

ASSIGNMENT ONE

Coursework Value:

Essay Topic

"Birth rates are falling in developed countries. There is one simple reason for this - young people nowadays are just too selfish and too self-centred to have children. And this is particularly true of women".

ASSIGNMENT 1:

To what extent do you agree with this view? Support your argument with relevant readings and evidence.

Sample essay

Introduction

Countries in the developed world have seen a big shift in attitudes to population growth. Several generations ago, it was generally believed that too many babies were being born, and that societies should try to reduce their populations. Nowadays, however, the concern is the reverse - that birthrates are falling too low and that urgent action is needed to encourage people to have more children. But what are the causes of this trend? And how much are the attitudes and lifestyles of young people to blame? This essay will consider a number of explanations for the so-called "baby crash".

The argument

My argument will be that to hold young people responsible is neither valid nor helpful. The best explanation, I believe, is to be found in the condition of increased economic insecurity faced by the young.

Claims & evidence

The birth rate has fallen dramatically in many parts of the world. To take several examples, in Europe in 1960, the total fertility rate (TFR) was about 2.6 births per female, but in 1996 it had fallen to 1.4 (Chesnais, 1998). In many Asian countries, similar declines have been experienced. Japan now has a birthrate of only about 1.3, and Hong Kong's has fallen to below 1.0 (Ichimura and Ogawa, 2000). A TFR of below 2.0 means that a country's population is not replaced, and thus there is a net population decline. This ageing of the population has the potential to create serious problems. Fewer children being born means that in the long term, a smaller proportion of the populace will be economically productive, whilst a larger proportion will be old and economically dependent - in the form of pension, health care and other social services. Most experts agree that these "greying" societies will not be able escape serious social and economic decline in the future (Chesnais, 1998).

The issue

Summarising
ideas

So what are the causes of this trend and what can be done to stop it?

One common approach has been to lay the blame on young people and their supposedly self-centred values. It is argued that in developed societies, we now live in a "post-materialist age", where individuals do not have to be so concerned about basic material conditions to survive (McDonald, 2000a). Thus people, especially the young, have become more focussed on the values of self-realisation and the satisfaction of personal preferences, at the expense of traditional values like raising a family. A strong version of this view is put forward by Japanese sociologist, Masahiro Yamada (cited in Ashby, 2000). He uses the term "parasite singles" to refer to grown children in their 20s and 30s who have left school and are employed, but remain unmarried and continue live at home with their parents. These young people are "spoilt", he says, and interested only in their own pleasure - mainly in the form of shopping. According to Yamada, it is this focus on self, more than any other factor, that is responsible for Japan's languishing birth rate (Ashby, 2000). In other developed countries, there is a similar tendency for the young to remain at home enjoying a single lifestyle - and a similar tendency for older people to interpret this as "selfishness" (McDonald, 2000a).

Critiquing
ideas

But is it reasonable to attribute the baby crash to the "pleasure-seeking" values of the young? The problem with this view is that whenever young people are surveyed about their attitudes to family, not only do they say they want to have children, they also express preferences for family sizes that are, on average, above the replacement level (McDonald, 2000a). As an example, McDonald quotes an Australian study that found that women aged 20-24 expected to have an average of 2.33 children in their lifetime. Findings like this suggest that the values of the young are not at all incompatible with the idea of having a family. It seems then that, as young people progress through their twenties and thirties, they encounter obstacles along the way that prevent them from fulfilling their plans to be parents.

Returning to
the issue

Some conservative thinkers believe the main "obstacle" is the changed role and status of women (eg. Norton, 2003). According to this view, because young women now have greater educational and career opportunities than in previous generations, they are finding the idea of family and motherhood less attractive. Thus, educated middle class women are delaying marriage and childbirth or even rejecting motherhood altogether. It is claimed that women's improved status - which may be a good thing in itself - has had the unfortunate consequence of threatening population stability.

Another
example of
critique

But there are several problems with this argument. For one, the lowest TFRs in Europe are found in Spain and Italy (around 1.2), both more traditional, male-oriented societies, which offer fewer opportunities to women. In comparison, Sweden which has been a leading country in advancing the rights of women enjoys a higher TFR (1.6 in 1996) - even though it is still below replacement. Chesnais (1998: p. 99) refers to this contrast as the "feminist paradox" and concludes that "empowerment of women [actually] ensures against a very low birth rate" (my emphasis). Another problem with trying to link improved education levels for women to low birth rates is that fertility in developed countries seems to be declining across all education and class levels. In a recent survey of Australian census data, Birrell (2003) found that, "whereas the non-tertiary-educated

group was once very fertile, its rate of partnering is now converging towards that of tertiary educated women".

We can summarise the discussion to this point as follows:

Young people today, in spite of what's said about their values, still express a desire to have children. However, few end up having as many as they say they would like.

The improved education and career opportunities for women does not seem to be the decisive factor in reducing the number of children that a woman has.

Restating the argument

These conclusions suggest that there must be something else involved. Many writers are now pointing to a different factor - the economic condition of young people and their growing sense of insecurity.

Peter McDonald (2000a) in his article 'Low fertility in Australia: Evidence, causes and policy responses' discusses some of the things that a couple will consider when they are thinking of having a child. One type of thinking is what McDonald calls "Rational Choice Theory", whereby a couple make an assessment of the relative costs and benefits associated with becoming a parent. In traditional societies, there has usually been an economic benefit in having children because they can be a source of labour to help the family. In developed societies, however, children now constitute an economic cost, and so, it is argued, the benefits are more of a psychological kind - for example, enjoying the status of being a parent, having baby who will be fun and will grow up to love you, having offspring who will carry on the family name etc. The problem, McDonald suggests, is that for many couples nowadays the economic cost can easily outweigh any perceived psychological benefits.

Providing evidence for the argument

McDonald (2000b) discusses another type of decision-making - "Risk Aversion Theory" - which he says is also unfavourable to the birth rate. According to this theory, when we make important decisions in our lives, if we perceive uncertainty in our environment, we usually err on the side of safety in order to avert risk. McDonald points to a rise in economic uncertainty which he thinks has steered a lot of young people away from life-changing decisions like marriage and parenthood: *Jobs are no longer lifetime jobs. There is a strong economic cycle of booms and busts. Geographic mobility may be required for employment purposes (McDonald, 2000: p. 15).*

Birrell (2003) focuses on increased economic uncertainty for men. Referring to the situation in Australia, he discusses men's reluctance to form families in terms of perceived costs and risks:

Many men are poor - in 2001, 42 per cent of men aged 25-44 earned less than \$32,000 a year. Only two-thirds of men in this age group were in full-time work. Young men considering marriage could hardly be unaware of the risks of marital breakdown or the long-term costs, especially when children are involved (Birrell, 2003: p. 12).

And Yuji Genda (2000) in Japan, responding to Yamada's analysis of "parasite singles", argues that the failure of young Japanese to leave home and start families is not due to self-indulgence, but is an understandable response to increasingly difficult economic circumstances. Genda (2000) notes that it is the young who have had to bear the brunt of the decade long restructuring of the Japanese economy, with youth unemployment hovering around 10% and a marked reduction in secure full-time jobs for the young.

Young people around the world seem to have an increasing perception of economic uncertainty and contemplate something their parents would have found impossible - a decline in living standards over their lifetime. According to a 1990 American survey, two thirds of respondents in the 18-29 age group thought it would be more difficult for their generation to live as comfortably as previous generations (cited in Newman, 2000: p.505). Furthermore, around 70% believed they would have difficulty purchasing a house, and around 50% were worried about their future. Findings like these suggest that

the younger generation may be reluctant to have children, not because they have more exciting things to do, but because they have doubts about their capacity to provide as parents.

Concluding

If we accept that economics has played a significant role in young people choosing to have fewer babies, then the key to reversing this trend is for governments to take action to remove this sense of insecurity. A number of policy approaches have been suggested. Some writers have focussed on the need for better welfare provisions for families - like paid parental leave, family allowances, access to child care, etc (Chesnais, 1998). Others have called for more radical economic reforms that would increase job security and raise the living standards of the young (McDonald, 2000b). It is hard to know what remedies are needed. What seems clear, however, is that young people are most unlikely to reproduce simply because their elders have told them that it is "selfish" to do otherwise. Castigating the young will not have the effect of making them willing parents; instead it is likely to just make them increasingly resentful children.

Structuring the essay Editing

References

Ashby, J. (2000). Parasite singles: Problem or victims? The Japan Times. 7/04/02.

Birrell, B. (2003). Fertility crisis: why you can't blame the blokes. The Age 17/01/03 p. 14.

Chesnais, J-C. (1998). Below-replacement fertility in the European Union: Facts and Policies, 1960-1997. Review of Population and Social Policy, No 7, pp. 83-101.

Genda, Y. (2000). A debate on "Japan's Dependent Singles", Japan Echo, June, 2000, pp. 47-56

Ichimura, S. and N. Ogawa (2000). Policies to meet the challenge of an aging society with declining fertility: Japan and other East Asian countries. Paper presented at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Los Angeles, USA.

McDonald, P. (2000a). Low fertility in Australia: Evidence, causes and policy responses. People and Place, No 8:2. pp 6-21.

Available: <http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/pnp/free/pnpv8n1/> [Accessed 10/5/03]

McDonald, P. (2000b). The "toolbox" of public policies to impact on fertility - a global view. Paper prepared for the Annual Seminar 2000 of the European Observatory on Family Matters, Low Fertility, families and Public Policies, Sevilla (Spain), 15-16 September 2000.

Norton, A. (2003). Student debt: A HECS on fertility? Issue Analysis No 3. Melbourne: Centre for Independent Studies.

Newman, D. (2000). Sociology: Exploring the architecture of everyday life. California: Pine Forge.

ASSIGNMENT TWO

Use the sample essay below to complete the following task;

You are required to write 450 words Literary Analysis Essay that focuses on your critical observations of the sample essay provided.

The purpose of a literary analysis essay is to carefully examine and sometimes evaluate a work of literature or an aspect of a work of literature. As with any analysis, this requires you to break the subject down into its component parts. Examining the different elements of a piece of literature is not an end in itself but rather processes to help you better appreciate and understand the work of literature/point of view as a whole.

GUIDELINES

Writing is the sharpened, focused expression of thought and study. As you develop your writing skills, you will also improve your perceptions and increase your critical abilities. Writing ultimately boils down to the development of an idea. Your objective in writing a literary analysis essay is to convince the person reading your essay that you have supported the idea you are developing.

This is an essay. An essay provides opinion/perspective and is organized

- Your essay must cover the topic you are writing about.
- Your essay must have a central idea (stated in your thesis) that governs its development.
- Your essay must be organized so that every part contributes something to the reader's understanding of the central idea.

Include:

TITLE OF YOUR ESSAY - It is essential that you give your essay a title that is descriptive of the approach you are taking in your paper. Just as you did in your introductory paragraph, try to get the reader's attention. **Using only the title of the literary work you are examining is unsatisfactory.**

THESIS STATEMENT – What is your opinion? State what you are writing about or set out to prove.

EXPLANATIONS AND TEXTUAL EVIDENCE - The substance of each of your developmental paragraphs (the body of your essay) will be the explanations, summaries, paraphrases, specific details, and direct quotations you need to support and develop the more general statement you have made in your topic sentence.

RECOMMENDATIONS- Suggest actions you would take or how you would correct shortcoming you identified. You can use theory as well as cite sources to reinforce the validity of your recommendations.

CONCLUSION- Your concluding paragraph might restate the thesis in different words, summarize the main points you have made, or make a relevant comment about the literary work you are analyzing, but from a different perspective. **Do not introduce a new topic in your conclusion.**

REFERENCES – List the sources you have cited - drawn evidences or examples from or presented- in your work.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS!!!!

- You are writing an essay and are expected to yourself follow all the rules learnt today in class.
- Graded Assignment: 10% of the coursework.
- Structure the essay as directed using Introduction, Body of paragraphs, recommendations, conclusion and references.

Remember this is a literary essay for the purpose of observing and commenting on someone's work. Your essay should provide valuable critique/evaluation of the work. Here are some suggested areas that you could address:

1. Identify the type of essay
2. What is the thesis statement?
3. Is the opening paragraph appropriate and interesting?
4. Do his examples, details, explanation follow a logical order?
5. Did he provide appropriate examples and evidence to support his claims?
6. What improvements would you recommend?
7. Was his conclusion effective? **Validate your reasoning.**
8. How would you rate this essay? **Validate your scores, citing examples.**
9. Did he appropriately reference his work?