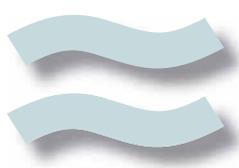




RIDING THE POPULATION WAVES



By Philippa Stevenson

Nothing is more certain than change

Over the last 25 years, variable rates of growth in New Zealand's population - currently about 4.1 million - have created waves of change for the whole population as well as for individual age groups. Volatile international migration, changing fertility patterns and complex age structures have all had their impact.

To study such demographic change, its causes and consequences, Professor Ian Pool, the country's leading demographer, established Waikato University's Population Studies Centre in 1982. Currently the centre and its affiliate, the Migration Research Group, are undertaking about \$7 million worth of research projects running until 2009.

The PSC has internationally acknowledged expertise in both 'pure' demography and in population studies. For the uninitiated, demography is the scientific study of the size, distribution and composition of human population and the factors that determine changes in population.

Population studies - a broader term - is also concerned with the consequences of population change such as the economic, social, cultural, health and environmental effects. This Waikato Magazine special looks at three issues - migration, families and ageing.

The coming and going of people

Migration is not a clearly defined, one-off event for people, and demographers, too, consider it a rather 'messy' thing. Most people change their place of residence at least once, and often many times during their lives. Many move over a long distance at some stage. Others return to places where they lived before. A lot of people have homes in more than one country.

Migration is also subject to considerable public misunderstanding and political manipulation.

The PSC and its affiliate, the Migration Research Group (MRG), have been researching aspects of migration within, into and out of New Zealand for more than 30 years.

Trans-Tasman migration, migration of Pacific peoples, Māori migration, immigration from Europe, emigration of New Zealanders, the 'Asian invasion', and the migration of refugees from Asia, Africa and the Middle East have all been examined.

Return migration of New Zealanders is a current hot topic. The Government is keen to attract skilled expatriates who are part of what has become known as the New Zealand diaspora.

In fact, research by Jacqueline Lidgard showed through the 1990s and into the new century that return migration was more common than often appreciated. New Zealand's emigrating citizens are not abandoning the country. Every year up to 25,000 return - the equivalent of half the current annual immigration target.

With terms such as 'astronaut families' and 'parachute kids' entering our vocabulary in the 1990s as pejorative descriptions of types of migration from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, Chinese migrants have been subjected to a lot of political and public comment.

But research by Elsie Ho on the family contexts of migration has debunked some of the myths and negative stereotypes about recent Chinese migration.

The flows of Pacific peoples into New Zealand have also been the source of much adverse political and public comment, especially with regard to 'overstayers'. Similarly, research by Richard Bedford on the circulation of Pacific people within what are best described as 'transnational' communities has deepened our understanding of the strong connections between New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours.

Besides describing and analysing migration flows, the PSC has also delved deeply into causes and consequences of migration. Often-cited articles by PSC director Jacques Poot show how trans-Tasman migration can be seen as a kind of internal migration in Australasia, with New Zealand being, in a sense, just another state in Australasia.

Differences between real incomes, in origin and destination, employment opportunities and the declining costs of international travel (in real terms it costs a third less to cross the Tasman than it did 40 years ago) are all important migration determinants.

Nonetheless, between 1800 and 1960 New Zealand gained more people than it lost as a result of trans-Tasman migration. Many of New Zealand's early 'European' immigrants came from Australia and not directly from Europe.



The Population Studies Centre:
people studying people.

Since the mid-1960s, however, the trans-Tasman flow has been to Australia's advantage and by 2001 over 400,000 New Zealand citizens were living in the 'lucky country'.

Trans-Tasman migration has also produced its share of myths about the 'kiwi dole bludger', the 'backdoor' migrants from the Pacific and Asia, and the 'financial drain' New Zealanders have imposed on the Australian social security system.

Research on population movements between New Zealand and Australia by Ian Pool, Ruth Farmer, Richard Bedford, Jacqueline Lidgard, Jacques Poot and Elsie Ho has helped to debunk some of the myths about kiwi 'slackers' and 'spongers'.

The impact of immigration on New Zealand is also hotly debated. Because there are so many dimensions to the impact - economic, social, cultural, environmental - answers aren't simple, but PSC staff have made significant scientific contributions.

The landmark 1988 book, *International Migration and the New Zealand Economy - A long Run Perspective*, by Jacques Poot, the late Bryan Philpott of Victoria University, and Ganesh Nana showed when and how immigration contributes to economic growth.

A 2004 scoping paper on the economics of immigration by Jacques Poot and Bill Cochrane has been the impetus for a new government-sponsored, cross-departmental research programme on the economics of immigration that will be developed over the next three years.

The growth, composition and movement of New Zealand's Māori population have also been the subject of a very considerable body of research.

Ian Pool's seminal work, *Te Iwi Māori*, the only definitive account of Māori population dynamics, is Waikato University's most significant contribution to New Zealand's literature on the topic.

Māori graduate and postgraduate students have picked up on many of the issues raised in Pool's work, producing a very rich and challenging analysis of many aspects of contemporary as well as historical Māori demography.



The transition of Māori from a rural to an essentially urban population has been recently revisited, and research is currently being carried out into the contemporary movement dynamics of Māori both within New Zealand as well as to, from and within Australia.

Linda Waimarie Nikora and Ngahuia Te Awakotuku have joined with Bernard Guerin to investigate a Māori community with very strong out-migration, by working closely with the community.

Refugee migration has contributed significantly to New Zealand's contemporary cultural diversity. Research by Ruth Farmer on refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as the early flows from Iran and Iraq, was an important focus of the PSC's research in the 1980s.

More recently, Pauline and Bernard Guerin have added a new dimension to the work of the MRG through their intensive, community-based research on the adaptation of Somali refugees in Hamilton and Auckland.

The very strong community focus of refugee research ensures the findings have particular relevance for the participants and the Guerins are determined their research will benefit the communities they are working with.

The family at risk?

Despite the high political and media profile accorded immigration, fertility still drives New Zealand's population growth.

For instance, from 1986 to 2001 only the Auckland, Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough regions gained by international migration.

The PSC's analysis of fertility takes it beyond the narrow demographic question of births - the number, rate, parent type by age, ethnicity etc - into questions of household and family formation, structures and forms.

Transitions - long-term fundamental changes in demographic phenomena - are central to much of the PSC's research and one of the most extensively researched has been the shift in societies from a combination of high fertility and high mortality to one of low fertility and low mortality.

In New Zealand, fertility is now slightly below the replacement level of an average of 2.1 births per woman.

Studying cohorts - groups of people born at the same time - the PSC has shown that since the 1970s the birth rate has been on a downward trend except for a baby 'blip' around 1990 primarily caused by 1960s baby-boomers having their own children.

By the middle of the 1990s this 'blip' led to increasing primary school rolls followed recently by rising secondary school rolls, and is expected to lead to a bulge in university rolls toward the end of the decade.

Large cohorts can be quickly followed by small ones and vice versa, which can cause problems for policy-makers and, though not unique to New Zealand, the PSC has been at the forefront internationally in studying the phenomenon.

Joint research with other population centres has led to a forthcoming book, *Riding the Waves*, co-edited by Ian Pool.

The long term decline in fertility means New Zealand is certainly on its way to becoming a much older society, although not as quickly as countries such as Japan or Italy, which have very low birth rates.

Our replacement level fertility may become more of an issue if it turns out to be due to temporary factors such as large numbers of people delaying childbearing to their late thirties. A fundamental downward trend may follow.

Now, though, our baby 'blip' and current fertility level means we still have a relatively youthful population in which the 'total dependency ratio' (the number of children and retirees divided by people of working age) is predicted to decline for another decade before it starts increasing rapidly.

Interesting questions arise around when people marry or form unions and have children, and when families dissolve through widowhood, separation or divorce or as children leave home. Contraception and sterilisation are also factors.

Internationally, there is a longstanding tradition of national sample surveys to collect this information, typically as a part of the official data collection process. New Zealand has never done this.

Because of the lack of official data, in 1995 the PSC launched New Zealand's first national survey on fertility and family formation. The New Zealand Women: Family, Employment and Education survey polled 3000 women nationwide, with extra sampling of Māori.

The costly undertaking produced a database that allows direct comparison with other developed countries. A follow-up survey was conducted in 2001.

Recently, Arunachalam Dharmalingam, in association with Portal Consulting, has followed up the surveys on a key issue - the work-life balance.

This work has shown that many families are vulnerable to long working hours and both partners have to be employed simply to have a minimal standard of wellbeing.

Despite suggestions to the contrary the research shows that the New Zealand family is not 'self-destructing' but is definitely vulnerable because of the global economic forces the country is exposed to, and the demise of the traditional New Zealand welfare state.

The PSC's research on fertility and the family has produced large numbers of papers in scientific journals, a number of theses and four monographs. High-quality data is now available that puts New Zealand alongside more than 25 other countries with which direct comparisons can be made.

Now, a fifth much longer and more exhaustive book on the history of the New Zealand family, 1840-2004, co-authored by Ian Pool, Arunachalam Dharmalingam and Janet Sceats is being edited. It draws heavily on all sources of data, especially the sample surveys, and emphasises cross-national comparisons.

PSC members have also spoken to a wide range of audiences. There has been a great deal of interest, for example, from family law practitioners, and the PSC helped in the preparation of briefing papers for the Family Commission.

● WHEN I'M 65

The ageing of New Zealand society is another major theme in the PSC's research.

The basic trends of our ageing society have been long recognised. The population aged 65 and over is expected to increase from 12 per cent in 2001, to 20 per cent in 2026 and to 26 per cent in 2051.

This brings major policy implications but an in-depth understanding of what it could mean for housing, living arrangements, participation in work, attitudes, hopes, support networks, location, life satisfaction and so on still needs to be developed.

Last year, the PSC obtained a \$4.4 million Foundation for Research, Science and Technology grant for a research programme called *Enhancing Wellbeing in an Ageing Society (EWAS)*. This research is being done in partnership with the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit, a community-based research organisation located in Lower Hutt.

Jacques Poot is directing the Waikato research with a group that includes Waikato experts in gerontology Peggy Koopman-Boyden, Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Bevan Grant.

The multi-disciplinary focus is a unique aspect of the EWAS research as is its strong links with major stakeholders and end-users, such as the Ministry of Social Development, Treasury and community organisations.

The PSC is assessing the future population using sophisticated computer modelling and by nationwide surveying of the 65-plus and the current mid-life group (45-64 years).

Focus groups and in-depth interviews are also part of the research programme, in addition to case studies of Māori, Pacific and Asian community groups.

This research is just beginning but international findings point to major implications of ageing for the health sector, financial transfers between generations, the labour market, income levels and support systems. Some myths, such as that living longer means a greater number of years of ill health, however, are being dispelled.

An increase in life expectancy is an aspect of structural population ageing. By around 2026, men's life expectancy at birth is expected to increase to 81.5 years from 77 years and for women to 85.4 years from 81.6 years.

For the first time in human history gains in life expectancy at birth are now almost entirely due to improvements in survival at the oldest ages instead of at younger ones.

Worldwide, there is much debate about longevity and particularly about whether the trend in increasing life expectancy can continue. The discussion has drawn on observations relating to Pakeha achieving high levels of life expectancy at the beginning of the 20th century - research presented by Ian Pool to the prestigious Max Planck Institute in Germany in 2002.

The PSC's long term interest in mortality has broadened to the study of population health more generally and since the early 1990s its research focus has turned toward the links between health and survival.

When the focus is turned on the PSC itself, one thing seems assured. The continuing fascination of population change not only for researchers but also for policy and decision-makers seems certain to ensure the PSC has a long, healthy and interesting life.

