

## In sexless Japan, almost half of young men and women are virgins: survey



Talk about a shrinking population. A survey of Japanese people aged 18 to 34 found that almost 70 percent of unmarried men and 60 percent of unmarried women are not in a relationship.

Moreover, many of them have never got close and cuddly. Around 42 percent of the men and 44.2 percent of the women admitted they were virgins.

The government won't be pleased that sexlessness is becoming as Japanese as sumo and sake. The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has talked up boosting the birthrate through support for child care, but until the nation bones up on bedroom gymnastics there'll be no medals to hand out.

Far from getting together and getting it on, the sexes are growing apart. There are now many more virgins than in 2010, when the last study was conducted and when only 36.2 percent of men and 38.7 percent of women said they had never had sex.

The study, released Thursday, was conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

The institute has conducted the same survey every five years since 1987, when the

proportion of unmarried men and women who said they had no partner stood at 48.6 percent and 39.5 percent, respectively.

There was no accounting for the discrepancy between the genders, except perhaps for the age-old problem of men and women having different understandings of the word "commitment."

The surveys did not ask about same-sex partners.

The institute said the increase in singles was particularly sharp for people in their late 20s, the age at which science tells us women are most fertile.

Asked about their hopes for the future, there seemed to be recognition that families are what humans are destined for. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents said they want to get married "sometime in the future."

But 30 percent of the 2,706 men sampled and 26 percent of the 2,570 female respondents said they were not currently looking for a relationship.

"They want to tie the knot eventually. But they tend to put it off as they have gaps between their ideals and the reality," said Futoshi Ishii, head of the NIPSSR's population dynamics research department. "That's why people marry later or stay single for life, contributing to the nation's low birthrate."

Boosting the birthrate is one of the coveted goals of the Abe administration, which has declared it will raise the fertility rate from the current 1.4 to 1.8 by 2025 or so. The government hopes to achieve this by making it easier for families to raise children, such as by increasing the places available at nursery schools.

The survey suggests it may also have to find a way to play cupid.

Meanwhile, the same study found that the number of children among couples who have been married for between 15 and 19 years averaged a record-low 1.94.

But in a plus for female empowerment, it also showed the ratio of women who returned to work after having their first child exceeded 50 percent for the first time.

The study, conducted in June last year, covered 8,754 single people and 6,598 married couples across the country.