

## Single-Parent Families - Demographic Trends

poverty family women percent births united

Globally, one-quarter to one-third of all families are headed by single mothers, calling into question the normativeness of couple headed families. Developed countries, in particular, are experiencing an increase in single-parent families as divorce becomes more common. The United States has the highest percentage of single-parent families (34% in 1998) among developed countries, followed by Canada (22%), Australia (20%), and Denmark (19%). In developing countries, divorce is not as common, but desertion, death, and imprisonment produce single-parent families, primarily headed by women (Kinnear 1999). Rates vary country to country from a low of less than 5 percent in Kuwait to a high of over 40 percent in Botswana and Barbados. In countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and Tobago more than 25 percent of households are headed by wo



There was a dramatic increase in single-parent families

**LOFT® Scoop Neck Shirts**  
Effortless. Softened. Versatile. Shop The LOFT®  
Shirt Collection.  
[www.LOFT.com](http://www.LOFT.com)

Ad ides of the twentieth century;

only 13 percent of families were headed by a single parent in 1970. Over one-fourth of children in the United States lived with a single parent in 1996, double the proportion in 1970. Approximately 84 percent of these families are headed by women. Of all single-parent families, the most common are those headed by divorced or separated mothers (58%) followed by never-married mothers (24%). Other family heads include widows (7%), divorced and separated fathers (8.4%), never-married fathers (1.5%), and widowers (0.9%). There is racial variation in the proportion of families headed by a single parent: 22 percent for white, 57 percent for black, and 33 percent for Hispanic families.

Historically, single-parent families were the result of parental death; about one-fourth of children born around the turn of the nineteenth century experienced the death of a parent before they reached age fifteen (Amato 2000). The factors most commonly related to the contemporary U.S. single-parent family are changing social and cultural trends, increased rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing, increased employment opportunities for women, decreased employment opportunities for men (especially African-American men), and the availability of welfare benefits that enable women to set up their own households (Rodgers 1996). It has been estimated that 50 percent of children born in recent cohorts will spend some part of their childhood with a single parent as a result of separation, divorce, or out-of-marriage births.

The U.S. divorce rate steadily and dramatically increased in the thirty year period 1965 to 1995. In 1965 the divorce rate was 2.5 per 1,000 people, increasing to an all time high of 5.0 in 1985 and declining to 4.4 in 1995. The United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world, twice that of Denmark, Canada, or the United Kingdom. The divorce rate is highest among lower income couples. Divorce is somewhat higher for African-American couples, with 10.5 percent divorced in 1993, compared to 8.8 of white couples and 7.3 of Hispanic couples. Developing regions of the world are also experiencing an increase in the divorce rate, although the proportions remain low in most regions of Asia and Africa.

Most children live with one parent as the result of divorce, but by 1996 the single-parent home was as likely to involve a never married as a divorced parent. Unmarried women in the United States accounted for nearly one in three births in 1995, compared with one in five in 1980 and one in ten in 1970. The percentage of births to single women varies across race. In 1995, 20 percent of all births to Asian and Pacific Islanders were to single women, compared to 25 percent for white women; 41 percent for women of Hispanic origin; 57 percent for Native American, Eskimo, and Aleut women; and 70 percent for African-American families.

For the most part the increase in births to unwed mothers is the consequence of unplanned, accidental pregnancy coupled with the decision not to marry. This includes teenage mothers who are less likely to marry than pregnant teens in the past, as

well as adult women who delay marriage while pursuing educational and career opportunities, increasing the probability of pregnancy outside of marriage. Teens account for almost 13 percent of all births in the United States (23% for African Americans, 23% for Native Americans, and 17% for Hispanic Americans, 11% of white births). Approximately one million adolescent girls become pregnant each year, with half ending in birth. The majority of these pregnancies (67%) involve an adult male over the age of twenty.

Since 1990, births have declined among African-American teens and risen among white teens, who comprise two-thirds of teen mothers. The factors contributing to teen pregnancy and childbirth include lack of close contact with adult role models; peer pressure; family poverty; the perception among many teens that few opportunities for success are available; and inadequate sex education, especially about contraception and family planning (Sidel 1998). Girls who have a positive self-image, high expectations and aspirations for the future, and good relationships with their parents are much less likely to get pregnant than others. The United States has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the world, with 53 births per 1,000 women aged nineteen and younger compared to countries at the lower end of the spectrum such as Denmark (nine births per 1,000), Netherlands (six births per 1,000), and Japan (four births per 1,000). Worldwide adolescents give birth to over 14 million children annually.

Another form of parenthood outside of marriage involves single women choosing to bear or adopt and raise children alone. Technological developments allowing insemination without inter-course contribute to women's choices in this regard. Women choosing to conceive children in this manner include lesbians, who may raise their children as a single parent or with a same-sex partner; and heterosexual women who are in their thirties, single, and want children before they are past childbearing age (Burns and Scott 1994). Although an increase in nonmarital childbirth has occurred among well-educated and professional women, it is more commonly found among women with lower levels of education and income.

The rate of births to women outside of marriage in the United States is similar to rates found in Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and other industrialized countries. In Sweden, nonmarital childbirth is twice as high as in the United States, while in Japan only one percent of all births occur outside of marriage. Several Central American countries have high rates of nonmarital births ranging from 67 percent in Guatemala and El Salvador to 53 percent in Honduras. Four factors explain the rate of births outside marriage in these countries: male migration, male mortality, machismo, and pro-natalist attitudes and policies (Kinnear 1999).

## Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select "copy". Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

```
<a href="http://family.jrank.org/pages/1574/Single-Parent-Families-Demographic-Trends.html">Single-Parent Families - Demographic Trends</a>
```

## User Comments



Briana Parrish

over 3 years ago

OMG WHO WROTE THIS ARTICLE I NEED TO KNOW FOR HOMEWORK!!!



Thesis writer

over 2 years ago

## Dual Earner Families

Parents, on average, will spend between \$8,760 and \$24,510 each year on child-rearing expenses, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture 2011 report. A dual-earner marriage is often a necessity to cover the costs that a family requires. Although working is more of a necessity than a choice for many families, busy schedules and the added pressures that work creates can affect children in several ways.

### Time

Whether you work full time or have a part-time arrangement, being in a dual-earner family typically means that time is an issue. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, working mothers spend roughly 1.2 hours per day doing care-related activities for their children while working dads spend an average of 49 minutes on the same tasks. The BLS also notes that working moms spend on average of two hours per day on household chores and dads spend 1.2 hours on chore-related tasks. Between out-of-the-house and in-house work, it's clear that kids of dual-earner families aren't getting an overwhelming amount of time with mom and dad doing leisure-time activities. This, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Healthy Children website, might lead to feelings of neglect in the children.

### Income

While being in a dual-earner family can have its negative qualities, the added income that two paychecks provides is often a necessity. The USDA notes that the projected costs of raising a child from birth through age 17 will run from \$169,080 to \$389,670. Having any extra income can help parents feel more comfortable in affording child-related expenses, such as day care or clothes, making the family environment less stressful for everyone involved.

### Stress

When stresses from work spill into the home, everyone suffers. Whether mom's boss is on her case or dad didn't get that much-deserved promotion, parents can feel anxious, distracted or depressed when at home because of

work-related issues. A stressful, or anxiety-filled, home environment can negatively affect children. According to the AAP, parents who bring work stresses home might take out their frustration on each other or the kids. Children might feel confused or sad, not understanding that the parent's anger isn't truly directed at them.

### Perceptions

When children see that both mom and dad work, especially if both parents enjoy their jobs, they can develop a positive perception about their future careers. The AAP notes that a dual-earner family can show kids that work isn't a bad or

threatening environment. Additionally, children can see that women can hold key places in the work force and that an array of professional options are open to both men and women. Instead of seeing the woman's place as in the home, children who have two working parents can develop a more well-rounded perception of being a professional and succeeding in a career.

## **Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800**

**We care and we listen, any time and for any reason**

---

### **Blended Families**



Recent research shows that for children, resilience is a key factor in enabling them to adapt to the challenges of a parent's remarriage.<sup>[1]</sup> However, despite children's general resilience, parental remarriage or re-partnering is still a challenging experience for them. There are many factors for adults to consider in helping children to adjust to new family arrangements.

This hot topic looks at these factors. It also looks at what a blended family is, some challenges you might expect along the way and offers tips you can use to manage these.

Blended families are different to traditional families, and adults will need to use skills and approaches in managing their children that they may not have used before. When establishing your blended family remember that your child's views are important.

#### **What is a blended family?**

In 2011 in Australia, 4-5% of families were blended families.<sup>[2]</sup> A blended family forms when adults, who already have children from a previous relationship, decide to live together or marry, and together with their children form a new family.<sup>[3]</sup> The existing children from the previous relationships may choose to live in the new family with their parent and their partner, either fulltime or part of the time.<sup>[4]</sup> Children may also be born in the new family. For some of the children in a blended family, both parents may be their natural (or adopted) parents, but for others, one of their parents is their natural (or adopted) parent.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### **Some factors to consider when establishing your new family**

Blended families can work well, with much support and love forming between the parents and the children involved, but patience is required because it can take time for the new family relationships to work. Some re-partnering parents have unrealistically positive expectations that their children will love the new partner as much as they themselves do. You need to allow time for these new relationships to develop.

Children may still be experiencing a level of grief and loss over their parents not being together anymore, or at losing their previous home, or their bedroom, or perhaps moving schools. When a child suddenly has to share what was their own private space, such as a bedroom, with a new family member they may be unhappy and struggle to adjust to the new shared arrangements.

#### **What challenges can you expect?**

**Differences in Family Cultures** - Some preparation beforehand about your expectations regarding involvement of ex-partners, family practices around relationships, how conflict is managed and what is acceptable in terms of behaviour and communication between family members will help. Having a consistent approach to managing the complexities between the relationships in your new blended family will assist children to feel more secure as they transition.

**Competing individual and family needs** - Managing a blended family is more complicated than a nuclear family.<sup>[6]</sup> The family dynamics of the previous family system may not translate into the new, blended family. For example, the sole child of one partner may experience jealousy when their parent begins to show equal attention to the children of the other partner. This can be managed by ensuring that each parent makes time to spend with their own child/children.

Whatever dynamics emerge the central and strongest dynamic needs to be that of the partnering couple with strong boundaries maintained around their relationship.<sup>[7]</sup> A strong relationship between the parental couple is considered

essential for the success of blended families.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Environmental pressures** - Even a mild lack of co-operation from ex-partners can be a source of irritation and stress for the developing new family.<sup>[9]</sup> Where previous partners adopt a negative attitude towards the new partner it can have a negative effect on the child involved, influencing the attitude that they bring to the new family situation. It is important that the child or children are not subject to fighting or arguments between ex-partners which could involve swearing, name-calling or physical or mental abuse.

Sometimes financial pressures may also be a reality for blended families and children may struggle with finding themselves in a family where they are not able to afford the things that they enjoyed before.

### **Practical Tips/ideas for managing your new family**

#### **Establish healthy family communication processes -**

involve the children in discussion about the way the new household will run

listen to and invite your child's/children's ideas

explain that there will be differences, and that things may feel strange at first

consider engaging grandparents in developing some new traditions for managing birthdays or other occasions

as a couple model the communication style that you want in your family

state ground rules such as expecting family members to be polite and respectful; talking things through; or if feeling

heated and upset, to wait until everyone is calmer before raising the concern again<sup>[10]</sup>

**Parenting Roles** - At the start unless the child is very young, it is best for the natural parent to discipline their own child.

This is because differences in discipline style may cause confusion for the child, and may contribute to the child resenting the new partner. As the relationships in your blended family grow, regardless of what decision you make about managing your child's/children's behaviour, you need to be consistent and in agreement about your roles.<sup>[11]</sup>

**Visiting children** - When children who live part of the time in the family come to stay, there may be discomfort between them and children who live full time in the family, and also between the parents. You can assist them to feel part of the family by:

reminding them that you love them and that they have a part in your life

letting them have a private space in which to take time to adjust, before asking them to join in

working out a space for their things in the household and assisting them to identify which items they might like to leave rather than transporting them each time<sup>[12]</sup>

**Looking after your relationship with each other as a couple** - Parents establishing a new blended family have no shared family history and whilst setting up a family are also attempting to build their new relationship as a couple. As a new couple you will need to juggle your own need for privacy together, with the need for the attention and time to establish quality relationships and family practices. It is important however, to consolidate your own relationship to ensure stability and security for your new family situation.

**Getting Help / who else can help?** - Make an appointment to see your GP who may be able to refer you to a Family Counselling service.

You may wish to contact your local [parenting help](#) service/s for further information.

#### **Related Tip Sheets for Parents and Carers:**

[Kids Helpline Hot Topics: Family Relationships](#)

[Kids Helpline Hot Topics: Supporting Children and Young People through Separation and Divorce](#)

#### **Links:**

[Parentline](#)

[Relationships Australia: Thinking of Forming a Step Family](#)

[Raising Children Network: The Australian Parenting Website](#)

#### **References**

The Well Being of Children Following a Separation and Divorce, Research Consortium, p18. Retrieved from: <http://www.med.monash.edu.au/childwellbeingrc/childwellbeingliteraturereview.pdf> on 10 October 2013.

Australian Government. Australian Institute of Family Studies: Australian households and families. Australian Family Trends No.4. Retrieved from: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factsheets/2013/familytrends/aft4/index.html> on 12 December 2013.

South Australian Government, Blended Families- Parent Easy Guide p1. Retrieved from: [http://parenting.sa.gov.au/peqs\\_general.htm#peq43](http://parenting.sa.gov.au/peqs_general.htm#peq43) on 10 October 2013.

**The New York Times**

---

The Opinion Pages

## Late Marriage and Its Consequences

March 22, 2013 8:48 am

On Wednesday I had the privilege of joining a Brookings Institution event organized around the new report “Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage,” which tries to tease out the social implications of the steadily rising age of first marriage — now at 27 for women and 29 for men, both historic highs. Not surprisingly, a lot of the discussion focused on the impact of this trend on children, because the story of late marriage is entangled with the story of rising out-of-wedlock births, thanks to what the authors call “the great crossover” — the fact that the age of first marriage, which was once about a year earlier than the average age at which the first child was born, now lags the average age of first birth by about a year. Hence the report’s most attention-grabbing statistic: That 48 percent of overall first births, and 58 percent of first births to what the report calls “Middle Americans” — women with a high school diploma and maybe some college, but no 4-year degree — now take place outside of marriage, a trend whose negative consequences for children probably don’t need to be rehearsed here.

One of the useful things about the “Knot Yet” report, though, is how much it tries to tell us about the impact of delayed marriage on the lives of adult men and women. The simplest way to interpret this impact is suggested by the write-up the study received from the Atlantic: Great for college-educated women, pretty good for the rest of the female population, bad for men and particularly bad for working class men. Upper-class women reap a large wage premium from delaying marriage — a college-educated woman who marries in her 30s earns over \$15,000 more annually than a woman who marries in her early 20s, and when you look at household income, the premium for marrying later rises to more than \$20,000. Women without 4-year degrees also enjoy a wage premium when they delay

marriage, albeit a smaller one (and a very small one when you look at household income). Men, meanwhile, reap a wage premium from marrying *earlier*, so late marriage tends to hurt their economic prospects: For men without a 4-year degree, the earlier the marriage, the higher their income, and even college-educated men earn more if they marry in their 20s than in their 30s. (This is not the only way that the burdens of the new marital landscape seem to fall heaviest on males.)

But the “good for women, bad for men” story is complicated by various factors. The cost of children, for one: While well-educated women are generally delaying marriage and childbirth, less-educated American women who wait to marry are much more likely to have a child before wedlock, which raises the chances that they’ll end up raising them with an absent or unreliable father — and with it, the chances that their wage premium will be eaten up by the price of parenting. The risk of never marrying, for another: For both the well-educated and the less-educated, marriage delayed can mean marriage forgone, and in terms of household income it makes more of a financial difference whether you marry at all than whether you marry at 27 or 31.

And the economic element is further complicated by the emotional component of the story. There is a health-and-happiness premium for marriage even in the carefree twenties: Married late-twentysomethings, male and female, are less likely to describe themselves as depressed and more likely to describe themselves as satisfied with their lives (and also less likely to report recent drunkenness) than both singles and cohabitating couples. More striking still are the numbers for marital happiness over the life cycle: While the risk of divorce does generally go down the older you get married, the “Knot Yet” study cites a survey showing that women who married in their mid-20s (24-26) were much more likely to describe their marriages as “very happy” over the long run than those who married younger *and* those who married older. (Though of course causation runs in both directions: An emotionally stable person who doesn’t drink to excess is more likely to get married in the first place, the person who feels confident enough to tie the knot in their mid-20s may be less likely to look back and feel like they “settled” in order to have children, etc.)

Then, finally, as many material benefits as delaying marriage and childrearing



offers to the best-educated Americans, the impact of late parenting on familial health and happiness is more uncertain. This was the subject of Judith Shulevitz's fascinating and disturbing New Republic essay late last year (I wrote about it here), which discussed the stress of fertility treatments, the risk of genetic disorders, the disappointment of having fewer children than you planned ... and then the distinctive burdens that come with becoming parents when your own parents are already entering their own declining years.

So instead of just looking for clear winners and losers from the new late-marrying landscape, it might be more plausible to say that 1) both the costs and the benefits of late marriage cross lines of gender and class, but 2) there do seem to be more sweet spots for the well-educated, and more land mines awaiting the working class. In upper class America, you may not want to marry too early or too late, but once you've graduated college there's a broad zone where financial and emotional interests seem more likely to align than not. The woman who meets her future spouse in college and gets married to him in her mid-20s, the male college graduate who waits till his late 20s to get hitched, and the career-minded woman who ties the knot at 31 are all striking a plausible balance (statistically speaking) between marital fulfillment, marital stability and potential earnings.

In working class America, though, it's much harder to figure out where the sweet spot lies, and how to bring the two sexes' interests into line. The path that offers the clearest financial benefits to men (relatively early marriage) is perilous for women, because the earnings that they lose by marrying early loom large if the marriage then falls apart, which earlier marriages are more likely to do. And wedlock isn't magic: Even if late marriage seems to hurt the economic prospects of working class men, their economic prospects are poor for many other reasons as well, which makes them less marriageable, period. But for women, this dearth of marriageable men then cuts both ways: You don't want to rush into things, but you don't want to let a plausible mate slip away. Hence the appeal of cohabitation, as a trial run — but that trial run makes it easier to end up with semi-accidental, semi-planned out-of-wedlock childbearing, because after all you're *almost* married, and you're in prime childbearing years, and the rewards for putting career ahead of family aren't nearly as high as they are for the college-educated ...

Obviously people don't generally game out their romantic life in quite this way. But that's part of the point: The longer the road from sexual maturity to marriage, the more complicated the underlying cost-benefit calculus in any given relationship becomes, and the more difficult it becomes for people with fewer resources to figure out the wisest course to take. So while the new romantic landscape doesn't offer *automatic* benefits to the upper class and *automatic* costs to everyone else, it does create a situation where the people who need the least help figuring out the wisest life course have multiple clear paths to take, and the people who would most benefit from a simple map to responsible adulthood can easily end up in a maze instead.

# Delayed Childbearing: More Women Are Having Their First Child Later in Life

T.J. Mathews, M.S., and Brady E. Hamilton, Ph.D.

## Key findings

### Data from the Birth Data File, National Vital Statistics System

- The average age of first-time mothers increased 3.6 years from 1970 to 2006, from 21.4 to 25.0 years.
- Increases in average age at first birth were more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Average age at first birth increased in all states and the District of Columbia; the District of Columbia (5.5 years) and Massachusetts (5.2 years) had the largest increases since 1970.
- In 2006, Asian or Pacific Islander women had the oldest average age at first birth (28.5 years) and American Indian or Alaska Native women had the youngest (21.9 years).
- The average age at first birth has been increasing in many developed nations.

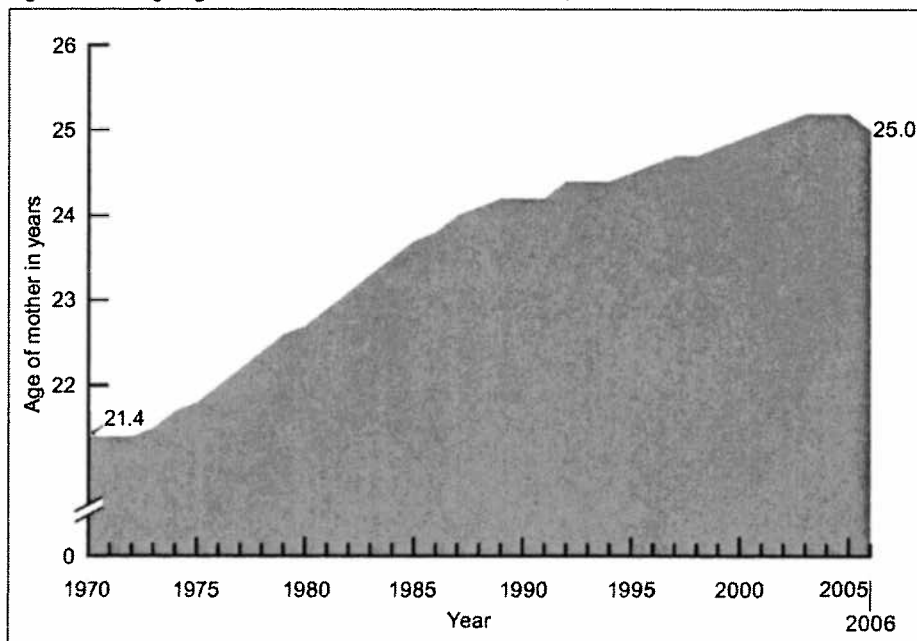
Of particular interest to both researchers and the public is the “average” age of women when they have a child, especially their first. Age at first birth influences the total number of births that a woman might have in her life, which impacts the size, composition, and future growth of the population. The age of the mother, both younger and older, plays a strong role in a wide range of birth outcomes (e.g., birthweight, multiple births, and birth defects), so it is critical to track the average age at which women have their first birth.

*Keywords: average age • first birth • race and Hispanic origin • state-specific average age*

## Are first-time mothers older?

The average age of first-time mothers increased by 3.6 years, from 21.4 years in 1970 to 25.0 years in 2006. While the average age for first births increased from 1970 to 2006, the increases were more dramatic during the first two decades (1970 to 1990) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average age of mother at first birth: United States, 1970–2006



SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System.





## Childlessness

Lysol and Tollhouse cookie commercials are losing their ability to pressure women to have children, since it's becoming quite obvious that childless women can enjoy disinfecting their marinara sauced counters and getting blazed with a bucket of cookie dough, too. The results of a new study published in the October issue of *The Journal of Marriage and Family* suggest (<http://www.livescience.com/23891-childfree-women-distress.html>) that, while, women who choose to remain childfree in today's groovy world of contraception feel more pressure to reproduce than other women without children, they aren't distressed about their placid lifestyle of going to weekend matinees, drinking at their leisure, and watching premium cable, probably because doing all of those things = wonderful.

Study author Julia McQuillan, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln sociologist, explained that, though motherhood in the United States was all knotted up with adult femininity, women have little to absolutely no qualms about choosing not to be mothers (women who didn't have children because of fertility issues were, unsurprisingly, significantly more distressed about being childless). Said McQuillan:

*Motherhood is so highly connected with adult femininity in the United States that many women feel that they need to be mothers. Yet we also found that there are women who have low or no distress about not being mothers, even if their friends and family want them to have children.*

In order to figure out that childless-by-choice women weren't melting into puddles of unused genetic material in their well-appointed and mercifully clean homes, McQuillan and her colleagues surveyed 1,200 American women without children about their reasons for staying baby-free. Among some of the most common reasons women had for forgoing motherhood were a simple desire not to have kids, financial concerns, education or career demands, or the absence of a suitable partner. It was only when women themselves viewed motherhood as important that pressure from family, friends, or the child-hungry media caused them any distress.

Interestingly, the study found that religious women experienced less pressure from media images to have children, whereas their irreligious (let's just say faithlessly pagan) counterparts were more susceptible to saccharine commercials for tear-free shampoo. Women who chose to remain childfree, however, have the last laugh — they have the most \$\$\$\$ of all the women in the study, probably because they're not using it to feed the insidious infant paraphernalia industry.

'Childfree' Women Feel Little Distress, Study Finds  
(<http://www.livescience.com/23891-childfree-women-distress.html>)  
[LiveScience]

