

Fertility Decline from a Perspective of Megatrends in South Korean Context

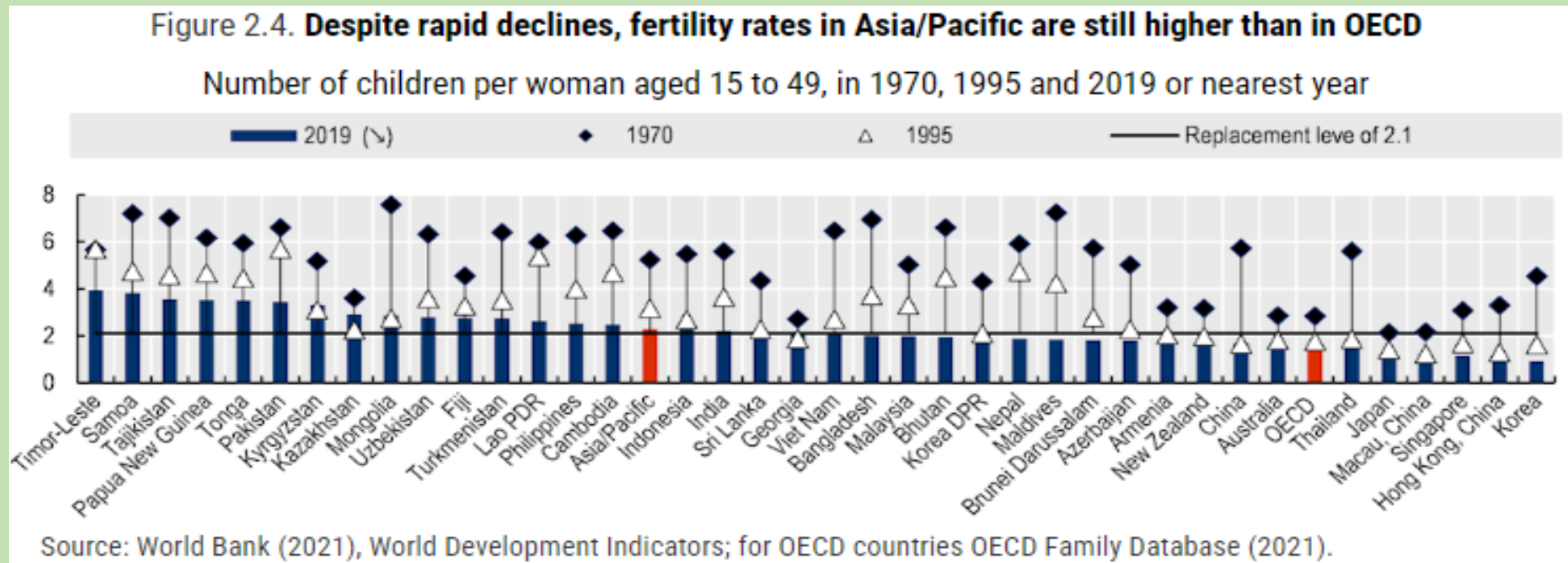
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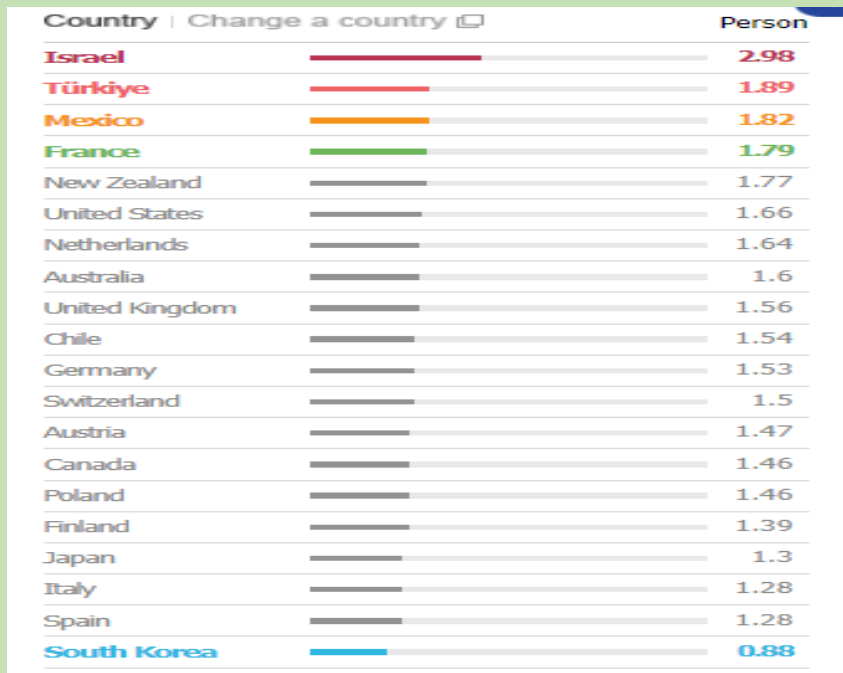
Fertility Decline as Megatrend

- Fertility rates have been declining across Asian countries over the past several decades, following a global trend of declining fertility rates.
- Women in the Asia /Pacific region had on average 2.3 children but this number varied by countries (OECD, Society at a Glance, 2022).

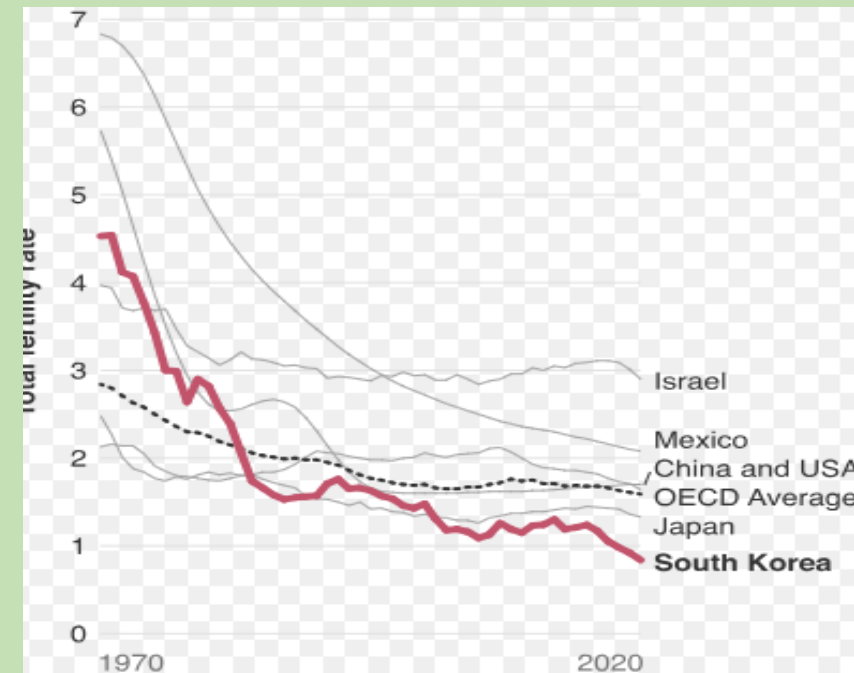


Fertility Decline in Korea

- Korean fertility rate is the lowest in the world and the decline has been faster than predicted.
- Working age population will decrease by app. 20% in 20 years (Statistics Korea, 2023), affecting all aspects of their society.



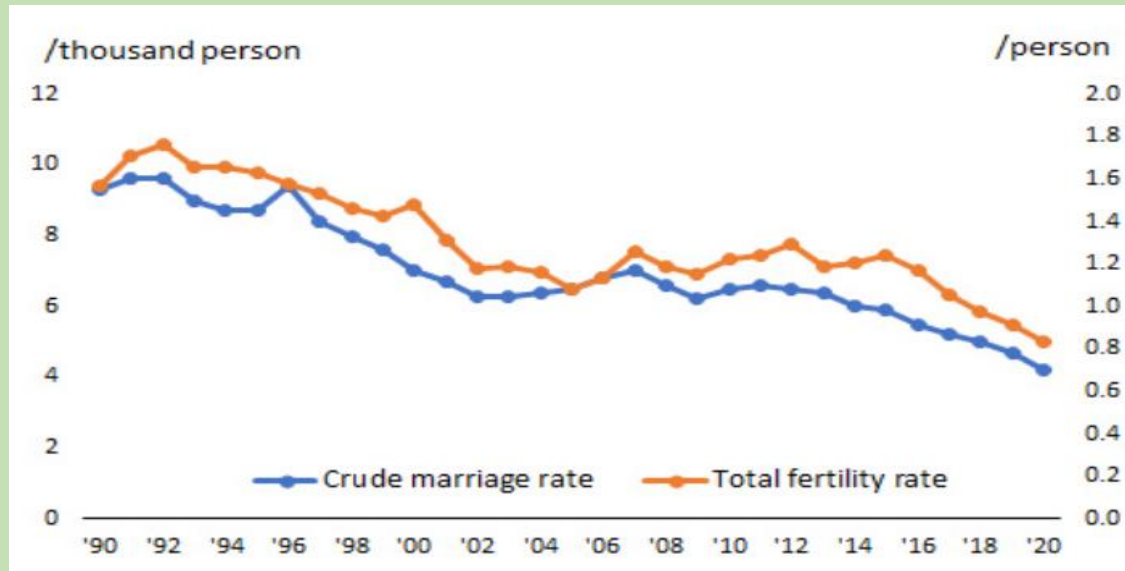
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Source:
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/07/south-koreas-extraordinary-fertility-decline.html>

Fertility Rates and Marriage Rates

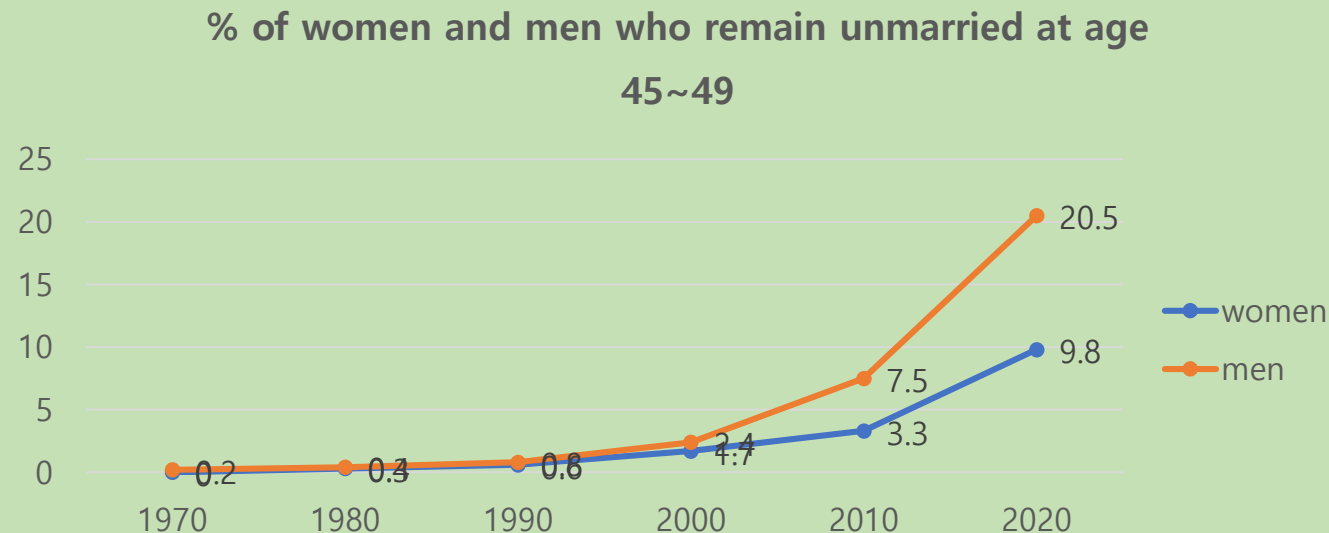
- Fertility decline can be decomposed into two factors: marital fertility rate change and marriage rate change.
 - As the majority child births take place within marital couples in Korea (96.1%, 2022), fertility rate is closely related to marriage rate.
 - Marriage rate and fertility rate have been decreasing very similarly.



Source: Kang, Im, & Kim (2022). <https://doi.org/10.15206/ajpor.2022.10.3.200>

Fertility Decline Decomposition

- C. Lee (2023) shows that 84.9% of all reduction in child births between 1991 to 2021 resulted from **reduction in the number of married women**, 14.3% resulted from reduction in marital fertility rate, and 4% from reduction in the number of reproductive women.
- It is important to understand why Korean young adults do not marry.



Source: Statistics Korea (each year)

Factors related to Marriage and Fertility Decline

- Economic factors
 - high housing cost (Choi, 2022; Kim & Choi, 2023), high child-rearing cost (including intensive private education),
 - concentration in the Seoul Metropolitan Area: over 50% of the whole population concentrate in the SMA and the in-migration of young adults to the SMA has accelerated (Chung, 2023).
- Socio-cultural factors
 - gender inequality, patriarchal tradition, work-family imbalance
 - cultural lag between gender and generations (Chin, Ki., & Sung, 2023)

Factors related to Marriage and Fertility Decline

- Family policy and population policy has been expanded to deal with the economic and socio-cultural factors during the last two decades
 - free child care service
 - partially-paid parental leave up to one year
 - fully-paid maternity (90 days) and paternity (10 days) leave
 - public home-visit child care service
 - child allowance for 7 years
 - infant allowance for 2 years etc.
 - flexible work
- These policy measures have had little success in inncreasing fertility rates.

Other Factors Related to Fertility Decline

- We need a new perspective of global megatrends.
 - social fairness and democracy
 - environment change and climate anxiety
 - technological grand transition
- These global megatrends may influence young adults' prospects for the future and their behaviors of family formation.

Other Factors Related to Fertility Decline

- Young adults are more negative on current states of social fairness and justice compared to older generations (Kim, 2018).
- Social fairness and democracy (Chin et al., 2019)
 - When young adults believe that social justice cannot be expected in social competitions, they are less likely to invest in romantic relationship and family formation.
 - As young adults perceive social fairness and democracy level as low, they are less likely to have a positive attitude on traditional couple relationship (i.e., marriage) and more likely to prefer no romantic relationship or alternative couple relationship (i.e., cohabitation).

Other Factors Related to Fertility Decline

- Prospects for environment change and climate anxiety
 - Koreans tend to have more anxiety on air pollution and plastic trash than on climate change (Oh & Yun, 2022)
 - Young generations have lower awareness on climate change than other generations
- To explore if there is an association, a simple analysis conducted using
 - Data : Social Survey by Statistics Korea (a nationally representative survey on various social issues including family, education, health, crime, safety, environment, welfare, labor etc.)
 - Sample : unmarried young adults aged 20~39

Prospects for Future Environment Changes and Climate Anxiety

How would you think general environments change in the next five years?

The proportion of young adults who are pessimistic on environment changes have decreased over the last ten years.

(Unit: %)

	2012	2022
Would be very improving (1)	3.66	8.88
Would be somewhat improving (2)	30.45	36.66
Would be no change (3)	35.81	40.46
Would be somewhat deteriorating (4)	25.32	11.63
Would be very deteriorating (5)	3.76	2.37
Mean (SD)	2.96 (0.93)	2.62 (0.89)

Note: Data are drawn from 2012 and 2022 Social Survey in Statistics Korea

Anxiety on Climate Change

How much are you anxious about climate change (global warming, heat, flood etc)?

Climate anxiety has decreased over the past ten years among young adults in Korea

(Unit: %)

	2012	2022
Not anxious at all (1)	1.42	4.05
Somewhat not anxious (2)	9.85	19.57
neither (3)	26.63	31.43
somewhat anxious (4)	49.92	36.33
very anxious (5)	12.18	8.61
Mean (SD)	3.61 (0.87)	3.25 (1.00)

Note: Data are drawn from 2012 and 2022 Social Survey in Statistics Korea

Marriage Attitude

How do you think on marriage norm?

The proportion of young adults who believe marriage is a necessary life event has decreased over the past ten years.

(Unit: %)

	2012	2022
One should marry (1)	22.53	18.44
It is better to marry than not (2)	42.67	36.36
Either is acceptable (3)	32.97	41.50
It is better not to marry (4)	1.57	2.89
One should not marry (5)	0.27	0.72
Mean (SD)	2.14 (0.79)	2.31 (0.83)

Note: Data are drawn from 2012 and 2022 Social Survey in Statistics Korea

Perceptions on Environment Change, Climate Anxiety, and Marriage

There is a possibility that marriage attitude is affected by pessimistic perception on environment changes and climate anxiety.

- A weak positive correlation between negative marriage attitude and worries on environment change and climate anxiety among unmarried young adults

	2012	2022
Negative marriage attitude and environment changes	.14***	.15***
Negative marriage attitude and climate anxiety	.05**	.10***

Note: Data are drawn from 2012 and 2022 Social Survey in Statistics Korea

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Conclusion

- The decline in birth rates is related to the development process of Asian countries.
 - Rapid economic development, urbanization, intense investment and competition in education, differences between traditional norms and current lifestyles, environmental problems, and climate crises are common phenomena in some Asian countries.
- In this development process, young people prioritize individual life tasks such as educational achievement and employment over family formation, resulting in lower marriage and birth rates.

Conclusion

- While the decline in birth rates has been explained from economic and socio-cultural perspectives so far, it is now necessary to examine it from the new perspectives of global megatrends.
- The more negatively young people view the future, the more they will avoid family formation and relationships, which will act as factor threatening the sustainability of society and reinforcing vicious cycles.
- We need to make greater efforts to provide young adults with better visions for the future.

Policy Recommendations

- Raise awareness of the significance of fertility decline as a future threat in Asian countries.
- Consider that family formation of young adults is related to the prospect for the future as well as economic and socio-cultural factors.
- Promote social fairness and democracy, and implement preventive measures for environmental changes and the climate crisis to help young adults envision a better future.

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