

# The Epoch Times

## Babies at a premium: Canadian women opting out of motherhood

Published October 11, 2007

By Joan Delaney

Babies, it seems, are becoming an endangered species.

In a number of countries including Canada, diminishing fertility rates are threatening the very existence of society as we know it.

Most of Europe, Scandinavia, many countries in Asia, Australia, and dozens of other nations are experiencing birth rates well below replacement levels. Japan, with a rate of just 1.26, has the lowest baby deficit in the world.

The situation in Russia, where the population has been declining by more than 750,000 each year, was declared a national crisis by President Vladimir Putin in 2006.

Canada's fertility rate, which has been plummeting for decades, has now reached a low of about 1.6. Demographers say that in order for a population to replace itself, there needs to be a birth rate of 2.1 children per woman.

This global baby bust has been blamed on everything from feminism to economics to individualism and the social revolution of the 1960s. Another reason, sociologists say, is that women are becoming increasingly reluctant to bring children into a world plagued by pollution, terrorism, and climate change.

At a meeting with visiting Canadian bishops in 2006, Pope Benedict said Canada's low birth rate is the result of "the pervasive effects of secularism."

A federally funded study released last week cited work stress as a contributing factor. Twenty-eight per cent of the 33,000 people surveyed said they were delaying having children, having fewer children, or not having children at all because of high levels of work stress.

Faced with the difficulties of balancing work and family, the study found that three times as many Canadians are choosing to make work their top priority, rather than family.

"Children are not seen as a blessing or a benefit any more as much as a hindrance to personal self-fulfillment and especially personal economic security," says Toronto-based Steve Jalsevic, managing director of Lifesite News, a website that advocates Christian family values.

Jalsevic believes the push for population control by such groups as the International Planned Parenthood Federation is one of the main reasons for the global baby drought. Another is the "very dramatic decline" of religious belief and practice in Canada and many countries.

The vast departure from religious or spiritual belief, he says, has led to a "this-life" oriented culture that just doesn't lend itself to having children.

Surprisingly, the United States, while still below replacement levels, nevertheless has one of the highest birth rates compared to other western countries, mostly thanks to birth rates among its sizable Hispanic-speaking population.

But America's religious community is also playing a large part. U.S. studies indicate that married couples who go to church have bigger families, says Ian Dowbiggin, professor of history at the University of Prince Edward Island.

"America is reputed to be one of the most religious countries in the world - it has a vibrant Christian community. It's quite clear that these kinds of marriages tend to have more children than do married couples who do not go to church or identify with a particular organized religion," he says. According to Statistics Canada, in 2005 Canada recorded its highest number of births in seven years, thanks mostly to women in their 30s. But the fertility rate remains far below replacement levels.

In the not too distant past, women had an average of three children by age 24; now, many are having just one well-planned baby in their late thirties. The age of women giving birth has risen steadily in the last 25 years. In both 2004 and 2005, the average age was 29.2 years, compared with 25.9 years in 1980.

In order to boost dwindling populations and head off labour shortage crises, some provinces have begun offering incentives for women to have more babies. Last month, Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams, announced that families would receive \$1,000 for every baby born or adopted in the province. "We can't be a dying race," Williams said.

Quebec, which has one of the lowest birth rates on the continent and the highest abortion rate in Canada, has introduced several incentives over the years including a four-day work week for parents with children under 12. But although fertility rates have risen, they still fall far short of replacement levels.

"Quebec is the most liberal part of Canada in every way," says Jalsevic. "Quebec has more or less led the flight away from faith in Canada."

Dave Quist, executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family, says the high abortion rate is part of the problem; roughly 100,000 abortions are carried out in Canada each year.

"If we look at the number of abortions that are done in this country every year and look at our declining birth rate, there's a direct correlation there."

While some demographers recommend increasing immigration as a remedy for low birth rates, that may not be a long-term solution. Statistics Canada says studies have shown that while immigrants have higher fertility rates than Canadian-born women, those rates decline to Canadian levels with the second-generation.

Dowbiggin notes that countries that are becoming rapidly industrialized like India and China are starting to keep their best and brightest at home, leaving only the "less desirables" available for immigration. Post 9/11, security concerns are also an argument against increased immigration, he says.

But what would make a "huge difference," Dowbiggin says, are changes to the tax system.

Currently, Canadians must pay tax on all earned income. If couples could pool their income, putting them in the same tax bracket, it would lower their combined tax bill.

"Income splitting would encourage parents to have more children because it wouldn't be as fiscally punitive as the current situation," says Dowbiggin.

While incentives for women to have more children have had varying degrees of success in many countries, fertility levels stubbornly remain below replacement values. The Guardian reports that in Germany, which has a rate of 1.3 babies per woman, 30 per cent of women are childless, with the figure rising to 40 per cent among university graduates.

In Japan, despite many incentives including cash bonuses for families that have more than one child, the birth rate hasn't picked up although there was a slight increase in 2006. Schools are closing, fewer hospitals have pediatric wards than in the past, and some towns have had to merge with nearby cities. *The Washington Post* reported that 90 children's theme parks across the country have closed in the last 10 years.

If the downward trend continues, the ramifications for the future could be grim. A declining number of taxpaying citizens means governments are going to be hard pressed to find money for things like social security and national health insurance.

And with the baby boomers now reaching retirement, the aging population is expected to swell even more in the coming years.

"The main question is who will pay the bills in the future, because we've got fewer and fewer tax-paying citizens in the economy working to support the growing cohort of elderly senior citizens," says Dowbiggin.

This could trigger a "whole set of consequences," he argues, such as the legalizing of physician assisted suicide and euthanasia. The large numbers of elderly people who need costly health care well past retirement age could prompt policy makers look to right-to-die legislation as a way of addressing the issue.

Quist agrees that a shrinking tax base would have a major impact, noting that around the world, there's been a downward trend in the size of families for many years.

"If our population peaks out over the next couple of years and we see no further growth, it's potentially a huge economic crisis down the road," he says. "It has enormous repercussions for us as a country long term."