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We need MORE babies, not fewer, Harry! PROF DANNY DORLING on why the real issue is how long we are living

By [PROFESSOR DANNY DORLING FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY](#)

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Many thousands of words have been written on the subject of [Prince Harry](#)'s announcement in Vogue last week that, when it comes to children, he intends to have 'Two, maximum!' Harry and Meghan might even stop at just Archie, he seemed to imply. He would certainly not go to three, as his elder brother William has done.

The reason he gave was that 'I've always thought: this place is borrowed. And, surely, being as intelligent as we all are, or as evolved as we all are supposed to be, we should be able to leave something better behind for the next generation.'

In other words, Harry was worried that we have stolen the future from the generations to come.

The claim is understandable and in many ways laudable. But it is simplistic and shows a misunderstanding about how both population growth and environmental damage works.

It would be better if Prince Harry were to spend his energy and time addressing how he could tackle the issue properly. In fact, the Vogue comment betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of the subject. Throughout history, we have had many population panics.

They began shortly after the French Revolution when the English Establishment came to believe that over-population led to starvation and the overthrowing of established order.

More recently, the late 1960s saw global consternation that the human population of the planet was growing by just over two per cent a year, and that this rate was completely unsustainable.

Prince Harry



Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, pose with their newborn son, Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor, two days after his birth. Prince Harry has revealed he and Meghan only want two children in a bid to save the planet

Had we continued to have children at the rate we had them then, there would indeed be many billions more people alive today, and tens of billion more projected into the future.

However, today the global population growth rate has slowed to about one per cent a year and that rate is now falling every year.

Indeed, people living longer into a healthy older age is a cause for celebration. It is by far the most important reason why we expect the human population to reach nine, ten, or at most 11 billion people by the end of this century.

But demographers do not expect life expectancy to continue to rise as quickly as it has been growing in recent decades. Already we are seeing fewer and fewer reports of people reaching spectacularly older ages. The human body is a little like a washing machine that has a design life of some 70 or 80 years, a machine with very little chance of much going wrong for the first half of our lives, the years in which we have most of our children. That is how we are evolved to be.

Harry also misunderstands just how few children people are now having. Today, there is no reason to panic about how many babies we have.

Many years ago, the majority of countries in the world saw their rates of childbirth reduce below 'replacement level', which is roughly 2.05 children per couple. (The 'replacement' figure is slightly higher than two because not all children survive to be old enough to be able to have children of their own.) In other words, the global birthrate is shrinking.

Latest estimates published by the United Nations in June revealed that the average couple are now expected to have 2.42 children over the course of their lives, 2.00 by 2080 and 1.94 by 2100.

Recently, however, childbirth rates have been falling much faster than the United Nations demographers projected, so these are likely to be over-estimates. There are not, in other words, too many children about.

Then bear in mind that Harry is living in Europe, the continent with the lowest birth rate, and where the average number of children couples are having is 1.62.



Harry and Meghan with baby Archie following his christening on Saturday 6 July. His elder brother Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, and Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, have three children. Prince George, six,



On Friday, the Office for National Statistics revealed that birth rates in Britain have hit a historic low. A total of 657,076 children were born in 2018, which was down 3.2 per cent on the year before and nearly 10 per cent down on 2012.

Without net inward migration, the population of Europe will fall to fourth-fifths of what it is today in just one generation, two-thirds in two generations, and will nearly halve by the third generation. Europe is very fortunate to be a net recipient of international migrants. Without them, the continent's very elderly population in future would be hard to care for.

If the Prince became more interested in this issue, he could learn that people tend to have fewer children when they migrate, so the more international migration there is towards places such as Europe, the lower total global population is expected to be. He could become an advocate for more migration.

There is also the rest of the world to consider. The average number of children per couple across North America is now 1.76. Across the rest of the Americas it has fallen to 1.96 and is expected to keep falling, reaching 1.80 by 2025.

The whole of Asia is already at 2.09 children per couple, and that is currently expected to fall to 1.94 by 2035. Africa has a fertility rate of 4.16, which was the number of children people in Brazil had in 1975, or India had shortly after 1985 (Queen Elizabeth, Harry's grandmother, gave birth to four children between 1948 and 1964).

Today, couples in Brazil have only 1.67 children, and in India they have 2.14. In India, childbirth rates are continuing to fall very quickly, as they are across all the countries of Africa. Rates are now static in Brazil.

Meanwhile, back in the UK the number of children every potential couple is expected to parent by 2020 is just 1.75.

A more important issue for Harry to consider is what he and his children do: how much they fly; how many homes they occupy; how they heat their houses and whether they could be better insulated; and whether he and they wear out their clothes rather than buy new ones to constantly try to look smart.

He is in a fortunate position to do something about his concerns, as is Meghan and as will be their child or future children.

The UN figures are only projections and they could easily go awry. In the past it was the European conquest of the Americas and Africa that sparked worldwide population growth from under a billion to nearing eight billion now. That will not be repeated.

However, Harry could warn us about what might rekindle the childbirth rates of the past. Harry knows about war. A Third World War is not unthinkable in his lifetime – and wars almost always create baby booms. Most people do not understand this.

Other precursors of population growth are widespread famine, as happened in India under the rule of the British in the past. Harry could promote vegetarianism to reduce that risk, if he were concerned.

He could also point out that we would be sensible to occupy our thoughts on the risk of a global dis-ease pandemic and how to handle one if it happens.

People will always have more children if mortality rates suddenly rise. They always have. In explaining this, Harry could help us all learn more.

And many more people will listen to him than to Oxford University professors!

Danny Dorling is the co-author of *Why Demography Matters*, published by Polity Press.

Professor Danny Dorling is a professor of geography at Oxford University. Professor Dorling said the reason for the global population growth today is not because of childbirth but because we are living longer



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[Paul L](#), New Forest, United Kingdom, 2 days ago

Another "intellectual" who thinks he knows it all I suppose. Doesn't matter how many or few there are we've still screwed the planet so the less of us there are the more chance the rest of the species have of survival. It is not all about humans. 😊