



Determinants of high fertility in three different societies of the Asia-Pacific region

Udoy Saikia and Gour Dasvarma, *Flinders University of SA*

Jim Chalmers, *United Nations Development Programme, Papua New Guinea*

Although fertility has been declining in most parts of the world, some societies or countries such as Timor Leste (East Timor), the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and the indigenous Khasi community in north-eastern India still exhibit very high fertility rates. Recent estimates show that Timor Leste has a total fertility rate (TFR) of 7.8 as of 1998-2003, one of the highest in the world, the Khasis have the highest fertility in India with a TFR of 5.6 in 2001, and Bougainville has an estimated TFR of 5.0 as of 1995-2000. The TFR for the developing countries as a whole is 3.0 as of 2003 (Population reference Bureau 2005). Further, fertility in these societies is not only high but it is also increasing, at least in Timor Leste. The majority of Timorese women have a preference for large family sizes, and their intention to use contraception at some time in the future is very low. Both the Khasi and the Bougainville societies are matrilineal and in Timor Leste, female-headed households are now common, where women often play a key role in family and community matters. The three societies may also have shared a common sense of insecurity and a feared sense of identity loss, living as they did amid or in close proximity to much larger and dominant populations. This paper aims to analyse the reproductive behaviour of women in these societies and identify the determinants of their high fertility.