parents' caring for their grandchildren). My planned analyses will divide women into four groups depending on their fertility intention in 2008: (1) 320 women who intended to have a child within the next two years, (2) 586 women who intended to have a child after the next two years, (3) 7,124 women who did not intend to have a child, and (4) 636 women who answered 'don't know' to the question concerning their intention. For each group, I will analyze the likelihood of giving birth between 2008 and 2010 with multi-variate logit regressions.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's intention to have a child means that in the future they intend to have the first child, if they have no child, and intend to have an additional child, if they already have at least one child.

Table 1. Achieved vs. intended parity, women aged 19-64, Korea, 2008

		Intended parity (including achieved parity)										Total
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Don't know	
Achieved parity	0	268	143	444	41	5	4	1	0	0	467	1,373
	1	0	847	149	11	0	0	0	0	0	104	1,111
	2	0	0	3,868	35	2	1	0	0	0	60	3,966
	3	0	0	0	1,532	0	0	0	0	0	5	1,537
	4	0	0	0	0	469	0	0	0	0	0	469
	5	0	0	0	0	0	154	0	0	0	0	154
	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	43	0	0	0	43
	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	10
	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
	Total	268	990	4,461	1,619	476	159	44	10	3	636	8,666

Source: Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families in 2008

Table 2. Intended timing for respondents who intend to have a child, women aged 19-64, Korea, 2008

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Within the next 1 year	150	16.6
Within the next 1-2 years	170	18.8
Within the next 2-3 years	64	7.1
Within the next 3-4 years	32	3.5
After the next 4 years	40	4.4
Don't know	450	49.7
Total	906	100.0

Note: The sample is restricted to women who intended to have a child.

Source: Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families in 2008