



Still childless at the age of 28 to 40 years: A cross-sectional study of Swedish women's and men's reproductive intentions



E. Schytt^{a,b,*}, A.B.V. Nilsen^{a,c}, E. Bernhardt^d

^a Department of Women's and Children's Health, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

^b Centre for Clinical Research Dalarna, Falun, Sweden

^c Centre for Evidence-Based Practice, Bergen University College, Norway

^d Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 June 2013

Revised 13 November 2013

Accepted 17 November 2013

Keywords:

Postponed childbearing

Women

Men

Reproduction

Intentions

ABSTRACT

Background: Delayed childbearing is associated with adverse reproductive outcomes. Our aim was to investigate Swedish women's and men's childbearing intentions at the age of 28, 32, 36 and 40 years, in terms of: (1) time point for a first child, (2) number of children, and (3) reasons for not yet having children.

Methods: Cross-sectional data from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study, including 365 childless women and 356 childless men aged 28, 32, 36 and 40 years who responded to a questionnaire in 2009. Descriptive and multivariate logistic regression analyses were conducted.

Results: Most 28- and 32-year-olds intended to have children, but only 32% of women and 37% of men aged 36/40 years (merged), many of whom still postponed childbearing. Reasons for remaining childless differed by age. Most prominent in the 36/40-year-olds were: lack of a partner (women 60%, men 59%), no desire for children (women 44%, men 44%), not mature enough (women 29%, men 35%), and wanting to do other things before starting a family (women 26%, men 33%). The 36/40-year-olds had the highest odds for infertility problems (OR 3.8; CI 95% 1.8–7.9) and lacking a suitable partner (OR 1.8 CI 95% 1.1–3.0), and lower odds for reasons related to work and financial situation.

Conclusions: Many childless 36- and 40-year-olds intended to have children but seemed to overestimate their fecundity. The most prominent reasons for being childless were: not having wanted children up to now, lack of a partner, infertility problems, and prioritising an independent life.

© 2013 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The postponement of parenthood in Europe and other societies with European-origin populations [1] raises questions about women's and men's reproductive intentions and choices [2–7]. The transition into parenthood is a major life event and many consider the timing of their first baby carefully [8]. However, many young women and men are unaware of the risk associated with delaying the first pregnancy to a time point when the woman's fecundity, and even the success rates of assisted reproductive technologies (ART), are in decline [3,4,9,10]. For women who manage to become pregnant in late reproductive life, the risk of pregnancy complications and adverse obstetric outcomes in both the mother and the infant increases [1]. Increasing paternal age is also associated with fertility problems and health problems in the offspring [11].

To explain the phenomenon of postponing childbearing, which was enabled by the introduction of effective contraceptives, a variety of reasons have been given. The most important of these is women's increased participation on the labour market, including their longer education [6,7,12] and career planning [6]. Financial and practical circumstances during university studies may be difficult to combine with establishing a family, and a high educational level and career increase the likelihood of delaying childbirth in women [12–14], whereas high income and a stable job have the opposite effect in men [14]. Additional contributing factors are value changes, difficult housing conditions, economic uncertainty, the absence of supportive family policies, gender equity, changes in partnership behaviour [6], and difficulties in establishing stable partner relationships [8,14]. Recent studies on Norwegian women and men who became parents at an advanced or very advanced age showed that besides having more age-related reproductive and physical health problems they constituted a heterogeneous group characterised by either socio-economic prosperity or vulnerability [15,16].

* Corresponding author. Address: Division of Reproductive Health, Department of Women's and Children's Health, Karolinska Institutet, Retziusväg 13 A, SE-171 77 Stockholm, Sweden. Mobile: +46 (0)70 65 80 710.

E-mail address: Erica.schytt@ki.se (E. Schytt).

Studies of women's and men's intentions regarding childbearing have mainly focused on the young, and specifically on students. The vast majority of women and men who attend university in Sweden [3,8], Finland [17], England [18], Canada [9], USA [19] and Australia [2] wish to have children, preferably two, and they most commonly intend to have their first baby in their late 20s and early 30s. Some even plan to have their first child at the age of 35 or later; this is the case for men more than women [2,3,9,17,19]. For students, important prerequisites before having the first baby are: to have completed one's studies, to have a permanent job position and a stable partner relationship, to feel sufficiently mature to become a parent, and to share the responsibility for parenthood [2,3,19]. Swedish female students more than male students stress the importance of having a good financial situation, access to childcare and working conditions with an opportunity to combine family life [3].

Few studies of reproductive intentions have included more representative samples, for example participants other than students, and women and men of higher reproductive age. By still being childless when reaching their late 20s and beyond, they would most likely constitute a selected group with different intentions and opportunities for childbearing compared with the young. Financial circumstances may be less influential, whereas the 'biological clock' may be more important [20,21]. A Swedish study from 2001, investigating the childbirth intentions of women ($n = 322$) and men ($n = 323$) more than 28 years of age, confirmed the two-child norm, and the main reasons were similar to those found in the studies of students [8].

The aim of this study was to describe the childbearing intentions of a representative sample of men and women, and their reasons for not yet having children, by using data from the Young Adult Panel Study. More specifically, we investigated women and men aged 28, 32, 36 and 40 years with regard to: (1) the intended time point for having the first child (2) the intended number of children, and (3) reasons for not yet having children.

The setting

In Sweden, where the present study was conducted, the average age when having a first child has increased by almost five years since 1970, and was 29 and 31 years in women and men respectively in 2011 [22]. Sweden has a generous welfare state with relatively low levels of economic and gender inequity, and high participation of women in the labour force. Nevertheless, pregnant women and their partners are at higher risk of unemployment than their non-pregnant peers, despite the law against discrimination because of pregnancy [23]. For many years now, the policy has been to facilitate the combination of work and child-rearing by granting generous parental leave for working parents, in total 480 days. Gender equality has been emphasised, for example by earmarking 60 days of parental leave especially for the father, and in 2009, 22% of the total number of leave days were used by men (www.forsakringskassan.se). The benefits are based on annual income from the preceding year, and parents without such an income, e.g. those who are unemployed or students, receive approximately 20€ per day. These family allowances may have had a positive impact on the total fertility rate in Sweden [24], which increased from 1.55 to 1.97 between 2000 and 2011.

Materials and methods

Participants

Cross-sectional data were drawn from the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) (www.suda.su.se/yaps) run by principal

investigator xxx at Stockholm University. The YAPS aims at investigating Swedish family and working life in the 2000s, and includes questionnaire and register data from approximately 3500 women and men on socio-demographics and attitudes related to family and working life. Recruitment and data collection was conducted in cooperation with Statistics Sweden.

Recruitment of the sample and the data collection by means of postal questionnaires were conducted in collaboration with Statistics Sweden (SCB). The first wave of data collection took place in 1999 when a randomly selected and representative sample of 3408 women and men from the 1968, 1972, and 1976 birth cohorts, and of Swedish origin, as well as 951 second-generation immigrants of Polish and Turkish origin from the 1976 and 1980 birth cohorts, were identified in the Swedish Total Population Register. A request for their participation was included in the questionnaire. The total response rate was then 65% ($n = 2\,820$). The second wave was conducted in 2003, for which 1200 women and men of Swedish origin from the 1980 birth cohort were added to the original sample. The total response rate was 70% ($n = 2816$).

The third wave, on which this study was based, took place in 2009 and included participants from the first and/or second wave, with a total response rate of 56% (1114 women; 871 men). For the present study we included women and men who neither had a biological child nor were expecting one. The flow chart (Fig. 1) shows the initial third-wave sample and the final study sample of the present study, which was 365 childless women and 356 childless men, after the exclusion of those who reported previous child/children, a present pregnancy (women) or that their partner was pregnant (men). At that time the participants were 28, 32, 36 or 40 years old, with the two latter age groups collapsed because of small numbers.

With a mean age at first birth of 29 years for women and 31 years for men (national figures), most of the respondents in our sample were past the age when a majority had already made the transition to parenthood. More specifically, in the total sample, 62.3% (women 58.2%; men 68.3%) of the 28-year-olds, 38.6% (women 34.2%; men 44.0%) of the 32-year-olds, and 24.4% (women 20.9%; men 28.8%) of the 36/40-year-olds were childless.

Measurements

Data were collected by means of questionnaires, which were distributed on the internet, and by post in cases of non-response. Those who still did not respond were approached by telephone and asked to respond to a considerably shorter version, and are therefore excluded from the response rate and sample.

Data on socio-demographic background included age, ethnicity, education, civil status, occupation and gross income (SEK). Reproductive intentions were investigated by using responses to the following questions: 'Do you think you will have children in the future?' with the response alternative Yes (Yes, definitely + Yes, probably), No (No, probably not + No, definitely not) and Do not know; 'When do you think you will have your first child?' (Within the next 2 years/within 2–5 years/more than 5 years from now) and 'How many children would you like to have?' (one child/two children/three children or more). Reasons for not yet having children included 10 specified items listed in Fig. 2a–c. The question was worded 'There may be several reasons for not having children (yet). Which one(s) of these reasons is (are) relevant for you?'. Several reasons could be given, and the participants were also asked to report the most important.

Data analyses

Differences between women and men regarding reasons for not having children and between age groups regarding reproductive intentions were calculated by Chi-square test. Differences

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2635701>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2635701>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)