Abstract

"Fertility Transition in Asia in Relation to Family and Population Aging"

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Declining fertility and increasing longevity have brought about remarkable shifts in the age structure of the population. Europe, Northern America and Australia/New Zealand initially experienced one of such inevitable demographic events, that is population ageing. While the transition from the young-age population to the ageing population occurred over a much longer period in the West, the speed of ageing is much faster in low-fertility countries of Asia. This has now emerged as a new issue challenging many low-fertility countries in Asia, as it has implications for the family and caring for the older persons.

This paper provides a general overview of the fertility transition in Asia and factors affecting the fertility decline. Focusing on low-fertility countries in Asia, the paper highlights the implications of low fertility on population ageing. Various indicators of population ageing, such as the changes in age structure, potential support ratio and feminization of the elderly population, are presented for a better understanding of the overall situation. Comparisons are made with Europe, Northern America and Australia/New Zealand to put forward the magnitude of the challenge.

As the Asian region contains over 60 per cent of the global population and has experienced a rapid decline in fertility, the absolute size of the older population is a major concern. While the overall population growth rate has been declining over time, the number of older persons is increasing at a rate at least twice as high. In addition to the increase in older persons, a gender disparity in the improvements in the life expectancy at birth is likely to result in a much higher percentage of females in the older age groups, particularly in the age group 80 years and older, many of whom being widows and more likely to be illiterate and living in poverty. Providing family support, health care and financial security are some of the contentious issues ageing societies will face.

There have been discussions concerning the possibility of increasing fertility in countries with below replacement fertility. However, evidence from European countries suggests that although fertility may rebound it is highly unlikely to recover sufficiently to reach the replacement level once it plummets to a very low level. It is, therefore, crucial for governments to plan for an ageing society long before fertility reaches a very low level. Meanwhile, it is important for Asian countries to recognize the significance of ageing problems and start formulating policies for the elderly given that it takes several decades for government old-age pension insurance schemes to mature and operate at full scale. It would be more difficult for families to care for their older members because families would be smaller, people would live longer and the migration of young adults would mean that families would fragment. The present trends present a major challenge to address the needs of families. It is, therefore, important to consider the present trends in designing social policies, put the family at the centre of any future social policy development and examine good national practices when designing a new approach to family policies.
FAMILY SCHOLARS COLLOQUIUM

"PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"

DAY ONE: PLENARY SESSION 1

PAPER 2

FERTILITY TRANSITION IN ASIA IN RELATION TO FAMILY AND POPULATION AGING

BY

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Fertility Transition in Asia:
Implications for Family and Population Ageing

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Fertility trends
by major region of the World
1950-2005

![Graph showing fertility trends by major region of the World from 1950 to 2005.](graph.png)

III. Near-replacement fertility
(TFR 2.2-2.9)


IV. Low fertility
(TFR 1.6-2.1)

Life expectancy at birth, 1950-2005


Life expectancy at birth and at older ages, 2000-2005

Percentage distribution of population by broad age groups, 2000-2050


Percentage distribution of population by broad age groups, 2000-2050

Annual growth rate of total population and population in older ages, 2000-2005

(percentage)

- Populations age over 80
- Populations age over 60
- Total


Percentage distribution of population 60+ by major area

Potential support ratio (15-64/65+)


Feminization of the elderly population

Sex ratio of population aged 80+ in 2005

Early warning for transitional and near-replacement fertility countries

Adopt family-friendly policies to maintain fertility level around replacement level

- The role of household members
- The role of employers
- The role of government
- Intergenerational support

Urgent action

- Early recognition of ageing problems and policy formulation
- Social security system for older persons
- Encouragement for continued employment
- Social care
- Health care
- Family support

A home care volunteer in the Republic of Korea brings new meaning to life for an elderly woman who lives alone
Demographic Dividend—Preparation for Population Ageing

- The momentum of population ageing is likely to be the most significant demographic process of the 21st century, with implications for a wide range of human behaviour.
- It is important to recognize the benefits of changing population age structure, as decline in fertility and increase in life expectancy temporarily increase the relative size of the workforce, opening a unique “demographic window”.
- Several countries in South-East Asia are projected to have a large segment of their population in the prime working ages, with the potential of high economic output and savings.
- This “demographic dividend” has the potential for stimulating economic growth if appropriate social and economic policies are in place.

Demographic dividend: Percentage share of population aged 15-64, by sub-region

[Graph showing demographic dividend by sub-region]