

Social Studies - World Topics

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POPULATION

By Harry Jivenmukta

- z The time required for the population of the world to reach one billion had taken all of human prehistory into the early 1800s.
- z The second billion was added in a little more than a century.
- z The 3-billion mark was reached in 1960, less than 50 years later.
- z The additional billions since then were accumulated in time spans of about a dozen years each.
- z The world population surpassed the 5-billion mark in 1987.
- z The sixth billion was reached within only a decade, by 1997.

The primary cause of this tremendous spurt in population growth was the drop in death rates. During the 19th century, death rates began to fall in Europe, Canada, and the United States as industrialization triggered improvements in health and living conditions and newly developed agricultural and transportation methods helped to increase food supplies. Late in the 19th century, birth rates also began to fall in these areas, and population growth slowed.

Medical and public health technologies introduced after World War II reduced death rates in the developing countries in a much shorter time than in developed countries. With the exception of Africa, the birth rates of developing countries have meanwhile fallen, though much more slowly than the death rates. The fastest-growing part of the world is Africa, with a growth rate estimated at about 28 per 1,000 people, or 2.8 percent, per year. The slowest-growing region is Europe, with only 0.3 percent. The world figure averages about 1.7 percent.

When the world's average birthrate comes down to equal the death rate, the population of the world will stop growing. Demographers, the social scientists who study population trends, project that this will occur when the population has reached about 10 billion. Before the end of the 21st century, the populations of many of today's developed countries could be declining simply because their birthrates may be lower than their death rates, as they already are in some European countries, for example, Italy. The populations of most developing countries, however, will be much larger than they are today. India's population, for example, is expected to double, from 853 million in 1990 to 1.7 billion in 2100. The population of Kenya, the world's fastest-growing country, could increase almost five times in the same period, from nearly 25 million to 116 million. Such large additional numbers place tremendous pressures on many poorer developing countries, which have difficulty feeding, educating, and providing health care and jobs for the people they already have.

Questions...

1. Why has the world's population increased so quickly?
2. What problems are associated with such rapid growth? Make a list.

- z In the 1990s nearly 60 percent of the world's population lived in Asia.
- z Europe, excluding Russia, had 10 percent.
- z North, Central, and South America together had 13 percent.

The most densely populated continents are Asia, with some 296 people per square mile (114 per square kilometre), and Europe, including Russia, with 183 (71). North America has 39 (15). Bangladesh has the greatest density; 1,956 per square mile (755 per square kilometre). Other density leaders are Taiwan, South Korea, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Japan.

A population's age structure has much to do with how that population lives and how its resources are divided. Because of high birth rates, developing countries have much greater proportions of children under the age of 15 than do developed countries. In most African countries children under the age of 15 make up more than 45 percent of the population, compared to 18 percent in Sweden, for example. Many of the resources of developing countries must be used to educate and care for dependent children, making less available for economic development that could provide jobs for them when they are older. In developed countries with ageing populations, like Sweden, with 23 percent of its people age 60 and above, an increasing share of resources goes to support the aged.

Some 50 percent of the world's people live in urban areas. The proportion is only 37 percent in developing countries, compared to 73 percent in developed countries. However, urban populations are growing much faster in developing countries than they did in the past in developed countries, particularly in large cities. Providing enough jobs and services for these rapidly increasing numbers of city dwellers adds to the pressures on developing countries. Of the seven cities presently thought to have more than 15 million people five are in developing countries (Mexico City, Shanghai, Sao Paulo in Brazil, and Calcutta and Bombay in India). The other two cities of this gigantic size are Tokyo and New York.

Questions...

1. Which areas of the world have the highest population densities?
2. How is the population increasing in Europe?
3. Why, do you think, are urban areas growing so fast?

A good indicator of a country's health status is its infant mortality rate; the number of deaths of children under the age of 1 per 1,000 live births in a year. The average rate in developing countries is 90, nearly six times the average of 16 in developed countries. The rates are highest in Africa, led by West Africa at 111. They are also high in South Asia, with an average of 96. Afghanistan's rate of 154 is the highest of the world's major countries.

Infant mortality rates tend to be lower in developing countries in which women have some education, even if incomes are low. Sri Lanka's rate of 33, for example, is less than one third of the rate of 109 in Saudi Arabia, even though Saudi Arabia's income per person is 24 times higher than Sri Lanka's. In Sri Lanka, however, nearly all girls attend primary school; in Saudi Arabia only slightly more than half do so.

In 1990 Iceland's infant mortality rate was the lowest in the world at 4.0 deaths per 1,000 births, followed by Japan's at 4.7. The rate of 9.1 in the United States was higher than that of 28 other countries, largely because of very high rates in poverty-stricken areas.

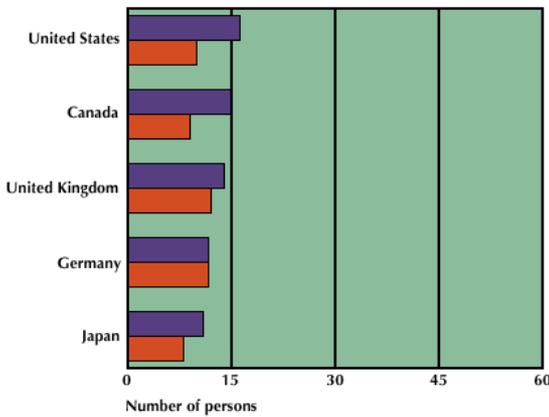
The infant mortality rate has a strong bearing on life expectancy at birth, or the average number of years a newborn baby can be expected to live if conditions remain as they are. In the Middle Ages, when infant mortality rates were probably well above 200 per 1,000 births, life expectancy was 30 years or less. By the early 1990s life expectancy was up to 63 years for the world as a whole. The average life expectancy in developing countries was 59 years, ranging from 67 in Latin America to just 53 in Africa. Average life expectancy in most of the developed countries of Western Europe and North America is now over 80 years. Japan, Iceland, and Sweden have the world's highest life expectancy.

In almost all countries life expectancy is higher for women than it is for men, and this gap has been growing as overall life expectancy increases. Life expectancy for a girl born in the United States in 1989 was 76.5 years, nearly seven years more than the 69.6 years for baby boys. The gap is narrower in many developing countries of Africa and Asia. In Egypt, for example, life expectancy is 62.1 for women and 59 for men, a difference of three years. In India, Nepal, and Pakistan in South Asia, the life expectancy of women is actually less than that of men by one or two years. In many developing countries, boys are favoured over girls because they are considered to be of greater economic value to the family. Consequently, infant girls get less care and attention than do boys, and their death rates are higher.

Questions...

1. Why are infant mortality rates a good indicator of a nation's health?
2. How has life expectancy increased in the last several hundred years?
3. Why do you think women generally have a longer life expectancy than men?

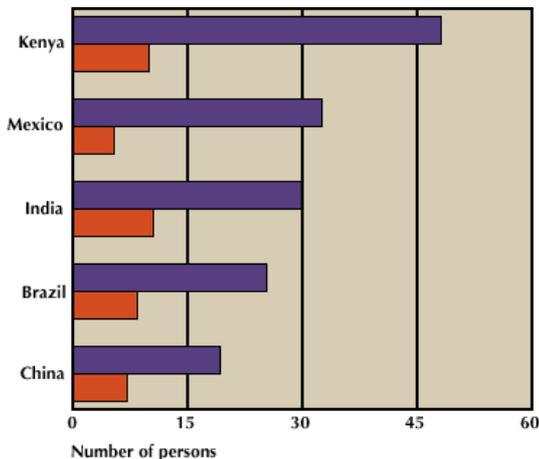
BIRTH AND DEATH RATES



The tables opposite show the problem with population increase. They compare birth rates with death rates. The top table shows comparative birth and death rates in some developed countries. The top bar for each country shows the birth rate and the bottom bar, the death rate. In many developed nations there is not much difference between the number of people being born and the number dying.

If the bars were the same for birth and death rates, the population would be in balance.

PER 1000 PEOPLE



The bottom chart shows the birth and death rates in some developing nations. It is clear that the number of births are much larger than the deaths and this is what causes the population explosion. In some cases the birth rate is 3 or 4 times the death rate. This means that for every one person who dies three or four people are born!

In some countries almost 50% of the population is under 15 years of age and this causes more problems. They will want to have children themselves, and they are not going to die for a very long time. These factors lead to an even greater population explosion in the future.

Questions...

1. Why is it important to study birth and death rates?
2. Why is the birth rate in the West so much lower than in many developing countries?
3. What effect does a high proportion of young people have on population growth in the future?

BIRTH CONTROL CASE STUDY - INDIA

5

In the mid 1970s Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India decided to do something about the population explosion taking place. She began a programme of voluntary sterilization. Local representatives were appointed to convince men to become sterilised. The very poor inhabitants were targeted with offers of money, about 100 Rupees if they would agree. Many people did agree but the policy was not as clear as many people would have liked.

Some people were told that they were just going for a check up and would be paid the money. Upon arrival at the hospitals they would be sterilised. Many never knew what had been done to them. Others were forcibly taken to the hospitals. It became a time of fear for many men. The policy was supposed to be aimed at men who already had children and who didn't want any more, but in fact some very young men and boys were also sterilised who did not have children of their own.

There was an outcry across India and the world. In the elections which followed Indira Gandhi lost and was then arrested and imprisoned for a short time partly because of the sterilisation issue.

Today, India has a population nearing 1 Billion. There are no effective population control remedies, and after the sterilisation fiasco no political leader wants to touch such a 'hot potato' issue. Soon India will have more people than China and will be the most populous nation on Earth.

Some people do try to control the number of children they have. There are many sex clinics in India which can tell parents the sex of their child still in the womb. Many people choose to abort female foetuses in order to keep just male children. In one alarming study, of 6000 foetuses which had been aborted, 5999 were female!

Questions...

1. Why did the sterilisation programme in India fail?
2. What lessons can be learned from this case study?
3. Imagine you were the Prime Minister of India. How would you encourage birth control?

BIRTH CONTROL CASE STUDY - CHINA

6

The Chinese Communist government needed to do something about the population explosion in China. Already the most populated nation on Earth something drastic was needed. The Chinese policy was to encourage people to get married at a later age and have only one child. This caused many problems.

In Asia generally, people want to have at least one son. This is based on traditional cultural beliefs that the son will support the elderly parents when they need it. Daughters traditionally go to live at their husband's home and if people had a daughter, they felt they would be alone in their time of need in old age.

China had a big advantage over other nations because it had a system of local government agents already in place. The Chinese used these agents to make sure the policies of the government were carried out. These same agents now took on the role of ensuring that people didn't have more than one baby. To 'encourage' people to follow the law, a graded system of taxes was also imposed. People who had two children paid more tax and those with three would be paying so much as to make it almost impossible to live. Along with the social exclusion of people who didn't follow the law, the birth control policy worked very well.

The main disadvantage of the policy was that some people let girl babies die, or even killed them so that they could try again for a boy. The result today is an imbalance of the sexes. There are many more boys than girls in China. These children are also the most spoiled children in the world because being alone they are showered with love by their parents constantly. Obese boys are a common problem in China, storing up health problems for the future.

The growth rate is estimated to have declined from well over 2 percent per year in the 1960s to about half that in the 1980s.

Questions...

1. Why has the Chinese policy of one child per family succeeded?
2. What are the bad aspects of China's policy?
3. How could you improve on this policy?
4. Could this policy be easily transferred to other countries?

One reason why people continue to have more children is that religions do not give any guidance on birth control. In fact all religions encourage people to have more children because they are a 'gift' from God. Most belief systems are dominated by religion, and even in the UK our moral and ethical codes can be traced back to Christianity.

Some religious groups, like Catholics, are banned from using contraceptives and their families are often bigger than average. In countries like India, where people can see that there is a problem, they do nothing because there is no guidance on the matter from the sources people use for guidance - i.e. the temples and the priests. Indeed, it is seen as a benefit to have a large family because it increases the chances of a more prosperous future with more people working and more money coming in.

Questions...

1. Find out what religions say about child bearing and birth control, and write a short summary of your findings. Choose three religions out of the six listed.

BUDDHISM

CHRISTIANITY

HINDUISM

ISLAM

JUDAISM

SIKHISM

2. What other factors make up the belief systems that determine how people act?

I think that there are three things that combine to result in a runaway world population:

- z medical advances,
- z cultural traditions,
- z ignorance.

The **medical advances** of the last 100 years or so means that many of the diseases or other illnesses (which meant that many people died earlier in life), have been eradicated or brought under control. As a result people live healthier lives and live longer. If this factor was taken on its own it would mean that the world population would increase.

Cultural traditions are very strong influences which were introduced into communities centuries ago. They are usually tied up with religious belief which make them very hard to break. People have 21st Century minds but 18th Century attitudes! Some examples of cultural traditions which impact on world population growth include:

- z Not using any type of contraceptive, (Roman Catholic),
- z Having families with lots of male children so that they can work on the family land, (many Asian and middle eastern developing countries)
- z Believing that God meant us to reproduce without worrying; the fruits of God's love, etc.,(most religions).

Taking point two about having lots of male children so that they can work on the family land: even when people who have these beliefs move to an industrialised workplace, where this necessity no longer applies, they usually carry on with the idea of the large family because it is 'traditional'.

Ignorance is the third factor in world population increase. People do not think about the future. It is simply a case of looking at this generation with no view or understanding about what effects high reproduction levels now will have on the world in the future. Education is the key in this respect. People should get into the habit of thinking about consequences.

Questions...

1. What do you think of the argument presented above?
2. What part do cultural traditions play in the population explosion?
3. How does religion affect population control?

we can control human population...

The fact is, we as humans do not know when to stop! Population growth is probably the biggest threat to our planet. More people means more usage of valuable resources and eventually things will run out.

We need a five point plan which will result in the effective control of the population of the world. But remember, we don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water either. The proposals should try to guarantee quality of life and some choice for people. Consider:

- z rights of people,
- z duties of people,
- z choices,
- z cultural expectations,
- z fairness and equality of proposals.



MY FIVE POINT PLAN

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

News Report May 14th 2020

IS THIS THE END?

Despite all efforts the world's population continues to rise. Governments have tried everything including:

- z Higher taxes for large families
- z Free contraception for all
- z Massive advertising campaigns
- z Educational programmes

It seems that no-one wants to listen. Even in China, where people did control their population for many years, the coming of the free market and the collapse of communism has led to a greater freedom in which people have returned to having larger families with a vengeance. There are no longer effective controls there.

It is estimated that the world is heading for a self made destruction. Raw materials, the environment, and the rich nations can no longer keep the lid on this explosive situation. The world, once a beautiful planet, is on the brink of extinction!

News Report May 14th 2020

THE WORLD BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF

When the United Nations embarked on the \$70 Billion programme of family education, there were many critics who claimed that the money would be better spent on health care or education. But today, the international conference on population congratulated the UN on its sterling work which has seen birth rates drop in over 75% of the nations of the world.

The massive 10 year programme of education, supported by health workers, has had unprecedented success in making people realise what the advantages of birth control could be.

The collision course that the human population was on, in which there would have been no winners, has been averted and the world can look forward to a new period of lower populations, more resources, better management, and a blooming cooperation with nature.

Questions...

1. What do you think the effects would be on ordinary people if the first scenario happened?
2. How would people benefit if the second scenario came true?
3. What do you think the story will be in 2020? Write your own report on the situation, giving examples of how the lives of ordinary people are affected.

