

Media Relations

Carsey Institute: Deaths Outpace Births In Increasing Number Of American Communities

June 14, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – In an increasing number of American communities, more residents are dying than being born, resulting in a natural population decrease that has been particularly acute in rural areas, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

“Last year, 24 percent of all U.S. counties experienced natural decrease. And, for the first time in U.S. history, deaths now exceed births in an entire state,” said Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer with the Carsey Institute and professor of sociology at UNH.

Natural decrease occurs when more deaths than births occur in an area in a given year. It is caused by two factors: out-migration of young adults from communities and growing older populations who remain in communities, and decreases in fertility levels.

The key findings show:

- Last year, more people died than were born in nearly a quarter of all U.S. counties.
- For the first time in U.S. history, deaths exceed births in an entire U.S. state: West Virginia.
- The primary cause of natural decrease is an age structure distorted by young adult out-migration and aging in place.
- Rural areas are much more likely than urban places to experience natural decrease.

Rural areas have been particularly hard hit by natural decrease; more than 90 percent of U.S. counties with a natural decrease are in rural America. Between 2000 and 2009, 750 rural counties (36 percent) had more people die in them than be born. This is up from 29 percent in the 1990s.

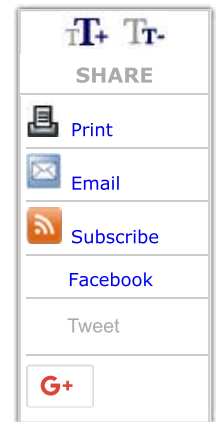
“Many agricultural counties have sustained decades of outmigration by young adults, leaving behind fewer young families of childbearing age. Natural decrease also is observed in many rural counties classified as retirement destinations by the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” Johnson said.

Natural decrease has implications that reach far beyond demography to institutions that are the bedrock of communities, according to Johnson.

“The viability of local schools becomes precarious as the student and parent populations diminish. With fewer births and children, the delivery of obstetric and pediatric services by local hospitals and physicians also becomes increasingly problematic—leaving the few remaining prospective parents to travel to distant hospitals and physicians for prenatal and well-baby care that reduces the risks to vulnerable mothers and children. The provision of daycare and family services is also difficult when families with children are few and scattered. And, the needs of families and children may get less attention in the political arena than those of the growing senior population,” he said.

The complete report about this research, “Natural Decrease in America: More Coffins than Cradles,” is available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=163>.

The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire conducts research and analysis on the challenges facing families and communities in New Hampshire, New England, and the nation. The Carsey Institute sponsors independent, interdisciplinary research that documents trends and conditions affecting families and communities, providing valuable information and analysis to policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the



general public. Through this work, the Carsey Institute contributes to public dialogue on policies that encourage social mobility and sustain healthy, equitable communities.

The Carsey Institute was established in May 2002 through a generous gift from UNH alumna and noted television producer Marcy Carsey. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

PHOTO

Kenneth Johnson, professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire and senior demographer at the UNH Carsey Institute

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/ken_johnson.jpg

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