
Human population control

Human population control is the practice of artificially altering the rate of growth of a human population.

Historically, human population control has been implemented by limiting the population's birth rate, usually by government mandate, and has been undertaken as a response to factors including high or increasing levels of poverty, environmental concerns, religious reasons, and overpopulation. While population control can involve measures that improve people's lives by giving them greater control of their reproduction, some programs have exposed them to exploitation.^[1] Worldwide, the population control movement was active throughout the 1960s and 1970s, driving many reproductive health and family planning programs. In the 1980s, tension grew between population control advocates and feminist women's health activists who advanced women's reproductive rights as part of a human rights-based approach.^[2] Growing opposition to the narrow population control focus led to a significant change in population control policies in the early 1990s.^[3]

Methods

Population control may use one or more of the following practices although there are other methods as well:

- contraception
- abstinence
- abortion
- emigration
- decreasing immigration
- starvation, famine
- pestilence, plague
- war

The method(s) chosen can be strongly influenced by the religious and cultural beliefs of community members. The failure of other methods of population control can lead to the use of abortion or infanticide as necessary final options. While a specific population control practice may be legal/mandated in one country, it may be illegal or restricted in another, indicative of the controversy surrounding this topic.

History

Ancient times through Middle Ages

A number of ancient writers have reflected on the issue of population. At about 300 BC in India, Kautilya, a political philosopher (c. 350-283 BC), considered population as a source of political, economic, and military strength. Though a given region can house too many or too few people, he considered the latter possibility to be the greater evil. Kautilya favored the remarriage of widows (which at the time was forbidden in India), opposed taxes that encourage emigration, and believed that asceticism should be restricted to the aged.^[4]

In ancient Greece, Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) discussed the best population size for Greek city states such as Sparta, and concluded that cities should be small enough for efficient administration and direct citizen participation in public affairs, but at the same time needed to be large enough to defend themselves against hostile neighboring city states. In order to maintain a desired population size, the philosophers advised that procreation, and if necessary, immigration, should be encouraged if the population size was too small. Emigration to colonies would be encouraged should the population become too large.^[5] Aristotle concluded that a large increase in population would bring, "certain poverty on the citizenry, and poverty is the cause of sedition and evil." To halt rapid population increase, Aristotle advocated the use of abortion and the exposition of newborns.^[6]

Confucius (551-478 BC) and other Chinese writers cautioned that, "excessive growth may reduce output per worker, repress levels of living for the masses and engender strife." Confucius also observed that, "mortality increases when food supply is insufficient; that permanent marriage makes for high infantile mortality rates, that war checks population growth."^[5]

Ancient Rome, especially in the time of Augustus (63 BC- AD 14), needed manpower to acquire and administer the vast Roman Empire. A series of laws were instituted to encourage early marriage and frequent childbirth. Lex Julia (18 BC) and the Lex Papia Poppaea (AD 9) are two well known examples of such laws, which among others, provided tax breaks and preferential treatment when applying for public office for those that complied with the laws. Severe limitations were imposed on those who did not. For example, the surviving spouse of a childless couple could only inherit one-tenth of the deceased fortune, while the rest was taken by the state. These laws encountered resistance from the population which led to the disregard of their provisions and to their eventual abolition.^[4]

Tertullian, an early Christian author (ca AD 160-220), was one of the first to describe famine and war as factors that can prevent overpopulation.^[4] He wrote: "The strongest witness is the vast population of the earth to which we are a burden and she scarcely can provide for our needs; as our demands grow greater, our complaints against Nature's inadequacy are heard by all. The scourges of pestilence, famine, wars and earthquakes have come to be regarded as a blessing to overcrowded nations, since they serve to prune away the luxuriant growth of the human race."^[1]

Ibn Khaldoun, a famous North African Arab polymath (1332-1406), considered population changes to be connected to economic development, linking high birth rates and low death rates to times of economic upswing, and low birth rates and high death rates to economic downswing. Khaldoun concluded that high population density rather than high absolute population numbers were desirable to achieve more efficient division of labour and cheap administration.^[7]

During the Middle Ages in Christian Europe, population issues were rarely discussed in isolation. Attitudes were generally pro-natalist in line with the Biblical command, "Be ye fruitful and multiply."^[7]

The means of controlling and regulating populations can be traced back to many cultures. "Infanticide, or the killing of infants and young children, has occurred since early times. The Bible cites Abraham's intention to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to God. In early Rome, the father was given complete power to kill, abandon, or even sell his child. In Greek legend, Oedipus was doomed to death until he was rescued by a family retainer. In Hawaii, China, and Japan, many female or disabled children were killed to maintain a strong race without overpopulation. Infanticide was practiced for many reasons. Like the Hawaiians, Chinese, and Japanese, some cultures saw the practice of infanticide as a means of controlling and regulating the population so that society's resources could be expanded on the strongest and most value (Crosson, Cynthia)."

16th and 17th centuries

European cities grew more rapidly than before, and throughout the 16th century and early 17th century discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of population growth were frequent.^[8] Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian Renaissance political philosopher, wrote, "When every province of the world so teems with inhabitants that they can neither subsist where they are nor remove themselves elsewhere... the world will purge itself in one or another of these three ways," listing floods, plague and famine.^[9] Martin Luther, a German monk and theologian (1483-1546), concluded on the issue, "God makes children. He is also going to feed them."^[9] Jean Bodin, a French jurist and political philosopher (1530-1596), argued that a larger population would mean more production and in turn more export, which would increase the influx of silver and gold, and thus increase the riches of a country.^[9] Giovanni Botero, an Italian priest and diplomat (1540-1617), emphasized that, "the greatness of a city rests on the multitude of its inhabitants and their power," but pointed out that a population cannot increase beyond its food supply. If this limit was approached, late marriage, emigration, and war would serve to restore the balance.^[9]

Richard Hakluyt, an English writer (1527-1616), observed that, "Through our longe peace and seldome sickness... wee are growen more populous than ever heretofore;... many thousandes of idle persons are within this realme,

which, havinge no way to be sett on worke, be either mutinous and seeke alteration in the state, or at leaste very burdensome to the commonwealthe." Hakluyt believed that this led to crime and full jails and in *A Discourse on Western Planting* (1584), Hakluyt advocated for the emigration of the surplus population.^[8] With the onset of the Thirty Year War (1618–1648), characterized by widespread devastation and deaths brought on by hunger and disease in Europe, concerns about depopulation returned.^[10]

The population control movement

In the 20th century, population control proponents have drawn from the insights of Thomas Malthus, a British clergyman and economist who published *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. Malthus argued that, "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio." He also outlined the idea of "positive checks" and "preventative checks." "Positive checks," such as diseases, war, disaster and famine, are factors that Malthus considered to increase the death rate.^[11] "Preventative checks" were factors that Malthus believed to affect the birth rate such as moral restraint, abstinence and birth control.^[11] He predicted that "positive checks" on exponential population growth would ultimately save humanity from itself and that human misery was an "absolute necessary consequence."^[12] Malthus went on to explain why he believed that this misery affected the poor in a disproportionate manner.

[There is a] constant effort towards an increase in population [which tends to] subject the lower classes of society to distress and to prevent any great permanent amelioration of their condition...The way in which these effects are produced seems to be this. We will suppose the means of subsistence in any country just equal to the easy support of its inhabitants. The constant effort towards population ...increases the number of people before the means of subsistence are increased. The food, therefore which before supplied seven millions must now be divided among seven millions and half or eight millions. The poor consequently must live much worse, and many of them be reduced to severe distress.^[13]

Finally, Malthus advocated for the education of the lower class about the use of "moral restraint," or voluntary abstinence, which he believed would slow the growth rate.^[14]

Paul R. Ehrlich, a US biologist and environmentalist, published *The Population Bomb* in 1968, advocating stringent population control policies.^[15] His central argument on population is as follows:

A cancer is an uncontrolled multiplication of cells; the population explosion is an uncontrolled multiplication of people. Treating only the symptoms of cancer may make the victim more comfortable at first, but eventually he dies - often horribly. A similar fate awaits a world with a population explosion if only the symptoms are treated. We must shift our efforts from treatment of the symptoms to the cutting out of the cancer. The operation will demand many apparent brutal and heartless decisions. The pain may be intense. But the disease is so far advanced that only with radical surgery does the patient have a chance to survive.^[16]

In his concluding chapter, Ehrlich offered a partial solution to the "population problem," "[We need] compulsory birth regulation... [though] the addition of temporary sterilants to water supplies or staple food. Doses of the antidote would be carefully rationed by the government to produce the desired family size".^[16]

Ehrlich's views came to be accepted by many population control advocates in the United States and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.^[17] Since Ehrlich introduced his idea of the "population bomb," overpopulation has been blamed for a variety of issues, including increasing poverty, high unemployment rates, environmental degradation, famine and genocide.^[12] In a 2004 interview, Ehrlich reviewed the predictions in his book, and found that while the specific dates within his predictions may have been wrong, his predictions about climate change and disease were valid. Ehrlich continued to advocate for population control and co-authored the book *The Population Explosion*, released in 1990 with his wife Anne Ehrlich. Paige Whaley Eager argues that the shift in perception that occurred in the 1960s must be understood in the context of the demographic changes that took place at the time. It was only in the first

decade of the 19th century that the world's population reached one billion. The second billion was added in the 1930s, and the next billion in the 1960s. 90 percent of this net increase occurred in developing countries.^[18] Eager also argues that, at the time, the United States recognised that these demographic changes could significantly affect global geopolitics. Large increases occurred in China, Mexico and Nigeria, and demographers warned of a "population explosion," particularly in developing countries from the mid-1950s onwards.^[19]

Population control and economics

Opinions vary among economists about the effects of population change on a nation's economic health. Recent US scientific research concluded that the raising of a child costs about \$16,000 yearly (\$291,570 total for raising him/her up to his/her 18th birthday).^[20] In the USA, the multiplication of this number with the yearly population growth will yield the overall cost of the population growth. Costs for other developed countries are usually similar.

While some believe that reduction of the population is a key to economic growth, others argue that population reduction should be focused on what they judge to be undesirable sections of the population (see Eugenics). Other economists doubt that a correlation between population reduction and economic growth exists. Some economists, such as Thomas Sowell^[21] and Walter E. Williams,^[22] have argued that poverty and famine are caused by bad government and bad economic policies, not by overpopulation. In his book, *The Ultimate Resource*, economist Julian Simon argued that higher population density leads to more specialization and technological innovation, which in turn leads to a higher standard of living. He claimed that human beings are the ultimate resource since we possess "productive and inventive minds that help find creative solutions to man's problems, thus leaving us better off over the long run".^[23] He also claimed that, "Our species is better off in just about every measurable material way."^[24] Simon also claimed that if you considered a list of countries ranked in order by population density, there is no correlation between population density and poverty and famine, and instead, if you considered a list of countries ranked in order by corruption within their respective governments, there is a significant correlation between government corruption and poverty and famine.^[25]

Contemporary research

It is generally accepted that overpopulation is aggravated by poverty and gender inequality with consequent unavailability, and lack of knowledge of contraception. Third world evidence usually bears this theory out. However, first and second world fertility rates, in the Depression era United States, modern Russia, Japan, Italy, Sweden, Estonia and France suggest that these populations are responding inversely to poverty and economic pressures, especially on women.^[26] Thus, France is increasing social and women's services, like childcare and parental leave, expecting the policy to stop the aging of its population. Italy is regarded as alleviating overpopulation more rapidly than Sweden as a result of less gender equality and fewer children's services.

Newer research has been done by the U.S. National Security Council, in a study entitled *National Security Study Memorandum 200*, under the direction of Henry Kissinger in 1974. This report stressed that only 13 countries are projected to account for 47 percent of the world population increase by the year 2050. This, it is argued, (due to its impact on development, food requirements, resources and the environment) adversely affected the welfare and progress of countries concerned. It further argued that this would undermine the stability of countries friendly to the US and therefore harm the "national security" of the US as well.^[27]

David Pimentel, professor of ecology and agriculture at Cornell University, and Mario Giampietro, senior researcher at the National Research Institute on Food and Nutrition (INRAN), place in their study *Food, Land, Population and the U.S. Economy* the maximum U.S. population for a sustainable economy at 200 million. To achieve a sustainable economy and avert disaster, the United States must reduce its population by at least one-third, and world population will have to be reduced by two-thirds, says the study.^[28]

The authors of this study believe that agricultural crises will develop, but they will only begin to impact us after 2020, and will not become critical until 2050. Geologist Dale Allen Pfeiffer claims that coming decades could see spiraling food prices without relief and massive starvation on a global level never experienced before.^[29] ^[30]

Another study has been done by the National Audubon Society which recently released a 16-page document called "Population and Habitat: Making the Connection." In this study, population control is widely supported.^[31]

Support for population control

Population control is also increasingly being featured in many environmental documentaries and films. An example is *The Planet*-documentary, which describes the ongoing rising human population, its effects on the planet, and the necessity of population control.

As early as 1798, Thomas Malthus stated in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* that population control needed to be implemented into society. Around the year 1900, Sir Francis Galton said in his publication called "Hereditary Improvement" that, "The unfit could become enemies to the State, if they continue to propagate." In 1968, Paul Ehrlich noted in *The Population Bomb* that, "We must cut the cancer of population growth," and that, "if this was not done, there would be only one other solution, namely the 'death rate solution' in which we raise the death rate through war-famine-pestilence etc." In the same year, another prominent modern advocate for mandatory population control was Garrett Hardin, who proposed in his landmark 1968 essay *The Tragedy of the Commons* that society must relinquish the "freedom to breed" through "mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon." Later on, in 1972, he reaffirmed his support in his new essay "Exploring New Ethics for Survival", by stating that, "We are breeding ourselves into oblivion." Other people advocating population control in the past were: Bertrand Russell, Margaret Sanger (1939), John D. Rockefeller, Frederick Osborn (1952), Isaac Asimov, Jacques Cousteau, ...

Today, a number of influential people advocate population control. They are:

- David Attenborough^[32]
- Michael E. Arth^[33]
- Jonathon Porritt, UK sustainable development commissioner^[34]
- Sara Parkin^[35]
- Crispin Tickell^[36]

The head of the UN Millennium Project Jeffrey Sachs is also a heavy proponent of decreasing the effects of overpopulation. In 2007, Jeffrey Sachs gave a number of lectures (2007 Reith Lectures) about population control and overpopulation. In his lectures, called "Bursting at the Seams", he featured an integrated approach that would deal with a number of problems associated with overpopulation and poverty reduction. For example, when criticized for advocating mosquito nets he argued that child survival was, "by far one of the most powerful ways," to achieve fertility reduction, as this would assure poor families that the smaller number of children they had would survive.^[37]

Opposition to population control

The Roman Catholic Church has opposed abortion, sterilization, and contraception as a general practice, but specifically in regard to population control policies. Pope Benedict XVI has stated that "The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings".^[38]

Present-day practice by countries

China

The most significant modern population control system is China's one-child policy, in which, with various exceptions, having more than one child is discouraged. Unauthorized births are punished by fines, although there have also been allegations of illegal forced abortions and forced sterilization.^[39]

The Chinese government introduced the policy in 1978 to alleviate the social and environmental problems of China.^[40] According to government officials, the policy has helped prevent 400 million births. The success of the policy has been questioned, and reduction in fertility has also been attributed to the modernization of China.^[41] The policy is controversial both within and outside of China because of the issues it raises, the manner in which the policy has been implemented and because of concerns about negative economic and social consequences.

India

In India, only people with two or fewer children are eligible for election to a Gram panchayat, or local government. Indian people invented the Nirodh and decided to use contraception to control child birth.

We two, ours two ("*Hum do, hamare do*" in Hindi) is a slogan whose meaning is that of *one family, two children* and is intended to reinforce the message of population control.

Iran

Iran has succeeded in sharply reducing its birth rate in recent years. Iran is the only country where mandatory contraceptive courses are required for both males and females before a marriage license can be obtained. The government emphasizes the benefits of smaller families and the use of contraception.^[42]

United States

Enacted in 1970, Title X of the Public Health Service Act provides access to contraceptive services, supplies and information to those in need. Priority for services is given to persons of low-income. The Title X Family Planning program is administered through the Office of Population Affairs under the Office of Public Health and science. It is directed by the Office of Family Planning.^[43] In 2007, Congress appropriated roughly \$283 million for family planning under Title X, at least 90 percent of which was used for services in family planning clinics.^[43] Title X is a vital source of funding for family planning clinics throughout the nation,^[44] which provide reproductive health care. The education and services supplied by the Title X-funded clinics support young individuals and low-income families. The goals of developing healthy families are accomplished by helping individuals and couples decide whether to have children and when the appropriate time to do so would be.^[44] Title X has made the prevention of unintended pregnancies possible.^[44] It has allowed millions of American women to receive necessary reproductive health care, plan their pregnancies and prevent abortions. Title X is dedicated exclusively to funding family planning and reproductive health care services.^[43]

Title X as a percentage of total public funding to family planning client services has steadily declined from 44% of total expenditures in 1980 to 12% in 2006. Medicaid has increased from 20% to 71% in the same time. In 2006, Medicaid contributed \$1.3 billion to public family planning.^[45]

See also

- Agriculture
- Birth control
- Birth credit
- Eugenics
- Malthus' Dismal Theorem
- Voluntary Human Extinction Movement
- Overpopulation
- Population bottlenecks
- Population genetics
- David Rockefeller
- Gradualism
- Genocide

Further reading

- Thomlinson, R. 1975. *Demographic Problems: Controversy over Population Control*. 2nd ed. Encino, CA: Dickenson.

External links

- Are we smarter than yeast ?^[46] A statement/video made by Dan Chay about our similarities with yeast in regards to overcrowding
 - CWPE.org^[47], Population Control. Articles maintained by the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment (CWPE).
 - The Nine Lives of Population Control by Midge Decter^[48] Traces the history of the perceived need for population control.
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