

Researchers

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Socioeconomic Consequences of Fertility Decline and Rising Child Sex Ratios in China

Fertility decline has fueled a sharp increase in the proportion of “missing girls” in China, so an increasing share of males will fail to marry, and will face old age without the support normally provided by wives and children. This paper shows that historically, China has had nearly universal marriage for women and a very competitive market for men. Less educated men experience higher rates of bachelorhood while women favor men with better prospects, migrating if needed from poorer to wealthier areas. The authors examine the anticipated effects of this combination of bride shortage and hypergamy, for different regions in China.

Country where the research will take place

China

How does the research describe the impact of population/reproductive health on poverty reduction and/or economic growth?

The research addresses the impact of rapid fertility decline (and concomitant intensification of gender selection) on China’s marriage market. We predict which groups of men are least likely to marry, and where they will cluster geographically.

How will the research address a policy need, and what kind of policy lesson is expected?

The projections imply a national average of about 20 percent of men being unable to marry. However, the areas where the unmarried will cluster will face up to twice or greater than the national average. We combine our projections of the geographical areas and socioeconomic groups where China’s unmarried men are likely to cluster, with data on the availability of social protection programs in these areas. We conclude that the financing and administration of these programs will need to be significantly altered if they are to provide a meaningful safety net for those aging without the support of wives and children.

Methods used

Simulation of China’s marriage market and extrapolation from historical data indicating that the least-educated men are least likely to marry while female marriage remains nearly universal.

Data used

Censuses 1982 to 2005 and secondary data from surveys.

Research results

Our projections indicate that unmarried males will likely be concentrated in poorer provinces with low fiscal ability to provide social protection to their citizens. Such geographic concentration of unmarried males could be socially disruptive, and the paper’s findings suggest a need to expand the coverage of social protection programs financed substantially by the central government.

Research product

Monica Das Gupta, Avraham Ebenstein, and Ethan Jennings Sharygin, “China’s Marriage Market and Upcoming Challenges for Elderly Men,” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, no. 5351 (June 2010), available at <http://ideas.repec.org/p/wbk/wbrwps/5351.html>.