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Men can step up to domestic duties to help arrest the global backslide in birth rates

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BEIJING: A more active role for men in fatherhood and domestic chores could be the key lever of population rebound to arrest collapsing fertility rates around the world.

Men being more hands-on in infant care and household responsibilities can support family building with evidence that it may also improve their personal well-being and professional fulfillment.

Speaking at the 2026 Congress of the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction, renowned reproductive endocrinologist Professor de Ziegler said the world was facing a general collapse of total fertility rates, defined as the number of children women are expected to have in their lifetime.

He said there were various reasons for declining birth rates, including socio-economic pressures, but the root cause was the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce and delaying parenthood as their biological fertility declined.

“The inherent desire for children does not diminish among many women pursuing education or career objectives,” he explained. “But it interferes with the realisation of that desire and often leads to abandoned hopes for family creation.

“The time has come for men to step up as the trigger for a bounce back in birth rates by supporting their partners in domestic responsibilities and parenthood options.”

Professor de Ziegler said the age of mothers at first birth had been steadily increasing globally. In Europe, it has increased by five years over the past five decades while in China the average age of first-time mothers has almost reached 30.

He told the ASPIRE Congress that birth rates had fallen sharply in countries like Japan, South Korea and Italy where women traditionally entered the workforce without a corresponding change in men’s roles within the partnerships.

Professor de Ziegler noted that in Nordic countries, where men generally are reported to be more involved in domestic chores, fertility rates were higher.

“Since male involvement in domestic life can influence birth rates, it represents a potential lever that can be used to encourage family building,” he said.

“Men participating further in child rearing to support their partners is bound to take on a new meaning and growing importance.

“American anthropologist, Professor Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, notably argues that men’s capacity to care for children is neither a modern invention, nor a product of some woke ideological trend.

“Rather, men’s role in infant care is deeply rooted in the animal kingdom where both male and female share equally in the tasks of feeding their young while the other hunts for food.

“Our long-term goal is to lay the groundwork for education, particularly among young people in schools about fertility issues, with a renewed vision of men’s domestic roles.

“Time will tell, but the hope for a rebound in birth rates is real and worth attempting.

“It will take quite a measure of inventiveness and adaptability to cope with the consequences of family and fertility choices we are making today, but there is no reason to think we are not up to the task.”

Professor de Ziegler is based in Cambodia where he has long experience in social and family issues. He is also a reproductive specialist at Maison de la Fertilité headed by Dr Chloé Tran in Paris.

He told the ASPIRE Congress studies had shown that fathers actively involved in newborn care experience hormonal changes that can enhance personal satisfaction and bonding.

“The hormonal changes encountered in actively involved fathers may improve men’s interpersonal connections and well-being, and even their professional fulfillment,” he said.

Around 3,000 specialists in fertility health – including scientists, clinicians, nurses and counsellors – are attending the ASPIRE Congress at the China National Convention Centre in Beijing.

For further information, go to <https://www.aspire2026.com>

Interview

Professor Dominique de Ziegler is available for interview.

To arrange, please contact Trevor Gill, ASPIRE Congress Media Relations.

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