

# **Yes, No, Maybe: Fertility Intentions and Reasons Behind Them Among Childless Finnish Men and Women**

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## **Abstract**

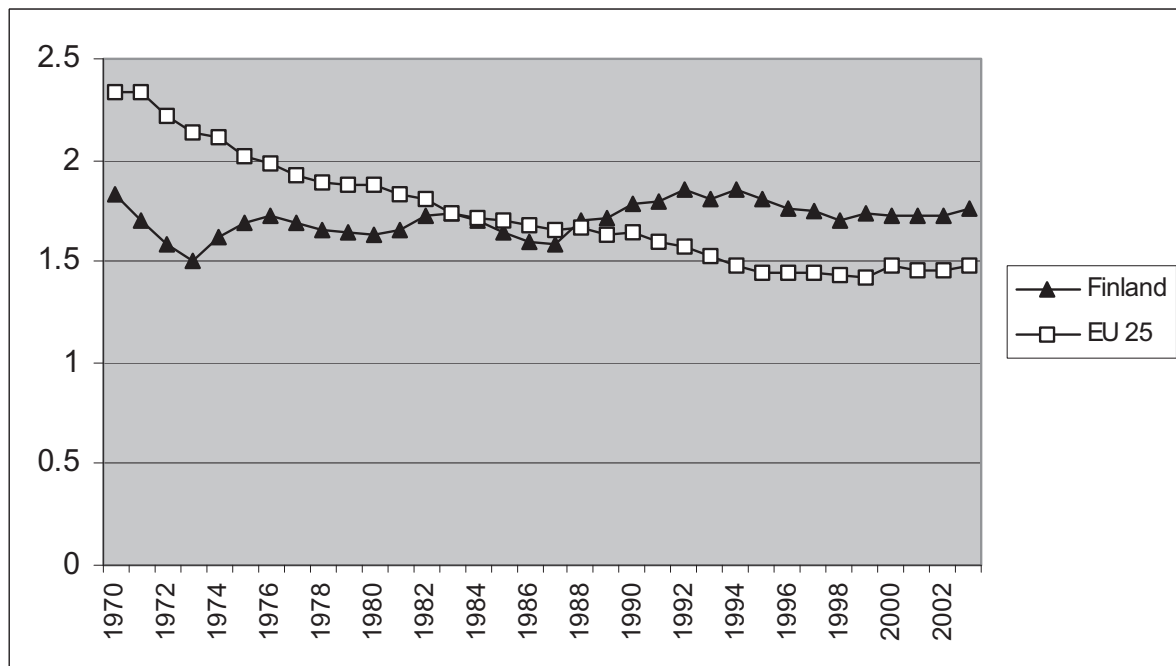
*In this paper we examine reproductive intentions among childless Finnish men and women aged 18 to 34 years. In Finland, as in other European countries, young adults are postponing parenthood to an ever-later age. Our intention is to investigate expressions of reproductive intentions, and particularly, to focus on the division of intentions between more positive and more hesitant expressions. We examine how education, factors related to economic security and values relate to childbearing hesitation among young adults. We also use information on the reasons that the young themselves have provided to examine differences in fertility intentions. Our study uses a sample of 724 men and women drawn from the PPA2 survey, which focused on Finns' attitudes in 2002 toward family and children, family policy measures, values in life, and fertility intentions. We find that education is related to postponement, and that unemployment increases hesitation. Partnership and the state of the relationship are clearly important preconditions for positive childbearing intentions among both men and women. Postponers are more likely to stress reasons that are related to present life situation and are more open to change, while persons who hesitate regarding future childbearing stress longer-standing reasons behind their intentions.*

Keywords: fertility intentions, postponement

## **Introduction**

Over the last four decades, period fertility rates have fallen in almost all European and North American countries. Lately the decrease has leveled off in most Western and Northern European countries, and period fertility rates have stabilized around 1.5–1.9, which is well below the replacement level of fertility (TFR 2.1). In Finland, TFR has been quite stable and on a relatively high level (1.59–1.85, Figure 1) since the mid-1970s, compared to many other Western European countries (Council of Europe 2003).

Figure 1. TFR in Finland and EU average since 1970.



Source: Eurostat <http://epp.eurostat.ec.eu.int/> Data on Population (15.6.2005); Council of Europe 2000; Council of Europe 2003; Statistics Finland 2004a.

Despite the stabilization of fertility rates in many Western countries, Pinnelli et al. (2002) have noted that there may be an increasing polarization of the population into “family types” with slightly larger families than before, and “non-family types” with no children at all. In recent estimations the share of childless women is expected to grow in the future (Council of Europe 2003), although the estimations are based on cohorts that have not yet reached the end of their childbearing age. In Family and Fertility Studies (FFS) conducted in Europe during the 1990s, the ideal and expected number of births seems to be around two in most of countries, the ideal numbers somewhat higher than the expected numbers (Van Peer 2002). However, there is some evidence that the proportion of persons who wish to remain childless or have only one child seems to be increasing in some Central and Eastern European countries (Goldstein et al. 2003).

Childlessness is not a new phenomenon in Europe. Earlier, when childbearing in a marital union was a societal norm, childlessness was connected to not being married. Entry into marriage was accompanied by childbirth following a relatively short interval (Notkola 1994). Today, young adults may live many “careless” years in marital or consensual union before the couple starts to plan children (Nikander 1992; Ritamies & Miettinen 1996). The current increase in childlessness among young adults mostly reflects a postponement of parenthood, e.g. temporary childlessness, and not necessarily an increasing proportion of persons who will never become parents (Sobotka 2004). However, delaying childbearing to an ever-later age can increase involuntary

childlessness. Difficulties related to conception of the first child are found to increase with age (Leridon 1992; Notkola 1995).

According to studies conducted in Finland, voluntary childlessness has not been very common. The proportion of women and men who wish to have no children at all has remained low, around 2 to 7 percent (Nikander 1992; Nikander 1995; Paajanen 2002). However, the growing age at first birth has led to discussions of increasing childlessness and polarization of childbearing also among Finnish families. In the beginning of the 1970s – when postponement is estimated to have begun in Western, Northern and Southern Europe (Sobotka 2004) – first-time mothers in Finland were 23 years old on average. By 2003, women were about 28 years old when they became mothers (Statistics Finland 2004a). The proportion of men and women who are childless at age 45 has increased gradually. In 1990, 14 percent of 45-year-old women were childless, and in 2003 their share was 17 percent (Statistics Finland 1991; Statistics Finland 2004b). Among 35-year-old women, the increase is more apparent, from about 19 percent to 25 percent. Among men, the proportion of men still childless at age 45 was about 26 percent in 2003, five percentage points higher than ten years before (Statistics Finland 1994; Statistics Finland 2004a).

The present analysis focuses on young adults who have not yet had any children. We do not examine childlessness so much as the expressions of reproductive intentions of those who are currently childless, as we believe that examination of postponement, or, in particular, hesitation of childbearing is important in itself. Reproductive intentions represent orientations towards action in a social world: the structure and perception of that world is essential for understanding reproductive behavior. However, we also believe that an investigation into factors related to hesitation or postponement of parenthood may shed light on why some men and women end up childless.

## **Postponing or rejecting parenthood?**

Fertility intentions and fertility expectations are statements regarding an individual's plans for having children. There is some discrepancy and a lack of consensus on how to measure fertility preferences and intentions (for example, see Miller and Pasta 1995; Noack and Östby 2002; Van Peer 2002). Fertility intentions have been measured in many different ways, as expectations or preferences, as desires, as ideals and intentions (Noack and Östby 2002) with different operationalizations of "intention" – for example, "intend to have a child", "want more children", "will have a child" (Miller and Pasta 1995).

According to Ajzen (1996), intentions are closely linked to volitional actions and can predict them with a high degree of accuracy. This does not mean, however, that a measure of intention will always correlate strongly with the corresponding behavior.

This is because intentions can change over time; the longer the time interval, the greater the likelihood that unforeseen events will produce changes in intentions. For example, in young age, even if you live in partnership, intentions are less certain than later in life when people have more experiences of children and life in its entirety (Ritambies et al. 1984; Rindfuss et al. 1988). Dissolution of partnership and a new partnership, for example, step family formation, often changes plans and fertility intentions. Partnership dissolution inhibits fertility intentions, and in countries where divorce is more prevalent and long-standing, there has been a tendency for marriages to break up at an earlier stage of marriage than in other countries. If this pattern continues, more couples are likely to be childless or have fewer births. On the other hand, in a new relationship with a new partner people often want to have at least one common child (Kiernan 1996; Prskawetz et al. 2003; Thomson 2004).

Infertility problems can also cause surprising and often very unfortunate changes to fertility plans (Van Peer 2002). Noack and Östby (2002) noticed that short-term and long-term expectations overestimated childbearing in the years to come. Only women who did not expect to have a(nother) child were found to be relatively stable in their decision. Schoen et al. (1999) has argued that intentions have an independent value in explaining subsequent fertility. Timing expectations and especially certainty of intentions were found to be strongly related to future fertility behavior, particularly among married persons.

The decision to have a first child is a choice of parenthood over non-parenthood. Individuals and couples must assess their current and likely future circumstances over a series of domains, including partnership, employment and income, housing and time commitments (Hobcraft & Kiernan 1995). On a macro level, secularization, the ideology of responsible parenthood, growing post-materialism, empowerment of women and changing expectations towards motherhood and parenthood are believed to be the underlying causes of low fertility in the western world (van de Kaa 2001). It has been suggested that one of the most important explanatory factors behind this change has been the existence of very strong normative and attitudinal shift from conservatism to individualism. Greater freedom of choice in terms of sexuality, fertility and family planning as a result of better and more reliable contraceptives and new, more permissive norms and values, has had a powerful effect on this shift. The presence of this change is marked by a greater equality of opportunities, for example in education, work and earnings (Palomba and Moors 1995).

Having children may well form part of a post-modern idea of self-fulfillment, but the emotional satisfaction of children can be achieved most economically by having only one or two (van de Kaa 2001). A shift from planning for “at least two children” to “no more than two” is accompanied by greater tolerance towards low fertility intentions.

Planning to have no children or only one child has gradually become a more acceptable way of family life in modern societies (de Rose & Racioppi 2001; Rovi 1994).

Rindfuss et al. (1988) have argued that an intention to bear no children or only one child is usually a consequence of voluntary postponing of childbirth, which takes its final form in the course of life, in accordance with experiences and changes in one's life orientation. Childlessness as an ultimate goal in life requires both explicit choice and permanent commitment to that choice. While this may well be an accurate description of reproductive decision making among some, we expect that for a majority, childbearing decisions are sequential. We presume that childbearing intentions and family size aspirations change according to perceptions of constraints related to reproductive goals, and according to assessment of reproductive goals with respect to other goals in life. When we study childbearing intentions as a contingent process, we look at the structural factors that may shape the intentions as well as the perceptions of these factors.

In this paper we examine the reproductive intentions of young adults and focus particularly on hesitation in future childbearing. In the data, childbearing intentions may be divided into three categories: (1) those who planned to have children in the future, but were not currently trying to get pregnant ('Yes'), (2) those who were less certain about future childbearing ('Don't know, uncertain'), and (3) those who were more certain and had no plans for future childbearing ('No').

We expect that persons who held more positive childbearing intentions ('Yes') are currently postponing parenthood, but for them, it is more a question of suitable timing of childbirth than an issue of whether to have a child or not. For those who were uncertain ('Don't know'), we believe that becoming a parent may not be as self-evident a choice as it is for persons with more positive intentions. Uncertainty, or hesitation towards childbearing, may reflect a general ambiguity regarding what goals to pursue in life, as well as perceived incompatibility of present circumstances or other domains in life with childbearing. Family formation and children are assessed with respect to other goals in life (for example, career, maintaining a particular standard of living, enjoying life without children). The incompatibility of factors such as one's job, economic situation or stage of partnership with having children can increase hesitation towards childbearing.

We have combined those who had no plans for future childbearing ('No') with those who were uncertain. Although future childbearing behavior may be very different among persons who did not plan to have children in the future when compared to those who were uncertain, we recognize that both options express a hesitation toward future childbearing in general, when compared to the group who said 'Yes' to childbearing.

Also, the number of direct refusals ('No') was low and increased markedly only among women aged 30 or over.

When studying factors related to postponement or hesitation, we rely on literature on fertility behavior. Particularly, we are interested in examining how partnership, education, economic security, or differences in value orientation affect childbearing expectations among young adults.

From previous literature we know that persons with higher educational attainment are more likely to postpone parenthood than those with a lower degree. Enrollment in education reduces the risks of childbearing, but several studies have found that at later ages, higher education is also associated with increased birth risks (for example, Vikat 2004). However, some studies have suggested that the positive gradient of higher education diminishes when selectivity (at later ages, at higher parities) is taken into consideration (Hoem 1996; Kravdal 2001). Previous research has also indicated that a larger share of highly educated women will never become mothers compared to women with less education, but the gap in childbearing behavior between education groups has been decreasing – and some studies suggest even the opposite trend (Nikander 1992, Martin 2000; Ritakallio 2005). Education is often understood to capture differences in life orientation: especially highly educated women are expected to value other goals besides family in their life, particularly those related to career and self-realization. A stronger hesitation toward childbearing among the highly educated is seen as reflecting ambiguity over which goals to pursue in life. However, we expect that the impact of life orientation on childbearing intentions is different for men and women. Combining two goals in life, i.e. career and family, has been possible for highly educated men to a greater extent than for highly educated women, as the burden of family responsibilities is still, to a great extent, borne by women. Nikander (1995), using data from Finnish FFS on men, found out, for example that among men education is positively related to eventually becoming a parent.

Education may also be positively related to childbearing intentions. A higher education often means better chances in the labor market in terms of income and job security. Therefore, persons with a higher education may feel more secure economically, and are more likely to have positive childbearing intentions than persons with less education and a less secure position.

A stronger hesitation toward childbearing can also be related to pragmatic factors, particularly to economic security. Economic uncertainty, related to being out of work or low income, can inhibit childbearing and thus increase hesitation. Since the recession in the beginning of the 1990s, unemployment rates have remained relatively high, particularly among the young. Increased insecurity, whether actual or perceived, can

increase hesitation to bear children among young adults, particularly among men, who still in many cases expect, or are expected to bear the economic responsibility of having a family.

## **Purpose of the study**

The aim of this paper is to look at childbearing intentions among childless young adults (aged 18–34 years) in Finland, and particularly, at factors which increase hesitation toward future childbearing among them. Although intentions may be poor predictors of final outcome, we presume that persons who do not wish to have a child, or who are uncertain about childbearing, have a greater likelihood of being childless at a later age, or even ending up childless, compared with persons, who are more positive toward childbearing and intend to have a child in the future. Naturally, also positive intentions can change along the way.

In this study we examine the extent to which pragmatic factors and value orientation factors are able to explain hesitation toward childbearing among childless young adults. Particularly, we are interested in the impact of educational level, employment and income, and orientation or disorientation toward family values, to childbearing intentions. In addition, we will look at the perceptions among young adults of the reasons behind their childbearing intentions.

Fertility research has been based primarily on the views of women. This is partly because of lack of data and statistics concerning men. However, husbands' desires and intentions influence couples' childbearing decisions with approximately equal force to wives' desires and intentions (Thomson 1997). When couples disagree about wanting a child, both partners' intentions shift toward not having a child. In this article we use data on both men's and women's intentions, but, unfortunately, we do not have couple data.

## **Data and methods**

The survey<sup>1</sup> used in this article was conducted as a mail survey in the beginning of 2002. The survey is country-representative, excluding the Swedish-speaking province of Åland. With one repeated round and one reminder letter, the overall response rate was 55.6 percent. Because of selectivity in the response rates, the data was weighted according to gender, age and primary education.

The age range selected for this article was 18–34 for both men and women. We selected a rather narrow age group to avoid selectivity as much as possible. Reproductive

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<sup>1</sup> Population Development, the Family and Family Formation in Finland in 2002, part of the DIALOG-project's PPA2-survey

behavior is very much related to age, and a large proportion of respondents aged 35 or over had already become parents. The majority of the 18 to 34 years age group is still in the beginning phase of their reproductive life; in the data, 66.9 percent of persons aged 18–34 years were still childless at the time of the survey. The proportion of still-childless men decreased from 96 to 47 percent in respective five-year age groups, and among women, from 85 to 33 percent.

We use logistic regression analysis to estimate factors related to a positive intention to have a child in the future. The dependent variable is the intention to have a child in the future, which was measured by a single question where the response options were (1) No, (2) Uncertain, (3) Yes, and (4) I am/my partner is currently pregnant. Respondents who were currently pregnant, or whose partner was pregnant, were excluded from the analysis. For the logistic regression analysis, the dependent variable was coded 1=No or uncertain, 2=Yes.

We examine factors related to intentions also by looking at respondents' own perceptions of circumstances related to childbearing. In the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of a number of factors related to their own economic situation, employment, couple relationship, and personal preferences, in their decision making concerning future childbearing. Both groups of respondents – those who expressed more hesitation (No/Uncertain) and those who intended to have a child in the future, but were currently postponing the decision (Yes, not planning pregnancy) – were asked to evaluate a set of reasons (about 20 different reasons, somewhat different sets for the two respondent groups). We use descriptive tables to examine the extent to which specific reasons are perceived as important among those who expressed hesitation toward childbearing and those who intended to have a child in future, but were currently postponing.

The independent variables in the logistic regression analysis are divided into three groups: 1) control variables (age, living in a union), which are used mainly to control for the life stage, 2) pragmatic factors (employment, income), and factors related to 3) values or life orientation (education, religiousness, material and family aspirations, and attitude toward children). In Table 1, distributions of explanatory variables and the proportion of respondents who hesitated about future childbearing (who answered 'No/Uncertain') in each category are listed.



Table 1. Distribution of respondents by background variables and proportion of respondents hesitating (no/uncertain) about future childbearing in each category.

		Men		Women		Total	
		%	No/ Uncertain %	%	No/ Uncertain, %	%	No/ Uncertain, %
Age	18–24	53.6	36.9	57.4	29.5	55.2	33.6
	25–29	27.4	44.5	26.0	41.3	26.8	43.2
	30–34	19.0	50.6	16.6	60.8	18.0	54.7
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Union	Married/Cohabiting	38.7	24.2	46.7	32.7	42.2	28.5
	Not in union	61.3	52.6	53.3	42.3	57.8	48.3
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Religion	Religion not important	24.5	35.7	30.7	42.3	27.2	39.0
	Religion important	75.5	42.6	69.3	35.9	72.8	39.9
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Area	Urban	74.1	39.8	77.0	37.8	75.3	38.9
	Rural	25.9	46.7	23.0	35.7	24.7	42.4
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Education	ISCED 2-4	62.0	46.8	47.9	39.3	55.7	43.9
	ISCED 5B	24.3	31.5	31.7	39.6	27.6	35.6
	ISCED 5A-7	13.7	32.7	20.5	32.8	16.7	32.5
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Employment	Employed	51.4	37.5	51.7	36.8	51.5	37.2
	Unemployed	15.3	59.0	10.5	45.5	13.2	53.7
	Student	33.3	40.0	37.8	37.0	35.3	38.6
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Income	Low (below 583 € /mo.)	30.6	45.2	30.8	39.2	30.7	42.8
	Middle (583–1,333 € /mo.)	33.0	32.6	38.1	40.0	35.3	36.2
	High (over 1,333 € /mo.)	22.2	49.5	16.8	34.0	19.9	43.4
	Missing	14.2	41.4	14.3	33.3	14.2	37.9
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Material well-being	Less important	77.6	42.4	73.7	36.2	75.9	39.7
	Important	22.4	37.4	26.3	42.7	24.1	39.7
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Close family relationships	Less important	43.0	54.1	29.3	53.3	37.0	53.8
	Important	57.0	30.3	70.7	31.1	63.0	30.7
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Negative perceptions of family life with children	No	76.6	38.0	79.4	31.0	77.8	34.7
	Yes	23.4	53.3	20.7	63.5	22.2	57.4
		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Total	N	409		315		724	

Education: ISCED 2-4: no vocational education, vocational school, specialized vocational certificate. ISCED 5B: vocational institute, polytechnic. ISCED 5A-7: university or college.

### **Control variables**

Age and living arrangement are used to control respondents' stage of life. Age is grouped into three categories: 18–24, 25–29 and 30–34-year-olds. Marital status has also been found to have an impact on childbearing intentions (Thomson 1997). Due to the relatively small number of respondents in our study, it was not possible to use separate categories for married and cohabiting men and women (only 9.5 percent of childless persons aged 18–34-years were married). In a preliminary study, cohabitants did not differ significantly from married persons, while persons who were not living in a union were clearly more hesitant toward future childbearing. In addition, we examined 'area' with two categories (Urban, Rural) to control for the impact of being a farmer/coming from a culturally traditional background on family and fertility behavior found in other studies (Nikander 1992).

### **Pragmatic factors**

Employment status is divided into three categories (1) employed (including all employment, e.g. also entrepreneurs and farmers), (2) unemployed (category includes also a small proportion of persons without work but not unemployed), and (3) student. We expect that employment is related positively to intentions, e.g. employed men and women are more likely to say 'Yes' to future childbearing, and unemployed men and women to show more hesitation. Enrollment in education (student) is expected to be related to postponement of parenthood; therefore we expect students to be more positive toward future childbearing. In addition to employment status, we use data on income. Income was measured as total household income, and in the case of two adults in a household, we have divided the household income by two. In the analysis, we expect that the economic security provided by greater income increases the odds for positive childbearing intentions. Income is divided into three categories of almost equal size. In addition, we included 'Missing' as a fourth category because of a relatively large proportion of respondents who had not provided any information on their income. Missing data in this question seemed to be related to lower socioeconomic status, or lower educational attainment.

### **Education and values**

Due to the postponement effect discussed above, we can expect that for young adults, educational level reflects also the impact of respondents' stage of life. Persons with a higher education, or who are studying for a higher educational degree have to a lesser extent realized their intention to become parents, compared with young adults with less education. The survey measured education as a degree already achieved, or, for students, a degree the respondent will achieve in the future. We use three categories, (1) ISCED 2-4: no vocational education, vocational school, specialized vocational certificate, (2) ISCED 5B: vocational institute, polytechnic, and (3) ISCED 5A-7: university or college.

We included also variables to more directly measure values related to family and other aspects of life. Religiousness has an impact on childbearing behavior, and we expect the importance of religion in a person's life to also increase the odds for positive intentions. Importance of material well-being and importance of close family relationships were created by combining several variables from a question, where the respondents were asked to assess the importance of certain values in their lives (1=very important to 5=not at all important). Importance of material well-being was created from five separate questions: (1) Having enough money/income, (2) Living in a nice, spacious home, (3) Husband and wife both earning their own income, (4) Being successful in working life, and (5) Having a good education. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .70. Importance of close family relationships was created from two questions: (1) Living with your partner in harmony; (2) Providing security to people close to you. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .68. In addition, we included one variable to measure how negatively respondents perceived family life with children, composed from two separate questions: (1) Children mean an economic burden and (2) Children keep me from living the way I want. Cronbach's alpha was a little lower for this variable, at .63. In the analysis, we expect that emphasizing family values and positive perceptions of children is associated with positive intentions, and that stressing material aspirations is associated with more hesitation.

## Results

The intention to have a child in the future decreased markedly with age among childless men and women. However, the proportion of persons who wished to have no children at all increased clearly only among women aged 30 or over (Table 2). Instead, the proportion of persons who were uncertain regarding future childbearing was relatively high in all age groups.

In the Finnish FFS study from 1989 (Nikander 1992, 93), the proportion of women aged 22 to 32 who intended to remain childless was about the same as in the current data (6.6 percent), but the proportion of persons who were uncertain was lower in that study, or 18.3 percent, and the proportion of persons who intended to have children in the future was clearly higher, or 75 percent, compared to the women in this study. Although we cannot compare the two data sets more thoroughly to discover, for example, if there are differences between educational groups, it appears that uncertainty concerning family formation is more prevalent among young adults today than it was 15 years ago.

Table 2. Childbearing intentions by sex and age among childless men and women aged 18–34 years, %.

	Men					Women				
	18–24	25–29	30–34	All	N	18–24	25–29	30–34	All	N
No	5.4	7.3	3.9	5.6	23	4.9	3.8	13.5	6.0	19
Uncertain	31.5	37.3	46.8	35.9	147	24.6	37.5	48.1	31.7	100
Yes	63.1	55.5	49.4	58.4	239	70.5	58.8	38.5	62.2	196
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
N	222	110	77		409	183	100	80		315

### Factors related to stronger hesitation

Although we treat age as a control variable, and its negative association with childbearing intentions was as expected, we found differences between men and women to be markedly small (Table 3). Initially, we expected age to have a less visible impact on men's intentions, as generally men become parents at a slightly later age than women, and the biological clock is much slower for them. The decreasing likelihood of a positive intention by age among men might suggest that age (or a partner's age) plays a role also in men's decision making concerning parenthood.

As expected, not living in a union decreased the odds of intending to have a child. Among women, the impact of not being in union was less marked than among men. Differences between respondents living in urban or rural areas disappeared almost completely, when other factors were included in the model.

Education was positively associated with the intention to have a child. Particularly, male respondents with a vocational institute or university-level education were more likely to say 'Yes' to childbearing than men with less education. However, the likelihood was markedly higher among men with an education from a vocational institute than among university-educated men. Among women, only academic women had significantly higher odds. We expect this to reflect the postponement that is more profound among university-educated women than among other women.

Employment status appeared to have a positive impact on childbearing intentions. Not being employed increased hesitation – the increase was statistically significant among the unemployed. Being a student is generally known to be related to postponement of parenthood. Therefore, we expected that students would behave accordingly, e.g. have more positive intentions regarding future childbearing than, for example, the unemployed, as for the students, the future should be more certain ('first studies, then children'). To our surprise, being a student also increased hesitation, and the impact was statistically significant among women even before including a variable measuring income. Among men, the impact of being a student was less marked, and not statistically significant. When an income variable was included in the model, the impact of being a student among women did not change markedly, but lost its statistical significance.

Table 3. Factors related to positive childbearing intention, childless men and women aged 18–34 years. Logistic regression analysis (No/Uncertain vs. Yes).

	Both			Men			Women		
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women	
Sex	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.992	.912	.802						
Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.514***	.412***	.328***	.563*	.408**	.335***	.479*	.408**	.309***
	.297***	.236***	.117***	.339***	.244***	.193***	.244***	.203***	.133***
Union	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.357***	.365***	.395***	.260***	.254***	.305***	.514*	.513*	.524*
Area	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.854	.987	.959	.730	.887	.855	1.031	1.137	1.032
Education	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	1.834**	1.733*	1.775*	3.055***	3.097***	3.176***	1.169	1.017	.960
	2.156**	2.097**	2.364**	2.297**	2.362*	3.045**	2.024+	1.820	1.867
Employment	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.471*	.410**	.660	.521	.402*	.655	.604	.522	.461
Income	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	1.166	1.183	1.275	1.275	1.275	1.275	1.152	1.152	1.304
	1.196	1.279	1.943	1.943	1.943	1.943	1.923	1.923	2.222
	1.272	1.274	1.133	1.133	1.133	1.133	1.467	1.467	1.420
Religion	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	1.080	1.080	1.080	1.734+	1.734+	1.734+	1.734+	1.734+	.588+
Material well-being	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	1.065	1.065	1.065	1.393	1.393	1.393	1.393	1.393	.724
Close family relationships	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	2.530***	2.530***	2.530***	3.001***	3.001***	3.001***	3.001***	3.001***	2.274**
Negative perceptions of family life with children	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	.409***	.409***	.409***	.575+	.575+	.575+	.575+	.575+	.232***
N	596	596	596	258	258	258	258	258	338

+ p<=0.1 \* p<=0.05 \*\* p<=0.01 \*\*\* p<=0.001

Education: ISCED 2-4: no vocational education, vocational school, specialized vocational certificate. ISCED 5B: vocational institute, polytechnic. ISCED 5A-7: university or college.

Income appeared to have no marked impact on men's intentions. However, it reduced the impact of being unemployed both among men and women. The change was less apparent among students. It seems that at least the low income level of the unemployed explains part of the impact that being out of work has on childbearing intentions. Among women, relatively high income appeared to increase positive childbearing intentions, but the results were not statistically significant. We tested also whether markedly low income (monthly incomes of less than 420 euros) would increase hesitation, but could not find any statistically significant association.

It may be expected that the impact of employment status varies across educational groups. We included an interaction term for educational level and employment status in the models (not presented here), but this did not yield any statistically significant results. Unfortunately, the data was too limited to allow tests for interaction effects for different age groups.

Among variables measuring values and life orientation, religiousness, importance of close family relationships and perceptions related to family life with children had an impact on childbearing intentions. Among men, religiousness increased positive intentions. Among women, it had the opposite effect. This somewhat unexpected result may be caused by selection, religious women having realized their intention to have a child earlier than others. Importance of close family relationships and positive perceptions of family life with children were related to intention to have a child. Both men and women, who felt that a child would be an economic burden, and that having children would prevent them from living the life they want, were more likely to hesitate about childbearing. Importance of material well-being, on the other hand, did not have a statistically significant relation to childbearing intentions.

Introduction of value variables in the models did not markedly change the impact of education. Among men, negative perceptions of family life with children were more prevalent among those with a higher education than among men with less education. Including this variable in the models markedly increased positive intentions especially among highly educated men, while among women, no similar effect appeared.

## **Reasons related to intentions**

Both pragmatic factors and factors related to values or life orientation appeared to have an impact on childbearing intentions among young childless men and women. How do respondents themselves perceive circumstances related to their decision making regarding childbearing and parenthood? The problems with examining perceptions of the factors that are behind childbearing intentions are essentially the same when we study factors related to intentions: we do not have any information on the people who have already had their first child. However, we expect to find differences in the

reasons, depending on whether respondents were hesitant about future childbearing or intended to have a child, but were currently postponing parenthood. Do those who are less certain have very different perceptions of the obstacles to childbearing than those who intend to become parents in the future?

A majority of the respondents had chosen more than one reason for their hesitation or postponement of childbearing. The mean number of reasons marked as important varied between 4 to 6 among both those who hesitated and those who were postponing. Decisions to bear children are often affected by several, perhaps related reasons, not only by one single factor.

Partnership and the state of the relationship appeared to be an important factor for many respondents (Table 4). Having a suitable partner was a very important precondition, because “I haven’t found the right partner and I am living alone” was one of the most frequently stated reasons for hesitation, especially among low-educated men and women. It was also an important reason for postponement among persons with less education. Perceptions of not being mature enough were more relevant among postponers, but also among less educated men and women who hesitated about future childbearing.

“My partner doesn’t want to have a child” was an important reason for hesitation and postponement among low-educated men and women, as was “problems in my relationship” – especially among low-educated men. Also, one in five highly educated women hesitated, and an almost equal share of low-educated women postponed future childbearing because of marital problems.

In the previous analysis (Table 3) it appeared that unemployment increased hesitation. In the questions concerning reasons for childbearing intentions, the importance of insecurity related to economic situation or work was measured by one question. It appeared that economic insecurity was an important reason for both groups; for those who were hesitating childbearing, but also for those who intended to have a child but were postponing parenthood. Among highly educated men, economic insecurity was an important reason only for one-fifth. Problems related to housing (too-small apartment) were more important reasons for postponers than for those who hesitated to have children, and the maintenance of the present standard of living was more important among those who were hesitating than among the postponers. However, this was more marked among men and women with a higher education than among persons with less education.

Career advancement and doing other interesting things in life were more important reasons among postponers than among those who were hesitating regarding childbearing. However, in almost all groups, these reasons were more important to women than to men.

Table 4. Reasons related to hesitation or postponement of childbearing. 18–34-year-old childless men and women, proportion (%) of respondents who considered the reasons important or very important.

	HESITANT (No/Uncertain)				POSTPONERS (Yes)			
	ISCED 2-4		ISCED 5-8		ISCED 2-4		ISCED 5-8	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
I want to finish my education first	-	-	-	-	62.5	70.1	56.1	56.8
Insecurity about my/our economic situation	42.4	54.9	24.4	41.1	59.4	51.3	29.6	42.7
Present apartment is too small for a growing family	28.3	26.0	19.0	30.4	37.9	31.1	24.4	35.4
I want to maintain my present standard of living	18.3	30.0	24.4	34.5	5.9	12.2	8.6	6.2
My job/my partner's job does not allow it/want to proceed with career	14.1	20.4	4.8	18.2	41.0	38.9	40.2	48.8
I want to do other interesting things in my life	16.1	27.5	19.0	30.9	45.1	59.7	36.1	43.2
I would not be able to enjoy life as I have so far	22.8	25.0	26.2	38.9	11.8	20.8	8.6	14.8
Difficult experiences about raising and caring for children	8.7	13.7	9.5	13.0	7.2	8.2	2.5	2.5
I live alone and haven't found a suitable partner	53.3	50.0	52.4	32.1	44.5	42.1	33.3	30.5
I don't feel I am/my partner is mature enough to take care of a child	42.4	48.1	15.4	40.7	52.5	56.0	19.8	50.0
My partner doesn't want a child	18.3	20.0	9.5	13.0	15.0	19.7	10.1	8.8
Because of problems in our relationship	18.5	8.0	11.9	20.4	16.8	16.2	6.0	6.3



Unfortunately, reasons related to enrollment in education were only asked of those who were postponing childbirth. Being a student was clearly one of the most important reasons for postponing. Surprisingly, men and women with lower education mentioned that reason more often than highly educated men and women. A partial explanation for this is that, in the data, persons with less education were somewhat younger than those with a higher education.

Factors related to preferences of personal lifestyle or negative perceptions of raising children were somewhat more related to hesitation than to postponement. Previously, in Table 3, negative perceptions related to children also appeared to increase hesitation towards childbearing. Valuing personal lifestyle was a little more apparent, especially among hesitating women with a higher education. To summarize, we can say that postponers had chosen more reasons that were related to changing life situations, such as ‘Present apartment is too small’ or not yet ‘mature enough to take care of a child’. They had a positive attitude toward the future: things will change. Those who hesitated had chosen more long-standing reasons, such as ‘I want to maintain my present standard of living’ or severe, negative obstacles such as ‘problems in our relationship’ as well as reasons, which could not be easily changed, such as ‘I haven’t found a suitable partner’. Their attitude toward the future seemed to be more negative: they could not see any change toward the better in this regard in the near future.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we focus on childbearing intentions and factors related to hesitation to have children in the future among childless men and women aged 18 to 34. In Finland as in other European countries, many young adults are currently postponing becoming parents to an ever-later age. Despite a relatively stable total period fertility rate, discussions about the increasing childlessness and polarization of childbearing among Finnish women and men have recently gained more attention.

It appears that uncertainty as to whether to have children at all is relatively common among young Finnish adults. This ambiguity about goals related to family formation seems to have grown during the last 15 years. While we can expect that many of those who currently hesitate or postpone childbearing will eventually become parents, an investigation into the factors that are related to this hesitation can shed light on perceived constraints to childbearing. Unfortunately, the cross-sectional data is not the best-suited tool for examining factors that are related to postponement of parenthood.

The impact of education is clearly related to postponement: highly educated men and women have realized their childbearing plans to a lesser extent than persons with less education, and are therefore more likely to intend to have a child in the future. Enrollment in education was also one of the most important reasons for postponement

among those men and women who intended to have a child in the future. Educational level increased positive intentions among men with vocational institute education and men with university education. Among women, the odds were markedly higher only among those with university education. This seems to suggest that postponement of parenthood is more evident among academic women than women with tertiary education. However, education may be related to differences in lifestyle preferences. Negative perceptions of family life with children were more common among highly educated men than among others, and valuing a personal lifestyle and having a wish to continue it were important reasons for hesitating to have children among highly educated women.

Factors related to economic security explain some of the uncertainty. However, low income itself was not apparently connected to hesitation, but a poor economic situation related to unemployment appeared to decrease intentions to have children. When comparing respondents' own perceptions of important reasons, it appeared that economic situation and job-related reasons were at least as important, or even more important among persons who intended to have a child but were currently postponing it, as among persons who were more hesitant toward childbearing. Factors related to housing were more important for postponers than for persons who were hesitating.

Factors related to hesitation were relatively similar among both men and women. Age appeared to decrease intentions among men almost to a similar degree as among women. Partnership and the state of the relationship are clearly important preconditions for childbearing intentions among both men and women. Interestingly, postponers provided more reasons for postponing parenthood that were related to present life situation, while those who were hesitating provided reasons that were of longer standing, clearly negative or more difficult to change. Postponers clearly had a more positive attitude toward their life and saw more possibilities for changing it than the hesitant.

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