

Education can offset impact of low fertility trap

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Credit: http://news.anu.edu.au/files/2013/04/fertility_1600-440x295.jpg

A smarter, better educated population may help offset the impacts of declining fertility rates in East Asia, and provide lessons for Australia, according to a new report from the Australian National University's Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute.

In his article titled "Low Fertility: An East Asian Dilemma," published in the March edition of *East Asia Forum Quarterly*, ANU demographer Professor Peter McDonald examines the challenges facing countries with

very low fertility rates, including Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

"While there are some short term economic benefits of a smaller population, in the longer term, when a country's fertility rate drops the size of the [labour force](#) falls and the population ages dramatically, which can result in a range of social and [economic challenges](#)," he said.

Low fertility rates occur partly due to the barriers women face in combining work with [family responsibilities](#).

"This is particularly an issue in advanced East Asian economies because of the long hours of work that are expected, and for those returning to the workforce, the difficulty of finding suitable part-time work."

Once in place, low fertility can be difficult to reverse, creating a 'low fertility trap' says Professor McDonald.

"It has been suggested that it may be possible to offset these impacts by creating a population that is smaller but smarter, by increasing the focus on education. We know good education has positive effects on human health, wealth and wellbeing, and is linked to higher life expectancy and economic growth.

"Older people with higher levels of education are healthier than their less educated peers; they also work longer, and contribute to society in other ways."

Professor McDonald says countries can also encourage higher [fertility rates](#) by making it easier for women to re-enter the [labour market](#) after they've had children, and by creating a [social environment](#) that is more supportive to families with children.

"The lesson for Australia from countries like Japan is that if we don't get family-friendly policy right here, we may face a similar low fertility problem, which will compound the challenges we already face with our ageing population."

Provided by Australian National University

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