

Peter McDonald Wins 2015 Irene B. Taeuber Award

CEPAR Deputy Director Professor Peter McDonald has been chosen as the 2015 recipient of the Irene B. Taeuber Award. This major honour from the Population Association of America (PAA) and the Office of Population Research, Princeton University is offered to one demographer every two years, for “either an unusually original or important contribution to the scientific study of population or an accumulated record of exceptionally sound and innovative research”.

Peter, CEPAR’s Deputy Director and Professor of Demography at ANU’s Crawford School of Public Policy, is universally regarded as Australia’s leading authority on demography. He has had, and continues to have, an extraordinary impact on CEPAR’s research program and profile.

The Irene B. Taeuber Award appropriately recognises his enormous international contribution to the study of population. The Award citation reads (in part):

“Peter McDonald’s work is notable for its application of empirical approaches to significant policy issues. The work is often multidisciplinary, applying theoretical perspectives from sociology, economics, history, psychology and anthropology. However, he is most well-known for the development of new theory relating to population issues and for the design of original data collections that address theory and policy.”

His work is often multidisciplinary, applying theoretical perspectives from sociology, economics, history, psychology and anthropology. His major contributions to demographic research have assisted the development of the discipline of population studies and demography not only in Australia but also in Asia. This research includes diverse demographic outcomes including nuptiality, fertility, household structure, child survival, labour force, and demographic estimation.

His most well-known impact has been in the development of gender equity theory applied to fertility; his theory of the link between gender equity and fertility in advanced societies has had a major influence on research in demography and in sociology, through to economics.

“Women have achieved high levels of gender-equity in individually-oriented institutions such as education and employment, but equity in family-related institutions such as the family itself and the conditions of work lags behind,” he said.

“Where the level of incoherence between equity in individual and family institutions is high, some women opt to have no children or only one child, placing the societal level of fertility at a precariously low level.

“The policy implication is that societies must hasten the speed of change in gender equity in family-oriented institutions, especially through policy measures that support the capacity to combine work with parenting.”

In Australia, he was the Head of Research at the Australian Institute of Family Studies for 11 years. His work has been fundamental to how the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates net international migration and produces its inter-censal estimates of population. His studies of different categories of permanent and temporary migration resulted in important policy changes being made by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

He has had a major role in influencing the way in which Australia measures migration through work using economic-demographic modelling, which underpins current immigration policy and is supported by both sides of politics. He is currently engaged in the conduct of a longitudinal panel survey on transition to adulthood and this study has already had policy impact in Indonesia.

Peter works extensively on demographic estimation and social change in Indonesia, and co-authored a prize-winning book on the fall in fertility in Iran based on original empirical work with ANU colleagues.

Irene Taeuber, in whose honour the award is named, was well-known for her important international population studies, particularly her demographic work in East and South-east Asia.