

Introduction

In the 1980s population growth in the arid areas of eastern and southern Jordan continued to be high and would have been even greater had it not been for significant out-migration. Fertility levels, although declining slowly, remained very high. Unlike the urban areas of Jordan, inter-generational wealth flows appear to still be from children to parents (Maani, 1990) making it logical in Caldwell's (1982) terms for couples to maintain high fertility and to seek large families. At the end of the 1980s, opportunities for emigration disappeared, and net return migration from the oil economies was recorded, producing new population pressures in this arid environment.

This paper will investigate these ideas from two recent surveys carried out by the authors in association with other Jordanian and British colleagues from an inter-disciplinary research team, involved in a much wider research and development project in the Badia region of Jordan. This project was organised by the Jordanian Higher Council for Science and Technology and the Royal Geographical Society, London. The first survey described in this paper was undertaken in the eastern Badia early in 1993, and provides the opportunity for a very up to date analysis of the demographic regime of this most arid of environments. Analysis of aspects of this data set is still being undertaken and it is hoped to extend and deepen analysis of this population in the future. A second survey reported in this paper was undertaken by the authors in southern Jordan in 1990/1. This study specifically addressed Caldwell's ideas, by investigating family structure and wealth flow directions in relation to fertility attitudes.

Fertility Decline in the Arab World : Some Pointers in the Literature

Fargues (1989) has explored the way in which four features - the near universality of marriage, the traditional ease of divorce, the institution of purdah and the effect of polygamy on age differentials between spouses - account for the culturally specific nature of Arab fertility behaviour. While in general these forces account for the persistence of very high fertility across the Arab world, Fargues notes the presence of clear cut regional differences within the Arab world in terms of fertility trends. Fertility remains much higher in the countries of the Arabian peninsula, including Jordan, than it is in the Maghreb or Egypt. From an examination of the transitions in the age at marriage and in female education, he concludes that all Arab societies are in the process of moving to lower fertility levels, but that regional variations remain strong with regard to the transition in familial roles. One surrogate of this is the level of female participation in the labour force, which Fargues (1989, 168) notes maps out a pattern which is almost the inverse to that of fertility rates. This should not be interpreted in the narrow way that Fargues does, leading to the erroneous conclusion that barriers to women's entry to the labour market remain the fundamental cause of spatial inequalities in fertility patterns. Instead it should be taken as an indicator of the need for wider research on the changing roles of both women and children within the family, and indeed of family structure itself, as an important key to understanding trends in fertility.

The now classic statement of Caldwell (1982) on the causes of fertility decline provide one line of approach to the topic. Caldwell has suggested that in so-called 'primitive' and 'traditional' societies there is a net wealth flow from children to parents, making it illogical to restrict fertility