

Critical demography

Developing a new UK-wide birth cohort study: How do today's parents of young children feel about participating in longitudinal research?

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Longitudinal birth cohort studies are essential for understanding children's development, demographic trends, and addressing the challenges facing UK families. However, the families of greatest research and policy interest are often the hardest to recruit and retain. Methodological reflection is critical for understanding whose voices are not heard in UK-wide family research, addressing declining survey response rates, and achieving the large, representative baseline samples needed to directly inform UK-policy.

The Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study (2023–2024) tested recruitment approaches for a new UK birth cohort and found patterns of response requiring further investigation: low response rates among parents under 25, and high item non-response rates among parents from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, despite having strong overall response rates.

Ahead of launching Generation New Era in 2026, the first UK-wide birth cohort in 25 years, the study team conducted several projects using qualitative, public engagement and cognitive testing methods to understand how to reduce barriers to participation and minimise sociodemographic differences in response. This work aimed to ensure that families can take part in ways that are sensitive to their circumstances and that data quality is strengthened across diverse groups.

This presentation will outline findings from these projects and the subsequent changes made to the study's design. I will also cover the challenges of conducting PPIE for a population-wide study, and how we have experimented with AI persona-bots to test survey questions from the perspective of lower-prevalence groups that were not captured in the other research projects (e.g. parents of very sick babies).

From page to screen: Cultural diffusion, narratives, and the reception of Heartstopper **Francesco Rampazzo - University of Manchester, Kristopher Velasco - Princeton University**

This paper examines how the Netflix adaptation of Heartstopper reshaped both the global circulation of the books and the narratives through which readers interpret transition to adulthood, coming out, and belonging. Following the release in April 2022, book sales increased sharply across countries, with particularly strong responses in Spain (+431%), the UK (+322%), Mexico (+269%), and Poland (+284%), pointing to substantial cross-market diffusion driven by platform exposure.

At the same time, reader narratives reveal both commonalities and divergence across contexts. Across countries, reviews consistently emphasise emotional intimacy, coming out, and the experience of youth transitions, highlighting the importance of recognition and affirmation. However, these themes are not uniformly articulated. In some settings, the series is framed primarily as accessible or giftable content for younger readers, while in others it is more explicitly discussed in terms of identity, acceptance, and belonging. References to the Netflix adaptation are widespread, suggesting that the series not only increased demand but also structured how audiences interpret the story.

Taken together, the findings show that digital platforms amplify cultural diffusion while simultaneously shaping the narratives through which intimate life courses and minority identities are understood. The results highlight how processes of recognition and belonging remain uneven across contexts, even as cultural products circulate globally.

Is South Korea's Total Fertility Rate even lower than we think?

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South Korea's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is frequently cited by international organisations and is at the centre of global discussions on extreme population decline. However, a critical but overlooked flaw exists in its calculation: the current method deviates from international standards. South Korea's TFR might actually be even lower than the officially reported figures. The core of the problem lies in a mismatch between the denominator and the numerator. Specifically, the denominator for the South Korean TFR excludes immigrant

women who do not hold Korean nationality, while the numerator includes births from these women. This research aims to examine how this discrepancy occurred and determine what the more accurate total fertility rates should be. To do so, we use data from the South Korean Population Census, Resident Registration Population, and Vital Statistics (Birth Data) between 2010 and 2024. We analyse the gaps between official and alternative TFRs, as well as the variances in these gaps across regions and age groups. Our preliminary findings suggest that official figures overestimated the TFR by a maximum of 0.05 during the 2010-2024 period. This research provides a more accurate picture of South Korea's demographic landscape. It also suggests how neglecting the immigrant population can lead to a distorted understanding of demographic realities and misguide policy responses.