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Birth rates to fall ...

BIRTH rates will continue to fall unless society's attitude towards women change in countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Demographic experts say both men and women are career conscious in cities like Singapore and the rat race gets more intense during a global downturn.

They say the fear of losing jobs causes people to devote almost all of their time to work — often at the expense of the family. And women are still expected to work and raise families.

So it is not surprising that the total fertility rate has plunged to 1.1 per woman in Singapore, way below the replacement rate of 2.1.

Monetary incentives such as the Baby Bonus Scheme do not seem to be attractive enough for Singaporean women to consider motherhood.

"You have to have a gender equity approach here," said Prof Peter McDonald, head of the demography and sociology programme at the Australian National University.

"It's a family-based solution that you need — countries that focus on women only fail."

He said Norway and Sweden have managed to keep their fertility rate at 1.8, and both parents are given time off with pay — until parents is 8 years old. — *Cherise Simons*