Causes of Delayed Childbearing in New Zealand and Western Societies

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Abstract

Motherhood…is combined with employment through varying degrees of compromise. At one extreme is the career woman who balances baby and briefcase. Many do not attempt her feat, some who do so abandon the attempt, and others simply stay at home when their children are small or take part time jobs. A few reject all the options for raising children and remain childless. (Joshi 2002: 466)

Fertility declines have been experienced in all industrialised countries since roughly the late 1970s and these have been accompanied by rising ages at first birth. This fertility decline may have significant consequences because a continuation of low levels of fertility will contribute to an ageing of the population and may lead to a decline in the size of populations. This will in turn have important social and economic outcomes. There are many different factors which are claimed to affect the timing of childbearing. These include changing roles of women, marriage status and changing marriage markets, the nature and availability of employment, macro-economic factors, national family friendly policies, availability and quality of childcare, education, the availability of contraception, and a more dedicated pursuit by both women and men of individual fulfillment through activities outside the family. As captured in the quote above, any discussion of the causes of delayed childbearing involves a controversy over the compatibility of paid employment and raising children, and the ability of the majority of women to combine these two pursuits. Many of the factors mentioned above affect this compatibility.

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and this in turn will affect women’s decisions to pursue or delay childbearing.

This essay will firstly outline events of the “second demographic transition” and increasing trends towards delayed childbearing in western countries, and discuss New Zealand’s position within this. Next, causes of this pattern towards delayed childbearing will be examined and weighed up in relation to New Zealand’s experience. Competing theories regarding timing of parenthood will be examined. These are firstly, Becker’s (1981) theory of economic interdependence in which sex-differentiated economic roles are the major integrative factor in marriages. Secondly, some theorists (Easterlin 1980; Oppenheimer 1994; Oppenheimer and Lew 1995) propose that when young men’s relative economic fortunes are declining, this will cause them to delay marriage and parenthood. The third theory (developed by Lesthaeghe 1983; 1995) suggests that a rise in post-materialist values has led to the pursuit of individual fulfillment outside the family through a broad range of activities. This pursuit thereby causes men and women to delay childbearing until other goals and desires have been met. More recently, writers who compare fertility in Southern Europe and Japan with Scandinavian countries propose that women have increasing equality in the workplace as well as political and social institutions but have seen no rise in the level of equality within the family. Women are still responsible for the bulk of household chores and child raising. This inequality causes women to delay marriage and child bearing (and domestic subordination) until they have enjoyed a period of economic and domestic freedom (Tsuya and Mason 1995; McDonald 2002). A discussion of these ideas will be followed by an outline of factors which are claimed to delay childbearing and the policy implications of these findings will be explored.

The “Second Demographic Transition”

The last century has seen dramatic change in fertility in all Western industrialised countries. Fertility declined from 1900 up until the 1930s at which time it reached around replacement level (2.1 births per woman). At this time, many theorists held that western fertility would not drop below replacement, but would level out and stay at this replacement level; others held that these countries would soon see a decline in population numbers. This was known as the “first demographic transition”. However, this was then countered by the baby boom, which was characterised by rising
fertility levels that peaked in the early 1960s when the total fertility rate in New Zealand reached over four live births per woman. Since then fertility has declined to below replacement in all industrialised countries reaching as low as 1.90 in New Zealand in 2002 and has fallen as low as 1.3 in Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany, Greece, most of Eastern Europe and the former USSR and Japan (Kohler et al. 2002; Statistics New Zealand 2004). This “second demographic transition” occurred with a remarkable similarity in timing across industrialised countries (Jackson and Pool 1994; Pool 1992; Gustafsson 2001; Bongaarts 2002; Caldwell and Schindlmayr 2003).

This phenomenon of below replacement fertility is also characterized by a rising age at first birth in all these countries excluding Eastern Europe and the former USSR (Caldwell and Schindlmayr 2003; Kohler et al. 2002). Historical trends in the median age of mothers in New Zealand reveal that women are choosing to delay childbearing until later in life (Statistics New Zealand 2004a). Over the past decade fertility for all age groups under 30 has dropped while the rates for those over 30 have increased. Figures for 2002 reveal that the 30-34 age group is the most common for childbearing, compared to the 1970s when 20-24 years was the most common. In addition, the median age at childbearing has increased; in 2002 it was 30.1, compared with 28.2 in 1992 and 24.9 in the early 1970s. This shows that New Zealand women are having their children about five years later than their counterparts in the 1970s (Statistics New Zealand 2004a). Therefore, while women are not having many children in their 20s, this lack of fertility is being recuperated later in life. However, total fertility is unlikely to be recuperated as some women may delay for too long and become unable to have children, because their circumstances may become unfavourable to having children once they reach their 30s. In addition, delayed childbearing is consistent with a decrease in the number of children a woman has because she has fewer years from the onset of childbearing in which to have children. Delayed childbearing will also lead to an ageing of populations because as more young people delay or forego having children the median age of population will rise. This will in turn have many social and economic implications (see Fussell 2002).

The fertility decline and pattern of delayed fertility in New Zealand is somewhat unique in that while the Pakeha population’s fertility pattern mirrored the rest of the English-speaking world, the Maori fertility decline did not occur until the 1970s, at which time the fertility rate dropped
radically, in what has been termed a “reproductive revolution”. It is claimed to be the fastest fertility decline for a population anywhere (Jackson and Pool 1994; Pool 1992).

Declining fertility can be due to either quantum effects (how many children a couple have) or tempo effects (age of mother at which births take place). This is because one cohort can delay their childbearing in comparison to the previous cohort resulting in a lower total fertility rate for those years in which median age has been increasing. Likewise, fertility can increase if there is a decline in the age of childbearing resulting in different cohorts giving birth at the same time (Gustafsson 2001). This means that some of the decline in total fertility rates witnessed since the 1960s can be explained by this increasing age a first birth. Completed fertility rates are therefore useful as they show the average number of children women from each cohort have had at the end of their reproductive years, but this measure can only be calculated years after these women have done the bulk of their childbearing.

Bongaarts (2002) studied the results of this tempo effect and concluded that because the mean age of childbearing cannot rise forever due to biological limits, it must eventually stabilize. When this occurs the total fertility rate will begin to increase again and he concludes that European countries will soon see an upward rise in fertility as a result. However, if the mean age at childbearing continues to rise above current levels, the number of years between generations will be stretched and therefore the replacement fertility level will need to increase (from 2.1) in order for replacement to be maintained. This may present problems because the number of children couples are having has been steadily decreasing while the age at childbearing has been steadily rising. Completed fertility rates of cohorts are decreasing in all industrialised countries except the United States and there are strong indications that this decline will continue (Frejka and Calot 2001).

**Causes of Delayed Childbearing**

**Economy and Employment**

Various theoretical explanations have been offered to account for this dramatic pattern of decreased fertility and delayed childbearing. The most common economic explanation was offered by Becker (1981) who argued
that women’s increased economic independence due to paid employment (related to increased investment in education) and welfare benefits has decreased economic interdependence between husband and wife which was previously the main gain to be had from marriage. Each partner specialised; the female in home production and child raising and the male in market work. However, the increase in women’s employment has reduced the advantage of sex-role specialization and subsequently reduced the desirability of marriage. The effect is to increase the opportunity costs associated with childbearing and household activities and thereby reduce fertility. Women anticipate spending longer in paid work and invest greater amounts of time and money in education. They then move into higher paid work which results in increased opportunity costs being foregone if women stop working in order to have children.

This theory seems plausible given that the countries which have witnessed a decrease in fertility in recent decades have also seen an increase in labour market attachment for women from about the 1960s (Oppenheimer 1994; Sceats 2003). Economic factors certainly seem to play a role in levels of fertility but it is interesting to examine whether this is due to women’s economic independence or there are other ways economic factors influence fertility. In a study in Japan, Tsuya and Mason (1995) confirm this economic hypothesis finding that shortly before the onset of the fertility decline, young women’s educational and employment opportunities improved markedly. This has led young women to enjoy a period of freedom before entering marriage. Because ex-nuptial births in Japan are very uncommon, this therefore delays childbearing.

However, many writers disagree with the economic independence argument. While Oppenheimer (1994) and Oppenheimer and Lew (1995) concede that economic independence can potentially delay marriage (and subsequent childbearing) by reducing the penalties of non-marriage and funding extended searches of the marriage market for suitable partners, they also see that economic independence may in fact work in the opposite direction. That is, economic independence may encourage earlier marriage because it provides women with disposable income to spend on going out to meet men and on “setting themselves up” for marriage, and moreover men’s wages may not be enough to live comfortably on and therefore forming a marriage in which both partners work may be a rational solution to this problem. However, they argue that this economic independence theory
should be primarily an argument for non-marriage rather than delayed marriage. They find that economic independence has little or no effect on the timing of marriage and childbearing and that those in a good labour market position are even more likely to marry and bear children than women who are not economically independent. It is important to note that their ideas are built on the idea that nuptiality positively affects fertility. While studies show that married couples are more likely to have children than co-habitating couples, and even more likely than single women, solo parenthood and childbearing during co-habitation are increasingly significant and this needs to be taken into account (Ball 2000; Santow and Bracher 2001; Dharmalingam et al. 2004).

Some writers (Gustafsson 2001; Joshi 2002) discuss the opportunity costs associated with childbearing in great detail. These are related to increasing levels of education for women in industrialised countries. Economic speculation on the optimal age at first birth involves a trade off between desire to have children young in order to enjoy them and the lower costs of later births. The basic tenet is that an expectation of spending more years participating in the labour force makes it rational for women to invest in higher education. Once educated, women are more likely to pursue careers in which earnings increase progressively with experience. These "steep earning curves" will lead to women delaying childbearing as late as possible in order to minimize lost opportunity costs which are incurred when they drop out of the labour force to raise children. However, many factors will affect whether there are in fact lower opportunity costs foregone if a woman chooses to have children later. Gustafsson (2001) finds that these factors include education levels, how quickly a woman’s job skills are lost during labour force interruption, the level of a woman’s earnings, the skill level of her employment, and the length of time spent out of the labour force. Increases in all these factors will make delayed childbearing an economically rational decision.

Through a model or simulation of their lifetime earnings, Joshi (2002) shows that an educated woman with high earning power will forego less earnings by having children than a woman with no educational achievements who would typically have her children earlier. A woman with no educational qualifications who has two children at age 23 and takes a nine-year break from the workforce will forego up to 58 per cent of her earnings from the year of first birth until assumed retirement at age 65 (see
Joshi 2002). A mid-level educated woman who typically would delay her childbearing until later (age 28 in this model), likewise have two children and take only two years out of the workforce will forego only around 25 per cent. And in comparison a highly educated woman is likely to delay until age 30 forego earning on an even smaller scale (Joshi 2002).

Another theory that has been proposed to explain the fertility decline is the idea that fertility will decline and childbearing will be delayed as young mens’ economic fortunes decline. Easterlin (1980) advances this idea, saying that if a cohort of young men have a lower economic status than their fathers enjoyed at the same age then they will delay marriage and childbearing; this will subsequently determine the rise and fall of women’s age at marriage and childbearing. Oppenheimer (1994) stresses the importance of not just focusing on women and argues that social scientists’ preoccupation with women’s economic independence has led them to overlook other important socioeconomic shifts, especially the deteriorating economic position of men. She demonstrates that men’s economic position has indeed declined in the past 20 years in the US as employment situations (especially for young men with less education) have worsened. She reasons that while women’s incomes have improved in relation to men’s (and this has been used as evidence than women’s economic independence is the driving force in delaying childbearing), this improvement in ratio is due to a decline in men’s incomes, not an increase in women’s, which remained stable until the mid 1980s. Therefore it is the worsening position of men, not the improved position of women that causes delayed marriage and childbearing.

Related to this idea is the finding that macro economic factors have also been found to affect the timing of births. In contrast to declining fertility rates in industrialised countries, the fertility rate actually rose sharply in Sweden in the 1980s before plummeting again in the 1990s. In a study by Santow and Bracher (2001) it is found that this is in part due to declining economic conditions in the 1990s. They found that a decline in GDP per capita, and increased unemployment of young people of childbearing age negatively affected total fertility and increased the age at first birth. Likewise, Andersson (2000) found that an increase in unemployment of young people resulted in a move of large segments of women and men from high to low income groups; and also from groups which display high levels of childbearing to those which have low childbearing (the unemployed and students). An impact of unemployment on age at first birth and on fertility
rates has also been found in a study by Holdsworth and Elliott (2001) in Spain. They found that increased unemployment of young men and women in their 20s meant that these groups were delaying leaving the family home and were subsequently marrying and childbearing later in life. These arguments relate the economic position of both men and women to decreases in fertility and rising ages of childbearing. They therefore partially prove the theory above that it is the economic position of young men which is the significant determinant of age at childbearing; however they also take into account women’s economic position. It seems only too rational that the economic position of both sexes will contribute to ages at childbearing as the majority of parents are either married or cohabiting when they decide to have a child.

It would be interesting to see whether unemployment rates affect fertility in New Zealand, as proposed above. Statistics for New Zealand unemployment rates show that this increased rapidly in the 1980s following the start of New Zealand’s neo-liberal experiment, peaked in the early 1990s and has been gradually declining since then. Unemployment statistics for New Zealand are highest for young people. In 1996, 42.7 per cent of unemployed people in New Zealand were aged 15-25, yet this age group is only 21.2 per cent of the working age population (Statistics New Zealand 2004b; 2004c). In 2001 the unemployment rate for New Zealand was 5.3, but the youth unemployment rates stood at 15.6 (age 15-19) and 8.9 (age 20-24), significantly higher than the average (Statistics New Zealand 2002). The pattern of unemployment for young people, although it has been higher than the total unemployment rate, has followed a similar pattern to it. So if the hypothesis that increased unemployment leads to a decrease in the fertility rate and an increase in the median age of mothers is true, we would expect the fertility rate to decline until the early 1990s and then begin to increase since that time. The median age of mothers would be expected to decline in the 1990s as well. This has not been the case so while the general unemployment rate may delay childbearing it obviously cannot account for increases in this delay and there must be other factors that influence this. However, in general a high youth unemployment rate has probably contributed to delayed childbearing, just not to the recent increase in median age at first birth.

Some authors also cite inaccessible housing markets as a cause of decreasing fertility and rising age at first birth. Oppenheimer (1994)
explains that it is expected in Western societies that a couple will establish their own household prior to having children. Prohibitive housing costs will therefore delay marriage formation and childbearing. Andersson (2000) found this was the case in Sweden and Holdsworth and Elliott (2001) find that this causes delays for Spanish couples wanting to have children.

There are other ways in which employment affects fertility. Santow and Bracher (2001) found that timing of first births was not affected by current work status, work experience or earnings during the previous year, but what was important was the number of years women had been working full time. Women were most likely to have children once they had been working for two years, with no effect of subsequent years of employment. A two-year threshold was also identified in Norway, and Santow and Bracher suggest that this is because young women consider it important to accumulate savings before entering motherhood.

Another important consideration is the way in which the nature of the job market will affect the compatibility of motherhood and paid employment. Following industrialisation and urbanisation, the standard working week became 40 hours and most employers will not allow parents to bring children to work. This is not very compatible with child raising. Rindfuss et al. (2003) argue that some countries have made the roles of worker and mother more compatible in recent years by introducing a range of social and economic policies designed to make these two pursuits more compatible. If shift work is available, parents are able to stagger their working patterns so that at any given time only one parent is working. If part time work is available, mothers may take on part time hours that are more compatible with child raising. In addition, flexibility on the part of the employer to allow parents to stay home to care for sick children, work flexible hours or work from home will make motherhood and employment more compatible. Holdsworth and Elliott (2001) find that lack of flexibility in the labour market including lack of part time work is a cause of delayed childbearing in Spain.

**Education**

Increased levels of education for women are strongly associated with declining fertility in all countries. In western countries it is also associated with delayed childbearing. Many studies find that more educated women tend to delay childbearing longer than less educated women (Ball 2000;
Santow and Bracher 2001; Rindfuss et al. 2003; Joshi 2001; Huinink and Mayer 1995; Wu and MacNeill 2002; Kohler et al. 2002; Gustafsson 2001; Oppenheimer 1994). There are a number of factors at work here. The first is the idea that more educated women embark on professional careers and, as a result, have a higher opportunity cost associated with childbearing and therefore tend to delay; this has been discussed above. Secondly, education is thought to reduce childbearing because it results in women entering adulthood later in life. In addition, increased education is usually associated with women having a greater knowledge of contraception and this also works to delay and reduce childbearing.

Moreover, being a student is negatively associated with childbearing. Women tend to delay childbearing until they have completed their studies. As women tend to stay in education longer in western industrialised countries, this will result in childbearing later. As Ball (2000:99) explains, “the process of obtaining a higher level education is largely incompatible with early childbearing…[this is] supported by the extremely low levels of childbearing recorded for university educated women at the ages 15-19”.

In New Zealand, higher education now has an even more significant influence on childbearing because since the 1990s there have been

- rising tuition costs,
- the abolition of universal student allowances and the introduction of the student loan scheme. Thus many of the current generation of tertiary students face not only a lengthy period without earnings, but also an additional burden of a substantial personal debt (Ball 2000:102-103).

The effect of this will be to prevent young people from becoming home owners and accruing savings which are considered desirable achievements before entering parenthood in New Zealand.

**Marriage**

Another determinant of timing of first birth is marriage or union status, but the relationship between marriage and childbearing is very complex because an anticipated birth or recent childbearing may cause a couple to marry. Alternatively a couple may make a joint decision to marry or cohabit and have a child at the same time. So some writers ignore union status because of the possibility that the birth may have caused the marriage rather than the opposite; that the marriage lead to the birth (Santow and Bracher 2001). In a study in Sweden, Santow and Bracher (2001) find that union status is
the most important predictor of the timing of first birth. Birth rates are higher for those who are married rather than cohabiting, and considerably higher among the cohabiting than among single people.

One factor related to this economic independence argument discussed by Oppenheimer and Lew (1995) and Huinink and Mayer (1995) is that increased labour force participation by women has changed the nature of marriage markets in a way that people are now marrying (and having children) later in life. In the past, men’s desirability in the marriage market was earned, that is, men took time to establish themselves in the labour market then acquired savings and other necessary elements to establish a household. For women, socio-economic status as well as ethnicity and religion were inherited and therefore no delay of establishing oneself prior to marriage and childbearing was required. However, with increased labour force participation and changing marriage markets today, women are now required to obtain education as well as a favourable economic position before marriage and childbearing and therefore it is necessary that these are delayed in the same way they have been delayed by men in the past.

Pursuit of Individual Fulfillment

A further theory that is used to explain the second demographic transition and delayed childbearing is the idea that both women and men are delaying childbearing until they have pursued individual fulfillment through activities not related to the family, and that this is caused by the rise of post-materialist values. This idea was developed by Lesthaeghe, who writes that,

> the steep decline in marital fertility after the early 1960s in the West is... a recent indicator of the autonomous progression of an individualistically oriented Western value system: it coincides with the legitimation of cohabitation outside marriage, voluntary childlessness, nonconformist sexual behaviour, abortion, and euthanasia (Lesthaeghe 1983:412).

In other words, changing fertility is a result of value and attitude change in the West. He argues that central to the fertility decline is the “increasing centrality of goal attainment, that is, the individual’s right and freedom of defining both goals and the means of achieving them” (Lesthaeghe 1983: 429). This desire for goal attainment is fueled by secularisation of values as well as rising incomes which increase individuals’ aspirations, stimulate self-orientation and create an aversion to long term commitments (such as child bearing).
Lesthaeghe later draws upon the earlier work of Ariès who argued that the first demographic transition was inspired by parental investment in child quality. In contrast, the second demographic transition “marked the end of Ariès era of the ‘child-king’” (Lesthaeghe 1995: 19) and was instead a time of adult-centered preoccupations with individual fulfillment, and there was strong emphasis on the relationship between partners, and less on children. As evidence for this he points out that children are no longer considered to be an impediment to divorce. However, this seems to be more an argument for childlessness rather than delayed childbearing and it seems ridiculous to think that individuals and couples would embark on such a demanding role as parenthood unless they desired their lives to become centered around their children.

This idea related to pursuit of individual goals is difficult to test in many populations and as a result there is little empirical evidence to support it. Some support for these ideas is found by Santow and Bracher (2001: 359) who find that young Swedes “have repeatedly placed educational and employment advancement, and earning money to buy goods or travel or pursue leisure interests ahead of starting a career as a parent.” This quote brings together all the ideas discussed above regarding employment and education because it shows a motivation for women’s increased education and labour market participation. It is possible that the changes in economy, employment and education which have been linked to the fertility transition are also linked to changing values and it seems likely that the combination of these two changes has determined the extent and timing of changes in fertility. Lesthaeghe (1995) concludes by arguing that the economic and value-change theories are far more complimentary than mutually exclusive. Further, Holdsworth and Elliott (2001) found that a lack of value change and a strong emphasis on tradition within Spanish society has impeded the fertility transition in Spain from transforming to a more Northern European pattern. Pool (1992) discusses notions of value change in the New Zealand context but his study is impeded by a lack of data. He concludes that the family now occupies a shrinking space in the lives of New Zealanders and that this is caused by individualisation, which is motivated by changing cultural values as well as “the individualizing tendency of participation in our economy” (Bumpass 1990; quoted in Pool 1992:83).

However, Tsuya and Mason (1995) in a study in Japan reject this emphasis on value change altogether saying that,
unless one posits the existence of structural circumstances that make it difficult for women to achieve a sense of belonging, esteem, or self-realization while marrying or having children, there seems little compelling reason to think that post-materialist values will produce below-replacement fertility (Tsuya and Mason 1995:141).

They argue that valuing individual fulfillment does not mean that people will postpone parenthood until later in life but rather, it is easy to see circumstances where achieving self-realization and fulfillment are facilitated by early parenthood. In addition they question whether the relationship between post-materialist values and declining fertility is a causal process or just coincidental.

**Inequalities in the Domestic Sphere**

The final proposition put forward as the cause of delayed childbearing is the idea that there is inequality between men and women in the domestic sphere. Despite the fact that women now make up a substantial proportion of the labour force, they are still responsible for the bulk of household chores as well as child raising. McDonald (2000) presents the argument that the cause of fertility declines is that gender equity has become very high in individual-oriented institutions (e.g. employment, political sphere), but has remained very low in family-oriented institutions. Women have gained some rights within the family, especially with the widespread availability of contraception they are now able to choose the size of their families and husbands are no longer given power to make this decision. However, major changes in the institution of the family are slow and women continue to see low levels of equity in their roles as wives and mothers in comparison with men's apparent freedom and autonomy from domestic duties. Therefore women are choosing to have smaller families to decrease the amount of inequality they suffer, or alternatively they are choosing to delay starting a family in order to enjoy a period of relative freedom before becoming wives and mothers.

Tsuya and Mason (1995) find a lot of support for this argument in Japan. Because Japanese family roles are very traditional (Japanese wives' roles are subordinated and highly domesticated and their position in the family has changed very little), but Japanese women face increasing employment and career opportunities combined with a high degree of equality in the workplace, they are reluctant to enter marriage and
motherhood before spending a period enjoying freedom from domesticity, during which time they can pursue higher education and work for pay. Likewise, Huinink and Mayer (1995) found that men do not do their fair share of domestic tasks and that this works to decrease fertility because women choose to have fewer children and later in life as a result.

Presser (1995) also discusses this idea. She argues that the emphasis in policy on women as primary caregivers for children, and men as providers has exacerbated this inequality. Her example in the US demonstrates that policy on divorce always puts the onus on women to continue caring for the children and demands only monetary payment from fathers. This double standard in which women's time inputs into children are considered more valuable than men's leads to a gendered conception of time. Women's time becomes more flexible and available for others, while a man's is scheduled and under his own control. This maintains women's inferior position within the household and in turn this leads to lower fertility because the difference between institutional equality and domestic inequality argued above will lead women to have no children, fewer children or to have them later in life. Presser prescribes equal involvement of fathers in child raising as the way to increase fertility.

Related to this gendered conception of time is the idea put forward by Joshi (2002), arguing that inequalities between male and female wages further the notion that women's time is more flexible and available for child care than men's. She argues for equality in pay, saying,

\[\text{men and women were paid unequally for a given level of human capital. This fact is relevant to the issues relating to women and children, as the higher price on a man's market time will tend to reinforce the tradition in which mothers rather than fathers adapt their market work (Joshi 2002: 452).}\]

\[\text{Work organization and culture seldom make it easier for a father than for a mother to adapt time to accommodate domestic tasks...Higher rates of pay for men usually mean that a two-parent family loses less in earnings if the father rather than the mother gives priority to earning (Joshi 2002: 458).}\]

The idea is that because women are being paid less even while doing the same work as men, this reinforces the assumption that women will take time out from work and careers in order to raise children. This in turn delays childbearing because women may choose to delay or have fewer children in order to increase domestic equality.
So the problem here seems to be an incompatibility between employment and motherhood. Because mothers are required to perform household and child raising tasks as well as involve themselves in paid employment the compatibility of these two pursuits will determine fertility levels in the future. Rindfuss et al. (2003) show that compatibility of these change over time. In many countries they used to have a negative correlation, but in recent years they have become more compatible due to policy and attitude change and now have a positive correlation. Their hypothesis is that any changes that increase the compatibility between being a mother and being a worker will lead to higher and younger fertility and their study supports this hypothesis. Many factors influence this compatibility, including economic and employment factors discussed above, marriage, the nature of the job market, the extent to which men will do unpaid work, education, as well as family friendly policies involving maternity and paternity leave as well as childcare. The compatibility of combining motherhood with paid work is affected by the availability, acceptability, accessibility, quality and cost of childcare. In New Zealand, despite the sevenfold increase in childcare use between 1976 and 1987 and the fact that more than 90 per cent of four-year olds and 70 per cent of three-year olds were enrolled in a formal childcare service in 1997, childcare services continue to be poorly funded and rely on the voluntary contributions of both time and money by primary caregivers (Shirley et al. 1997). Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Dharmalingam (2002) find that informal childcare arrangements between friends and especially family are the most effective in allowing mothers to pursue a career in New Zealand.

Sceats (2003) discusses the ability of New Zealand women to combine paid employment with child raising. She finds that many women find it increasingly difficult to do this and many are being forced to make a choice between family and career. She concludes that there is a double standard in New Zealand with lip service being paid to the importance of family but little real support is offered to those families who are trying to cope on one income. In addition, lack of family friendly policies involving employment flexibility for parents is a barrier to family formation.

**Conclusion**

Outlines of the causes of delayed childbearing have included economic incentives for delayed childbearing. These have involved increased
economic independence of women; the loss of opportunity costs being lowered by later childbearing; the declining economic fortunes of men; macro-economic factors which affect both men and women; inaccessible housing markets; length of time of employment required in order to “set oneself up” and the nature of the job market. Factors related to education have included increased opportunity costs being forgone for more educated women; the fact that young people are entering “adulthood” later due to years spent in higher education; increased knowledge of contraception; the incompatibility of combining motherhood with being a student and New Zealand’s student loan scheme. Marriage also affects levels of childbearing and the changing nature of marriage markets has also led young people to delay childbearing. The pursuit of self realisation and individual fulfillment also seems a convincing reason for delayed childbearing and because this rise in post materialist values occurred at the same time as economic changes it is possible that these factors combined have caused the fertility transition. However, the inequalities between men’s and women’s domestic roles also need to be considered as these decrease the compatibility of combining motherhood with paid employment.

It is possible that the combination of economic changes involving women’s independence and men’s worsening labour market conditions as well as increased levels of education have combined with both changing values as well as no change in the levels of domestic equality. It is likely to be a combination of these factors which have determined the nature, timing and speed of fertility changes in different countries around the world and in New Zealand. Scholars have warned us not to look for overarching theories to explain all fertility transitions in all industrialised countries as an interplay of these factors will have combined with culture and national policies to influence different countries in different ways (Caldwell and Schindlmayr 2003; Rindfuss et al. 2003). It is likely that in New Zealand, increasing economic opportunities from the 1950s onwards combined with value changes resulted in increased fertility then. However, economic declines combined with increased levels of higher education, changing marriage patterns, as well as changing values and no increase in domestic equality have probably all served to decrease fertility and increase age at first births in New Zealand since the late 1970s. New Zealand women now face increasing difficulty of combining motherhood with a career and thus
childbearing will continue to be delayed until the compatibility of combining these two pursuits is improved.

While it is hard to initiate value change that will result in men increasing their proportion of unpaid household work, policies that place the emphasis on women as primary caregiver can be changed. In addition, a longer period of paid maternity and paternity leave as well as more flexibility being required from employers in regards to the demands of children as well as improved childcare services will all help to make the role of mother more compatible with the role of worker and this should lead to increased fertility.

References


