

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on
Policy Responses to Low Fertility**

**Cross Cutting Issues and
Lessons Learned**

Ronald R. Rindfuss and Minja Kim Choe

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Fertility Decline in Economically Developed Countries

Variations in patterns of decline

Path Dependence

Fertility changes will occur within a pre-existing institutional, cultural, and historical setting

Fertility and institutional background co-evolve together

Key Issues Affecting Fertility

Easy entry into adult roles

Finishing school

Getting a job

Establishing an independent household

Reconciliation of parental and work roles

Key Issue 1: Labor Market

- **Shorter and more flexible full-time work (+)**
- **Availability of high-status part-time work with benefits (+)**
- **Low unemployment rate (+)**
- **Flexibility for mothers to reenter the labor market (+)**

- **Precarious jobs (-)**
- **Labor market insecurity (-)**

Key Issue 2: Childcare, Parental Leave, Child Allowances

- **Subsidized childcare (+)**
 - Open during working and commuting hours
 - High quality, for children of all ages
- **Maternity and paternity leave (+)**
 - Paid at high levels of wage replacement
 - Ease of return to work
- **Government subsidies for families with children (+??)**

Key Issue 3: Housing

- **Affordable housing for ownership and rental (+)**
- **Location near workplace (+)**
- **Access to affordable mortgage (+)**
- **Availability of public housing (+)**

Key Issue 4: Marriage-Childbearing Link

- **Strong disapproval of non-marital childbearing (- ??)**
 - **Affects both mothers and children**
 - **May delay childbearing**

Key Issue 5: Primary and Secondary Education

- **School provides lunch and long school hours (+)**
- **After-school programs (+)**
- **High level of expectation for parent's involvement (-)**
- **High level of demand and cost for after-school private lessons (-)**

Key Issue 6: Tertiary Education

- **Relative ease of returning to education after discontinuing (+)**
- **Rigid ranking of colleges and universities, strongly linked to employment opportunities (-)**
- **High cost (-)**

Key Issue 7: Gender Considerations

- **Gender equitable sharing of housework and family care (+)**
- **High level of gender equity in work place (+)**

Economic Development, Gender, and Fertility

- In general, negative correlation between GDP per capita and period fertility
- Positive correlation for GDP per capita above US\$30,000
- Exceptions due to gender equity
 - France and Australia – higher fertility
 - Japan and Singapore – lower fertility
 - All have similar GDP per capita

Key Issue 8: Immigration

- **Migrants tend to have slightly higher fertility than native populations, but the overall effect is small (+)**
 - **Migrants tend to be at peak childbearing ages**
 - **Many wait to have children until they settle in the destination country**

Do Policies Make Difference?

Direct vs. Indirect Policies

In France, Singapore, Republic of Korea, many policies have demographic motivations

Many policies in Northern Europe, motivated by gender and employment considerations, have demographic effects because they promote work-family reconciliation

Many policies designed as anti-poverty measures have demographic effects

Institutions and Family Policy

Institutional context presents a potentially important constraint on what is seen as possible policy innovations

History and cultural heritage, family system, labor market, educational system, housing market, gender equity

Policy Making

- **Communicating research findings to policy makers**

Role of media

- **Political considerations**
 - **Balancing interests of elderly and young adults**
 - **Public responsibility for individual well-being**
 - **Fiscal burden**