

FORUM

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## Fertility in Canada: Retrospective and Prospective

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### Résumé

Après avoir retracé les grands contours du déclin séculaire, le présent essai s'interroge sur les tendances futures de la fécondité au Canada. Afin d'expliquer le passé et d'étayer les perspectives d'avenir, l'auteur examine les forces qui façonnent les comportements procréateurs dans les sociétés avancées. Une fécondité faible, sous le seuil de remplacement, est jugée endémique dans ces sociétés.

### Abstract

Following the broad configurations of the secular decline, this paper speculates about the future course of fertility in Canada. To explain the past and rationalize the future scenarios, an attempt is made to unravel the forces that shape the procreative behaviour in advanced societies. Low fertility — below replacement level — is viewed as a condition endemic to such societies.

*Key Words* — fertility in Canada, family, population forecasting

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of public interest in population issues. Aging and slowdown in population growth; immigration and rising ethnic and cultural diversity; and emergence of new trends in family and living arrangements are increasingly capturing the attention of social scientists and policymakers alike. At the root of some of these developments is the dramatic decline of the fertility rate since 1960, to a level that is no longer sufficient to ensure the renewal of generations, and in the longer run that of the population as a whole. This paper takes a long view of the fertility evolution in Canada. Structurally it consists of three sections. The first singles out the main stages of secular decline in fertility; the second identifies the significant underlying factors, particularly those more closely associated with the recent baby bust; and the third speculates about the future course of fertility in Canada.

*Secular Decline of Fertility: The Main Stages*

In less than one hundred years, Canada has gone from a regime of traditional high fertility, characterized by the quasiabsence of birth control within marriage, to a regime of low fertility with almost perfect contraception. Prior to the onset of the decline, the crude birth rate was in the range of 45-55 per 1,000; it now stands at 15 per 1,000. From about six births per woman, the total fertility rate has declined to a below-replacement level of 1.7 in recent years. The progression towards ever-lower reproductive targets has not, however, been monotonic. The transition from high to low fertility has followed a trajectory punctuated by phases of fast and slow deceleration, and by upward and downward swings (Figures 1 and 2). Viewed in its historical context, even the post-war baby boom, its magnitude notwithstanding, is not out of character, and the present baby bust is well in keeping with a secular decline that may not yet have run its course. This section attempts to depict the broad configurations of this fertility transition from traditional high, to modern low levels.

*The Pre-decline Level of Fertility*

Though much of the past remains shrouded in mystery, enough information has been retrieved — all due to the remarkable achievements of historical demography in Quebec — to reconstruct the main reproductive features of the early French Canadian population. Birth rates in the range of 50 to 60 per 1,000 were estimated to have prevailed through the 17th and 18th centuries (Henripin, 1954:50). With plenty of land available for settlement by new households, marriage and childbearing were encouraged by kin, and, to some extent, by the state through various material and administrative incentives. Similar reproductive patterns were found in other provinces in the earlier days of settlement. Birth rates of over 55 per 1,000 have been estimated for the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba for one or another period during the 19th century (Henripin, 1968:370). High fertility, typical of frontier settlements, and large-scale immigration of young people with a high propensity to marry and have children, were some of the significant factors.

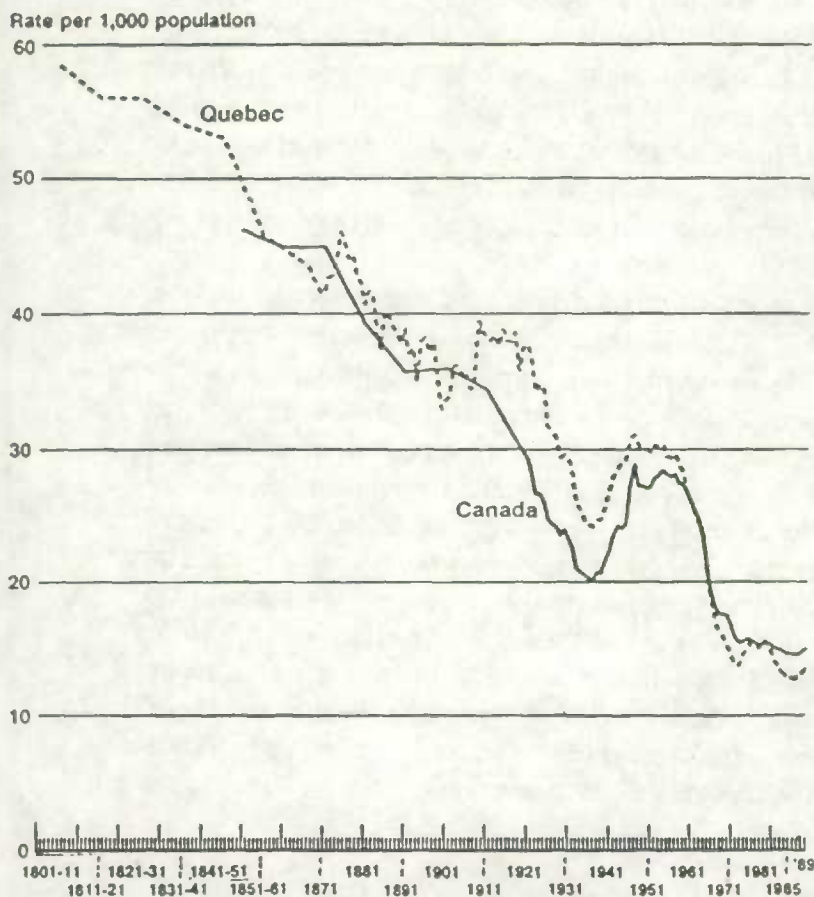
### *The Onset and Early Periods of the Decline*

Eventually, Canada was caught up in what is called the long-term or secular downward movement of fertility among nations undergoing modernization. At first hardly perceptible, the decline picked up momentum in the 1870s and 1880s. After a protracted lull, and even an increase in Quebec's birth rate, the earlier downward tendency resumed its course around 1910. By the mid-1930s, however, it came to an abrupt halt. To the extent that these early estimates of birth rates are valid, they reveal an interesting pattern of alternations between fast and slow phases in the decline. As such, they were harbingers of the more turbulent swings that were to come.

This early period of the decline was characterized by the coexistence of old and emerging models of reproduction. Large and small families coexisted to varying degrees, depending upon social class, ethnicity and region. Even as late as the 1930s, when fertility had reached its historical low, almost 20 per cent of ever-married women who had fully or nearly completed their childbearing, had six or more children, and this occurred at a time when as many as 16 per cent of couples were permanently childless, many most probably by design. During the 1930s, urban/rural and regional variations were wider than ever before or since. The contrast between Quebec, with 3.3 births per woman, and British Columbia, with 1.9 births per woman, epitomizes the amplitude of the regional variations. What is amazing is that a reduction of childbearing of this scale was possible in an era when most of the methods of contraception used were rudimentary and not very efficient.

### *The Baby Boom*

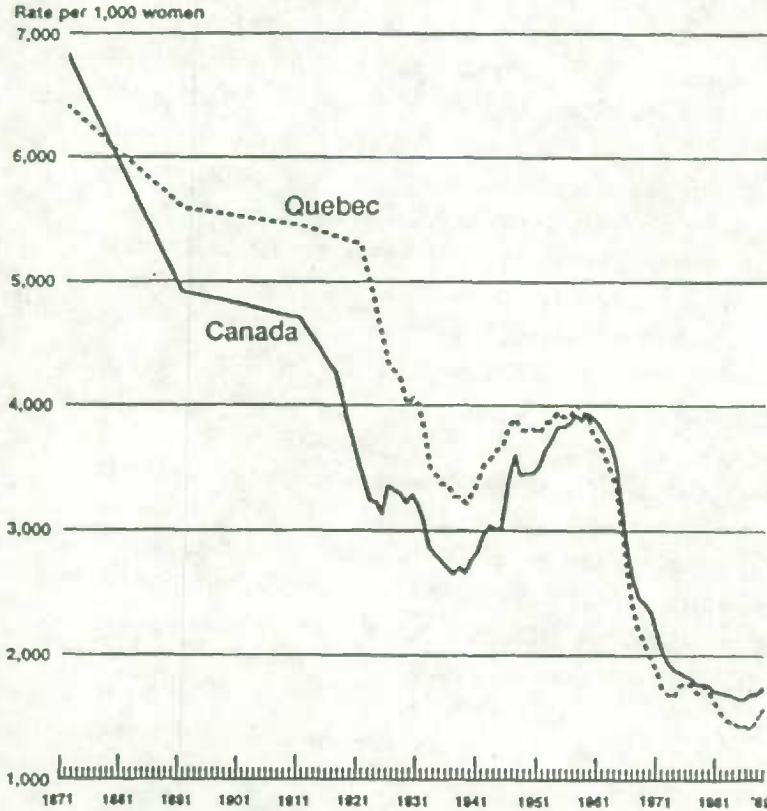
At the very time when the Western world was haunted by the spectre of population stagnation, with its attendant dire economic and political consequences, fertility played havoc with forecasters and produced a baby boom that lasted for more than two decades. The increase in the total fertility rate, from its low of 2.6 in 1937 to a high of 3.9 in 1959, was the outcome of a combination of shifts in both the *timing* — women having children earlier in life and at shorter intervals — and the *level* of childbearing, resulting in larger family sizes. Roughly half of the increase was due to the former.



(1) Crude birth rates from 1801 through 1867 refer to the Catholic population of Quebec.  
 Source: Statistics Canada, *Vital Statistics, Births and Deaths, Catalogue 84-204, Annual*; Henrpin, J., *Trends and Factors of Fertility in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1972, p. 5, 366; *Historical Statistics of Canada*, M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley (eds.), MacMillan, Toronto, 1965, p. 43.

FIGURE 1. CRUDE BIRTH RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION, CANADA AND QUEBEC<sup>(1)</sup>, 1801-1989

A remarkable feature of the baby boom is that it was an all-embracing movement involving, in varying degrees of intensity, practically all social strata, irrespective of cultural background, education or income. While spearheaded by the generations in their prime childbearing years, the baby boom was sustained by all but the oldest generations. The rise in nuptiality (with a marked tendency toward



(1) Data for Newfoundland excluded.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Vital Statistics, Births and Deaths, Catalogue 84-204, Annual*; Henrigin, J., *Trends and Factors of Fertility in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1972, p. 6, 366; *Historical Statistics of Canada*, M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley (eds.), MacMillan, Toronto, 1966, p. 43.

FIGURE 2. TOTAL FERTILITY RATE PER 1,000 WOMEN, CANADA<sup>(1)</sup> AND QUEBEC, 1871-1989

earlier marriage and a higher proportion marrying in each age), which significantly broadened the pool of young and relatively stable unions ideally suited for reproduction, was the key factor in the post-war baby boom. And those who married did so with the intention of having children. Childlessness among ever-married women fell dramatically from 16 per cent in the 1930s (cohorts born between 1902 and 1911) to seven per cent in the 1950s (cohorts born between 1932 and 1936).

While describing the unfolding of the baby boom is a relatively straightforward proposition, unravelling the underlying factors is not. Yet, there is no lack of competing theories. In Easterlin's (1980) well-known interpretation, the baby boom was the product of the long-term effects of growing up during the Depression on people's values — their modest taste for material goods and aspirations for home and family — and the favourable labour market which these relatively small cohorts enjoyed in the environment of post-war economic expansion. For Ryder (1984), what changed was not so much fundamental family values as the material conditions of family formation. Owing to both the high demand for labour — brought about by the post-war economic recovery — and to the short supply of younger workers — the result of the low birth rate of the 1930s — more people at younger ages were in the position, economically speaking, to begin families. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the consumer choice argument, the baby boom took place in an environment of tremendous expansion in the market for durable goods. As Rostow (1965:80) puts it, "Americans began to behave as if they preferred the extra baby to the extra unit of consumption."

All these are probably valid points. However, what is important to recognize in any interpretation of the baby boom is the uniqueness of its historical setting -- the Great Depression and World War II that preceded, and the post-war prosperity that accompanied it. As one leading American economist (Feldstein, 1980:1) states, "the first two decades of the post-war period were a time of an unsurpassed economic prosperity, stability and optimism." And all this succession of historical events happened at a time when traditional pro-family values were still strong in the populace.

### *The Baby Bust*

The baby boom came to a halt as unexpectedly as it began. Who, indeed, in the heyday of the baby boom, would have predicted a collapse in the fertility rate from almost four births per woman in 1959 to about 1.7 in recent years. The drama, curiously enough, unfolded according to a childbearing *quantity/timing* stratagem that was characteristic of the baby boom, but in reverse, and at a significantly swifter pace. It took 22 years for the baby boom to reach its peak, but only eight years for total fertility to revert to its previous low of 2.6, and 12 years to hit replacement level. Couples of all childbearing ages were caught in the downsizing of the family. Women in the upper age brackets and higher birth orders initiated the decline, but were quickly overtaken by those under age 25.

Today, large families have virtually disappeared, while childlessness is on the rise. According to Canadian census data, the proportion of childless, ever-married women aged 25-29 rose from 14 per cent in 1961 to 30 per cent in 1981. It is difficult to say how many will remain without offspring either by choice or because, after repeated postponements, their "biological clocks" will have run down. Concomitant with the downward reappraisal of family size, there has been an upward shift in the age pattern and a slower tempo of childbearing. There is now a tendency to have children later in life, and to space them farther apart. The number of first-time parents in their thirties is on the increase of late, possibly signifying the realignment of women's priorities in life.

This drive toward unprecedented low childbearing involves all social strata, ethnolinguistic groups and regions. The province of Quebec, which in earlier times enjoyed the highest fertility in the country, has seen its fertility rate plunge to 1.4 births per woman (1985), the lowest of all the provinces. The subreplacement fertility is now the national norm. Even Canada's aboriginal people, who maintained a high reproductive profile until about the mid-1960s, have seen their total fertility rate wind down from 7 to 3.5 births per woman (Romaniuc, 1987).

*Factors in the Fertility Decline*

The secular decline of fertility in industrialized countries has received a great deal of attention within the framework of demographic transition theory (Coale and Watkins, 1986). While an earlier version of the theory emphasized declining mortality as the driving force of transition, the more recent version stresses the economics of childbearing. The explanation of modern reproductive behaviour is enunciated in terms such as the opportunity cost of childbearing, cost and benefits of children to parents, socialization of support for the aged, and reversal in flow of wealth from parents to children. More recent attempts aim at the broadening of the explanatory framework. Thus, Kaufmann (1990) singles out three key components in the current low fertility: widening of options, primacy of individual choice over normative constraints in marriage and parenthood, and downgrading of socioeconomic status of the family — all these due to a combination of factors such as economic development and institutional changes, resulting in greater employment opportunities for females, cultural liberalization, and greater control over procreation.

The explanation attempted here is neither comprehensive nor systematic. It is restricted to the developments that basically took place in the areas of contraceptive technology, female employment, and family and marriage, concomitantly with the most recent stage in the secular decline of fertility, that is, the post-1960 baby bust. Due to lack of space, other potentially promising explanatory avenues, particularly those that could be subsumed under the label of "ideational" undercurrents of fertility decline, had to be left out, or are touched upon only incidentally.

*Contraceptive Technology*

The advent of highly effective contraceptive technology — the Pill and intrauterine devices in the 1960s, and contraceptive sterilization in the 1970s — revolutionized birth control practices. One immediate consequence has been a much tighter control of the timing of childbearing and the size of the family. If so-called "unwanted births" have not been completely wiped out, their occurrence has been significantly reduced.



The spread of sterilization is particularly revealing both as a method of contraception and as mental disposition toward procreation. According to the Canadian Fertility Survey (1984), sterilization in the province of Quebec has been carried out on one or the other spouse in 38 per cent of marriages where the wife was 30 to 34 years old. Similarly, as many as 28 per cent of families with one child and 52 per cent with two children, now have at least one medically sterile partner. That so many couples at the earlier stages of family formation have resorted to a method that for all practical purposes is irreversible speaks a great deal about their determination to put an irrevocable end to their reproduction.

There is, however, more to this than meets the eye. Highly reliable, coitus-independent birth control has had far-reaching behavioural implications. Parenthood is no longer a matter of faith and biology, but an act of choice. Preston (1986) has argued that the availability of highly effective contraception has raised the cost of adherence to pro-family values and contributed to the erosion of their legitimacy. Traditional sexual morality and marriage have been weakened by the modern coitus-independent contraceptive technology. As a result, writes Preston (1986:183) "the social value of confining sex to marriage was clearly reduced. Sex became less a social act and more a purely private one, and the institutions contrived to govern access to it predictably began to erode. Rates of entry into marriage declined sharply and rates of exit grew, aided by legal changes reflecting an altered value system."

We shall carry the logic of Preston's argument from contraceptive technology into the reproductive revolution when later discussing the future of marriage and its generative function. In the meantime, in what follows, we shall address another important factor that affected procreative behaviour directly, and, indirectly, via changes in marriage and family.

#### *Growth of Female Employment*

In the 1920s, only 20 per cent of females over 15 years of age were employed. Over the next 30 years their participation rate rose slowly, inching up to 24 per cent in 1951. During the baby boom period of the 1950s, the rise was somewhat faster, reaching 30 per cent by

1961. But it was not until the 1960s that women moved *en masse* into the work place, a trend that continued even during the economic slowdown. High male unemployment and the rising cost of living may in fact have reinforced the move towards women joining the labour force in the 1970s. By 1990, almost 60 per cent of women were gainfully employed. Although still heavily concentrated in the low-paid jobs where they predominated historically, it is in occupations carrying higher salaries that their employment expanded the fastest. Between 1971 and 1981, the number of women in the 20 highest-paid professions increased fourfold, as against one-and-a-half times in the traditional lowest-paid jobs.

Contemporaneously, there was a marked trend toward greater work stability. Women's traditional motherhood-related pattern of exit and re-entry into the labour force has given way to a more stable employment picture. Marital and family status differentials in female labour force participation are disappearing. One novel development has been the dramatic rise in the labour force participation of married women with pre-school children (from 28 per cent in 1971 to 58 per cent in 1986 for those under age 35). The division of labour by sex within marriage is less clear cut, and this has meant a weakening of traditional sex roles and of "gains from trade" within marriage (Michael, 1985). Women and men now behave much more similarly when it comes to gainful employment.

Two arguments could be put forward to explain how women's gainful employment can mediate a procreative pattern. One has to do with role incompatibility: working and mothering compete for women's time and energy; career building takes place over the same years in which families are formed and children raised. Progress in household technology has barely kept pace with the ever-rising standards of living. The bulk of housework still falls on the shoulders of the wife, even when she is employed, according to contemporary time-budget surveys. Its common sense appeal, notwithstanding the incompatibility argument is, however, too narrow to account for the complex decision-making process involving the trade-off between employment and childbearing.

The other argument is that increased opportunities for women's employment, along with advances in contraceptive technology, have

opened up alternatives to motherhood. By the same token, childbearing has been brought within the ambit of economic calculus. Improved education and skill have increased the earning power of women in the market, and hence the opportunity cost of staying at home.

### *Marriage and Family*

The early and almost universal marriage pattern that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s has given way to a different lifestyle. Today fewer people marry, and among those who do, there is a tendency to marry later in life. The rise in the divorce rate since 1970 has been as spectacular as the fall in the nuptiality rate. The rate of remarriage has not kept pace with the rate of divorce, and second marriages have proven to be even more fragile than first — hence the greater marital instability and conjugal mobility. At the same time, the dominance of the two-parent family, based on a formal marriage, is increasingly being challenged by the still small but rising incidence of mono-parental families, headed largely by women, and by the soaring practice of non-marital cohabitation, a less stable, and less procreation-oriented conjugal arrangement (Burch and Madan, 1986; Ram, 1990). As a result, the pool of people enjoying the optimum conditions for procreation that stable and lasting marriage offers has shrunk in our society.

However, there is more to it. Families are undergoing profound change, not only in structure but in substance as well. McDaniel (1986) speaks of an emerging "feminist" model as opposed to the traditional family model. Roussel speaks of the deinstitutionalization of marriage, the loss of social control over it, and its transformation into a simple pact of convenience between two individuals concerned. Lasch (1990) deplores the invasion of the family by the market. What is involved here is a significant change in the relationship between family members that ultimately affects, in fact weakens, the very generative function of marriage and family.

The traditional husband-dominated relationship is giving way to a more egalitarian partnership between spouses (Chapman and Balakrishnan, 1986). Marriage is seen more as a joint venture for meeting certain goals, of which procreation may not be the most

important. Robbed of its "institutional content" in favour of personal gratification and individualistic goals, marriage's vulnerability to internal and external strains is more real today than ever before (Roussel, 1984).

At the same time the parent/child relationship is undergoing a major redefinition. According to some observers at least (Shorter, 1975), adolescents seem to be veering away from parents and towards peer groups for companionship and socialization, and are rejecting their parents' values and their own traditional role as guardians of the family line. Proclivity for separate households and common-law unions are some of the outward manifestations of the prevailing spirit of independence among adolescents and young adults. Indifference toward family identity and continuity weakens their own aspirations of becoming parents.

There are basically two kinds of motivation for having children: one is economic — old age security and the economic return which parents expect from their offspring; the other is psychological — the enjoyment parents derive from children, the transmission of family values, and the projection of themselves onto their offspring. Society has long since taken over much of the welfare function, and now family identity and continuity seem to be on their way out as inducements for having children. The instinct of perpetuation and altruistic sentiments can well be evoked as something intrinsic to human species, but they are far too elusive concepts to provide a meaningful basis for the rationalization of procreative behaviour of human populations.

#### *What Can Be Inferred?*

The above review of selected social and economic indicators, albeit sketchy, is nonetheless revealing of things happening if not in unison then at least in a cluster, more or less contemporaneously. The period during which the baby bust took place was marked by a number of major social events such as the collapse of nuptiality and the rise in divorce rates, along with the growing incidence of common-law unions and single motherhood as options to the traditional two-spouse family. The economic climate was marred by high unemployment, deterioration in the relative income of young adults, rising inflation and spiralling housing costs (Romaniuc, 1984). Yet all these events picked

up momentum when the downward drift of the fertility rate was well underway and had almost reached its low ebb. The collapse of nuptiality followed the onset of the baby bust by almost a decade. Inflation and unemployment reached high levels only during the early 1980s, and are basically cyclical occurrences. Their annual rates dropped from their peaks in the early 1980s of 12.4 per cent and 11.8 per cent, respectively, to something in the vicinity of 5 per cent and 7.5 per cent by the end of the decade, only to begin rising once again as Canada was plunged into an economic recession by 1990. The country's changing economic fortune probably had a compounding effect, but the driving forces in the fertility decline since 1960 must be sought elsewhere.

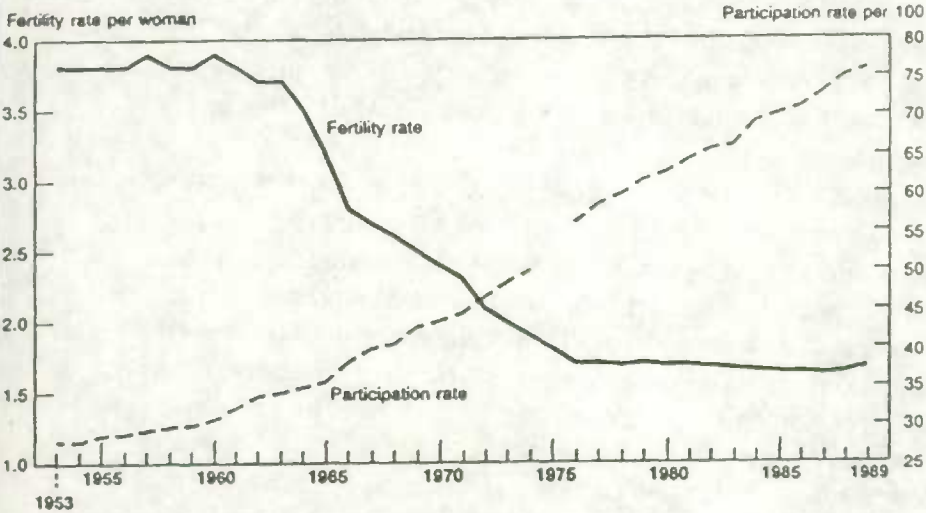
Of various indicators reviewed in this paper, the rate of female labour force participation offers the most coherent picture (Figure 3) — an almost perfect negative correlation with the fertility rate since 1960. In a previous section, it has been shown how employment of women can interfere with their family role. Yet the causal relationship between the two eludes precise determination. Rather, the increasing participation of women in the labour force can be viewed as interacting with low childbearing and marital instability in a mutually reinforcing process driven by deep-seated cultural and economic forces.

On the one hand, the quest for equality between spouses, their economic independence and self-actualization, embedded in the very culture of our individualistic society, makes women seek gainful employment. So also does the pressure for higher standards of living. Aggressive advertisement and skilful salesmanship, combined with a highly efficient credit system, render many pleasurable goods not only desirable but also "affordable." The ever higher consumption expectations and indebtedness have probably driven more mothers and potential mothers into the work force than the basic necessities of life ever have.

On the other hand, reduction in family size means less domestic commitment, thus releasing energy that can be redirected towards revenue-generating activities outside the home. This makes women's economic independence more real. While this process may have contributed to marital instability, it also can be argued that the increasing propensity for women to earn income is a rational option to a

marriage which no longer provides insurance for the future. And so goes the argument of a circular and self-perpetuating process of low fertility in an individualistic, affluent society.

FIGURE 3. TOTAL FERTILITY RATE AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE OF WOMEN AGED 20-44, CANADA, 1953-1989



Note: The participation rate series breaks in 1975, the year in which major revisions were made to the labour force survey.  
Source: Derived from Labour Force Survey, and Statistics Canada, *Vital Statistics, Births and Deaths, Catalogue 84-204 Annual*.

### Looking Ahead

What direction is fertility likely to take? Has the secular decline run its course and reached its nadir in the current baby bust? Is fertility likely to stabilize, break new lows, or rise again adding yet another upward cycle? A short- or medium-term versus a long-term view may be in order when venturing into prognostications about the future course of fertility.

*In the Short or Medium Run*

The total fertility rate in Canada over the past decade has remained almost stable at around 1.7 births per woman. It would, therefore, be tempting to postulate a stability scenario for the near future. A closer scrutiny reveals, however, that this stability in the total fertility rate is the outcome of two divergent but offsetting tendencies in the age-specific fertility rates. On the one hand, the fertility of young women has continued to decline, while, on the other, the fertility of women in their thirties has increased. What these shifts in the age pattern of childbearing seem to underline is a reordering of life priorities, whereby women's employment is taking precedence over their family aspirations. Women in their thirties seem to "catch-up" with delays in childbearing prompted by work and career commitments in their younger ages. If this interpretation is correct, then the current stabilization of the total fertility rate could be only a lull, albeit a long one. Once the "catch-up" process has run its course and an older age pattern in childbearing has been established, the total fertility rate may well resume its earlier downward trend.

Such a scenario is borne out by the recognition that the forces associated with the baby bust continue to operate in our society. There is still considerable potential for growth in female employment, particularly in occupations that command above-average wages. If such potential is realized, the opportunity cost of childbearing will increase accordingly. Though greatly reduced, unwanted births have not been eliminated. Sex education and greater accessibility to contraception could substantially reduce the still significant incidence of teenage pregnancies. As marriage increasingly gives way to common-law arrangements, downward tendencies in childbearing may well be reinforced. Canada thus will join the growing league of countries and regions in Europe with a fertility rate approaching just one birth per woman.

And yet, after all, history may repeat itself. Another baby boom, at least a mini one, cannot be ruled out. In support of this scenario, one may turn to Easterlin's (1980) autoregulatory process, wherein large cohorts give birth to small cohorts which in turn give birth to large cohorts. Perhaps, indeed, because of their smaller size, when the baby bust cohorts of the 1960s and 1970s come of age, they will find

themselves in a less competitive environment with brighter economic prospects, and will find marriage and larger families more attractive as a lifestyle. It may also be that the scarcity of children will make them more desirable, or that people will swing back to pro-family values. One could cite, in support of a recovery hypothesis, earlier increases in fertility in some Eastern European countries. This turnaround, however, was not spontaneous; rather it was the outcome of pronatalist policies combining material incentives with, in some cases, severe restrictions on abortion. Even so, these policies have not met with unqualified success, for after an initial upturn, the fertility rate resumed its descent.

Yet, there are now renewed signs here and there, that an upward shift in fertility could well be in the offing. The most conspicuous and best documented case is that of Sweden. In this country, the total fertility rate has risen steadily throughout the 1980s from a low of 1.6 to 2.02 births per woman in 1989. According to Hoem, the rise in the period fertility "reflects a change in the time pattern of cohort fertility" (1990:735), but he expects cohort fertility (that is the number of children born to a generation of women) to rise ultimately as well. He links the change in childbearing behaviour to that country's social policy in support of the family. Sweden's reproductive experience is particularly noteworthy since it has often been in the vanguard of social change and may serve as a harbinger of what may happen elsewhere in the Western world. A rise in fertility, though slower, is already being observed in Norway and Denmark. Other countries, including the U.S.A., seem to be following suit, to the extent one can trust still incomplete data.

On the domestic scene too, the most recent data (1989) seem to reveal a slight upturn in fertility in some provinces, notably in Ontario, and even more so in Quebec. In the latter province, the total (period) fertility rate increased from a low of 1.44 in 1985 to 1.66 in 1989 (Rochon, 1990). Canadian demographers will watch this turn of events closely, if it is one, in view namely of the Quebec government's policy, implemented in 1988 which provides substantial financial grants to families with two children and, even more, to those with three.

Occurrences such as those reported above, as infrequent as they are, are important signposts for anyone venturing to predict short-term



changes in fertility. If indeed signalling the beginning of a new trend, the emergence of something of a new baby boom, they will cause forecasters to anticipate its likely magnitude. It is tempting in doing so to evoke the historical precedent of the 1950s baby boom. However, what is important to recognize when citing this precedent is, as pointed out earlier, the uniqueness of its historical setting — the Great Depression, World War II and the post-war prosperity, and a social context still largely permeated with familistic values. Though some shifts toward pro-family preferences have been detected among the youngest cohorts, (Lesthaeghe and Moors, 1991), they are far too weak to announce a pending break with the ideational trends that have prevailed since 1960. They do not seem to be evolving into an ideational climate capable of triggering and sustaining a major recovery in fertility.

#### *In the Long Run*

All the above scenarios — stabilization, resumption of the decline, and upturn — are plausible medium-run assumptions. In the long-run, however, this writer's reading of history is that the developments associated with the secular decline will continue their downward pressure on fertility. Once set in motion by the forces of industrialization and by ideologies emphasizing individualistic values, the process of fertility decline is sustained by its own dynamic. A host of mutually-reinforcing factors are at work making low fertility, at below-replacement level, a highly likely long-term prospect for advanced societies. The developments deemed to have brought about the recent baby bust, in particular, are likely to continue holding sway. Four of them call for further elaboration.

First, there is the omnipresent pressure for ever higher standards of living in our affluent, individualistic society. There is something of a paradox here. Common sense (and also marginal utility analysis in the way of the "New Home Economics") would suggest that as people's basic (and not so basic) needs are satisfied, their interest may turn to other things, such as having children for the sake of their psychic satisfaction. This might well be so to some extent. But as a general proposition, it tends to ignore the inner workings of a society in which, according to Duesenberry (1967), the attainment of an ever-higher

standard of living is an end in itself, a major social goal, and, to a large extent, an object of public policy. "As a society becomes increasingly affluent, wants are increasingly created by the very process by which they are satisfied", wrote Galbraith (1976:131). In our consumer-oriented society, there seems to be a never-ending race between the production of goods on the one hand, and the creation of wants by the very process of production and by the power of advertising and salesmanship on the other. "The more wants that are satisfied, the more new ones are born" (ibid., p. 128).

The implications for procreative behaviours of consumption imperatives in our affluent society, as expounded by Duesenberry, and, in particular, Galbraith, are still awaiting demographers' attention. The argument can be made that the urge for ever-higher standards of living, and the indebtedness that their attainment generates, explains to some extent why so many women are drawn into the labour market and so many men search for extra income. As more income is spent for the acquisition of "superior" goods, less income is set aside for forming families and having more children.

Second, for the reason just mentioned but also because of the quest for economic independence of spouses and as insurance against the liabilities of marriage breakdown, we should expect the growth momentum of the female work force to continue unabated. However, there is more than just the numbers; there is a shift in quality. More permanent and higher skilled jobs require greater work commitment and thus make the dual role of parenting and working more toilsome.

Third, an argument was made earlier about how modern contraceptive technology has contributed to the erosion of family values and undermined the legitimacy of marriage. The argument could be extended to include the social implications of the reproductive revolution that humanity has embarked upon. Artificial insemination and laboratory-grown embryos (*in vitro* fertilization) and the potential for their intra- and extra-marital transfers through sperm and/or egg donation for both biological and foster (surrogate) mothering, are some of the dimensions of the biomedical reproductive revolution. Yet, these life-giving biomedical advances, no less than the birth-averting ones (coitus-independent contraceptives referred to

earlier, and abortive pills being developed), raise serious questions about their long-term social implications, should they, as is likely, become increasingly prevalent. Kass (1985) in particular has made a penetrating, and not too reassuring, analysis of these implications. "The transfer of procreation to the laboratory and the shuffling of paternity and maternity this shift makes possible, undermines the justification and support that biological parenthood gives to the monogamous marriage". "Having babies without sex" may have no less of a weakening effect on the family, kinship and descent than that of "the possibility of sex without babies."

The fourth and final point concerns marriage and the family more directly. A great deal has been written about the future of these time-honoured institutions. This author is inclined to side with those who think that the turbulent times that the family is experiencing are not over. More people are forgoing marriage or opting for alternative, informal, less procreation-oriented conjugal arrangements. Likewise the prospect of a lasting marriage for those who choose it is growing dimmer. The implications for childbearing of these social trends have been outlined earlier. There is, however, one dimension, mentioned sometimes but not stressed enough: the intergenerational transmission of family values. This becomes increasingly more difficult in the prevalent demographic environment of our society. The kinship network and the number of siblings are greatly reduced, as a result of fertility decline. Marriages dissolving and rebuilding entail fragmentation and segmentation of the child socialization process. Even though greater longevity makes it possible for four generations (grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren) to overlap, the potential for child socialization in acquiring the meaning of family continuity is being defeated by the diminishing physical and social contact among them.

So much for the forces operating in our modern society that may account for the continuing below-replacement fertility in the long run. Is there anything that can be said about countervailing factors; anything that can be learned in the way of meeting the demographic and social challenges in the modern world? A few things are already being done and more could be done to cope with the hardship of being a working parent. Affordable daycare for children, sharing of housework between

spouses, and still more efficient labour-saving home appliances are among some of the social and technical innovations one could think of to help alleviate the burden of working parents. In this era of computer technology, work in some occupations could be done at home. Flexible hours, maternity and paternity leave, and many other arrangements could be made to provide a more "family-friendly workplace", along with various kinds of financial assistance to families.

Yet, although these and similar family-supportive measures have been in operation for quite a while in various degrees in many countries, they have failed to stem the downward tide of the fertility rate. How much more of the same would be needed to reverse the trend? Could anything short of a policy of comprehensive material and institutional family support, on a scale comparable to that applied to public education and health care, avert below-replacement fertility from becoming a lasting feature of advanced societies? Can it be afforded? And if all this is feasible, what will be the long-term implications for the very family, whose "ills" it intends to cure, of extending the scope of the welfare state in the realm of childbearing and childrearing? These questions alone suffice to reveal the complexity of the issues. It is an open-ended debate which an unprejudiced student of social affairs has to contend with.

There is, however, one message that seems to follow from the retrospective and prospective analysis of fertility undertaken in this paper. Although fertility rates may fluctuate over a relatively short-range, their long-term evolution is expected to gravitate toward low ebbs. Advanced societies may well have reached their demographic maturity, a state characterized by low, possibly below-replacement fertility over extended periods, with slow or no growth, and an aging population. The responses to such an emerging demographic environment — be it in the way of social and institutional adjustments or in regard to immigration and fertility — will preoccupy social scientists and policy makers in the years to come.

#### *Note*

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*Disclaimer*

All the views expressed in this paper are strictly personal and not those of Statistics Canada with which the author is affiliated.

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