

Which Men Remain Childless: The Effects of Early Lifecourse, Family Formation, Working Life and Attitudinal Variables

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Abstract

This paper examines later life childlessness among men in Australia. The data are from 1,610 men aged 45-59 interviewed for Wave 1 of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, a large-scale, nationwide, longitudinal survey of the household population of Australia conducted in 2001. Staged logistic regression models were used to identify the early lifecourse antecedents and later lifecourse correlates of a man being childless in later life. The results show that the father's and mother's occupations, the type of schooling and birthplace are important early lifecourse variables predictors of whether a man is childless in later life. Nuptiality and occupational variables are strong later life predictors of whether a man is childless. The importance of attitudinal variables, particularly attitudes towards family, work, money, leisure, health, and community, as predictors of his childlessness is highlighted. The implications of the findings for Australia's public debate are discussed.

Introduction

High rates of childlessness among men, which in the past were linked to the high degree of asymmetry in the sex ratio of the population, have been a notable feature of much of the European-settled period of Australia's demographic history (McDonald 1974; Borrie 1993). Whilst the current rates of childlessness among males are almost certainly much lower than those of the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, there is evidence that childlessness in Australia is increasing. A decrease in the percentages of males who are partnered, particularly in those who are legally married, has accompanied this trend (Birrell *et al.* 2004).

The prevalence of childlessness among men in Australia appears to be higher at all ages than it is among women (Gray 2002). However, whilst differentials in childlessness among females have been studied extensively (Merlo and Rowland 2000; Carmichael and McDonald 2003; Parr, 2005), relatively little attention has been paid to the patterns among men. Except for Gray (2002), which focuses on measurement issues, studies of childlessness among Australian men appear to be restricted to small scale surveys of men's and women's reasons for not having children (Weston and Qu 2001, Carmichael and Whittaker forthcoming). There appears to be no study of differential rates of childlessness among men in Australia. The apparent neglect of men's childlessness may reflect the relative shortage of data on men's fertility (Australian census questions on numbers of children are designed to be answered only by women), the wider range of child-conceiving years for men, the lack of finality of the male childless state, and the difficulties posed by the incompleteness of the reporting of paternity (Gray 2002).

The relative shortage of studies on childlessness among men is of concern not only because men form the majority of the childless population but also because men's circumstances and attitudes are likely to form an important part of the explanation of childlessness among women. According to Cannold (2004), some women's aspirations to become mothers are thwarted by men's attitudes, whilst other women attitudes to having children tend to follow those of the men in their lives. Changing gender roles in relationship to childcare provide further reason for concern in relation to the dearth of

studies on men's childlessness. Australian men still on average undertake considerably less domestic work and childcare than Australian women, and the impact of the arrival of the first child on time use patterns is less marked for men than for women. For men the major changes to time use from the arrival of a first child are reduced time for sleeping and for other forms of personal care (eating, drinking, washing *etc.*) and reduced time for recreation (Craig and Bittman 2003; Craig 2005a and 2005b). Nonetheless, as has been the case for the United States, there has been some convergence in gender roles within the family over time, with fathers spending more time on and becoming more involved in bringing up children (Bianchi 2000; Baxter 2002; McLanahan 2004). Perhaps more importantly for the understanding of differentials in men's childlessness, with the increased average involvement in bringing up children almost certainly has come an increased spread to the levels of men's involvement in bringing up children. It is likely that women's expectations of the assistance a man will provide with domestic and childcare work affect the selection and retention of men into unions and whether they are willing to have children with them. It is also likely that such expectations have increased over time (Cannold 2004). However the greater opportunities to participate in childrearing and the greater expectations of their involvement may not necessarily be attracting Australian men to fatherhood: it is quite possible many men are deterred from fatherhood by the expected greater participation in domestic and childcare work that may come with it.

Early lifecourse variables, that is those variables whose values are typically determined either at birth or during a person's childhood, have been shown to have significant predictive power for identifying which women will be childless in later life (Parr 2005). Such variables are likely to also affect a man's likelihood of childlessness in later life. The socioeconomic status of a man's family of origin, his number of siblings, and his levels of and type of schooling may affect his fertility by affecting the levels of education, income and wealth in later life, all of which may affect whether he is able to attract and retain a partner, the education, income, wealth and attitudes of his partner, and his ability to contribute to the support of children (Parr 2006). A man's attitudes to and expectations of fatherhood may reflect, to some extent, his own experiences in childhood: for some men fears of being unsuitable for parenting or of being able to maintain an enduring relationship may stem from the example given by one or both their parents (Weston and Qu 2001). A man's country of birth may affect his likelihood of childlessness in later life not only because the socioeconomic circumstances of migrant groups differ considerably but also by conditioning his attitudes to the importance of having sons and daughters and expectations of the levels and types of involvement he should have in their upbringing. Moreover, the act of migration may disrupt unions (Abbasi-Shavazi and McDonald 2000).

The nature of a man's employment may affect whether or not he is childless in numerous ways. His inclination and ability to attract and retain a partner, and the education, income, wealth and attitudes of the partner he selects (and is selected by) all may at least in part reflect the status, income, and opportunities for meeting prospective partners he derives from his employment (Birrell et al. 2004). His financial circumstances (along with his partner's) affect a couple's ability to afford to support a child in numerous ways. The costs of children include not only the ability to cover the additional living costs resulting from the child but also the reduced income of (usually) the female partner

which results from withdrawal from the labour force to look after a child, taking unpaid parental leave, or a change to part-time work or to another occupation which is more compatible with childrearing (Chapman *et al.* 2001; Henman 2001; Percival and Harding 2002; Breusch and Gray 2004; Baxter 2006). His income also contributes to the determination of the value of some of the government benefits which may be claimed by parents, including Family Tax Benefit Part A (a means-tested benefit paid to the parents of children), childcare benefit, and in some cases it may be that costs of childcare are tax-deductible from his salary. For some men the circumstances of their work may make it difficult to commit to fatherhood. According to Hand and Lewis (2002) in contemporary Australia men see being accessible to children as an important part of fatherhood which the circumstances of work may impede. That said, despite the perceived conflicts between work and family, childlessness may not necessarily be advantageous to a man's career: some men see a continuing stigma attached to childlessness being disadvantageous to their careers (Blake 1979).

In some cases it is the male partner's employment which is temporarily (at least partly) interrupted in order to look after the child, although such cases are still in the minority and the durations of paternity leave tend to be shorter than those of maternity leave (ABS 2006a, Whitehouse *et al.* 2006). However, many fathers use some of their annual and other types of leave entitlements to help look after young children. Entitlement to paternity leave varies by the permanency and length of service of the employee (Whitehouse *et al.* 2006). The underutilisation of paternity leave may reflect that, even though publicly they may pay lip-service to it, colleagues and senior management are privately and effectively unsupportive of men taking such leave (Hand and Lewis 2002).

The nature of a man's significant relationship(s) would affect his likelihood of childlessness in later life, not only because of the obvious necessity for a partner to produce the child. Fears of the break-up of a relationship and a resultant reduced level of contact with children may deter some men from fatherhood, reflecting that Australian men are relatively unlikely to gain custody of children following a relationship breakup and face a rigorous enforcement of child support and maintenance payments to children and former partners (Birrell *et al.* 2004; Carmichael and Whittaker forthcoming). Some men (and women) may also fear the loss of attention from their spouse and the disruption to their sex lives that may come with the arrival of a child. The selectivity of partnering is likely to be an important factor for the explanation of men's childlessness. The circumstances of the female partner are almost certainly more important than those of the man, since it is still usually the female partner who will undertake the majority of the childcare and additional domestic work to the detriment of other time uses, and the female partner's income that will be fully or partially sacrificed in order to look after the child (Craig 2005).

Childlessness may be linked not only to socioeconomic and demographic variables but also to attitudes and values. According to Lesthaeghe (1995) the increasing prevalence of childlessness, along with the raft of other changes to family formation in Western industrialized nations he labels the "Second Demographic Transition, reflects a range of shifts in values. These include; stronger aspirations for quality relationships, greater risk aversion, a weakening of commitment to family relationships (more so among men), a decreased sense of community responsibility, and increasing careerism

and materialism. McDonald (2006) also links the growing materialism of an era of economic deregulation to low fertility at the national level. Carmichael and Whittaker (forthcoming) highlight the perception that having children would be detrimental to leisure activities as being important of the explanation of childlessness in contemporary Australia.

This study seeks to address a gap in the literature on childlessness among men, particularly the absence of literature on differentials in childlessness in contemporary Australia. It addresses the early lifecourse antecedents of childlessness, differentials by later lifecourse variables, and attitudinal differences between childless men and men with children. The implications of the findings for Australia's public debate on fertility are discussed.

Data and Methods

The data are from Wave 1 of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, a large-scale, nationwide, longitudinal survey of the household population of Australia conducted in 2001 by the Australian Commonwealth Government's Department of Family and Community Services. A multi-stage, cluster sample design was used, and 13,969 men and women from 7682 households and 488 census collection districts, which were stratified by State or Territory and metropolitan area or non-metropolitan area, were interviewed successfully. Data were collected on family formation and background, employment and unemployment history and status, and income. The household response rate was 66 per cent (Watson and Wooden 2002a and 2002b).

Men who were childless were identified from a question on "how many children have you ever fathered?". The questionnaire asked respondents how likely they were to have a child in the future. The likelihood was recorded on a 0 to 10 scale. The analysis was restricted to 1,610 males aged 45-59, in view of the relatively low percentages of childless males in this age range who considered it likely they would have a child in the future.

The HILDA data provide a rich array of potential explanatory variables. The explanatory variables fitted during the course of the analysis are as follows:

Early Lifecourse Variables

- 1 The number of siblings the respondent grew up with.
- 2 The father's occupation when the respondent was 14 (the occupations were coded according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) (ABS 1997).
3. The mother's occupation when the respondent was aged 14 (based on ASCO).
4. Whether the father was absent from home or deceased when the respondent was 14.
5. Whether the mother was absent from home or deceased when the respondent was 14.
6. The respondent's type of schooling (government, Catholic, other non-government).
7. The respondent's highest level of schooling (Year 12 or the overseas equivalent, Year 11 or the overseas equivalent or below).
8. Whether the respondent completed a Bachelor's degree or higher.
9. The respondent's country of birth (overseas countries of birth were grouped along linguistic and geographical lines).

10. Whether the respondent is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Later Life Employment Variables

- 11. The respondent's current occupation (based on ASCO).
- 12. The respondent's current employment status (full-time, part-time, unemployed, not in labour force).
- 13. The respondent's gross annual income.
- 14. The percentage of the respondent's working life spent in paid employment
- 15. The percentage of the respondent's working life spent unemployed and looking for work.

Family Formation Variables

- 16. The respondent's current relationship status (legally married, unmarried cohabitation, separated, divorced or widowed, formerly cohabited, never married or cohabited).
- 17. The numbers of times the respondent has been legally married.

Attitudinal Variables (all variables are measured on a 0-10 scale- higher values indicating greater importance).

- 18. The importance of the home in which you live.
- 20. The importance of your employment opportunities.
- 21. The importance of your financial situation.
- 22. The importance of your involvement in local community.
- 23. The importance of your health.
- 24. The importance of your leisure activities.
- 25. The importance of religion.
- 26. The importance of your family.

Other Variables

- 27. Whether the respondent has a long-term health condition.
- 28. The type of place of residence (major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote or very remote).
- 29. The respondent's age last birthday.
- 30. Interaction terms between current relationship status and current occupation.

Since the response variable is binary, logistic regression is used. Staged logistic regression models were computed, with the entry of variables reflecting the temporal ordering of the variables.

Results

The Prevalence of Childless Men

The percentage who are childless in the 45-59 years age group is higher for men (12.8%) than for women (9.5%). This would partly reflect that fatherhood is more likely than motherhood to be postponed to later ages and the greater likelihood of paternity being unrecognised or unreported (for example due to avoidance of child support). It

would also reflect the effect on the marriage (and partnering) market of there being slightly more males than females in Australia's population in the age groups considered. According to 2001 population estimates the sex ratio for 45-59 year olds is 100.7 males per 100 females, a legacy of the predominantly male immigration of the post World War II period (ABS 2006b). Repartnering following the break-up of a union is more common for men than for women. According to the HILDA data 18.4% of 45-59 year old men had married more than once compared to 17.7% of women. This may have resulted in a larger number of never married men than never married women being displaced from marriage (and fatherhood) by the remarrying.

The Relationships of Childless Men

Childless men are heterogenous in terms of their histories of married and cohabiting relationships (Figure 1). Nearly one third (31%) of 45-59 year old childless men are currently legally married and a further 14% are currently cohabiting with a partner but not legally married (such relationships are known as "de facto" relationships in Australia). Just under a quarter are not currently in either a married or a cohabiting relationship but have been so in the past. The remaining 31% have neither been married nor in a cohabiting relationship (of 3 or more months duration).

The variation in the percentages of men in different relationship categories who are childless is huge (Table 1). The overwhelming majority (over 95%) of men who have not married or cohabited with a partner are childless, and the percentage of men who formerly cohabited with a partner without marrying is only slightly less (82%). The rate of childlessness among divorced, separated or widowed men is about one and a half times that of men who are still legally married. The percentage of men who are currently in an unmarried cohabiting relationship who are childless is nearly four times the percentage of legally married men. About three-quarters of the men currently in an unmarried cohabiting relationship are formerly married. The percentage of these men who are childless (11%) is slightly higher than that for formerly married men who have not repartnered. The percentage who are childless among men who are currently in cohabiting relationships and who have never married (62%) is far higher, and is closer to that for men who are not currently partnered than to those for currently and formerly married men. Perhaps because of the greater time spent between and reforming unions, the rate of childlessness is higher among men who married three or more times, but does not differ between men who married once and men who married twice.

Childlessness by Early Lifecourse Variables

Of the early lifecourse variables considered, it is the variations between categories of parental occupation and by the intactness of the parental relationship which appear widest (Table 2). Men for whose fathers no occupation is recorded are the most likely to be childless in later life. Men whose fathers worked in a middle status white collar occupation are also relatively likely to be childless. Men whose fathers worked in a managerial or administrative occupation are the least likely to be childless. Roughly two-thirds (68%) of the fathers of men in this group were farmers or farm managers. Thus rural upbringing may contribute to this pattern. However rates of childlessness are also

low among men whose fathers were in non-farming managerial or administrative occupations. Just over half the men reported that when they were aged 14 their mother was not employed. Men whose mothers were not employed are only slightly less likely to be childless than those whose mothers were in employment.

The most striking feature of the variation by mother's occupation is the wide divergence in rates of childlessness between men with mothers in the two "high end" occupational categories: the rate of childlessness is lowest for men with a mother in a managerial or administrative occupation and is highest for men with a mother in a professional occupation. Almost all the mothers in managerial or administrative occupations were farmers or farm managers. Thus rural upbringing may explain their sons' low rate of childlessness. Most of the mothers in professional occupations were either in health professions (58%) or education professions (28%).

Men who attended non-Catholic non-government schools (most of which would be fully independent schools, but which would also include schools affiliated to other religious or secular organisations) have a higher rate of childlessness than men who attended other types of schools. The variation in male rates of childlessness by the highest level of education attained is slight.

The variation in rates of childlessness by the number of siblings a man had when growing up is fairly slight. Men who grew up in relatively large families (with 4 or more siblings) have lower rates of childlessness than men who grew up with fewer siblings. Men who grew up in two child (one sibling) families are the most likely to be childless. Men who were the eldest sibling when they were growing up are less likely to be childless than those who had an older sibling. This may in part be due to their older ages.

First generation migrant men are only slightly less likely to be childless than men born in Australia. However the percentage who are childless varies considerably between the different regions of birth. Men in the two largest English-speaking migrant groups in Australia (the British Isles-born and New Zealand-born) are more likely to be childless than the Australia-born. However men who were born overseas in other countries are considerably less likely to be childless. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who are childless is well below that for non-Aboriginals. However the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in the relevant age range in the sample is small.

Childlessness by Employment

Men in "high end" occupations are less likely to be childless than men in "low end" occupations, with the percentage of men in labouring and related occupations who are childless being particularly high at one-and-a-half times the average (Table 3). The relatively low rates of men in managerial and administrative occupations or in professional occupations who are childless reflect these men being more likely to marry and stay married (Birrell *et al.* 2004). Men in labouring and related occupations have the mirror image of this pattern. The contrast in rates of childlessness between the married and unmarried varies by type of occupation: for men in "high end" occupations the difference in rates of childlessness between the married and the unmarried is considerably less than it is for men in "low end" occupations. This reflects men in "high end" occupations having both a higher rate of childlessness among the unmarried and a lower

rate of childlessness among the married. The higher rates of childlessness among married men in “high end” occupations may reflect the selectivity of their marriages, with more being married to women who are also in “high end” occupations.

Men who are currently in full-time employment have a lower rate of childlessness than men in part-time employment and men who are not in employment. The higher percentage of men in full-time employment who are currently married would be a contributory factor. It may also reflect that men with children to support are more likely to choose to work full-time. Moreover, men who are less committed to remaining in a particular job may be more disinclined to have the commitments associated with children. The percentage of men who are currently unemployed who are childless is nearly double the average. Among men who are unemployed a much higher percentage are not currently in a union, a pattern that reflects both a higher percentage never entering marriages or cohabiting relationships and higher percentages who were formerly married or in cohabiting relationships but are no longer with a partner. Rates of childlessness reduce significantly as the percentage of a man’s working life spent in paid employment increases and increase significantly as the percentage of working life spent not in the labour force increases. The correlation between childlessness and the percentage of working life spent unemployed is positive but not significant at the 5% level. In part because of the differences in occupation and employment status, the mean gross annual income of childless men (A\$40,173) is less than the mean gross annual income of men with children (\$A48,371).

Associations between Childlessness and Attitudinal Variables

Respondents were asked to place the importance they placed on various domains of life on a 0-10 scale (higher values corresponding to a greater importance). The mean scores show that whereas men with children place the greatest importance on their family, childless men see their health as the most important (Table 4). As well as their tending to place considerably less importance on family than their counterparts with children, childless men also tend to place less importance on their employment and work situation, involvement in their local community, and religion. However they tend to place more importance on leisure activities and slightly more importance on their financial situation.

Multivariate Models

Table 5 presents a simplified logistic multiple regression model of the effects of the early lifecourse variables on childlessness in later life, and Table 6 a model selected from the full range of early lifecourse and later lifecourse variables. Due to space considerations the full models could not be shown.

The effects of parental occupations remain large and significant even after controlling for a range of other early lifecourse variables (Table 5). A man at age 14 having a father who had no occupation or whose father was absent or deceased is associated with a considerably increased likelihood of childlessness than having a father in employment. A curvilinear relationship with the status of occupation is evident, with men with fathers in middle status occupations having a somewhat higher risk of

childlessness than men with fathers in “high end” occupations and men with fathers in “low end” occupations. Despite its likelihood of increasing wealth and the resultant greater affordability of children, having a mother in a professional occupation is associated with a significantly increased probability of a man being childless (Parr 2006). However, having a mother in a managerial or administrative occupation is associated with a significantly reduced risk of childlessness. After controlling for the other variables, the contrasts between the middle and lower status maternal occupation categories and the no occupation category are insignificant. Having attended a non-government, non-Catholic school significantly increases the likelihood of a man being childless, despite the higher incomes and wealth of this group (Parr 2006). Having been born in Australia, New Zealand, the British Isles or Europe is associated with an increased likelihood of a man being childless relative to that for men born in other countries. This would reflect the higher fertility of migrants from the less developed countries.

Not surprisingly, having been in a married or cohabiting union reduces the likelihood of a man being childless considerably. There is no significant difference between the effects of current and former marital unions. However having been in a marital union as opposed to a cohabiting union is associated with a substantially reduced risk of childlessness. Some of this correlation may be due to the arrival of a child raising the likelihood of unmarried couples marrying legally. The greater fragility and typically shorter durations of unmarried cohabiting relationships compared to legal marriages may also contribute to the explanation (Liefbroer and Dourleijn 2006). Mindful of this and the prospect of only limited contact with children should a relationship break up, men in cohabiting relationships may be more likely to be deterred from fathering children. That many of those in cohabiting unions have experienced the break-up of a marital union would contribute to the explanation of their childlessness, both because of the time lost due to disruption of the previous union and because this disruption may have made them cautious about subsequent commitments, including children (their cohabiting rather than marrying may be indicative of this). Moreover, it is likely that a higher percentage of the families of men in cohabiting relationships would include step children. It is also likely that a small part of the correlation is due to some of the unmarried cohabiting couples being same sex partnerships (to date same sex unions have not been accorded legally married status in Australia). According to 2001 census data roughly 4% of all unmarried cohabiting couples are same sex couples, although it is widely believed the census data understate this prevalence (De Vaus 2004). Being in an ongoing cohabiting union is associated with a significantly lower likelihood of being childless than having been so in the past but no longer being so. Having been in a cohabiting union which is no longer continuing, in turn, is associated with a lower likelihood of being childless than never having been in either a marriage or a cohabiting union.

Men with recorded occupations are significantly more likely to be childless than men without recorded occupations. This may reflect men without occupations being less able to afford to support children. The differences between the “high end” and the “low end” occupations become insignificant after controlling for the effects of the other later lifecourse variables. Thus much of the difference in rates of childlessness between men in “high end” occupations and those in “low end” occupations, shown in Table 3, is attributable to the former being more likely to form and to remain in relationships, especially legal marriages.

Table 6 shows that attitudinal variables are strongly associated with a man's likelihood of being childless. Of the various attitudinal variables considered the importance placed on family is the one most strongly associated with the reduction of the likelihood of a man being childless. This may be indicative of those who value family more being more likely to have children. It may also reflect the arrival of children elevating the importance of the family. The importance a man places on the community in which he lives also has a negative association with his likelihood of being childless. This may reflect those without children having a lesser involvement in the community than those with children, due to their lack of a need for childcare, schooling and children's recreational and social facilities. It may also reflect some childless men being more inclined to avoid social situations in which family formation is likely to be discussed (Lampman and Dowling-Guyer 1995). Alternatively it may be indicative of Lesthaeghe's (1995) thesis that the less community reverent (therefore more individualistic) more readily deviate from the community norm of marriage and children. The importance a man places on leisure activities and the importance he places on his health are associated with an increased likelihood of his being childless. The arrival of a child is associated with men having reduced time for non-child leisure activities (which would include health-related pursuits such as sporting activities) (Craig and Bittman 2003; Craig 2005). It also leads to men's annual and other leave entitlements being used for childcare, presumably at the expense of time for holidays or recreation (Whitehouse *et al.* 2006). Thus it is logical that men who would value such activities more highly are less inclined to have children. The finding may also reflect that in the light of the arrival of children other domains in life assume a lesser importance, including holidays, hobbies and sporting activities, and other activities undertaken with friends. The importance a man places on work and the importance he places on his financial situation are both significantly and positively associated with his likelihood of being childless. This may reflect those who are more strongly materialistic or who are more strongly careerist seeing the prospective costs of children and the prospective conflicts between parental and work-related commitments as a greater deterrent from having children. It may also be partially indicative of the arrival of children reducing the importance attached to non-family domains of life.

Significant effects of the mother's and the father's occupation and type of schooling remain after controlling for a wide range of later lifecourse relationship formation, work-related and attitudinal variables (Table 6). The significantly higher likelihood of childlessness among men for whose fathers no occupation were recorded may reflect the lesser ability to afford children or the insecurity about taking on a fatherhood role among men whose own parental relationships were disrupted by divorce, separation, death or unemployment or who did not know their father's identity. Even after controlling for other variables, the likelihood of being childless is somewhat lower for men with fathers in with "high end" occupations and for men with fathers in "low end" occupations than for men with "middle status" occupations. For men with fathers in "high end" occupations a greater ability to afford to support children may be a factor. For the sons of men in managerial and administrative occupations the high percentage having had a rural upbringing may also be a factor. The significant negative effect of having a mother in a managerial or administrative occupation may be linked to the overwhelming majority (89%) of these mothers having been farmers or farm managers and the greater

importance placed on having children in rural settings. The significant positive effect of having a mother in a professional occupation persists even after controlling for the later lifecourse variables considered. It may be that men with mothers in professional occupations are more likely to grow up placing less importance on family relative to other domains of life. It may be related to the selectivity of the partners of the sons of women in professional occupations; they may be more likely to choose an educated, professional partner, whose career aspirations may dissuade her from having children (Parr 2005). It may also be that with most of the mothers being health professionals these men are better informed about family planning. Even after controlling for the later lifecourse variables, there is a significant positive effect for a man having been educated in a non-government non-Catholic school. It may be that men who attended private schools see the costs of children are higher, in particular they may aspire for their children should they have any to attend such schools, and this deters them from having children.

The introduction of the later lifecourse variables reduces the effects of birthplace and the effect of age to insignificance. The higher rates of childlessness among men who were born in Australia, New Zealand, the British Isles and Europe relative to those born in other overseas countries, shown in Table 5, are largely explainable by differences in marriage and cohabitation patterns, particularly the higher propensities of the latter to marry legally and to stay married.

Summary and Discussion

This paper shows that childless Australian men are heterogenous in terms of their histories of relationships, with just under half being in married or cohabiting relationships, just under a quarter having been in such a relationship in the past but not currently being so, and just under one-third never having been in such a relationship. Thus the explanation of male childlessness should be seen as a complex piecing together of the differing explanations of childlessness within these subcomponents. Unmarried cohabitations and legal marriages are not comparable in their likelihoods of producing children: men who are in cohabiting unions are considerably more likely to be childless than men in legal marriages.

The pattern of Australian men in lower status occupations and men who are not in employment being more likely to be childless than their counterparts in higher status occupations, shown by this study, contrasts sharply with the pattern for Australian women, among whom it is those in higher status occupations that are the more likely to be childless (Parr 2005). The analysis in this paper shows that much of the higher rate of childlessness of men in lower status occupations compared to those in higher status occupations is attributable to their being less likely to form and to maintain marital unions. Birrell *et al.* (2004) show that in recent years the gap in partnering rates, especially in rates of legal marriage, between men in higher status occupations and men in lower status occupations has increased, a pattern they attribute to the viability of men in lower status occupations participating either in male breadwinner relationships or in collaborative partnerships being progressively undermined by a lack of the requisite

financial resources. Thus it is likely that differentials in childlessness between better off men and less well off men also will grow over time.

Childless men appear no less satisfied with life than men with children: the mean value for the question “how satisfied are you with life” for childless men aged over 45 is very similar to that for men with children. Nonetheless, one of the concerns in relation to the childless is that they will lack the support provided by children and often also of a partner later in life (Rowland 1991; 1998). Childlessness has been found to be a risk factor for institutionalisation later in life (Rowland 1998). The lack of support in later life for childless men may be compounded their tending also to have a smaller than average number of siblings to offer support and assistance to them, which has been demonstrated by this study. Childless men have also been found to have fewer close friends than childless women (Keith 1983). Thus childless men may be regarded as a group of particular concern not only because of their prospective social isolation in later life but also because their lack of economic resources may also restrict their options for affording secure and manageable accommodation, access to support services, and other forms of comfort in later life.

The early lifecourse has important consequences for a man’s likelihood of being childless. However, the effect of early lifecourse advantage on a man’s later lifecourse likelihood of being childless appears to be a mixture of counteracting effects. The childlessness-reducing effects of father’s occupation may be indicative of economic advantage *per se* tending to reduce the likelihood of childlessness. However, having private education, which is more prevalent among the children of the advantaged, has a childlessness-increasing effect, possibly due to differing perceptions of the costs of children. Moreover, having a mother in a professional occupation also is associated with an increased likelihood of a man being childless, possibly because it is associated with more libertarian attitudes to women’s roles which, in turn, tend to encourage childlessness (Lesthaeghe 1995; McDonald 2000; Parr 2005).

This paper provides evidence that childlessness among Australian men is a matter of attitude, as well as of socioeconomic circumstances and relationship formation. After controlling for other variables, men with children place more importance on family and the local community and less on work, personal finances, health and leisure activities. If, as seems reasonable, materialism and careerism have become more prominent among Australian men whilst the importance of community has declined then the individual-level linkages between the importance placed on work, personal finance, and the lack of importance placed on community may be incorporated into an explanation of rising rates of childlessness in Australia over time. The perception that childlessness in some cases is the product of selfishness is widespread both among the childless themselves and among those with children (Lampman and Dowling-Guyer 1995; Weston and Qu 2001; Carmichael and Whittaker forthcoming). Both the positive effects of the importance a man places on his financial situation, and on his work and the negative effect of the importance a man places on the community in which he lives may be interpreted as evidence linking childlessness more often than not with selfish attitudes (although it does not of course support the stereotype that all childless men have selfish attitudes). However, it is not possible to prove definitively from the data source used to what extent it is the more materialistic, careerist, and individualistic attitudes which shape a man’s disposition to be childless and to what extent it is being childless which shapes the

importance placed on these variables. The positive effect of the importance a man places on leisure activities may support the contention that time use change plays an important part in deciding not to have children. However again reverse causality cannot be discounted. The significant correlation between the importance of leisure activities and childlessness among men may provide some grounds for linking the growing diversity of leisure opportunities which are available and increases in childlessness in Australia in recent years.

Concern over levels of fertility which are low by historical standards has become prevalent in Australia's public debate (Heard 2006). Whilst the most-publicised statement of apparently pronatalist attitudes in the current Federal Government, Treasurer Peter Costello's suggestion "If you can have children it's a good thing to do - you should have one for the father, one for the mother and one for the country, if you want to fix the ageing demographic," (Dodson 2004), highlights increasing the parities of the parous as the way through which the birth rate is to be raised, it is recognized that levels of childlessness exert considerable leverage on the overall rate of fertility (McDonald 2000). The higher value childless men place on leisure activities may indicate that increasing the availability of paternity leave may have some scope for attracting more men towards fatherhood. The finding that the likelihood of a man being childless correlates with the importance he places on his financial situation may point to a need to lower the perceived costs of childrearing if the aim is to raise fertility by attracting more men to fatherhood. The effects on fertility, and particularly childlessness, of changes to government benefits, may in part be due to the clarity with which government family benefits are understood. Thus, because the effect of universal, substantial and immediate flat-rate benefit, such as the recently-introduced Maternity Payment, is obvious to all, including the childless, whilst the potential benefits of Australia's means-tested family benefits (Family Tax Benefit Part A, Family Tax Benefit Part B and the Baby Bonus) and childcare subsidies may be opaque to many, particularly to the childless, on a per dollar basis the allocation of expenditure to the former may be a more effective way of increasing fertility and, particularly, of reducing childlessness.

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Figure 1: Pie Chart of Distribution of Childless Australian Men Aged 45-59 by Relationship History

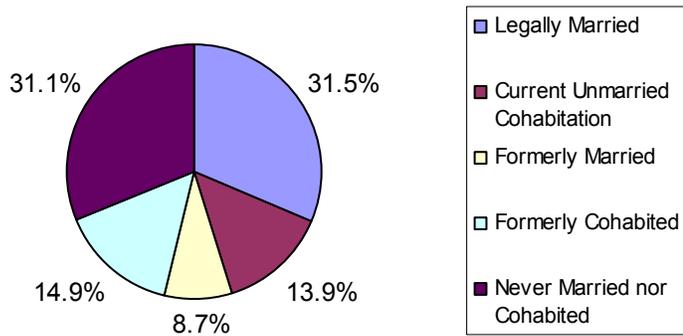


Table 1: Percentage of Men Aged 45-59 who are Childless by Relationship: Living in Australia (HILDA) Survey Wave 1

	Percentage Childless (%)	N
<i>Relationship Status</i>		
Legally Married	5.6	1171
Current Unmarried Cohabitation	23.0	126
Formerly Married	8.6	210
Formerly Cohabited	81.6	38
Never Married nor Cohabited	95.4	68
<i>Number of Legal Marriages</i>		
0	83.6	134
1	6.3	1180
2	6.3	267
3 or More	11.1	27
<i>Total</i>	12.8	1610

Table 2: Percentage of Men Aged 45-59 who are Childless by Early Lifecourse Variables: Living in Australia (HILDA) Survey Wave 1

	Percentage Childless (%)	N
<i>Highest Level of Education</i>		
Bachelor's or Above	11.8	305
Year 12	14.2	317
Year 11 or less	12.5	983
<i>Type of School Attended</i>		
Government	12.4	1254
Catholic Non-government	13.3	211
Other Non-Government and Other	15.1	139
<i>Number of Siblings</i>		
0	14.1	78
1	14.8	338
2	13.4	373
3	12.8	298
4+	10.5	515
<i>Father's Occupation at Age 14</i>		
Managerial or Administrative	7.2	333
Professional	14.1	156
Associate Professionals	9.5	179
Tradespersons and Related	16.1	349
Advanced or Intermediate Clerical, Sales or Service	21.1	123
Intermediate Transport and Production	9.5	200
Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service	10.0	40
Labourers and Related	12.8	172
No Occupation	27.6	58
<i>Father Absent or Deceased</i>		
	18.9	90
<i>Mother's Occupation at Age 14</i>		
Managerial or Administrative	1.8	56
Professional	17.7	130
Associate Professionals	11.1	90
Tradespersons and Related	13.3	105
Advanced Clerical and Service	11.5	87
Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service	13.7	131
Intermediate Transport and Production	14.7	68
Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service	12.3	179
Labourers and Related	14.7	197
No Occupation	12.2	567
<i>Mother Absent or Deceased</i>		
	13.2	38
<i>Country of Birth</i>		
UK, Ireland or New Zealand	15.7	217
Europe	10.7	140
Asia	9.0	78

Other Overseas	6.1	66
Australia	13.2	1,109
<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</i>		
Yes	17.7	17
No	12.7	1,593
<i>Total</i>	12.8	1,610

Table 3: Percentage of Men Aged 45-59 who are Childless by Later Lifecourse Variables: Living in Australia (HILDA) Survey Wave 1

	Percentage Childless (%)	N
<i>Current Occupation</i>		
Managerial or Administrative	8.0	225
Professional	10.3	272
Associate Professionals	9.7	155
Tradespersons and Related	10.3	195
Advanced or Intermediate Clerical, Sales or Service	11.5	122
Intermediate Transport and Production	9.3	151
Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service	13.5	52
Labourers and Related	19.2	94
<i>Current Employment Status</i>		
Full-time Employed	10.0	1136
Part-time Employed	17.3	133
Unemployed	25.0	68
Not in Labour Force	19.4	273
<i>Total</i>	12.8	1,610

Table 4: Mean Scores for Attitudinal Variables between Childless and Non-Childless Men: Living in Australia (HILDA) Survey Wave 1

Variable	Childless	Not Childless
Importance of the Home in Which You Live	8.11	8.08
Importance of Your Employment and Work Situation	7.22	7.54
Importance of Your Financial Situation	7.92	7.85
Importance of Involvement in Your Local Community	5.30	5.72
Importance of Your Health	8.91	8.86
Importance of Your Family	8.64	9.53
Importance of Leisure Activities	7.86	7.60
Importance of Religion	3.81	4.35

Table 5: Final Selected Logistic Regression of the Effects of Early Lifecourse Variables on Whether a Male Aged 45-59 is Childless: HILDA Wave 1 Data

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Father's Occupation</i>		
High End ^a	-1.45***	0.33
Middle Status ^b	-0.72**	0.32
Low End ^c	-1.23***	0.34
Other or No Occupation	0.00	
<i>Mother's Occupation</i>		
Managerial or Administrative	-1.85+	1.02
Professional	0.43+	0.25
Other Occupation or None		
<i>Type of Schooling</i>		
Non-Government Non-Catholic	0.46+	0.27
Government or Catholic	0.00	
<i>Country of Birth</i>		
Australia		
Australia, New Zealand, British Isles or Europe	0.69*	0.33
Other Overseas	0.00	
<i>Age</i>	-0.04*	0.02
<i>Constant</i>	-0.38	1.01

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$, + $p \leq 0.10$

a = Managerial or Administrative, Professional or Associate Professional

b = Trades or Related, Advanced Clerical and Service and Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service

c = Intermediate Production or Transport, Elementary Clerical, Sales or Service and Labourers or Related

Table 6: Logistic Regression of Final Selected Model of Effects of Early Lifecourse and Later Lifecourse Variables on Whether a Male Aged 45-59 is Childless: HILDA Wave 1 Data

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Father's Occupation</i>		
High End ^a	-1.53***	0.45
Middle Status ^b	-0.73+	0.44
Low End ^c	-1.61***	0.48
Other or No Occupation	0.00	
<i>Mother's Occupation</i>		
Managerial and Administrative	-3.03*	1.42
Professional	0.66*	0.31
Other Occupation or None	0.00	
<i>Type of Schooling</i>		
Non-Government Non-Catholic	0.94**	0.32
Government or Catholic	0.00	
<i>Relationship Status</i>		
Currently or Formerly Married	-6.37***	0.76
Currently Cohabiting	-4.92***	0.78
Formerly Cohabiting	-2.30**	0.88
Never Married and or Cohabited	0.00	
<i>Current Occupation</i>		
High End or Middle Status ^d	-0.63*	0.29
Low End ^c	-0.94**	0.36
No Occupation	0.00	
<i>Age</i>	0.04+	0.03
<i>Importance of Work</i>	0.08+	0.05
<i>Importance of Financial Situation</i>	0.12+	0.07
<i>Importance of Community</i>	-0.14***	0.04
<i>Importance of Health</i>	0.18*	0.09
<i>Importance of Leisure Activities</i>	0.12*	0.06
<i>Importance of Family</i>	-0.36***	0.07
<i>Constant</i>	7.49***	1.82

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$, + $p \leq 0.10$

a = Managerial and Administrative, Professional and Associate Professional.

b = Trades and Related, Advanced Clerical and Service and Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service.

c = Intermediate Production and Transport, Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service and Labourers and Related.

d = Managerial and Administrative, Professional, Associate Professional, Trades and Related, Advanced Clerical and Service and Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service.