

## **Pathways to Extramarital Sex in Shanghai during the Transition from State to Market**

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In the 1980s, China launched a series of economic reforms and began to open its relations with the outside world; this transformation had major implications for the organization of the Chinese economy and society. While the average standard of living has increased, Chinese society has become more stratified as a result of market expansion and privatization (Wu and Xie 2003; Wu 2006; Zhou 2000). Attitudes toward sex and sexual behaviors have changed in tandem with this economic reform (Farrer 2001, 2003; Parish et al. 2007). These changes are especially dramatic for individuals who experienced job transitions from the state to the market sector, a transition that is often associated with higher earnings (Wu and Xie 2003) and status upgrade (Lu 2002). Those who transitioned to the market sector have more opportunities to socialize and travel, and, not surprisingly, display a higher risk of engaging in casual and commercial sex compared to those who remain in the state sector (Parish et al. 2003; Parish et al. 2007).

Many of the individuals who engage in casual and commercial sex are married. Yet, little is known about the prevalence of extramarital sex among married people. In this paper we explore the pathways through which status change leads to extramarital sex among married individuals in Shanghai, a city at the forefront of market reforms in China. Status change is broadly defined as an individual experiencing either (1) a transition from the state to the private sector, or (2) job loss as a result of the restructuring of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s. Ethnographic research suggests that private entrepreneurs view engagement in extramarital sex as a sign of a successful career and a dominant social position (Farrer 2001, 2003), and consider it an important component of business transactions and alliances (Zheng 2006). On the other hand, job loss may lead to mental and financial pressures (DiPrete 2002) and extramarital sex might provide a way to compensate for career failure (Pyke 1996).

An individual's status change will affect both his/her social status and his/her relative status in marriage vis-à-vis a spouse. Thus, individual status change may lead to extramarital sex by altering the relative status of a husband and wife. It may alter marital power dynamics by changing the extent to which a spouse contributes valued resources to the marriage (Rodman 1967, 1972). When imbalanced power characterizes the marital relationship, the more powerful member may be more likely to engage in extramarital sex.

For example, Edwards and Booth (1976) found that wives who reported “getting their way” in marital disagreements had higher rates of extramarital engagement. Forste and Tanfer (1996) found that wives who had more education than their husbands were more likely to engage in extramarital sex. Similarly, a worker’s job loss affects the well-being of other family members and the marital relationship as well (Dew et al. 1991). In most dual-income Chinese families the husband is still considered the primary economic provider (Higgins et al 2002); therefore, job loss of the husband is a major shock to the existing marital power relationship. The husband may lose the respect of his wife and children, and his decision-making power is challenged (Liker& Elder 1983). Engaging in extramarital sex might restore the male’s dominant position in the marriage. For example, among middle-aged men in the U.S., the inability to fulfill the role of economic provider in the family was found to be a major reason for engaging in extramarital relationships (Lusterman 1997).

## **Data**

Data for this study come from the Shanghai Sexual Networks Survey (SSNS) conducted from October 2007-January 2008. This is a citywide survey of a probability sample of 1,192 urban residents ages 18-49, and 496 rural migrants ages 18-49 living in residential households. These two samples were randomly selected from a stratified multi-stage cluster sample screened by the Shanghai Statistical Bureau for the 2005 3% intercensal survey of the Shanghai population.

These data are uniquely suited to explore the relationship between economic and marital status change dynamics and extramarital sex. They combine data on respondents’ sexual histories and the work histories of respondents and their spouses. Information was collected from respondents on their own and their current marital/cohabiting partners’ demographic and socioeconomic attributes (e.g., age, marital status, education, previous and present occupation and sector, duration in present occupation, individual income). To trace the sexual histories of respondents, the survey collected detailed demographic and socioeconomic attributes of up to three most recent non-marital partners, as well as the attributes (dates of start and end of partnership and type of partnership) and behavioral repertoires (frequency of sexual intercourse, type of sexual act, condom use) of each of these partnerships.

Married individuals constitute 72.27% of the sample, and the majority of individuals are in a first marriage (70.6% of the sample). Among those who are currently married, 68% had switched to work in the private sector, and 15% had lost their job for reasons other than retirement or re-training, and are currently unemployed. We categorize sex as extramarital when the date of first sex with someone other than a spouse/cohabiting partner comes after the date of first sex with current spouse/cohabiting partner. The prevalence of extramarital sex measured in this way is 7.88% for men and 1.42% for women.

Relative to measuring extramarital sex by directly asking respondents if they have had any other partner during their marriage (a question that was not asked in this survey), the definition of extramarital sex based on overlapping dates is likely to be an underestimate, because it is possible that respondents think in terms of established relationships when asked about specific dates but might have included short-term

relationships if asked directly about extramarital sex partners (Manhart et al. 2001). Although gender difference in extramarital sexual behaviors have been found consistently in other studies (e.g., Atkins et al. 2000), it may be that, relative to men, women focus more on long-term relationships and neglect to report short-term relationships. Given potential gender differences, models will be run separately by gender.

## Methods

Due to the low prevalence of extramarital sex, we use rare-events logistic regression to correct the underestimated probability of success in traditional logistic regression when the occurrence of the event is very low (King and Zeng 2001, 2003). Two kinds of status change will be specified in the regression model: (1) job shifts to the private sector, and (2) job loss resulting from the restructuring of state-owned enterprises. The occurrence of either one of these events can cause a change in the respondent's social status, which can, in turn, affect the risk of extramarital sexual behavior. The effect of each aspect of status change is estimated as a function of respondents' occupational class, education, cohort, number of trips outside Shanghai, marital duration and strength of close networks.

However, status change via job shift or job loss could be either the reason for, or the result of, extramarital sexual behavior. The latter is possible because extramarital sex is stigmatized and might affect job promotions (Farrer 2003). Therefore, we use event-history analysis to follow individuals starting at the time of marriage in order to predict the event of extramarital sex. In this model, in addition to other controls, we include individuals' job transitions as a time-varying covariate to explore the effect of status change of individuals on the risk of extramarital sex.

Event-history modeling is also used to examine the role of relative status change within marriage on the risk of extramarital sex. We treat relative status in the marriages of respondents as a time-varying covariate, which is jointly determined by the career patterns of both respondents and their spouses.

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