

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan— A Quantitative Study

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

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Xiaojun Hu, PhD

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Tadahiko Murata, PhD

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Hu, Xiaojun, and Tadahiko Murata.
*Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan—A
Quantitative Study*. 2024. [Complete
report forthcoming.] 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 this report.

ACADEMIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Eileen Barker, PhD

Professor Emeritus, Sociology of Religion,
London School of Economics

Yoko Kowata, PhD

Professor Emeritus, School of Education and Welfare,
Aichi Prefectural University

James T. Richardson, PhD, JD

Professor Emeritus, Sociology and Judicial Studies,
University of Nevada, Reno

Stuart A. Wright, PhD

Professor of Sociology, Lamar University

Project Consultant: Jolene Chu, MA, Senior Researcher, Jehovah’s Witnesses

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.

Academic Advisory Committee for JWJ-QS

Eileen Barker, PhD

Yoko Kowata, PhD

James T. Richardson, PhD, JD

Stuart A. Wright, PhD

*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>.

Table of Contents

Section 1: A Systematic Study of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan

Section 2: Religious Attitudes and Experiences

Section 3: Family Life*

Section 4: General Social Attitudes*

Section 5: Health and Well-Being*

*Forthcoming.

SECTION ONE

A Systematic Study of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan

Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan—A Quantitative Study (JWJ-QS) examines the attitudes, values, and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2023, this Christian group had some 214,000 adherents in Japan, with a ratio of about 1:583 to the general Japan population (124,752,000), and about 9 million Jehovah's Witnesses practicing their faith in 239 countries and territories worldwide.¹

Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs), a religious community known for publicly sharing its beliefs, originated in the late 19th century in the United States, where they were known as Bible Students. They were first present in Japan in the 1920s, though very few in Japan responded to their message until the late 1940s. Beginning in the postwar period, however, a growing number of Japanese adopted the Jehovah's Witness (JW) faith.² A 1977 quantitative sociological study of Jehovah's Witnesses conducted in Japan theorized that since the country had undergone drastic social change and increasing secularization, the appeal of the religion lay partly in its nonmaterialist outlook, advice on family and child-rearing, and community cohesion.³ No similar quantitative study of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan has been done in the intervening decades.

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. Following the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022, by the adult son of a member of the Unification Church, an eruption of inflammatory rhetoric has developed against minority religions.⁴ Some second-generation activists who are former Jehovah's Witnesses or were reared by Witness parents have joined the campaign, calling on the government to restrict the religious practices of Jehovah's Witnesses based on allegations related to their child-rearing, parental rights, and medical choices.

Missing from the public discourse and academic literature are the perspectives of those who currently comprise the Jehovah's Witness faith community, including first- and second-generation adherents. For this reason, a team of independent researchers interested in the scientific study of religion has conducted a methodologically rigorous survey of Jehovah's Witnesses from all prefectures of Japan. The survey questionnaire was developed in cooperation with the Japan national office and world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses. An international, multidisciplinary academic advisory committee reviewed the research methodology, survey design, and data analysis. (The advisors are not part of the religious community.) The academic advisors' recommendations were incorporated into this study report.

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 "Japan," in 1998 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1998), 66–161.

³ Bryan R. Wilson, "Aspects of Kinship and the Rise of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan," *Social Compass* 24, no. 1 (1977): 97–120.

⁴ Levi McLaughlin, "The Abe Assassination and Japan's Nexus of Religion and Politics," *Current History* 122, no. 845 (2023): 209–216.

Research Objectives

JWJ-QS was designed to accomplish four main research objectives:

1. Identify demographic characteristics and religious motivations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan
2. Examine the family life of those who have become Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan—their overall family satisfaction and functioning, marital relationships, approaches to child discipline, and communication about sex and religion
3. Investigate the attitudes and values of those within the Jehovah’s Witness community—their priorities, concerns, and social responsibilities
4. Examine the health and psychological well-being of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan

Survey Design

The survey questionnaire consisted of some 50 main sets of questions organized into four thematic sections that corresponded with the research objectives.

Table 1.1 shows the four themes and related topics. The section on religious factors identified who Jehovah’s Witnesses are, what attracts them to the religion, and how they perceive the religion affects their lives. The section on family life examined family satisfaction, marital relationships, and child-rearing attitudes and practices. The general attitudes section investigated their values, priorities, concerns, and social responsibilities. The last section examined the health practices and psychological well-being of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan.

Table 1.1. Survey themes

Religious factors	Family life	General attitudes	Health and well-being
Who become JWs	Satisfaction	Values, priorities	Health habits
Religion’s attraction	Marital relationship	Concerns	Medical treatment
Perceived changes	Child-rearing	Social responsibilities	Psychological well-being

At the end of the survey, participants had the option to add comments related to the survey topics. This report includes selected comments that reflect the findings from the quantitative analysis. In this report, some numbers are rounded so that the sum totals 100%.

Methodology

The study used an anonymous, online survey to collect data from a sample of baptized adult Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan. The Witness community does not keep a national registry of congregants’ names and contact information, so a random sample of individuals was not possible. Therefore, the study used a random cluster sampling of congregations aimed to approximate a representative sample of the faith community. The research design included the following methodological aspects.

Random cluster sampling. The principal investigator (PI) and co-principal investigator (Co-PI) requested a member of the academic advisory committee familiar with the geography of Japan to randomly select 150 congregations out of 2,807 Japanese-language congregations. The number of congregations selected in each of the 47 prefectures ranged from 1 to 8. The PI obtained from Jehovah’s Witnesses’ national office the email addresses of contact persons (congregation elders) in the randomly selected congregations. Survey invitations and links were emailed from the PI to the respective contact persons, who then sent invitations by email or text message to all congregants who met the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility criteria. Persons eligible to participate in the survey were baptized Jehovah’s Witnesses aged

18 or older who were currently attending a Japanese-language congregation in Japan and had actively engaged in sharing their faith in the public ministry during the past six months. After the survey period ended, contact persons from the selected congregations emailed a report to the PI with the number of eligible congregants who received the survey invitation (totaling 11,344) and the number of invited congregants who requested and received the survey links (totaling 8,197).

Provision for assistance. With the goal of having a sample as representative as possible and the desire not to exclude persons who met the eligibility criteria but who needed assistance to take the survey, allowances were made for respondents to have assistance reading the questions or using an electronic device. Most of the 7,193 respondents (86.4%) reported that they took the survey without any assistance. (For more information on sample size, see below.) Some (8.1%) reported that they received help to use an electronic device, 3.2% needed help reading the questions, and 2.3% needed both.

Survey period. A one-day soft launch period confirmed the functioning of links and the survey platform before beginning the full survey launch. The survey was conducted in two waves, each lasting five days, starting January 5 and closing January 14, 2024. The online survey platform KoboToolbox⁵ allowed several links to be sent concurrently to the selected 150 congregations, resulting in improved data management and uninterrupted submissions over the two wave periods. The survey platform automatically recorded the start time and the end time of respondents to complete the survey, which averaged 102 minutes.

Data Processing

After the close of the survey, data were exported from the KoboToolbox survey platform server to a Microsoft Excel document. The quantitative data set for

statistical analysis was anonymized and de-identified. As explained in the informed consent, those willing to be contacted for possible future research could enter their contact information, which data were kept confidential and separate from the data set used for quantitative statistical analysis.

Response rate. Survey submissions during the first wave of 75 congregations numbered 3,828 and during the second wave of 75 congregations numbered 3,812. During the 10-day survey period, the total number of submissions was 7,640 out of 11,344 invited congregants, resulting in a response rate of 67.3%.

Data cleaning. For data integrity, a data cleaning process was conducted to ensure that only qualified respondents were kept in the sample for statistical analysis.

A total of 160 respondents opened the survey link but were determined to be ineligible based on their responses to questions regarding five eligibility criteria. The survey platform was formatted so that it automatically denied access to the online survey to any respondents whose answers indicated that they did not meet all five criteria. The following is a breakdown of respondents who were ineligible to complete the survey: 107 reported that they currently did not attend meetings in a Japanese-language congregation; 39 reported being minors under 18 years of age; 10 reported not being actively engaged in the public ministry in the past six months; 8 did not consent to take the survey; and 1 reported not being baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (Five individuals were disqualified on two eligibility criteria items.)

To ensure high quality data, researchers included a measure to identify respondents who showed a clear pattern of socially desirable responses, that is, replies that were intended to be socially desirable, or

⁵KoboToolbox 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 allow only one survey to be submitted from a device. (<https://www.kobotoolbox.org/>).

favorable, rather than the respondents' actual opinions or experiences.⁶ Based on their giving only the most favorable responses in the five-item scaled measure, the submissions of 239 respondents were removed.

Next, data cleaning identified and removed 48 submissions that lacked intrasubject reliability (e.g., respondents implausibly reporting a baptism year prior to or same as their birth year). Also removed were 3 respondents who repeatedly selected the same digit in response to at least two consecutive scaled measures, indicating an apparent lack of careful attention to survey items. In total, 447 submissions were removed from the data set.

Sample

After data cleaning, the total sample consisted of 7,193 individuals. This section describes characteristics of the JW study population. Where general population

data for Japan were available, the demographic characteristics of the sample were compared to the distribution of the general population, although differing measures used in national studies did not allow direct comparisons.

Gender and age distribution. Table 1.2 compares the percentage of the sample with the general population ages 18 and over by gender and age group. In continuity 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 (51.8%).⁷ In Japan and around the world, women tend to be more religious than men⁸ and older adults tend to be more religious than younger adults.⁹ Similarly, for the sample population of Jehovah's Witnesses, 48.6% were older adults aged 60 and over, compared to 36.9% middle-aged adults from ages 40 to 59 and 14.5% young adults from ages 18 to 39.

Table 1.2. Japan population and JW sample by gender and age group

	Total	Male	Female	Young adults (ages 18–39)	Middle-aged adults (ages 40–59)	Older adults (ages 60+)
Japan general population, 2022 (ages 18+)	107,209 (in thousands)	48.2%	51.8%	26.7%	32.6%	40.7%
JW sample	7,193	29.0%	71.0%	14.5%	36.9%	48.6%

Source: 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 computed by the principal investigator, January 25, 2024, Table 1, *Population by Age (Single Years), Sex and Sex ratio - Total population, Japanese population*, October 1, 2022.

Note: The Excel report of the "Population Estimates / Annual Report" is accessible through the e-Stat link provided above. To permit a comparable analysis with the JW sample, the total Japan population was adjusted to include only those 18 years and above. Those under age 18 were removed and percentages were calculated for the total sample, gender, and age distribution.

⁶ 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>.

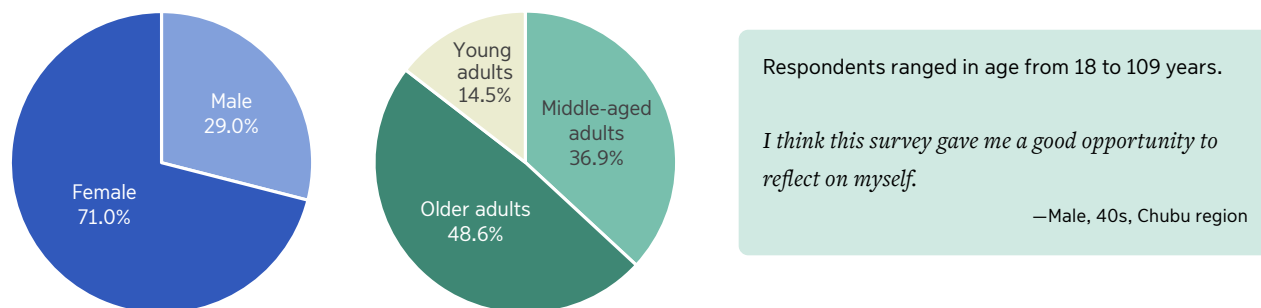
⁷ Wilson, 107–108.

⁸ Pew Research Center, "The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World," March 22, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>.

⁹ Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," June 13, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>.

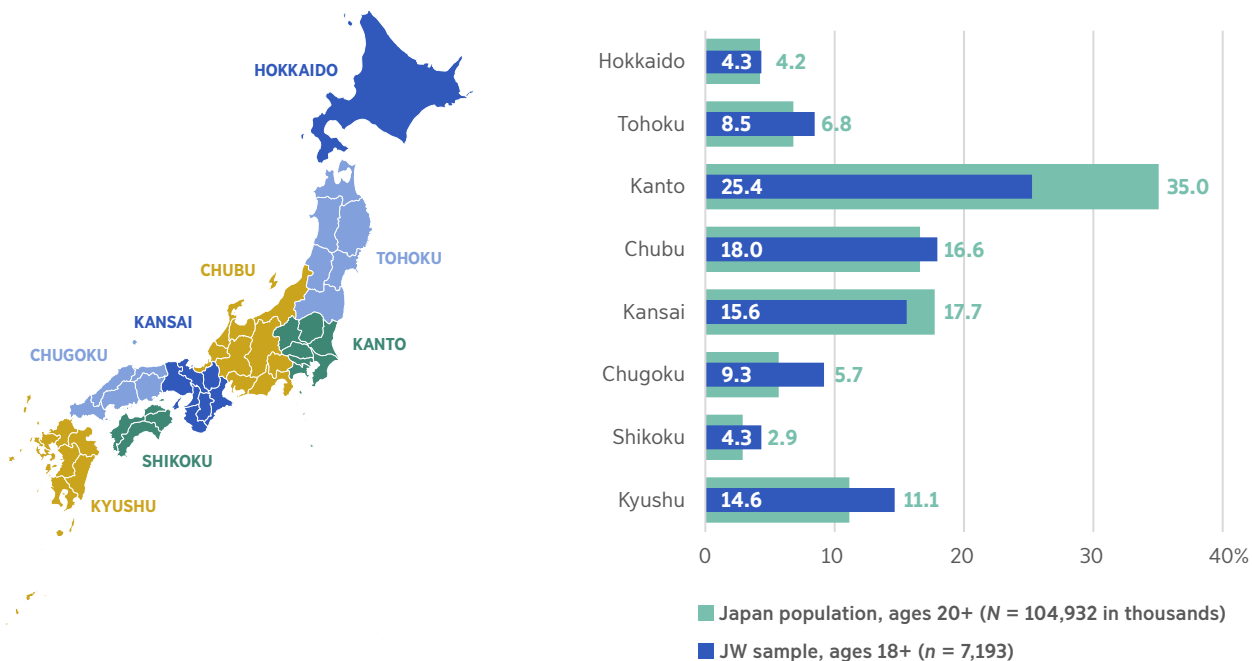
The charts in Figure 1.1 show the distribution of the sample population of Jehovah’s Witnesses by gender and age.

Figure 1.1. Sample distribution by gender and age



Regional and area distribution. The random cluster sample selection included congregations across all prefectures. Figure 1.2 compares the percentages of the sample with the general adult population in each of the eight geographic regions in Japan. The sample had slightly higher percentages in Chugoku and Kyushu and a lower percentage in Kanto. Differences between the general population and sample population depended on the number of congregations selected to participate in the survey. Respondents also identified their geographic area: from seaside areas, 27.6% ($n = 1,987$); from inland areas, 57.2% ($n = 4,111$); and from mountainside areas, 15.2% ($n = 1,095$).

Figure 1.2. Percent distribution of Japan population and JW sample by region



Source: e-Stat, Statistics of Japan, “Population Estimates / Annual Report,” Population by Age (Five-Year Groups) and Sex for Prefectures - Total population, Japanese population, October 1, 2022, accessed and computed by the principal investigator, January 25, 2024, [Population by Age \(Five-Year Groups\) and Sex for Prefectures - Total population, Japanese population, October 1, 2022](#).

Note: General population data are for those ages 20 and over; sample population is for those ages 18 and over. A direct comparison with the JW sample of those 18 and over was not possible because the Japan population reported clusters of five-year age groups. The percentages of those aged 20 and over of each region were computed by first summing across each respective prefecture then calculating a percentage for the total population aged 20 and over.

Education. Table 1.3 shows the education level of the sample population, ages 18 and over, with the available data for the Japan general population, ages 15 and over. Some 95.2% of JW respondents continued schooling beyond compulsory education (6 years of elementary school plus 3 years of lower secondary school, equivalent to junior high school). Of the JW sample, 58.4% graduated from high school and over one-third (36.7%) completed post-secondary education. In the JW sample, 2 respondents reported having no formal education and 52 respondents (0.7%) did not report their education level.

Table 1.3. Education level, Japan population and JW sample population

Education level	Japan population, ages 15+ (N = 108,259 in thousands)	JW sample, ages 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>.

Note: The table includes the main levels of education. The percentages in the table do not ladder to 100% and figures are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Occupation status. Using the employment classification of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), the JW sample was distributed across all occupation groups. As shown in Table 1.4, most (50.6%) had occupations related to service, clerical, sales, or transportation occupations; and 16.2% were employed in administration and management, and in professional and engineering occupations.

Table 1.4. Occupations, Japan population and JW sample population

Employment by occupation	Japan employed population (N = 67,230 in thousands)	Employed JW sample (n = 4,153)
Administrative and managerial workers	1.8%	2.2%
Professional and engineering workers	19.0	14.0
Clerical workers	20.8	10.6
Sales workers	12.3	8.9
Service workers	12.2	27.2
Security workers	1.9	0.5
Agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers	3.0	1.7
Manufacturing process workers	12.9	6.0
Transport and machine operation workers	3.2	3.9
Construction and mining workers	4.1	7.0
Carrying, cleaning, packaging, and related workers	7.3	8.9

Source: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Statistical Handbook of Japan 2023* (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2023), 130, Table 12.3 Employment by Occupation, <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/pdf/2023all.pdf#page=146>.

Note: The table includes the main occupations of interest that correspond to sample population. The percentages in the table do not ladder to 100% and figures are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Not reported in the table above are another 4.8% ($n = 343$) of the total sample who selected “other” as option for occupation and 0.6% ($n = 41$) did not report any occupation. The JW questionnaire also provided response options in addition to occupations, with the following percentages for the total sample: unpaid homemakers (29.2%), students (0.3%), or on family or maternity leave (0.1%). Others without occupations identified themselves as unemployed (10.2%), retired (1.3%), or with disability (1.1%). Of all female respondents, 41.0% self-identified as unpaid homemakers.

Employment and economic status. The employment rate for the JW sample population was 57.7% (4,153 employed divided by 7,193 total sample) compared to Japan's employment rate as reported in the 2022 census of 60.9%.¹⁰ The employment rate of those of retirement age of 65 and over for the JW sample population was 27.4% (758 ÷ 2,771) compared to 25.2% for the Japan total population.¹¹ The unemployment rate for the JW sample population was 4.3% for those aged 18 to 64 (151 ÷ 3,546) and 15.1% for those aged 18 and over (736 ÷ 4,889).¹² Of those who reported being unemployed, 79.5% (*n* = 585) were aged 65 and over. The unemployment rate reported for Japan was 2.6%.¹³ The differences between the general and sample populations may be partially attributed to the age distribution of the sample and national populations.

In the JW survey, respondents provided a self-assessment of their economic situation and financial difficulty using five categories related to household spending. The results from the JW sample were as follows: 7.8% of the total JW sample indicated they could afford expensive or costly items (e.g., home, car); 46.0% could easily purchase appliances; 30.3% had enough money for food and clothes but had difficulty buying large appliances (e.g., TV, refrigerator); 8.6% had enough money for food but had difficulty buying clothes; 2.4% could “hardly make ends meet” with “not enough money for food.” (An additional 4.9% did not report their economic status.) Combining the bottom two categories of this five-point measure—difficulty

buying clothes (8.6%) and difficulty making ends meet even for food (2.4%)—the total JW sample reporting economic difficulty at these levels was 11% (*n* = 787). Although direct comparisons with the general population are not possible because different measures are used, the relative poverty rate for the national sample in 2021 was 15.4%.¹⁴

To provide an approximate comparison for the most vulnerable subgroups, two economic measures are used from the MHLW report—the relative poverty rate and a self-assessment of living conditions by which respondents rated their financial situation as “very comfortable,” “somewhat comfortable,” “normal,” “somewhat difficult,” or “very difficult.”¹⁵

In the MHLW national sample, the two demographic groups reporting the highest poverty rates were single-adult households (over age 18 and under age 65) with minor child(ren) with a poverty rate of 44.5% and single females aged 65 and older who live alone with a poverty rate of 44.1%.¹⁶ Although the measures used in the MHLW and JW surveys do not use the same metrics, both serve as subjective indicators of economic assessment. Using the same demographic subgroups, the percentage of JW single adults in households with minor child(ren) aged 18 to 64 who reported economic difficulty was reported at 16.0% (8 ÷ 50), and for JW single females aged 65 and older who live alone, 19.6% (72 ÷ 367).

¹⁰ Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2024* (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2023), 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>.

¹¹ e-Stat, Statistics of Japan, “Labour Force Survey,” Table number 16, Employment rate by age group, accessed and computed by the principal investigator, January 25, 2024, https://www.e-stat.go.jp/en/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00200531&tstat=000000110001&cycle=1&year=20240&month=12040604&tclass1=000001040276&tclass2=000001040277&result_back=1&tclass3val=0.

¹² The 4.3% is a computed unemployment rate for the population aged 18 to 64 years divided by labor force. This is different from the 10.2% for all age groups in the total sample who self-identified as unemployed.

¹³ Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2024* (Tokyo: Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2023), 429, Table 19-1.

¹⁴ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), “Summary Report of Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2022,” 14, https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hss/dl/report_gaikyo_2022.pdf.

¹⁵ The “relative poverty rate” is defined as “the ratio of people living below the poverty line.” MHLW, “Summary Report of Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2022,” July 4, 2023, 14, 16, https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hss/dl/report_gaikyo_2022.pdf.

¹⁶ The findings regarding older females are based on a separate study which drew on the MHLW data and were reported in: Yuki Nikaido, Amane Shimazaki, and Takuro Negishi, “More than 40% of single elderly women struggle to live in poverty,” *Asahi Shimbun*, March 8, 2024, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15192214>.

The MHLW's self-assessment of living conditions found the highest degree of difficulty (combining "somewhat difficult" and "very difficult") in two demographic groups: households with minor child(ren) (54.7%) and households composed of single mothers with child(ren) (75.2%).¹⁷ Using similar subgroups in the JW sample, economic difficulty was reported by 10.6% (157 ÷ 1,476) and 21.7% (5 ÷ 23), respectively.

These approximate comparisons, though using different economic measures, suggest that the JW study population experience less economic difficulty than the general population.

Findings from the JWJ-QS study indicate that those facing economic difficulty in Japan come from a wide range of employment and education backgrounds. For example, of the 173 who reported having the most economic difficulty (not enough money to buy food), 17 (9.8%) were in professional and engineering occupations and 21 (12.1%) were service workers. All had formal education: 109 (63.0%) graduated from high school, 23 (13.3%) from vocational school, and 13 (7.5%) from university. Their economic difficulty was not related to employment type or education level but may reflect broader economic conditions in Japan.

Role in the congregation. To understand the composition of the JW sample, knowing their general level of involvement in the ministry and congregation is useful. All baptized males and females are unpaid "ministers" who share the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses with others. Almost half of the survey respondents (47.6%; $n = 3,426$) are "publishers" who participate in the ministry for an unspecified amount of time every month. The remainder (52.4%; $n = 3,767$) identified themselves as "pioneers" who commit to

a certain number of hours, usually with a goal of 30, 50, or more hours per month. In addition to the public ministry, some men are appointed as elders and ministerial servants to support the congregation in various ways, such as facilitating meetings and caring for the spiritual needs of congregants. Almost two-thirds of male respondents (65.0%; $n = 1,355$) have congregation roles as either elders or ministerial servants. The degree of involvement of the JW sample in Japan is consistent with the high commitment other researchers have identified as characteristic of the faith community elsewhere.¹⁸

Of the 1,355 elders and ministerial servants, on the five-point scale of economic status, 89.3% ($n = 1,210$) rated their economic status at the three mid to high levels and 7.8% ($n = 106$) indicated lower economic status based on the two difficulty levels. Similarly, of the 3,767 "pioneers," who volunteer more time in the public ministry, 85.9% ($n = 3,237$) reported an economic status at the mid to high levels and 10.2% ($n = 385$) indicated lower economic status. Economic status was not related to congregation roles.

Conclusion

The JWJ-QS project addresses an important need by providing research-based information about an understudied religious community. The random cluster sampling method, a sample size of over 7,000 across all prefectures, the regional distribution comparable to the general population, and a demographic breakdown characteristic of religious groups in Japan suggest that the study population approximates a representative sample. The large sample, sound methodology, and comprehensive survey design provide high-quality data from which to study the attitudes, values, relationships, and well-being of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan.

¹⁷ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), "Summary Report of Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2022," 16, https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hss/dl/report_gaikyo_2022.pdf.

¹⁸ George D. Chryssides, *Jehovah's Witnesses: A New Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

SECTION TWO

Religious Attitudes and Experiences

Based on the findings in *Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan—A Quantitative Study*, this section reports main characteristics of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) in Japan that are related to these key questions about their religious attitudes and experiences:

1. Who become Jehovah's Witnesses, and when, how, and why have they done so?
2. Who have left the faith for a time, and why have they returned?
3. How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive their relationships—in their congregation, with relatives and nonrelatives, and with society in general?

The findings illuminate the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan, characteristics of conversion, personal attractions to the religion, and general social relations.

Religious conversion is complex and multifaceted, affecting one's core identity, belief system, and interpersonal relationships. How the wider society views a given religious group and those who pursue spiritual interests by following a certain path depends

in part on the sociocultural context.¹ One aspect of context is the extent to which a culture values conformity to traditional norms. Japanese culture overall has historically been described as embracing such values as cooperation and group harmony.² Even while recent scholarship notes evidence of individualistic tendencies in Japanese society, certain collective features of society persist.³

Traditional belief systems could be considered one such example. Although the 1947 Constitution of Japan “created a free-market religious economy for the first time in Japanese history,” Shinto and Buddhist practices and institutions still dominate, whereas “Christianity remains a small minority religion.”⁴ Various personal and social motivations factor into one's decision to become part of a religious community. In any culture, it may be the case that the general population does not understand how and why individuals conduct an active search and consciously decide to embrace a lesser-known religion that the majority might view with suspicion.⁵

¹ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

² See, for example, Harry C. Triandis. *Individualism and Collectivism*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

³ Yuji Ogihara, “Temporal Changes in Individualism and Their Ramification in Japan: Rising Individualism and Conflicts with Persisting Collectivism,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (May 2017): 695, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00695>; S. Hirota, K. Nakashima, and Y. Tsutsui, “Psychological Motivations for Collectivist Behavior: Comparison Between Japan and the U.S.,” *Mind & Society* 22 (August 2023): 103–128, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11299-023-00298-y>.

⁴ Mark R. Mullins, “Christianity in Contemporary Japanese Society,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, eds. Inken Prohl and John Nelsen (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 136–137, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004234369_007.

⁵ Erica Baffelli, “Fear and the construction of minority religions in Japan,” *Religion, State & Society* 51, no. 3 (2023): 223–237; James T. Richardson, “The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24, no. 2 (1985): 163–179, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386340>.

The role of parental influence in the transmission of religious values and affiliation has been the subject of much scholarly research, though the majority of studies have been conducted in the United States. There is a scholarly consensus that parents “are the most powerful and proximal influence on adolescent” religion and spirituality.⁶ In some faith traditions, religious identity is assumed to be transmitted at birth. In others, transmission may primarily involve instructing children in the practice of rituals and traditions. Whereas in others, transmission mostly involves the imparting of doctrines and standards of behavior.

This research study inquired as to whether individuals in Japan experienced the opportunity to exercise personal autonomy; for instance, regarding the time and study they invested before deciding to be baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some sociologists of religion describe JW doctrine as “rational” and “coherent,”⁷ in part because the decision to be baptized as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses is normally preceded by a period of study of (biblical) reasonings underpinning JW beliefs and practices. The study period can represent a significant investment of time and effort on the part of teacher and student to help the student decide if they accept JW doctrinal concepts and desire to align their lives with the community’s moral precepts. Respondents who as children were raised in the faith by their Witness parents report on whether or not their commitment to the religion was a personal choice made after gaining an understanding of its beliefs and practices.

Original attraction and commitment to a religion can change over time. Sustained commitment to remain in a religion involves an ongoing assessment of what the religion expects and offers.⁸ This study measures Jehovah’s Witnesses’ original attraction to the religion, different aspects of their conversion process, and their current motivations for being in the religion. Similar to other religions, what it means to belong to the JW faith community may vary depending on one’s age, cohort, and generation of believers in the family. For example, those who are first in their family to become Jehovah’s Witnesses would likely have less support than would second-generation JWs who have relatives who share their beliefs. The research findings quantify the respective proportions of those with JW and non-JW parents and growth patterns of the religious community over time with these first- and second-generation converts.

In Japan, recent controversies about minority religions and the second generation (Nisei) have raised questions about the nature of the transmission of religious faith from parents to children. As previously noted, researchers have found that across various types of religious groups, parents have a strong influence on their children’s religious orientation.⁹ Among the factors influencing religious transmission from generation to generation are the quality of parent-child relationships, relative conservatism, religious values, consistency of the practice of and communication about religious beliefs, and the role of grandparents in religious socialization.¹⁰ The gender of parent and child has also been shown as salient in successful transmission, with mothers generally more influential

⁶ Annette Mahoney, *The Science of Children’s Religious and Spiritual Development* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108874342>. For a meta-analysis, see Melanie Stearns and Cliff McKinney, “Connection Between Parent and Child Religiosity: A Meta-Analysis Examining Parent and Child Gender,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 33, no. 6 (2019): 704–710, <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000550>.

⁷ James A. Beckford, *The Trumpet of Prophecy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 119; Bryan R. Wilson, “Aspects of Kinship and the Rise of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan,” *Social Compass* 24, no. 1 (1977): 100.

⁸ Vassilis Saroglou et al., “Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging: The Cognitive, Emotional, Moral, and Social Dimensions of Religiousness Across Cultures,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 51, nos. 7–8 (2020): 551–575, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120946488>.

⁹ Adam Gemar, “Parental Influence and Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Belief, Attitudes, and Practices: Recent Evidence from the United States,” *Religions* 14, no. 11 (2023): 1373, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14111373>; Jesse Smith, “Transmission of Faith in Families: The Influence of Religious Ideology,” *Sociology of Religion* 82, no. 3 (Autumn 2021): 332–356, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sraa045>.

¹⁰ Christopher D. Bader and Scott A. Desmond, “Do as I Say and as I Do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behaviors upon Religious Transmission,” *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 313–329, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/67.3.313>; Smith, “Transmission of Faith”; Vern L. Bengtson, “The Unexpected Importance of Grandparents (and Great-Grandparents),” chap. 5 in *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

than fathers, and sons more receptive than daughters.¹¹ Research of conversion among Japanese to nontraditional religions likewise indicates strong parental religious influence, particularly that of mothers, in intergenerational affiliation.¹²

Regarding conversion among Jehovah's Witnesses, one ethnographic study of intergenerational transmission in JW families in a non-Christian culture found that children with JW parents made their decision to become and remain JWs, not based on one pivotal moment, but resulting from a process of learning over time and reaching the conclusion that the beliefs were rational and beneficial.¹³ In the current JW study population in Japan, respondents came from a variety of familial and generational situations, affording an opportunity to examine patterns of intergenerational religious transmission.

Globally, religious affiliation and commitment have declined among younger adults, and individualism is on the rise.¹⁴ At a time when fewer may view religion as important in their lives and many leave organized religions for more personalized quests, it would be expected that some religious adherents experience doubts or disappointments and leave their faith community. Others may turn away from their commitment to or practice of communal values or activities. Disaffiliation from religious groups is an important subject of study among scholars of religion, especially in connection with smaller or newer religious groups.¹⁵ Research findings indicate that some have interrupted

their association with the Witness community for a period of time and then chosen to reaffiliate. An understudied topic, but one explored in this study, is the process and motivations involved for those who leave the religion and later return.

The decision to identify oneself with a religion includes, not only consideration of beliefs, but also a subjective assessment of what the religion offers in the way of support, how the religion might affect interpersonal relationships, and how others view the religion. Differences with family, friends, and others can be a potential source of increased tension; conversely, shared beliefs, a sense of belonging, and mutual support can have a bonding effect.¹⁶

One survey of Japanese attitudes toward religion found increased distrust toward religion, particularly non-Buddhist religions.¹⁷ Discrimination against religious minorities can become ubiquitous, fueled, in part, by biased news sources, online misinformation, and hate speech. The effect of subjective conclusions drawn without reliable evidence disrupts family life across generations and threatens religious freedom.

Among the key findings reported in this section are the following: the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan over time, the length of study preparation before baptism, perceived support within the religious community, changes in personal relationships, and experiences of discrimination because of their religious affiliation. Results show the various ways in which

¹¹ Evidence of paternal influence is discussed in Lori Baker-Sperry, "Passing on the Faith: The Father's Role in Religious Transmission," *Sociological Focus* 34, no. 2 (2001): 185–198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.2001.10571190>.

¹² Sachiko Sugiyama, "Parental Influence Upon Religious Orientation in a Japanese New Religious Group," *Tohoku Psychologica Folia* 49 (1990): 90–96.

¹³ Arnaud Simard-Émond, "Understanding Conversion to Jehovahism among Indigenous Peoples: The Case of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg," *Social Compass* 70, no. 2 (2023): 283–303, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231182499>.

¹⁴ Pew Research Center, June 13, 2019, "The Age Gap Around the World," <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2018/06/ReligiousCommitment-FULL-WEB.pdf>; Yuji Ogihara, Yukiko Uchida, and Takashi Kusumi, "How Do Japanese Perceive Individualism? Examination of the Meaning of Individualism in Japan," *Psychologia* 57, no. 3 (2014): 213–223, <https://doi.org/10.2117/psysoc.2014.213>.

¹⁵ Heinz Streib et al., *Deconversion Revisited: Biographical Studies and Psychometric Analyses Ten Years Later* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht / Brill Deutschland GmbH, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666568688>.

¹⁶ Jude Mary Cénat et al., "The Transcultural Community Resilience Scale: Psychometric Properties and Multinational Validity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (August 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713477>; Saroglou et al., "Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging."

¹⁷ *Japan Data: Distrust in Religion Rises in Japan*, Nippon.com, April 18, 2023, survey based on data from Tsukiji Honganji, <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01645/>.

Jehovah's Witnesses navigate their multifaceted religious life.

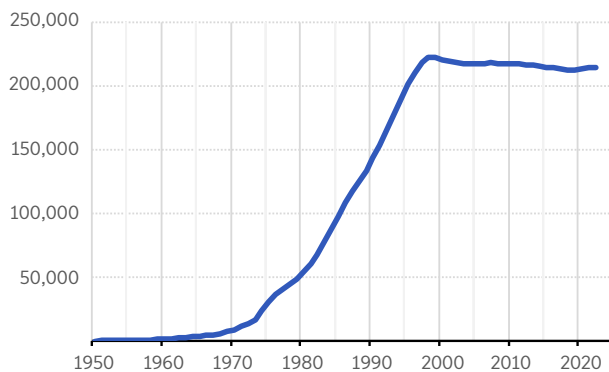
Becoming Jehovah's Witnesses—Who, When, How, and Why

Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan are known for sharing their beliefs with others at their homes and on the streets. Yet, given the cultural and historical context, acceptance of their message in this non-Western, non-Christian context has not been a foregone conclusion. The following presents research findings on the pattern of growth, characteristics of the conversion process, and what attracts individuals to the religion.

Growth of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan. To determine the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan over time, official JW reports and JWJ-QS data were compared. The religious organization's annual reports provide the average number of publishers per year that

could be used to determine the change in the total JW population in Japan over the past seven decades.¹⁸ (See Figure 2.1.) Using the survey data from the sample population of 7,193 respondents, the cumulative sum of those who were baptized each year provided an approximation of growth over time. (See Figure 2.2.) The survey data do not include mortalities or those who were no longer affiliated. However, findings from the sample population show a similar pattern to that of the official JW reports, with rapid growth during much of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. The survey data show that the number of baptisms continued to increase steadily after the 1990s. The JW annual reports indicate that the number of those involved in the public ministry over the past two decades has remained fairly constant. A steady growth pattern of baptisms among Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan occurred during the 20-year span from 2002 to 2022, when the national population growth rate in Japan fell slightly from 0.19% to -0.53%.¹⁹

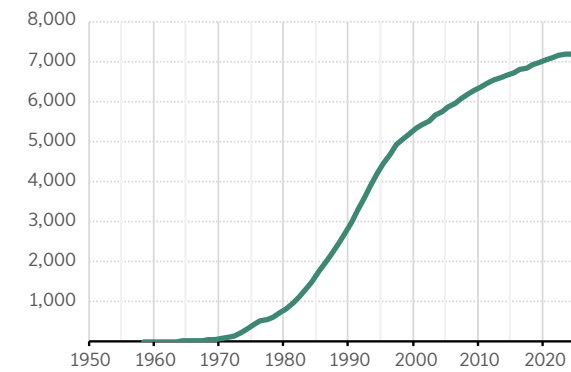
Figure 2.1. JW publishers in Japan, average number per year, 1950 to 2022



Source: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Annual reports, 1950–2023.

Note: "Publishers" refers to Jehovah's Witnesses who actively participate in the public ministry.

Figure 2.2. JW sample population, cumulative sum of baptisms per year, 1958 to 2024



Note: From the sample population of 7,193 respondents, cumulative sum totals of baptisms per year were calculated. Survey data do not include those who had died or were no longer affiliated.

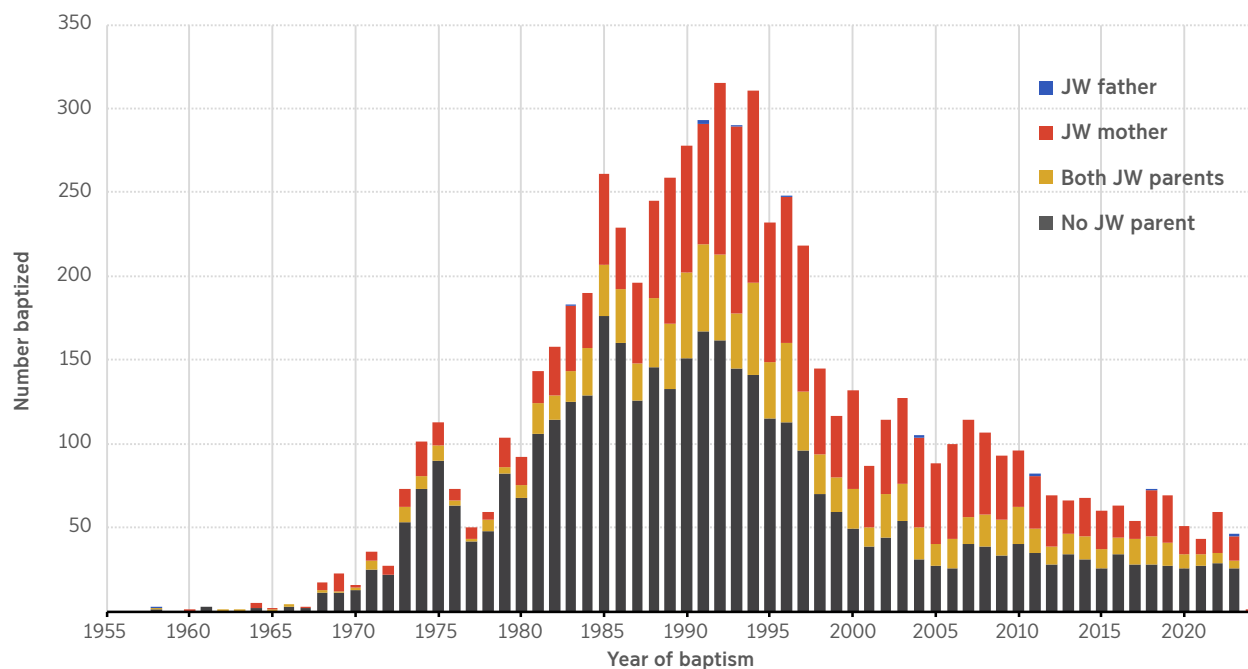
¹⁸ Jehovah's Witnesses who regularly share their beliefs with others are counted as "publishers." The term refers to one who actively publishes, or preaches, the good news of God's Kingdom. The organization does not count "members," such as those who simply self-identify with the religion or attend Witnesses' religious services.

¹⁹ "Japan Population Growth Rate 1950-2024," Macrotrends (website), <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/JPN/japan/population-growth-rate>, accessed August 3, 2024.

Those with JW parents and non-JW parents. The survey asked, “Do you have a parent who is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses?” If yes, respondents indicated whether their JW parent was their mother, father, or both. With these data, the total sample population baptized each year was grouped by those with and without JW parents, as shown in Figure 2.3. Those baptized during the early decades of the religious group were less likely to have JW parents than those baptized in later years when the number of congregants with at least one JW parent increased. (Of the 7,193 respondents, 1.5% ($n = 108$) refrained from answering the two questions.)

Over half of the sample (53.5%; $n = 3,847$) had parents who were not Jehovah’s Witnesses. Of the 45.9% ($n = 3,300$) with JW parents, 14.8% had both a JW mother and a JW father, and 30.1% had a JW mother with a non-JW father. Only 10 respondents (0.1%) had a JW father with a non-JW mother. The finding that so many of the respondents (44.9%) had a JW mother and that most of these were in religiously divided households highlights the influence JW mothers had on their children’s religious choice.

Figure 2.3. Jehovah’s Witnesses with and without JW parents, by year of baptism, 1955 to 2024



Note: $n = 7,085$ (which excludes “prefer not to answer” (PNA) = 108).

- Few JWs had JW parents during the early years of the religion in Japan.
- Over time, the number and proportion of those with JW parents increased.
- Almost half of JWs in Japan (44.9%) had JW mothers.

For those with JW parents ($n = 3,300$), the survey asked how old respondents were when at least one parent became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The response options were infant (before birth to 11 months), young child (1 to 6 years), elementary school age (7 to 12 years), teenager (13 to 17 years), young adult (18 to 23 years), and aged 24 or older. As shown in Table 2.1, about half of these respondents had a JW parent during their early childhood—19.4% during infancy and 36.1% during young childhood. One-fourth (25.0%) reported that their parents became Jehovah’s Witnesses during their elementary school years.

Although adolescence might be a more difficult developmental time to have a parent (mother) convert to a different religion, this was the situation for almost a tenth (8.5%) of the respondents who were then teenagers. Notably, 11.0% of respondents were adults (age 18 and over) when their parents became Jehovah’s Witnesses. These figures suggest strong parental influence and possible two-way transmission or reinforcement of religious beliefs in parent-child relationships, a finding consistent with the previously cited scholarly literature on intergenerational religious transmission.²⁰

Table 2.1. Age of JWs when a parent became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses

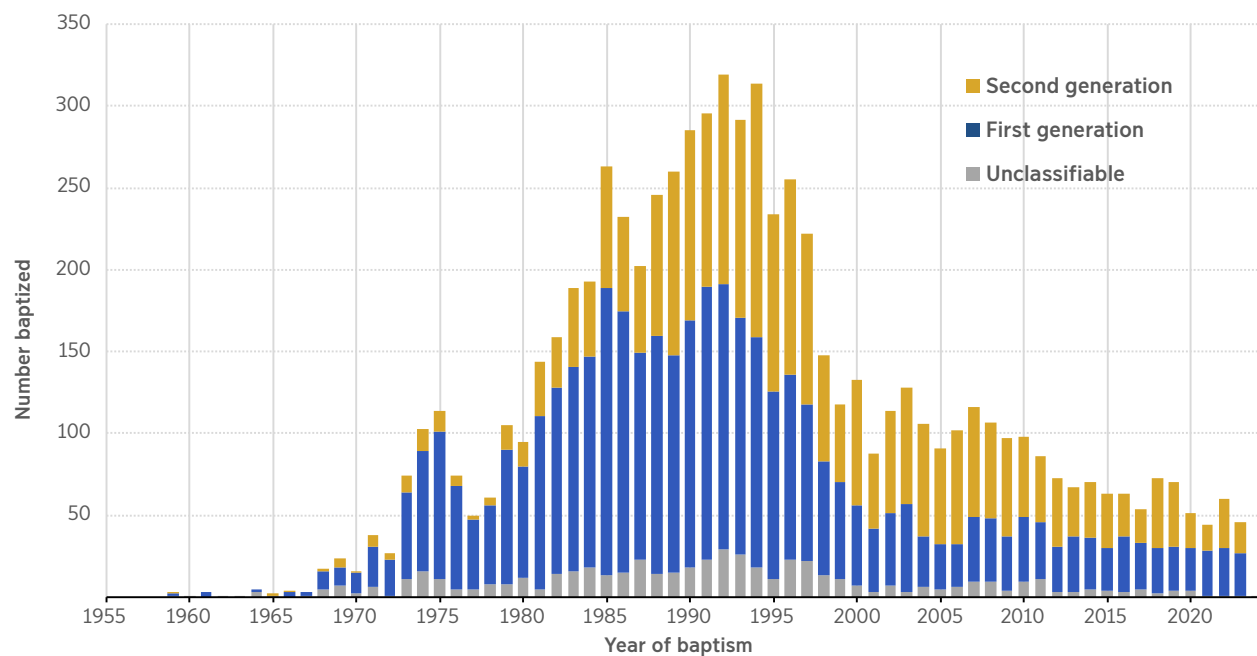
Age range	Sample population with JW parents ($n = 3,300$)	
	n	Percent
Infant (before birth to 11 months)	640	19.4
Young child (1 to 6 years)	1,190	36.1
Elementary school age (7 to 12 years)	825	25.0
Teenager (13 to 17 years)	281	8.5
Adult (18 years and over)	364	11.0

²⁰ See footnotes 9 through 12.

Generations of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The survey data allowed exploration of the proportion of the sample who were first- and second-generation JW’s by using the respondents’ year of baptism and their age when their parent became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Those who reported having no JW parent were considered first-generation JW’s; those who reported having a JW parent and were baptized after a parent became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses were considered second-generation JW’s. About half of the sample population (53.5%; $n = 3,847$) were first-generation JW’s. Over one-third of respondents (38.9%; $n = 2,797$) were second-generation JW’s. Another 7.6% of respondents ($n = 549$) could not be classified into either category because they selected “prefer not to answer,” or it was not clear whether they were baptized before or after their parents. Figure 2.4 shows the shift in the generational composition of Jehovah’s Witnesses over time.

Figure 2.4. First- and second-generation Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1955 to 2024



Note: First generation ($n = 3,847$; 53.5%), second generation ($n = 2,797$; 38.9%), unclassifiable ($n = 549$; 7.6%).

JW congregations are composed of both first-generation and second-generation JW’s.

Table 2.2 shows notable generational differences. First-generation JW's were older (average current age, 66.9) and baptized at older ages (average age at baptism, 35.5). Second-generation JW's were younger (average current age, 43.3) and baptized at younger ages (average age at baptism, 17.9). First-generation JW's were predominantly female (79.5%) compared to 59.6% for second-generation JW's. First-generation JW's consisted of 20.5% males but doubled to 40.4% for second-generation males.

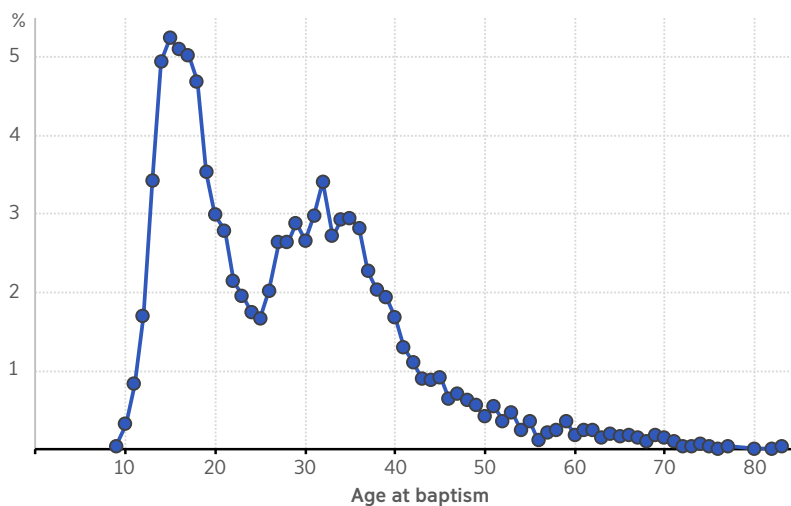
Table 2.2. First- and second-generation Jehovah's Witnesses by age

Generation	Total sample (n = 7,193)		Current age	Age at baptism
	n	Percent	Mean (years)	Mean (years)
First-generation JW's	3,847	53.5	66.9	35.5
Second-generation JW's	2,797	38.9	43.3	17.9
Unclassifiable	549	7.6	54.8	23.1

Note: Unclassifiable category includes those with PNA responses and those for whom it could not be determined if they were baptized before or after their parent.

Age at baptism. Findings showed a wide range of baptism ages among respondents, from age 9 to 83 years. Figure 2.5 plots the percentage of respondents who were baptized at each age. The average age at baptism for the total sample was 27.7 years; for males, 25.4; for females, 28.7. Just over one-fourth of respondents (26.6%) became baptized Jehovah's Witnesses before age 18; 58.4% were baptized as young adults (aged 18 to 39); 12.6% as middle-aged adults (aged 40 to 59); and 2.3% as older adults (aged 60 or older). Of the 167 who were baptized in their later years, 11 were aged 75 years old or over. For Jehovah's Witnesses, chronological age does not determine when individuals are baptized.

Figure 2.5. Baptism age of Jehovah's Witnesses (percentage)



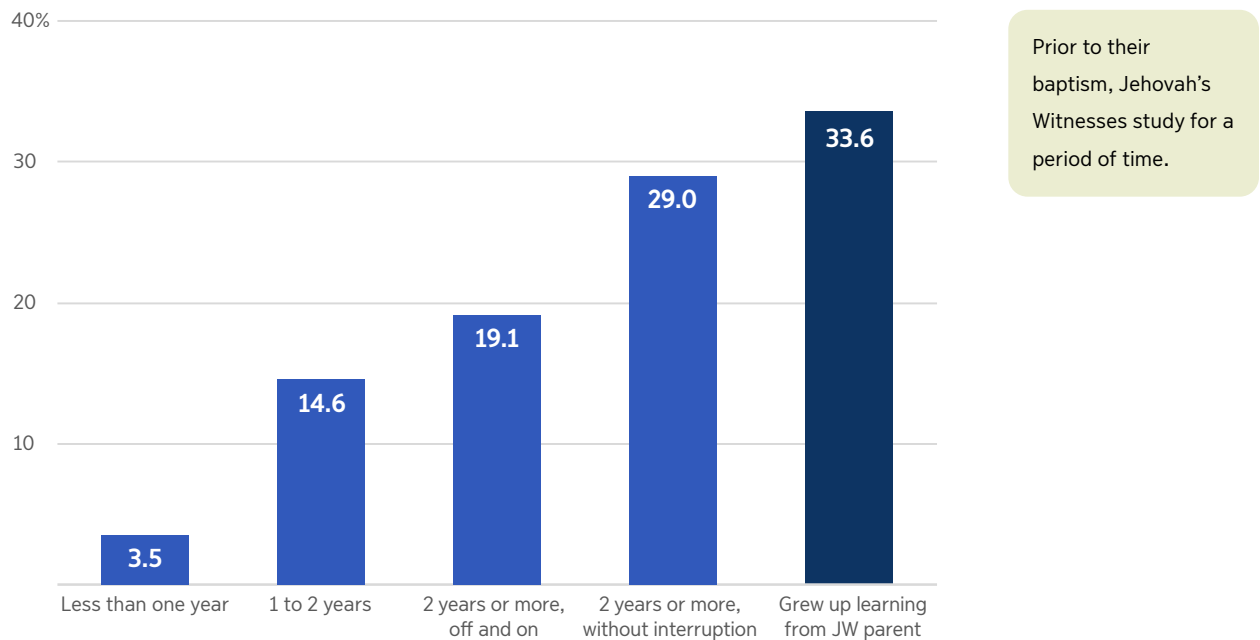
Note: n = 7,193.

Period of study before baptism. The findings show that before individuals are baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses, they engage in the study of religious teachings for a considerable period of time. Figure 2.6 shows how long respondents studied prior to their baptism. One-third of respondents (33.6%) learned about the religion from a JW parent or guardian. Almost half

(48.1%) studied for two or more years, either without interruption (29.0%) or intermittently (19.1%). A small percentage (14.6%) studied for one to two years. Only 251 respondents (3.5%) reported that they studied the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses for less than one year. The majority (81.3%) of the second-generation JWs grew up learning about the Bible from a JW parent.

Figure 2.6. Time spent in religious study before baptism

How long did you study the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses before you were baptized?



Note: n = 7,193. PNA (n = 14; 0.2%) are not shown in the chart.

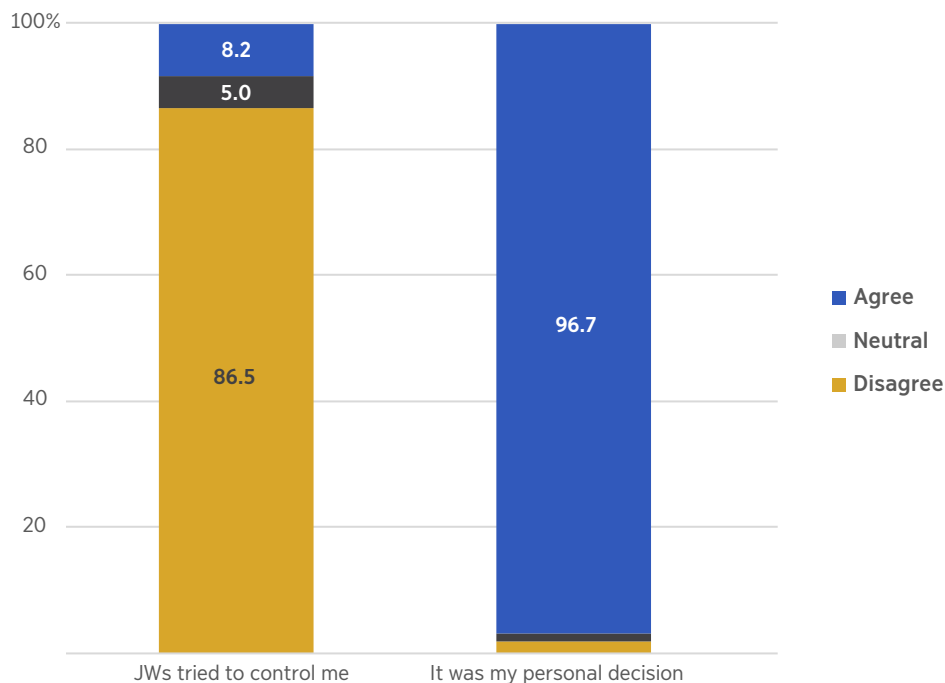
Perception of study with Jehovah’s Witnesses. The survey investigated how respondents perceived their study with Jehovah’s Witnesses, with their rating six statements on a five-point, agree-disagree scale. Two statements specifically inquired about perceptions of personal choice and/or efforts to control their decision:

- I felt that Jehovah’s Witnesses were trying to control me.
- It was my personal decision to become a Jehovah’s Witness.

Figure 2.7 shows that the vast majority (96.7%) indicated that their becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses was a personal decision, with only 1.8% disagreeing. Similarly, 86.5% indicated that they did not feel Jehovah’s Witnesses tried to control them while studying the Bible. However, even for the relatively small percentage (8.2%) who felt JW’s tried to control their decision, most of these indicated having a high degree of agency during the course of their Bible studies.

Figure 2.7. Perception of choice or control when studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses

Concerning the situation when you were studying the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses



Becoming one of Jehovah’s Witnesses was considered a personal decision.

Note: n = 7,193. PNAs are not included in the chart.

To understand more how respondents perceived their situation when they were studying, the survey included the following agree-disagree statements:

- I felt Jehovah’s Witnesses acted kindly mainly to convert me.
- I had to sever my relationship with my family to become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.
- I felt pressured to believe what Jehovah’s Witnesses teach.
- I could share my doubts and ask questions.

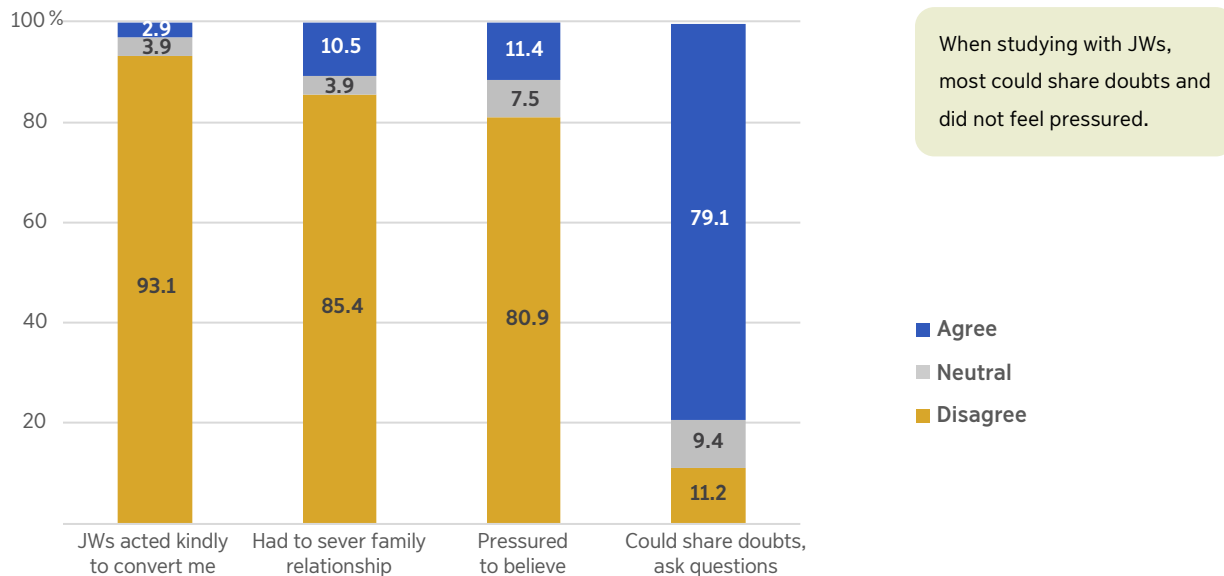
As shown in Figure 2.8, respondents disagreed that they were pressured (80.9%) or that JW’s acts of kindness were mainly with the intent to convert them (93.1%). Although changing one’s religion can sometimes be a source of conflict for family members, most (85.4%) indicated that their studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses did not result in severing family relationships. Three-fourths (79.1%) agreed that they could share doubts and ask questions when studying.

I find the current congregation to be open-minded, vibrant, and exceptionally welcoming. I really like that. . . . In the past, there was a certain strictness and seriousness or earnestness stemming from Japanese culture, which reflects both positive and negative aspects. I also sensed a disconnect from Jehovah’s Witnesses in other countries.

—Male, 50s, 1st-generation JW

Figure 2.8. Perception of situation when studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses

Concerning the situation when you were studying the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses



Note: n = 7,193. PNAs are not shown in the chart.

A comparison of responses for first- and second-generation JW's found similar patterns. Less than one-tenth of both groups felt that JW's tried to control them during their Bible study (7.3% and 9.7%, respectively), while both groups agreed that it was their personal decision to become Jehovah's Witnesses (97.3% and 96.2%, respectively). Negligible differences were found between first- and second-generation JW's in the percentages of those who reported that they could share their doubts (79.2% and 78.3%) and that JW's acted kindly to convert them (3.1% and 2.5%).

During my student years, there was a period when I voluntarily chose to stop studying the Bible and attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Even so, my mother never forced me to engage in Witness activities. Rather, she respected my decision and continued to raise me with loving affection.

—Male, 40s, 2nd-generation JW

Original and current attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses. To understand the original and current attractions to the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, respondents were asked two related questions with the same list of response options for each question.²¹ The questions were as follows:

- Individuals are attracted to a religion for different reasons. What originally attracted you to Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Individuals decide to remain in a religion for different reasons. What attracts you now to Jehovah's Witnesses?

For both questions, respondents could select up to 3 of 11 items related to the following: “attracted to the moral guidelines,” “logic of the teachings,” “to learn more about the Bible,” “to make better life choices,” “family members who were Jehovah's Witnesses,” “Jehovah's Witnesses' good-hearted qualities,” “to be

closer to God,” “hope for the future,” concern that “family and friends would reject me if I did not become one of Jehovah's Witnesses,” “help with my family relationships,” and “religious rituals.”

What attracted Jehovah's Witnesses to their religion varied and changed somewhat from their original to current attractions. Figure 2.9 shows the percentages of respondents who selected each item as one of their top three original and current attractions to the religion. (For comparative purposes, those who chose “none of the above” or “prefer not to answer” in either question ($n = 188$) were not retained in these results.)

“Logic of the teachings” was one of the top three responses for both original attraction (37.8%) and current attraction (43.0%). Two items had the largest shift in percentages from original to current attraction. “Had family members who were Jehovah's Witnesses” was an original attraction for over one-third (36.9%), but less than one-tenth (9.3%) selected this as a reason they remain in the religion. In contrast, “to be closer to God” was chosen by less than one-fifth (17.3%) as an original attraction but by two-thirds (66.5%) as a current attraction.

The item about “JW's good-hearted qualities” was selected by 39.8% as an original attraction and 23.2% as a current attraction. “Hope for the future” was selected as an original attraction by 27.5% and as a current attraction by 40.6% of respondents.

Other items selected by at least one-fourth of respondents for original and current attractions were, respectively, “make better life choices” (33.2% and 36.4%), “attracted to the moral guidelines” (24.5% and 35.3%), and “to learn more about the Bible” (27.5% and 31.5%).

²¹ The list of items in the attraction measure was adapted from those used in separate studies of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and Rwanda: Aldiyar Auyezbek and Serik Beissembayev, *Views, Values and Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Analytical Report on the Results of the Study* (Astana, Kazakhstan, 2023); V. Nkurikiyinka and J. Chu, *Jehovah's Witnesses During and After the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda: Psychosocial Factors Related to Faith, Forgiveness, and Family* (forthcoming, Autumn 2024).

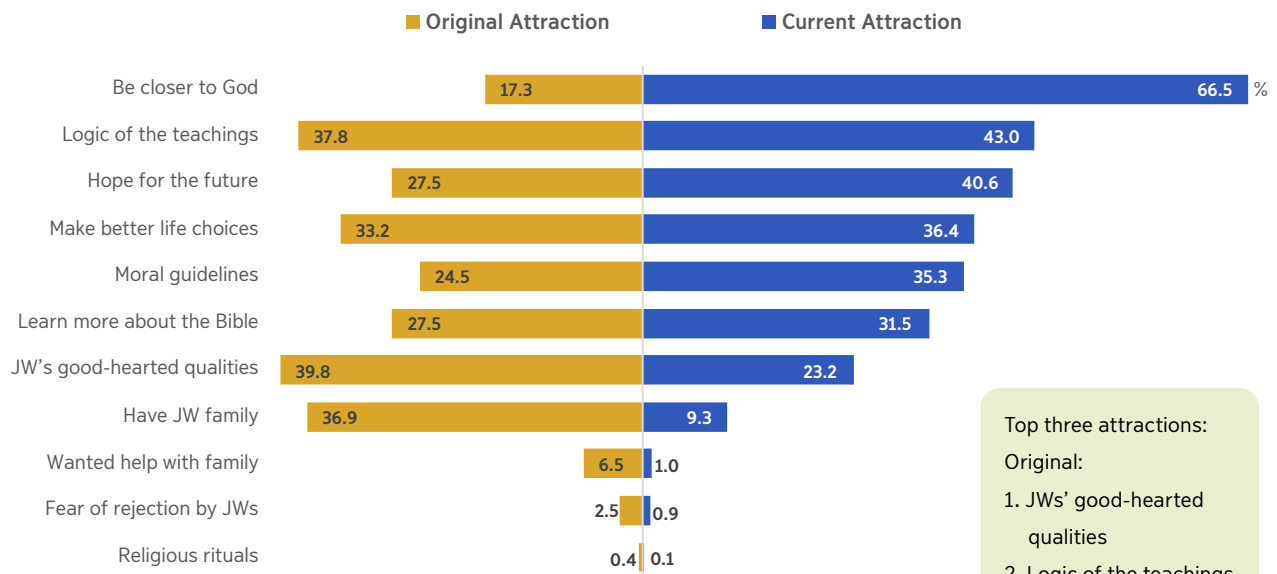
Notably, less than 0.5% chose “religious rituals” as either an original or current attraction. Concern about JW family and friends rejecting them was selected by 2.5% of respondents as an original motivation and less than 1.0% as a main reason for their remaining in the religion.

During my student years, I noticed the distinct attitude, behavior, and refreshing atmosphere among Jehovah’s Witnesses at my school. This experience inspired me to begin studying the Bible. These second-generation Witness children stood out from other students, which I found both appealing and admirable. As a result, I requested a Bible study, hoping to become more like them.

—Female, 30s, 1st-generation JW

Figure 2.9. Original and current attractions to Jehovah’s Witnesses

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



Top three attractions:

Original:

1. JW's good-hearted qualities
2. Logic of the teachings
3. Have JW family

Current:

1. To be closer to God
2. Logic of the teachings
3. Hope for the future

Note: n = 7,005. Data analysis compared original and current attractions for the same respondents.

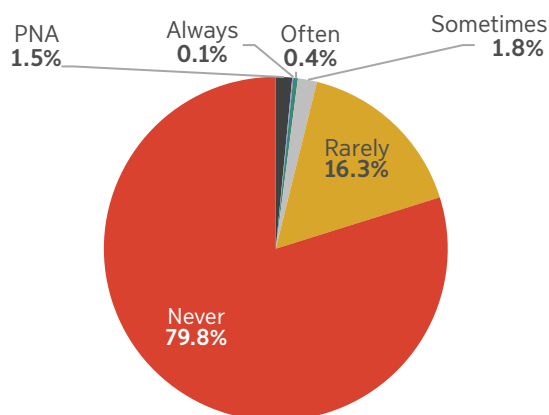
Ever stop or regret being one of Jehovah's Witnesses

Research findings show a high degree of stability and commitment among Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan, with most congregants remaining in the organization without interruption. Of the total sample, most (95.8%) never stopped their religious association after becoming baptized Jehovah's Witnesses. A small number of respondents ($n = 268$; 3.7%) reported that they had previously stopped their association but later returned.²² Of those who had stopped and returned, 76.1% ($n = 204$) were female and 23.9% ($n = 64$) were male. For the total sample population (which was disproportionately female), 4.0% of all female respondents and 3.1% of all male respondents had stopped their association with Jehovah's Witnesses for a time.

A consistent pattern was found in responses to the survey question that asked if respondents ever regretted being Jehovah's Witnesses, with a similar percentage (96.1%) reporting that they either "never" (79.8%) or "rarely" (16.3%) had regrets about being Jehovah's Witnesses. (See Figure 2.10.) Only 40 respondents (0.6%) indicated that they "often" or "always" had regrets, and another 129 (1.8%) selected "sometimes."

Figure 2.10. Regret over religious affiliation

Do you ever regret being one of Jehovah's Witnesses?



The vast majority of JW's in Japan (96%) have never or rarely regretted being JW's.

Note: $n = 7,193$.

¹⁹ Individuals may stop their religious association by becoming inactive (no longer participating in congregation ministry activities or attending meetings). There are no congregation sanctions for inactivity. Baptized congregants who commit serious unrepentant wrongdoing (such as sexual misconduct, violence, or substance abuse) may be subject to removal from the congregation if they refuse to reform despite efforts by congregation elders to provide spiritual assistance. Removal results in curtailed spiritual and social interactions with other congregants (except within the immediate household, where family relationships and responsibilities remain). Individuals may still attend congregation meetings and request pastoral help; and reinstatement to the congregation is possible upon acknowledgment, repentance, and cessation of the wrong. For a full discussion, see the series of four articles for congregation study in the August 2024 issue of *The Watchtower* (<https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-august-2024/>).

Leaving and Returning—Who Leave and Why They Return

The study examined the proportion of those who, after their baptism, remained Jehovah’s Witnesses without interruption, and those who left for a time and then resumed their association with the religious community. The 268 respondents who indicated that they had stopped association with Jehovah’s Witnesses (3.7% of the total sample) were asked how long the interruption lasted and what factors, if any, moved them to return to the religion. Of this subgroup, 97 were first-generation JW’s, 150 were second-generation JW’s, and 21 respondents could not be classified.

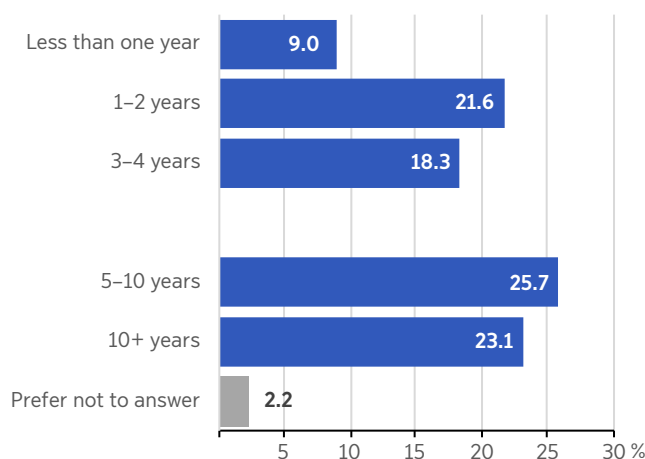
Time away. The survey asked those who had previously stopped associating with Jehovah’s Witnesses how long had they stopped. Response options were as follows: less than 1 year; 1 to 2; 3 to 4; 5 to 6; 7 to 8; 9 to 10; and more than 10 years. As shown in Figure 2.11, almost one-third (30.6%) resumed their association with the religious community within 2 years of leaving. Almost half (48.9%) resumed their association within 4 years of having stopped. For some, resuming

association with Jehovah’s Witnesses occurred after a longer time—one-fourth (25.7%) resumed association within 5 to 10 years and almost one-fourth (23.1%) after more than 10 years of interruption. A comparison of first- and second-generation JW’s who had stopped association found that 55.3% of second-generation JW’s resumed association within four years, compared to 38.1% of first-generation JW’s.

Since childhood, I resented the strict and constraining nature of the organization, so I left when I turned 20, believing I had finally found freedom. However, I still held the belief that the Bible has true and accurate principles. After many twists and turns, I eventually decided to return to the organization, despite having believed I would never do so. Now, my life is filled with genuine happiness, and I experience a deep sense of joy from drawing closer to Jehovah.

—Female, 40s, 2nd-generation JW

Figure 2.11. Time away from association with Jehovah’s Witnesses



Almost one-third of those who leave resumed association within 2 years.

Half resumed association in less than 5 years.

Note: Findings are based on the subgroup of respondents who had stopped being Jehovah’s Witnesses for a time (n = 268).

Year when resumed JW association. The survey asked those who had left for a time: “To the best of your recollection, in what year did you resume activity as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses?” Of the 268 who had previously stopped associating with Jehovah’s Witnesses, 239 reported the year they returned. As shown in Table 2.3, three-fourths returned after the year 2000. The year 2018 had the most ($n = 16$) resuming their association with Jehovah’s Witnesses. Most who had previously stopped and later resumed their association have since remained as Jehovah’s Witnesses for years, even decades.

Table 2.3. Time periods when resuming association

Time period	n	Percent of total who left ($n = 239$)
In or before 1980	5	2.1
1981 to 1990	20	8.4
1991 to 2000	35	14.6
2001 to 2010	82	34.3
2011 to 2020	72	30.1
2021 to 2024	25	10.5

Note: The number for the year 2024 is incomplete; one respondent indicated having resumed association in 2024, prior to the close of the survey period on January 14, 2024.

Age when resuming association. To determine the ages when the 239 respondents in this subgroup resumed their JW association, their reported year of return was subtracted from the year of birth for each respondent. The ages of return ranged from 16 to 79. The average age when respondents returned was 36.5. The average age of return for first-generation JW’s who had left was 47.3 (standard deviation, $SD = 13.94$) compared to 30.8 ($SD = 4.63$) for second-generation JW’s. Table 2.4 shows that over three-fourths resumed their association before age 45, but about 20% resumed association later in life.

Table 2.4. Age when resuming association

Age	n	Percent of total ($n = 239$)
25 and under	53	22.2
26–35	80	33.5
36–45	55	23.0
46–55	25	10.5
Over 55	26	10.9

After spending nearly 15 years away from the organization, beginning in my 20s, I was able to return thanks to Jehovah’s love and mercy. I once blamed my parents’ strict upbringing policy for everything, but now I feel deeply grateful to them for their unwavering dedication in raising me.

—Female, 50s, 2nd-generation JW

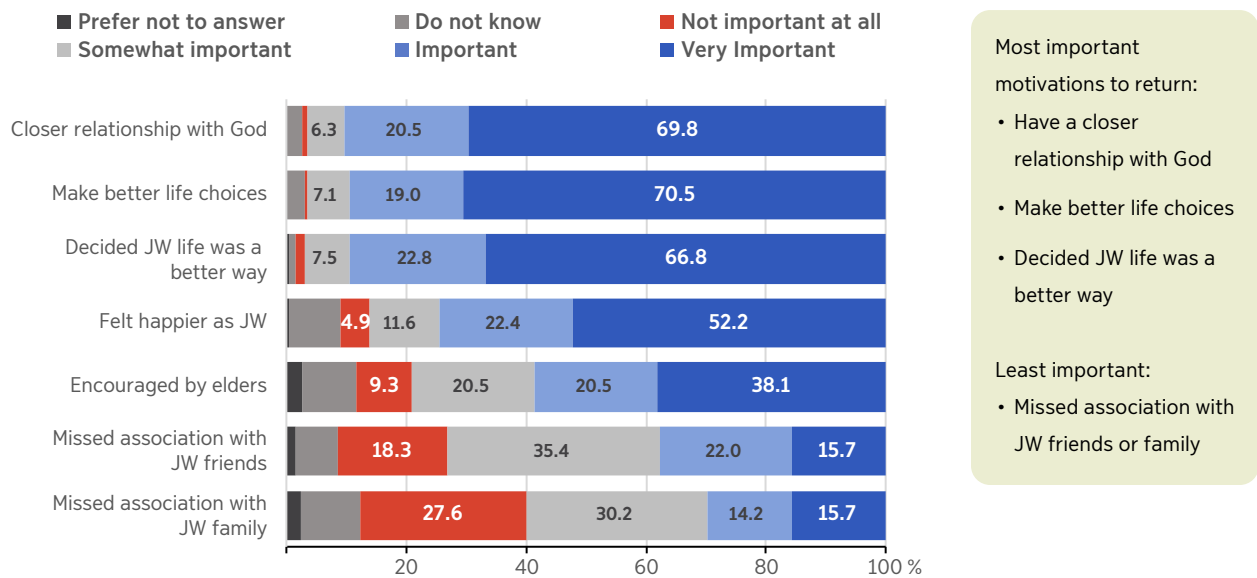
Motivations to return. Respondents who had stopped associating with Jehovah’s Witnesses for a period of time were asked, on a five-point scale, how important or not important certain motivations were for them to resume their association. As shown in Figure 2.12, no single motivation stood out in the list of seven. Approximately 90% identified the following as important or very important motivations for them:

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

For first- and second-generation JW’s, the top three motivations were the same as above, but the item with the largest percentage selected by second-generation JW’s was “to make better decisions in life” (91.3%). Other motivations that respondents rated as important or very important were that they felt happier as JW’s (74.6%) and were encouraged by congregation elders (58.6%). Depending on their circumstances, individuals might have had limited social interaction with JW friends and family during the time that they stopped being active in the congregation. Still, a relatively small percentage indicated that missing their association with JW friends (37.7%) or with JW family (29.9%) was an important motivation for them to resume association. This was true for both first- and second-generation JW’s.

Figure 2.12. Motivations to resume association with Jehovah’s Witnesses

How important were the following as motivations for you to resume association with Jehovah’s Witnesses?



Most important motivations to return:

- Have a closer relationship with God
- Make better life choices
- Decided JW life was a better way

Least important:

- Missed association with JW friends or family

Note: n = 268.

I am more determined than ever to strengthen and deepen my relationship with Jehovah.

—Female, 40s, left and returned

Perceived Support, Relationship Changes, and Discrimination

The study investigated certain benefits and costs associated with being Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan: respondents’ perception of congregation support, changes in relationships, and experiences of discrimination.

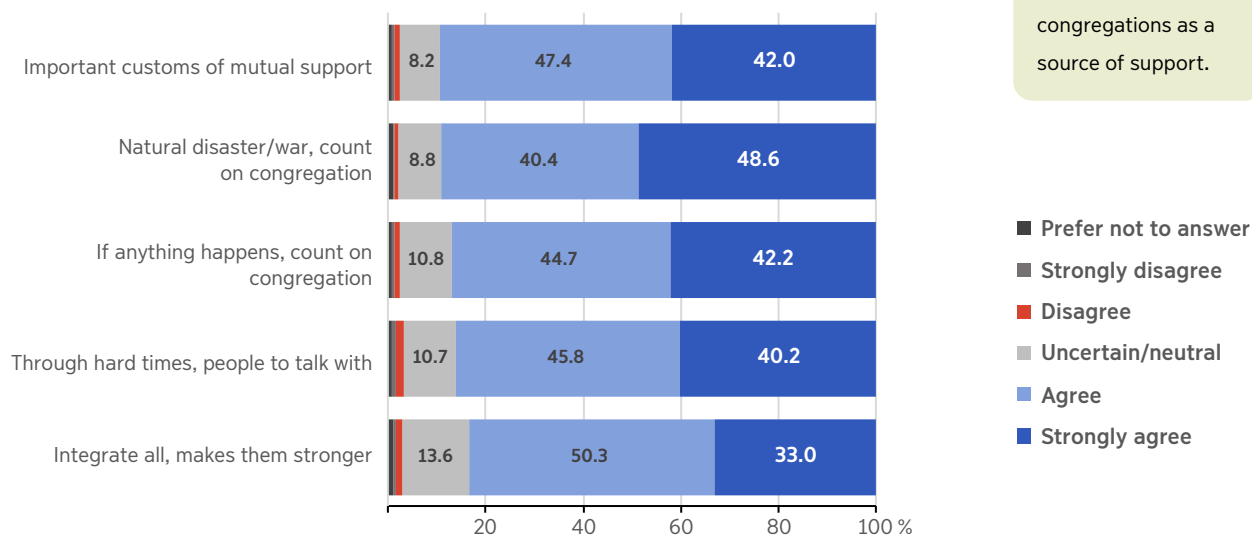
Congregation support. Religious groups can foster a sense of social connectedness and provide a network of support in times of need. The study examined the extent to which Jehovah’s Witnesses view their religious community as a source of support. The survey included five items selected from a measure of community support and resilience with a five-point

agree-disagree scale.²³ The selected items related to how respondents viewed their congregation in the following areas: a) mutual support, b) integration and strengthening of congregants, c) dependability, d) having people to talk to during hard times, and e) trustworthiness in the event of a natural disaster, war, or other extreme situation.

Figure 2.13 shows the responses from the total sample for each item in the measure. All items had a consistent pattern of agreement, with over 80% indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The statements with the highest agreement were related to mutual support in the congregation (89.4%) and trustworthiness in the event of an extreme situation such as natural disasters (89.0%).²⁴

Figure 2.13. View of congregation support

When you think about those in your congregation, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following?



Note: n = 7,193.

²³ Cénat et al., “The Transcultural Community Resilience Scale.”

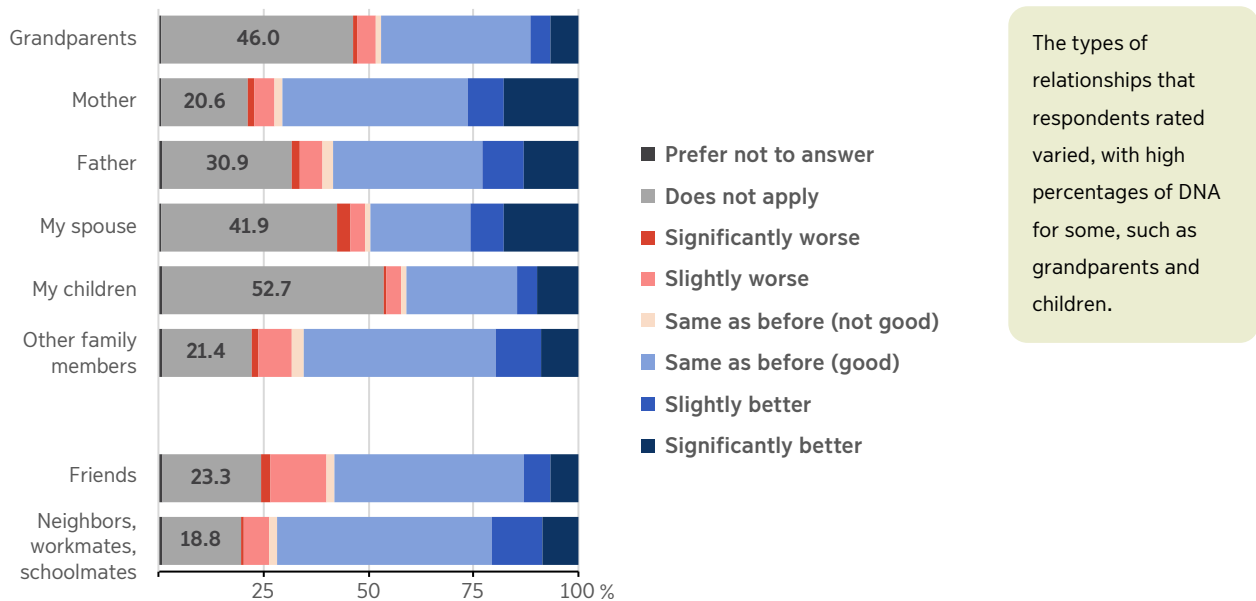
²⁴ Some responses may have been influenced by the coincidental occurrence of a magnitude 7.6 earthquake that struck the Noto Peninsula in the Ishikawa Prefecture on January 1, 2024, just before the survey period was set to begin. To support disaster relief efforts, Jehovah’s Witnesses provided aid and organized volunteers from across Japan (“Strong Earthquake Shakes Noto Peninsula in Japan,” January 4, 2024, Jehovah’s Witnesses—Official Website, <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/japan/Strong-Earthquake-Shakes-Noto-Peninsula-in-Japan/>). Cf. reports on disaster relief after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, “The 2011 Japan Tsunami—Survivors Tell Their Stories,” *Awake!* (December 2011): 14-20; *2012 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2012) 18-23, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2012-Yearbook-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses/Highlights-of-the-Past-Year/>.

Perceived changes in relationships. The survey asked respondents how they would rate their current relationships compared to the time before becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses. A six-point scale was used (“significantly worse,” “slightly worse,” “same as before-not good,” “same as before-good,” “slightly better,” and “significantly better”), with the additional options of “prefer not to answer” (PNA) and “does not apply” (DNA). Although this cross-sectional survey research cannot attribute any changes in relationships to the effects of religion, the measure does provide insight into respondents’ perceived changes in relationships after their becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses.

DNA responses ranged from 18.8% to 52.7%. Since respondents could choose the PNA option for sensitive questions they did not want to answer, the DNA responses likely indicated those who did not have a particular relationship (e.g., no spouse or children) or the person may have died (e.g., a deceased parent or grandparent). Others could have chosen the DNA option because they had always been part of the JW community and therefore had no basis for a before-and-after comparison of their individual relationships. Despite uncertainty about DNA responses, the data provide insight into the types and perceptions of relationships of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Figure 2.14 shows the results for all response options, including DNA.

Figure 2.14. Perceived changes in relationships after becoming JWs (with DNA responses)

In your opinion, compared to the time before you became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, how would you rate your current relationships with the following?



Note: Based on responses from the total sample, n = 7,193.

Perceived relationship changes after becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses are better understood by removing DNA responses from the analysis. As shown in Figure 2.15, across all relationships, most respondents indicated that their relationships with others were good both before and after becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses. Positive perceptions of relationships could reflect the quality and stability of both the respondents and those in their social circle.

Spousal relationships showed the greatest improvement since becoming Jehovah's Witnesses. Of the 3,677 respondents who reported being currently married, 42.7% indicated that the relationship with their spouse was good both before and after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses. Another 46.8% reported slightly or significantly better relationships with spouses after they became Jehovah's Witnesses.

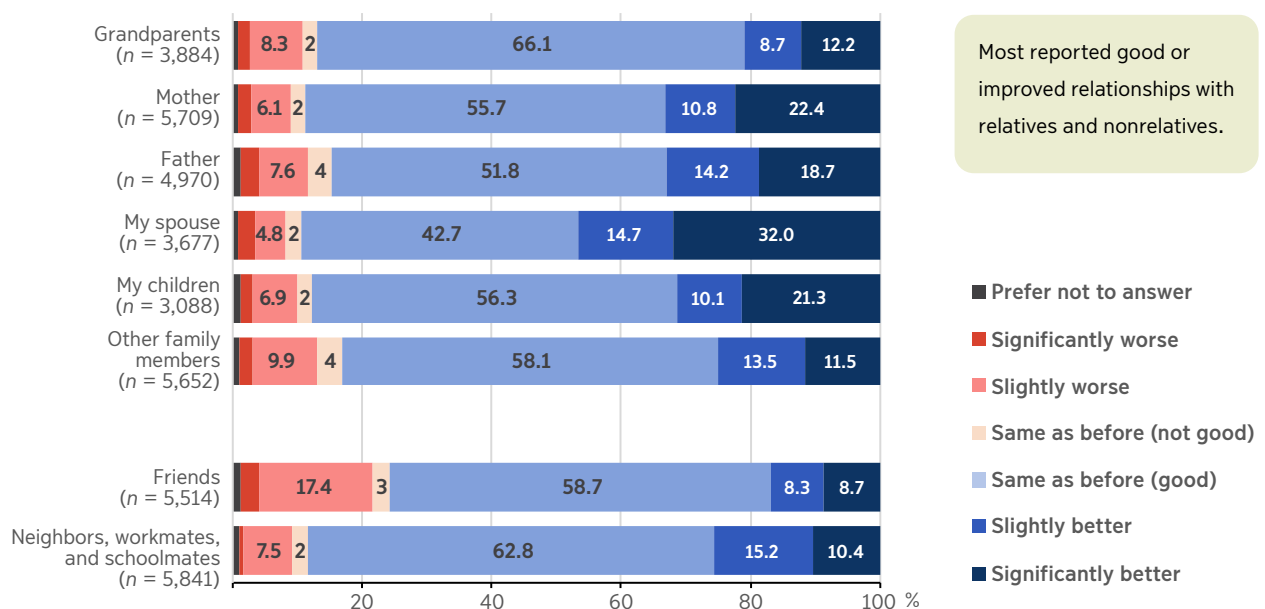
At a time of intergenerational tension in Japan, respondents reported good intergenerational relationships with grandparents, parents, and children. Of the 3,088 respondents who reported having children (including minor and adult children), over half (56.3%) indicated the relationship with their children was good both before and after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses; another third (31.4%) reported better relationships with their children. Relationships with grandparents were among the strongest. Of the 3,884 respondents reporting relationships with their grandparents, two-thirds (66.1%) indicated their relationships were

good both before and after their becoming Jehovah's Witnesses; another one-fifth (20.9%) reported better relationships after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses.

Overall, respondents viewed their relationships favorably with proximate others, which could include those who are not Jehovah's Witnesses. Of the 5,841 reporting perceptions of their relationships with neighbors, workmates, and schoolmates, 62.8% perceived these relationships to be good both before and after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, and an additional 25.6% reported that these relationships were better after conversion. Of the 5,514 respondents reporting on relationships with friends, 58.7% indicated these were good both before and after their becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, and 17.0% indicated that friendships became better. Although it might be assumed that differences in beliefs and behaviors could strain friendships, a small percentage (17.4%) indicated slightly worse relationships with friends.

Figure 2.15. Perceived changes in relationships after becoming JW's

In your opinion, compared to the time before you became one of Jehovah's Witnesses, how would you rate your current relationships with the following?

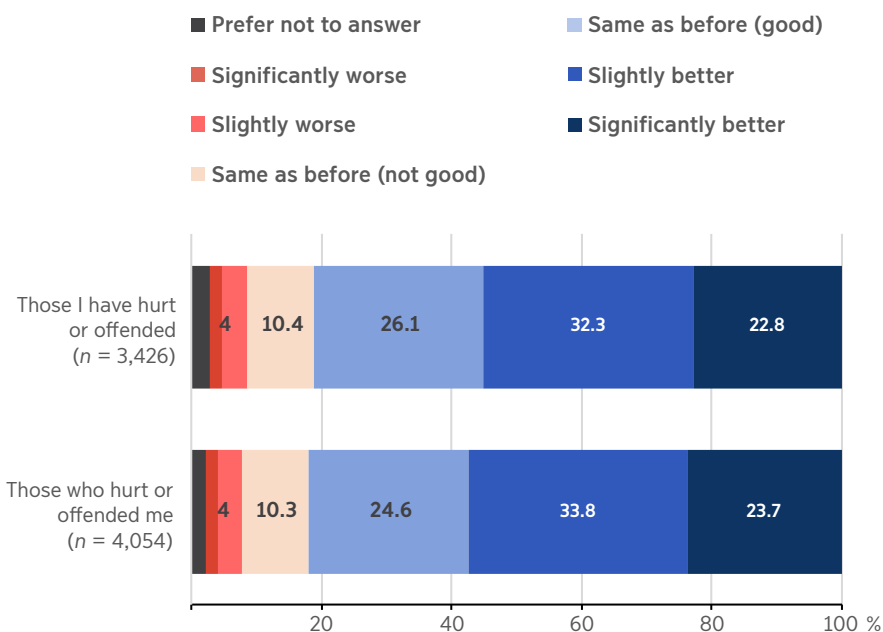


Respondents also gave their perceptions of conflict relationships since becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses—relationships with those they had hurt or offended and relationships with those who had hurt or offended them. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that having conflict relationships did not apply to them—43.6% selected DNA for relationships with those who had hurt or offended them, and 52.4% selected DNA for relationships with those they had hurt or offended.

Figure 2.16 shows the responses of those who reported on their conflict relationships and how they perceived changes in these relationships. Over half reported slightly or significantly better relationships with those whom they had hurt (55.1%) and who had hurt them (57.5%).

Figure 2.16. Perception of conflict relationships

In your opinion, compared to the time before you became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, how would you rate your current relationships with the following?



Over half reported better relationships with those they had hurt or who had hurt them.

Note: “Does not apply” responses were removed.

As shown in Table 2.5, the majority of first- and second-generation JW's reported having good relationships with close family members both before and after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, or that relationships became better. The total percentage of those who reported good or improved relationships for all types

of relationships was more for those who grew up with JW parents (second-generation JW's) than for first-generation JW's. The same pattern was true of conflict relationships. The majority of both JW generations thought that since becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, previous conflict relationships were good or better.

Table 2.5. Perceived relationships: First- and second-generation JW's

	First-generation JW's				Second-generation JW's			
Relationships	Same-good	Slightly better	Much better	Total	Same-good	Slightly better	Much better	Total
Interpersonal								
My grandparents	55.5%	9.8%	15.9%	81.2%	74.7%	7.6%	8.6%	90.9%
My mother	48.1	12.8	20.4	81.3	65.5	8.7	22.1	96.3
My father	49.5	13.7	17.0	80.3	55.6	14.5	18.6	88.7
My children (minor or adult)	54.4	11.0	21.4	86.8	68.3	5.9	21.2	95.4
My spouse	34.5	18.0	34.0	86.5	64.4	6.9	25.9	97.2
Conflict								
With those I have hurt or offended	24.5	31.9	20.3	76.7	28.5	33.1	25.1	86.7
Those who hurt or offended me	23.9	33.0	22.0	78.9	26.0	35.4	25.2	86.5

Note: The *n* for each type of relationship reported varied. The total percentages for each generation are those who reported that their relationships were good or improved after becoming Jehovah's Witnesses.

There will never be a congregation without challenges. But much like in a family, misunderstandings are naturally expected. By fostering open communication, giving and receiving forgiveness, we can be more united.

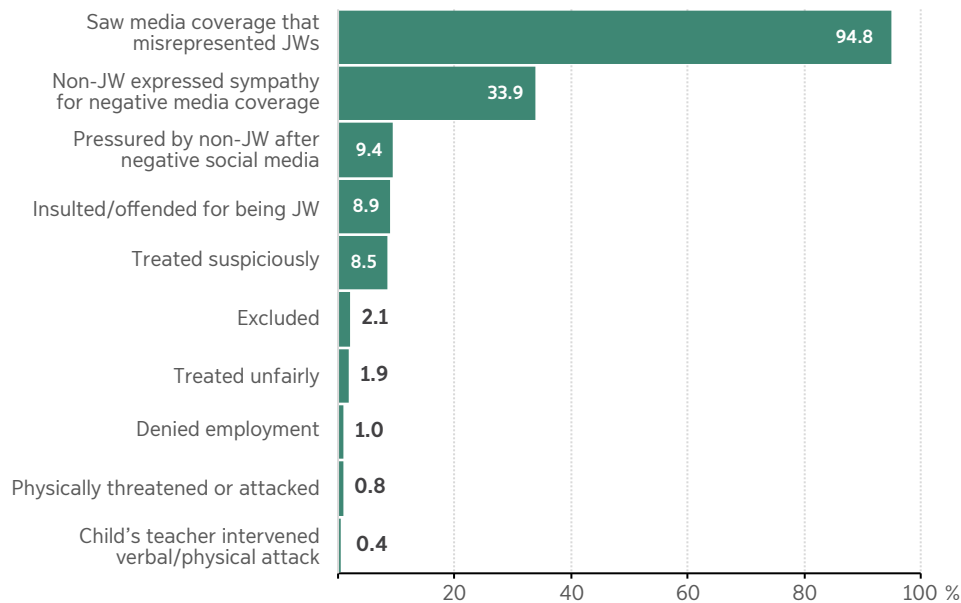
—Female, 30s, 2nd-generation JW

Experiences of discrimination from media, social media, and other forms. The survey questionnaire listed types of discrimination and asked if respondents had experienced any of these in the past 12 months. Respondents could select all that applied. Figure 2.17 shows the percentage of the total sample that selected each item. In the list of discrimination experiences, those related to media reports were the most prevalent. The vast majority of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the sample population (94.8%; $n = 6,165$) indicated that they had seen media coverage that they believed misrepresented the religious group. Another 33.9% ($n = 2,206$) reported that someone outside the religious community had expressed sympathy toward them because of negative media coverage. The findings indicate that Jehovah’s Witnesses and others view media coverage about the religious community as inaccurate.

The findings also suggest possible adverse effects of social media. Some (9.4%; $n = 610$) reported that non-Witness family or friends pressured them after they saw social media posts about Jehovah’s Witnesses. Others reported that someone had insulted them (8.9%; $n = 578$) or treated them with suspicion (8.5%; $n = 555$) because they were Jehovah’s Witnesses. A few experienced other forms of discrimination: being excluded (2.1%; $n = 134$), treated unfairly (1.9%; $n = 122$), denied employment (1.0%; $n = 63$), physically attacked or threatened (0.8%; $n = 54$), and having a teacher intervene to protect their child from an alleged verbal or physical attack (0.4%; $n = 24$).

Figure 2.17. Experiences of discrimination of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan

In the past 12 months, have you experienced any of the following?



JW's (94.8%) have seen media coverage they believe misrepresents their religion.

The media consistently reports negative news and topics related to Jehovah's Witnesses. I am totally unhappy with the current situation, where the voices of the second generation of Jehovah's Witnesses who are content with their faith are rarely, if ever, highlighted.

—Female, 20s, 2nd-generation JW

Note: $n = 6,502$. PNA and/or DNA responses ($n = 691$) were removed.

While it was my personal decision to value and treasure the Bible and what it teaches, the way others view us, including the insults and criticism from those who are not Witnesses, deeply hurts me.

—Female, 20s, 2nd-generation JW

Conclusion

During the early years of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan, from the 1950s to the late 1980s, the largest number of JW converts came from non-JW households. Over time, more of the newly baptized were second-generation JWs. Today, congregations are composed of first-generation and second-generation JWs, with the potential for an increased number of third-generation JWs.

The age when Jehovah’s Witnesses were baptized ranged from youth to later life, with an average age of 28. The decision to be baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses occurred after a considerable period of time spent studying the faith’s beliefs and practices. One-third of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan learned about the religion from their JW parents. For those who studied with someone other than their parents, almost half studied for two or more years prior to their baptism. The majority perceived a high degree of personal choice in their decision to identify themselves as being associated with the religious group.

Most Jehovah’s Witnesses in Japan were attracted to the religion because of what they deemed to be the logic of the teachings—it was both what motivated them to begin and to continue their association with Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The influence of family on individuals’ religious decisions was mixed. About half who converted to the religion did not have JW parents. For others, having JW family connections influenced their original attraction to the religion, but having JW family was not the reason persons felt motivated them to continue in the religion. Neither affirmation nor disapproval from family was seen as a motivator to stay in (or leave) the religion. Less than one percent indicated that concern over rejection from JW family or friends

was a main reason for their remaining in the religion. Witnesses said they were attracted to the religion to make better life choices, have moral guidelines, and have a hope for the future. However, the number one reason Witnesses gave for remaining in the religion was “to be closer to God.”

After baptism, the overwhelming majority remained in the religion without interruption and without regrets. A small percentage of the sample population (3.7%) left the religion and later resumed their association. About half of those who left and later returned to the congregation did so within four years. Another one-fourth resumed association ten or more years after they had stopped association. The leading reason this small group gave for resuming association after an interruption was wanting “a closer relationship with God” (similar to what initially attracted individuals in the religion). Those who left also said they were motivated to resume association to “make better life decisions” and because they decided that the life of Jehovah’s Witnesses was “a better way.”

The findings reveal Jehovah’s Witnesses’ positive perception of the religion’s effect on their lives. They viewed congregations as a source of social and instrumental support. Overall, most Jehovah’s Witnesses reported having good interpersonal relationships with no change since becoming Witnesses. Others reported better relationships with family and nonfamily after becoming Jehovah’s Witnesses. Although improved relationships cannot be attributed solely to the religion, the research shows that Witnesses experienced their religion as having a positive, rather than detrimental, effect on interpersonal relationships in the family and with the larger community. The percentage of those who grew up with JW parents (second-generation JWs) who reported positive and improved

relationships since becoming Jehovah's Witnesses was higher than those of the first generation who grew up with no JW parents.

A disadvantage associated with being Jehovah's Witnesses was the experience of discrimination, particularly from negative media portrayals of the religious community. Most Jehovah's Witnesses saw media coverage that they believed misrepresents their faith community. Some reported that those outside the religion reacted to the negative media reports and social media content by either expressing sympathy or reinforcing pressure against religious adherents. Other forms of discrimination that Jehovah's Witnesses experience (e.g., being insulted, treated suspiciously, denied employment, threatened or attacked) could also have been influenced by the media and social media. From the research sample, this included 24 cases where teachers intervened to protect a child of a JW family from an alleged verbal or physical attack at school. The percentages are relatively small, but the numbers are concerning, and if applied across all Japan, the minority faith community could be vulnerable to increased hate speech of the kind that has turned to violence in some other countries.²⁵

Those who chose to become, remain, or return to the Jehovah's Witness community varied widely in age and life situation. However, the findings reveal distinct patterns in attitudes and beliefs toward their professed religion. Conversion to the faith for most involved a

study process that, for instance, has led older adherents to maintain a strong religious commitment for decades into later life. Respondents expressed broad consensus favoring internal aspects of the religion (closeness to God, personal improvement) over social attractions (pleasing family, finding friends) or ritual. And even with a common perception of societal discrimination, very few regretted their decision to become and remain Witnesses. While social influences did not govern the decision of most to become and remain Jehovah's Witnesses, interpersonal relationships were valued, as evidenced by the social support within the congregation and improved relationships with family and nonfamily.

The continued existence of religious groups large and small, ancient and modern, depends on the acquisition and transmission of beliefs and practices to succeeding generations. JWJ-QS identified the processes and motivations involved for those who have adopted the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan. Their self-reported experiences generally align with objective descriptions of the belief system as rational, with learning and logic being among the most prominent attractions. However, for many respondents, intrafamilial ties also figure into the transmission of the faith and the process of learning and practicing the religion. The findings provide insights into the conversion experiences, personal motivations to belong to the religious community, and the general social relations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

²⁵ Jenny Hill and Jaroslav Lukiv, "Hamburg Shooting: Seven Killed in Attack on Jehovah's Witness Hall," March 10, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64910415>; Cherylann Mollan and Ashraf Padanna, "Kerala Attacks: India Police Investigate Deadly Blasts Targeting Jehovah's Witnesses," October 30, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67259078>. For a general discussion of recent religious discrimination, see Jonathan Fox, *Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me: Why Governments Discriminate Against Religious Minorities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108773171> and Eti Peretz and Jonathan Fox, "Religious Discrimination against Groups Perceived as Cults in Europe and the West," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 22, nos. 3-4 (2021): 415-435 (1-21), <https://doi.org/10.1080/215676892021.1969921>.

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).