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A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs

John Bongaarts and Steven W. Sinding’s article “A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs” that appeared in the 35th volume of *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* in Marchof 2009 addresses the major concerns in arguments against the implementation of family planning programs across the globe, and makes a case for the benefits of those programs. Some of the concerns that Bongaart and Sinding address include whether or not family planning programs have any effect on fertility, the cost-effectiveness of those programs, whether or not those programs are needed in inhibiting the over-growth of various populations, and if the death toll of the AIDS epidemic makes family planning programs even necessary. In their support of family planning programs, Bongaart and Sinding cite research and statistics that demonstrate the improved welfare of women and children because of programs of that nature, as well as evidence of the advantage of organizations of that kind as a national health investment. Bongaart and Sinding would like family planning to be recognized as an international priority and for those programs to be part of a solution to the problems of high fertility and rapid population growth.

Bongaart and Sinding’s article is a part of recent debates surrounding the continuation and funding of family planning programs and the funding of contraception, and also the environmental concerns of the accelerated growth of the human population on the Earth and

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over crowded living conditions. According to Bongaart and Sinding “[i]nstead of being near the end of the unprecedented population expansion of the past 50 years, human numbers continue to increase by more than 75 million a year…[t]he United Nations expects the population of the world to continue to grow until at least 2050, adding 2.7 billion to the 2005 population of 6.5 billion.” This growth of the world wide population will put stress on the environment with the increasing need for food. Besides the need for more food, high fertility rates also have a possible impact on a population’s health. Bongaart and Sinding state that “[t]he 76 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world in 2003 resulted in 184,000 pregnancy-related deaths and 1.8 million infant deaths.”

The tone and voice that Bongaart and Sinding’s use to relate their findings is very informative, and their arguments in support of family planning programs are all based on facts and data. They use a few terms in their article that may not be familiar to those lacking knowledge of family planning programs, but otherwise are clear and straightforward with the presentation of their case. The clearness with which they write helps Bongaart and Sinding to, as they claim, “set the record straight on several central issues in this debate”, and let the reader understand important factors and come to their own conclusions about the information given.

All of the information that is provided to the reader by Bongaart and Sinding, make for a strong appeal to logic and reasoning. Research and statistics provide concrete evidence that support the efficacy and favorable results that family planning programs produce on fertility rates, and the health and well-being of those that use those programs. One piece of research that Bongaart and Sinding provide is an experiment that was begun in Bangladesh in the 1970s. According to Bongaart and Sinding, in the experiment:

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Comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services were provided in the treatment area of the experiment. A wide choice of methods was offered, high-quality referral and follow-up were provided and a new cadre of well-trained women…replaced traditional birth attendants as service providers. Contraceptive use rose sharply as these improvements were implemented. No such change was observed in the comparison area. The differences between the two areas in contraceptive use and fertility were maintained overtime…The result was a 20-year fall in the fertility of Bangladesh, from more than six children per woman to nearly three.

Besides appealing to logic and reasoning, a side note at the beginning of the article informs the readers of each of the authors’ credentials, and informs the readers of their authority and credibility concerning the subject. John Bongaarts is a scholar in and the vice president of the Population Council, which is a non-profit organization that conducts research in developing countries, most of which concerns reproductive health and AIDS. Steven W. Sinding is a senior fellow at the Guttmacher Institute, another non-profit organization that focuses on reproductive health, and is also a retired director general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The qualifications of both Bongaart and Sinding can make them seem biased towards the support of family planning programs because of their involvement, and it could also be the reason they chose to put focus back on this debate. But their qualifications also show a great deal of knowledge and experience of those organizations and the positive effects and aid that they produce. And firsthand knowledge is usually more dependable than knowledge acquired through other sources.

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One appeal that the authors don’t take much advantage of is making an appeal to the emotions. The only times that the authors make a slight attempt to tap into the readers emotions is during the introduction and conclusion of the article, and they do this by explaining how over population and high fertility can directly affect a nation’s welfare, and thereby the citizens of that nation. One of those times when Bongaart and Sinding endeavor to evoke some of a readers emotions and empathy during the articles conclusion, is when they explain how “[w]omen and children continue to suffer and die as a consequence of unwanted and unintended childbearing”.

I found that this article, as a piece of writing and as an argument, was effective. As a piece of scholarly work, I found that this article was fairly engaging because of its readability and lack of complicated jargon, which can be rare in that genre. The research and data that this article uses and provides is a major factor in its effectiveness. Bongaart and Sinding provide an array of supporting information for their argument in favor of family planning programs for each major concern and criticism in opposition to those organizations that they address. The evidence, and the simplicity with which it is presented to the reader, gives the reader proof of the benefits of family planning programs without the argument being figuratively shoved down their throats.

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Work Cited

Bongaarts, John, and Steven W. Sinding. “A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs.”

*International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 35.1 (2009). *EBSCOhost*. Web. 11 March 2012.