

SUMMARY REPORT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan— A Quantitative Study

Investigating the views, family life, and well-being of a faith community

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Hu, Xiaojun, and Tadahiko Murata.
*Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan—
A Quantitative Study: Summary
Report of Preliminary Findings.*
March 2024. www.jwj-qs.jp.

This scientific study was conducted by independent researchers with the cooperation of the Japan branch and world headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses. An academic advisory committee of international scholars reviewed the research design, examined the data for validity, and approved the summary report.

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Review of Research Methodology by Academic Advisors

The Jehovah's Witness (JW) organization in Japan, which has over 200,000 members participating in over 2,800 congregations nationwide, was recently faced with a need to obtain considerable information about the lifestyle, beliefs, and practices of its members. A study was needed to inform public officials and policy makers and to counter very negative media coverage in Japan about the group and its values and activities. Such media coverage has led the government of Japan to consider proposals to limit some Witness activities or even revoke the Church's status as a religious organization entirely, a development with major ramifications. This situation led to a creative and impressive effort to accomplish, within a very short timeline, research needed to obtain evidence-based information relevant to the controversy. The complex research design that was developed may well serve as a model of how to develop research on religious groups in other places. The elements of the approach taken will be described in brief with an assessment of the steps taken and the overall effort.

Two researchers—one a statistician and the other an academic in information science—oversaw the research project as principal and co-principal investigators. The survey design and analysis plan were reviewed by an advisory group of experienced researchers. Findings from the research were developed independently from oversight by the religious organization, which agreed to grant the researchers access to the study population. This made it possible to conduct online survey research to develop a sample of Witness members nationwide that would approximate a true random sample of members throughout Japan.

It is very difficult and potentially quite expensive to attempt a nationwide survey of members of a religious group. In recent decades, the internet has made the task more manageable if a religious organization has a way to connect with members using some of the internet-based research tools that have been developed for such purposes. However, even if an organization has a way of contacting members via the internet, there remain many challenges. Asking all members of a religious organization to submit responses to an internet survey is not practical because of the huge amount of data that would have to be analyzed. Thus, random sampling methods would need to be applied in order to obtain a large enough representative sample of the membership that would allow conclusions to be drawn from the data concerning important variables of interest (i.e., age, gender, length of time in the group, child rearing methods, etc.).

Also, the sample must be large enough to allow analysis on various variables of import. An initial step was to randomly select 150 congregations in Japan, with at least one congregation included from each of the 47 prefectures in Japan. This was accomplished by an experienced researcher not affiliated with the Witness organization but who is a member of the advisory committee. Then, with email addresses furnished by the national JW office, emails were sent to contact persons in each of the 150 congregations (church elders) explaining the research project and asking them to send the link to the survey instrument to all members of the 150 congregations who met the certain eligibility criteria. Those eligible were sent a link to the survey instrument that had been developed

to focus on areas where information was needed. The survey instrument was filled out online anonymously to ensure confidentiality of responses.

Eligibility criteria included being 18 or older, a baptized member of the congregation currently attending a Japanese-language congregation, and who had been involved in sharing their faith over the past six months. Over 11,000 eligible members were invited to participate, and over 8,000 requested and received the survey link. After some testing to make certain the survey instrument worked properly, the research was conducted in two waves in January 2024. The two waves of the survey resulted in a total of 7,640 surveys being completed. A total of 447 responses were deleted, leaving 7,193 responses that were used in the analysis. Respondents not meeting eligibility criteria (160) were dropped from the sample, as were 239 respondents whose responses indicated a social desirability pattern (answering all five questions on the Socially Desirable Response Set* with the same extreme response). Also dropped from the sample were 45 respondents who implausibly reported a baptism year prior to their birth year and three “straight-lining” respondents who selected the same response on at least two consecutive scaled measures.

The overall research design and plan were reviewed by an advisory group of experienced academics who have been involved for decades doing research on minority religions in various countries. Academics on

the advisory group were not members of the JWs. Thus, although the research was carried out by investigators who were members of the JW community, the use of an independent advisory group lends credence to the effort. It is also worth noting that other elements of the research design (random selection of congregations, anonymous submissions, use of validated measures such as the social desirability scale, transparency of the data gathering and analysis, plus the comprehensive statement of limitations of the research design) add overall validity to the project.

The approach described above, including the important role of an advisory group of independent researchers, demonstrates the efficacy of the multi-level methods used, which resulted in a large data set that allowed analysis of many aspects of JW life. The instrument itself was lengthy, with 50 main sets of questions organized into four major areas of JW life: religious factors, family life, general attitudes, and health and well-being. These data will be useful in responding to the criticisms of JWs that have developed in Japan, and the methods developed for the survey will, we believe, serve as a model when other religious groups or religion scholars want to find out details of the lives of members of a religious group.

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*See Ron D. Hays, Toshi Hayashi, and Anita L. Stewart, “A Five-Item Measure of Socially Desirable Response Set,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 629–636, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316448904900315>.

Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan—A Quantitative Study (JWJ-QS) examines the attitudes, values, and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan, a relatively small Christian faith community numbering about 214,000 adherents.¹

This summary report provides key preliminary findings and conclusions from the study. The full report of preliminary findings will become available progressively at <https://jwj-qs.jp/>.

Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs), a group known for publicly sharing its beliefs, originated in the United States in the late 19th century. They were first present in Japan in the 1920s. In more than a century since then, only one scientific study has been done on Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan, a sociological survey in 1977.²

The lack of scientific data on Jehovah's Witnesses has come into sharp focus in the context of recent second-generation controversies regarding religious minorities. An eruption of inflammatory rhetoric has developed against minority religions following the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022, by the adult son of a member of the Unification Church. Some second-generation activists who are former Witnesses or were reared by Jehovah's Witness parents have joined the campaign, calling on the government to restrict the Witnesses' religious practices based on allegations related to their child-rearing, parental rights, and medical choices.

This independent study seeks to fill the gap in academic literature and public understanding by exploring the perspectives of those who are currently part of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith community, including first- and second-generation adherents. The research team conducted a methodologically rigorous survey of congregants from all parts of Japan, using a survey questionnaire developed in cooperation with the Japan national office and world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses. An academic advisory committee of internationally recognized scholars reviewed the survey design and research findings. Their comments and suggestions have been incorporated into the survey design.

Methodology

An anonymous online survey was open to all eligible persons in 150 randomly selected congregations out of 2,807 Japanese-language congregations in the 47 prefectures in Japan. To be eligible to take the survey, individuals had to be age 18 or over, currently attending a Japanese-language congregation in Japan, and actively participating in the public ministry of Jehovah's Witnesses for the past six months. Links to the survey were made available to all eligible persons, numbering 11,344, in the selected congregations, and 8,197 requested the survey link. Participation was optional, and completed surveys were submitted directly and anonymously to the survey platform, KoboToolbox.³

¹ 2023 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide: 2023 Country and Territory Reports, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2023-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2023-Country-and-Territory-Reports/>.

² Bryan R. Wilson, "Aspects of Kinship and the Rise of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan," *Social Compass* 24, no. 1 (1977): 97–120.

³ KoboToolbox allowed confidential data collection that fully complied with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, with data security measures, restricted password-protected access, data encryption, virus and intruder firewall protections, and skip logic functions. The one submission per respondent feature was selected to prevent the same user from taking the survey more than once on the same device (<https://www.kobotoolbox.org/>).

Survey design. The survey questionnaire contained measures about religious identity and motivations, family life and child-rearing, attitudes and values, and physical and mental health. At the end of the survey, participants could add comments related to the survey topics. Selected comments are included in this summary report.

The survey was conducted in two waves, from January 5 to 9 and January 10 to 14, 2024. A total of 7,640 surveys were submitted out of 11,344 invited congregants, resulting in a response rate of 67.3%. The response rate for each region was: Hokkaido, 63.9%; Tohoku, 66.8%; Kanto, 67.0%; Chubu, 69.8%; Kansai, 67.7%; Chugoku, 71.5%; Shikoku, 66.0%; Kyushu, 64.3%.

During the data cleaning process, 160 ineligible submissions and 48 other nonqualifying submissions were removed from the data set according to scientific standards. The survey included a measure to identify respondents who showed a clear pattern of socially desirable responses, that is, replies that are intended to be socially desirable instead of the respondents' true opinion or experiences.⁴ Based on their extremely favorable responses to this measure, the submissions of 239 respondents were removed. In total, 447 submissions were removed from the data set, leaving a total sample of 7,193 submissions.⁵

Demographic Findings

A comparison of the demographic characteristics of the survey sample ($n = 7,193$) with the distribution of the general population of Japan shows the following:

Gender and age distribution. Consistent with the gender breakdown since the religion's earliest days in

Japan, Jehovah's Witnesses have more females (71.0%) compared to the general population aged 18 and over (51.8%).⁶ For the sample population of Jehovah's Witnesses, 14.5% were young adults (ages 18 to 39), 36.9% middle-aged adults (ages 40 to 59), and 48.6% were older adults (ages 60 and over).

Education. Table 1 compares the education level of the sample population with the Japan general population. (The Japan population included those aged 15 years and over; the JW sample included ages 18 and over.) The majority of JW respondents (58.4%) graduated from high school and over one-third (36.7%) completed post-secondary education, compared to 35.0% and 33.0%, respectively, of the general population. In the JW sample, 2 respondents reported having no formal education and 52 respondents (0.7%) did not report their education level.

Table 1. Education level, Japan population, and JW sample population

Education level	Japan population, aged 15+ (N = 108,259 in thousands)	JW sample, aged 18+ (n = 7,193)
Elementary school or junior high school	11.2%	4.1%
Senior high school or middle school	35.0	58.4
Junior college or higher professional school	12.8	24.4
College, university or graduate course	20.2	12.3

Source: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2024*, (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2024), 63, Table 2-9, Population 15 Years Old and Over by Age Group and Educational Level (2000 to 2020), <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/73nenkan/zenbun/en73/book/index.html#page=96>.

⁴ Ron D. Hays, Toshi Hayashi, and Anita L. Stewart, "A Five-Item Measure of Socially Desirable Response Set," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 629–636, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316448904900315>.

⁵ The 447 submissions were removed from the data set as follows: 160 did not meet the eligibility criteria; 45 implausibly reported a baptism year prior to their birth year; and 3 respondents selected the same digit consecutively (called "straight-lining") on at least two scales. In addition, 239 submissions were removed for extreme socially desirable responses.

⁶ e-Stat, Statistics of Japan, "Population Estimates / Annual Report," Population by Age (Single Years), Sex and Sex ratio - Total population, Japanese population, October 1, 2022, accessed and edited by Xiaojun Hu, January 25, 2024, Table 1, [Population by Age \(Single Years\), Sex and Sex ratio - Total population, Japanese population, October 1, 2022](#). For a comparable age comparison with the sample population, the percentage was calculated for those aged 18 and over from the general population census report.

Employment and economic status. The total JW sample population (ages 18 and over) had an employment rate of 57.7%, comparable to the national employment rate of 60.9%.⁷ The JW unemployment rate for those under age 65 is 3.4% compared with the national rate of 2.6% (2.7% calculated for those under age 65).⁸ The differences between the general and sample populations may be partially attributed to the age distribution of the sample and national populations.

The survey also assessed the current financial situation of respondents using five categories. The high ratio of females and older adults in the JW community might suggest that a substantial portion would be economically disadvantaged. The 2021 poverty rate in Japan was 15.7%, with over 50% of single mothers, 25%

of elderly, and 14% of children living in poverty, and an overall food insecurity rate of 3.4%.⁹ Although official measures of food insecurity may not be comparable to subjective ratings, it is of note that the survey found that only 2.4% of respondents indicated they could hardly afford food, whereas 8.6% had enough money for food, 30.3% had enough money for food and clothes but would have difficulty buying large appliances, 46.0% could easily purchase appliances, and 7.8% could afford expensive or costly items.

The main findings follow the thematic organization of the survey: religious attitudes and experiences, family life, general social attitudes, and health and well-being. At the end of the survey, respondents had the option to add comments. This report includes selected comments that reflect the findings.

Religious Attitudes and Experiences

The JWJ-QS survey investigated several questions related to religious attitudes and experiences: (1) Who become Jehovah's Witnesses? When, how, and why have they done so? (2) Who have left the faith, and why have some returned? (3) How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive their congregation life, their fellow congregants, and society at large? The findings illuminate the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan, characteristics of individual conversion, personal attractions to the religion, and social relations.

Older religions mainly gain new converts by heredity. By contrast, new religions are often composed primarily of first-generation adult converts. The increase among Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan comprises first-generation converts and those who were raised from childhood in the religion. The survey examined the conversion experience of current Witnesses, including their family's religious history and their personal motivation to become and remain Witnesses.

⁷ Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2024*, (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2024), 429, Table 19-1, Population Aged 15 Years Old and Over by Labour Force Status, <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/73nenkan/zenbun/en73/book/index.html#page=462>.

⁸ Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2024*, (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2024), 432, Table 19-2, Labour Force by Age Group and Labour Force Status, <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/73nenkan/zenbun/en73/book/index.html#page=466>.

⁹ Haruka Ueda, "Multidimensional Food Poverty: Evidence from Low-Income Single Mothers in Contemporary Japan," *Food Ethics* 8, no. 2 (2023): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41055-023-00123-9>.

The decision to be baptized as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses is normally preceded by a period of Bible study, whether the individual is first generation or a succeeding one. Respondents reported the duration of their Bible study before baptism and their perception of control or choice in the decision to be baptized.

The study population included those who decided to leave the Jehovah’s Witness community for a time. The survey did not inquire about their reasons for leaving—whether respondents voluntarily ceased religious activity or were expelled for unrepentant, serious violation of the Witnesses’ moral code of conduct. Respondents reported reasons for their decision to return to the community.

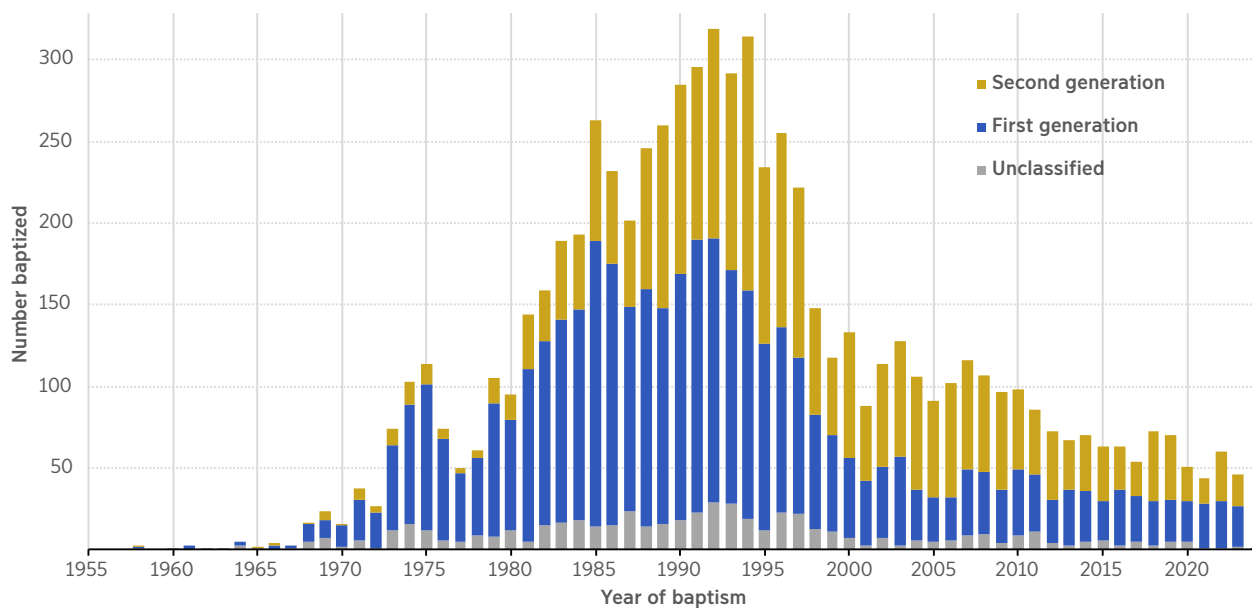
Finally, the decision to identify oneself with a religion includes, not only consideration of beliefs, but also a subjective assessment of what the religious community offers in the way of social support, how the religion might affect interpersonal relationships, and how adherents are affected by the way others view the religion.

Becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses—Who, When, How, and Why

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan are known for sharing their beliefs with the public at their homes and on the streets. JWJ-QS data align with official reports of rapid growth from the 1970s through the early 1990s, with fewer new baptisms thereafter.

First- and second-generation converts. Those baptized during the early years of the religious group were mostly first-generation JWs; but as the number of converts increased, more of those newly baptized had at least one JW parent. Of the total sample, 53.2% were first generation with no JW parent and 38.9% were second generation with at least one JW parent. (In a separate survey question that asked who in the family “are JWs, or were at the time of death,” 45.8% indicated that they had a JW parent.) Figure 1 shows the breakdown of first- and second-generation JWs by respondents’ baptism year. (If it could not be confirmed that the respondent was baptized before or after their parent, then they were categorized as unclassified.)

Figure 1. First- and second-generation Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1955 to 2024



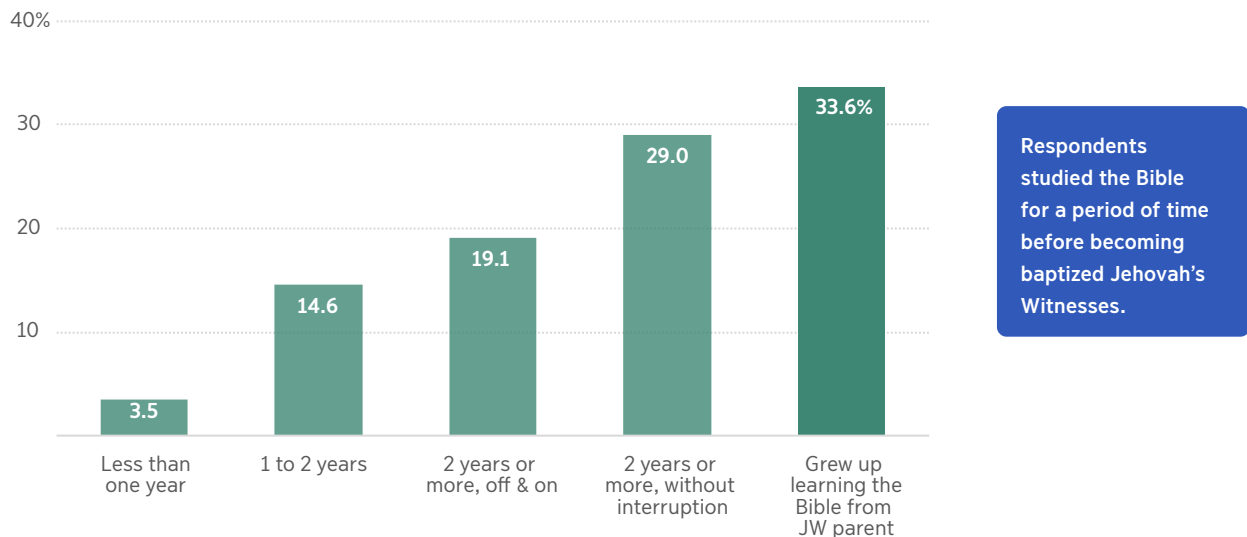
Note: First generation, $n = 3,826$ (53.2%); second generation, $n = 2,797$ (38.9%); unclassified, $n = 570$ (7.9%).

A total of 55.5% of second-generation JW's were age 6 or under, and one-fourth (25.0%) were ages 7 to 12 when their parents became Witnesses. The rest were teenagers (8.5%) or adults (11.0%) when a parent converted to the religion, suggesting a cross-generational influence on religious beliefs in parent-child relationships.

Age at baptism. The average age at baptism was nearly 28. Over one-fourth of respondents were baptized as minors (under age 18), over half were baptized at ages 18 to 39, with the rest being baptized in later life.

Period of study before baptism. The decision to be baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses occurs after considerable time and study. As shown in Figure 2, about one-third of respondents learned about the religion while growing up with a JW parent or guardian. Two-thirds learned from individual instruction provided by JW congregants. Of those, 62.7% studied for longer than a year, with almost half (48.1%) studying for two or more years, either continuously or intermittently.

Figure 2. Time spent in religious study before baptism



Note: n = 7,193.

Perceived individual choice in study experience.

The survey investigated the extent to which respondents felt that their decision to become Jehovah's Witnesses was a result of external pressure or personal choice. Most (86.5%) disagreed with the statement that JW's tried to control them; less than ten percent (8.2%) perceived efforts to control them. Regardless, 96.8% indicated that becoming Jehovah's Witnesses was their personal decision; 1.8% disagreed.

My father is a Buddhist and my mother is one of Jehovah's Witnesses. So I grew up in a religiously divided household.... I was able to think and make a decision for myself.
 —Male, 50s, 2nd generation

I believe that decisions regarding religion should be made by each individual and that even parents should not force their faith on their children.
 —Male, 60s, 1st generation

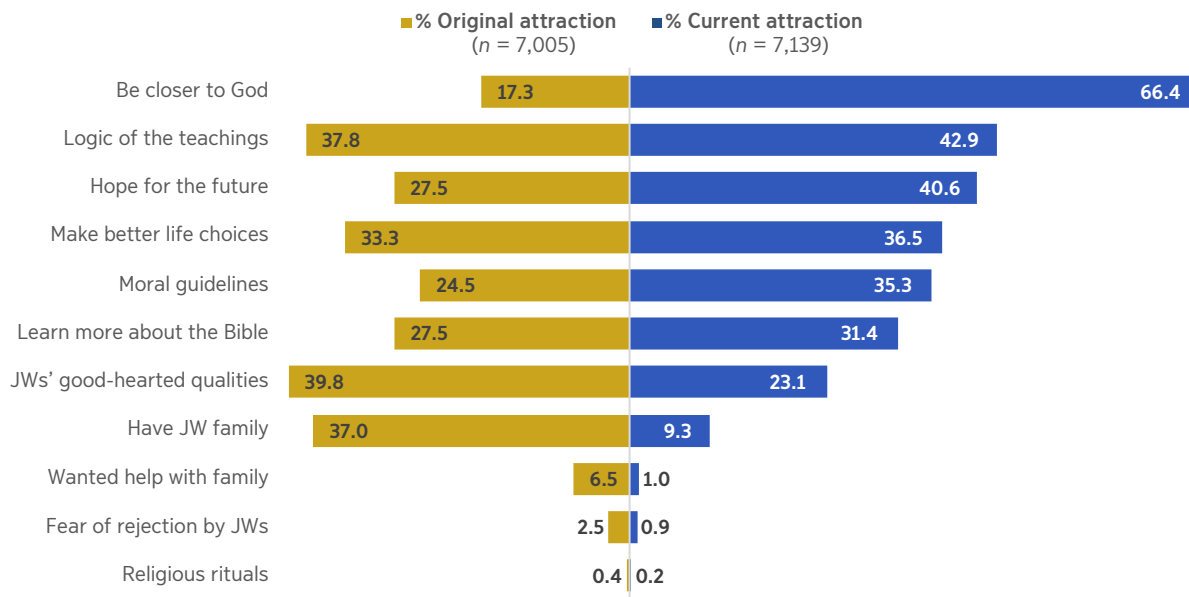
Original and current attractions to Jehovah’s Witnesses. In line with the finding that most respondents perceived their conversion to the religion as a personal choice, original and current attractions to become and remain Jehovah’s Witnesses differed somewhat, as shown in Figure 3.

“Logic of the teachings” was one of the top three choices for both original (37.8%) and current (42.9%) attractions. The other two top original choices—had JW “family members” (37.0%) and JWs’ “good-hearted

qualities” (39.8%)—were superseded over time. Along with “logic of the teachings,” two other top current attractions were “be closer to God” (66.4%) and “hope for the future” (40.6%). Only 2.5% indicated concern about rejection by JW family or friends if they did not convert, and less than 1% selected this as a reason to remain in the religion. In contrast, more Jehovah’s Witnesses chose as current attractions “make better life choices” (36.5%), “moral guidelines” (35.3%), and “learn more about the Bible” (31.4%).

Figure 3. Original and current attractions to Jehovah’s Witnesses

What originally attracted you to Jehovah’s Witnesses? What attracts you now to Jehovah’s Witnesses?



Note: “Prefer not to answer” and “none of the above” responses were removed.

“Logic of the teachings” was a main original and current attraction to Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Other original attractions:

- JWs’ good-heartedness
- Having JW family

Other current attractions:

- To be closer to God
- Hope for the future

Leaving and Returning—Who Leave and Why They Return

The survey inquired if respondents ever regretted being Jehovah's Witnesses and if they ever stopped their association with the Witness community. The majority (96.1%) indicated that they "never" or "rarely" regretted being Jehovah's Witnesses. Less than 1% indicated that they "often" or "always" had regrets.

Out of the total sample, 268 respondents (3.7%, 204 females and 64 males) reported that they had stopped their association for a time.¹⁰ The average age when ceasing association was 30.6, but most stopped associating while in their 20s. Among those who reported stopping their association, almost one-third (30.6%) resumed within two years of leaving and almost half (48.9%) resumed their association within four years of having stopped. One-fourth resumed association within five to ten years and almost one-fourth after ten or more years of interruption.

Motivations to return. The survey asked those who resumed association with Jehovah's Witnesses after an interruption to rate the importance of various reasons for returning. About 90% rated these three reasons as important or very important:

- Wanted a closer relationship with God (90.3%)
- Wanted to make better decisions in life (89.6%)
- Decided that the Witness life was a better way (89.6%)

Three-fourths of respondents rated "felt happier" as JW's as important or very important. Although some respondents likely had limited social interaction with JW friends and family during their time away, a relatively low percentage indicated that missing associa-

tion with JW friends (37.7%) or JW family (29.9%) was an important motivation to resume association.

Congregation Support, Relationship Changes, and Discrimination

The study investigated certain benefits and costs associated with being Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan.

Congregation support. The survey asked the extent to which Jehovah's Witnesses view their religious community as a source of social connectedness and support, especially in times of need. Over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the congregation integrates and strengthens congregants and is dependable in times of need, and that they have people to talk to during hard times. Nearly 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the congregation is a source of mutual support and can be counted on during natural disasters, war, or other extreme situations.

There is no congregation without a problem. Since we are a family, it is normal to have misunderstandings. But we can talk, forgive, be forgiven, and be united.

—Female, 30s, 2nd generation

Perceived changes in relationships. The survey asked respondents how they would rate their current relationships with relatives and nonrelatives compared to the time before becoming Jehovah's Witnesses. Respondents reported that after they became Witnesses, their relationships with spouses (44.5%), with children (30.9%), and neighbors, workmates, and schoolmates (25.6%) saw the greatest improvement. For all relationships, at least three-fourths reported having good or improved relationships.

¹⁰Among Jehovah's Witnesses, a distinction is made between those who become inactive (no longer participating in the ministry with the congregation) and those who are no longer Jehovah's Witnesses (either because they have been disfellowshipped for unrepentant serious violations of the Witnesses' code of conduct or they have formally disassociated themselves from the congregation by renouncing their faith). Inactivity carries no congregation sanctions. Disfellowshipping or formal disassociation generally results in congregants withdrawing spiritual and social ties, though the individuals may continue to attend religious services; and in the immediate household, normal family dealings continue. Disassociated ones or disfellowshipped individuals who repent and cease behavior deemed objectionable may be reinstated and resume fellowship with the congregation. "Do Jehovah's Witnesses Shun Those Who Used to Belong to Their Religion?" *Frequently Asked Questions* (article series), Jehovah's Witnesses—Official Website, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/shunning/>.

Experiences of discrimination from media, social media, and other forms. Respondents indicated the types of discrimination they had experienced in the past 12 months. Nearly 95% of Jehovah’s Witnesses reported seeing media coverage that they believed misrepresented the religious community. The survey findings show the possible effects of negative media reports and social media content. Almost 10% indicated that they experienced pressure from non-Witness family or friends after they saw social media posts about Jehovah’s Witnesses. Over 500 respondents reported that they had been victims of insults, 63 were denied employment, and 54 had been threatened or attacked because of their religion.

The media report only negative news about Jehovah’s Witnesses. I am very sorry that they do not take up the voices of the second-generation people who are happy to be Jehovah’s Witnesses.

—Female, 20s, 2nd generation

Family Life

Marriage, parenting, and intergenerational family composition have undergone major changes in Japan in recent years. For instance, the birth rate and consequently the number of minor children per household have decreased, while rates of divorce and single-parent and one-person households are on the rise.

JWJ-QS collected data on the composition of respondents’ families, as well as their attitudes toward family life and child-rearing practices.

Family composition. Most Jehovah’s Witnesses in the sample were or had been married, but a large proportion of them had no minor children, in part because of the older average age of respondents. Among Witnesses who had minor children, nearly 90% were married, providing minor children with the support of

two-parent households. The percentage of Jehovah’s Witnesses in single-person households, ranging from younger to older adults, was about half that of the general population in Japan.¹¹

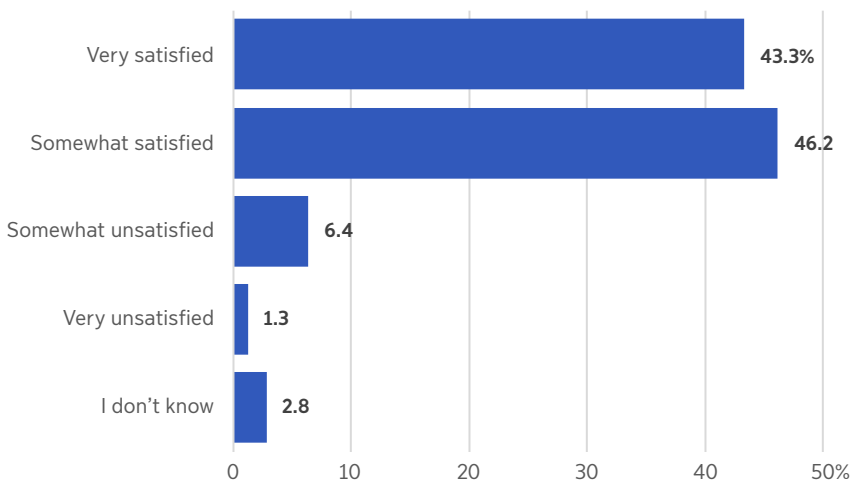
The data reveal that many Jehovah’s Witnesses are part of multigenerational families, including possible three-generational households with older adults and minor children, composed of both Witness and non-Witness relatives. Reasons to live in a multigenerational household can vary widely, whether caregiving, economic, filial, emotional, or other needs. Behind the numbers are unique and complex relationship dynamics that support individuals of all ages within the family unit. The data suggest a high degree of intergenerational connection among Jehovah’s Witnesses.

¹¹ In 2020, one-person households accounted for around 38 percent of the total number of private households in Japan, while more than half of the total households were made up of nuclear families. The number of one-person households has increased over the past two decades. “Share of Single Households Japan 2000–2020,” Statista, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/606243/japan-one-person-households/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20one%2Dperson%20households,over%20the%20past%20two%20decades>.

As previously described, most respondents regarded their fellow congregants as a supportive social network. Does this congregational closeness result because many Witnesses have no family members that share their faith? On the contrary, the data show that a large majority of respondents (82.6%) had at least one JW relative, most often a mother, followed by a father or one or more grandparents. One-fourth had a sibling network that shared their faith. About one-fifth reported having no Witness relatives.

Family satisfaction and functioning. The respondents' view of the quality of their family life was measured by a single question: "How satisfied are you with your family life?" As shown in Figure 4, nearly 90% selected either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied; conversely, less than 8% were somewhat or very unsatisfied.

Figure 4. Satisfaction with family life
How satisfied are you with your family life?



Most (90%)
Jehovah's Witnesses
are satisfied with
their family life.

Note: n = 7,193.

If I had not studied the Bible, I may have put myself first and my family second; but I have been taught that it is important as the head of the family to put the physical, mental, and emotional needs of my wife and children first.
—Male, 40s, 2nd generation

The quality of communication and the degree of closeness or conflict in a family can affect family members as individuals and the family unit as a whole. JWJ-QS used a validated measure for three aspects of family functioning: cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict.¹²

¹² Charlotte Ching Ting Fok, James Allen, David Henry, and People Awakening Team, "The Brief Family Relationship Scale: A Brief Measure of the Relationship Dimension in Family Functioning," *Assessment* 21, no. 1 (2014): 67–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107319111425856>.

Over 80% of respondents rated their family’s expressiveness positively. A large majority characterized their families as cohesive, with 90.8% agreeing that “in our family we really help and support each other,” and three-fourths agreed that their families “spend a lot of time doing things together” and “have a feeling of togetherness.”

The conflict subscale in the family functioning measure asked if family members argued frequently or often put each other down. Slightly less than one-third of respondents indicated that their families are characterized by anger and frequent arguments. A small number (213 respondents) agreed that “my family members sometimes are violent.” Although most Jehovah’s Witnesses reported expressiveness and cohesiveness in their family life, some respondents indicated that they contend with troubling family situations.

Family functioning was also examined by gender, age, marital situation and mixed-faith marriages, and years

as a Jehovah’s Witness. The findings show that older adults had less positive scores, while males, those married, and long-time JWs had more positive scores.

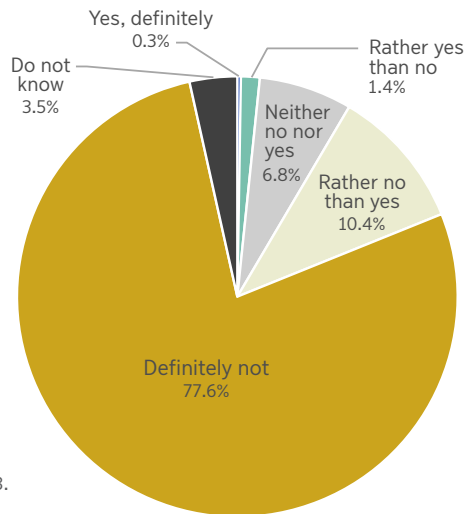
Marriage and Divorce

Commitment to marriage is related to the duration of and degree of satisfaction in marital relationships. Respondents expressed a strong sense of commitment whether or not their spouse shared their religious beliefs; although, rates of commitment and satisfaction were higher for those with Witness spouses.

Religious difference not a reason to divorce. Since religious differences have the potential to cause marital conflict leading to divorce, the survey asked if one’s spouse does not share the same beliefs, is that “an acceptable reason for a divorce.” Figure 5 shows that 77.6% of respondents replied that having different religious beliefs was “definitely not” an acceptable reason to divorce and only a fraction (0.3%) indicated that it would be an acceptable reason for divorce.

Figure 5. Religious difference, not acceptable reason for divorce

If one spouse is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the other spouse does not share his or her beliefs, is that an acceptable reason for a divorce?



Three-fourths of Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe that difference in religious beliefs is an acceptable reason to divorce.

Note: n = 7,193.

Factors for a happy marriage. Among the most important factors for a happy marriage, “fidelity” topped the list for over 99% of respondents, including those with JW and non-JW spouses. Sharing the same beliefs, readiness to discuss problems together, understanding, and tolerance were the next items of importance. Factors considered less important for a happy marriage included good living conditions, satisfaction in sexual relations, having the same social background, and having children.

Adult Children’s Recall of Child Discipline Approaches

The study investigated Jehovah’s Witnesses’ perception of child discipline approaches in Japan and how the discipline approaches might differ by gender, generation, and for JW and non-JW parents. Respondents indicated their recollections of various methods of discipline used by their parents or school officials.

The analysis of discipline approaches was calculated for the total sample and then broken down by gender, generation, and JW and non-JW parents. Types of discipline were categorized as follows:

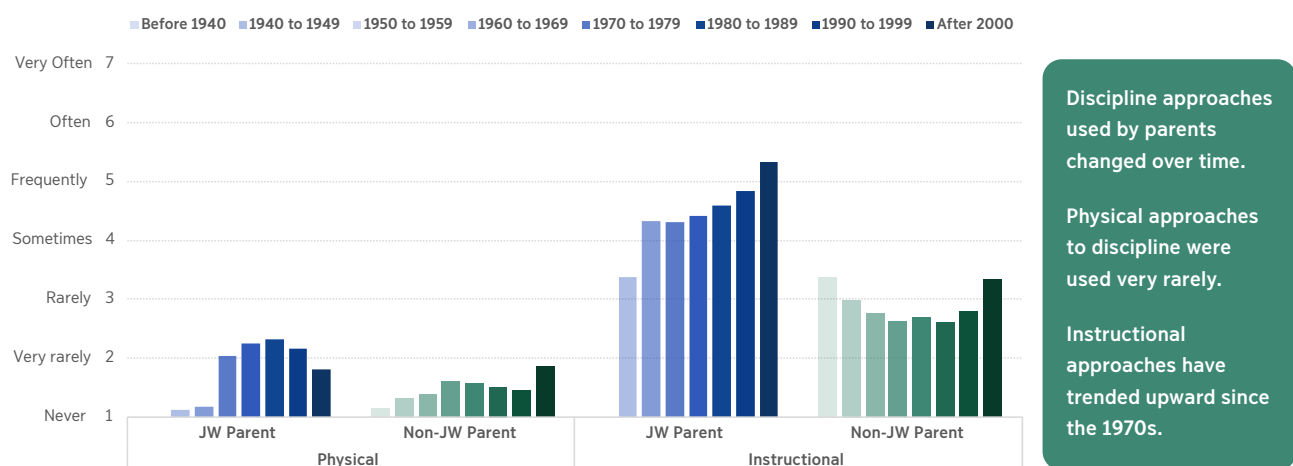
- Verbal (shout, yell, scold; threaten to do something)
- Distal (ignore or not talk; send to another room)
- Behavioral (add more chores; take away or prohibit something)
- Physical (hit with object; hit with open hand)
- Instructional (commend for good work / explain why behavior was good or bad)

Respondents recalled that parents used multiple types of discipline. However, most types of discipline were reportedly used rarely or very rarely.

Gender and generation. For all discipline approaches, mothers appeared to have been more involved in administering discipline than fathers, using all types of discipline more frequently. To analyze generational effects, survey respondents were grouped by decades based on their year of birth. Those born in the 1940s and 1950s recalled less frequent discipline, though recall and perception over decades of time would likely differ from the actual situation. Respondents born after 2000 recalled less physical discipline and more instructional discipline than were used in the 1970s, when physical discipline reportedly peaked. The data show a similar pattern over time for parental and school discipline, suggesting a larger cultural influence.

JW and non-JW parents. Adult children recalled that JW parents used discipline approaches more often than non-JW parents. Figure 6 shows the physical discipline approaches (hitting with hand or object) and instructional approaches (commending and explaining) as respondents recalled their JW parents and non-JW parents using. JW parents used considerably more instructional discipline than non-JW parents, who used such instruction rarely. Both JW and non-JW parents reportedly used physical discipline very rarely; but according to the youngest age cohort, physical approaches used by JW parents were trending downward.

Figure 6. Generational differences in discipline approaches used by parents, as recalled by adult children



Discipline approaches used by parents changed over time.

Physical approaches to discipline were used very rarely.

Instructional approaches have trended upward since the 1970s.

Note: The sample size varied for each subgroup and each decade cohort.

I regret that I should have raised my child more lovingly. I was a single parent and focused only on my daily life.

—Female, 70s, 1st generation

When I was a child, my mother, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was strict and hit my bottom many times. However, corporal punishment at school was quite common at that time. I don't feel traumatized by remembering that.

—Male, 50s, 2nd generation

Acceptable discipline approaches today.

Respondents were asked to select the discipline approaches they currently feel are acceptable. Instructional methods, followed by behavioral discipline, were most frequently chosen. For Jehovah's Witnesses, the words most closely associated with the term "discipline" were to "instruct" (91.7%) or "correct" (90.4%), with only a fraction (2.2%) associating "discipline" with "physically punish." Of the 5,962 Witnesses who rated the acceptability of corporal punishment, 98.2% indicated that it was "never" (83.1%), "very rarely" (12.0%), or "rarely" (3.1%) acceptable for parents to use physical punishment with children.

The content of Jehovah's Witnesses' literature and their meetings was assessed in terms of the fostering of parenting attitudes and practices. Among the parental practices encouraged, more than 90% of respondents selected forgiveness, recreational activities with children, reassurance of parental love when a child makes a mistake, and freedom for children to express their viewpoint. Respondents deemed that JW literature encourages the use of discipline approaches other than corporal punishment and that JW publications contribute to public awareness about protecting children from physical and sexual abuse.

Religious and Sex Education

Respondents with JW parents indicated that their parents wanted them to share the same religion, more so than those with non-JW parents. During their childhood, respondents could talk with their parents about sex and morality. Based on responses, religion appeared to be an easier topic for parent-child discussion than sex for both JW and non-JW parents. Respondents agreed that JW parents (more so than non-JW parents) taught them to think about decisions and develop values that helped them as adults.

Information sources on sex education varied with no one clear source. The survey inquired about the usefulness of sex education. Nearly all respondents (98.9%) agreed that teaching children about sex could protect them and that parents are an important source of this education.

Regarding information on protecting children from sexual abuse, Jehovah's Witnesses learn from various sources, including JW publications. Respondents agreed that parents must teach their children about their religious beliefs; but they also agreed that "when children grow up, they have the right to choose their own religion."

General Social Attitudes

Although they may hold distinctive religious beliefs, Jehovah's Witnesses have much in common with their fellow citizens in Japan. The main causes of concern for Jehovah's Witnesses are not uncommon for the larger society. The main concerns for over 90% of JW respondents were safety for self and family, strengthening their faith, relationship with family, health of self and family, and wanting to quit bad habits.

Freedom of worship was a moderate to extreme concern for 89.6% of JW respondents. About one-third expressed moderate to extreme concern about the political situation in Japan. It is not known if this concern relates to the current threat of state interference with their religious freedom or to other political issues.

The survey asked JW respondents about their priorities in life, with 8 items categorized as self-oriented and 8 items categorized as other-oriented. Respondents prioritized the interests of others over their own. Spiritual items were their highest priorities: serving God, having a clean conscience, and living by moral standards. Family matters were high priorities—especially family harmony and family happiness, and also the needs of children and elderly relatives. Showing respect to others and helping those in need were priorities but less so than spiritual and family priorities. Self-oriented items such as career advancement, material goods, personal success, and interesting hobbies were given lower priority.

Civic responsibilities. To understand Jehovah’s Witnesses sense of civic responsibility, the survey asked respondents if they could justify certain illegal or unethical acts. The act that was identified most as “never can be justified” was “forcing, coercing, or bribing someone” to become a JW (99.1%), followed by “driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs” (98.5%), and claiming “government benefits that one does not have the right to” (97.5%). Even littering—a relatively minor offense—was considered as unjustifiable by 89.9%.

Social and political positions of nonviolence and political neutrality. In a list of statements about political neutrality, nonviolence, and governmental

laws, respondents had the highest agreement with the following positions: not wanting to use arms against others (97.2%), showing respect for life (97.0%), maintaining political neutrality (96.3%), showing respect for laws established by the government (94.5%), and wanting to help their country by peaceful behavior and paying taxes (92.0%).

Willingness to help others. The study investigated the extent to which Jehovah’s Witnesses are willing to help those outside their group. Given a list of nine categories of people, respondents indicated whether they would assist if the person was in need of urgent help. As would be expected of many social groups, Jehovah’s Witnesses (98.7%) indicated that they most likely would help a fellow believer. Willingness to help those who might involve more effort—such as a family with many children—was high (92.8%). Similarly, 89.8% indicated a willingness to help those who might be viewed as having access to other help—government officials or police. Few made a distinction between rich and poor persons in their willingness to help (85.1% and 94.5%, respectively). Willingness to assist someone of another religion was high (95.1%), as was willingness to help those who left the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses (81.9%). Those with the highest percent of “difficult to answer” responses were for persons who left the organization (1.2%) or who were alcoholics (1.0%) or drug addicts (1.4%), suggesting the need for further information before deciding whether or not to help.

Life decisions. The study investigated how Jehovah’s Witnesses make decisions between right and wrong. Results show homogeneity among Jehovah’s Witnesses, with 97.6% indicating that moral standards are important in making life decisions.

Health and Well-Being

This final section covers various measures of health and well-being, as well as attitudes toward medical interventions and personal health habits among Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Most respondents (78.2%) perceived their health status as satisfactory, good, or excellent. The largest single category selected was satisfactory, with 41.6% of responses. A minority of 2.8% rated their health as poor.

Diet and exercise. The survey asked participants to rate their eating habits. Most (62.1%) perceived their eating habits as “usually healthy” (47.2%) or “always healthy” (14.9%). A minority of respondents (3.2%) described their eating habits as “usually not healthy” (2.8%) or “not at all healthy” (0.3%).

A significant proportion of respondents engaged in exercise, with 20.2% reporting exercising regularly and 37.4% exercising sometimes. Conversely, 30.6% exercised rarely, and 11.3% stated that they never exercised.

Tobacco, drug, and alcohol use and abuse. The data reveal the distribution of participants’ smoking habits. The majority of respondents (79.1%) reported never smoking and 19.8% used to smoke but do not anymore. Only a small fraction of respondents (0.1%) reported occasional or frequent smoking habits. These findings underscore a significant adherence to non-smoking behaviors among the surveyed individuals.

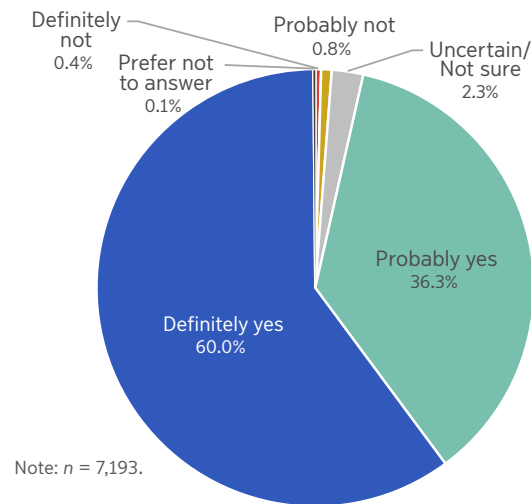
An overwhelming majority of respondents reported never using soft drugs (99.1%) or hard drugs (99.5%). The majority of respondents (80.8%) reported never having abused alcohol. An additional 9.7% stated that they used to abuse alcohol but do not anymore. A smaller fraction, 0.7%, reported frequent alcohol abuse.

Attitudes and practices related to health care. The survey asked about respondents’ views and preferences regarding medical care, including factors influencing their decisions to seek healthcare, satisfaction levels with existing medical care, and opinions on healthcare accessibility and quality.

The majority of respondents (66.6%) reported having regular health check-ups, with an additional 14.8% reporting health check-ups sometimes. Smaller proportions (18.1%) reported rarely (11.7%) or never (6.4%) having such appointments.

Seeking a doctor’s care for a health problem. The majority of respondents indicated that they would definitely (60.0%) or probably (36.3%) consult a doctor in case of a health problem, as shown in Figure 7. Smaller proportions expressed uncertainty (2.3%), and a minority expressed that they would probably not (0.8%) or definitely not (0.4%) do so.

Figure 7. Seeking medical care
If you had a health problem, would you see a doctor?



Attitudes about medical care. A majority of respondents (84.4%) agreed that doctors care about their patients. Most (60.4%) disagreed that people should follow doctors’ instructions unconditionally, and three-fourths (75.2%) agreed that consulting different specialists before making medical decisions was advisable. There is strong consensus on parental responsibility for children’s health (99.0%) and the importance of seeking the best treatment for them (98.0%). Virtually all respondents agreed on the need to carefully choose treatments (99.4%). The vast majority (97.1%) agreed or strongly agreed about the importance of seeking medical treatment when sick. Conversely, the majority (98.3%) rejected the notion of relying solely on prayer for healing. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding among respondents, reflecting a balance between trust in medical expertise and the importance of individual autonomy in healthcare decisions.

A majority of respondents expressed openness toward accepting such treatments as vitamins (87.8%), surgical interventions (91.5%), chemotherapy (79.5%), radiation therapy (79.9%), medications (75.8%), antidepressants (66.9%), physical therapy (81.8%), and hemodialysis (68.0%). However, most respondents indicated they would probably not or definitely not accept organ transplants (73.1%) or blood transfusions (99.3%), the latter position being related to religious views among Jehovah's Witnesses.

Reasons for refusal of blood transfusions.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible prohibits ingesting blood, whether as food or by transfusion. Overwhelmingly, 95.5% of respondents indicated that they would refuse a doctor's recommendation of blood transfusion.

The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of various reasons for refusing blood transfusions. The response that blood is sacred and that abstaining from blood is a Bible command was considered as important or very important by 99.5% of respondents. Over half (62.9%) indicated that the fear of contaminated blood was also an important or very important reason to refuse blood transfusions. Less than one-third (30.9%) indicated concern over the possibility of negative repercussions within the JW community as an important reason to refuse blood-based medical treatment.

Parental Attitudes Toward Medical Care of Their Children

After indicating their medical preferences for their own care, the 533 respondents with minor children were asked about their view of doctors' recommendations of medical treatment for their children.

Respondents indicated relatively high acceptance of a doctor's recommendations about vitamins (88.2%) and surgical interventions (94.0%) for their child. However, 89.1% of parents with minor children reported that they would not agree to blood transfusions. As regards organ transplants, 51.4% said they would not agree if recommended for their child.

For chemotherapy and radiation therapy, 69.6% and 67.2% of respondents, respectively, indicated probable acceptance of these interventions.

The survey inquired about two hypothetical situations: (1) Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "If a child accepts a blood transfusion against my wishes, I will not recognize that child as my own." A large majority of parents (90.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed; 5.8% neither agreed or disagreed; 0.6% agreed; and 2.8% preferred not to answer. (2) Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "If I know that my child might be given a blood transfusion against my wishes, I would not seek needed medical treatments for my child." A majority (60.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed; another 21.4% neither agreed or disagreed; 13.3% agreed or strongly agreed; and 4.9% preferred not to answer.

Since life is a gift from God, I believe I should choose medical treatment that is not against God's commands. I am grateful for physicians who show special consideration.

—Female, 40s, 2nd generation

Psychosocial Measures of Well-Being

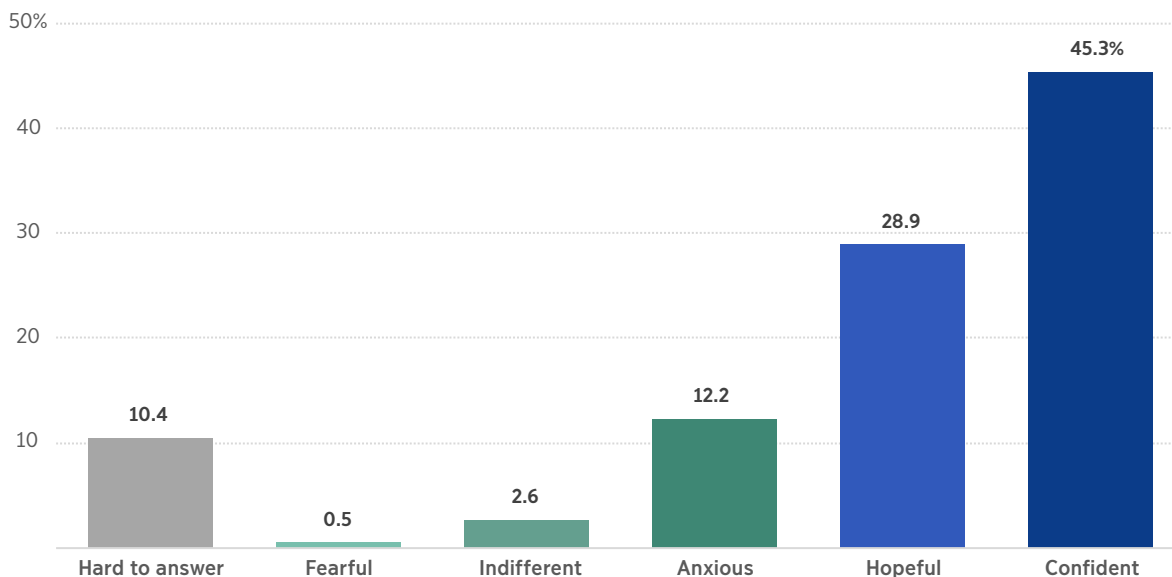
This last section of summary findings covers question sets that measure respondents' subjective feelings about their well-being and outlook for the future.

Life satisfaction. Respondents rated their life satisfaction on a scale of 1 (not satisfied) to 10 (satisfied). On the 10-point scale, one-tenth (10.8%) rated their life satisfaction 5 or below and 89.2% rated it 6 or above. The high positive score of 8 was the most frequently chosen (33.9%). A comparison of responses by age groups shows a gradual increase in life satisfaction with age, particularly for those 78 and older.

Outlook for the future. The survey asked, “When you think about tomorrow and your future, how do you feel?” As shown in Figure 8, the largest portion of respondents selected “confident” (45.3%) and “hopeful” (28.9%). One-tenth (12.2%) selected “anxious” (12.2%), and only a fraction (0.5%) selected “fearful.” One-tenth (10.4%) selected “hard to answer.”

Figure 8. Outlook for the future

When you think about tomorrow and your future, how do you feel?



Note: $n = 7,193$.

Hope. Respondents were further asked to choose specific statements that reflected their outlook on the future. Among the findings, there were 79.0% of respondents who did not feel alone and 84.3% who did not feel scared about the future; 97.5% reported having a faith that gives them comfort; and 95.7% felt able to give and receive love and care.

Temporal view of past, present, and future. The survey respondents were asked to categorize the outlook about various periods of time in their life with response options from very negative to very positive. Positive and very positive responses varied depending on the time period: childhood (38.0%), the present (76.5%), near future (83.0%), and distant future (90.9%).

Conclusion

The JWJ-QS project was prompted by controversies related to religious freedom in connection with issues involving second-generation children of religious minorities. These controversies have been the source of numerous media stories in Japan over the past two years. JWJ-QS examines the issue in the context of Jehovah's Witnesses, particularly regarding their views on child-rearing, parental rights, and medical choice. The quantitative survey with a sample of over 7,000 participants from the Witness community in Japan contributes to the scientific study of religion in various ways. This conclusion highlights key findings related to the main research topics (religion, family, attitudes, and well-being) and then discusses three themes that emerged from the findings. Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan are a diverse population composed of men and women, young and old, from different educational and economic backgrounds, and across all geographic regions. Their educational level, employment experience, and economic status are comparable to those of the general population in Japan. Despite their demographic diversity, results show consistency in many of their views and practices.

Religion. Jehovah's Witness participants viewed their decision to practice their religion as a personal choice that results only after having spent a considerable period studying the faith's beliefs and practices. One-third learned their religious values and beliefs from their JW parents while growing up, and others participated in a study program usually for two or more years before making the commitment associated with baptism. Persons were baptized at various ages, some in their youth and others later in life, the average age of baptism being 28. Data on the influence of family on their religious decision revealed that having JW relatives originally led some to the religion, but having JW family is not what keeps them in the religion. Concern that JW family or friends would

reject them if they did not adopt the religion was identified by less than 1%.

The number one reason Witnesses remain in the religion is "to be closer to God." The "logic of the teachings" attracted many to the religion initially and was a main motivation to remain in the religion. Other main attractions were the "moral guidelines," "make better life choices," and "hope for the future."

The vast majority rarely or never regretted their decisions to become Jehovah's Witnesses. A relatively small number in the sample stopped their association at various ages, but most often while in their 20s. Half of those who left had later resumed their association within four years, and one-fourth returned after ten or more years. Their main reason to return was the desire for "a closer relationship with God" (as in their original reasons to convert). Other motivations to resume association were to "make better life decisions" and their deciding that life as one of Jehovah's Witnesses was "a better way."

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan view their congregations as a source of social and instrumental support, especially in times of need. Most view their religion as having a positive, not detrimental, effect on their relationships in the family and with the larger community. However, accompanying the positive associations with becoming Jehovah's Witnesses are experiences of discrimination. Most have seen media coverage that they believe misrepresents their religion. A few have been denied employment, threatened, or attacked because of their religion.

Family. The majority (62.7%) of respondents are married, and only 5.1% are separated or divorced. The influence of parents on their adult children is reflected in the significantly lower divorce rate of those with at

least one JW parent compared to those with non-JW parents. A small percentage (7.4%) have minor children. Of those parents with minor children, almost 90% are married, thus providing their children with the support of a two-parent household. Only 16.3% of the JW sample lived alone (about 50% lower than the general Japan population). A high degree of intergenerational connectivity was evidenced by those living with older adults, with half of young adults and one-third of middle-aged adults living in households with older adults. A sizable percentage (15.7%) of older adults lived in households with minor children.

Over three-fourths had at least one JW relative; however, one-fifth had no JW relatives. Although individual circumstances within family relationships could not be investigated in a cross-sectional survey study, the findings give an overall portrait of JW families. Both family life satisfaction and family functioning were viewed positively by respondents. The vast majority are satisfied with their family life and view their families as cohesive. Some JWs have tense or troubled family situations, with 3% ($n = 213$) reporting that their family members were sometimes violent.

Commitment to marriage is one of the strongest predictors of longevity of marriage and marital satisfaction. Married Witnesses indicated a strong commitment to their marriage partner. Although almost three-fourths of the total sample indicated that having the same religious beliefs was important for a happy marriage, three-fourths also believed that having different religious beliefs is not an acceptable reason to divorce. Most identified fidelity as very important in marital relationships (over 99% of respondents), including both those married to JW and non-JW spouses.

Research findings provide a broader context to understand discipline approaches used in Japan. The adult children who made up the JW sample recalled that their parents and school officials used multiple discipline approaches—verbal (yelling or threatening), distal (ignoring and sending to room), behavioral (adding chores or prohibiting something), and physical (hitting with an object or hand). However, group

comparisons of gender, generation, and religion of the parent show that verbal, distal, behavioral, and physical discipline approaches were used rarely. Both JW parents and non-JW parents used physical discipline rarely. Mothers were more involved in disciplining than fathers, using all discipline approaches more frequently. Physical approaches to discipline changed over time in both the home and school settings, particularly in and after the 1990s. The use of instructional approaches (commending and explaining) trended upward since the 1970s. Before 2000, JW parents used physical discipline more often than did non-JW parents. JW parents used instructional approaches far more often than non-JW parents—even from the 1940s, steadily increasing each subsequent decade. According to respondents, the content of JW publications and meetings emphasize commendation, and discourage physical child-rearing practices. This is consistent with how respondents understood the meaning of “discipline”—instructing and commending, but not physical punishment.

Those with JW parents recalled their parents as being more open to discussions about sex and religion than those with non-JW parents. Jehovah’s Witnesses are well-informed about child protection services and the importance of protecting children from sexual abuse. In addition to media sources, respondents learned about these important topics from JW publications and meetings. Research responses indicate that Witnesses take seriously their role to help their children learn to think about their decisions and to help them become responsible adults. They believe children must learn progressively and that when they grow up, children should choose their own religion. Adult children believe that the values they learned from their parents helped them as adults.

Witnesses in Japan tend to be focused on others, more so than on themselves, suggesting a more collectivist than individualist culture within the religious community. Spiritual matters—relationship with God and having a clean conscience—were rated as top priorities. Family harmony and happiness were higher priorities than personal needs, success, advancement, and independence. The main JW concerns are matters of faith

and improving personal habits, followed by matters related to safety, family, and freedom of worship. Financial and political matters are lesser concerns.

The vast majority of Witnesses indicated a sense of social responsibility, viewing illegal and unethical acts as “never justified.” “Forcing, coercing, or bribing someone to become a Jehovah’s Witness,” “driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs,” and “claiming government benefits for which one does not have the right” were the top three behaviors that were most objectionable by most JWs. Views on social responsibility are reflected in their indicating a willingness to help persons from various economic, social, and religious backgrounds, including former Witnesses. They believed that their decisions are guided by moral standards, not to be compromised even in situations where their actions would be unseen.

Health and well-being. Most Witnesses rated their physical health as at least satisfactory and indicated an inclination toward healthier lifestyle habits in terms of diet, exercise, and medical check-ups, as well as medical treatment options for themselves and their children. Alcohol and substance abuse and tobacco use are uncharacteristic of the study population. Overall, they had a favorable outlook, with positive assessment of life, hope, and feelings about the present and future.

Extended observations. Several themes in the findings were observed. First, respondents said that their relationship with God was central to decisions they make and that wanting to be closer to God motivated them to become and remain Jehovah’s Witnesses. Making moral decisions, having a clean conscience, respect for life, sharing their beliefs with others, and teaching their children were extensions of this central belief. Those who stopped association with the Witness community for a period of time reported that their relationship with God was the main motivation to resume association.

Second, Jehovah’s Witnesses tend to seek information before making decisions. For example, Witnesses study for a period of time before baptism. They are attracted to the “logic of the teachings.” Despite having studied

before and after baptism, perhaps for years, “wanting to learn more about the Bible” is a main reason that many remain in the religion. Similarly, most respondents indicated that their parents taught them to “think carefully about [their] life decisions.” In making health-care decisions, reasons not to accept blood transfusions were primarily for religious conviction, but also because of an informed awareness of the medical risks associated with blood-based treatments.

Third, Jehovah’s Witnesses try to navigate their relationships in a way that both cares for the needs of others and respects individual rights and responsibilities. A high level of social connectivity and interest in others’ well-being is evidenced by the proportion of those in intergenerational households, their commitment to marriage, and their view of the congregation as a source of support. However, personal boundaries and decisions are respected, including those of their children as they grow to maturity.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research has several limitations common to online surveys and religious studies. For example, an inherent problem with online surveys is that researchers cannot be certain that all respondents represent the study population even when care is taken to make the sample of responders as representative as possible under the circumstances. To ensure that respondents met the eligibility criteria, the invitation to participate in the study and the links to the online survey were sent only to those in the randomly selected congregations who met the criteria. Individuals who indicated they did not meet the criteria were denied access.

The JWJ-QS survey was longer than the length generally recommended for online surveys distributed to the general public. The high completion rate and number of submissions suggest that JWs as a group are more tolerant of long questionnaires, especially one designed for their religious community. However, respondent fatigue is a factor and could have affected the time respondents had to consider and respond to questions.

Translation of the survey questions from English to Japanese used a back-translation method and multiple

iterations to produce a quality translation. However, the nuanced meaning of some expressions could differ, affecting the responses to survey questions.

A cross-sectional study cannot prove cause-and-effect relationships. In JWJ-QS, respondents reported changes in relationships and health habits since their religious conversion; but these findings show perceived effects, not observable, tested behavioral changes over a period of time. Similarly, reports on parenting practices were based on generalized recollections of adult children on past experiences.

The study incorporated procedures to limit the effects of socially desirable responses (SDR), as described in the methodology section of this report. During the recruitment of subjects and in the survey itself, anonymity and request for open responses were emphasized. An SDR measure was used to identify and remove from the data set those more likely to give responses that reflected favorably on themselves or their chosen religion. Still, social desirability bias is a limitation of studies on sensitive and personal topics. Research results showed homogeneity among most respondents to questions related to their beliefs but showed varied responses related to relationships and personal practices, which suggest candidness in responses.

Researcher bias can affect the objectivity of studies if personal beliefs or expectations are allowed to compromise scientific integrity. The study investigators, both JWs, brought to the project both their

personal knowledge of the study population and their professional credentials in information science and statistical analysis. Bias mitigation measures were incorporated in the research design, data analysis, and reporting (e.g., anonymous online survey, third-party data collection, rigorous data analysis, reporting of desirable and undesirable findings). Academic advisors with considerable research experience who were not affiliated with the religious organization but informed about the organization through their scholar research reviewed the study design and procedures. An outside scholar independently and randomly selected which congregations to include. Familiarity with the religious culture can help researchers design survey questions that are appropriate for the study population. Conclusions can accurately reflect the data findings without personal bias.

In conclusion, this study provides a research-based understanding of how Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan view themselves and their religion. The study was prompted by a lack of scientific scholarship on Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan. Lack of knowledge often opens the way for stereotypes and misunderstandings. In the current climate of sharp criticism and sensational allegations by a few former adherents, JWJ-QS aimed to utilize a scientific approach that allowed ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan to add their expressions to the discourse. The investigators hope that scholars will find this study useful in broadening understanding of a group whose distinctive views and practices hold potential for further study.

The research study was reviewed and approved by Pearl IRB, an independent institutional review board, on December 27, 2023. All data collection and management procedures adhered to ethical standards and the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its amendments. Funding was provided by the Arnold-Liebster Foundation (founded for the purpose of promoting peace, tolerance, and human rights).