

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

**Specification: demographic trends in the United Kingdom since 1900: birth rates, death rates, family size, life expectancy, ageing population, and migration and globalisation.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline and explain the following concepts:

- Net migration
- Infant mortality rate
- Fertility rate
- Birth rate
- Death rate (mortality rate)

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate the nature, causes and significance of changes in these statistics since 1900.

**Demography** is the study of populations. Demographic statistics relate largely to **birth rates** and **death rates** but there are wide range of other trends that can impact population change, such as **fertility rates**, **childbearing trends** and **net migration**.

First a few definitions:

<b>Birth rate</b>	The number of live births per 1000 of the population per year.
<b>Fertility rate</b>	The average number of children per adult woman (this differs from the <b>completed family size</b> which is the average number of children for a woman born in a particular year).
<b>Infant mortality rate</b>	The number of deaths of children under the age of 1 per 1000 live births per year.
<b>Mortality rate</b>	The number of deaths per 1000 of the population per year. (also known as the <b>death rate</b> )
<b>Net migration</b>	The number of people moving into a country minus the number of people moving away.
<b>Life expectancy</b>	The average length of time someone today is expected to live; the average age a new-born baby born today would reach, assuming mortality rates remain the same as they are now.

And now some trends:

<b>Birth rate</b>	The birth rate has fallen significantly since the beginning of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. It has not been a steady decline though: there have been several fluctuations, particularly after the two World Wars, known as the <b>baby booms</b> (and people born at that time are referred to as <b>baby boomers</b> ).
<b>Fertility rate</b>	This fell dramatically from the late 19 <sup>th</sup> century with a both towards families having fewer children and more women choosing to delay childbearing or not to have children at all. There was an increase in the fertility rate after 2001, but still well below its historical numbers. It has decreased (very slowly) for the last few years, reaching 1.81 in 2016. It has been lower however, both in the 1970s and

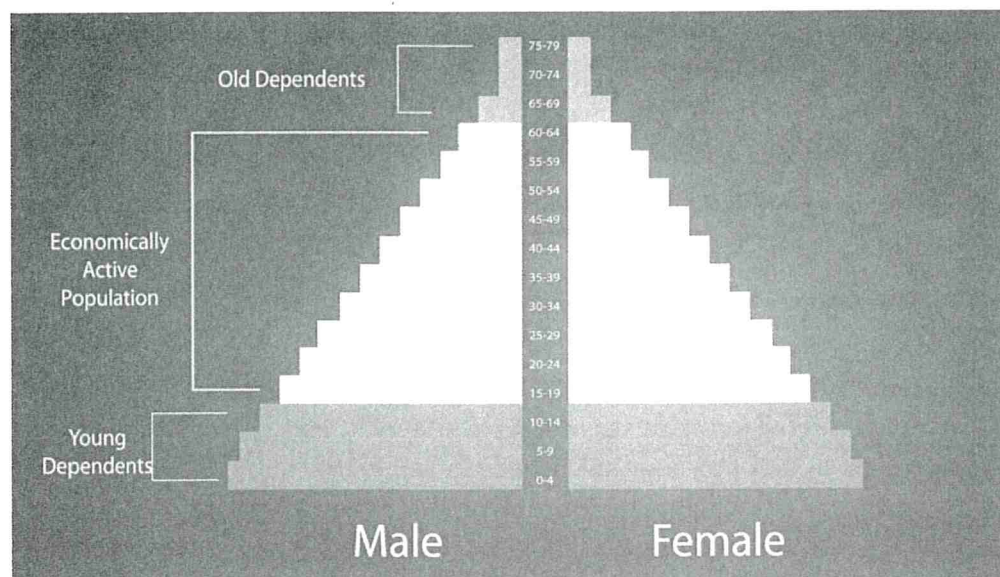
	in the late 1990s. Graphs of total fertility rate very clear show the baby booms.
<b>Infant mortality rate</b>	The infant mortality rate has fallen dramatically since the 19 <sup>th</sup> century. The initial impact of this was a large increase in the population, as birth rates remained high. Later birth rates began to fall. One reason for this was that, historically, birth rates were high because parents had <b>insurance children</b> because of the high infant mortality rates. There was a <b>lag</b> before birth rates adapted to reflect the new infant mortality rates (this is known as the <b>demographic transition model</b> ).
<b>Mortality rate</b>	The mortality/death rate has fallen dramatically over the years (since 1900). This is usually put down to improved public health, although <b>McKeown (1972)</b> argued that the main factor was improved nutrition, and therefore it was social and economic improvements that brought down the death rate, rather than health innovations. However, <b>Tranter (1996)</b> disputed this, arguing that about three quarters of the fall in the death rate between 1850 and 1970 could be put down to the elimination of preventable diseases.
<b>Net migration</b>	<p>Net migration in the UK increased significantly in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, having been very low prior to that, and indeed for many years the UK was net exporter of people. However, since 1945 there has been significant fluctuation. There are times when immigration and emigration are higher or lower, impacting net migration. There have still been years of net emigration (the most recent being 1992, the most statistically significant being the 1970s and early 1980s) but the norm since the middle of the 1980s is for more people to arrive than to leave.</p> <p>Increased immigration has happened in a number of waves in the post-war period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediately following the Second World War the government encouraged immigration from Commonwealth countries, to work in various industries. This did not lead to a major spike in net migration though because emigration to places like Australia and the US remained high.</li> <li>- In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was an increase in the number of people claiming asylum in the UK from a wide range of international conflicts.</li> <li>- From 2004, in particular, there was a significant increase in immigration from within the European Union and particularly from former Eastern bloc countries (like Poland) which had recently joined an expanded EU.</li> </ul>
<b>Life expectancy</b>	Current life expectancy is 79.2 for males and 83.1 for females. This has been steadily climbing for many years, although the rate of increase has slowed. In 1901, the life expectancy was 48.5 for males and 52.4 for females.

## The Ageing Population

Why do we have an ageing population? Birth rates and fertility rates have been falling; as have death rates. There is a demographic concept known as the **replacement level** which is that the total fertility rate needs to be 2.1 in order to replace the existing population. As, for some time now, this rate has been below 2, we are seeing an ageing profile. People are living longer life expectancy is growing, and there are fewer young people to support them.



There is a traditional “age pyramid” that demonstrates how the economically active section of society is able to pay for you and old dependents.



However, **Donald Hirsch (2005)** notes that this no longer reflects the reality in Western countries like the UK, where our ageing population is turning the pyramid on its head. While, in truth, the UK’s age pyramid is a long way from being turned on its head, it certainly doesn’t resemble a pyramid anymore, rather more a pillar (with a slight bulge in the middle and a point at the top). The concerns Hirsch raises, however, are important: if the UK’s population is ageing, how can it be paid for? How will the population manage to sustain a growing group of older adults? What happens when the “baby boomers” (those born shortly after the Second World War) are in their 80s and 90s? We don’t have long to wait! Hirsch argues that either people will have to work much longer or else they will need to pay a lot more in tax and in pension contributions.

Part of the issue with the the ageing population is the perception that the older members of the population are a burden. **Peter Townsend (1981)** argues that old age is a social construction that has been developed through a state-imposed age where people have to stop work and depend on (inadequate) pensions and therefore often find themselves in poverty. Having said that, older people do have more health problems and do have to change their working patterns (and eventually finish work altogether): not just because of a social construction.

The ageing population could have the following impacts on families and households:

- It increases the **dependency ratio** making it increasingly difficult for society in general and families in particular to meet older people’s needs.
- Problems relating to health and social care and paying for it. Increasingly care for the elderly is administered by local councils and largely self-funded, rather than provided by the NHS. The impact of an ageing population combines with cuts in local government funding to mean that increasingly families have to find this money themselves. These trends were partly in response to the **Griffiths Report** of 1988 which proposed an approach known as **Care in the Community**.
- This has an impact on whether older people are able to stay in their homes, or indeed whether they are able to pass them on to their children (and the impact of this on the next generation).
- While in the extended families of the early industrial family, a grandparent’s role was to assist with childcare, etc. greater life expectancy means there is a longer period when they are receiving care rather than providing it.



## Evaluating the idea that the ageing population is a significant problem

- Increasingly older people (particularly the **baby boomers**) are a prosperous section of society, rather than the dependent and poor section of society described by Townsend. They are often asset rich (having bought houses when property was cheap and having seen the value of that property increase at a rapid rate).
- In some ways this is just another problem caused by the ageing population: younger families are unable to get family homes comparable with those of their parents' generation because house prices have been pushed up by older adults remaining in their homes much longer and therefore more demand than supply for family homes.
- A demographic change that helps to reduce the impact of the ageing population on the dependency ratio is net migration: if there is a sufficient supply of working-age migrants paying taxes, this can compensate for the distortions of the population triangle.
- However, while migrant workers travelling without their families and returning home at a later date have this impact, those who travel with their families or who choose to remain here after retirement do not reduce the dependency ratio.
- On average, recent migrant women have a higher fertility rate than the average for the whole population. While this initially increases the dependency ratio, it may ultimately reduce the extent to which we have an ageing population (if net migration remains positive).
- **Jane Pilcher (1995 and 2010)** argues that the problems of an ageing population are as much to do with social policy decisions as demographic trends. Women live longer and therefore need pensions and later care for longer, but tend to have smaller pensions (for a range of reasons). Pensioner poverty is largely confined to those who were also in poverty, or at least on comparably low incomes, before they retired. As such, social policies designed to undo the damaging impact of gender and social class inequality would go a long way to mitigating the problems associated with an ageing population.
- **Andrew Blaikie (1999)** takes a postmodern viewpoint arguing that the experience and image of retirement and old age has changed dramatically in postmodern society. When society was based around production, there came a point when older adults' contribution was deemed no longer of value. But they remain valuable as *consumers* throughout their retirement and therefore in a postmodern consumer society they are an important demographic. They have disposable income and leisure time. Products are marketed directly at them, especially those that seek to reverse the ageing process and rejuvenate them.

### Links to Core Themes

- Themes relating to **stratification** and **social differentiation** are inextricably linked to demographics for sociologists, because demographic trends are not merely natural changes like those that might occur in the animal kingdom, but are clear responses to social change. Issues like high birth rates and high infant mortality rates link to experiences of poverty, just as reduced mortality rates link to the alleviation of poverty through public healthcare and welfare. Because of this unquestionable link to **social policy** there is also a link to **power**.