

“Contemporary Issues in Southeast Asia”
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Panel:
Human Development

**1. The Social Dimensions of Fertility Intentions and Behaviour in Brunei:
Contributions to Qualitative Demography**

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Very little is known of the Bruneian fertility transition and its determinants. Fertility sample surveys are extremely rare in this population, thus confining demographic studies to the use of census data, and incomplete or even unreliable reports. Moreover, census data can only be useful to a certain extent. As a result, comparative work on a Southeast Asian regional perspective often means that analyses is incomplete because of the dearth in data for Brunei.

This presentation offers the values and virtues of pursuing a qualitative, narrative-driven approach to exploring a sensitive demographic issue such as fertility intention-formation and reproductive behaviour. Qualitative approaches in demography are relatively underdeveloped compared to the descriptive, predictive, body of work traditionally within the domain of quantitative demography. There is a clear gap in the literature regarding the theorization of fertility decline that can be addressed by qualitative methods.

In understanding the causes of fertility decline in a small population such as Brunei, this paper uses qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews with 30 women of reproductive ages. This paper addresses the key questions of: What is the extent of the role of society and social relationships in determining fertility intentions and behaviour? What are the salient relationships within one’s social network that have helped determine one’s fertility intentions? And how do meanings and attitudes towards motherhood, the self, and important others assist in forming fertility intentions and behaviour? The study uses a thoughtful approach in combining classical demographic theories of fertility decline and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to interpretatively analyse the qualitative results of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted. Differences in attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control can be highlighted from the various narratives.

This study invites a discussion about what it means to have children in modern day Brunei. By extension, this research may help provoke questions to explore in similar societies in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore – countries that share similar ethnic compositions of Malays and Chinese populations as

Brunei. In addition, there may be contributions towards the theorization of fertility transitions and their determinants in developing countries, and in particular small, oil-rich nations.

2. Population Ageing in Vietnam – An Irreversible Truth?

Matthew Tye

(AXA Doctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology and Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, University of Oxford)

Research Questions: What are the effects of individual ageing on household dynamics, intergenerational relations and care?

What formal institutions and other social structures support ‘healthy active ageing’? How can older peoples contribution to social and economic development be greater facilitated?

Will Vietnam grow old before it becomes rich? Very few developing countries that have reached middle-income status have gone on to become fully developed nations. Longevity is of direct and urgent importance in proactively addressing the challenges facing both today’s and tomorrow’s older generations if they are to achieve prosperity and accomplishment rather than hardship and uncertainty. The rapidly changing context of Vietnamese society is putting the multi-generational household under increasing pressure from the forces of both demography and modernisation. There are now around 8 million elderly (60+) people (10% of the population), but that figure will jump to 36 million (30%) by 2050.

A sustained investigation of quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic means in the north and north-central provinces of Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ha Tinh and Vinh focused on numerous variables such as health, household living arrangements, and finances. It revealed that family structures have largely been maintained, the inter-generational contract remaining strong, despite changing economic and social paradigms over the last two decades. In addition, the elderly are not simply dependents in their households or those in which they reside, in fact they are still contributing to the households in various ways such as child-care, household chores and pooling of income. This is an important factor for healthy active ageing with a crucial contribution also being made by the elderly in living productive lives in the society and economy. There is also a huge and growing disparity between the elderly living in urban and rural areas. However, there are currently local government structures (such as UBND or VAE) throughout the whole country which could in future years be effective in raising the elderly out of poverty or providing social care if reformed proactively.

This paper discusses one of the most pressing contemporary challenges in transitional Vietnam, with valuable insights for Southeast Asia where many countries are facing the unprecedented approach of accelerated population ageing. The research methodology is innovative in the context of Vietnam, one of Southeast Asia’s fastest-growing economies. Vietnam has its sights on becoming a developed nation by 2020.

3. Mobility and Opportunities through Lifelong Learning in Singapore: Promise Or Trap?

Rebecca Ye

(Department of Sociology, University of Oxford (MSc) Research Associate, Institute for Adult Learning (Workforce Development Agency), Singapore)

In this era of the “knowledge economy”, the notion of academic credentials as a currency of opportunity had led many to believe that there are more opportunities than before (Brown, 2003). While the rhetoric of skills development for mobility and lifelong learning as fundamentally optimistic human endeavors dominate, the reality instead reflects that there is an increasing mismatch between the aspirations of people and the very policies that have been designed by governmental agencies to help realize these ambitions (Evans, 2009). Apart from increasing levels of mass higher education and the cultivation of a *fetish* for qualifications, other sociological phenomena, like migration, appear to have intensified the competition to jobs and rewards, thus making it more arduous for locals to cash-in on the opportunities the knowledge economy promised. If systems continue to perpetuate this credential competition, will the inequality of opportunities fracture the hope and emancipatory ideal that education and upgrading of skills promise, consequently altering future aspirations? This piece of research is primarily motivated by a keenness to explore further the concept of the “opportunity trap”. The inquiry will be situated within the context of Singapore where access to knowledge and qualification appear to no longer automatically promise inheritance of rewards, despite familiar and longstanding government rhetoric of investment in human capital. As the system of education can be seen as a way of reproducing legitimate culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2008), exploration of the structuring of the Singaporean education system and the consequential (or potential) production of social inequality is key to this study.

This work-in-progress research also considers the education-skills landscape of the region. With ASEAN’s aspirations to develop and sustain regional frameworks in the fields of higher education and vocational training, viewing Singapore as a particular and critical case could provide insight to the endeavour, especially if we would like to consider the impact of the opportunity trap on emerging ASEAN economies.

4. Parental resources and children’s malnutrition over the life-course and their consequences for cognitive outcomes – evidence from Indonesia.

Sarah Mohaupt

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Motivation

Childhood health and nutritional disadvantages can have long lasting effects over the life-course and even be transmitted over generations. Malnutrition on its own is a violation of children's rights and wellbeing - no child should suffer from hunger and

go without adequate food. Beyond this, malnutrition has consequences for the growing and developing body of a child. Insights from neuroscience have shown that malnutrition has an effect on the development of the brain in particular the working memory functions which are necessary for learning. Together with other disadvantages such as inadequate financial resources the risk of lower school achievements or even drop-out of school increases. The consequences is a depletion of children's human capital which is likely to lower their earning capacities in later life and laying the foundation for a cycle of disadvantages possibly passed on to the next generation.

Indonesian context

These disadvantages are especially salient in developing countries. For instance, in Indonesia around 42% of children under five are stunted (i.e. they are too short for their age – an indicator of malnourishment). This incidence rate is quite high compared to its neighbouring countries and in relation to its status as a lower-middle-income economy. With an evolving economy that needs more and more skilled workforce it is important to identify where human capital is compromised and children are not reaching their development potential.

Research questions

This paper addresses two main questions. First, to what extent do parental resources influence children's health outcomes at different stages of their life-course? We investigate a range of parental socio-economic resources (education, consumption, assets, and occupation) and their association with children's health (height-for-age) at different stages of their life-course (early childhood, school-age, and young adulthood). Further, we study to what extent dynamics of stunting (e.g. reversal or chronic stunting) differ by parents' socio-economic background.

Second, do children who experience different degrees of severity of stunting in early childhood also differ in their cognitive achievement outcomes in later childhood? And do children that differ in their dynamics of severity of stunting (e.g. persistent, catch-up & late onset of the severity) also differ in their cognitive achievement outcomes in later childhood? E.g. do children who experience catch-up growth are also able to improve their cognitive outcomes compared to children whose status does not change?

Data and sample

Here, we use data from the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS), a rich panel data set consisting of four waves of data over a period of 14 years. We study a cohort of 1,642 children who were less than five years old in the first wave of the IFLS for whom we can observe health and cognitive outcomes in all four waves. Stunting is a good measure for long-term health and nutritional deprivation as it accumulates episodes of inadequate nutrient intake and disease over time. For cognitive outcomes we use Raven's coloured progressive matrices - a non-verbal test accepted as good measure for a person's capacity for systematic method of reasoning.