

*Report on*

**Fertility Decline, Below Replacement Fertility and the Family in Asia:  
Prospects, Consequences and Policies**

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This three-day workshop was organised by the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis in conjunction with the University's Family Studies Research Programme. Bringing together more than 50 participants from 15 countries, it yielded productive discussions on 40 papers presented. These papers covered at least 11 countries spanning East, South East, North and South of Asia, representing the large variety of scenarios resulting from these countries being in the different stages of the fertility transition. These papers aimed to understand the issues related to fertility decline, below-replacement fertility and the family in Asia, particularly with respect to their determinants, consequences, challenges, and relationships with policy. The papers also emphasised that in order to link local fertility variations with population policies, these issues need to be contextualised within changes in family structures, values and relations that are particular to Asian societies.

The workshop was organised into eight sessions. The first day had two sessions, starting with issues relating to the broader Asian context. A keynote address was delivered by Professor Peter F. Macdonald of the Australian National University, on "Below Replacement Fertility in Asia: Determinants and Consequences". The second session focused on issues in the East Asia, with a keynote address by Professor Elisabeth J. Croll of the University of London, on "Fertility Decline, Family Size and Female Discrimination in Asia".

The second day continued with the regional issues. Session 3 examined issues in Singapore, starting with a keynote address on "Twenty-Five Years of Below Replacement Fertility: Implications for Singapore", by a representative of Dr. Paul Cheung, Chief Statistician from the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore. Session 4 on Southeast Asia and Session 5 on South Asia were conducted as parallel sessions.

The third and final day engaged the theme of 'Gender, Family and Fertility Issues in Asia' over three consecutive sessions. The workshop closed with a concluding keynote by Professor Wolfgang Lutz, co-principal investigator of the Asian MetaCentre, and leader of the Population Project at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Austria. His speech on "The End of Population Growth in Asia: Projecting the Long Term Consequences of Fertility Decline

Below Replacement” offered a glimpse at the results of recent probabilistic world population projections, with a focus on the future face of population growth in Asia.

Discussions yielded a number of interesting insights. The labour force of major Eastern Asian countries is also predicted to age faster over the next several decades than any other population in history. The rapid decline of fertility in a very short time in China has been attributed to the success of the ‘One-Child Policy’, which at the same time resulted also in an abnormally high sex ratio at birth. Son preference has been identified as a worrying trend, with the associated discrimination against girls and daughters.

Migration as a potential solution for the problems of low fertility was also discussed. Some countries with relatively low fertility rates are beginning to absorb immigrants in large numbers. The countries affected by low fertility today can be divided largely into two groups: first, those with fertility rates in the range of 1.7 to 2.0 births per woman and, second, those with fertility rates of below 1.5 births per woman. For countries with fertility rates falling in the range of 1.7 to 2.0, replacement migration has been identified as a successful way of avoiding hyper-ageing and labour shortfalls. Where fertility is below about 1.6, there is concern that the level of migration required for replacement of the population become impossibly large.

Given the likelihood that migrants are expected to form a significant part of the social landscape in the future, issues of citizenship and rights to the city for foreign workers should no longer be peripheral concerns. Efforts to resolve them in an inclusive manner will provide pathways to accommodate the future in a way that will not only achieve social justice for the migrants, but can also sustain nation-states and their economies.

Moving away from the consequences of below-replacement fertility levels, the workshop also examined the advantages and disadvantages of above-replacement level fertility, questioning if the end-goal of below replacement level fertility for all countries is ideal.

The shifting boundaries of ‘tradition’ and its conscious manipulation through human agency was the focus of a paper on fertility in a Chinese village. A paper on fertility behaviour in Bangladesh found that social interaction and the availability of emotional and other types of support, are determinants of fertility decisions. Other determinants of fertility behaviour include the choice of contraceptive use, and this was seen in the example of Bali, Indonesia, where contraceptive use was contingent on the price of the contraception.

The sexual division of labour was also brought into sharp focus. Case studies of childlessness and marital stability in India, and of fertility decisions and the role of the woman in Singapore provoked discussions on the role of women in the family and in the public sphere. In Vietnam, the conjunction of declining fertility levels and the continued vitality of the patrilineal, patrilocal model also sparked off discussions. The persistence of the male breadwinner model in Indonesian communities challenges the provision of economic opportunities for females, leaving participants with an idea of the varying implications of fertility decline on women’s roles in parts of Asia.

With the emergence of below replacement fertility in many countries, concerns were also expressed over whether, and to what extent will the nature of marriage and the norms and values regarding family and marriage change. For example, China has completed the first demographic transition and some evidence in urban areas has indicated the start of the second demographic transition. Whether most countries will enter the second demographic transition along with the implied changing norms and values will be seen in the next decade.

In conclusion, the aims of the workshop in achieving a much better understanding of the issues surrounding below-replacement level fertility and the family in Asia were well-met. The outputs of the workshop include the publication of several of the papers presented as special issues in the Asia-Pacific Population Journal and Journal of Population Research.