

# Fewer women having children in their 30s

## FERTILITY RATE

YEAR	TOTAL FERTILITY	AGE-SPECIFIC FERTILITY RATES						
		15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
1972	5.4	89	260	261	215	141	74	29
1997	3.3	54	226	188	109	55	26	8
2006	2.8	45	208	168	79	36	15	6

Source: UN-DESA World Fertility Report (2011)

Rukmini Shrinivasan | TIG

An analysis of forty years of global marriage and fertility data shows that the real effect of the decline in fertility in India has been a massive decrease in the number of women in their thirties having children. In western and northern Europe, on the other hand, women are more likely to have their first child at 30.

The United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs' World Fertility Report released last week presents 40 years of marriage and fertility data for 196 countries. The data illustrates the progress of India's fertility transition, and shows where it stands with respect to the rest of the world.

The proportion of teenage Indian women having children has halved in the last 30 years; in 2006, just 5% of women aged 15-19 bore children or were pregnant. The bulk of pregnancies still take place in a woman's twenties: around 21% of women in their early twenties bore a child in 2006 as compared to 26% in 1972, and 17% in their late twenties bore children as compared to 26% in 1972.

But the real effect of the decline in fertility is felt at the upper end of the age spectrum. In 1972, 22% of women in their early thirties delivered a child. In 2006, this proportion was less than 8%.

The average age at first marriage is still below 18 for women in India and the aver-

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age age at first birth remains around 20 years in India. With more educated women now having fewer children, women are having all their children much earlier.

While historically the fertility transition begins with a decrease in fertility among older women, there is another factor that is contributing to this trend in India. "Our population programme has been dominated by sterilization, and does not focus much on spacing," says Dr Faujdar Ram, director of the Mumbai-based International Institute for Population Sciences. Only 5% of Indian couples use condoms and 3% of women use the contraceptive pill, according to the National Family Health Survey. As a result, the trend has been for women to have their children and get sterilized, rather than postpone the birth of their first child. Spacing, however, is not a mere medical process, but one that involves a social transformation. In demographic terms, this is called 'testing the fecundity' — families want to ensure that the woman can bear children