

Falling Birth Rates in New Zealand

The statistics regarding falling birth rates in New Zealand is alarming, given the consequences and repercussions that many people are unaware, or uneducated about. This essay is written in the hope of educating and encouraging the people of New Zealand to start having conversations around this topic, and therefore subsequently result in positive action to remediate this problem.

To look at some brief numbers, RNZ (Radio New Zealand) details in an article that currently, the country's fertility rate is 1.56 children per household, which is significantly below the replacement rate of 2.1. Incidentally, the replacement rate refers to the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next.^[1] This current fertility rate is down 20% from the last decade. For reference, back in the 1960's in New Zealand, the average was 4.3, which is far higher than today's value.

The average age of women giving birth in New Zealand is currently 31.3, while 50 years ago, it was around 25 years.^[2] It is safe to assume that due to women starting to have children later in life, it will have the effect of lowering the fertility rate of the country, as the woman has less chance of having more children before she goes through menopause. Adding to this, the late teens and early 20's are considered the most fertile years for women, while the mid 20's still are fruitful years, from the late 20's onwards, there is a significant decline in fertility and the chances of women conceiving naturally, dramatically decrease.

So why is the birth rate declining and what are the repercussions and possible solutions?

The way the world works now, is that women are encouraged to pursue a career, that their purpose and design is equal to man, that finding fulfilment in life goes hand in hand with having a successful career. The current economic climate (and which has been the case for a number of years), means that oftentimes, women feel that they *need* to be working in a good career, to earn good money, to be well set up and established in order to have a family. "Before we have kids, we must be at *this* level of financial security, have *this* size house, *this* size car, and live in *this* particular town, next to *this* particular school or kindergarten." These are common thoughts for families these days. The list goes on. Sadly there is an element of truth in these desires, as the cost of living has skyrocketed over the past 20 years, making it increasingly more difficult for a household to thrive, solely off one individual's income. Societal pressures have shaped and conformed the family lifestyle and structure, to the point that a lot of parents feel burdened down with the constant grind of working long hours to earn enough money to tick all the boxes that are expected of them. This does not need to be the case however. For example, I have had a number of people ask me, something along the lines of "So you grew up, with 8 other brothers and sisters. That must have been really lame as you were never able to go overseas during the holidays, or have takeaways every Friday". Obviously this is true, that my parents were unable to afford to take us all to Fiji during a school break, or to indulge in a meal of fish and chips every Friday. This would have been a sure and steady path to financial ruin, particularly regarding the takeaways example, as every one of us children have voracious appetites, consuming every last crumb, and always wanting more. However, my childhood was far from lame. It was a constant, chaotic, circus of entertainment, partially due to my parents being as far from normal as a soak in a hot spa, fully clothed, on a summer's day, but primarily due to the sheer number of us children. At any given time, someone was arranging a game to play, or a challenge to complete, or a plan to terrorise another sibling. The list is endless. The point of sharing some insight into my childhood is plain and simple: *You do not need to have lots of money to have happy, healthy, fulfilled*

children. What is far more important, is having loving parents, and in my experience, parents who have faith in God, that He will look after them, and provide for their needs, as He says he will in His Word, the Bible.

Adding to this, more solutions to this problem, could be community events whereby new or struggling mothers can meet up with each other and with professionals to get help and be encouraged in their motherhood journey. Additionally, people employed by social welfare systems could attend these meetings and assist in making sure these women are given their appropriate financial help from the government. Finally, monthly community run, free events involving childcare and entertainment, could be a great incentive for mothers to learn new skills on how to engage with their children and give them happy memories, and raise them well, without feeling like they need to spend a lot of money on overseas trips, or the latest and greatest, expensive toys.

One very obvious and alarming reason for the birthrate showing an evident decline, is the increase in abortions, seen in New Zealand. In 2019, there were 12,587 abortions, while in 2020, this figure rose to 13,246. In 2023 there were 16,277 abortions.^[3] This is terrifying. That means that every day, on average, 44 lives were terminated. 44 children who never saw the light of day. Who never got to smile, laugh, cry, experience a hug, run, jump, play with their friends or eat chocolate. This is heartbreaking. Taking 2023's statistics, if these babies were given the chance to live, this would dramatically increase the birth rate, by approximately 30%, which would push New Zealand's birth rate to 2.03 which is incredibly close to the necessary value of 2.1 (the replacement rate). Decreasing abortions, and thereby increasing the birthrate would lead to a healthier and more sustainable future for our country, as the replacement rate would almost be met. For a quick breakdown of the numbers, please consult the workings below.

The total births in 2023 were 56,953.^[4] This is a birth rate of 1.56 (births per woman).^[4] If the aborted lives were carried full term, and were given the chance to live, this would have meant the total babies born would have been 56,993 (actual babies born) plus 16,277 (aborted babies), giving a total of 73,270. $16,277/56,993 \times 100$ is 28%. Approximately a 30% increase. Therefore, adding a 30% increase to the birth rate, gives us a new birth rate of 2.03 ($0.3 \times 1.56 = 0.47$, and $0.47 + 1.56 = 2.03$), which is very close to the replacement rate figure of 2.1. These numbers reinforce, the dramatic effect abortions are having on our birth rates, and by connection, how close or far, the birth rates are to the necessary, and vital replacement rate. Measures must be taken to raise awareness on the problems of abortions, and the positive alternatives to abortions such as open adoption and fostering. For example, it would be advisable for every clinic that carries out an abortion, to have access to a professional counsellor who is able to talk to the mother considering an abortion, and share feasible, alternative options to abortion, such as open adoption. This would be a legal requirement, that the mother must at least *hear* the options she has in front of her, before making a rash, and often regrettable decision.

Some of the problems of falling birth rates include that our population will inevitably become 'top end heavy' (i.e., too many elderly). This would put a further strain on the already fragile economy, as the cost to look after and house these individuals would dramatically increase. The work force would be reduced, as less people are coming up the ranks to take over those who are leaving. Valuable and necessary jobs may not be filled, having a detrimental effect on society. School sizes would decrease, meaning relevant research and funding would likely decrease as well. A surge in immigrants to fill the void of jobs being vacant could cause further problems such as culture clashes and racism. The list goes on.

One final solution to this problem of falling birth rates lies in prayer. God shares a command in

Genesis, to Adam and Eve, “to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth”.^[5] In Psalm 127:3-4, it reads “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.”^[6] These verses show that it is a good thing to have children, and not just one child at that. As a father of a beautiful 9-month-old girl, I find so much joy, purpose and strength from my love for this little gift from God. God's heart must break as he witnesses so many terminations of lives, so many decisions to not have children because people are too focussed on careers, and so many people who desire to not have more than one or two because of financial worries. The list goes on. God is the great giver and taker of life. He is capable and faithful to provide for families' needs, who put their trust in Him. Philippians 4:19 “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”^[7] Prayer is a powerful tool therefore, and Christians should intercede on behalf of the nation of New Zealand, that more people would choose to inject joy, and life into their lives, in the form of beautiful, happy children. Prayer that people would not be afraid of their future, if they decide to have children. Prayer that each mother and family would get the support and help they need. Finally, prayer that any mother considering the termination of the new life that God is knitting together in their womb, would reconsider, and would make the choice to keep the baby, or sacrificially give the baby up to another, loving family.

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References

^[1] J., C. *Replacement level fertility and future population growth, Population trends*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7834459/#:~:text=In developed countries, replacement level, need to be much higher.> (Accessed: 27 March 2025).

^[2] Kenny, K. (2024) *Fewer births, an older population, does it matter? what you need to know*, RNZ. Available at: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/what-you-need-to-know/509980/fewer-births-an-older-population-does-it-matter-what-you-need-to-know> (Accessed: 27 March 2025).

^[3] Nzfamilylifeinternational (2024) *New Zealand's official abortion death toll announced [2023]*, Family Life International NZ. Available at: <https://fli.org.nz/2024/12/19/new-zealands-official-abortion-death-toll-announced-2023/> (Accessed: 28 March 2025).

^[4] *Births and deaths: Year ended December 2023 (including abridged period life table): Stats NZ* (no date) *Births and deaths: Year ended December 2023 (including abridged period life table) | Stats NZ*. Available at: <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/births-and-deaths-year-ended-december-2023-including-abridged-period-life-table/> (Accessed: 28 March 2025).

^[5] The NIV Bible, Genesis 1:28.

^[6] The NIV Bible, Psalm 127:3-4

^[7] The NIV Bible, Phillipians 4:19

