

Foreword

Fertility transition is an important and visible demographic event in the second half of the 20th century at the global level. A large number of studies have found that fertility decline has been low or moderate in most parts of the world except in a few pockets. Considering India's economic, cultural and geographical diversity, the fertility patterns differ significantly across the states, with a clear north-south divide. The 2001 census indicates that Karnataka is lagging behind among the South Indian states with regard to demographic transition. This monograph is the outcome of a research undertaken by Dr. T.V. Sekher and Prof. K.N.M. Raju of the Population Research Centre of the Institute. One of the objectives of the study was to understand the fertility patterns at the village level and among various social groups. Besides census data, sample registration system, demographic surveys and other official statistics, a few micro-level qualitative field studies were also undertaken in this project.

The study highlights the existing regional variations in health and demographic indicators in Karnataka. Fertility decline has been faster in southern and coastal regions of the state, and at a tardy pace in backward northern districts that are characterised by low literacy, low female age at marriage, poor health infrastructure and low status of women. To what extent social development is instrumental for demographic and fertility transition is both a research and policy question. To a large extent, the future demographic transition in Karnataka depends on the overall development of the backward districts. If the state can make substantial efforts for the improvements in the quality of life in northern Karnataka districts, the fertility transition may be sooner than expected. The findings of this research may be of interest not only to demographers, but also to social scientists, NGOs, policy makers and health and family welfare administrators.

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