Understanding social change

Objectives:

1) To create a research project loosely based on the study proposed by W. M. Williams, A West Country Village: Ashworthy: Family, Kinship and Land.

2) Concentrate on the sociological issues that arise from demographic change in a city community, including family, kinship, class and age.

3) Look at Exeter's population change over the past 20 years.

4) Research Methods:

i) Conduct a questionnaire to be carried out in Exeter.

ii) Collect secondary data relevant to the project (e. g. census data)

iii) Map the shops and services in the high street to gain an understanding of what age groups Exeter wants to attract.

iv) Find out if there is a strong sense of community by finding out what clubs and societies are available.

v) Look at religion in the community.

2001 Census Results for South West Region

From the census data one was able to see that, during the last 20 years the South West's population has grown by over half a million, the fastest growing region in this period. However out of all the places in the south west that have experienced demographic change Exeter has experienced relatively low population growth of about 10. 5% The South West has also shown a

growth in its 'retirement' population by a fifth since 1991. The South West has acquired an additional 10, 000 residents of retirement age but at the same time has experienced a loss of 3, 800 people of working age and a loss of 13, 000 people under sixteen.

Sociological factors to investigate when looking at the effects of demographic change on the community of Exeter

Secondary data is quite important to use alongside the first hand research. For example census information and settlement maps would show how the area has changed over time. By mapping the shops and services available on the high street in Exeter one will be able to see which order they are, i. e. 'high order' e. g. doctors, dentists, cloths shops, or 'low order' e. g. bakery, grocers, butchers. The more high order shops and services available, the more likely the community will not need to travel outside of the city therefore making it more self sustained and a high probability of having a good community spirit. The types of shops and services available will also give a clue as to what age groups Exeter's retailers and services are aiming to attract.

One could find out Exeter's sphere of influence by asking where people travel from to get to Exeter. From this information it would allow one to then find out if the influx of 'visitors' that Exeter attracts have an effect on the community of Exeter.

To see if Exeter has a strong sense of community and family and kinship systems, one could look at a number of different factors. One could find out what clubs and societies are available to the residents of Exeter. For

example Exeter has its own football team, 'Exeter City'. Therefore you could ask people what football team they support and also how many Exeter football games they attend each year. One could also find out who the clubs and societies are aimed at. This would give a clue as to the age group of the individuals who join the clubs/societies, which would therefore show for example if the community spirit is stronger in the older members of Exeter's community as compared to the younger members. Another important factor is religion, as it is an important medium of bringing a community together and uniting them.

The questionnaire should attempt to find out more about the change in Exeter's population and it's effects on family and kinship. Some of the key areas that should be covered in the questionnaire are, the age of the individual, whether they are married or divorced, single parents, and the number of children per household. A way of assessing kinship ties is by finding out if the house of the individual has room for relatives to stay. Also find out the individuals' place of birth, how long they have been living in Exeter, if they have family living within ten minutes travelling distance, how often they see their relatives and also if they have children do they use a family member to baby-sit them or a friend? Also find out the type of job industry the individual is in, primary, secondary, tertiary or quaternary, as this would show a change in work patterns between the young and the old. Transport andcommunicationare also key factors in keeping family and kinship bonds strong.

Another issue to be looked at is, does the large student population have an effect on family and kinship structures in Exeter? Also by finding out the

number of local people that attend the university compared to the number of people who live outside of Devon this would show if family and kinship bonds are less strong amongst the younger members of society.

Other factors that should be taken into account when conducting this project are, to find out whether Exeter has an ageing population. This would effect family and kinship systems as the young for example may move away to find better jobs oreducationi. e. university. One could also see how the change in attitudes towards women in the work place has had an effect on the social structure. Also the change in industry could attribute towards the social structure of the community of Exeter.

In Britain, the census provides useful demographic information that can highlight areas for particular study. The 1991 census report on migration shows that Devon seems to lose more young people (20-28 year olds) than it gains through in-migration. At the same time many older people migrate into the county than leave it (Census Migration 1991). The 1991 census report indicates that the South West had the lowest proportion of 18-29 year olds in Britain as well as the highest proportion of pensioners. These are significant trends that could potentially have had an affect on the social structure of the South West and Exeter in particular. Closer investigation will hopefully help identify the precise nature of any changes that have occurred whilst also revealing the implications of demographic change.

One problem that we could encounter could be that the demographic changes that have occurred in Devon and the South West in general may not be so marked in Exeter. Many people who move to the region, particularly

older people, choose more rural locations rather than cities and towns. Also, young people from Exeter are arguably more inclined to stay in Devon rendering the trends of the county invalid in some areas. This is backed up by census statistics that show the ratio of young and older people in Exeter is more in keeping with national averages. However, we are confident that, to some extent at least, there will be evidence of demographic changes within Exeter; especially those that result from large scale in-migration of older people. As we are using questionnaires, we may also be able to extend are survey beyond the city into areas where demographic change may be more prominent.

Literature Reviews

Population Dynamics contains a number of different studies concerning factors that affect populations. We chose two and conducted a review on them to provide more background for our own research project.

The first study chosen was Dangerous Misconceptions?: fertility change in colonial western Kenya, by Tamasine Robins. Robins carried out acase studyon the population of western Kenya, with particular emphasis on the effects of fertility change. She claimed that demographic studies relied too heavily on the demographic transition model, which is Eurocentric in nature and unsuitable for analysing population change in Kenya. Robins' study attempts to examine the effects of 'colonialism' on fertility.

Robins chose Western Province in Kenya as the field area for her research, and used a number of methods to collect data for analysis. Survey and census data were used, also historical and anthropological accounts. The

first census of Kenya took place in 1948, and the second in 1962. These provided a reasonably accurate picture of trends and patterns in population. Robins also utilised other sources to add to the data collected from the census, carrying out detailed analysis of past population surveys, missionary accounts and government reports. She also conducted some interviews, which helped to add greater depth and meaning to the data.

One major strength of the research is the use of triangulation of methods, which combines all the good points of each and this means that the quality of the research is likely to be improved, the scope of the data widened, and can enhance the validity of the research by providing more consistency across methods (Denscombe 1998: 84-85). The disadvantages in the study include the fact that causation of population change is difficult to establish, and that with the types of data used, it is hard to be very specific about the background changes that affect population dynamics (Robins 1996: 14).

The final outcome of Robins' study found that during the colonial period fertility levels increased dramatically, resulting in a rapid growth in population. This was attributed to the influence of western values and the advent of capitalism.

The second study looked at was one carried out by Akim J. Mturi and Sian L. Curtis, Fertility, Infant Mortality and Family Planning Policy in Tanzania. They studied the effects of these factors on population change, and tried to find out whether family formation patterns have a direct or only a background effect on infant mortality. The study analyses the potential impact of the family planning programme in Tanzania on the infant mortality rate.

The central research method used in the study is the data collected in the 1991/1992 Tanzania Demographic andHealthSurvey which contains data gleaned from interviews conducted on all women between the ages of 15 and 49 in selected households. Other similar surveys are used to add to the data. This information produces a range of statistical data, which is then analysed to produce a table showing the distribution of births.