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Demographers' interest in fertility trends and determinants in developed countries: Is it warranted?

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Abstract

Studies of fertility trends and determinants in developed countries are high on demographers' research agenda. The interest in this subject is probably, to a large extent, motivated by a notion about low fertility being problematic, but demographers have not been much engaged in efforts to find out whether that is actually the case, at least as judged from the contents of the major demography journals. In this paper, the possibility of various individual- and societal-level effects of low fertility is briefly reviewed. Some of the harmful effects may be foreseen and considered an acceptable disadvantage by couples making fertility decisions, while others more rightly can be considered social problems. It is argued that knowledge about fertility trends and determinants may help us learn more about the consequences of low fertility and see clearer whether interventions may be justified and what specific steps one might take. Further efforts to expand this knowledge should therefore be welcome, and it is possible that demographers can make an important contribution by applying this knowledge themselves in studies of consequences of fertility. A higher priority to forecasting might also be worthwhile.

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