



Australian Population Association

12th Biennial Conference

population and society: issues, research, policy

15-17 September 2004 - Canberra, Australia

Convergence of fertility ideals in Iran: A comparative study of the youth and the older generation

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Abstract

Reproductive health issues are among the important concerns in countries with young populations. The 2000 Iran Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS) showed that around a quarter of the total population of Iran was youths aged 15-24. This paper aims, first, to examine the attitudes and behaviour of young-married women on browsing such reproductive issues as marriage, fertility and family planning; and second, to analyse the differences between reproductive behaviours of two generations: married women aged 20-29 and the previous generation (married women aged 40-49 years old).

The data used in this paper are drawn from the Iran Demographic and Health Survey and the 2002 Iran Fertility Transition Survey (IFTS) conducted in four provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, West Azarbaijan, Yazd and Gilan. Bivariate and multivariate analyses are carried out to meet the objectives of the paper.

Our preliminary results show that the two generations had similar attitudes towards age at marriage and fertility. However, there was a significant difference between their attitudes on ideal fertility at the time of their marriage. This may indicate high prevalence of unintended pregnancies among the older generation, or alternatively the adoption later in life of low-fertility ideals by the older generation. Family planning use before the first pregnancy for the two generations was also different.

Given the importance of the young age structure of the population in Iran, this paper concludes that Iran's family planning program should include more youth-friendly programs. Given the low fertility ideals among the two generations, we argue that Iran may experience further fertility decline, and is likely to join the low-fertility countries. This has considerable policy implications, and calls for both short- and long-term population policies in Iran.

Paper prepared for the 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, 15-17 September 2004, Canberra.