

**International Seminar on Kinship and Demographic Behavior  
Salt Lake City, Utah, 31 October – 1 November, 2005**

**REPORT**

Organized by the IUSSP Scientific Committee on Historical Demography and University of Utah in recognition of the Utah Population Database 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Funded by Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah and the George S. and Dolores Dore Eccles Foundation.

Program Committee: Tommy Bengtsson (Lund University), James Z. Lee (University of Michigan) and Geraldine Mineau, chair (University of Utah).

Scholars from several disciplines have focused on the role of kinship structure and its effects on population dynamics. Historians of population have demonstrated the importance of the kinship network to understand demographic and social processes. Historical demographers have closely examined kinship networks in historical societies where kinship is thought to have been a major organizing principle of social groupings. Anthropologists and behavioral scientists have a tradition of studying the cultural bases and consequences of kinship systems and ties. More recently, interest has grown with respect to biological processes and theories and their fundamental linkages with kinship. This trend has, in large part, been motivated by the fact that demography addresses phenomena central to biology (fertility, mortality, and nuptiality). There are a number of inquiries that are using concepts that draw upon these various approaches. For example, kinship structure or early family events have been studied in terms of their effects on outcomes including health, fertility, and mortality. These studies of kinship have stimulated new analytical approaches and have produced findings that are among the most innovative and productive lines of inquiry in population history and social history.

Longitudinal databases derived from family registries, family reconstitutions, population and events registers, and genealogies have become a valuable resource for studies of the social and demographic consequences of familial and kinship networks in the past and are being used to expand the scope of understanding demographic processes. Inclusion of morbidity and mortality information is an important new development because these data enable researchers to address novel questions such as the presence of disease aggregation in families and the association of consanguinity and health outcomes. The addition of information on socio-economic status, such as occupation or landholdings, has further enhanced the richness of such analyses. Indeed, the expanding availability and increasing quality and informational depth of such databases is creating a growing body of research synergies and discoveries between genetic epidemiologists and historical demographers.

The aim of this seminar was to bring together international scholars to exchange ideas and perspectives. The impetus for this symposium comes from two sources. The first occurred 30 years ago with the development of the Utah Population Database (or Mormon Historical Demography Project as it was known then); this resource has been used for numerous studies in the area of human genetic and population research. The second theme occurred in the fall of 2004 when an interdisciplinary group of researchers met in Paris for an International Seminar on “New History of Kinship” organized by IUSSP-INED-EHESS. That seminar emphasized how the historical demographic study of kinship has changed over the last fifteen years.

### Participant Characteristics

|              |               |    |
|--------------|---------------|----|
| Sex          | Male          | 13 |
|              | Female        | 5  |
| Region       | Europe        | 4  |
|              | North America | 14 |
| Career Stage | Junior        | 9  |
|              | Senior        | 9  |

The seminar was attended by historical demographers, economic historians, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, as well as scientists from a public health background. Seven papers were presented and are on the IUSSP website; four papers emphasized mortality or longevity, two focused on the selection of marriage partners and one analyzed social and family organization related to fertility, marriage and mortality. These authors studied different regions including Europe (Netherlands, Italy, Belgium), North America (Quebec, Massachusetts, Utah) and rural China. They all used individual level analysis combined with family and/or household information.

A roundtable discussion highlighted a number of ongoing issues. First, there should be continuing emphasis on a broader group of relatives and encouragement for investigators to collect data on kin networks. This would include kin both inside and outside the household, vertical and horizontal kin, and fictive kin or marriage witnesses. These kin groups may be viewed as providing resources versus other groups. Second, the emphasis should be on the research questions rather than the data sets. It is important to understand what difference kinship makes; what contribution or explanation does this concept add in various contexts. Examples include studying the interplay between fertility and mortality or the transmission of patterns of inequality. In some cases kinship size or structure may be a dependent variable rather than an independent variable. Third, because we are dealing with families, we need to continue to consider explanations with biological and evolutionary approaches. However, there was also caution expressed about interpretations that move too quickly to natural selection; an example would be how to interpret the grandmother effect. The inclusion of evolutionary concepts could be considered as a complement rather than a substitute for social explanations. Fourth, another point of discussion included more attention on the policy implication of research findings. Examples include the implications for Gaalen and van Poppel's discussion of long term trends in childhood living arrangement and survival in adulthood and whether women's health would be different depending on the family structure once she marries. Lastly, there a number of recommendations: more comparative studies, conferences with a specific focus and standardized analysis, further discussion to determine if there are common measures of kinship to use in analysis, and an overview where we are now. The group believed that it is important to influence the priorities of funding agencies and decided to respond to an invitation to provide information to the Demographic and Behavior Sciences Branch at NICHD to assist in its long-range planning effort. The recommendation was to support a broad emphasis on intergenerational research into demographic processes including a focus on longitudinal studies and demographic outcomes.