

《2015年中国新生儿数量下降》

Now that married couples in China are allowed to have a second child, whether they are willing to do so is essential to the nation's plan of tackling the problems on ageing population and labor force.

However, a recent report from the National Bureau of Statistics may cast some shadow on that plan. Zhong Shi joins me now in the studio to explain.

Q1. The report details the number of newborns last year. What does it say and why is it seen as problematic?

You're right. According to that report, a total of 16-and-a-half million people were born in 2015. That's 320,000 less than 2014. Why is that alarming? Because starting in 2014, a married couple who were both the single child in their respective birth families were allowed to have a second child.

In theory, that means more children would have been born in 2015. So the numbers provide a harsh reality check for population planners. Many can't help but wonder if the current Two-Child policy will prove effective in bringing more babies, and potentially more labor force down the road.

The country's health authorities give 2 main reasons that have contributed to the drop in the number of newborns. First, 2015 was the year of the sheep. Many believe in traditional notions that predict a difficult life for people born in that year.

Second, the number of women in childbearing age has been falling. In 2015, the number of women between 20 and 29 years old -- or the age group considered to be the time for child bearing, was down 1.5 million compared last year.

Q2. I don't suppose we have the statistics on the number of married couples considering a second child. But what do we know about their decision making process? Why or why not are they considering two children?

That's a great question. But before I get to that, a brief look at what the nation wants and needs. The policy change comes as China battles a fast ageing society and a continuously falling labor force.

Statistics show that by the end of last year, people aged 60 and above took up over 16% of China's population, a number that was on the rise. What was falling was the working-age population, almost 4.9 million fewer people compared to the previous year.

That explains why we need more young population. But what are married couples thinking? Let's find out. Population experts say policy makers should be on alert whether the Two-Child policy and providing enough incentives are effective measures.