

**VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS, FERTILITY
'PLANS' AND THE 'DEMAND' FOR CHILDREN:
EVIDENCE FROM EUROBAROMETER SURVEYS**

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MACINNES, John.- Infecunditat voluntària, “projectes” reproductius i “demanda” d’infants: Evidències des de l’enquesta de l’Eurobaròmetre

Resum.- La infecunditat voluntària és un fenomen complex. Hi ha molts problemes per distingir les decisions sobre el calendari de tenir fills de les decisions sobre tenir-ne o no tenir-ne. Evidències procedents de les enquestes Eurobarometer, bassades en la informació donada pels entrevistats sobre els seus ‘plans’ reproductius originals, demostren que aquests rarament es compleixen. La informació sobre el nombre de fills desitjats és susceptible a interpretacions molt diverses, i s’acostumen a dirigir l’atenció de l’entrevistat més enllà de la seva situació personal. Pot ser convenient distingir entre infecunditat voluntària temporal i permanent. Hi ha evidències d’un lleu increment de la infecunditat voluntària. En termes generals, el perfil sociodemogràfic dels qui voluntàriament no tenen fills s’assembla a la resta de la població amb fills o amb plans per a tenir-los. La diferència més substancial és la seva menor probabilitat d’estat o haver estat en parella. Tot i així, aquesta situació pot ser tant un resultat com una causa de infecunditat voluntària.

Paraules clau.- Infecunditat voluntària temporal/permanent, perfil sociodemogràfic, Enquesta Eurobarometre, Europa.

MACINNES, John.- Infecundidad voluntaria, “proyectos” reproductivos y “demanda” de niños: Evidencias a partir de la encuesta del Eurobarómetro

Resumen.- Infecundidad voluntaria es un fenómeno complejo. Hay muchos problemas en distinguir decisiones sobre el calendario de tener hijos y decisiones sobre tener o no tenerlos. Evidencias procedentes de las encuestas Eurobarometer, basadas en la información dada por los entrevistados sobre sus ‘planes’ reproductivos originales demuestra que estos raramente se cumplen. La información sobre el número de hijos deseados es susceptible de interpretaciones muy diversas, y suelen dirigir la atención del entrevistado más allá de su situación personal. Puede ser conveniente distinguir entre infecundidad voluntaria temporal y permanente. Hay evidencia de un incremento leve en infecundidad voluntaria. En términos generales, el perfil sociodemográfico de los voluntariamente sin hijos se parece al resto de la población con hijos o con planes para tenerlos. La diferencia más sustancial es su menor probabilidad de estar o haber estado en una pareja. Sin embargo, esta situación puede ser tanto un resultado como una causa de infecundidad voluntaria.

Palabras clave.- Infecundidad voluntaria temporal/permanente, perfil sociodemográfico, Encuesta Eurobarómetro, Europa.

MACINNES, John.- Voluntary childlessness, fertility “plans” and the “demand” for children: evidence from eurobarometer surveys.

Abstract.- Voluntary childlessness is a more complex phenomenon than it may at first sight appear. This is especially true as it may be very difficult to distinguish decisions about the timing of children from a decisions about whether or not to have them at all. Evidence from Eurobarometer surveys using respondents' recall of earlier 'plans' shows that these are rarely fulfilled. Survey evidence of respondents' desire for, or plans to have children ought to be interpreted with more care than is sometimes taken, since terms implying 'ideal' preferences are capable of very diverse interpretation and may focus respondent's attention away form the details of their personal situation. It may be useful to distinguish the 'temporarily' and 'permanently' voluntarily childless.

There is some evidence of an increase in voluntary childlessness. In general the voluntarily childless are similar to the rest of the population with children or plans for them. The most important difference is that they are less likely to now be or have been in a partner relationship. However this is as likely to be a result of childlessness as its cause.

Keywords.- Voluntary infertility (temporary or permanent), demographic characteristics, Eurobarometer Survey, Europe.

MACINNES, John.- L'infécondité volontaire, les “projects” de féconditaé et la “demande” d'enfants: résultats des enquêtes de l'Eurobarometer

Resumé.- L'infécondité volontaire est un phénomène complexe. Il existe de nombreux problèmes pour distinguer entre les décisions d'avoir des enfants portant sur le calendrier de celles portant sur le fait d'en avoir ou non. Des évidences procédant des enquêtes de Eurobarometer, basées sur l'information donnée par les interviewés sur leurs "plans" reproductifs originels, montrent que ceux-ci sont rarement atteints. L'information sur le nombre d'enfants désirés est suceptible d"interprétations très diverses, et on a tendance à diriger l'attention de l'enquêté au-delà de sa situation personnelle. Il peut être convenient de distinguer entre infécondité volontaire temporelle et permanente. Il existe des évidences d'une légère augmentation de l'infécondité volontaire. En termes généraux, le profil sociodémographique de ceux qui n'ont pas d'enfants volontairement ressemble à celui du reste de la population ayant des enfants ou prévoyant d'en avoir. La différence la plus substantielle est leur probabilité moindre d'être o d'avoir été en couple. Malgré ceci, cette situation peut aussi bien être un résultat que une cause d'infécondité volontaire.

Mots clés.- Infécondité volontaire temporaire/permanente, profil soiodémographique, enquête Eurobarmetre, Europe

VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS, FERTILITY ‘PLANS’ AND THE ‘DEMAND’ FOR CHILDREN: EVIDENCE FROM EUROBAROMETER SURVEYS.

John MacInnes

1.- Defining voluntary childlessness

Defining voluntary childlessness is not a simple matter, and both terms in the definition must be treated carefully. We can first of all distinguish between adults who currently have and do not have children. In turn we can distinguish between biological parents who have fathered or given birth to live children, and those who have parented their own or other's children (adopted, fostered or step-children) for a period of time, as well as those who have given a child up for adoption. We then face the problem of defining volition. We might contrast voluntary with involuntary childlessness stemming from impaired fecundity or infecundity. There are varying estimates of the extent of the latter. Coleman (1996) suggests that in contemporary Europe around 3% of couples suffer 'primary sterility'. While Grabill and Glick (1959) suggested a higher figure of around 10%. Studies quoted by Clarke and McAllister (1998) suggest that around 14 % of individuals experience infertility, but that only 3-4% have problems that cannot be resolved (Templeton 1992). However a greater problem in distinguishing voluntary and involuntary childlessness is the increasing importance of attitudes and behavior that involve delays or postponement of childbirth, and the rapid increase in infecundity for women as they grow older (Beets 1996). Toulemon (1996) estimated that in the absence of medical intervention, the rate of failure for couples attempting to have a child would rise from around 4% at age 20 to 12% at age 30 and 20% at age 35. In the latest years for which data is available (1999/2000), the lowest mean age at first birth for mothers stood within the EU stood at 26.4 (for Austria and Portugal) and was 28 or more in all other countries except Finland and Greece (data for Belgium was not available).

The voluntary childless who are sexually active must first of all have the means to avoid conception, so that changes in contraceptive technology and knowledge of them are relevant. Those who do not have children may have more or less strong plans, desires or

intentions to have children in the future, especially if they still have a substantial number of childbearing years ahead of them, so that although they are currently ‘voluntarily childless’ they might not define themselves as such, nor intend to ultimately be so, leading some observers to distinguish between the ‘temporary’ and ‘permanent’ voluntarily childless. They may also be involuntarily childless, for physiological or medical reasons, but, unless they have actually unsuccessfully tried to have children, may be unaware of this condition. Finally, they may be capable of having children, but unwilling to have them for other medical reasons such as a medical condition that would make pregnancy dangerous, or risk transmitting an known inherited medical condition to any children (Silverman and Silverman 1971).

Those both without children and not intending to have them may change their plans in the future. A study by Rovi (1994) and two studies based on the longitudinal U.S. National Survey of Families and Households (Heaton et al 1999; Schoen et al 1999) found ‘negative’ fertility intentions to be more stable than positive ones, so that those planning not to have children were more likely to carry out their plans than those planning to have them. However the time period in the Schoen et al study was rather short – six years, and a study by Qu et al (2000), and as we shall see, the present study, found the reverse: that early plans to be childless are quite likely to be reversed. Conversely, those intending to have children in the future but not immediately, may ultimately never find the ‘appropriate’ time to do so, or upon doing so, may discover a previously unknown infertility problem or discover that age has reduced their fertility. Tanturri and Mencarini, in a qualitative interview study of childless women in five Italian cities, found that a third of their respondents had never tried to have children, but that often ‘childlessness is the unintended outcome of extended postponement’ (2004). As Rowland (1998) comments ‘childlessness is commonly a situation consolidated only gradually as youth gives way to middle age’. Poston and Trent (1982), Cambell (1985), Morgan (1991) and Clarke and McAllister (1998) have all emphasized the importance of delayed childbearing gradually turning into childlessness, what Tanturris and Mencarini label ‘permanent postponement’ (2004). Alexander (1992), Morell (1994) and Beets (1996) found some women retrospectively regretting their drift into childlessness.

Finally those without children who have reached the end of their childbearing years (rather easier to define in the case of women rather than men) without having planned or tried to have children may be defined as voluntarily childless, although it may be that some

proportion of such people had an unknown sterility condition that would have rendered them involuntarily childless had they tried to have children.

Much depends on how we view the plans intentions or desires of the currently childless. These may be more or less strongly held, more or less concrete or compete with other priorities. Few 'choices' are not socially constrained in some way. As we shall see, individuals with children may subscribe to an abstract personal ideal of childlessness, while those without, and no intention to have children may cite having them as 'ideal'. The distinction is often made (e.g. Van Peer 200) between 'general ideal', 'personal ideal' and 'realized' family size or numbers of children. The first is defined in terms of respondents' perception of a general social ideal, the second in terms of their own personal ideal or plans and the third in terms of the number of children the respondent has actually had. Previous survey research has shown that ideal family sizes are, on average, greater than personal ideal family sizes which in turn are greater than actual family sizes realized by survey respondents.

As Clarke and McAllister comment (1998) 'Many parents do not *plan* to have children at all – or at least not at the particular time they arrive.' In patriarchal societies motherhood may be seen as an irresistible obligation for married women, while Rowland (1998) has speculated that the rise in voluntary childlessness may be associated with the reassertion of 'the right not to marry' and 'the right not to have children' after the high rate of nuptuality and fertility of the baby boom years. Tanturri and Mencarini (2004) go further:

'Childbearing, for instance, is no longer essential for the definition of female identity, but is seen rather to compete with other sources of fulfillment (Piazza, 2003). Being childless does not imply any loss of status, but on the contrary, frequently helps women to carve out a path for themselves in other areas. Similarly, partnership has assumed a central value in the life of the partners, regardless of their parental role (Aries, 1980). Moreover, increased childlessness has also brought about a reduction in social sanctions and greater social acceptance of the refusal to procreate or to lead a "child-free" life (Bonazzi, 2001).'

Silverman and Silverman (1971) found that amongst other reasons for voluntary childlessness were views that a child would interfere with a couple's relationship, would

restrict the mother's career or be difficult to afford. The intention to have a child may be seen as realizable only after other conditions have been met which may be more or less under the person's control. These may include finding a partner and establishing a relationship with them seen as adequate for parenting. Thomson (1997) found men's views to have equal weight to those of their partners in decisions about births, however, as is well known, we have much less data about the fertility behavior and attitudes of men compared to women. Miller and Pasta (1996) investigated the impact of couple disagreement about fertility decisions. The definition of such a relationship may range from a minimum of conception of the child only, followed by single parenthood, through to a relationship that is emotionally satisfactory or materially advantageous or has other characteristics that the person deems necessary (such as marriage). Silverman and Silverman (1971) cited lack of sexual activity or lack of marital stability as factors in childlessness, while Qu et al (2000) found that partnership history was a key determinant in the realization of men's and women's original fertility intentions. Other prerequisites and/or priorities may include securing the resources seen as necessary to the kind of parenting the person envisages, such as establishment of an appropriate labour market career or completion of training, both for the person or their partner or both, the presence of other family members or networks of friends to support parenting.

Plans desires or intentions reported by survey respondents may merely be *ex post* rationalizations of behaviour that at the time was not consciously thought through in such terms. Finally, to the extent that strong social norms or expectations exist about having children, people may feel constrained to describe their childbearing behaviour or plans in a way that is consistent with aspects of such norms, rather than challenging them directly. Morell (1994) found that the voluntarily childless may construct 'acceptable' reasons for their decisions. Ireland (1993) Letherby (2002) Gillespie (2003) Hird (2003) have investigated the relationship between dominant discourses of femininity and motherhood and the self identities of voluntarily childless women.

2.- Defining voluntary childlessness using the Eurobarometer survey questions

The questions in Eurobarometer 56.2 allow us to measure ideal and personal ideal numbers of children in a number of different ways. First respondents were asked [Q. 60] 'Generally speaking, what do you think is the ideal number of children for a family?' We can take

their answers to this question as a definition of ‘general ideal family size’. They were then asked [Q. 61] ‘And for you personally, what would be the ideal number of children you would like to have or would like to have had?’ We can take their answers to this question as a definition of ‘personal ideal family size’. However, we can assume that personal ideals may change over the life course, and it is likely, for example, that they may be adjusted to conform to the respondents own experiences. Respondents aged over 24 were therefore asked [Q. 62] ‘Thinking back to when you were around twenty years old, how many children did you want to have then?’ We can take their answers to this question as representing their personal ideal family size at that age, but answers to such a question have to be treated with caution, as respondents may have difficulty remembering accurately, or indeed may find it easier to remember those aspects of their lives that are consistent with their current experiences. Respondents were also asked whether they had actually realized the number of children they remembered planning at twenty, and if they had not, were asked to choose from a set of reasons describing why [Q. 63]. Those aged less than fifty were then asked ‘How many more children do you (still) plan to have?’ [Q. 66]. Respondents could reply with a specific number, or ‘don’t know’, but unfortunately the latter does not allow us to differentiate between respondents who did not know *whether* they planned to have more children, or did have plans to have more children but did not know *how many* they might plan to have. Respondents were also asked how many children they had had, and their age at first birth. Throughout, whether children includes adopted, fostered or step children, or those given up for adoption is not specified, but since we are interested in respondents without any children or plans to have them, this is less of a drawback. These questions give us five measures of desired number of children from which measures of voluntary childlessness can be taken:

- 1 General ideal family size [Q. 60]
- 2 Current personal ideal family size [Q. 61]
- 3 Personal ideal family size at age 20 [Q. 62]
- 4 Current realized number of children [Q. 64]
- 5 Current realized and planned children for respondents <50 [Q. 64 & Q. 66]

We can compare the proportion of respondents giving zero as the general ideal number of children for a family with earlier surveys in 1979 and 1989. 11% of respondents said there was no such thing as an ideal family size or that 'it depends', and 4 % said that they did not know. Their responses have been treated as missing in the current analysis.

Table 1. General ideal family size, Europe. % respondents choosing 'no children' 1979 -1989. (excluding responses 'don't know' and 'no ideal family size')

	1979	1989	2001	Men 2001	Women 2001	N(2001) (unweighted)
Belgium	6	5	4	6.1	2.5	1007
Denmark	3	3	0	0	0.2	1000
W Germany	9	7	6	9.8	3.4	1001
Greece	na	2	1	0.8	0.4	1002
Italy	3	2	1	1.4	0.9	999
Spain	Na	4	2	2.4	0.9	1000
France	3	3	2	1.2	2.6	1005
Ireland	2	2	5	5.4	4.3	1001
N. Ireland			2	0.8	2.2	312
Luxembourg	5	3	1	1.2	1.2	604
Netherlands	3	3	2	2.7	2.9	999
Portugal	na	3	2	1.7	1.7	1001
Gt. Britain	2	2	1	1.7	1.2	1000
E. Germany			7	9.9	5.0	1006
Finland			1	1.0	0.9	1003
Sweden			0	0.5	0.5	1000
Austria			7	7.1	7.3	999
EU 15			2.7	3.5	2.1	15939

Source: European Commission (1990) and EB56.2

The question wording for general ideal family size has unfortunately sometimes been used in the past to refer to respondents own desires rather than their perception of a general ideal (e.g. Coleman 1993, Clarke and McAllister 1998). In this context it is worth noting that in 2001 11% of respondents said that there was no such ideal – it would depend on a person’s circumstances. For all countries, except Ireland, the percentage citing an ideal family size of zero children has declined over time, although the numbers are very small.

Table 2. Personal ideal family size, Europe 2001. % respondents reporting ‘no children’ as ideal family size. (Excluding ‘don’t know’)

	All	Men	Women
Belgium	8	13.6	3.5
Denmark	2	2.3	2.0
W Germany	11	18.3	7.9
Greece	2	2.1	1.4
Italy	4	5.3	2.7
Spain	4	5.2	3.1
France	4	4.9	3.3
Ireland	5	6.7	5.0
N. Ireland	5	3.6	5.9
Luxembourg	5	4.9	4.9
Netherlands	10	10.4	10.2
Portugal	3	2.9	3.9
Gt. Britain	4	5.6	2.8
E. Germany	9	14.0	5.2
Finland	5	5.6	4.1
Sweden	2	1.7	2.5
Austria	9	11.2	9.7
EU 15	5.6	7.0	4.5

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author’s analysis.

The proportions vary substantially across countries within Europe, lowest in the Scandinavian countries and highest in Germany and Austria. In most countries more men than women cite no children as an ideal. Variation across countries is slightly greater for men than for women, ranging from 0% in Denmark to 10% in East and West Germany.

Once respondents are asked specifically about their own preferences rather than a general ideal, the numbers choosing 'no children' approximately double. The ranking between countries changes slightly, with Belgium and the Netherlands joining countries with higher numbers choosing no children. Again variation across countries is slightly greater for men than for women.

For respondents aged over 24, Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents who reported that around age twenty they planned to have no children (4.7% of men and 3.2% of women said that they didn't know what their plans were at around age 20, and were excluded from the analysis.) It also shows the proportions who said that at that age they had no definite plans in the sense that they did not think about or care about the issue. On this measure voluntary childlessness is still more prevalent. Across the 15 EU member states, three times as extensive as on the 'personal ideal family size' measure. 20% of men and 13% of women report having favoured no children when they were aged around twenty, with a further 23% of men and 12% of women saying that they did not think about it at that age, or did not care. In virtually all countries, around ten percent or more of men and women report that they did not plan to have children at this age, with the proportion of men reporting this rising to twenty five percent or more in Germany, Austria Luxembourg Northern Ireland and the Netherlands. However, 48.4% of such men and 61.1% of such women reported having since had children. This suggests that, at least in terms of respondents' recollections, attitudes towards childlessness changes over the life course for many respondents.

We can compare these results with respondents in the survey who are currently aged around twenty. Of those aged 18 to 22 at the time of the survey, only 7.3% of men and 4.0% of women said that their personal ideal size of family was no children. However a further 13.1% of men and 7.0% of women said that they didn't know how many children would be their ideal. When asked about their plans to have children however, 28% of men and 20% of women of this age said that they did not know how many children they planned to have, and 8% of both men and women said that they planned to have none. Thus, compared to older survey respondents' recollections of their plans at that age, young men

and women today seem less likely to explicitly plan no children, or have this as their ideal family size, but are less likely to have definite plans to have a specific number of children. It is also noteworthy that although only 4% of young women cited no children as their personal ideal family size, double that proportion (8%) said that they planned to have none.

Table 3 A. Recollection of plans for children at around age 20, Europe 2001. Respondents reporting that they planned no children, one or more children or did not think or did not care about the issue at that age. (Respondents aged 25+ only, excluding ‘don’t know’)

All	none	Didn't think about it/ didn't care	One or more
Belgium	15.6	11.3	73.0
Denmark	17.0	15.5	67.6
W Germany	22.1	13.6	64.3
Greece	11.8	21.1	67.1
Italy	15.3	13.8	70.9
Spain	10.8	24.8	64.4
France	12.7	10.0	77.3
Ireland	10.0	35.1	54.9
N. Ireland	21.1	28.5	50.4
Luxembourg	24.0	11.2	64.7
Netherlands	19.5	14.8	65.8
Portugal	14.4	27.0	58.6
Gt. Britain / UK	18.5	16.2	65.2
E. Germany	18.7	4.5	76.8
Finland	16.2	23.2	60.7
Sweden	14.8	19.3	65.9
Austria	24.4	10.7	64.9
EU 15	16.6	17.1	66.2

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 3B. Recollection of plans for children at around age 20, Males

Males	none	Didn't think about it/didn't ca	One or more
Belgium	19.3	16.8	63.9
Denmark	18.1	23.5	58.4
W Germany	31.3	19.2	49.5
Greece	14.1	26.3	59.6
Italy	19.4	20.2	60.5
Spain	11.6	31.9	56.5
France	18.2	14.5	67.4
Ireland	11.3	44.2	44.5
N. Ireland	27.7	35.7	36.6
Luxembourg	28.8	11.8	59.4
Netherlands	24.8	19.5	55.7
Portugal	17.5	31.9	50.6
Gt. Britain / UK	21.8	26.3	51.9
E. Germany	26.2	6.4	67.4
Finland	17.5	31.1	51.4
Sweden	16.6	29.1	54.3
Austria	29.5	16.0	54.5
EU 15	20.4	23.3	56.3

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 3 C. Recollection of plans for children at around age 20, Females

Female	none	Didn't think about it/ did care	One or more
Belgium	12.2	6.6	81.2
Denmark	16.0	8.1	76.0
W Germany	14.2	8.5	77.3
Greece	9.6	16.2	74.1
Italy	11.7	8.1	80.2
Spain	10.3	18.3	71.5
France	8.1	6.0	85.8
Ireland	8.9	27.2	64.0
N. Ireland	15.4	22.3	62.3
Luxembourg	20.0	10.4	69.6
Netherlands	14.1	10.1	75.7
Portugal	11.7	22.7	65.6
Gt. Britain / UK	15.9	7.8	76.3
E. Germany	12.4	3.2	84.5
Finland	15.0	16.4	68.7
Sweden	13.2	9.9	76.9
Austria	19.9	6.3	73.8
EU 15	13.3	11.6	75.1

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

If we make the assumption that any inaccuracy or bias in respondents' recall of their fertility intentions at around age twenty does not vary systematically with their age at the time of the survey, then we can estimate the proportion of men and women who planned no children at that age at different periods of time. In order to do this respondents who said that they did not think or care about the issue at that age have been excluded. (We shall

show below that their eventual reported fertility outcomes lay between those who originally did and did not plan to have children at this age.) As Table 4 shows, it appears that for both men and women, the proportion of those planning no children has increased substantially since the 1970s, and that this increase has been greater for men (18 to 38%) than for women (10 to 20%). This suggests a different trend in childlessness intentions from that revealed by Table 1 for general ideal family size.

Table 4. Respondents recalling wanting to have no children at around age 20 by period in which they reached that age

% planning no children	Men	N	Women	N
Up to 1950	19.3	413	11.0	690
1951-55	17.5	329	10.5	478
1956-60	21.2	410	7.7	437
1961-65	23.9	371	8.1	521
1966-70	18.2	463	10.2	523
1971-75	23.6	442	13.6	580
1976-80	27.7	504	16.0	531
1981-85	32.1	524	18.0	673
1986-90	34.8	584	17.2	739
1991-96	38.4	597	20.1	771
		4637		5943

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Although the experience of different countries has not been uniform in this period, and the proportion of respondents recalling different fertility intentions varies substantially from one year to the next, almost all countries experienced rises in planned childlessness. Because N's for individual countries are small, we can compare them by sex by decade, comparing the proportion of those planning no children at twenty for the period 1966- 75, before the recent rises started, and 1987 - to 1996, the last ten years for

which we have data. Table 5 shows that there were rises in planned childlessness for both men and women for all countries except Great Britain, which records a slight drop for both men and women, for Portugal, which records a rise for men but not for women, and for France which records a rise for men but no change for women.

Table 5. Respondents recalling wanting to have no children at around age 20 Individual countries 1966-75 & 1987-96

	Men 1966-75	Men 1987- 96	N	Women 1966-75	Women 1987-96	N
Belgium	17	34	124	14	17	155
Denmark	18	23	137	13	17	171
W Germany	24	68	131	14	24	148
Greece	17	32	121	8	24	164
Italy	19	32	128	8	26	158
Spain	15	18	103	14	23	121
France	12	28	159	6	6	152
Ireland	21	25	74	13	15	137
N. Ireland	24	67	37	0	22	43
Luxembourg	26	40	95	23	26	94
Netherlands	25	34	147	6	25	172
Portugal	23	33	92	19	10	130
Gt. Britain	29	26	130	20	19	181
E. Germany	26	43	127	13	15	148
Finland	27	31	114	17	21	176
Sweden	13	26	122	14	19	157
Austria	35	46	123	13	30	162
EU 15	20.9	36.9	1964	12.0	19.6	2469

Note N's refer to the total number of cases for both time periods.
Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

So far we have examined respondents reported ideals and recollection of their plans when younger. Examining whether respondents' have had children tells us little, as this is so strongly influenced by age: younger respondents may still have to fulfill plans to have children while older respondents may have realized all their plans, or in the case of women, may have passed their fertile age. However we can identify those respondents, who report not only that they have no children but that they also plan to have no children. We could define this group as the potentially permanently childless. We can also identify those without children who say that they don't know if they have plans to have a child. Such respondents could be classified as potentially permanently childless. We can identify those respondents who do not yet have a child but say that they plan to have at least one as the temporarily childless. The distribution of these groups by country and by sex is shown in Table 6, along with the proportion of respondents who currently have a child. This gives a higher incidence of childlessness than the personal ideal family size measure, but lower than that indicated by respondents' recollections of their plans at age 20. Again, men are more likely than women to report childlessness, but the differential is rather less than that given by personal ideal family size. It can also be seen that the ranking of countries here does not correspond with that for general or personal ideal family size.

Only respondents under fifty were asked about their plans for children, and so to produce this table it has been assumed that respondents over 49 did not plan to have children. This assumption is almost certainly realistic for both men and women, as the number of men reporting fathering children after 49 in the survey is tiny. Table 7 shows the distribution of respondents in the Eurobarometer survey with children by their age at first birth. Since only 1.3% of men and 0.2% of women had their first child after the age of forty, we can treat the latter as an age representing the end, in practice, of childbearing activity. This is confirmed by respondents reports of their plans for children. Very few respondents between the ages of 41 and 49 (respondents over 49 were not asked the question) reported having plans for children: 3% of men and 1% of women.

Table 6. Respondents reporting that they:

- Did not have children and planned not to have children in the future
- Did not have children and did not know their plans
- Did not have children and planned to have children in the future
- Had children

Row %	Currently childless						Have children	
	Permanent		Potentially permanent		Temporary			
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Belgium	14.8	7.9	10.3	5.2	13.6	16.1	61.2	70.8
Denmark	10.6	8.6	2.7	2.8	19.3	15.1	67.4	73.5
W Germany	17.2	10.2	12.7	4.7	13.3	13.4	56.7	71.6
Greece	4.7	6.4	8.2	4.1	26.9	18.6	60.2	70.9
Italy	7.9	7.7	11.9	9.6	23.9	16.8	56.3	65.9
Spain	9.1	6.0	14.1	8.0	22.4	20.0	54.5	66.0
France	8.9	4.8	10.0	4.4	21.8	18.0	59.3	72.8
Ireland	16.9	11.4	16.1	8.1	13.6	13.8	53.1	66.5
N. Ireland	9.9	6.2	15.2	5.6	18.5	11.2	56.3	77.0
Luxembourg	10.5	9.7	7.4	2.6	16.7	13.6	65.2	73.8
Netherlands	11.8	12.4	5.3	4.5	24.1	16.6	58.6	66.5
Portugal	7.4	7.6	6.4	3.3	19.9	15.7	66.2	73.3
Gt. Britain	9.9	5.2	4.8	2.1	15.4	7.0	69.8	85.6
E. Germany	13.8	7.1	8.5	2.9	17.0	11.4	60.6	78.6
Finland	9.7	10.2	8.8	5.6	17.6	9.7	63.8	74.5
Sweden	6.1	7.8	7.0	6.7	17.6	11.1	69.2	74.3
Austria	13.8	13.5	10.7	6.8	14.9	10.1	60.7	69.4
EU 15	11.0	7.5	10.0	5.4	19.0	14.6	60.0	72.5

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 7. Age at birth of first child

Age at birth of first child	Male	Female
< 21	7.2	22.8
21-30	73.9	68.5
31-40	17.6	8.4
41-50	1.2	0.2
51+	0.1	0.0
	4552	5893

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 8 shows the proportion of respondents over 40 (i.e. those who are most likely to have completed any family plans) who were childless. All the figures are higher than those reported in table 6. Were we able to assume that fertility intentions were stable across generations, such results would suggest that many individuals do not realize their fertility plans. In practice, we know that for many European countries the incidence of childlessness is in fact increasing, suggesting that unrealized fertility intentions may also increase in the future. Table 9 compares Eurostat data, where available, for the proportion of women born in 1960 who were childless in 2001 with the Eurobarometer results for women aged 40 to 59. It is necessary to use such a spread of ages to avoid problems with small numbers. Since childlessness has been increasing, we could expect that for most European countries the Eurostat data would show rather higher levels of childlessness than that recorded by Eurobarometer. This is indeed what we find for most countries, although for some (chiefly West Germany and the UK) the differences are rather large.

Table 8. Respondents reporting no children (respondents aged > 40 only)

	All	men	women	Women born 1960 (Eurostat)	Women aged 40 -59 (EuroB)
Belgium	14.5	17.6	11.7	13.7	14.6%
Denmark	13.1	14.3	12.3	12.0	9.9%
W Germany	13.7	16.9	10.9	27.8	15.0%
Greece	10.1	10.0	10.3		7.8%
Italy	10.5	11.9	9.5	14.7	9.4%
Spain	11.7	14.8	8.8	11.0	10.1%
France	11.8	15.5	8.7	10.7	8.7%
Ireland	18.4	22.9	14.3	15.1	10.1%
N. Ireland	10.4	13.7	7.4		8.3%
Luxembourg	14.3	14.9	13.3		9.8%
Netherlands	13.7	15.2	12.4	17.7	15.0%
Portugal	10.5	9.9	11.0	7.2	9.2%
Gt. Britain	11.6	15.8	7.7	21.5*	8.4%
E. Germany	10.1	13.3	7.5	7.9	8.0%
Finland	14.9	15.0	15.2	18.0	16.8%
Sweden	10.5	9.6	11.4	13.8	12.3%
Austria	15.7	16.9	14.8		11.9%
EU 15	12.1	14.7	9.8		

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 9. Percentage childless women in 2001.

	Women born 1960 (Eurostat)	Women aged 40 -59 (EuroB)
Belgium	13.7	14.6
Denmark	12.0	9.9
W Germany	27.8	15.0
Greece		7.8
Italy	14.7	9.4
Spain	11.0	10.1
France	10.7	8.7
Ireland	15.1	10.1
N. Ireland		8.3
Luxembourg		9.8
Netherlands	17.7	15.0
Portugal	7.2	9.2
Gt. Britain	21.5*	8.4
E. Germany	7.9	8.0
Finland	18.0	16.8
Sweden	13.8	12.3
Austria		11.9
EU 15		

*Data refers to UK

Source: Eurostat; Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

3.- Characteristics of the voluntarily childless

Because of the small numbers involved, the analysis that follows is mostly confined to analysis of all 15 EU member states together. Table 10 shows that older men and women are progressively less likely to plan children, and more likely to have already realized plans for children. Although there is not a clear age trend at earlier years in the numbers definitely planning no children, it rises for both men and women in their late thirties and early forties, settling at a substantially higher level. Those respondents aged over 24 who reported that at age twenty they wanted a definite number of children were asked whether they had yet had all the children that they wanted at that age. Those who said that they had not had all they children they wanted then were asked to choose up to three reasons from the list shown in Table 11, which compares all respondents with those saying that they had no children and planned none. Two reasons are most frequently cited, both by childless and other respondents: women's health and the inability to find the right partner, or the existence of problems with a partner. The only other reasons cited by more than a few respondents are that of 'finding the right time' to have children, or work life balance (more frequently cited by women).

Unfortunately the survey did not ask specifically if health problems related to involuntary infertility, but it is probably a reasonable assumption that a significant proportion of childless respondents citing their own or their partners' health problems as a reason for having fewer children than planned may be defined as involuntarily rather than voluntarily childless for our purposes here. A further drawback of the survey design is that this question was only asked of that subset of respondents who wanted a definite number of children at around age 20, excluding those who knew they wanted children but did not know how many. We cannot identify if their own or their partner's health has been a factor in family planning for such respondents. However in subsequent analyses we can identify as 'voluntarily childless' those respondents with no children or plans to have them, and who, if they were 25 or over and had planned to have a definite number of children at age around twenty, did not report health problems for either themselves or their partner.

Table 10. Realized and planned children by age group and sex. Europe 2001

Age & Sex	Have child	Temporary childless (plan)	Potentially permanent (dk plan)	Permanent childless (plan none)	N
men					
15 26	8.2	55.6	29.1	7.2	1576
27 29	21.2	51.9	16.6	10.2	391
30 32	43.8	32.9	13.5	9.9	505
33 35	58.9	23.1	11.3	6.7	523
36 38	65.8	9.4	11.6	13.2	447
39 41	76.3	6.3	5.4	12	443
42 44	77.5	3.8	4.4	14.2	338
45 49	79.2	1.7	3.5	15.6	596
50+	87.7	na	na	12.3	2837
All	60.0	19.1	10.0	11.0	7656
Women					
15 26	18	58	19	4.9	1497
27 29	49.5	34.2	10.6	5.7	368
30 32	70.6	18.6	7.2	3.6	558
33 35	75.6	12.5	7.2	4.7	471
36 38	84.8	4.1	4.5	6.6	441
39 41	84.6	2.3	3.5	9.6	429
42 44	88.7	0.3	1.2	9.8	337
45 49	88.1	1.3	1.0	9.6	716
50+	90.9	na	na	9.1	3384
All	72.5	14.6	5.4	7.5	8201

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 11. Reasons given for having fewer children than planned at around 20.(only respondents over 25 who reported a definite number of children wanted at around 20, and said that they had not had all those children)

	All respondents		No children and planning none	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
I have/had health problems	4.7	18.5	17.8	30.4
My partner has/had health problems	13.0	2.7	19.3	4.6
I did not find the right partner/ I have/had problems with my partner	15.3	14.5	32.6	28.6
I have/had financial problems	4.6	5.9	1.7	2.8
My partner has/had financial problems	0.3	1.4	0	0.2
I find/found it difficult to combine work and family life.	7.0	8.7	1.9	8.4
Availability of suitable accommodation was a problem	2.8	2.7	1.0	2.2
The cost of children is/was too high	7.3	7.2	2.9	1.1
I could not find the right time for having children	11.3	9.3	12.6	10.9
My priorities changed. I have enough children	11.8	12.2	3.3	1.7
I still plan to have more children	18.9	17.5	2.3	1.1
N	1389	2001	180	239

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Are those respondents who neither have children, nor, if they are under fifty, plan to have more children also the men and women who say that their ideal number of children for a family is zero? This is shown in Table 12 which compares this group with those respondents who either have or say that they plan to have children. Two- fifths of men

and a half of women without children or plans to have them reported an ideal family size of one or more children, suggesting that their childlessness may be ‘voluntary’ but not always ideally desired. However for about one half of men and two-fifths of women, their childlessness corresponds with their reported personal ideal family size. Around seven out of ten of both men and women whose personal ideal family size is no children are those who neither have nor plan children. Very few respondents indeed with children or plans to have them say that no children is their personal ideal family size.

Table 12. Children and plans for children by personal ideal family size

Row %	Personal ideal no. of children			
	Don't know	None	One or more	N
Men				
No children and plan none	10.5	48.1	42.4	830
Have or plan children	7.9	2.3	89.8	6864
Women				
No children and plan none	8.7	38.4	52.9	609
Have or plan children	4.1	1.3	94.6	7621

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

4.- Stability of childbearing intentions

The survey also allows us to identify those respondents without children or plans to have them who report that they did not want children at around age twenty (Table 13). Just over a half of men and just under a half of all women without children or plans for them also recalled planning to have no children when they were aged around twenty. Only one in four men and two out of five women without children or plans for them originally planned to have them. This measure also allows us to make comparisons with

two panel studies, one in Australia for the period 1981-90 and one in the United States for the period 1988-94 which looked at the stability of fertility intentions.

Table 13. Current parental status and plans by number of children wanted at around age 20. Europe. 2001. (Respondents over 25 only, excluding ‘don’t know’)

Row %	Children wanted at age 20			
	None	One or more	Didn't think/care	N
Men				
No children and plan none	53.8%	23.6%	22.7%	649
Have or plan children	17.5%	61.0%	21.5%	5404
Women				
No children and plan none	45.1%	39.6%	15.3%	559
Have or plan children	10.2%	80.7%	9.1%	7114

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Qu et al (2000) report results from the Australian Family Formation Project. 783 Respondents who had participated in a 1981 survey about fertility plans were traced in a 1990 second wave survey (about 52% of original participants were located) 783 respondents without children in wave one were re-interviewed in 1990 when aged 27-43. Table 14, recalculated from Qu et al (2000) shows that nine years later the majority of the childless, whether planning children or not, were those who originally wanted children. Conversely one quarter of those who had said in 1981 that they did not want children had gone on to have them nine years later, and just under another quarter now said that they wanted to have them. The study noted the role of relationship status in influencing outcomes. Those most likely to have had children were those with the same partner in both waves, or single in wave one and partnered in wave 2. Continuously single were the most likely to say they did not know their fertility plans. Of those unsure

or saying that they did not want children in wave one, those most likely to have changed intention and either have or plan children in wave 2 were those who had moved from singlehood to partnered status. The authors noted that results differed little by sex.

Table 14. Fertility plans and outcomes: Australian Family Formation Project

Outcome by 1990	Fertility plans in 1981			
	Want	Don't want	Don't know	All
Had children	398	12	10	420
No children + Want	200	8	11	219
No children + Don't want	44	25	13	82
No children + Don't know	54	3	5	62
All	696	48	39	783

Source Qu et al 2000 table 1

Three findings are worth highlighting from the Australian study. The first is that although respondents who said that they wanted children in 1981 were more than twice as likely to have them in 1990 than other respondents, the majority of respondents in 1990 who either did not have or did not want children, or did not know if they wanted children, were respondents who had said they wanted them in 1981. This is because the group who said they did not want children or didn't know their plans in 1981 was so small. The second is that the intentions of those who wanted children appeared to be more stable than those who did not. One in seven of those who wanted children in 1981 changed their view by 1990, compared to almost half of those who did not want, and five out of six of the 'don't know's. The third feature is the similarity in the distribution of 1990 views of those who said in 1981 that they did not want or did not know if they wanted children.

It is possible to undertake a study similar to the Australian one using Eurobarometer data, but with two substantial changes. The first, and most important, is that since the Eurobarometer study is cross-sectional, our only information on respondents' earlier intentions is their current recollection of them. As we noted above, this may not be accurate, respondents may have difficulty recalling their intentions from what may be a considerable time in the past, or may prefer to align their recollection of past beliefs with subsequent behaviour or attitudes. The second is that we have information on original fertility intentions at a single age (twenty), and thus at different points in time for respondents of different ages rather than at a single point in time for different ages as in the Australian study.

Table 15. Respondents aged 27-43. Realized and planned fertility by intentions recalled for around age 20.

Men and women age 27 - 43	Children wanted at twenty			All
	one or more	or none	didn't think/care	
Children had or planned now				
have child	2245 76%	453 43%	384 59%	3082 66%
plan child	498 17%	240 23%	94 14%	832 18%
plan no child	76 3%	255 24%	40 6%	371 8%
dk plans	135 5%	108 10%	135 21%	378 8%
N	2954	1056	653	4663
Row %	63.3%	22.6%	14.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

This means that rather than looking at changes in fertility intention over a fixed period, the length will vary according to the age of respondent. The Australian study found little difference between men and women respondents, so for ease of comparison we first present a comparison of the results of the study for both sexes. The Australian respondents were aged 27 to 43 at the time of re-interview, and so we have first confined the analysis of the results to these ages. Respondents who said that could not remember their fertility intentions at around age 20, who did not know whether or not they had a child were excluded from the analysis.

Compared to the Australian study, a lower proportion of respondents reported definitely wanting children, but higher proportions of all three groups had had children at the time of the survey. Two factors accounting for this may be the higher mean age of the Australian respondents in wave one (aged 18 to 34 years) when asked about their original fertility intentions and the fact that the Eurobarometer respondents had had a longer mean period of time from age twenty in which to realize their intentions. There is greater consistency between intention and outcome in the Eurobarometer study, although this may be due to the use of the recall of intentions, rather than a longitudinal capture of intentions at the relevant time in separate survey waves. However the Eurobarometer study confirms that negative or uncertain fertility intentions appear to be less stable than positive ones. While only 8% of those who said they wanted children at age twenty said they had no plans for them or didn't know if they had plans for them at the time of the survey, two-thirds of those who said they did not want a child and almost three-quarters of those who said they did not care or think about it when they were twenty either had a child or planned one by the time of the survey.

Because of this greater consistency, and unlike the Australian group, the majority of those currently without children are those who intended not to have them, or did not care or think about it around age 20, although these groups still only accounted for 55% of all those without children, and 80% of those both without children or plans for them.

If we make the assumption that any inaccuracy or bias in respondents' recall of their fertility intentions at around age twenty does not vary systematically with age, then we can examine the stability of fertility intentions over time by comparing respondents recall of intentions at age 20 with their current realized and intended fertility recorded in the survey, by age group.

**Table 16. Realized and planned fertility by intentions recalled for around age 20.
Men and women by age group**

Col %		Children wanted @20			Total
Men and Women		none	one or more	didn't think/care	
25-29	have child	15.2	40.2	15.9	30.6
	plan child	40.9	48.7	39.2	45.4
	dk plans	16.8	9.1	38.6	15.2
	plan no child	27.1	2.0	6.3	8.8
N		303	748	176	1227
30-34	have child	40.5	74.0	45.1	62.0
	plan child	28.3	21.1	23.8	23.2
	dk plans	13.0	4.0	25.7	9.0
	plan no child	18.3	1.0	5.3	5.8
N		400	1006	206	1612
35-39	have child	53.5	84.9	70.5	76.1
	plan child	12.5	7.3	6.3	8.2
	dk plans	7.6	4.6	17.0	7.2
	plan no child	26.4	3.2	6.3	8.4
N		288	887	224	1399
40-44	have child	57.3	91.6	82.0	83.2
	plan child	4.8	2.2	2.2	2.8
	dk plans	7.5	1.7	5.1	3.4
	plan no child	30.4	4.5	10.7	10.7
N		227	717	178	1122
45-49	have child	74.4	90.1	76.4	85.3
	plan child	1.4	1.8		1.5
	dk plans	2.7	1.4	5.0	2.1
	plan no child	21.5	6.7	18.6	11.1
N		219	791	161	1171
50+	have child	70.1	95.0	87.0	90.5
	plan no child	29.9	5.0	13.0	9.5
N		686	3869	1004	5559
1 25+	have child	53.4	85.2	72.9	77.6
	plan child	13.8	8.5	7.0	9.2
	dk plans	6.9	2.2	9.0	4.1
	plan no child	25.8	4.1	11.1	9.0
N		2147	8089	1950	12186

This is shown in table 16. This suggests that early fertility intentions may change quite rapidly. Only 27% of those aged 25-29 who reported not wanting any children when they were 20 still held this intention, while double that proportion (56%) either had or planned a child. Conversely only 2% of those originally planning children now said they did *not* plan to have them and a further 9% said they did not know their plans. The percentage of those originally planning no children who continue to be both childless and without plans for children fluctuates across different age groups, but for those aged over fifty who we can assume have completed their childbearing plans is only 30%. 70% of such respondents had had a child despite recalling not wanting any around age 20. Conversely the proportions of those recalling originally wanting children who have realized this intention rise steadily with age to reach 95% of those aged over 50. The percentage such respondents saying they do not know their plans declines with age, while those now planning no child rises to 7% for those aged 45-49 and 5% for those aged 50+.

In order to consider gender and the stability of fertility intentions, table 17 compares intentions at age 20 with outcomes for male and female respondents in two age groups: ages 25-40 and over 40. Table 17 shows, for those aged 25+, whether they currently have a child, by their recall of their plans for children at around age twenty. A small number of respondents who either said that they did not know whether they had a child, or could not recall their plans for children at around age twenty, are excluded from the analysis. We have already seen (Table 3) that respondents' recall of their plans for children at age twenty gives a higher levels of planned childlessness than other measures such as respondents views of their personal ideal family size. The table suggests that, in common with the study by Qu et al (2000) in Australia but in contrast to studies by Schoen et al (1999) and Heaton et al (1999) for the USA, positive fertility intentions appear to be more stable than negative ones. Even in the 25-40 age group, which will contain many respondents who have not completely realized their fertility intentions, around a half of women who recalled planning no children, or who did not think or did not care about the issue at around age twenty, had since gone on to have a child. The corresponding percentages for men are 31 and 45%. In the second age group, in which the vast majority of men and women will have completed any childbearing plans, only one in four women and one in three men who recalled planning not to have any children had in fact not gone on to have any. In contrast, in this age group, over

Table 17. Realized and planned fertility by intentions recalled for around age 20 by sex and age group

		Plans for children at age 20			
women		none	one or more	didn't think/care	All
25- 40	No child	215	429	92	736
		52.2%	23.9%	46.7%	30.6%
	Had child	197	1368	105	1670
		47.8%	76.1%	53.3%	69.4%
	All	412	1797	197	2406
	(Row %)	17.1%	74.7%	8.2%	
41+	No child	118	232	61	411
		26.6%	6.6%	13.6%	9.3%
	Had child	325	3279	387	3991
		73.4%	93.4%	86.4%	90.7%
	All	443	3511	448	4402
	(Row %)	10.1%	79.8%	10.2%	
men					
25- 40	No child	461	505	247	1213
		68.9%	41.2%	55.5%	51.8%
	Had child	208	721	198	1127
		31.1%	58.8%	44.5%	48.2%
	All	669	1226	445	2340
	(Row %)	28.6%	52.4%	19.0%	
41+	No child	206	204	128	538
		33.1%	9.2%	14.9%	14.6%
	Had child	417	2007	732	3156
		66.9%	90.8%	85.1%	85.4%
	All	623	2211	860	3694
	(Row %)	16.9%	59.9%	23.3%	

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

nine out of ten men and women who recalled originally planning to have children had gone on to do so. However, because many more men and women originally planned to have children than planned not to have them, the majority of childless women in both age groups, and around two out of five childless men, are those who recalled originally planning to have children.

These results are consistent with analyses cited above that have emphasised the importance of timing in ‘voluntary’ childlessness, insofar as the voluntarily childless appears to be a fluctuating group. If we look at the over 40’s who we can assume to have virtually completed any childbearing plans, there is a reasonable consistency between the proportions of men and women recalling plans to have no children at around age twenty (men 16.9% women 10.1%) and the proportions eventually childless (men 14.6% women 9.3%). However as the table makes clear, the second group comprises a majority of women and many men who originally planned to have children, and only a minority (around one in four women and two out of five men) who originally planned childlessness. The contrast with the studies by Schoen et al and Heaton et al may be explained by the greater mean period of time elapsing between fertility intention and result in the Eurobarometer data, the age at which intentions were measured, and the fact that the measure of intention is based on respondents’ recollections rather than two waves of a panel study.

5.-Comparisons between the permanent voluntarily childless and other respondents

The shifting composition of the potentially voluntarily childless group raises the question of whether there are differences between those childless respondents who appear always to have intended this, those who have changed their minds, and those who are potentially ‘permanent’ postponers or delayers of childbirth despite having some kind of intention to have children. However before investigating this issue, we make a more basic comparison between those respondents in the survey who were both childless and had no plans to have children, (excluding those who have mentioned health problems where we have such information) with respondents who either have or (if under fifty) plan to have children. A very small number of respondents who did not

know whether they had children, and a larger number of mostly younger respondents who said they did not know whether they planned to have children, have been excluded from the analysis. All the results reported below are significant at the 1% level on a Pearson chi sq. test, but given the large number of cases in the sample, more attention should be paid to the substantive comparison of percentages.

Age

Women without children or plans for them had a slightly higher mean age (+2.5 years) but there was no difference at all for men.

Table 18. Age in years

Men	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
no child or plans	45.31	777	16.373
child or plans	45.32	6054	17.455
Total	45.32	6832	17.334
Women			
no child or plans	49.43	537	18.301
child or plans	46.90	7141	18.274
Total	47.07	7678	18.286

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Whether living with a partner

Both men and women without children or plans for them were much less likely to have ever been in a relationship, or to currently be in one. Moreover the average age of those who had never been in a relationship was much higher than for others, suggesting that such respondents had either chosen to avoid, or had not been successful in forming such relationships. Table 11 showed that a major reason for those who said they had originally wanted to have children but did not have any was that of not being able to find a partner or experiencing problems with their partner. Similar results on the relevance of this factor were found in the studies by Qu et al (2000) and Schoen et al

(1999) and Heaton (1999). Respondents were asked to choose from the following list of descriptions:

Married

Remarried

Unmarried, currently living with partner

All shown in table as 'Currently in couple'

Unmarried having never lived with a partner

Shown in table as 'Never in couple'

Unmarried having previously lived with a partner, but now on my own

Divorced

Separated

Widowed

Shown in table as 'Previously in couple'

Table 19. Partnership Status

Men	no child or plans	child or plans	Total
Currently In Couple	33.2%	69.8%	65.7%
Previously In Couple	27.2%	15.0%	16.4%
Never In Couple	39.7%	15.2%	18.0%
Total	753	5992	100.0%
Women	no child or plans	child or plans	Total
Currently In Couple	31.7%	60.4%	58.5%
Previously In Couple	33.5%	28.8%	29.1%
Never In Couple	34.8%	10.8%	12.5%
N	516	7063	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 20. Mean age of those ‘never in couple’

	No child or plans	Child or plans
Men	41.9	23.3
Women	46.3	22.3

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author’s analysis.

Similarly, those without children or plans for them are much more likely to be living on their own (around a half of both men and women) rather than with other household members over fifteen compared to those with children or plans for them.

Table 21. No of persons over 15 in household

			Total
	no child or plans	child or plans	
men			
1	50.8%	16.0%	20.0%
2	37.3%	50.1%	48.6%
3	6.4%	18.6%	17.2%
4	4.0%	11.5%	10.6%
5 and more	1.5%	3.8%	3.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
women			
1	50.5%	23.5%	25.4%
2	35.8%	46.1%	45.4%
3	7.4%	16.6%	16.0%
4	3.4%	10.3%	9.8%
5 and more	3.0%	3.5%	3.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author’s analysis.

They are also slightly more likely to be living in a large town rather than in a rural area or small village, a finding also noted by studies in the U.S.

Table 22. Location of household

Men				Total
		no child or plans	child or plans	
	Rural area or village	24.6%	29.5%	28.9%
	Small or middle sized town	39.6%	42.5%	42.2%
	Large town	35.8%	28.0%	28.9%
Total		777	6012	100.0%

women				Total
		no child or plans	child or plans	
	Rural area or village	20.2%	29.9%	29.3%
	Small or middle sized town	46.4%	41.5%	41.9%
	Large town	33.5%	28.5%	28.9%
Total		535	7110	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

While there was little difference between the distribution of occupations for men, women without children or plans for them were both more likely to be employed and more likely to have a managerial or professional position, or to be self-employed than other women, again a finding from U. S. studies (DeOllos & Kapinus 2002).

Table 23. Current occupation (women)

Women	no child or plans	child or plans	Total
Self employed, mgt, prof.	20.5%	10.8%	11.5%
Supervision, white collar	25.9%	19.6%	20.0%
Manual	7.1%	9.4%	9.2%
hh duties	9.3%	25.6%	24.5%
student	8.0%	7.3%	7.3%
unemp, temp NW	4.5%	4.7%	4.7%
retired /ill	24.8%	22.6%	22.8%
Total	537	7142	7679

They were also less likely than other women never to have worked.

Table 24. Current occupation, or previous occupation for those not currently working (women)

			Total
Women	no child or plans	child or plans	
Self employed, mgt, prof.	29.4%	17.6%	18.4%
Supervision, white collar	38.0%	33.9%	34.2%
Manual	15.1%	24.1%	23.5%
Never worked	17.5%	24.4%	23.9%
Total	537	7142	7679
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Numbers were too small to examine the effect of education by sex and individual country, however, across Europe as a whole there is a distinct relationship for men and women.

Table 25. Age on completion of full time education

Women age 30+			Total
	no child or plans	child or plans	
Up to 15 years	31.8%	39.1%	38.6%
16 - 19 years	41.0%	42.7%	42.5%
20 + years	27.2%	18.3%	18.9%
N	437	5648	6085
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Men age 30+			Total
	no child or plans	child or plans	
Up to 15 years	29.9%	33.6%	33.2%
16 - 19 years	46.5%	41.9%	42.5%
20 + years	23.6%	24.5%	24.4%
Total	615	4731	5346
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

While women without children or plans for them are more likely to have completed their full time education at a higher age, this is not the case for men. Age of completing

full time education is complicated by the fact that this value is not known for younger respondents who are still studying, and by the gradual rise in age at completion of full time education over time, so that older respondents will be more likely to have completed their education earlier. To reduce these effects the following table show results only for respondents aged thirty or over, and excludes the small number of respondents of this age who were still in full time education.

While there was no difference in the distribution of household income for women, men without children or plans for them were more likely to be in households with incomes in the bottom income quartile. However these results should be treated with caution as a substantial proportion of respondents did not provide information on household income.

Table 26. Harmonised household income quartiles (men)

Harmonised HH income quartile				Total
		no child or plans	child or plans	
(col. %)	--	32.1%	18.2%	19.9%
	-	25.9%	25.8%	25.8%
	+	20.9%	26.7%	26.0%
	++	21.1%	29.2%	28.3%
N		555	4134	4689

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Finally, contrary to what we might expect, given the much stronger association between public definitions of femininity and motherhood than between masculinity and fatherhood, men without children or plans for them expressed slightly less overall satisfaction with their lives than other men, while for women there was no difference. Other studies have found either no effect on overall life satisfaction for childless couples or small positive effects.

Table 27. Overall life satisfaction (men)

Men		no child or plans	child or plans	Total
	Very satisfied	18.5%	23.1%	22.6%
	Fairly satisfied	61.6%	61.1%	61.2%
	Not very satisfied	15.7%	13.2%	13.5%
	Not at all satisfied	4.2%	2.6%	2.8%
Total		771	6009	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

6.- Comparisons between parents and childless respondents who recalled originally planning or not planning children

We look next at the comparison between those without children or plans for them who recalled originally wanting or not wanting them, and those with children who recalled originally wanting or not wanting them. In all the analyses undertaken, there was much greater differences between those with and without children than between those originally planning or not planning children within each of these two groups

There was no substantial difference in the mean ages of the two groups, either for men or for women, nor on life satisfaction, or type of community (urban rural).

Women who recalled originally not planning to have children had a mean age at first birth only just over a year higher than those who recalled planning to have children (24.0 and 25.3 years) while the difference for men was slightly greater (26.7 and 28.8 years).

Women without children who recalled planning to have none completed their full-time education later than women without children who originally planned to have children, by about one year, on average (18.4 years and 17.4 years), but there was no difference for women who had gone on to have children between those originally planning and not planning to have them. Nor was there any difference for men.

Women without children who originally planned to have them were more likely to be in the lower household income quartile, but there was no difference between women with children who had originally planned or not planned to have them. There was a similar difference, but much smaller in magnitude and barely significant, for men.

Table 28. Women aged 41: fertility intentions and outcomes by household income quartile

Women > 40	plans@20 & child				Total
HH INCOME QUARTILES	no plan & no child	plan & no child	no plan & child	plan & child	
--	19.0%	50.3%	31.8%	30.3%	31.3%
-	38.1%	19.6%	22.7%	26.3%	25.9%
+	30.2%	18.3%	20.5%	21.5%	21.4%
++	12.7%	11.8%	25.0%	21.9%	21.3%
N	63	153	220	2228	2664

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Table 29. Women aged 41: fertility intentions and outcomes by occupation

Women	plans@20 & child				Total
	no plan & no child	plan & no child	no plan & child	plan & child	
Self E, mgt, prof	38.1%	32.9%	23.5%	20.9%	22.3%
superv, w. coll.	34.7%	36.4%	34.3%	30.4%	31.2%
manual	13.6%	14.3%	26.5%	24.6%	23.8%
never worked	13.6%	16.5%	15.7%	24.1%	22.7%
N	118	231	324	3278	3951

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Women with children who had originally not planned to have them were less likely than other women with children to have never worked, but there was little difference for women without children. There was no difference for men.

Women without children who had originally planned to have them were slightly more likely than other childless women to currently be in a partnership or have ever been in one. There was a smaller, barely significant difference for women with children. There was no such difference for men. Childless women, but not men, who had originally planned not to have children were slightly more likely to be living alone.

Table 30. Women aged 41: fertility intentions and outcomes by partnership history

		plans@20 & child				Total
		no plan & no child	plan & no child	no plan & child	plan & child	
CURRENTLY PARTNERSHIP	IN	26.8%	34.2%	58.3%	60.9%	58.1%
PREVIOUSLY PARTNERSHIP	IN	42.0%	39.5%	41.7%	38.9%	39.3%
NEVER IN PARTNERSHIP		31.3%	26.3%	.0%	.2%	2.6%
		112	228	324	3266	3930

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

7.- Eurobarometer 47.1

Eurobarometer 47.1 included a question about combining children and families that can also be used to count those who express a preference for no children. The question was worded as follows and respondents were shown a card with eight possible responses.

'For many women and an increasing number of men the question of how to combine bringing up children with having a job outside the home is an important issue in their lives from the following list, and regardless of your actual situation, which one do you consider ideal for yourself?' [q76]

A full-time job and no children
A full-time job and one child
A full-time job and more than one child
A part-time job and no children
A part-time job and one child
A part-time job and more than one child
No job as long as the child(ren) are below school age
No job as long as there are children living at home
Don't Know
No job at all even if there are no children (SPONTANEOUS)
Another situation (SPONTANEOUS)

The question can be criticized on a number of grounds. What respondents consider ideal for themselves may change over time, particularly in relation to the age of any children, something recognized only in the final two 'no job' options. This may account for some of the respondents who expressed a preference for arrangements not shown on the card. In addition, the survey asked respondents to answer 'regardless of their actual situation' and the demographic questions in the survey do not allow us to identify respondents who do or do not have children. However given the paucity of data on childlessness and attitudes to it, the analysis of the question can at least reveal whether the characteristics of respondents choosing childlessness in this context are similar or not to those characteristics found by analysis of Eurobarometer 56.2. Table 31 shows the percentage of all respondents by sex and country who chose either option 1 or 4: a full or part time job and no children.

Analysis at European wide level (all 15 EU member states) split respondents into three groups: those who preferred either a part or full-time job and no children, those who chose either a part or full-time job and one or more children, or no job when children or under-school-age children were present (all options implying the presence of children) and those who said that they did not know, chose another situation or said they would prefer no job at all even if children were not present (options consistent with the presence or absence of children). The results obtained for the characteristics of the respondents are rather similar to that obtained from analysis of Eurobarometer 56.2.

Both men and women preferring no children are slightly younger than others. Women, but not men, are more likely to have completed their full time education at a later age.

Table 31. Preference for a job and no children

	Men	Women	N
Belgium	10.2	6.9	989
Denmark	6.5	3.7	1001
W. Germany	20.6	11.7	1025
Greece	1.8	2.5	1010
Italy	6.7	4.3	997
Spain	10.5	8.5	1000
France	10.8	6.2	1006
Ireland	10.5	6.1	1003
N. Ireland	16.8	12.0	301
Luxembourg	9.8	6.8	597
Netherlands	12.4	6.9	1020
Portugal	5.7	2.7	1000
Gt. Britain	21.0	12.0	1078
E. Germany	11.8	5.7	1023
Finland	9.0	6.9	1011
Sweden	5.9	6.1	1000
Austria	17.0	13.2	1056
EU 15	13.0	8.0	16117

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Around a half of both men and women have no partner, they are more likely to be living on their own and are much less likely than others to be living with a partner, or to be currently married. They are more likely to be separated or divorced. While the labour market status of men is little different from other men, the women are more likely to be working, and to be working full time. For men and women living in couples, women are more likely to be in dual earner couple where both members work full-time than other women.

Table 32. Preferences by age and sex

Men	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
job & no child	36.34	14.688	846
job & child	42.76	16.440	5958
DK / other	45.67	21.314	994
Total	42.43	17.122	7797
Women			
job & no child	37.69	16.480	585
job & child	44.13	17.640	6793
DK / other	54.53	20.461	942
Total	44.86	18.306	8320

Men	job & no child	job & child	DK / other	All
15 - 24 years	27.8%	15.6%	25.2%	18.3%
25 - 34 years	24.8%	19.6%	13.4%	19.6%
35 - 44 years	20.9%	20.1%	9.7%	19.0%
45 - 54 years	11.9%	16.5%	11.0%	15.3%
55 - 64 years	9.7%	16.5%	15.1%	15.5%
65 + years	5.0%	11.6%	25.6%	12.4%
Total	1001	5755	906	7662
women				
15 - 24 years	26.6%	15.7%	13.7%	16.3%
25 - 34 years	23.7%	18.9%	7.1%	18.0%
35 - 44 years	16.1%	18.5%	6.3%	16.9%
45 - 54 years	13.8%	14.9%	10.8%	14.3%
55 - 64 years	13.8%	16.0%	18.9%	16.2%
65 + years	6.1%	16.0%	43.2%	18.2%
Total	654	6622	911	8187

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 33. Mean age completed full time education

Men	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
job & no child	18.23	925	3.925
job & child	17.89	5333	4.431
DK / other	16.77	786	4.729
Total	17.81	7044	4.419
Women			
job & no child	18.03	569	3.989
job & child	17.00	6054	4.013
DK / other	15.12	830	4.336
Total	16.87	7453	4.104

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 34. Partnership status

Men	job & no child	job & child	DK / other	Total
LIVE WITH PARTNER	37.2%	70.8%	45.1%	63.5%
HAVE A PARTNER	9.4%	9.0%	9.1%	9.1%
NO PARTNER	53.4%	20.2%	45.7%	27.4%
Total	955	5537	822	7314
Women				
LIVE WITH PARTNER	37.9%	63.0%	45.3%	59.1%
HAVE A PARTNER	12.6%	7.3%	5.2%	7.5%
NO PARTNER	49.5%	29.8%	49.5%	33.4%
Total	634	6322	821	7777

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 35. Marital status

Men		job & no child	job & child	DK / other	All
	Single	56.1%	25.0%	44.4%	31.4%
	Married	26.5%	62.3%	37.5%	54.7%
	Living as married	8.4%	6.5%	4.3%	6.5%
	Divorced	6.5%	2.7%	4.4%	3.4%
	Separated	1.9%	1.1%	.9%	1.2%
	Widowed	.6%	2.4%	8.5%	2.9%
N		1000	5754	906	7660
Women					
	Single	46.0%	20.5%	22.5%	22.7%
	Married	30.4%	53.8%	37.5%	50.2%
	Living as married	6.4%	6.5%	3.7%	6.2%
	Divorced	8.7%	5.6%	3.6%	5.6%
	Separated	2.6%	2.0%	1.2%	2.0%
	Widowed	5.8%	11.5%	31.4%	13.3%
N		654	6624	911	8189

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 36. Household size

men	job & no child	job & child	DK / other	
1	32.9%	12.4%	27.0%	16.8%
2	31.3%	29.0%	33.3%	29.8%
3+	35.9%	58.7%	39.8%	53.4%
N	1001	5754	905	7660

women				
1	35.2%	16.3%	36.2%	20.1%
2	33.8%	28.1%	34.1%	29.2%
3+	31.0%	55.5%	29.7%	50.7%
N	654	6624	912	8190

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 37. Labour market status respondents aged 20 to 64 only

Men	job & no child	job & child	DK / other	
FULL-TIME >34 H	75.8%	74.5%	57.7%	73.2%
PART-TIME 10-33 H	4.3%	4.3%	4.1%	4.3%
PART-TIME <10 H	.1%	.9%	.2%	.7%
UNEMPLOYED	8.7%	7.1%	9.7%	7.5%
NO PAID WORK	7.9%	7.9%	16.5%	8.7%
NONE OF THESE (SPON)	3.2%	5.4%	11.8%	5.7%
Total	818	4679	534	6031
Women				
FULL-TIME >34 H	56.2%	35.1%	32.3%	36.7%
PART-TIME 10-33 H	11.7%	17.1%	10.1%	16.1%
PART-TIME <10 H	3.4%	2.5%	.5%	2.5%
UNEMPLOYED	11.5%	7.5%	3.0%	7.5%
NO PAID WORK	15.1%	29.0%	39.9%	28.5%
NONE OF THESE (SPON)	2.1%	8.9%	14.2%	8.7%
Total	523	5024	436	5983

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

Table 38. Labour market status of couple Respondents aged 20-64 living with a partner only

men		job & no child	job & child	DK / other	All
	Dual FT	35.6%	31.7%	30.5%	31.9%
	Male FT Fem PT	19.5%	17.8%	11.5%	17.5%
	Male FT Fem NW	24.3%	29.1%	20.0%	28.1%
	Other	20.6%	21.4%	38.0%	22.4%
N		399	3808	295	4502
Women					
	Dual FT	44.1%	28.1%	25.7%	29.0%
	Male FT Fem PT	14.0%	17.6%	6.9%	16.7%
	Male FT Fem NW	16.5%	30.3%	24.3%	29.1%
	Other	25.4%	23.9%	43.1%	25.2%
N		279	3838	276	4393

Source: Eurobarometro 47.1, author's analysis.

8.- Modelling childlessness from EB 56.2 using logistic regression

Analysis of contingency tables, as presented so far, is not the best technique to examine the effects of several variables at once, and it is clear that several may be involved in determining the likelihood that a person or a couple will choose to be childless. In order to investigate this logistic regression was used to model childlessness. Models were tested separately for men and for women, given that the results so far suggested that variables behave differently for the two sexes.

Respondents were divided into two groups, those who either had a child, or who said that they wanted to have a(nother) child, and those who said that they did not have a child and either planned to have none or did not know their plans. Only respondents aged between 25 and 59 were selected, so as to exclude younger respondents who are more likely to be vague about their reproductive intentions, and older respondents whose reproductive behaviour may have finished a considerable time ago.

Several alternative models were attempted, using ‘forced’, simultaneous entry and looking for both best fit and model parsimony. Table one reports the results for the final model for women, which used marital status, age, job and children wanted at age 20.

Table 39. Model for women

		Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for	
						Lower	Upper
Age	Age in years	38.869	1	.000	1.040	1.027	1.052
Current/past job	SE, mgt, prof.*	28.872	3	.000			
	Superv, wh. coll	5.708	1	.017	.730	.563	.945
	manual	25.126	1	.000	.430	.309	.598
	Never worked	11.123	1	.001	.518	.351	.762
Children wanted around age 20	None*	198.940	2	.000			
	One or more	174.675	1	.000	.190	.148	.243
	Didn't think/ didn't care	4.163	1	.041	.710	.511	.987
Marital status	Married*	441.159	7	.000			
	Remarried	.843	1	.358	1.464	.649	3.304
	Cohabiting	96.539	1	.000	5.620	3.983	7.930
	Always single	388.654	1	.000	30.140	21.483	42.287
	Single now	189.042	1	.000	11.714	8.248	16.636
	Divorced	9.056	1	.003	1.859	1.241	2.785
	Separated	5.187	1	.023	2.117	1.110	4.037
	Widowed	.469	1	.493	1.262	.649	2.455
	Constant	110.870	1	.000	.037		

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author's analysis.

Original (constant only) -2LL 3185.74
 Model Chi-square 828.39 (sig .000)
 Hosmer and Lemeshow (R_L2) 0.26

The column ‘Exp (B)’ in the table shows the change in the odds ratios for predicting childlessness for a unit change in the predictor variable. Numbers greater than 1 represent an increasing chance of childlessness compared to the reference categories (indicated with an asterisk*). It can be seen that the likelihood of childlessness increases gradually with age, and with all marital statuses other than marriage (although the results for re-marriage and widowhood do not reach significance) with by far the strongest effect being for those not currently or ever in a couple. Those who recalled not wanting children at around age twenty are about five times more likely to be childless than those who said they planned to have children or did not think or care about the issue at that age. In contrast to the results reported in Clarke and McAllister (1998) interaction terms between age and the other variables (including marital status) were not significant in the model. It should be borne in mind that these results, from a cross-sectional survey, do not allow us to infer causality. Thus the marital status of the childless is not necessarily a ‘cause’ of their condition, it may be a result of it, or the effect of other prior variables influencing both marital status and childlessness not measured in the survey or captured in the model.

None of the predictor variables had correlation coefficients with each other greater than 0.1 so that collinearity was not a problem. 32 cases out of 4645 (0.6%) used in the model had standardised residuals greater than 2.5 and these were all cases of voluntarily childless respondents incorrectly predicted to be in the non-childless category. Overall the model was better at predicting non-childlessness than childlessness, and its performance in predicting childlessness is poor.

Table 40. Model performance

1 = childless	Predicted		Percentage Correct
	0	1	
Observed 0	4072	70	98.3
1	354	149	29.6
Overall Percentage			90.9

Source: Eurobarometro 56.2, author’s analysis.

It could be argued that including respondents' recall of their fertility intentions at age twenty is inappropriate, as it might be seen as an outcome rather than a predictor variable. That is respondents' answers might have been influenced by their current fertility intentions or past fertility behaviour. Removing this term from the model does reduce its performance, but not dramatically, and did not alter the significance of the other variables: further evidence of the instability of fertility intentions that we have already described. Once the job variable, describing women's status in their present or last job was included, the variables for size of community and for age at completion of full-time education ceased to be significant.

There is controversy over whether or not it is appropriate to weight data in logistic regression analyses. The model was re-run using weighted data which very marginally improved its performance but left most values very little changed, so that the results are not reported separately here.

9.- Conclusions

Voluntary childlessness is a more complex phenomenon than it may at first sight appear. This is especially true as it may be very difficult to distinguish decisions about the timing of children from decisions about whether or not to have them at all. Evidence from Eurobarometer surveys using respondents' recall of earlier 'plans' shows that these are rarely fulfilled. Other surveys have also suggested that respondents are reluctant to describe fertility behaviour in terms of conscious or detailed plans. Survey evidence of respondents' desire for children, or plans to have them, ought to be interpreted with more care than is sometimes taken, since terms implying 'ideal' preferences are capable of very diverse interpretation and may focus respondent's attention away from the details of their personal situation. Eurobarometer evidence suggests that there are substantial differences between respondents views of 'ideal' family sizes, their personal 'ideals' and the number of children they might wish to have given their actual circumstances. It also shows that their own fertility plans or forecasts made before respondents reached ages where childbearing is common, are an unreliable guide to future behaviour, at least on the basis of their own recall of those plans.

There is some evidence that at least some respondents do not fulfil their fertility intentions, in that the numbers of men and women over forty who are childless is greater than the number intending to be so at earlier ages. Negative fertility intentions

appear to be less stable than positive ones over the longer term. This is mostly because almost all those who originally intend to have children proceed to realize their desires. Comparisons between groups according to their original fertility intentions reveal very few differences. There is also some evidence of a trend an increase in the proportion of men and women who intended to remain childless at around age twenty.

Analysis of the characteristics of the voluntarily childless is complicated by the small numbers involved. Personal or partners' health and inability to find the right partner are the most frequently cited reasons for childlessness. Economic and work-life balance reason are much less frequently cited. Women without children or plans for them are more likely to have more education, be employed, to be working in managerial and professional occupations and to be single and living in an urban area. There is a link between choosing to avoid or not being successful in forming partner relationships and both permanent or temporary voluntary childlessness, however it would be wrong to assume that this is a causal factor, as opposed to a result of the fact of childlessness or the intention to remain so.

Logistic regression analysis confirms that there are few great differences between women who are and plan to remain childless and other women, apart from their relationship status. Women who originally do not plan to have children are more likely than others to remain childless, but their intentions are not in themselves a good predictor of later behaviour.

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