

Prohibiting Sex or Prohibiting True Love? An Empirical  
Assessment of Effect of Statutory Rape Law on Teenage  
Marriage in Japan\*

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**Abstract**

Statutory rape law that criminalizes a sexual relationship that involves those under the age of consent for the sexual behavior has been viewed as a way to protect youths from adults' exploitation and teenage childbearing. The same law also has been criticized as interfering into "true love" or "serious marriage," especially in Japan where the cohabitation and the out-of-wedlock childbearing are still rare. This paper provides some evidence on this question by estimating the effects of the passage of statutory rape rule and changes in the degree of enforcement at local prefectures on teenage marriage. We estimate reduced form models of new marital formations by prefecture-age group over the cohorts born between 1940-1990. We find that the passage of statutory rape law significantly encourages new marital formation of women under 18, the usual age of consent if the law exists. The results suggest that statutory rape law seems to be prohibiting some "true love" sexual relationship, which may have been substituted for by a formal marriage. It is, however, still an open question whether it increases "true love" or "cover-up" marriage given the Japanese context.

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