

Rapid Decline of Fertility Rate in South Korea: Causes and Consequences

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Abstract

This paper examines the Family Planning Policies implemented in South Korea since the early 1970's resulting in rapid declines in fertility rates that are currently among the lowest in the world. Based on interviews of over two hundred and fifty undergraduate students from various Korean universities and combined with official population statistics, the consequences of this rapid total fertility decline are examined. The study provides a glimpse into the promises and pitfalls that accompany population policies which could be instructive for policy and planning regarding current demographic transitions from high to low birth rates globally.

Keywords

Rapid Fertility Decline, Aging Populations, Reduced Fertility and Labor Force, Migration's Role in Low Fertility Countries

1. Introduction: A Short History of Family Planning in Korea

After the ceasefire culminating in the end of the Korean War, South Korea was faced with the reality of two million North Korean refugees in the South and a total fertility rate of near six children per woman resulting in a population growth rate of 3% per year. This rather high birth rate and the then poor economic conditions were influential in the creation of the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea (PPFK) in 1961. By 1962, a campaign by PPFK was in place to reduce birth rates. The slogan, "If you give birth recklessly, you will inevitably become a beggar" was the initial plan of action to inform the public opinion, followed shortly with the catchy and memorable "3 3 35" campaign focused on Korean women. The message, displayed publically throughout the country was meant for every woman to have no more than three children, each birth three years apart, and to stop by the age 35. The campaign proved quite effective! By

1970, the total fertility rate had dropped to 4.5, an impressive drop of almost two children per woman in Korea in one decade.

Beginning in 1970, the new slogans of the PPFK were targeting two children per woman instead of three. By mid-1970's a campaign was launched to also target men in using contraceptives and state sponsored voluntary vasectomies and by mid-1980's the success of the family planning program in Korea was indeed discernable in the birth rates dropping below two, which is below replacement population levels.

It is important to note that a total fertility rate of 2.2 children per woman is necessary to maintain a replacement level fertility at zero population growth. Yet, the PPFK promoted a policy of a single child per family by late 1980's. A typical poster campaign seen at the time throughout South Korea was the picture of a smiling couple holding hands, looking up, and one child with a bigger smile in the middle of the happy couple. These same posters warned of the problems associated with over-population in a geographically small country with high population density. By 1985 the total fertility was 2.2 and by 1995 TFR had dropped to 1.74 and by 2010 to 1.2 children per woman. Current estimates point to a TFR of 1 or perhaps less, one of the lowest, if not the lowest in the world (figures on TFR derived from the Korean National Statistics Office [KNSO] by the author).

Korea's current population of about 50 million is not expected to reach 52 million before its actual decline begins. In fact, the South Korean population is projected to drop to around 42 million by 2050 with the current level of total fertility rate. **Figures 1-3** are population pyramids presented to contextualize the aforementioned fertility changes.

2. Role of the Family Planning Program in Reduced Fertility

By any measure, the history and results of the PPFK campaign to reduce fertility has been a resounding success. It must be noted that over the past 50 years Europe has also experienced a significant decline in TFR and family size—though not as dramatic as South Korea—without any government sponsored program of population control. Therefore, even if not unexpected in a country with a high population density, high educational attainment “level, a high percentage of urban population and increasingly one of the more affluent societies in the world, still the initial successes of the program are impressive as well as a cause for celebration.

In short, it is not an overstatement to conclude that South Korea's Family Planning Program resulting in low birth rates is clearly an outstanding example of a program that was well planned, well executed, and produced the intent and objectives of the initial plan. If one looks at the planning process to lower births, it stands out as a well conducted call for action by the government as well as the private sector to educate the public about the perils of rapidly growing population. The process by which, in measured ways, the campaign to reduce births was carried out was methodical, well-articulated, well received and effective. The

goals set for each five-year period (five year plans) to curb fertility were met on time, or indeed ahead of time. The goals of the PPFK were achieved and importantly, exceeded the expectations. Additionally, concomitant with the above factors, a substantial number of highly educated women internalized attitudes and behaviors highly favorable to increased equality in work and pay with their male counterparts favoring upward social mobility.

However, a closer sociological examination of the successes of this program will indeed sound an alarm bell regarding the future implications of this policy. In short while the manifest functions of the program have been clearly met, there are emergent latent functions of the plans to reduce fertility that were not originally anticipated and are now causing concerns regarding the future of the South Korean society. These concerns that will be addressed below are not peculiar to Korea. Any country that is currently undergoing a transition to below replacement level fertility would face population decline in the absence of immigration. The number of countries with projected decline in indigenous population outside Western Europe where it has been the established pattern for a few decades is on the rise, especially in Eastern Europe and North-East Asia where the trend is now well established, and the Middle East, with more regions seemingly poised to follow suit.

3. Role of Women in Contemporary Korean Low Birth Rates

A focus of inquiry for this research emerged in regard to the role of women in contemporary low fertility rates. Obviously the family planning campaigns had a historically important role in this demographic transition. However, there is widespread agreement in Korean academic circles as well as the national government policy makers that the current low birth rates present major problems for the country in the next decade. In fact some movements have occurred to encourage families to have more children, with tax break incentives and cash bonuses as preferred strategies during the last few years. It should also be noted that Korea has a modern national health care system that covers costs related to childbirth, prenatal and postnatal care. However, there seems to be no evidence suggesting an increase in total fertility rates as of this writing.

In an attempt to understand the impact of women's personal decisions and attitude on this process we interviewed women college students at the Kookmin University (in Seoul), Ehwa Women's University (also in Seoul) and at Far East University in Gangok, Korea where the author was housed on the campus of FEU. With almost two third of Korean women in 25 - 34 year age bracket being university graduates [1], the interviewee cohort is deemed representative of the younger female population of the country.

Data were collected through a one-page questionnaire regarding the age of student respondents, number of siblings, parents' number of siblings, future plans for work or being a homemaker. Beyond these demographic profile questions, we asked them about the ideal number of children they would desire, how many children they would like to have and finally, how many children they

would realistically expect to have. A total of 276 female students completed questionnaires which were available to them in Korean (Hangul) as well as in English based on their choice. From the questionnaires, we interviewed 30 students by simply having them tell their stories about why they wish to have the number of children that they had indicated on the questionnaire; how they envisioned their future, whether they planned to marry, stay single, stay childless, to adopt children, or anything that they had to share about this topic. These interviews were loosely structured and the students were told that the main interest was in their narrative. A major factor in determining the selected thirty students to participate in the longer interview was their English language proficiency to express their thoughts freely.

The responses to the questionnaire inquiry about the desired number of children and the reasons why were unexpectedly uniform. Furthermore, while interviews were with one subject at a time lasting one to three hours, the responses were again surprisingly consistent.

Young college student women, reflecting the general fertility trends in the country, are getting married much later or not at all. Average age of marriage for a Korean female is now slightly over the age of 31. Most women desire not to have any children or to have only one, regardless of the baby's gender. They reject the subservient position of their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. They do not see an attitude among their potential husbands that foretells of equal responsibility in raising children and doing housework. They cherish attaining higher education and a successful career much more than devoting their early adult years to raising children. They are outspoken about women's rights in Korea that lag behind the similar economically developed countries. Some with caution report the popularity and preference of cohabitation to marriage while keeping it a secret from their elders, an understandable cultural taboo within the quite recent past. It could be surmised that this may be a further barrier to child bearing out of wedlock.

Practically all respondents accepted the use of birth control as a right of the individual woman and not a subject for negotiation with parents, potential partners, or their religious community. Abortion was not seen as immoral or unusual, while most indicated that unwanted pregnancies should be avoided through birth control. But in a culture that is yet to accept adoption as an alternative, termination of pregnancies are not viewed from a moralistic lens. It would not be far-fetched to say that many college age Korean women are not very interested in getting married or having children, quite revealing about the low fertility rates in Korea. Demographers consider a woman's fertility period to fall between the ages of 15 and 45. This is derived from biology. Evidence also suggests that some late age pregnancies (over the age of 40) can have complications for both mother and child. It stands to reason then that Korean women have reduced the window of child bearing to about six years: Between the age of 33 and 39. This is an interesting pattern to birthing with far reaching sociological implications.

In conclusion it seems like low birth rate and the ideal of small families are now the established norm in South Korea rather than being a government sponsored drive. If the ideal number of children for the Korean women is ONE, experience in Europe suggests that the average actual family size may be even smaller. A Eurobarometer survey in 2001 indicated the ideal family size of around 1.7 among German and Austrian women, but the TFR has stubbornly remained below 1.5 in both countries for the past 25 years. The ultimately intended family size is particularly small in Italy, Spain and Austria. Nevertheless, the number of children women intend to have in these countries is above the actual fertility rate, which points to barriers in family formation in all these countries [2]. Furthermore, data for Western European countries since early 1970's indicate that once TFR falls below replacement level the pattern continues and in spite of occasional upward movements it remains at sub-replacement level.

4. Unintended Consequences of Low Fertility

Let us now come to the focus of this report that asks the question: What are the consequences of such low fertility for the Korean Society? The resulting impact of the one-child policy is presenting some serious concerns for a population that is rapidly aging and is expanding social safety nets as the traditionally large family pattern is radically changing in a country that has been, for quite sometime, a very tradition oriented society with reverence for filial piety.

We begin by looking at the structural consequences of a population that actually undergoes a decline in numbers in its size. If the decline in total population is due to low birth rates, especially in as rapid a fashion as the Korean population is experiencing, the consequences are not immediately noticed, yet they will be quite significant in the long run. An immediate observation would be that the average age of the population would begin to increase as the proportion of the aged (those over the age of sixty-five) will increase in relation to other age groups, especially the younger population.

4.1. Aging Population, Social Security and Healthcare Costs

A foregone conclusion based on declining birthrates over a period of time is the aging of the population. In other words, as the proportion of children and young people in the population decreases, conversely, the proportion of the elderly and retired in that population increases. Continuous improvements in healthcare and life expectancy further accelerate this trend. This phenomenon has already occurred in Japan and Russia, and now is also unfolding in much of Europe, though at a slower pace because of the impact of immigration. Yet, the rapidity by which this is occurring in South Korea is noteworthy and interesting to explore. According to the Korean National Statistics and the UN projections [3] the ratio of working population (15 - 64 year olds) to those over 65 years (Support Ratio) in Korea will dramatically drop from 9.8-to-1 in the year 2000, to just over 1.5-to-1 by 2050, with almost 35% of population then aged 65 years or older

[4].

The pressure upon the workforce to foot the bill for social security benefits of the aging population may require either steep increases in taxes paid by the shrinking working age population or significant reduction in social security net benefits to the aged or both. Therefore, in addition to the potential economic stagnation or decline, the general welfare of the elderly population is indeed an issue of concern for the policy makers and employers.

It is noteworthy to recall that in the mid 1960's, the economy of South Korea lagged behind its hostile neighbor, North Korea. Both the GNP and the per capita income of the South Koreans lagged behind North Korea. The traditional family, influenced by five thousand years of history by Confucian thought and ideology of filial piety was strongly embedded in the country. Social security programs and other safety nets were either none-existent or at a rudimentary level. The aged relied on their children, especially their first-born sons for care and comfort. It was the duty of the oldest son and especially of the daughter in-law to be the care provider as the parents aged. While some of that tradition still exists, especially in rural areas, the contemporary Korean society has been transformed immensely in less than two generations [5]. Today, South Korea, the fourteenth largest economy in the world, is a highly urbanized, modern and technologically advanced society. While young Koreans' respect and honor for their elders have not diminished, as highly educated professionals living in modern urban areas, they are removed from the intense familial interactions of the parents and especially grandparents. However, at present South Korea has a well-developed and generous social security system as well as a comprehensive national healthcare system [6].

A glimpse at the changes in demographic profile of the aged already experienced can convey the impact of the increasing percentage of the elderly, especially those above the age of 75 (Table 1) on these programs [7].

It is important to note that the share of the South Korean elderly population in the latter three age groups (75 - 79; 80 - 84; and 85+) is a true indicator of the occurring increased life expectancy among the aged. Moreover, this substantial increase, when framed in the context of smaller percentages of the youth enter-

Table 1. Population distribution of the aged 65+ by 5 year cohorts.

| Age | Year | | | | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 |
| 65 - 69 | 41.8 | 45.0 | 42.9 | 41.3 | 46.1 | 39.5 | 40.8 |
| 70 - 74 | 30.3 | 27.0 | 29.4 | 28.7 | 27.5 | 28.9 | 27.2 |
| 75 - 79 | 16.9 | 16.9 | 15.9 | 17.8 | 17.4 | 17.3 | 17.8 |
| 80 - 84 | 8.1 | 7.5 | 8.2 | 7.9 | 9.0 | 9.3 | 9.0 |
| 85+ | 2.9 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 5.0 | 5.1 |
| Total | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Source: Korean Statistical Information Service; 2002.

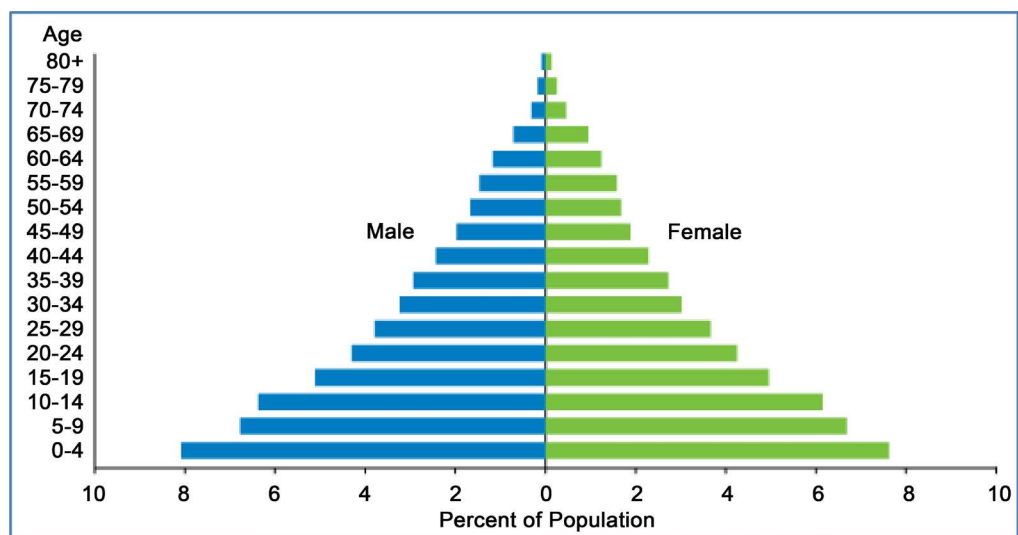
ing the labor force indicates the financial burden that will be facing the Korean government in the near term as revenues due to present tax structure will shrink at the same time that the social security and health care expenditure are on the increase. To contextualize the information presented above, using recent data [8] presented by the Korean National Statistics Office (KNSO), the percentage of the Korean population over the age of 65 in 1966 was 3.3%. The sixty-five year old age group and older had grown to 5.9% of the total population in 1995 and to 10.7% of the population in 2009. KNSO projects that by 2030 the 65 years and older percentage of the population will be at least 19.3% of the total population. For comparison, those aged 65 years and over in Sweden—one of countries with highest percentage of old people in the world—accounted for 19.6% of the population in 2014.

To complete the picture, the total fertility rates (number of children born per woman) for the two countries over the past half-century are shown below [9]:

| | South Korea | Sweden |
|-------------|-------------|--------|
| TFR in 1960 | 6.0 | 2.2 |
| TFR in 1970 | 4.5 | 1.9 |
| TFR in 1980 | 2.7 | 1.7 |
| TFR in 1995 | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| TFR in 2010 | 1.2 | 2.0 |
| TFR in 2011 | 1.0 | 1.9 |

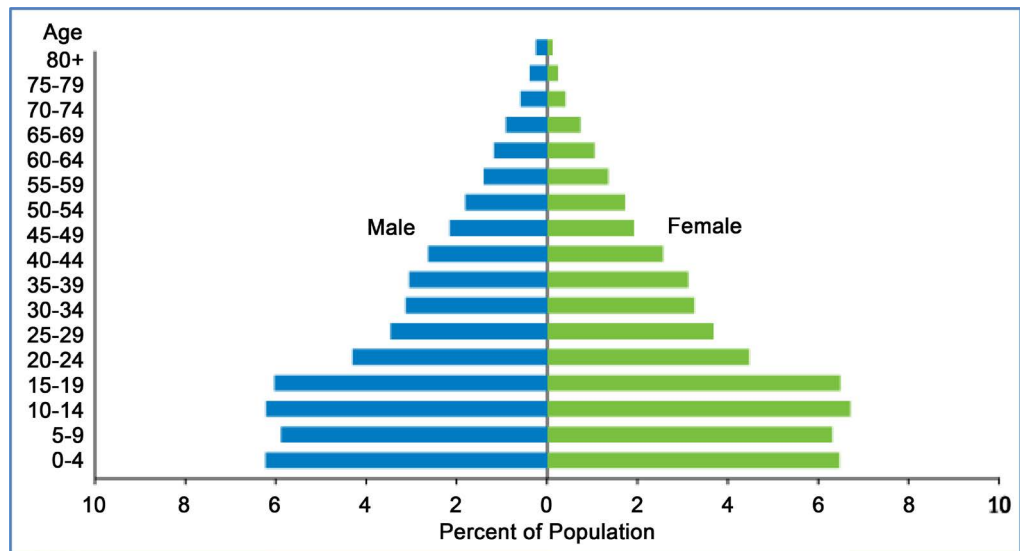
Looking at South Korea’s actual population pyramids for 1950, 1975, and 2005 (Figures 1-3), it can be further delineated that South Korea is rapidly becoming an aged society at a rate unprecedented in human history.

In sum, Figure 3 and the trend shown above clearly indicate that the cost of care for an aging population to be paid by the national government should rapidly become an alarming concern when viewed in light of a shrinking indigenous labor force due to low birth rates. While Japan’s recent fertility drops and



Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision.

Figure 1. South Korea’s age and sex structure, 1950.



Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision

Figure 2. South Korea's age and sex structure, 1975.



Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision

Figure 3. South Korea's age and sex structure, 2005.

aging have received some attention in the literature, the rapidity of the transition to low fertility and aging in Korea by far surpasses the Japanese experience both in intensity and time frame [10].

4.2. A Shrinking Labor Force and the Need for Immigrant Workers: Emerging Ethnic Conflicts

South Korea is among the most homogeneous societies in the world. For various reasons stemming from foreign invasions of the Korean peninsula, a strong feeling of xenophobia has permeated Korean consciousness during the last 5000 years. 19th century influences from China, 20th century colonization by Japan that ended in 1945, and then the Korean War with foreign soldiers on the

ground only exacerbated the fear of foreigners whose goals were more often not honorable toward the native population. This history of repeated invasions and broken promises continues to reinforce xenophobia among the Koreans, even though in recent years “peaceful” foreigners have been invited as guest workers and visitors.

While in the past fifty years emigration has been a fact for Korea as young Koreans have left for opportunities abroad, immigration has not been a common pattern affecting the Korean society until quite recently [11]. The net migration for the country has been negative or zero for decades. Concomitant with drops in fertility, economic growth has been a rapid and impressive feature of the Korean society in the latter part of the 20th century. Indeed the transformation of South Korea from a poor economy to one of the richest in the world in less than forty years is also unprecedented in modern human history [12].

The degree and a matter of fact ease by which young Koreans view their economic affluence is most surprising to an outside observer including the author of this article. In an economic sense, the “Korean miracle” is indeed miraculous. One only needs to spend some time in different neighborhoods of the greater Seoul metropolitan area (population 21,000,000 strong); ride the world class subway system of this thriving megalopolis; or take the bullet train (KTX) from Seoul to Busan (the second largest city with a population of about 4 million people) to observe the phenomenal economic and technological advances made just in public transportation system that links the country in an efficient way. Add to this the well-developed and well-maintained freeway systems that crisscross the country in all directions and note the air travel routes as well and the well developed and inexpensive public bus transportation system to all parts of the country and the marvel of the economic infrastructure is indeed impressive.

Yet, for this economic engine to continue its performance with an aging population and shrinking labor force, drastic measures in short to medium terms would be required. These, in addition to policies encouraging greater fertility rate and larger families – reversing some of the astonishing successes of PPFK – should also certainly include a new approach towards immigration. The latest government data reported by Yonhap News Agency puts the total number of residents of Korea with foreign background at 1.45 million (2.8% of population) in 2013 [13]. **Table 2** compares this with a number of Western European countries:

Table 2 gives an indication of how some countries in Europe with long

Table 2. Ratio of population with foreign background—2013.

| Country | Total Population (Mil) | Foreign Background Population | % of Total Pop. |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| South Korea | 50.2 | 1.45 | 2.8 |
| Sweden | 9.6 | 2.00 | 20.7 |
| Germany | 80.8 | 16.56 | 20.5 |
| UK | 56.1 | 10.94 | 19.5 |

Source: National statistics from respective countries.

standing low TFR have managed to maintain more normal demographic profiles with the help of immigration, alongside policies for social integration and multiculturalism [14]. Most of these immigrants have successfully integrated in communities and made professional contributions in their respective fields. Many of them have achieved prominence and global recognition in art, literature, sports, music and numerous other aspects of life and brought honor to their new homelands.

The need in some segments of the labor force in South Korea is already pointing to labor shortages to keep the economy on track [15]. While the indigenous labor force is highly skilled with most high school graduates finding their way into the higher education institutions, shortages in labor force in certain sectors (especially blue-collar manufacturing) are already demanding imported labor in form of immigration which is a new experience for the South Korean society. And, this is about the immediate needs of the country not the longer term requirement to balance the population structure.

The number of foreign born residents in Korea is fairly accurate due to well-developed registration systems, accurate record keeping of arrival and departures, as well as highly computerized tracking system of alien registration cards, dates of arrival and departure and strict requirements for visa renewals for working foreigners that are mandated for the most part on a one year extension basis [16].

Data on the nationality of registered foreigners working in Korea will be provided below to give a snapshot. The level of skill reflecting educational/technical background of these immigrants varies. For example many, if not most American, Australian, British, Canadian, and Japanese immigrants have higher skills needed in teaching or technology related businesses. However, among some other nationals, the level of skill, thus their place within the Korean labor force may require less training for jobs that are in blue collar and some domestic service category occupations. **Table 3** which follows reflects the most recent data on foreigners living in Korea [17]. These data are also broken down to show the numbers of legal as well as unregistered foreigners in the country and the totals for some of the larger numbers reflecting the country of origin.

What is evident from all available data and projections is that South Korea needs a much greater level of immigration from a range of backgrounds and expertise in order to maintain the current level of prosperity and its economic and social development. The UNPD Replacement Migration paper [18]) estimates that for South Korea to maintain a constant number of working population (15 - 65 age group) at its peak (before starting to decline) there has to be net immigration of 129,000 every year between 2000 and 2050 for a total of 6.4 million over 50 years.

At present, immigration policies and regulations in Korea are not conducive to that end. The *Employment Permit Scheme*, the only avenue through which a foreigner would be allowed to work and live in the country, though progressive in terms of employees' rights and legal status, could be cumbersome and

Table 3. Number of foreigners in Korea by nationality at the end of 2010.

| Nationality | Total | Legal Aliens | Undocumented | % Non-status |
|-------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total | 1,261,415 | 1,092,900 | 168,515 | 13.4 |
| China | 608,881 | 532,315 | 76,566 | 12.6 |
| USA | 127,140 | 122,297 | 4483 | 3.8 |
| Viet Nam | 103,306 | 87,866 | 15,440 | 14.9 |
| Japan | 48,905 | 48,206 | 699 | 1.4 |
| Philippine | 47,241 | 35,985 | 11,256 | 23.8 |
| Thailand | 44,250 | 31,842 | 12,408 | 28.0 |
| Indonesia | 31,728 | 26,982 | 4746 | 15.0 |
| Mongolia | 29,920 | 19,037 | 10,883 | 36.4 |
| Uzbekistan | 25,895 | 20,166 | 5729 | 22.1 |
| Taiwan | 24,760 | 23,920 | 840 | 3.4 |
| Canada | 20,435 | 19,895 | 540 | 2.6 |
| Sri Lanka | 18,377 | 16,437 | 1940 | 10.6 |
| Bangladesh | 12,605 | 7098 | 5507 | 43.7 |
| Cambodia | 12,192 | 11,101 | 1091 | 8.9 |
| Pakistan | 10,319 | 7340 | 2979 | 28.9 |
| Nepal | 9834 | 8029 | 1805 | 18.4 |
| Russia | 9767 | 8513 | 1254 | 12.8 |
| Australia | 8469 | 8330 | 139 | 1.6 |
| India | 7117 | 5768 | 1349 | 19.0 |
| U. K. | 5458 | 5396 | 62 | 1.1 |
| Myanmar | 4656 | 3281 | 1284 | 28.1 |
| Hong Kong | 3742 | 3529 | 213 | 5.7 |
| All Others | 46,506 | 39,567 | 6942 | 14.9 |

Source: Korean Statistical Information System (Web based data as referenced).

bureaucratic with its inter-governmental agreement process and term restriction. Under the scheme, foreign workers are allowed only to stay in Korea for three years and usually (especially for lower grade workers) are not allowed to bring in their families. Basically, the system is designed to discourage long term stay and permanency in the country, which in turn cannot be too helpful to remedy the aging demographic of the country on the long term basis.

The European experience shows that invariably immigrant women have a higher fertility rate than indigenous female, and have larger families. In England and Wales 26.5% of all birth in 2013 were to mothers born outside the country [19]. The same data shows the TFR of 2.19 for women born out of the UK while the TFR for UK born women was only 1.79 in 2013. A similar pattern can be traced in other Western European countries. But in the case of South Korea, the current immigration regulations are not designed to impact the demographic of

the country in the same way.

Understandably there are socio-political considerations in any government's approach to the subject of immigration, whether in Europe or Korea. Sociological literature supports the hypothesis that youth alienation and being labeled as different contributes to engagement in criminal behavior. One could find an even stronger support for this hypothesis in a xenophobic society with little experience in race and ethnic relations until quite recently. Thus the low fertility propelled drive for increase in immigrant workers could cause the alienation of immigrant youth or the "second generation" of immigrants to feel rejected by large sections of society and strike back, as an unintended consequence of their lack of integration [20]. Crime data for Korea reflect higher proportions of offenses committed by foreigners, though still limited in number, in comparison with native Koreans. This is mainly due to low skill migrants being attracted to many economic sectors in South Korea. If efforts were made by the Korean Government to attract more skilled professionals as well, the issue of integration and alienation may be effectively controlled. A final note regarding higher crime rates among immigrants of import is that such activity is primarily concentrated among the young immigrants or young children of immigrants who are often engaged in gang type activities due to their lack of integration within the larger Korean community.

5. Conclusions

This paper examined the efficacy of the family planning program in Korea and its longer term consequential impact on the country's social and demographic structure. We submit that the program indeed succeeded in its stated objective of reducing the total fertility rates of around 6 when the plan was initiated to the present TFR level of 1 in measured stages and through an effective national campaign. Like many other planned programs, especially those at state or national level, the objectives are clear and they may indeed be reached. Yet the unintended or latent functions of many such plans that are either not considered or anticipated may have negative impacts on Korean society as a whole. Obviously the planners could not be expected to anticipate all consequences such as those we discovered based on our interviews with the young female students.

The important lesson however from what we learn from the Korean family planning case is that even with the best of intentions, programs may produce unintended results, thus taking a measured and cautious approach rather than more aggressive and ambitious measures might have been prudent, especially in a country on the road for rapid economic prosperity and social change.

A key question during this research was the significance of the role played by women's changing attitude in Korea in this fertility transition process. This study reaffirms that perhaps the most significant type of birth control is women's empowerment to make informed personal decisions by themselves, free from family, social and cultural pressures and restrictions. Through high educational attainment, and career-oriented objectives, women indeed have signifi-

cantly impacted societal changes that are producing structural changes in the Korean society. Considering the economic power that Korea exerts on the world stage, some unintended consequences of low fertility notwithstanding, transformation of Korea to a modern “Asian Tiger” are indeed significantly influenced by the more assertive, independent, and skilled Korean women [20].

We believe that any attempt by the Korean government to promote higher fertility rates towards replacement level, must include a broad conversation with the most important human resource in the Korean Society today, the young women of Korea who hold the key to balance the desire for professional self-fulfillment along with equity in earnings with men as well as incentives to raise the next generations of Koreans. As for the latter issue of the responsibility for child care, it seems that the young female Koreans are not convinced that the potential young fathers are yet ready to take a greater role in sharing the load and extending support at home while both partners are holding full time jobs outside the home. Here we are dealing with well entrenched cultural norms that have not changed as rapidly as many other aspects of the society. By rejecting the “second shift” at home, young women of Korea seem prepared to continue with the present below replacement birth rates for the near future. This brings us to the second conclusion of this paper.

In our view, it is now time for the authorities in South Korea to change their own, and the society’s views on immigration [21]. They should embark on a campaign—hopefully as effective as PPFK—to bring in the foreigners from the cold and promote multiculturalism as a way forward for the nation. Immigrants must be embraced not just as temporary labor force but new welcome additions to the communities where they live and work with a well designed and implemented plan to encourage integration and productive co-existence. There should also be an effort to attract expatriate Koreans (well over 10% of the nation’s population) to return home and enrich the work force and the society with their world views and wealth of experience.

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