

**Low Fertility and Reproductive Polarisation:
The Perspective from Within the Family**

By

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Paper presented at Workshop:
“ Sub-replacement Fertility: Is this an Issue for New Zealand? “
Institute for Policy Studies, Victoria University,
Wellington. October 26th 2006

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INTRODUCTION

In my paper I am going to argue that there is a contradiction between the ideals held by most New Zealanders about family formation, and the realities that they face in trying to achieve these ideals.

In terms of ideals, I will show that there would still seem to be little personal or societal support for very low fertility, with its accompanying high levels of childlessness and one child families. Rather there is still nostalgia for the family of the immediate past, often the family in which one grew up, and indications of its diminution or even demise are viewed with concern. Against this, however I would also argue that this ideal is constantly being tested against the reality of modern life. As a result reproductive expectations are being if not eroded, then certainly compromised.

To examine this I will be presenting the views and experiences of women who have recently made decisions about whether and/or when to have children, and how many children they plan to have. If, as Testa and Grilli maintain in their recent paper in *Population* (2006), the reproductive intentions and probably the behaviours of each parenting generation, are shaped by perceptions of the experiences of the generation immediately ahead, then these may provide us with some indication of the factors that may determine fertility trends in New Zealand over the next 10 years.

My paper complements that of Ian Pool, but also takes the discussion into some dimensions he did not cover. He dealt with macro-level aspects of reproduction and its co-variates. My paper will provide the counterpoint, the ideals against which couples balance their own realities and their own family formation behaviours.

In a sense, Ian Pool's paper deals only with the norms as average or modal behaviours. My paper looks not only at those but also at norms as model behaviours, as things couples feel they should or would like to do. For many couples and for the society this counterpoint may create inherent tensions. The documentation of these points of difference may also provide points of reference for policy concerns and possible interventions.

DATA SOURCES

In his paper Ian Pool has drawn attention to the differences between the English-speaking countries and other Western Developed Countries (WDCs), in terms of both family policy and their somewhat higher levels of fertility. The reasons for this difference have been of interest to researchers in countries such as Japan which have experienced prolonged very low fertility levels

¹ This paper is a shortened version of Sceats (2007) *Attitudinal Factors Likely To Affect Future Fertility Trends Among New Zealand Women*, prepared for the New Demographic Directions Project, FoRST Grant to the Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato.

In 2002 The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Tokyo commissioned studies in a number of low fertility countries to examine the policy environments and the subjective experiences of women in a range of English speaking countries where fertility had not reached the low levels being experienced in Japan.

A parallel series of in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out between 2002 and 2005, in 2 waves in New Zealand, in Melbourne, and in and around London, More limited studies were also carried out in Spain and Italy, countries with very low fertility.² Details of these surveys are presented in Table 1 All used the same basic methodology determined by the Japanese funder.

Table 1 Quantitative Study of Work and Motherhood in 4 Low fertility Countries (2002-5)*

- New Zealand (n=68) in Auckland, Hamilton and rural Waikato
- Focus group, AUT students (2005)
- Australia (n=33 in Melbourne)
- United Kingdom (n=20 in London, Surrey and Essex)
- Spain (n=15)

**Funded by The Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Tokyo, and New Demographic Directions Project, FoRST Grant to the Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato*

The focus of the studies was the impact of combining work and family life on fertility decisions. The results of the New Zealand study have been published and presented elsewhere (Sceats 2002, 2003, 2005), and a cross-comparative study of policy and work-life balance in the three English Speaking Countries (ESCs) was presented at the Australian Institute for Family Studies Conference, Melbourne in February 2003.

Suffice to say here that the respondents were women between 20 and 40 years of age, from a range of work and family situations, but skewed somewhat towards professionals and the better educated- so they are likely to be the innovators of behavioural change. The New Zealand sample is both larger and more representative than the Australian and European studies and includes women from urban –Auckland and Hamilton- and rural areas in the Waikato, 1/5 are Maori. Pasifika and migrant women were also included, but are under represented. The Pakeha women are generally the children of the end of the Baby Boom and themselves children of early baby Boomers.

These qualitative studies provide an opportunity to explore in more detail some of the complex macro and micro-level factors that shape the fertility decisions that are made within the family, and which are reflected in the more sparse data from large scale surveys and vital statistics.

Where possible I shall draw on the cross-comparative qualitative survey data to identify areas where the views and experiences of the New Zealand women are similar to or different from those of their counterparts in Australia, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, in Spain. In all of

² I was directly involved with the Australian and New Zealand arms of the study, and involved in the commissioning of the UK component which was also more limited in its data collection. The Japanese investigator also has made available to me a translation of the report on the Spanish interviews.

these societies the movement towards sustained low fertility is more pronounced than it is here. This may provide some insights into whether we are travelling along the same road, or whether NZ fertility trends may take a slightly different route.

I must stress that I am not suggesting that their views are representative of their particular society as a whole. However because they were all at similar stages in their lives and were all answering the same questions about the same significant events most of them had experienced, the variations in their views may reflect their different societal contexts.

In addition I shall draw from some the attitudinal data collected in the two NZ fertility surveys, NZWFEE, and the NZFFS., which have been analysed in our forthcoming book on the NZ family, together with pertinent findings from 2 recent surveys on the effect of the student loan scheme on reproductive intentions.(see Table 2). To provide a glimpse into the attitudes of the upcoming generation of parents, I have included some of the findings from a focus group we held with some AUT students in which we canvassed some of the same issues that were discussed in the cross-comparative qualitative studies.

Table 2. Other Survey Data Sources :

- New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment (NZW:FEE) (1995, n= 3000, University of Waikato, Population Studies Centre)
- New Zealand Family and Fertility Survey (NZFFS) (2001, n=1800 , University of Waikato, Population Studies Centre)
- NZ Students Association Income and Expenditure Survey (2004) (n=3964)
- Survey of Student Debt among Junior Doctors (2003) (n=158)

MACRO-LEVEL ENVIRONMENT

It has been suggested by Peter McDonald and others that the decision whether or not to have children at all is often influenced by a couple's perception of the extent to which the society in which they live is supportive of families and whether the physical and social environment is favourable to child-rearing (McDonald, 2002). Ian Pool has already quoted Kingsley Davis' view that "Reproduction of the species is not easily compatible with industrial society" (Davis, 1937). Results from the cross-comparative qualitative study provide an opportunity to compare the views of women living in two European low fertility highly urbanized countries, with those of women living in Australia and New Zealand on how they see their respective societies as places in which to bring up children.

It is something of a cliché to claim that New Zealand is a great place to bring up children, but it was felt that agreement or disagreement with this statement would give an indication of how strongly respondents felt about New Zealand, taking into account not just policies but their emotional attachment to the society, as an environment for their children.

What stood out was the degree of unanimity among the NZ respondents in the view that New Zealand was indeed a good place for families, often in spite of some reservations. Many of the

respondents made their judgements on the basis of their experiences living outside New Zealand, either as migrants or as returning New Zealanders.

Most of the Australian respondents felt that Australia was a good place in which to bring up children, with only 1/5 also citing reasons why they disagreed with it. The British respondents were much more ambivalent about the desirability of the UK as a place in which to rear children, with less than half unconditionally endorsing it. Spanish respondents were also ambivalent, with few feeling that Spain was as good a place as those with “similar political, geographical and social order, as, for instance, [other] Mediterranean European Community ones”. More desirable countries were considered to be France, Ireland the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries where policies were thought to be more supportive of families.

All the Maori respondents agreed with the statement, some noting particularly the unique role and contribution of Maori culture. Like their Pakeha counterparts, physical aspects of the country- its beauty, access to the outdoors etc, are important. Safety and the health and education systems were generally seen as positive aspects of New Zealand. Several, while generally in agreement with the view that NZ was a good place to raise children, had reservations about its applicability nationwide, identifying growing problems of housing, transportation etc. particularly in Auckland as making it harder for families.,:

The main reasons women thought Australia was a great place to raise children were similar to those given by New Zealand women, with an emphasis on wide open spaces and the outdoors lifestyle, diversity and multiculturalism, egalitarianism in health and educational systems, and generally better opportunities for children, safety and distance from the world’s trouble spots. However growth of cities and the concomitant problems were cited as negative reasons

Concerns were expressed by the UK respondents about the safety of the environment, particularly in urban areas, and the difficulties of raising children in such circumstances. Some expressed a preference for countries such as Canada, Australia or New Zealand which are seen as being safer, more egalitarian and offering greater opportunities. Spanish respondents also expressed concern about the difficulties and stresses of bringing up children in large urban areas without adequate access to a clean outdoor environment.

Thus, in this study, the Australasian women are differentiated from their European counterparts by having much more positive views of their social and physical environment. This is perceived to be more supportive and advantageous to family life, with the counterpoint that increasing urbanization is seen as hostile to child rearing.

IMPACT OF LOWER FERTILITY ON SOCIETY

To ascertain attitudes towards the impact of the fertility declines apparent in all four countries, women were asked why they thought this was occurring and whether this was a good or a bad thing for their society.

New Zealand:

The majority of New Zealand respondents viewed the trend to low fertility negatively. A few however were ambivalent and saw both good and bad impacts. Reasons included:

- The need for a young population to counteract the aging of the workforce. Many made the link between falling fertility and an aging population, and the slowing of population growth was generally seen as negative. Some linked these factors with the need for increased immigration.
- Some Maori and the Pasifika women saw low fertility as “a threat to cultural continuity”, and to “tradition and the carrying on of the family line”, and were concerned about the impact that increased immigration would have.
- The value of big families: this view was particularly strong among women who said that they had themselves come from larger, predominantly catholic families, and among Maori
- Concern about selective fertility decline: Several raised the issue of the possible negative impacts of low fertility being the choice only of the better educated and better off, leaving larger families to those who did not have other options
- The link between low fertility and other social trends and policies: eg student loans; housing costs; growing materialism of society; having children so late
- Pressure on women: eg pressure to go back to work and a consequent weakening of the bond between mothers and children and a devaluing of the role of mothers in society. It was also seen to be hard for women who have delayed having children and were now experiencing difficulties in conceiving.

Only a small proportion of the women had a positive view of the impact of smaller family size, and of these several also mentioned negative effects, Reasons for considering the fertility decline as a positive development included:

- The likelihood of reducing population pressure,
- It ensures better family life ensuring that more children are wanted children and that families can invest more in their children,
- It is better for women because large families are hard work and do not allow women to do other things
- A range of family types is good for society and it is good that people are now thinking about their options.

Australian, UK and Spanish Respondents:

There were more mixed views among the Australian women with the majority of women saying it was both good and bad. The overall impression, however, is that is not a positive thing. The reasons were similar to those given by New Zealand women, with perhaps more emphasis on the impact it would have on the size and structure of the population.

Most of the UK respondents however felt that having fewer children is a good thing for British society. Reasons included: The world was already overpopulated; smaller families are what works in the current society; there are more opportunities for children; better quality of childcare and family life. There was some nostalgia for the size of families in which they grew up but there was an acknowledgement that this is not what they want for themselves

Most Spanish respondents considered the low birth rate as a bad thing for their society citing: that an aging population will likely cause a different vision of the world- more conservative and sense of youth will be missing.; that there will be difficulties in paying retirement pensions These are seen to be solved mainly by immigration, and this is generally favoured, because the cultural mix will enrich Spanish society. But, in a few cases this is seen, on the contrary, as contributing to national identity loss. A few saw a lower birthrate as good for women because it frees them from their traditional social role, as a wife and mother with many children

There is a marked contrast between the Australasian, and particularly the New Zealand women's view of the desirability of low fertility for a country. In these two countries it is generally regarded unfavourably, or at best with ambivalence with the positive aspects often being contrasted with negative effects. Similarly the Spanish women did not see many advantages compared with their British counterparts.

REASONS FOR SMALLER FAMILIES

The reasons given by the NZ women for the trend toward smaller families clearly reflect both their own experiences as well as their perceptions of the society as a whole and included:

- the costs today of having and raising children was the most frequently mentioned cause:
 - factors such as current costs eg housing and student loan repayments,
 - the cost of child care, difficulties in coping on one income and
 - future costs of bringing up and of educating children.
- changes in life-style such as increased consumerism,
- increased aspirations for children
- changing roles of women leading to delays in childbearing. including the declining likelihood of conception and the issues of infertility.
- lack of support systems for families. This was seen at several levels from the governmental through to family networks. This was linked to changing family structures and the way families are valued

Reasons given by Australian, British and Spanish respondents were similar to those given in New Zealand with financial reasons being most commonly cited. Materialism and lifestyle factors were closely linked to financial reasons, as were aspirations for children and the lack of family support systems. The cost of housing was specifically mentioned by the UK group to be a limiting factor

especially in London, together with the practical difficulties larger families face today, particularly in large urban areas

In addition the Spanish women cited;

- long working hours both for father and mother: leading to less free time to take care of children.
- unstable social and labor situation and poor quality jobs,
- people in low paying jobs cannot afford children and there is a lack of support systems: eg no day nurseries at companies, few conveniences and little financial support for meeting children's essential needs.
- society is more selfish, with young couples preferring to have free time for themselves.

Thus the women in the English-speaking countries seem to concur in the belief that the decline in fertility is primarily due to the increasing costs of having and raising a family, coupled with a shift in social values affecting both the roles and expectations of women, and the way families are valued and supported in an increasingly materialistic society with more aspirations for children. All these factors were also mentioned by Spanish women, but unlike their English-speaking counterparts, social factors like long working hours and instability in the labour market were given primacy.

PRESSURE TO HAVE CHILDREN

Turning now from perceptions of the broader macro-level environment I shall now look at the more immediate context of family and friends and the influence these may have on reproductive decision-making. While the decision to start a family is obviously a very private couple-based one, the birth of a baby has ramifications which extend beyond the couple, particularly to the wider family who often have a view on this.

Most of the women said that they had experienced pressure to have children. Generally this came from family, but also from workmates. What is clear from the comments is that friends and family tend to ask about when women will have children, not if. Most of the Maori respondents felt the weight of family expectations that they should be having children, often when they were starting a serious relationship

For many women, the pressure came not to have a first birth, but to have another birth, particularly for those who came from larger families themselves. For some this pressure, including from their husbands, was not just to have another but to have one of a particular sex:

While some women appeared to accept this, many were clearly upset and some particularly resented pressure from their parents to produce grandchildren. One woman said that she felt there was "an obsession" about children in New Zealand, while another noted that there was a lack of understanding that it was a legitimate choice not to have children. Women who had difficulty in conceiving often found the comments insensitive and added to the pressure they already felt. Some specifically mentioned that they had significant delays in becoming pregnant and others had been older when they had married and had had their age commented on.

While this informal pressure relates to societal and family expectations that a woman should have children, there are other norms about childbearing that are apparent in the negative reactions several had experienced to their pregnancies. Some women said that they had had pressure not to have children and these included a woman who became pregnant as a teenager, another chose to continue an exnuptial pregnancy without a partner and another woman reported negative reaction to their decision to have a large family:

All of the Australian women without children and just over half of the women with children had experienced comments about when they would be starting their families, Some women remarked on the pressure they received as being due to the culture they belonged to:

“Coming from an Italian Catholic background ... what do you think?”

Many of the UK women reported pressure from others to have children following marriage. Again some of this pressure came from parents/parents-in law wanting grandchildren, and this was resented, particularly if there were difficulties in conceiving or carrying a pregnancy

It was never when are you going to have children? It was, when are you going to give me grandchildren? I hated it.’

However it is instructive, in passing, to consider the situation of these putative and rather maligned grandparents. For many people one of the compensations of getting older is becoming a grandparent. Yet this may be an unrealized expectation for many or, if it does occur, the “mokapuna” may be far less numerous than they had envisaged or that their own parents had had. While obviously there are some parents who are not very subtle about expressing these hopes, there are many for whom this is a silent sadness. Resented though the pressure may be, other findings from these same studies show that once the children are born it is to the grandparents that many of these same respondents turn for the support needed to deal with the complexities of balancing work and family life. Such support is sorely missed if not available.

REPRODUCTIVE INTENTIONS WHEN GROWING UP

New Zealand Respondents

As already noted most of the NZ respondents were children of the late Baby Boom, a period of relatively recent collective memory which seems to have helped shape perceptions of family life. Most women when growing up had thought about the number of children they themselves would like to have eventually. No strong relationship between current and desired family size is apparent, but many noted that their current attitudes towards family size were influenced by their experiences and observations growing up.

About ¼ of the women, almost all of whom were non-Maori, said that when they were younger they had not wanted children, and a number of these did not have children at the time of the interviews. Several said that their views, initially against having children, had changed either as they grew older or their circumstances changed,

Maori and Catholic Pakeha respondents were more likely to have favoured families of 3 or more children, and several specified a large family of over 6 children. However few of these women had achieved more than the normative 2-3 child family at the time of interview.

Australian Respondents

As in New Zealand, Australian women who had no children at the time of the interview were more likely to report not wanting to have children when they were growing up,

- .Most women however reported that growing up they wanted two or three children,. And many had had the two or three children they said they wanted when younger
- the small number who said that they had wanted large families actually had two or three children each and did not intend to have any more,

While no one would like to be held to account for the views they may have had when growing up, it is of interest that most tended to want a 2-3 child family or have subsequently modified their views towards this number. Perhaps of more interest is the fact that many of the currently childless women apparently had not wanted children earlier in their lives.

REPRODUCTIVE INTENTIONS

Childless women

The reproductive intentions of childless women are of particular importance in the present context because of the impact of increased levels of childlessness may have on overall fertility levels. We have data from several sources with which to examine this issue. The NZW:FEE and NZFFS do not have data on ideal or expected family sizes, but do have some on intentions among childless women, arguably the “hardest” of the attitudinal variables, particularly among women in their 30s. These data are presented in Table 3

Table 3. Proportions of Women in Each Age group who are Childless, and proportions of these who intend to have children, 1995 and 2001

Age group (yrs)	% childless in each age group	% intending to have children
NZW:FEE: 1995		
20-24	72	81
25-28	41	70
30-34	22	55
35-39	11	32
NZFSS: 2001		
20-24	74	84
25-28	49	81
30-34	29	59
35-39	18	25

Source: Pool *et al* (2007) Table 8.6

The proportions in each age group who are childless decreases with age, but is higher in each age-group in 2001 than it was in 1995, reflecting the increasing delay in child-bearing. Thus 22% of women in their early thirties in 1995 had no children, and this had risen to almost 30% for this age

group in 2001, while among women in their late thirties, the proportion childless increased from 11% to 18%. In both periods, however, the overwhelming majority of women in their twenties intend to have children.

The shift upwards in the age of childbearing is apparent in the higher proportions in 2001 of childless women 25-34 years who intend to have children, compared with 1995. But by their late 30s the likelihood of parenting is diminishing and thus the proportion of these childless women intending to have a child drops off. Significantly this drop off was higher in 2001 than in 1995. For women 35-39 years who had no children in 1995 1 in 3 intended to have a child, but by 2001 this had fallen to 1 in 4. The dual effects of childless and the intention to have no children increased. This would equate to between 6% (1995) and 13% (2001) of all women in this age group remaining childless.

Young Women in the Focus Group

Reproductive intentions were discussed in the focus group of AUT students. They were all young women between 18 and 20 years, enrolled in a variety of courses. None were married although several were in long term relationships and none had children Children were a less important part of their plans than travel and career development but all intended to have children

- They expect to start a family by age 30
- By this age will have established themselves high paying jobs which will be unaffected by time off
- There is concern about delaying too long, but they have belief in technology to solve this problem
- They expect to have 2 children and were negative about a 1 child family
- They expect full and ongoing support for child-rearing from their partners and their own mothers

Their views are an interesting and optimistic glimpse of what future parenting may look like. It should be noted that they come from a cohort that has come of age in a time of relatively full employment. So, unlike the women from a slightly older generation in the other surveys, they do not have any worries about the security of their situation if they wish to combine work and motherhood

Women Without Children In The Qualitative Surveys

In both the New Zealand and the Australian surveys about half of the childless (about ¼ total) women were reasonably sure that they would not have children.

- Some were not interested in having children at all, citing reasons which included enjoying their life style and careers, not being “maternal”, and believing that there were “too many people in the world anyway”.
- Others noted that while they would probably have liked to have children, it was now either unlikely or impossible.

The other women who were currently childless all planned to have children. The impact of age was clearly important to all these women, determining both the timing- relatively soon, and possibly the number of children they could have.

By contrast with Australasian women, age did not feature in the responses of the British and Spanish women, and all the currently childless respondents intended to have children, when circumstances were right- eg financially/personally secure. Several in fact said they were reassured by the growing numbers of women in their 40s having children.

The dilemmas facing a woman in her early thirties as she contemplates this aspect of her life were described by a single childless 32 year old NZ woman:

I'd always had 35 as an age, but now I'm quite keen on having 3 kids- it's probably not realistic- I'm running a bit late. I don't have a partner-he's still dithering, so 3 is still possible. You should start before 30 in case of infertility, but that's not realistic. So treatment may have to wait- re infertility, I have tons of energy at present, but you're programmed, I should start in next 3 or 4 years. But does that mean I need more experience [at work], a reputation, so I can go contracting with more authority and have more chance of marrying a rich man more established in his career, then there would be less panic for me to have a regular income. ...I'm getting left behind my friends. The later I leave it the less likely that they'll be off your hands at 50 which means you travel less, have more dependency

Women who already have children

While the data in Table 3 refer only to childless women, NZW: FEE also provided information on the further childbearing intentions of women who already had one or two children, see Table 4

Table 4: Percentage of Women Intending to Have Another Child, by Age and Current Family Size

Age-Group	Current Family Size	
	1 child	2 children
30-34 years	64%	20%
35-39 years	22%	9%

Source; Pool *et al* (2007) Ch .8

Not surprisingly, the desire to have additional children decreases with age and parity. Thus women in their early thirties with single-child families may want to extend this number, but most do not want to go beyond two, or exact replacement. By their late thirties, however, they are recognizing that the chances of increasing their family size are limited and thus only a small minority, even of those with only one child, say they want to have another child.

Women with one child

Intentions to have another child were canvassed with respondents in all the qualitative surveys, and here the decision making reflects much more personal circumstances than the wider family or societal

The popularity of the two-child family is clear among women who already have one child, most of whom said that they would like to have one more child. The major reason was the need to have a sibling for the existing child, the sense that with one child it wasn't a proper family and concern about such a family structure

I don't want an only child and I don't want to be an only child's mother-

For several that needed to happen fairly soon so that they could resume their careers: "I just think it would be easier to get it all done in one hit", a contemporary twist on the long-established NZ pattern of close birth spacing

There was only one respondent who expressed satisfaction with having a sole child family. The other women who had only one child and said that they were not planning on any more, all expressed regret that they would not have other children. Reasons included age, poor marital situation, bad experience with first birth and/or in the postnatal period, financial situation and concern about future educational costs,

By comparison with the New Zealand women, the Australian respondents were more evenly split over the intentions of women with one child to have more children but gave similar reasons.

Women with two children

Convergence around the norm of a two child family is apparent also in the responses to this question by women who already had two children. Most said that they would not be having any more children .

They cited reasons like the extra cost of a third child, the demands on time and energy, and reluctance to go through another pregnancy. Nevertheless there was some degree of ambivalence about this for many who, under other circumstances, would perhaps go on to have a third child. Several women were concerned about their "biological clock" and that they might be running out of time to complete their family so probably would not make it to three children, implying that they would if they could

Several other women said that they probably would not have any more children but would like to have another baby in order to get a child of a preferred sex,

I want a girl-whatever it takes to get a girl-up to 4.

Convergence around the two child norm is also evident among the Australian, British and Spanish respondents who already have two children and who didn't plan to have more children, as well as those with one child and planning to have only one more. Most said that they had their desired family size and did not want any more, citing financial, career, and age reasons Nevertheless there

was some hesitation about the question, particularly among the Spanish women, with some qualifying their views saying that maybe later if their financial / work situation improved

Women with three or more children

Only 2 women in this group wanted to have more children. One Maori woman who had four children said that she would like, at least, to have another girl so that her daughter could have a sister. The other woman who wanted to have another child said that she felt four was a good number and that “she loved little babies”.

The other women with three or more children all said that they did not intend to have any more children and felt that their families were complete. All mentioned financial reasons and the difficulties in giving enough time to each child if they had any more.

None of the women with three children (or more) in the other 3 surveys planned to have more children, Finances were mentioned as the reason for not having more children by other respondents.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS A ONE-CHILD FAMILY

Personal Perceptions

Because, as we have seen, the often-expressed reason for having another child was related to the need for siblings, or concern about having an only child, this issue was probed further in the second wave .of the NZ study. Unfortunately we have no cross-comparative data for this variable.

Negative views strongly outweighed positive attitudes towards having an only child, particularly among Maori. Even among women who do not yet have any children, only one favoured this situation, and one was ambivalent. This seems to contribute to the pressure many women in this situation feel when contemplating having only one child: in the time available

Those who had positive views, were all Pakeha women. But for some, while not opposed to the idea, seem to reject it for themselves: and for some this seems to be based on social expectations and a view that such children miss out on important aspects of family life.

As noted, no Maori women favoured having only one child, although some accepted that it was becoming more acceptable, but they tended to see it as predominantly a Pakeha phenomenon. Not only is the one child family seen as not part of Maori culture, and that such children would be disadvantaged, it is also associated with the fear of child mortality- an issue mentioned by only one Pakeha respondent

Societal Perceptions

There was recognition that societal values had shifted in this area and that there was more acceptance and more understanding of the impact of other factors on family structures. Also a recognition that “Some people are lucky to get one” Nevertheless negative social values are seen to be associated with only children, including the assumption that such a child would be spoilt, isolated etc., and/or that

“There is suspicion, as if there is some problem”

Maori cultural values around whanau are reflected in the value placed on having children and the sense of loss and sadness that a one child family might occasion. On the other hand the extended family was seen as both a support and a pressure to have children:

These views suggest that not only is there still little support for the concept of a sole child family, but this is seen negatively both at a personal and a societal level

FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN STARTING A FAMILY

Having considered reproductive intentions and seen that most women we spoke to have had or will have children, it is instructive to look at the issues they say they considered before they started their families

While some women said that they had not thought about any of these issues- either because the pregnancy was unplanned or they were desperate to have a baby, for the New Zealand respondents concern about the impact of a child on career was the most frequently mentioned, followed by the overall financial cost of raising children.

Effect on work/career

About 2/3 of women said that this had been a consideration for them, including more than 1/2 of the Maori respondents, and for several it was the reason they had delayed starting a family. Some said that they worried that the pregnancy would compromise their careers. Others were worried that if they were out of their jobs too long they would lose touch or continuity. This was often the point where the decision was taken to stay in the workforce after the baby was born. For some however the pregnancy represented a chance to change direction or escape from an unsatisfactory job.

Overall Financial Cost

While only a minority of NZ women said that they had thought about the long-term cost of having children, many said that they had thought about the impact of being reduced to one income. This had two aspects, both financial, including for some women, distress at the thought of not having their own income and the effect of this on their self-esteem. While this was an important consideration for the NZ respondents, it was the most important consideration for the women in the other 3 surveys

Long Term Cost Of Education

This was an issue of which they became more aware with subsequent pregnancies.

Availability of Childcare

Although many women were concerned about returning to the workforce comparatively few in the NZ sample had thought about this but this was particularly important for the European women

Availability of Support Networks

This was quite an important consideration with about half of the Australasian women saying that they had thought about the availability of support networks for themselves, particularly extended family.

Effect on Relationship with Partner

This was a not a concern for many NZ respondents, but was for their counterparts in Australia and the UK

EFFECT OF COSTS ON FAMILY SIZE INTENTIONS

The majority of women said that the cost of raising children was a significant factor in determining the number of children they would have. Many, particularly the Maori women, said that they would love to have more children but felt that if they did they would not be able to do as much for the children. Factors mentioned included:

- reluctance to take further time out of the workforce and the consequent drop in income,
- the costs of education,
- the cost of child care which increases with subsequent children

However the predominant sentiment was being able to afford the best possible life for the children they have, and a balance between giving the child the maximum opportunities while ensuring that this does not restrict those of the mother.

Those who did not feel that financial considerations affected their intentions concerning family size included a couple who had adopted a child after years of infertility, a couple who had waited 9 years for their first child, those with religious beliefs about family size, and late-starting professional couples for whom money was not an issue, but as one said “The limitation for us is in terms of energy rather than finances”.

There was a mixed response among the Australian respondents with half of the women agreeing and identifying the drop to one income and the cost of childcare as factors, The majority of UK and Spanish respondents said that the cost of children might determine how many they have.

IMPACT OF STUDENT LOAN SCHEMES

Most of the respondents in the NZ surveys had completed their education before or soon after the widespread uptake of the Student Loan scheme, so it did not feature particularly in their responses. For those coming into the parenting age group now and in the near future, student loans are an important fact of life for many.

A little further light on the potential impact of this on the reproductive intentions of younger adults, most under 30 years of age is shown by data from the New Zealand University Students Association Income and Expenditure Survey carried out in 2004 on tertiary-level students of all categories of study and related to almost 4000 students in universities, college of education and polytechnics .

These data show that a vast majority, more than 70%, of the students, irrespective of whether they had student loans or not, reported that student loans would have at least some impact on their deciding whether or not to have children, and about 30% considered the impact would be significant.

Another recently published survey of all NZ 1st year trainee interns identified through the Medical Council register found that 83% reported that student loans made saving for the future difficult, including saving for a house or retirement. And 42% reported that “their student loan debt had influenced their decision to have children or more children”. (Moore, 2006)

“SAFETY” OF JOB MARKET FOR WOMEN WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Given the emphasis the NZ respondents placed on the impact that starting a family would have on their careers, they were asked how safe they felt the current job market was for women with young children- how likely did they think it was that they would be able to obtain a job that met both their work and family requirements.

The overwhelming majority of women felt that the situation is very difficult, particularly getting appropriate work that would also permit them to meet their family obligations. “Compromise” was the word used most frequently and many spoke of the trade-offs they needed to make, and the guilt they felt

Only a few women felt that the labour market in their particular area was safe for women like themselves. All of those with children who felt this way were in areas such as health where there is currently a shortage of skilled workers. Several of the women without children also did not perceive problems.

Many women felt that their own situation was secure but that they were the exception to the general situation, which many felt was not favourable. Often it was the attitude of their immediate boss that made the difference, or that they felt that there were skill shortages in their area and that gave them leverage.

Maori women were less likely to regard the job market as insecure and almost half reported that they were very confident that they could obtain suitable employment if their current situation changed.

As many women with young children wish to return to the workplace part time, the issue of obtaining suitable part time work and/or continuing their careers is important. Women in traditional male occupations such as law, accountancy and engineering were more likely to feel that there

were difficulties in working at an appropriate level part time, and therefore options were limited for them while their children were young.

“I’d have to take a lower job or commit to working full time. So I run out of choices”.

Loss of skills if out of the workforce too long was another concern. One woman felt that she would be alright if she took one year off, but that it would be "extremely hard" to return after longer absence as her job required up to date knowledge

Other more fundamental problems with the labour market, including the introduction of paid parental leave, were cited and concern was expressed that this would make it very hard for small businesses and as a result they may decide not to employ women who are likely to become pregnant. The lack of options in a city the size of Hamilton was also mentioned

“It’s not at all secure. I wouldn’t get my job back-no way they’d keep it open for 12 months, so I’d be moved aside or I wouldn’t get back in. I couldn’t do this job if I had kids. Not fair on kids. Pay goes down ...no matter how much you’re earning”

“The situation is not good. People make or have reservations about employing women with children-think they won’t be as available” [partner in law firm]

IMPACT OF WORKING ON FAMILY AND PERSONAL LIFE

Because most women now return to the workforce and often when their children are very young, their perceptions of the impact of working on their family life may affect not only the way they view their dual role but perhaps more importantly, it may influence the views of their own children and of the generation immediately behind them.

Almost all women said that staying in the workforce once one had children had an enormously intrusive effect upon family and personal lives. Many reported feeling very stressed by the difficulties they encountered combining the two roles, regretting the lack of time they could spend with their children and/or their partner. This appears to increase with the number of children and as children get older. There were several women, all of whom had only one child, who said that they had organised both work and family life so that they were mutually supportive, but all women were insistent that their child would always take priority.

“Working is a huge compromise to my family life, full stop. .. ”

It is possible that subsequent cohorts of women may look at this experience and decide that it is not for them, and this may have a profound effect upon their family and work choices, and thus on fertility levels.

COMPARISON WITH THEIR MOTHERS' LIVES: IS IT HARDER OR EASIER FOR WOMEN TODAY?

At the end of the interview, after having reviewed their personal experiences the women were asked to consider their own lives in relation to those of their mothers and to comment on whether they felt that things had got harder or easier for women to combine work and family life. and what they felt was the impact of current policies. As with so much in this area, views were mixed with some of the same factors being cited as both positive and negative, and seem to reflect both their own experiences and their perceptions of societal views.

Most women felt that in many respects their lives were easier in this area than their mothers' had been but few attributed this to policy changes as much as to general shifts in social attitudes Chief among the policy changes that had made things easier was the introduction of paid parental leave, although this was often qualified by concerns about its limitations in terms of eligibility, duration etc.

Attitudinal changes identified were greater awareness in the workplace and acceptance of the reality of women with families in the workforce. The major social change was in the availability of more options and opportunities for women, including being able to choose whether or not to have children, a career or both. Associated with this were more and a greater range of childcare facilities

There was also recognition that some current policies and attitudes were also making things harder. Again the responses did not necessarily reflect specific policies but rather social and economic factors that were seen to impact on people in this area

It's considered socially acceptable now, but it's physically and emotionally harder because there is huge pressure.

You're expected to work, and women don't feel they can stay at home- there is pressure on full time Mums at home Women are still seen as primary caregivers even though they are still working and doing other bits and pieces

The **increased** expectations of society for women to be able "do it all" was most frequently and often eloquently mentioned. Several noted that the model of commitment to career was a male model which women were expected to accommodate, while men rarely had to make a parallel adjustment. Women's own expectations to be good mothers and good members of the labour force put pressure on them in varying ways. Dispersed families and increased mobility were seen to reduce family support -an essential underpinning of many workingwomen's lives. Social attitudes were seen to be overly judgemental and children of working mothers were expected to have problems

Workplace attitudes, particularly those of employers are seen still to be not supportive. Increasing reluctance to hire married women at the beginning of their family formation stage in their lives because of their potential leave requirements and other costs were noted. Another woman noted

that there was insufficient recognition of the value of women with children “we are stable, we are not going anywhere, and we work hard because we need the work.

Economic pressures included: rising living costs, particularly in health and education that put pressures on women to return to work. This was compounded by the costs of childcare and the costs of petrol, because women with children frequently have significant costs involved in driving their children to and from childcare, and later to school and other activities.

It's a luxury to stay at home to look after kids. Your partner needs to have a very high income for you to afford to stay home.

As in New Zealand, in the other surveys there were mixed responses to this question Most women thought it was getting easier, but some clearly thought it was getting harder and some saw some aspects that had a dual effect. Similar issues were identified, with a mix of societal and policy changes, but with perhaps slightly more emphasis than was given by NZ respondents to the positive role of policy in areas such as subsidies.

Often women would say that the women being able to work was one of the positives but that this was at the expense of a balanced family life, partly contributed to by a lack of support to combine the two. Lack of equity for women compared with men in being able to combine work and family. was a concern for the Australian respondents

Most of the Spanish respondents felt that it was getting harder and attributed this to unfavourable social and economic policies compared with other European Community Countries,

CONCLUSION

These attitudinal data, drawn from a number of low fertility countries, show some interesting differences between the New Zealand respondents and even those in Australia, with respect to norms and values relating to fertility changes.

New Zealand, in spite of some reservations, is still seen as a desirable place in which to raise children, and indeed many of the NZ diaspora decide to return home when they reach the family formation stage in their lives. There is little enthusiasm for, and in fact some concern about the prospect of continuing declines in fertility. While there is an increase in childlessness, and probably in one-child families, these are also not regarded particularly favourably. Thus at the macro-level the environment for young New Zealand couples contemplating parenthood appears to be positive.

The New Zealand respondents, like their counterparts in the other surveys, have generally embraced the norm of the 2 child family, but unlike them there was much more regret expressed, particularly by Maori women, about not having more children.

Many of these children of the Baby Boom did seem to look back at the size of their own families of orientation as an ideal that they would have liked to achieve. In reality however changing social and economic pressures mean that most will not.

In particular the investment that many women now make in their education and their careers contributes to the delay in the start of childbearing, and this in turn is likely to limit the number of children they will have. Unless some way is found to encourage earlier child-bearing that does not compromise education and career development – it seems likely that this trend will continue and possibly exacerbate, given the likely impact of student loans and other factors. If we look at some of the factors which women in the other surveys say affected their attitudes and decisions- rising costs, employment conditions, lack of support systems, increased urbanization etc. it seems likely that these could become increasingly important here also.

Perhaps for some couples these constraints will outweigh their desires to have children, ultimately leaving them with fewer children than they might have wished to have. Peter McDonald the Australian demographer, “proposes that there is a considerable desire for children, as seen through childbearing intentions, but the risks and uncertainties of a globalising world make people hesitate to have children.” It is possible that the pressures many young families are currently experiencing in trying to balance work and family life may make those coming behind them reconsider this approach and find new ways of achieving this balance

The generally pro-natalist climate of New Zealand may make such trends less extreme here, at least in the short term. It may also permit the continuation of a diversity of family sizes, with a minority of couples having more than the statutory two child family. Thus while our national TFR may not reach the extremely low levels seen elsewhere, it seems possible that it will conceal increased polarization between population groups- defined by geography, employment status etc

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