

Abstract

Fertility Preferences in Thailand

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Fertility levels in Thailand have fallen to levels that would have been unthinkable only two decades ago. The Total Fertility Rate, over six in the 1960s, had dropped to below replacement level by the end of the 1980s, and by 1996 was slightly below two. Over the last several years there has been an active debate over the future course of Thai fertility. Those who rely on past trends to project fertility suggest that fertility will continue to decline. Others, who note the importance of a balanced sex composition of children to Thai parents, argue that two children are the lower limit of fertility decline. This paper uses data from a recent contraceptive and fertility survey to document trends and differentials in desired fertility desires of Thai married couples. The data indicate that fertility desires have essentially remained unchanged during the 1990s. On average, currently married women aged 15-49 in 1996 desired 2.4 children and women aged 15-29 desired 2.1 children. There was little variation in desired number of children, especially among younger women, by region of residence, rural/urban place of residence, education or occupation. Approximately 39 percent of women desired one child of each sex. A further 27 percent of women, most of whom wanted two children, had no sex preference. The results support the argument that little further decline can be expected in marital fertility in Thailand, with the desire for a balanced sex composition of children playing a role in setting a lower limit for fertility decline.