

Sex and the Planet: is sex the most dangerous human activity, to all life on earth?

At its best giving the greatest mutual pleasure humans know....this activity also has risks, both *direct* and *indirect*.

The *direct risks* are heart attacks or strokes (mainly in older men!) and STIs (both genders). Other *direct* risks apply only to *uncontracepted sex* – which Nature has applied unfairly to women alone, and which can be minimised by voluntary family planning:

- Maternal mortality: c 1000 deaths each day, 99% in resource-poor settings, including almost 1,000 a week from c 20 million unsafe abortions and
- Maternal morbidity, which is 20 x mortality.

But un-contracepted sex has a danger that is no less serious for being *indirect*, namely too many humans (>7000 million, rising annually by the population of Germany) for sustainability on our finite planet. In 2009 the UK's Chief Scientist declared the world faces a "perfect storm" of population growth, peak oil and climate change, which enhances the risk of violence in the face of energy, water and food insecurity.

Each nation-state has a moral responsibility for overall ecological sustainability within its own borders. But when governments (or environmental organisations) are asked 'How can we live more sustainably?' the response is about reducing the per capita footprint of their constituency and almost never in terms of gradually stabilising and then reducing the *number of feet* (making the footprints). Yet the much-advocated life-style changes will not happen, in time, and will never suffice: we will never meet *human needs* (or the needs of the other species whose with which we share this beautiful planet) without addressing the issue of *human numbers*.

More than 4 decades ago Ehrlich and Holdren showed there are only 3 factors or drivers of human environmental impact, namely: the 'green-ness' or otherwise of technology - on average, per person; ongoing resource consumption and pollution, again per person; and the number of persons. Since the stakes are so high and there *exist* only these 3 factors, is it not foolhardy to continue to neglect any one of them? There are insane taboos that still inhibit adult discussion about population. In reality that often-neglected driver can be addressed in a woman-centred way, wisely and compassionately, as demonstrated by countries as different as Taiwan and Iran. What has never failed to work is *to make family planning and other reproductive health services freely available, and, by removing a whole raft of barriers, accessible to all women: empowering and encouraging them via education and the media to use it - without any whiff of coercion*.

The Founder of Christianity commanded (and all religions concur): *'love your neighbour as yourself'*[1] How can we obey without including our 'neighbours' in the future? We must ensure that there are not altogether so many future neighbours that this finite planet becomes uninhabitable. All the 'haves' in the world must *also* and simultaneously address the two more widely recognised factors above. [475 words]

I have not seen a world problem that wouldn't be easier to solve with fewer people, or harder, and ultimately impossible, with more.

Sir David Attenborough, Patron, *Population Matters*

Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race.

James Grant, *The State of the World's Children*, UNICEF1992

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