

CENTRE FOR HEALTH POLICY SEMINAR SERIES

The University of Melbourne



Understanding Historical and Contemporary Fertility Transitions: A Birth Interval Approach

Presented by Professor George Alter

Wednesday 5th April, 9.30am-11am in
Room 515, Level 5, 207 Bouverie Street



The European fertility transition has been attributed to the emergence of "stopping" behaviour (terminating childbearing before the end of a woman's reproductive years). In Africa, however, some observers see increasing use of modern contraception to increase the spacing between births rather than "stopping" at some particular birth order. This paper uses a new approach based on the analysis of birth intervals to identify the extent of stopping and spacing in German villages, Taiwan, Cameroon, Ghana, and Mali. The German and Taiwanese data largely confirm the "stopping" hypothesis, but stopping appears at very low family sizes more rapidly than previously thought. There is no evidence that stopping is related to birth order in the African case studies, but spacing between births has increased.

Professor George Alter is Research Professor at the Inter-university Consortium for Social and Political Research (ICPSR) and Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He was Director of ICPSR from 2011 to 2016. He also has an appointment in the Population Studies Center, University of Michigan and is widely regarded as one of the world's leading historical demographers. His research grows out of interests in the history of the family, demography, and economic history, and recent projects have examined the effects of early life conditions on health in old age and new ways of describing fertility transitions. He is also involved in international efforts to promote research transparency and data sharing. In 2010-11, he was President of the Social Science History Association.