The Declining Birth Rate in Ceylon

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The published vital statistics for Ceylon indicate that there has been a fall in the birth rate over the period 1946 through 1966. The birth rate (Table 1) was 38.4 in 1946 and in 1966 it was 31.6. The fall, however, has not been regular. Till 1959 the birth rate has fluctuated between a high of 40.6 reached in 1948 and a low of 35.8 in 1958, but even during this period the overall trend has been a downward one. Since 1959 the decline has been steady though small. The recorded annual decline has varied from 0.1 to 0.9.

The decline in the birth rate has been the subject of some investigation. Abhayaratne and Jayewardene[1] and Jayewardene and Selvaratnam[2] studied fertility in the earlier part of the period when the birth rate was more or less constant. This constancy in the face of a dramatic fall in death rate, which made the length of the fecund marital period longer and the probability that a woman would produce more children in her life time greater, they attributed to a real decline in fertility produced by a postponement of marriage. Supporting their hypothesis was the data collected at the census of 1946 which indicated a decrease in the size of completed family.

Fertility in the latter part of the period has been studied by Wright[3] who contends that the discernible decline in the birth rate is the result of changes in the age structure of the population. He has shown, using age specific fertility rates, that the crude birth rate in 1963 would have been no different from that in 1953 had the age distribution of the population in 1963 been the same as that in 1953. It must, however, be pointed out that the total fertility rate –a measure of the average size of completed family– shows a decline even during this period.

There are three factors that could conceivably affect the recorded birth rate - (1) registration of vital events, (2) mortality and (3) fertility. What contribution these factors have made to the decline in the birth rate is a matter of interest, especially as the birth rate is sometimes used to assess the efficiency of a family planning program. In this study an attempt is made to assess the effect that each of these factors has had on the birth rate in Ceylon.

1. O. E. R. Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene, 'Fertility Trends and Population Growth in Ceylon,' *Ceylon Journal of Medical Science*, 13 (1964), pp. 1 - 77.
   O. E. R. Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene, 'Fertility in Ceylon,' *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, 7 (1964), pp. 99 - 111.
   O. E. R Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene, *Fertility Trends in Ceylon*, Colombo, Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd., 1968.
2. C. H. S. Jayewardene and S. Selvaratnam, 'Fertility Levels and Trends in Ceylon,' *Contributed Papers to the Sydney Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population*, (1967), pp. 237 - 244.
3. N. H. Wright, 'Recent Fertility Change in Ceylon and Prospects for the National Family Planning Program,' *Demography*, 5 (1968), In Press.

Registration of Vital Events

During the period relative to this study there has happened nothing to account for changes in the registration of vital events. Birth and death registration was introduced into Ceylon by the Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths Ordinance No. 6 of 1847. Yet registration proper could be considered to have started only in 1895 when penalties for non-registration were introduced by the Birth and Death Registration Ordinance No. 1 of 1895. Since 1946 birth registration can be considered to be particularly good. First, encouraged by a system of social medicine, a large proportion of births occur in government hospitals. This ensures registration. Second, the system of free education, the advantage of which is liberally taken, acts as an incentive to birth registration. Third, the rice ration scheme, through which rice is distributed free of charge or at a subsidised price to Ceylonese, makes it imperative that a birth be registered.

In 1953, however, a post enumeration survey in which the extent of birth and death under-registration was also assessed, indicated that there was a birth under-registration of 11.9%.[4] Though this figure has been unquestionably accepted by the United Nations and quoted widely in their demographic year-books, its accuracy has been questioned mainly on the ground that the correction of birth and death under-registration and census under-enumeration with the figures of the study gives a more unbalanced balancing equation than the one with the uncorrected figures.[5] Birth under-registration has been estimated by Sarkar[6] at 4.0%, by Raja Indra[7] at 4.4% and by Abhayaratne and Jayewardene[8] at 5.0% during the period 1946 through 1953. A more recent survey of birth and death under-registration indicates that birth under registration is only 1.0%.[9] This latter study also indicates that the difference in the result from that of the previous survey is due, not to better reporting between 1953 and 1963, but to a better technique used in the later survey which assured more accurate estimation.

The birth rate is also affected by census under-enumeration and death under-registration, as these two factors enter in the computation of the estimated mid-year population which forms the dominator. The survey conducted by Kannangara[10] indicated an under-enumeration of 0.7% at the Census of 1953. On this basis, the United Nations assumed an under-enumeration of 10% at the census of 1946. Under-enumeration at the census of 1946 has been estimated

4. I. Kannangara, *Post-enumeration Survey 1953*, (Colombo, Department of Census and Statistics, 1953).
5. O. E. R. Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene (1968), *op. cit.*
6. N. K. Sarkar, *The Demography of Ceylon*, (Colombo, Government Press, 1957).
7. R. Raja Indra, *Sinhalese Population Growth* (Colombo, Department of Census and Statistics, 1955).
8. O. E. R. Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene (1968), *op. cit.*
9. L. Aponso, *Birth and Death Registration in Ceylon* (In preparation).
10. I. Kannangara. *op. cit.*

by Sarkar[13] at 6.3% and at both the census of 1946 and 1953 by Abhayaratne and Jayewardene[14] at less than 1.0%. It is perhaps reasonable to assume that census under-enumeration was 1.0% during the entire period. Death under-registration has been estimated at 5% during the entire period by Abhayaratne and Jayewardene.[15] Kannangara's survey[16] revealed an under-registration of 11.1% while Aponso's survey[17] gives a figure of 4.0%.

Birth under-registration tends to depress the birth rate by giving smaller enumerators, census under-enumeration tends to elevate the birth rate by decreasing the denominator while death under-registration tends to depress it by increasing the denominator. The net effect of birth under-registration, census under-enumeration and death under-registration on the birth rate depends on the relationship between births, deaths and total population on the one hand and the errors in their counts on the other.[18] Birth under-registration of 5%, census under-enumeration of 1% and death under-enumeration of 5%, which are perhaps accurate estimates of these errors in Ceylon, have had a combined effect of depressing the birth rate by 4.9%.

Mortality

Changes in mortality affect the birth rate by alterations in the age structure of the population.[19] The birth rate is computed from the births in a year - the result of activity of a segment of the population, the female population in the age period 15 - 45 years old, and the total population in that year. When mortality remains constant, the birth rate is constant if fertility is constant. When mortality changes, the birth rate will yet remain constant if fertility is constant and the mortality changes does not affect the relationship of the child bearing population to the total population. Mortality changes produce changes in the birth rate in the face of constant fertility, if the mortality changes affect different segments of the population differently and change the age structure of the population so that the relationship between the child bearing population to the total population is altered.

The effect that the change in the age structure of a population has on the birth rate could be assessed by computing the birth rate in the different years with the age structure of the population in that year keeping the age specific fertility constant. With the age specific fertility of 1953, the birth rate in a

13. N. K. Sarkar, *op. cit.*

14. O. E. R. Abhayaratne and C. H. S. Jayewardene (1965), *op. cit.*

15   *Ibid.*

16   I. Kannangara, *op. cit.*

17. L Aponso, *op. cit.*

18. J. B. Scarlborough, *Numerical Mathematical Analysis* (London, Oxford University Press, 1958).

19. R. Freedman and A. L. Adlakha, 'Recent Fertility Declines in Hong Kong, the Role of the Changing Age Structure', *Population Studies*, 22 (1968), pp. 181-198. N. Keyfitz, 'Changing Vital Rates and Age Distribution', *Population Studies*, 22 (1968), pp. 235-252.

population with an age structure found in 1946 would be 38.7. The birth rate of 1953 was 39.4 (age specific fertility of 1953 and age structure of 1953). The birth rate in a population with the age structure found in 1963 and the age specific fertility of 1953 would be 37.2 (Table 2). During the period 1946 through 1953, consequently, the change in the age structure of the population has acted to elevate the birth rate, while during the period 1953 through 1963 the change has tended to depress it. The effect of the change in the age structure of the population could be eliminated if the birth rate of 1953 and 1963 was standardised to the population of 1946. With the standardisation, the birth rate of 1953 is 38.7 and the birth rate 1963 is 35.2 (Table 3). The recorded birth rate in these two years (Table 1) was 39.4 and 34.1 so that the change in the age structure of the population has elevated the birth rate in 1953 by 0.7 points or 1.8% and depressed the birth rate in 1963 by 1.1 points or 3.4%.

Fertility

Any change in the birth rate after correcting for errors due to registration of vital events and changes caused by the change in the age structure of the population must be due to changes in fertility. Correction for registration and enumeration errors makes the birth rate of 1946, 1953 and 1963, 40.4, 41.4 and 35.9 respectively. Correction for the change due to the changes in the age structure of the population makes the birth rate in 1946, 1953 and 1963, 40.4, 40.3 and 34.7 respectively. These figures indicate that between both 1946 and 1953 and 1953 and 1963, there has been a decrease in fertility.

Changes in fertility could be the result of alterations in the fecund marital period – alterations caused by changes in the age at marriage and the joint survival of husband and wife – or by changes in the practice of family planning. The average age at marriage[18] for males in 1946 was 28.8. In 1953 too the average age at marriage for males was 28.8 years. In 1963, it was 28.3 years. During the period 1946 through 1963 the average age at marriage for males has remained more or less constant. In the case of females the average age at marriage was 22.0 years in 1946, in 1953 it was 23.0 and in 1963 it was 23.2 years. There has been a steady increase. The average age difference between husband and wife has decreased from 5.9 years in 1946 through 5.8 years in 1953 to 5.2 years in 1963. The increase in the age at marriage for females has been attributed to the increasing use of educational facilities by females.[19] While there is an association between the change in the age at marriage and the change in the school leaving age for females, which is the cause and which is the effect is difficult to determine.

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18. The figures are given in the Registrar General's Report on Vital Statistics.

19. C. H. S. Jayewardene and E. C. Fernando 'Fertility in Developing countries', *Contributed Papers to the Sydney Conference of the International Union in the Scientific Study of Population* (1967), pp. 300-308.

Wright[20] explains the increase in the age at marriage by what has been termed the marriage squeeze[21] - an increase in the disproportion between males and females of marriageable age. The inevitable increase in the age at marriage of females with a fall in mortality in a community with full nuptiality, has been demonstrated by Hajnal.[22] When eligible males are all exhausted without all the eligible females being married, some of the eligible females must get married later on and consequently raise the age at marriage. This is, of course, in a population where the female mortality is lower than the male. Table 4 shows the number of females in the age groups 15 - 19 years old, 20 - 24 and 25 - 29 and 30 - 34, respectively in the years 1946, 1953 and 1963. In the important age group, females 20 - 24 years old and males 25 - 29 years old – the prime ages at marriage– the ratio has declined from 101.9 in 1946 to 100.3 in 1953 and 100.2 in 1963.

With the decreasing mortality the expectancy of life for both males and females has increased. In table 5 are presented the probability that a woman aged 20 - 24 would live till she passed age 45 - P_w - the probability that a woman would survive from marriage to the end of her reproductive period and the probability that a man aged 25 - 29 would live till he has passed age 50 - P_h - the probability that a man would survive from marriage till the end of his wife's reproductive period. The probability of joint survival till the reproductive period of the woman is over could be calculated from these two figures - $P_w P_h$ - and from this probability of joint survival the average length of the fecund marital period.[23] Table 5 shows that the average fecund marital period was 11.4 years in 1946. It has increased to 16.9 years in 1953 and 17.4 years in 1963. The increase in the average length of the fecund marital period means a longer period in which the woman could bear children and in the absence of the use of contraceptives means an increase in the size of the completed family.

The increase at the age at marriage has tended to decrease the fecund marital period between 1946 and 1953 by 0.1 years and between 1953 and 1963 by 0.3 years. This at the earlier end of a woman's reproductive life when she is more fertile. The increased expectancy of life has tended to increase the fecund marital period between 1946 and 1953 by 5.6 years and between 1953 and 1963 by 0.5 years towards the end of the reproductory period. Assuming a very negligible use of contraceptives, the minimum pregnancy rate per elapsed time for a woman in the age group 20 - 24 (the age at marriage) is 37.1 and in the age group 35 - 39 and 40 - 44 (the age at which the effects of the

20. N. H. Wright, *op. cit.*

21. D. Akers and R. Parke, 'On measuring the Marriage Sqeeze'.
    Abstract in *Population Index*, 33, No. 3, July-Sept. 67.

22. J. Hajnal, 'Age at marriage and proportions marrying',
    Population Studies, 7 (1953), pp. 111-136

23. R. S. S. Sarma, *The effect on declining mortality on fertility*.
    Paper read at Annual meeting of Population Association of America, (1968).

mortality decline are felt) is 34.9.[24] On this basis the postponement of marriage would have prevented the birth of 0.1 children per woman in both 1953 and 1963. The increased longevity would have produced an additional 2.0 births in 1953 and 2.1 births in 1963. The nett result of the changes in the fecund marital period would have been to increase the size of completed family by 1.9 in 1953 and by 2.0 in 1963. The total fertility rate indicates that the size of completed family was 5.1 and 4.5 in 1953 and 1963 respectively.[25] Census data on motherhood and fertility gives the size of completed family in 1946 as 5.6. [26] The size of completed family consequently fell short of the expected by 2.4 in 1953 and 3.1 in 1963. This must necessarily be due to an increase in the use of birth control methods.

Pregnancy rates round the world indicates that a rate of 0 - 3.0 per 100 woman years of elapsed time is found among those practising birth control with a high degree of efficiency, rates of 3.1 - 15.0 among those practising birth control with a moderate degree of efficiency, rates 15.1 - 30.0 among those practising birth control with a low degree of efficiency, rates of 30.1 - 50.0 among those practising birth control to a negligible extent and rates of 50.1 - 100.0 among those who practise no birth control at all.[27] On this basis the computed size of completed family in Ceylon for the years 1946, 1953 and 1963 using the fecund marital period for the respective years and assuming a 10% pregnancy wastage are shown in Table 6. The size of completed family in 1946 - 5.6 - is what would be expected in a population not practising birth control at all. The size of completed family in 1953 - 5.1 - indicates a population using contraceptives to a negligible extent. The 1963 figure - 4.5 - is what is to be expected in a population that is practising birth control with a low degree of efficiency.

The changes that have occurred in the age specific fertility (Table 3) are of a type that favours a reduction in fertility through the postponement of marriage than the practise of birth control. As birth control is usually used to terminate child bearing than to control and space it, the use of birth control is usually associated with a fall in the age specific fertility of the older age groups. A fall in the age specific fertility of the younger age groups is usually taken as evidence of postponement of marriage,[28] though the possibility of the practise of birth control by the younger age groups cannot be ruled out. From the age specific fertility and the proportion married in that group the marital age specific fertility could be calculated.

24. C. H. S. Jayewardene, 'Pregnancy Rates in the Evaluation of Family Planning Programs', *Contributed Papers to the Sydney Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population* (1967), pp. 406-412.

25. Annual Administration Reports of the Registrar General of Ceylon on Vital Statistics for 1953 and 1965.

26. Report of the Census of 1946, Vol. 2.

27. Summarised in Abhayaratne and Jayewardene (1968), *op. cit.*

28. R. Raja Indra, *Recent Fertility Trends in Ceylon*. Paper presented at the International Population Conference, Ottawa, 1963.

The figures for 1953 and 1963 are given in Table 7. There has been a marked increase in marital fertility in the 15 - 19 years old age group, perhaps as a result of better nutrition. Whatever it may be this group certainly does not appear to practise birth control. The marital fertility of the age groups 20 - 24 years old and 25 - 29 years old has shown a decline suggestive of the use of contraceptives. The marital fertility of the other age groups has shown an increase so small as not to indicate a change. The conclusion possible from this analysis is that some birth control is being practised and that by the younger age groups.

The changes that have occurred in Ceylon since 1946 – the change in the age at marriage and the joint survival of husband and wife – indicate that the size of completed family should have been 8.0 in 1953 and 8.7 in 1963, if there had been no change in fertility. The actual performance of the women produced a result that is 2.4 below the expected in 1953 and 3.1 below the expected in 1963. As the period in which this reduction is effected is the fecund marital period of the woman – 16.9 years in 1953 and 17.4 years in 1963 – 0.14 births per reproducing women were prevented in 1953 and 0.18 in 1963. Assuming a 90% efficiency in the use of contraceptives 15.6% of the reproducing couples in 1953 and 20.0% of them in 1963 would have been practising family planning.

TABLE 1

Crude Birth Rates in Ceylon, 1946-1967

Year	Birth Rate	Year	Birth Rate
1946	38.4	1957	36.5
1947	39.4	1958	35.8
1948	40.6	1959	37.0
1949	39.9	1960	36.6
1950	40.4	1961	35.8
1951	40.5	1962	35.5
1952	39.5	1963	34.1
1953	39.4	1964	33.3
1954	36.2	1965	33.2
1955	37.9	1966	32.3
1956	36.4	1967	31.6

SOURCE: Registrar General's Reports on Vital Statistics, 1946 - 1963.

Figures for 1964-67, obtained from the Registrar General's Department.

TABLE 2

Estimated Birth Rates for 1946, 1953 and 1963 with the Age Specific Fertility of 1953 and the Age Structure of the Population of those years.

Age Group	Age Specific Fertility 1953	Female Population in Thousands		
		1946	1953	1963
10 - 14	0.4	387	483	572
15 - 19	59.8	300	391	496
20 - 24	249.1	313	388	442
25 - 29	298.5	270	334	397
30 - 34	230.5	203	251	354
35 - 39	142.7	200	256	309
40 - 44	35.6	135	173	262
45 - 49	6.4	126	168	214
Estimated Total Births (thousands)		259	321	395
Population (thousands)		6695	8155	10625
Estimated Birth Rate		38.7	39.4	37.2

SOURCE: Age Specific Fertility : Registrar General's Report on Vital Statistics for 1953.
Female Population and Total Population, Registrar General's Reports on Vital Statistics for 1946, 1953 & 1963.

TABLE 3

Birth Rates for 1953 and 1963 standardised to the Population of 1946

Age Group	Female Population (thousands) 1946	Age Specific Fertility	
		1953	1963
10 - 14	387	0.4	0.3
15 - 19	300	59.8	59.0
20 - 24	313	249.1	207.0
25 - 29	270	298.5	233.0
30 - 34	203	230.5	245.2
35 - 39	200	142.7	153.4
40 - 44	135	35.6	46.3
45 - 49	126	6.4	6.3

SOURCE: Female Population, Registrar General's Report on Vital Statistics for 1946.
Age Specific Fertility, Registrar General's Reports on Vital Statistics for 1953 and 1963

TABLE 4

Ratio of females to prospective husbands, 1946, 1953 and 1963

| Age of Female | Ratio Female/100 males | | | Age of Male |
	1946	1953	1963	
15 - 19	96.8	103.1	103.1	20 - 24
20 - 24	101.9	103.3	100.2	25 - 29
25 - 29	110.0	98.7	98.8	30 - 34

Computed from Census figures.

SOURCE: Census Reports of 1946, 1953 and 1963.

TABLE 5

Fecund Marital Period 1946, 1953 and 1963

Year	P_w	P_h	$P_w P_h$	Fecund Marital Period
1946	72.7	70.9	51.5	11.4 years
1953	88.3	86.7	76.6	16.9 years
1963	90.0	87.9	79.1	17.4 years

P_w Probability of survival of a woman aged 20 - 24 till she is passed 45 years of age.

P_h Probability of survival of a man aged 24 - 29 till he is passed 50 years of age.

$P_w P_h$ Probability of joint survival of husband and wife from marriage till end of reproductory period of wife.

Fecund marital period is calculated on the assumption that the natural fecund period - the married life of a woman (M)-is the period from average age at marriage to age 45. Fecund Marital Period $= M P_w P_h$

SOURCE: Statistical Abstracts of Ceylon - 1946, 1953 and 1963.

TABLE 6

Computed size of completed family at different levels of use of contraceptives in 1946, 1953 & 1963

Level of contraceptive use	1946	1953	1963
High degree of efficiency	0-0.31	0-0.45	0-0.47
Moderate degree of efficiency	0.31-1.54	0.45-2.29	0.47-2.35
Low degree of efficiency	1.54-3.06	2.29-4.57	2.35-4.70
Negligible use	3.06-5.09	4.57-7.61	4.70-9.97
No use	5.09-10.07	7.61-15.31	7.97-15.66

The computed size of family size has been calculated on the basis of a pregnancy rate of 0 - 3.0 per 100 woman years of elapsed time in population practising contraception at a high level of efficiency, 3.1 - 15.0 at a moderate level of efficiency, 15.1 - 30.0 at a low level of efficiency, 30.1 - 50.0 with negligible use, 50.1 - 100.0 with no use of contraceptives taking into account that the fecund marital period was 11.4 years in 1946, 16.9 years in 1953 and 17.4 years in 1963 assuming a 10% pregnancy wastage.

TABLE 7

Age Specific Marital Fertility 1953 and 1963

Age Group	1953			1963		
	A.S.F.	% married	A.S.M.F.	A.S.F.	% married	A.S.M.F.
15 - 19	59.8	23.7	252.4	59.0	15.0	393.5
20 - 24	249.1	65.8	378.7	207.0	57.4	360.7
25 - 29	298.5	84.4	353.7	233.0	80.9	288.1
30 - 34	230.5	87.7	262.9	245.2	89.1	275.2
35 - 39	142.7	86.5	165.0	153.4	89.9	170.7
40 - 44	35.6	80.7	44.1	46.3	86.1	53.8

A. S. F.   = Age Specific Fertility.
A. S. M F. = Age Specific Marital Fertility.
Age Specific Marital Fertility calculated from the Formula

$$ASMF = \frac{ASF}{\% \ married} \times 100$$

SOURCE: Registrar General's Reports on Vital Statistics for 1953 and 1963.

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