

Controlling overpopulation: a one child policy for australia essay example

[Sociology](#), [Population](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Background](#) \n \t
2. [Discussion](#) \n \t
3. [Negative Aspects of the Policy](#) \n \t
4. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
5. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Overpopulation occurs when the numbers of organisms exceed the carrying capacity of a habitat. It is of growing concern that the number of humans will grow too large and the earth will be unable to sustain their numbers.

Normally, if the carrying capacity is exceeded, death occurs to maintain equilibrium. Humans, however, have devised mechanisms to circumvent the natural processes that would normally control their population levels. For example, the discovery of antibiotics and modern crop control ensure humans can exceed their carrying capacity. It is of increasing concern what implications this will have for planet earth and the survival of the human species. Mechanisms to limit population growth have been proposed. These controls include the use of contraceptives and the “ One child policy” as implemented in China. This paper will explore the positive and negative impacts of implementing a policy to restrict the growth of the human population.

Background

Historically, despite high birth rates, the human population of the planet was controlled by high infant mortality, food shortages, plagues, and wars. But in post-industrial times, population levels have increased at an almost exponential rate, raising concern for the implications of uncontrolled population growth (“ Overpopulation,” 2013).

There are many factors that are responsible for rapid expansion of a population of organisms in an environment. High birth rates and decreased death rates, as seen in human populations with medical care more accessible in modern times is an example. The capability of humans to control their environment is also a factor. Increased food production, food safety, and storage are insurance for environmental fluctuations. Population levels are predicted to reach nine to eleven billion by 2050, with most of this growth occurring in underdeveloped regions of the world (“ Overpopulation,” 2013).

Many policies have been proposed to restrict human population growth. The most notable perhaps is the “ One child policy” employed by China. This restricts the number of children born per household to one, unless the family can pay a substantial fine (twice the typical household income in most Chinese households). If a second child is born, an identity card will be denied for that child and it cannot utilize public services such as schools and hospitals. Forced abortions and sex-selected infanticide (favoring the birth of a male offspring) are not uncommon (Phillips, 2012).

Increased population growth and density will also have implications for global health issues. The possibility of transmission of communicable

diseases increases with increasing population density, thus increasing the incidence of epidemics and pandemics. The black plague, the Spanish flu, and the Hong Kong flu are examples of the ramifications of increased population density. There is the possibility of more epidemics due to high population growth (“Overpopulation,” 2013).

The other implications of increased population growth involve the impact to the environment. Additional stress is put on resources such as food, water, and fuel (Bailey, 2010). In addition, global carbon dioxide emissions have increased substantially and continue to increase with higher population numbers. This is believed to be causing global climate warming/change with the additional accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, magnifying the greenhouse effect (SUNY, 2009). This could ultimately result in melting of polar ice causing sea level to rise and possibly increase the incidence and severity of environmental catastrophes (floods, droughts, fires, severe storms, etc.).

Discussion

Positive Aspects of the Policy

Australia is considering implementing a “One child policy” similar to China. China’s population is growing at incredible rates and in the 1979, a proposed policy of having only one child per family was introduced (Kane, 1999). Rapid expansion of the population was putting strains on the infrastructure (hospitals, roads, schools) in addition to strains on the environment (food, water, pollution, etc.). Public policy implemented in the 1950’s involved implementation more readable access to contraception and abortion as well

as the promotion of later marriage, etc. This helped reduce population growth from 2.8% in the 1950's to 1% in the 1970's. At that time, a new policy was suggested, the "One child policy" in efforts to reduce population growth in China to 0% by 1980 (Kane, 1999).

Positive aspects of implementing a "One child policy" include less stress on the environment, including food and water supplies, energy demands, and use of urban infrastructure. Energy demands alone have resulted in high carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. Also, air and water pollution have been a major concern in China. In comparison, in Australia, the major concern involves water supply. Several significant droughts have been seen in the last several years. With a lower population density, Australia should not see as dramatic an effect on greenhouse gas emissions, disease transmission, or stress on the infrastructure.

In addition, experts say unregulated population growth is keeping a large proportion of people in developing countries at the poverty level. The increasing strain on environmental and economic resources will continue this trend (Smith, 1993).

Overpopulation puts an incredible stress on the economy. It causes high unemployment rates and poverty. Also, historically overpopulation will result in social unrest and higher rates of violence, protest, and wars. The 1979 genocide in Rwanda is an example. Increased stress on resources resulted in a Malthusian check (demographic entrapment). The resulting civil unrest was the cause of no employment for young men and they resorted to violence (Butler, 2004).

Another outcome of overpopulation is the threat to the biodiversity of the

planet. The higher stress put on ecosystems, the greater the chance of species going extinct. A contributing factor to this is the ignorance and apathy of most people to the threat of overpopulation. This is perhaps a result of the inability of most people to understand the scale of our current population numbers (Gehrt, 1996). Apart from the reduction in bequest value (the value of leaving species like pandas for the enjoyment of future generations), the loss of genetic diversity substantially reduces the potential for life saving pharmaceuticals to be discovered. The extinction of species, therefore, could result in a loss of biological capital.

In 2010, China celebrated the 30th anniversary of the “ One child policy.” Population growth has decreased dramatically, but there are several negative aspects as well and the government is now reopening the idea of rescinding this policy.

Negative Aspects of the Policy

There are several negative aspects to the “ One child policy.” Besides the ethical implications and loss of personal liberty to choose how many children a family desires, it could have negative implications to sexual selection, contraception, and forced abortions. China, in fact, is considering relaxing the “ One child policy.” Opponents state that would put a stress on the Chinese economy and environment, but proponents stress there are human rights aspects that need to be rectified (Bezlova, 1999).

One of the most shocking outcomes of the policy in China is the rate of forced or sex-selective abortions, even as late at 7 months gestation. Also, there is now a large transient community of Chinese that were never

reported as being born and exist outside traditional educational and medical systems. This is a major concern not only for the economy, but for public health (Phillips, 2012).

Human behavior due to overpopulation can be best described by the theory of “ The Tragedy of the Commons.” This theory is based on the human reaction to reduction in resources. The higher the stress to an individual, the greater the chance of ego-seeking behavior in aim of self-preservation. The greediest individuals exploiting a resource will initially benefit the most. After a while though, when the resource is limited, controls (laws) need to be enacted to protect the resource. This will curtail an individual’s freedom. So as the human population approaches the carrying capacity, more and more freedoms will need to be sacrificed (Hardin, 1998). Loss of personal freedom would be a tremendous cost to an individual’s freedom not only to choose how many children to have, but also people will be under increased governmental controls with respect to their utilization of resources. This will result in higher rates of violence and unrest in the population.

Conclusion

There are positive and negative ramifications of implementing the “ One child policy.” There is the risk of humans reaching the carrying capacity of the earth and it resulting in irreversible environmental damage such as global climate change, air and water pollution, and an increased risk of epidemics and pandemics. On the other side, ethical issues in controlling family size are of equal concern. As seen in China, there is now a high rate of forced abortions and sex-selective abortions. Has the policy really been that

effective? In addition, there are so many unreported births, population levels in China have not been controlled as initially planned. Can a similar policy be recommended for Australia?

Australia's population is currently far below the environmental carrying capacity. There is a concern over water demand, especially in years of drought, but instead the focus should be on the populations with the highest growth (i. e., the third world countries). These countries should be provided and educated with contraceptive techniques as well as environmental awareness. Unfortunately, many of these areas are already at or exceeding their carrying capacity and the environmental damage being done is substantial.

Perhaps we need more global awareness as to the consequences of overpopulation. Some studies do predict that there will be a plateau in global population growth by 2050. Obviously, population growth in developing countries is of the highest concern, with India bypassing China's population level by 2050 (Hoevel, 2007). A focus on reducing global greenhouse gasses is also very important. As population levels increase, energy demands increase. This increases the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses.

Population control is perhaps not the answer. Maybe the answer is greater global awareness. This is ignored in many lower income areas and developing countries however. The population growth in western societies, such as Australia, has been decreasing in the last few decades.

Implementing a " One child policy" is not the answer in these societies.

Education and governmental control of emissions, perhaps by the

implementation of taxes on emissions for industries is a more effective way of benefiting the earth.

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