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Family Demography: Macmillan Encyclopedia of Families, Marriages, and Intimate Relationships

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Family Demography

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Family demography is, simply put, the study of who makes up a family. Paul Glick, the founder of the family demography discipline, wrote the first overview of the field in his 1988 *Journal of Marriage and Family* article "Fifty Years of Family Demography: A Record of Social Change." Beginning with the first year of the National Council on Family Relations (then called National Conference on Family Relations) and the journal *Marriage and Family Living*, early work in family demography focused on the family life cycle, religious and racial intermarriage, the marriage squeeze, and the role of socioeconomic status in marital stability. Later work addressed additional topics, such as marriage and divorce, unmarried cohabitation, lone parenting, and living alone. By the 1980s, family demographers were studying topics related to changing laws, such as the role of birth control and no-fault divorce, and the implications of these changes, including remarriage and stepfamilies, among other topics. Not until 2000 was another review article written on this topic. In that article Jay Teachman, Lucky Tedrow, and Kyle Crowder outlined the three previous decades of changes to American families. In 2010, Andrew Cherlin published another decade in review, addressing the first decade of the new century. These reviews shed light on the ever-changing topics studied by family demographers.

Defining Family Demography

Family demography is a subfield of demography that uses demographic methods to study family behavior and structure. Family demographers study the formation (e.g., cohabitation and marriage), change (e.g., childbear-

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the demographic transition? Describe its four stages.
2. What are some critiques of the second demographic transition?
3. Explain the increasing phenomenon of gray divorce. What factors are contributing to its prevalence?
4. An emerging family form characterized by couples living apart together (LAT) is made possible by several factors. What are those factors? What might be the family implications of further increases in the number of LAT couples?

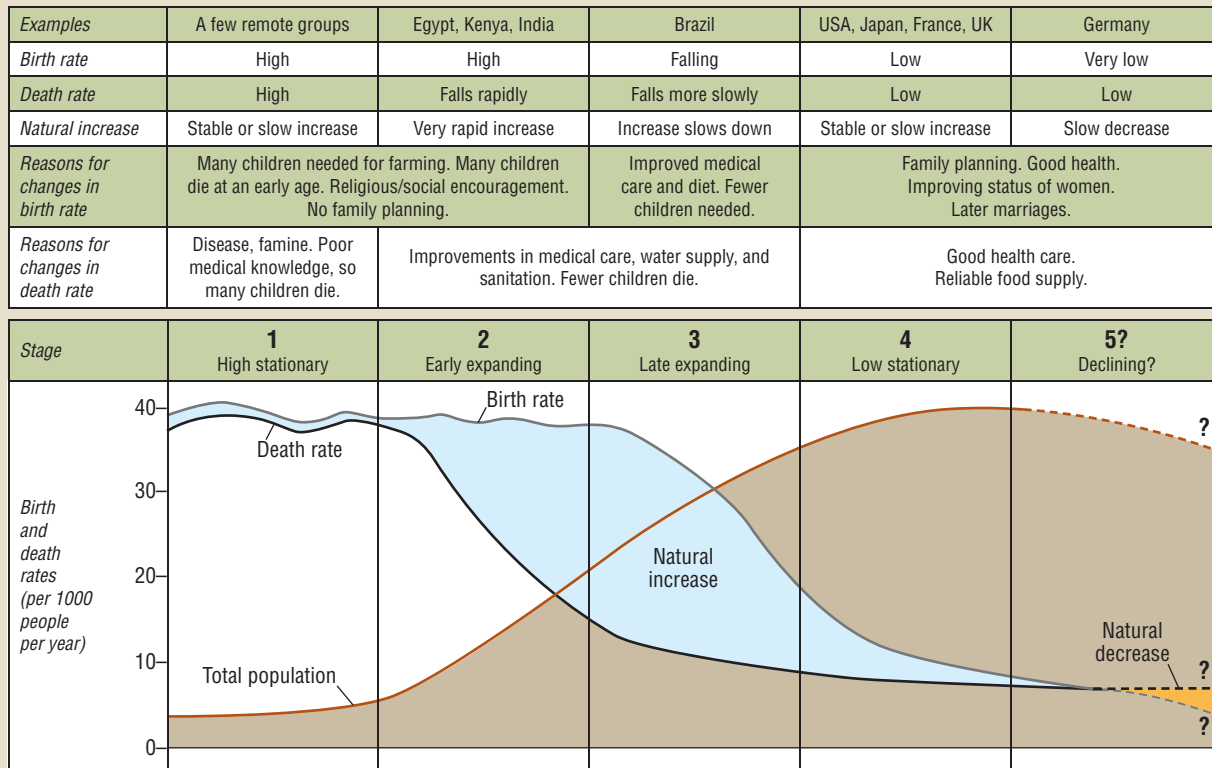
ing and family life cycle), and dissolution (e.g., widowhood and divorce) of families as well as interactions and behaviors (e.g., gender roles and intergenerational kinship interactions) within families.

In the mid-twentieth century, demographers developed the specific field of family demography in response to changes in fertility patterns. The 1950s and 1960s saw most births occurring within marital unions; as a result, most family demographers studied the nuclear family structure of married parents and their children. As fertility patterns changed (both within and outside the nuclear family), family demographers shifted their focus to these new family forms.

Family demographers use demographic techniques to study families. Often, data come from large, longitudinal data sets at the national level, including data from the US census. In addition to using data from the decennial census, family demographers use the Current Population Survey to analyze data about families and households. Approximately sixty thousand households are included in this monthly survey conducted by the US Census Bureau, with topics that cover labor-force participation, income, veteran status, education, health, voting patterns, and family life. The Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation also is used to study economic well-being, family dynamics, education, insurance, childcare, and food security.

The National Survey of Families and Households conducted by the Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison includes data from interviews conducted in 1987–1988, 1992–1994, and 2001–2003 (known as Waves 1, 2, and 3). These rich data on family life include life-history information from childhood through adulthood on topics such as marriage and partnering, fertility, education, and employment. The National

Figure 1. Demographic transition model



SOURCE: Adapted from Warren S. Thompson (1929, table 1). "Population." *American Journal of Sociology* 34 (6): 959–975.

Longitudinal Surveys is a set of surveys designed to gather specific information about labor-force participation. The survey is conducted by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and includes two youth surveys (1979 and 1997) tracking youth annually or biennially. Follow-up surveys were also done with the children of the 1979 female respondents.

The National Survey of Family Growth, conducted periodically by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) since 1973, gathers information about fertility and infertility, use of contraception, partnering, men’s and women’s health, and family life. The National Center for Health Statistics (part of the CDC) also collects data through several other health-focused surveys. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health started in 1994 and is the largest, most comprehensive longitudinal survey of adolescents.

These and many other data sources are used by family demographers to study families and their changes over time. Analyses are published in many peer-reviewed journals as well as through official and governmental reports. The National Council on Family Relations and the Population Association of America are two of the major professional

organizations in which family demographers participate; the top journals for family demography are *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations*, and *Demography*.

Stages of Demographic Transition

The first demographic transition (FDT) refers to the trends in fertility and mortality patterns in Western Europe from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the first half of the twentieth century. European countries began the eighteenth century with very high fertility and mortality rates (stage 1). These simultaneous high rates produced a stable population. With industrialization and modernization (and the corresponding social and economic developments), the likelihood of childhood survival increased. Slowly population size grew as fertility rates moved higher than mortality rates (stage 2). Over time, the cost of children increased, and families made adjustments to their own fertility patterns (stage 3). By the end of the FDT, both fertility and mortality rates were low and population size again stable (stage 4). These patterns were seen across the West and were assumed to exist globally. All countries have started this transition, and many have completed the four stages,

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although many poor countries have not yet completed the transition. For example, Afghanistan is currently in stage 2, and India and Mexico are in stage 3 (see Fig. 1).

Initially introduced in 1986 by Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa, the second demographic transition (SDT) aimed to explain the new transition of sustained below-replacement fertility rates. In his review of thirty European countries, van de Kaa (1987) noted that this was in part a result of a shift in ideology from altruistic to individualistic as well as the new expression of greater egalitarian views and new postmodern attitudes among both men and women.

Beginning in the 1950s with rising divorce rates in both Scandinavia and the United States, the SDT started to take shape. An increase in premarital sex and a corresponding decline in age at first sexual encounter followed World War II. Because attitudes about premarital sex changed more slowly than behaviors, marriage age also dropped in an effort to legitimize early sexual experiences. A good postwar economy increased fertility rates to record highs during the baby boom across Europe and the United States. Then the introduction of the birth control pill in the 1960s further weakened the relationship between marriage and childbearing, and fertility rates fell to below-replacement levels, especially in Europe. Delays in marriage and rising numbers of singles rounded out this first phase of the SDT. The 1970s and early 1980s saw an uptick in premarital cohabitation as young couples continued to push against marriage, and postmarital cohabitation began to expand as divorced couples less frequently remarried. This increased time that people remained unmarried led to increases in non-marital childbearing as well, both before and after marriage.

Although not all countries follow the same specific sequence, van de Kaa (1987) has argued that all transitions shared the same four basic features in a relatively similar order: a weakening of marriage as the ideal family type and a strengthening of cohabitation, a shift away from families centered on children, a shift from using contraception not only to prevent unwanted births but to have children as a manifestation of self-fulfillment, and a shift from the nuclear family to more diverse family forms.

By and large, evidence from Western nations supports the SDT (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006), although some exceptions exist. Age at first marriage has risen across the world, and the proportion of never-marrying persons has likewise risen. However, divorce rates have stabilized and declined in many countries, including the United States, and most young adults continue to express a desire for marriage. Cohabitation is broadly seen across most industrialized countries, although a wide variety exists—from very low rates in Italy (10%) to very high rates in Finland (75%).

Additionally, cohabitation is commonly a step toward eventual marriage more than a substitute for marriage. Fertility rates vary as well across Western countries, from near-replacement levels (2.1) in the United States to very low levels (less than 1.5) in Italy and Spain. The SDT is not without its critics. Early critics argued that this “second” transition was in fact a “secondary” feature of the first transition, highlighting lifestyle changes more than demographic changes. Other critics asserted that these new changes were a continuation of the first transition or that this notion overemphasized the connection between family relationship patterns and fertility patterns.

One additional critique of the SDT model relates to whether the United States fits neatly in the SDT model or if it is an exceptional case. The United States, for instance, has a higher fertility rate than its peers. (In fact, the fertility rate is increasing among some racial and ethnic subgroups.) Many find that the differences lie largely within the United States, with substantial geographic, economic, and racial differences in marriage, fertility, and other family trends.

New and Contemporary Topics Being Studied

Gray Divorce. Gray divorce refers to divorce among those over the age of fifty. Despite the aging population of the United States, it is somewhat surprising that research in this area has been sparse. Baby boomers, who were born between 1946 and 1964, were the first generation to both marry and divorce (and remarry) in significant numbers. Despite the overall stabilizing trend in divorce, gray divorce is on the rise. In 1990, fewer than 10 percent of divorces were to persons over the age of fifty. In 2010, it was 25 percent. The gray divorce rate has more than doubled since 1990. Older adults are more likely to be in remarriages and have greater likelihoods of divorce compared with adults in first marriages. Additionally, as life expectancy increases, the likelihood that a marriage will end through widowhood decreases, thereby raising the exposure to the risk of divorce. At the same time, cultural meanings of marriage and divorce as well as aging have changed to focus on individualism and autonomy.

Research on gray divorce finds that middle-aged adults (ages fifty to sixty-four) experience higher rates of divorce than those over age sixty-five. In the United States, Whites have the lowest rates of gray divorce, followed by Hispanics, and Blacks have the highest rates of gray divorce. Divorce rates are also highest among those with less education, the unemployed, and those who are retired. Divorce is also more likely early in the marriage; the likelihood of divorce is ten times greater for those who have been married fewer than ten years compared with those married more than forty years.

Major life events for older adults (retirement, chronic health issues, and empty nesting) are not significantly related to the likelihood of gray divorce. However, traditional predictors of divorce (duration, order, and quality of marriage) appear to function for older couples the same way they do for younger couples. As with younger couples, socially and economically disadvantaged older couples are more likely to divorce than those who are not. Although gray divorce is a relatively new topic of study, research in the area of “gray partnering” is growing to include research on gray divorce versus widowhood, gray cohabitation, and gray dating.

Living Apart Together. In 1978, Dutch journalist Michel Berkiel first used the term *living apart together* to describe the relationship of couples who are committed to each other but do not live together. Living apart together (LAT) was later defined by Irene Levin (2004) to include three specific conditions: (1) couples must see themselves as a couple; (2) other significant people in their lives must also see them as a couple; and (3) the couple must not reside together. This definition applies to both heterosexual and homosexual couples and to both married and unmarried couples. Some later research has specified monogamous and intimate in their definitions of LAT. Defining LAT is somewhat challenging, because unlike marriage or cohabitation, these living arrangements do not necessarily begin (or end) with a specific event such as a wedding or move-in.

Partly as a result of an ambiguous definition, research and data on LAT couples have been limited. A 1993 survey in Sweden asked, “Do you live in a marriage-like relationship with someone while maintaining separate homes?” of couples who were neither married nor cohabiting. Results indicated that 6 percent of Swedish couples fit the definition of an LAT couple in 1993. By 1998, this percentage had increased to 12 percent, and by 2001 it had risen again, to 14 percent (Milan and Peters 2003). A 2002 survey in Norway found that 8 percent of couples in 2002 were classified as LAT, and a Canadian study also found about 8 percent of couples were LAT couples in both 2001 and 2011 (Milan and Peters 2003). Data in the United States are more limited, but estimates from General Social Survey (a sociological survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago) data suggest that 6 to 7 percent of couples in the late 1990s were LAT couples, and data from California (2002–2004) suggest a higher estimate of 13 percent (Strohm et al. 2009). Difficulty defining the term *living apart together* and poor data have made estimates of LAT couples difficult to assess both in the United States and elsewhere.

Despite the limited data and imperfect definitions, researchers agree that LAT arrangements are on the rise

(or at least have become more visible). Demographic shifts (including increases in life expectancy), economic changes (including fluctuations in the labor and housing markets), and normative changes toward individualism have allowed for the emergence and growth of this new family form. Additionally, technology and communication improvements and a globalized economy have allowed couples to meet and maintain relationships around the world. This development fits into the SDT model. Charles Strohm and his colleagues note that LAT represents an intimate relationship without co-residence and not an outright rejection of partnerships altogether.

LAT couples choose to live separately for a variety of reasons. Young adults often live apart owing to life circumstance. Some young couples are financially unable to move or are committed to schooling or jobs in different areas. Others are limited by the housing market or caregiving responsibilities. Young adults in LAT relationships often live with other adults (parents or roommates) and expect that they will reside with their partners in the future. They see LAT as a step toward another arrangement. Older couples see LAT as a lifestyle choice, one that is not necessitated by their external situation. Older adult couples typically do not desire a residential relationship. Some older adult couples want to maintain their own long-term households. A desire to not repeat mistakes made in previous relationships is also a driving force toward an LAT relationship. Older adult couples want to balance intimacy and autonomy, maintain independence in their finances and decision-making, and have companionship with mutual support. Some older adult couples fear disapproval from their adult children and their social networks if they were to move in with a romantic partner. Same-sex couples may choose a nonresidential relationship to maintain privacy. Additionally, with couples for whom childbearing and childrearing are not involved, a residential relationship may not be a defining feature of a desired relationship.

Although little is known about LAT relationships, existing research has been consistent in its findings. LAT couples are younger than married couples and have more education than either married or cohabiting couples. LAT couples are more ethnically diverse and more urban than married couples. LAT couples are also more similar to never married singles than to married couples. LAT couples place high value on independence and expect their partners to contribute both economically and emotionally more than married partners. Research is focusing on older LAT couples and on better comprehending how LAT couples understand and define their own relationships.

Emerging Adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a stage in the life course defined by profound change, freedom, and excitement, as well as anxiety and fear. Typically, this stage occurs between ages eighteen and twenty-five (although

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some research suggests the stage may go as late as twenty-nine), after adolescence and before adulthood. This unique stage provides the educational foundations for adolescents' future careers and has long-lasting implications for family formation. Previous research defined this life stage as prolonged adolescence (Erikson 1968) and as a novice phase of development (Levinson 1978). Emerging adulthood is characterized largely by extended education through four-year and graduate degrees, the postponement of marriage and parenthood, and the irregular and lengthened transition into steady employment.

Four revolutions are responsible for creating the demographic situation that characterizes emerging adulthood. First, the technology revolution shifted the economy from one based on manufacturing to one based on service and information, which required the continuation of schooling for many. Second, the sexual revolution and the development of the birth control pill allowed for a separation of marriage and sexual activity. Third, the women's movement created more options for women in education and the labor market and provided alternatives to early marriage. Finally, the youth movement promoted youth and disparaged adulthood, pushing back at marriage and parenthood as events to be avoided in the immediate future.

Emerging adulthood is characterized by demographic shifts and the exploration of a future life direction. Emerging adulthood is demographically dense: this group is completing secondary education, beginning and completing higher education, starting and changing jobs, moving in and out of residences, and taking paths toward long-term romantic relationships and childbearing. Likewise, emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, transition, and possibilities.

Emerging adulthood provides opportunities for exploration in the areas of work and love, and exposure to diverse perspectives. Whereas adolescent relationships are short-lived and recreational, later relationships allow for the consideration of potential long-term and more intimate partnerships. Adolescent work is focused primarily on earning money for fun and entertainment and often provides few long-term job skills. Work experience during emerging adulthood, however, offers cognitive challenges and focuses on preparation for future careers. These relationships and work experiences also expand individuals' perspectives by exposing them to new ideas and new people that were otherwise unavailable during adolescence.

Emerging adulthood is theoretically and empirically distinctive from both adolescence and adulthood. Unlike adolescents, emerging adults are free from parents and social roles and are not yet committed to new adult responsibilities. Those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five see themselves as neither adolescents nor entirely adults. In previous generations, young adults saw discrete events,

such as completion of schooling, the start of a career, and marriage (and/or parenthood), as the clear indicators of adulthood. Today, these events are not what defines adulthood. Emerging adults see accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions (and to a lesser extent becoming financially independent) as the hallmarks of adulthood.

Conclusion

Andrew Cherlin concluded in 2010 that American families had changed from the previous decade, as reflected in the growing complexity in family structure, and that this change promoted more vague and fluid definitions of families. Changing definitions, he argued, created challenges for family demographers. Early demographic indicators (births, marriages, divorces) were concrete, easily measured, and clearly interpreted. New family forms have made traditional measures less valuable for studying families. For example, household-based surveys no longer capture the dynamic nature of family residence and relationships. Concrete measures likewise capture only events with discrete start and end times (marriages and births but not gradual cohabitation). Additionally, the inability of current methods and measures to address multipartner fertility and multi-household families (such as stepfamilies) may misrepresent the true nature of families. Cherlin called for refinement not only in concepts and methods but also in statistical models used to study contemporary families.

Family demography, as a subfield of demography, is relatively new to the discipline. Emerging as a result of changes in fertility rates, family demography has taken on an important role in the study of families across the globe. Family demographers use the methods of demographers to study the structures and interactions of families. This ever-changing discipline highlights the marriage between two related fields to emphasize the uniqueness and complexities of families.

SEE ALSO *Cohabitation; Divorce, Effects on Families; Family Development Theory; Fertility; Later-Life Families; Living Apart Together; Remarriage; Single-Parent Families.*

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Family Development Theory

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Family development theory combines elements of life course analysis, human development concepts, and an emphasis on family change. The theory considers the patterned sequence of relationships over time, which is useful in explaining the dynamic nature of families and how change occurs in the family life cycle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the concept of family career different than that of family life?
2. What may be some challenges of the linear model of family development?
3. According to the more general model, how may the current stage and the duration at that stage influence family development?

History

The comprehensive historical summary of family development theory has been traced back to family sociology, demography, and the study of normative developmental patterns (Mattessich and Hill 1987). The early work of Ruth S. Cavan and Katherine H. Ranck (1938) and Earl L. Koos (1946) assumed families move through deterministic, invariant stages in the family life cycle. After World War II, the US government funded research on family stress by Reuben Hill (1949) and later by Evelyn Duvall (1957). The first systematic statement of the approach characterized family development as proceeding through life-cycle stages. Duvall's widely cited model consisted of eight family stages and concurrent developmental tasks: (1) married couple without children, (2) childbearing families with the oldest child between birth and thirty months, (3) families with preschool children, (4) families with school-age children, (5) families with adolescent children, (6) launching families, (7) middle-age, "empty nest" families, and (8) aging families. These family stages can be studied on three levels of analysis: the individual-psychological, the interactional-associational, and the societal-institutional. A systematic approach to family development was elaborated by Reuben Hill and Roy Rodgers (1964), who suggested replacing the concept of *family life course* with *family career*.

Joan Aldous (1978) described Rodgers's *family career* concept as the intersecting relationships within families. When distinct family stages are linked together, the resultant pathway represents a family life course or career. Family careers are made of a series of individual family members' careers. The process of family development was also defined. Rodgers and James M. White (1993) expanded this idea by claiming the probability for a family to proceed to a new stage was dependent on the previous stage and how long they had been in that stage. The next advance in the theory combined the family stage theory with life course concepts (White and Klein 2002). Methods such as event history, hierarchical linear modeling, and