

Fertility Trends in Post-transitional Societies: Process and Prospects of Below-replacement Fertility

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To give an insight into the future of low fertility societies, I introduce the process of fertility decline and explanations thereof. Although the classic fertility transition theory assumes that a society reaches a static phase in which its natural increase is zero, in reality, unexpected baby booms and fertility declines have occurred. Today, half of the world population lives in areas with sub-replacement fertility. This fertility decline is accompanied by changes in relationship behaviors or values, and this is conceptualized as the second demographic transition (SDT). Very low fertility with TFR of 1.5 or less is characterized by a gender asymmetry system, a strong family system, compressed modernity, and negative feedback, known as the low fertility trap. On the other hand, individualism observed in the SDT reflects not only autonomy or emancipation but also acceleration of social stratification derived from the instability of couple relationships or poverty. Whether the observed very low fertility is a temporal phase or permanent is examined through demographic analysis considering fertility timing. For future fertility trends, hypotheses regarding the upper or lower limit of the fertility level and new family values, an alternative to individualism, are discussed.