

Uh-Oh... This is What Happens When There are Too Many Young People in the World

According to the headline of an [article](#) this month by Somini Sengupta in the *New York Times Sunday Review*, “The world has a problem: too many young people.”

As soon as I saw that I wanted to ask: Too many for whom and for what? It’s easier to cluck about demographic imbalances than to explain why they are a problem.

To my relief, though, Sengupta makes the problem clearer, linking to ample documentation with stats from respectable sources:

“At no point in recorded history has our world been so demographically lopsided, with old people concentrated in rich countries and the young in not-so-rich countries.

Much has been made of the challenges of aging societies. But it’s the youth bulge that stands to put greater pressure on the global economy, sow political unrest, spur mass migration and have profound consequences for everything from marriage to Internet access to the growth of cities.”

The most striking example:

“Nowhere can the pressures of the youth bulge be felt as profoundly as in [India](#). Every month, some one million young Indians turn 18 – coming of age, looking for work, registering to vote and making India home to the largest number of young, working-age people anywhere in the world.

Already, the [number of Indians between the ages of 15 and 34](#) – 422 million – is roughly the same as the combined populations of the United States, Canada and Britain.”

The main problem is that the burgeoning youth population in India and certain other countries has increasing access to education without a commensurate increase in job opportunities calling for such education. Their countries, while mostly growing economically, still lack sufficient investment and infrastructure to create meaningful, full-time jobs for such people. That is indeed a formula for political unrest, such as what we saw in the Arab Spring, and for mass migration to countries believed to offer greater opportunity.

But as Sengupta also notes, youth unemployment is just as great in the richer countries. So most of those unemployed or underemployed young people in developing countries aren't likely to fare much better by migrating to the “developed” world.

Another part of the problem is the gender imbalance:

“In China, where girls have been systematically culled from the population, there were 34 million extra men in 2010, according to census data. In India, there are [17 million more men and boys](#) between the ages of 10 and 24. That makes the marriage market even more competitive, which puts a man without a good job at a major disadvantage. Many are bound to be bachelors for life – a potent formula for violence, some scholars say, especially against women.”

All this seems to add up to a problem without any clear solution.

To be sure, the article quotes a European expert who asserts that “A demographic arbitrage between aging societies with a shrinking work force and youthful societies would be good

thing, if the whole thing could be managed...”

But Sengupta cites no suggestions for managing it, other than ending with the old saying: “Mind your daughters, or the world will come to ruin.” Could young people themselves come up with something more workable than that, wittingly or otherwise?