

Why normal people should care about ‘baby busts’

BY ANNE MORSE, Thu Jun 12, 2014

June 12, 2014 (POP) - Long, long ago, when Anne’s parents were in college (sorry, mom and dad), demographers made an observation: they saw that for most of human history, even though couples were having far more than two children, mortality was also very high. The result was that populations either stayed the same or grew very slowly.

Then, with the advent of modern medicine, our life expectancy doubled, and then doubled again. And, not unexpectedly, our population doubled, and then doubled again, as well.

Population alarmists saw this doubling as the harbinger of catastrophe: “The world is ending!” “We’ll breed ourselves to death!” “Famine!” “No more personal space!”

But demographers developed a theory: since fertility and mortality had complimented each other for most of human history, and demographers predicted that they would one day soon do so again. Mortality would fall first, and then fertility would follow. After a while, things would be back in balance.

For a while, this theory of the “demographic transition” seemed to work just fine. Countries modernized, mortality fell, and fertility, after a lag, followed the same downward path.

But instead of stabilizing at 2.1 children per couple or so—zero population growth—as the demographers expected, fertility continued to fall.

A growing number of countries—Romania, Greece, Japan, Taiwan, and the Ukraine among them—now have fertility rates hovering between 1.1 and 1.4 children per woman.

For the first time in human history, otherwise prosperous and secure societies see their numbers shrinking: Russia is losing 750 people per day. Germany is losing over 600 people per day. Japan is losing 450 per day.

Demographers call this “lowest low” fertility, but they have no idea how “low” it will actually go. Nobody does.

Among the factors driving fertility downward is the radical redefining of human sexuality that has occurred over the past half-century. Don’t blame the demographers for failing to see this coming: it is something new in human history.

Over the last half century, the pill and the sexual revolution have changed the sexual dynamic so dramatically that previous paradigms no longer apply. Economic security and mortality, which once dominated reproductive decisions, now only play small, tertiary roles.

Once upon a time sex produced children—unless you acted to prevent conception. Now, intercourse is expected to be sterile, unless you choose to deviate from the norm and stop contracepting. As [Ron Lesthaeghe](#) wrote in the 2010 *Population and Development Review* “during the first transition, couples chose to adopt contraception in order to avoid pregnancies; during the second, the basic decision is [whether or not] to stop contraception in order to start a pregnancy.”

Sterile sex is the new baseline. In countries going through this second demographic transition, having children is increasingly viewed as aberrant social behavior. This is especially true if a couple is having their second or third child.

The reasoning behind when to have children and how many children to have has changed as well. Couples once asked themselves: “Do we need to space our children right now?” or “How many children can we care for right now?”

This concern about the well-being of one’s present and future children has been replaced by an emphasis on self. As Lesthaeghe wrote, reproduction mainly occurs after, “a prolonged ‘process of self-questioning and self-confrontation by prospective parents. . . in which the pair will weigh a great many issues, including direct costs and opportunity costs, but their

guiding light will be the outcome of self-confrontation. Would a conception and having a child be self-fulfilling?”

The population controllers—who are still obsessed with the numbers—are now attempting to impose this indubitably flawed model of sex onto the women of less-developed countries. Perhaps if they gave an honest look at another set of numbers (namely, that half

of the world lives in a society with below-replacement fertility) they would acknowledge it as a serious symptom of a larger social change. Instead, they continue to force this flawed part of our culture on less developed countries. They are undermining marriage, harming children, and compromising the long-term health of society as a result.

Don’t get us wrong. We are not concerned with imploding fertility because we are obsessed with population numbers. In fact, we are bemused as governments attempt to bribe women into having children without realizing that the whole calculus of having children has changed.

We are concerned because imploding fertility has consequences far beyond the number of workers a country may or may not have in a certain year. It reflects a revolutionary sexual and social dynamic that changes everything, not just the number of children borne.

This new dynamic changes the age at which we have kids, whom we have them with, and our relationships with them. It changes the calculus of the long-term monogamous relationships that we call marriage; it means that ever greater percentages of children will grow up without one or more of their biological parents in the house; it isolates more and more people in one-person households; and it leads to more and more divorce.

We have not just lowered our birth rate or changed the way we view sex, we have, in a very real sense, dissolved the glue that holds society together.

That is to say, the family.

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