



M Mazharul Islam

Title: Rapid decline in family size in Oman: Untangling the puzzles and paradoxes

Abstract:

Sultanate of Oman has experienced a rapid demographic transition with a sharp decrease in fertility and family size in recent time that is quite stunning and more than expected, yet has remained largely unnoticed. It is puzzling to note that the ‘sea-change’ in the total fertility rate (TFR) in Oman has occurred in the midst of paradoxes, such as having a pronatalist policy, low rate of contraceptive use (around 30%), no official population control program, universal marriage for both male and female, and little change in high desired family size (about 6). The objective of this paper is to provide a critical review of the fertility decline in Oman, and provide some plausible explanations for causes of fertility decline in recent times. The study is based on data obtained from available national-level surveys, published reports, and the United Nation’s world population prospects report. Fertility rate in Oman has declined from about nine births per-woman in 1988 to a control level of 3.3 births per-woman in 2008, and then remains stable approximately three births per-woman. The massive economic and social development, women education and participation in labour force brought a big change in family formation, reproductive behaviour and lifestyles of women, resulting fertility decline in Oman. Delayed age at marriage and spacing birth appeared as the major cause of fertility decline in Oman. To promote wider acceptance and easier implementation, avoiding cultural and religious sensitivity attached with the term ‘family planning program’, Oman is implementing a unique birth spacing program, which help reduce fertility by increasing birth interval. The tradition of prolonged duration of breastfeeding also contributes to declining fertility. The Omani government should be aware of the current trends in fertility and its consequences, and adopt the culturally appropriate policy for future population management.

Bio:

M Mazharul Islam is a Professor, Department of Statistics, Sultan Qaboos University Oman, since 2009. His academic background includes B.Sc. (Honours), M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Statistics. He started his career as a Lecturer in the Department of Statistics, University of Dhaka in 1984 and promoted to full professor in 1999. Worked as short-term International Consultant of Population and Development Specialist, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist and Public Health Specialist with UNFPA, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, UNICEF and WHO in different countries. He has published over 150 peer-reviewed articles in major journals as well as many scientific research reports on the subjects of statistics and social sciences.
