

**"The Future of Human Reproduction"**  
**Professor David Coleman**  
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Professor Coleman said that as societies mature they show a typical demographic transition. In the 1700's the birth rate in England and Wales was high but it was matched by a high death rate, giving population stability. However there was a transition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with declining death rates the population rose markedly. There was a further decrease in birth rate in the 1950s with the growing availability of birth control and the average family dropped to under two children. However, the birth rate has increased in the last decade leading to a projected population increase, because women have delayed having children until they are older, and are now catching up and immigration of woman from societies with an expectation of large families. The more developed countries, which have not attracted large scale immigration, such as Russia and Japan, are showing a decline in population.

The fertility rate of a society represents a balance between biological, social and economic pressures. On average all woman have shown a remarkable stability in their ideal choice of family size. Since 2000, this has stayed at two to a maximum of three children.

There is a strong biological urge to have and to nurture offspring. This is despite the health and cost of bearing and looking after children. This urge is stronger in women than men.

Pressures from society can be very strong in determining family size. In the 1950s, only 5% of children were born outside of marriage, but now the figure is 46% and rising. There has also been growth in self-indulgence as opposed to family and social commitment. A higher proportion of women have chosen not to commit themselves to family life. Another change is that many men are sharing domestic chores as both partners are working outside the home during the day.

Thus, the trend is of societies progressing from the original state of high birth, high death to one where the population is managed by educated woman. However there are still societies at the initial stage of this development, notably in Africa.

*Given on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> November at the Royal Agricultural College*