

Delayed Marriage and Childbearing: the Key Perspective to Understand the Period Fertility

Decline and the Up-warding Childlessness Rate in China Since Last Decade

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Since the 1990s, China's fertility has been in the low fertility phase. China's family planning policy has shifted to selective two-child policy, universal two-child policy and three-child policy since 2013 to cope with the consequences of low fertility and the rapid ageing process. However, even in a much looser policy context, births and fertility of China only rise for a short period of time, followed by a continuous decline until 2023. This investigation aims to understand the decline in births and fertility and identify the key reasons behind it. To this end, we analyze China's demographic trajectory using several indicators relating to marriage and childbearing. The results proved that the decline in fertility has been driven by the decline in the number of first and second births. Further analysis demonstrated that the reduction in the first birth rate was mainly due to a decline in women under 28 and an increase in the single rate for the same age groups. There is an enlarging gap between average children ever born (CEB) for all women, married women, and mothers at specific ages. This confirms the depressing impact on cohort fertility. By distinguishing childlessness rates into unmarried and married categories, the striking increases for both were evident in the 2010 and 2020 censuses. This evidence strongly suggests that the postponement of marriage and childbearing also drives the upward trend in the childlessness rate. Our study makes a valuable contribution to the demographic literature that aims to understand the fertility fluctuations of China. Moreover, we highlight the significance of marriage and childbearing postponement in elucidating the decline in first birth fertility and the increase in the childless rate over time in China. The Chinese government is at high demand to learn the speed and degree of delayed reproduction and take measures to help the couples to realize their fertility intention accordingly even they postpone their marriage and childbearing at younger age.