

# Children of 1957—the baby boom they ignited

By **BRUCE ELLIS**  
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## Born in 1957?

If so, you are just one of 4.3 million people born that year, the peak year for births in the post-World War II baby boom.

The boom in births that occurred between the late 1940s and 50s in the United States was due to the end of the depression, postponement of births during WWII and other reasons, according to a new book, *Postwar Fertility Trends and Differentials in the United States*, co-authored by UNC assistant sociology professor Ronald R. Rindfuss.

The baby boom has had major effects on society. The nation has had to provide food and clothes for the baby boom kids, educate them and now must provide jobs for them.

At first, maternity wards in hospitals were not large enough to accommodate the increase in births, then elementary school facilities had to be increased and new schools built. Later, high schools and colleges had to be expanded.

The boom in births occurred in every social and economic subgroup in the United States, according to Rindfuss' recent book, which updates past studies on fertility trends.

A sharp increase in births occurred after World War II, and the birth rate increased until 1957, the peak year for fertility in the nation, Rindfuss said.

Since 1957, the birth rate has gradually declined in every group in the nation. The decline accelerated in 1970, he said.

"Fertility is lower now than it has ever been," Rindfuss said. "It's reached a historical level."

Despite the current low birth rate, the baby boom kids have now reached or are approaching the normal age for marriage and childbearing.

"One of the major questions is what are they (the baby boom kids) going to do about fertility with so many of

them," Rindfuss said. "It will definitely have a major impact on society. We may even have another boom in births."

He said some authorities believe the nation might see a sharp increase in births soon, others think the current rate will remain the same and still others believe fertility will continue to decline.

"We're entering a whole new era," Rindfuss said. "There were limited fluctuations in fertility in the past because of limited control over fertility."

Fertility, however, can be controlled now by individual couples through birth control methods and, therefore, the birth rate can fluctuate more easily.

Fluctuations in the birth rate have a major impact on society, Rindfuss said, because institutions, such as schools,

which are age-related must deal with increasing and decreasing numbers of people in the population.

Due to the baby boom and the subsequent decline in the birth rate, communities across the nation which once considered raising school taxes to accommodate the baby boom children now are debating which schools they should close.

The baby boom has had other effects on society. Enrollment in colleges and universities in the nation rose from 1.5 million in 1952 to 6.3 million in 1972 and the proportion of young adults attending college rose from 11 percent to 25 percent during these years, according to the Census Bureau.

Baby boom kids are now entering the labor force and must try to find jobs.

Authorities attribute the increase in the proportion of college students to the notion that an education means success

in the job world. After trying to cram into management positions, the baby boom generation may find, however, that there are fewer people for them to manage due to the decline in births since the boom.

The baby boom generation also will have troubles when it reaches retirement age. The Census Bureau estimates that the elderly population will rise from 23 million today to 55 million by the year 2030.

The Social Security system then will be affected by the large number of retired adults drawing benefits from taxes collected from a smaller work force.

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