

its age composition and how fast it is growing or declining. Demographers are interested in the number of males and females in a population (the sex ratio), the age composition, the causes and consequences of migration, the fertility and mortality rates and the causes and consequences of such rates, and how and why changes take place in all these aspects.

Demography has developed into a remarkably coherent field, which encompasses various aspects of human life. It has firmly established itself as a discipline with strong ties with the policy-making agencies. Within the discipline of demography, however, the recent years have shown an increasing recognition of the limits of the existing theories and methods. This is particularly obvious in the absence of a strong critical tradition, and the isolation of the discipline from recent theoretical developments in other social sciences.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF DEMOGRAPHY

The discipline of demography includes the study of theories, events and policy propositions. It deals with vital issues relating to marriage, birth, life, migration and death. Demography deals with three main aspects of populations, which are discussed in the following three sections:

Size

Size refers to the number of people living in a given place at a given point of time. It looks at the changes taking place in the numbers, why such changes are taking place and the consequences of such changes on the size of the population. Clearly, identifying the terms 'place', 'person' and 'time' can define the size of a population. A demographer's concern is not only to find out the numbers in a group, but also to study the population changes over a period of time, and also to compare it with the populations of other areas. Such comparison can be done for populations within a country or across countries. Demographers can also predict the future size of a population on the basis of the existing birth rate. These numbers are necessary for providing social utility services such as education, health facilities and medical aid, legislators, planners and policy makers. These figures help the government and planners to develop future plans, strategies and expansion activities. The government can ensure adequate production of consumer goods, and make arrangements for providing basic facilities for the population on the basis of demographic data regarding the size of a population. Demographers look at not only the changes in the size of population, but also the reasons or causes of such change. There can be several causes for such changes in population, including changes in fertility and mortality rates, literacy and education.

levels, age at marriage, lack of availability and use of health and medical facilities, use of artificial means of birth control and so on.

Composition

Composition of population refers to the measurable characteristics of a population. These characteristics are, in general, related to demographic processes. The most widely studied aspects of composition include age structure, sex ratio, literacy and education levels, marital status including age at marriage, occupational composition and rural-urban distribution of population. The age structure of a population reveals the proportion of population in different age groups, generally categorized broadly into the young population (0-14 years), the working population (15-60 or 65 years) and the older population (65 years and above). The sex ratio refers to the number of females per 1000 males in a population. It reflects the socio-economic conditions existing in a society. The low status of women, low female literacy and low employment rate will show a negative female sex ratio. In most developing and underdeveloped countries, this scenario is common, whereas in developed countries, there is a positive female sex ratio. The occupation structure shows the employment and occupational patterns existing in a country—the proportion of population engaged in agriculture, industries and the services. Developing and underdeveloped countries show an occupational structure that is predominantly agricultural, whereas developed countries show a major proportion of the population engaged in the industrial and service sectors. The age at marriage and marital status of a population have a definite impact on the size of the population. The lower the age at marriage, the longer will be the fertility span and the higher will be the fertility rate, which will result in the higher growth rate of population. This scenario is typical of underdeveloped and developing countries.

Thompson and Lewis state that the relationship between the composition of a population and its mortality, fertility and migration is a reciprocal one—composition affects the demographic processes and these processes in turn affect the composition by determining the age structure, sex ratio and distribution of population.

Distribution

Population distribution refers to the territorial distribution of population across cities and towns, villages and districts, states, zones, regions and countries. Demographers find out the population within countries, across countries and the world population. They also study the population in advanced industrialized and urbanized areas, newly developing and growing industrial urban areas, pre-urban industrial areas and developing and

underdeveloped countries. Distribution of population in urban, semi-urban and rural areas is an important aspect of this component of population studies. Demographers also look into the changes taking place in the distribution of population, and the causes for these changes. Changes are basically due to migration of people from one place to another.

According to Thompson and Lewis, the questions of how the world's population is distributed among and within the continents, world regions and countries, and how their numbers and proportions change can be answered by learning about the demographic concepts of size, composition and distribution, and demographic processes of fertility, mortality and migration.

As a scientific study of human populations, demography uses a variety of analytical techniques to turn raw data into more precise measures. This branch of demography is usually referred to as *formal or technical demography*. Formal demography helps in understanding the causes and determinants of population growth. This knowledge is essential for avoiding the negative consequences of increase in population. Apart from dealing with the measures of fertility, mortality, nuptiality (marriages), migration and the relationships between them, demography also deals with the size and composition of human populations at a given point in time. The relationships between these elements and the social, economic and cultural environment within which they exist are also of interest to a demographer. This branch of demography is referred to as *substantive demography or population studies*. Population studies provide the tools for examining the interactions of demographic, social, economic, political and cultural processes, which are the basis for human survival. In its broadest sense, demography deals with these processes, which are necessary for effecting structural and institutional changes in societies in order to bring about effective improvements in living standards of the masses of the people. It is thus multi-disciplinary in nature.

There are different opinions regarding the scope of demography. Some demographers believe that its scope is restricted and have narrowed down, while others consider it to have a broad scope. There are yet others, who give a balanced view on the scope of demography. These views are discussed in the following section.