

Declining Fertility

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Context:

Recently, a Lancet paper showed global population trends are changing, with declining birth rates instead of overpopulation.

Background:

Regardless of the exact timing of peak world population, it will likely begin declining in the second half of the century, with dramatic geopolitical, economic and societal consequences.

Major findings on global population trends in the Lancet:

1. The Lancet paper projects a significant decrease in the global population. Most countries, including India, are expected to see lower birth rates.
2. By 2100, China's population might drop by up to 50%.
3. Sub-Saharan Africa is the exception, likely to experience population growth.
4. The decline in birth rates suggests a future with more elderly people and fewer young ones.
5. The change could affect job markets, healthcare, and social systems, as there will be more old people needing care but fewer young people to support them.

Factors behind declining fertility:

1. Higher education levels and increased empowerment among women lead to smaller family sizes.
2. The high cost of child-rearing and lack of job security discourage having children. This trend is observed even in wealthy countries with generous parental support policies.
3. Young people are reluctant to bring children into a world threatened by environmental issues like climate change.
4. In India, 90% of the youth are in low-paying, informal jobs, contributing to uncertainty about the future.
5. India's extreme wealth inequality, with the richest 1% owning 40% of the wealth, creates societal instability. India's low ranking in the World Happiness Report and concerns about its democratic status further impact decisions about starting a family.

Way Forward:

1. Policies should focus on instilling hope in young people about their future.
2. Enhancing education and ensuring job security can address economic uncertainties.
3. Implement progressive taxation and improve social security systems to create a more equitable society.
4. Universal health coverage should be provided, especially for long-term care of chronic conditions.

5. Tackling issues like climate change can alleviate young people's fears about the future world of their children.
6. Improving the democratic health of a country can positively impact societal outlook and stability.

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