

A Reluctance to Embrace the One-Child Family in Britain?



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1. Introduction

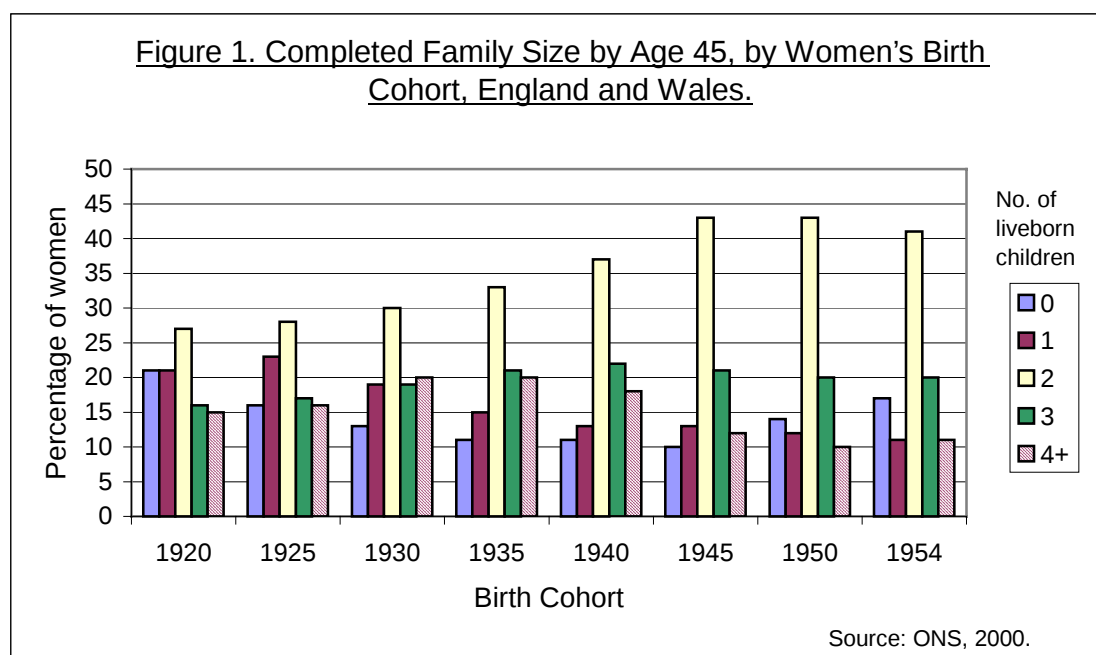
With Total Fertility Rates now below two in the majority of European countries, increasing attention needs to be focussed on women with fewer than two children. In Britain, the main focus has been on childlessness (e.g. Gillespie, 1999; McAllister and Clarke, 1998; Kiernan, 1989), but little attention has been paid to women who stop at one child or intend to do so. This may be attributed to the fact that one-child families are still relatively uncommon in Britain, despite childlessness being on the increase. Among the most recent cohorts to have finished childbearing in England and Wales (those born in 1954), 17% of women remained childless, while only 11% had a one-child family (ONS, 2000). In addition, the evidence suggests that even fewer women intend to have a one-child family than actually do so (Laybourn, 1994).

This paper makes a preliminary investigation of one-child families in Britain, exploring the incidence of such families and aiming to ascertain the characteristics of women who have just one child and those who are intending to have just one. The paper starts by noting how the incidence of one-child families in Britain has changed over time and briefly compares the incidence of one-child families in Britain with those of the most recent cohorts of women from other European countries. Possible advantages and disadvantages of having just one child are examined from the parental perspective and this is followed by a discussion of the varying decision-making processes that may lead to having a one-child family. Three different approaches are then used to further investigate one-child families. First I model the completed family size of women that have reached age 45 in order to explore the characteristics of those having just one child as opposed to having two or more or remaining childless. Then the current fertility intentions of women at parities zero and one are modelled separately to gain understanding of the factors associated with intending to have just one child or being uncertain about future childbearing.

2. The One-Child Family in Britain: Historical and European Contexts.

Both one-child families and childlessness may be thought of as below average or very small family sizes. Other things being equal, one might expect both one-child families and childlessness to be common among cohorts of women whose fertility is low and such family sizes to be less common among higher-fertility cohorts. This relationship appears to have existed in Britain for women born prior to 1940. Anderson (1998) shows, using data from the 1911 and 1946 Censuses, that between the marriage cohorts of 1870-79 and 1925, mean family size declined from 5.8 to 2.2 children, while the percentage of marriages bearing a single child rose steadily from 5.3% to 25.2% and childlessness also doubled. Conversely, mean family size increased from 2.00 to 2.42 between women born between 1920 and 1935, while, as figure 1 shows, the proportion of women having a one-child family or remaining childless fell (ONS, 2000). Only 13% of those born in 1935 had a one-child family (ONS, 2000).

Among those born in the 1940s and 1950s, the most recent cohorts to have completed childbearing, the relationship between mean family size and the proportion of one-child families breaks down. Despite mean family size falling to just below replacement levels among women born in the 1950s, these cohorts have been even less likely than their predecessors to have an only child. The move to smaller families among those born in the 1950s is marked instead by an increase in childlessness and two-child families and a decrease in those with four or more children (see figure 1). For the first time this century, the proportion remaining childless is exceeding the proportion with one child. Whether these trends will continue among current cohorts of reproductive age remains to be seen; their stated fertility intentions may provide some clues.



A comparison of family size distributions in eight European countries (Pearce, Cantisani and Laihonon, 1999) shows women born in the Republic of Ireland or England and Wales in 1955 to be least likely to have a one-child family (10% and 12% respectively). One-child families are particularly common in Southern Europe, with 26% of Portuguese and 22% of Spanish women born in 1955 stopping at one. The relationship between childlessness and one-child families is also of interest, with those from England and Wales being most likely to remain childless (17%) *relative* to having one child (12%), followed in second place by the Republic of Ireland. In France, Spain, Portugal and Denmark, the opposite pattern can be seen, with for example, 20% of French women having one child and only 8% remaining childless. These differences may reflect differences in attitudes towards childlessness and one-child families between different European countries or simply differences in the marital or socio-economic circumstances of women in different countries.

3. The One-Child Family: Positive Choice or Circumstance?

Advantages and disadvantages of the one-child family

Like any family size, the one-child family may be considered to have various advantages from the parental viewpoint. As compared to remaining childless, having one child provides the parent with emotional and social rewards, for example by enabling nurturing behaviour (Foster, 2000) and creating social relationships (Schoen et al, 1997). As compared to having a larger family, the one-child family minimises the various costs involved in childrearing. These include direct financial costs such as food and clothing as well as indirect costs such as the mothers' lost earnings. One child may have less impact on adult relationships and on leisure activities, while one pregnancy and birth will have less perceived impact on a woman's body than repeated childbearing. In assessing the risk of future union dissolution, women might also consider that caring for one child single-handedly might be easier than caring for two or more. Government policy could even be said to favour the first child over

subsequent births, as the child benefit given to parents is around 50% higher for first than subsequent children.

The counter-argument to the suggestion that one child is less costly than two in various ways is that the first child costs the most and the marginal costs of subsequent children are likely to be much lower. Baby equipment and toys will be purchased the first time round, additional time spent out of employment may be lower for the second child as two can be looked after together, and the second child may have less impact on the parental lifestyle compared to the first, as lifestyle changes are likely to have been made already. However, even if subsequent children cost less than the first, it is still likely that one child is the 'cheapest' option for those wishing to experience parenthood. Indeed, Davies, Joshi and Peronaci (2000) estimate that in the 1990s, the average highly skilled woman who has only one child will not forgo any earnings from employment over her lifetime.

On a more positive note, parents of one child will be able to put maximum input into bringing up their child and the child will not have to compete for parental time with any siblings. This is likely to both benefit the child and provide emotional satisfaction for the parent. Working mothers frequently experience guilt feelings about their multiple roles (e.g. Hochschild, 1990) and may prefer to spend the limited time they have available for childrearing with one child than struggle to spend enough time with two or more children.

However, there may also be some disadvantages in having only one child. Parents will not be able to have a child of each sex or experience the different personalities of their children. Blake (1968) also notes that having an only child limits the period of one's life during which children can be enjoyed. Parents may have to spend more time actively occupying one child who has no sibling to play with, though conversely they will not have to cope with sibling conflict and jealousy. They may fear that they will have less help or company in old age or that only children would find it harder to cope with the care of elderly parents or consequences of divorce.

In rational terms, the one-child option may be an appropriate choice for those who wish to experience parenthood, while at the same time pursuing goals in other fields such as employment or leisure. However, as Kohler (2000) argues, an individualistic perspective on fertility is not enough, as decisions are still made within the social environment. In the case of the one-child family in Britain, lack of social approval may be perceived to be a major reason for not stopping at one child. A strong stereotype of only children exists, that characterises such children as spoiled, lonely and maladjusted due to the lack of siblings (Laybourn, 1994). Research has shown the prejudices surrounding only children to be unfounded (e.g. Laybourn, 1994; Falbo, 1982; Blake, 1981), but the stereotype still persists. This leads parents of only children to be particularly anxious about their child's welfare. They also risk being considered selfish for not providing their child with a sibling to interact with and being thought of as only marginally committed to parenthood (Laybourn, 1994; Callan, 1985; Busfield and Paddon, 1977.). The Canadian Fertility Survey of 1984 found that a larger proportion of respondents believed that parents had a second child in order to create a better environment for the children than believed that they did so for their own personal satisfaction (Burch, 1991). Similarly, an Australian study of 38 women with one child in the early 1980s found that companionship for the first child was the primary benefit cited for having a second child, while the enjoyment of having a second child was seen as secondary. In addition, several of the women intending to stop at one child stated as a possible reason for having a second that people would stop criticising them (Callan, 1985). Observation of a UK internet forum for parents of only children shows that concerns about only-child stereotypes are still a major issue among this group in the 21st century (ukparents.co.uk, 2001).

The extent of the norm against one-child families can be illustrated by examining 'ideal' family size responses from national surveys. Clearly such results tend to reflect the perceived

ideal for a 'normal' family and do not equate to the desired family size for particular individuals (Girard and Roussel, 1982). However, the concept of ideal family size is still important, because individuals' behaviour may be judged against the perceived ideal (Scott, 1998). The evidence suggests that the two-child family has been widely accepted as the ideal in Britain for many years. In 1979, 71% of Britons chose two as the ideal number of children, the highest percentage of nine EEC countries surveyed, while only 2% thought that one child was ideal (Girard and Roussel, 1982). In 1994, 75% of Britons that responded in the British Social Attitudes Survey stated that two was the ideal number of children for a family to have, the second highest after the former East Germany out of the 24 countries participating in the 1994 International Social Survey Programme. Again, less than 2% chose 1 child as the ideal (Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung, 1997). These clear family size norms lead to social pressure to avoid a one-child family. Back in 1973, Griffith stated in the US context that 'even for women who want to combine work and childbearing, social pressure to have a second child and personal concern for the child's welfare are likely to make a decision to have only one child a very difficult one to make and carry out' (Griffith, 1973, p241).

Family size: the decision-making process

There are clearly several advantages and disadvantages of having a one-child family, but not all women who finish their reproductive years with one child actively weigh up the costs and benefits at the outset, as in the 'one-decision model' outlined by Udry (1983). It is important to recognise that fertility intentions may be held with different levels of certainty and uncertainty and may change over time (Morgan, 1982). Some women will have a preference for a particular number of children before they start childbearing, others will make decisions sequentially as their family grows, some will revise their intentions over time in response to the experience of parenthood or other circumstances and others may have uncertain intentions over the entire reproductive lifecourse (e.g. Udry, 1983). A one-child family may arise via a number of different pathways. Distinctions can be made between 'one-decision' and 'sequential' decision-making, as above (Udry, 1983), between active and passive decision-making (Gillespie, 1999), or between the processes of choice and circumstance. The woman who intends to have one child from the outset and fulfils her intention could be said to have made an active decision to have one child 'by choice'. In contrast, the woman who initially intends to have two children but then is unable to have a second due to infertility could be said to have one child 'due to circumstance'.

However, choice and circumstance are often inseparable. Women who choose to stop at one child under certain circumstances might have had different intentions under an alternative set of circumstances. In addition, initial intentions to have one child and later decisions to stop at one are not the only pathways to a one-child family. For example there is the woman who intends to remain childless but has an unintended birth. Or the woman who intends to have two children, makes a series of decisions to postpone childbearing (Heaton, Jacobson and Holland, 1999) and then runs out of time to have more than one as the biological clock is ticking. In the latter case, a choice may be made to delay marriage or first birth, rather than to deliberately have a one-child family; the family size is a consequence of other choices. Simple distinctions between choice and circumstance may therefore be misguided. Gillespie's (1999) distinction between active and passive decisions about family size is more useful, as many women may in effect make a 'passive' decision about family size arising from union and socio-economic choices and circumstances, unplanned births and other factors, and end up with one child. Similarly, Morell (1994) contrasts not making a positive decision to have a (second) child with the negative decision to not have a (second) child, the former approach being more passive than the latter. The analyses here take into account that preferences may change with parity by examining the intentions of childless women and those with one child separately and take uncertainty into account as well as more definite plans.

Looking back at the 1930s, it is not clear whether the high proportion of one-child families was a result of the increased preference (among individuals or society) for very small families or a result of circumstances discouraging large families. Anderson (1998) emphasises the advent of new choices, for example, the new competing consumption opportunities available for parents and children that might encourage parents to severely limit their families. In contrast, Eckstein and Hinde (2001) emphasise the constraints on childbearing during the 1930s, in particular the lack of family accommodation and lack of kin support for childrearing available to those moved to new local authority estates. Similar factors are still likely to affect current family size choices: the increasing acceptability of voluntary childlessness, the climate of union instability, the high cost of childcare and the attractions of employment and leisure that compete with having children are all affecting the circumstances that women find themselves in and the choices that they have to make. In many ways, decisions about family size are harder to make now than ever, as there is less imperative to automatically marry and have children, lifecourses are unpredictable and people are left to construct their own biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

Although it is often not possible to distinguish between one-child families formed by choice or due to circumstance, the perceptions of outsiders of the reasons underlying the decision may be important in determining how the decision is regarded. One might hypothesise that women who are perceived by outsiders to have had only one child through circumstance, for example because they are not currently living with a partner, will be under less pressure to conform to the two-child norm than those who appear to have one child by choice and are therefore perceived to be challenging the two-child norm by their behaviour.

Research suggests that women may decide to have one child or to stop at one for a multitude of reasons incorporating both choice and circumstance. These include:

- being unable to conceive or carry a pregnancy to term.
- having other health problems.
- no current partner.
- feeling 'too old' for another baby, having started childbearing late.
- having had a bad experience of pregnancy or childbirth (e.g. pre-eclampsia, emergency caesarean, postnatal depression).
- partner does not want another / does not help to look after first child sufficiently.
- partner already has other children – time/financial commitments.
- cannot afford another without cutting back on spending or employment.
- conflict of childrearing with employment, leisure, relationships (self-actualisation).
- not enjoying childrearing/ little maternal instinct.
- seeing others struggling with 2+ children.
- happy with one child; no need for another; wanting to give one child plenty of attention.

(e.g. Laybourn, 1994; Callan, 1985; UKParents, 2001)

Similar reasons might be given by women with two children to justify why they do not intend to have a third child, but in general such women are unlikely to have to justify their decision since stopping at two children is considered to be normal behaviour.

Cross-sectional survey data cannot provide us with anything like a full understanding of the processes underlying family size outcomes and intentions but the analysis in the following sections should provide some preliminary insights into the demographic and socio-economic factors associated with having a one-child family or intending to have one child at parity zero or one. One question that this paper aims to answer is whether the factors associated with having or intending to have a one-child family are similar or different to those associated with having or intending to have no children. This should provide some insight into whether those

women having or intending to have one child are similar in many respects to other female parents and intending parents or whether they have more in common with the childless.

4. Data

This paper uses data from the General Household Survey (GHS), a multi-purpose household survey of British adults. The survey ran continuously from 1990 to 1996 and also took place in 1998. The brief analysis of completed fertility in section 5 uses a merged data set from the 1990-1996 rounds of the GHS, consisting of women who had reached aged 45 by the interview date. During the 1990s, women (but not men) aged 16-59 were asked for their complete fertility histories and these are used along with a small number of variables available retrospectively.

The main advantage of using this survey is that it provides up-to-date information on current fertility intentions. Sections 6 and 7 analyse the fertility intentions of a sample of women currently aged 16-44 from the 1991-1996 rounds of the GHS (the 1990 survey was excluded for these analyses, as the questions on fertility intentions were different). The GHS asks women four questions on fertility intentions, two of which are used in this analysis. The first question, “Do you think that you will have any (more) children (after the one you are expecting)?” has five possible response categories: Yes, Probably Yes, Don’t Know, Probably No and No. This wide range of possible responses makes these data superior to other British data on fertility intentions and because ‘probable’ as well as firm intentions are allowed for, complete uncertainty (i.e. the Don’t Know response) is much lower than in comparative studies. The second question used asks of those intending to have another child “How many children do you think you will have born to you in all (including the one you are expecting and those you have already who are still alive)?” Section 6 merges the data from these two questions in order to ascertain which childless women are intending to have just one birth and section 7 uses the responses to the first question to find out which women at parity one are intending to stop at one.

The GHS data are not ideal as they do not contain any information on religion, partners’ non-resident children, male fertility histories and intentions or women’s attitudes to childbearing. In addition, data on contraceptive use and sterilisation were only asked in alternate years, so could not been included in the merged data sets used here. Section 7 does, however, discuss the data on contraception and sterilisation from the 1998 GHS briefly.

5. Women with Completed Fertility: Who has Exactly One Child?

Using the 1990-1996 rounds of the GHS, it was possible to obtain a sample of 13 098 ever-married British women born between 1930 and 1954 that had reached age 45 by the date of interview and were therefore assumed to have completed their families. In this sample, 13.3% of the women had had exactly one child by age 45, with the most common family size being two children (40.4%), followed by three (22.6%). These figures are comparable with those from vital registration for all women (ONS, 2000). Only 8.5% of the ever-married women in the sample remained childless.

A multinomial regression model was used to predict the probability of having 0,1,3 or 4+ children rather than two. As the data were retrospective, only a small number of variables were available to enter into the model: woman’s birth cohort, age at first marriage, marital history up to age 45 and highest educational qualifications at interview. All possible two-way interactions were tested in the model.

The results are shown in table 1. More recently-born cohorts would be expected to be less likely to have an only child than those born earlier (see figure 1), and this is confirmed in the table. Women born between 1935 and 1949 were less likely to have a single child family than those born in the early 1930s (and also less likely to remain childless or have four or more children suggesting a strong move towards the two-child family over this period). Women born in the early 1950s were less likely to have one child than those born in the early 1930s only if they married at age 30 or above, perhaps because later marriage and later childbearing were becoming more acceptable.

Table 1. Multinomial regression model of completed family size among women born 1930-1954 (n = 13098); 2 children as reference category.

Significance: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Independent variables		Parameter estimates by completed family size			
		0	1	3	4+
Intercept		-1.739 ***	-1.082 ***	-0.656 ***	-1.186 ***
Marital history up to age 45	Continuously married	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Separated	0.779 ***	0.338 **	0.021	0.348 *
	Remarried	0.833 ***	0.634 ***	0.228 **	0.630 ***
	Re-separated	0.368	0.377	0.137	0.594 **
	Three marriages	0.601	0.176	0.102	0.820 *
Age at first marriage	<20	-0.548 ***	-0.281 **	0.323 ***	1.032 ***
	20-24	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	25-29	0.538 ***	0.254 **	-0.205 *	-0.409 ***
	30+	1.884 ***	0.932 ***	-0.573 *	-1.225 **
Birth cohort	1930-34	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	1935-39	-0.290 *	-0.375 ***	-0.100	-0.223 *
	1940-44	-0.337 **	-0.341 **	-0.106	-0.733 ***
	1945-49	-0.388 **	-0.397 **	-0.415 ***	-1.282 ***
	1950-54	-0.210	-0.090	-0.334 *	-1.485 ***
Educational qualifications	Higher education	-0.177	-0.098	0.178 *	0.165
	A level	0.280	0.328	0.220	0.449 *
	O level/ GCSE	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	CSE	0.116	0.039	0.023	-0.211
	Other	-0.218	0.089	0.314 *	0.923 ***
	None	0.361 ***	0.285 **	0.260 ***	0.743 ***
Interactions					
Separated ×	First married aged 25-29	0.566 *	0.564 *	-0.520	0.283
Separated ×	First married aged 30+	-0.160	1.363 **	-0.585	1.295 *
Remarried ×	First married aged 25-29	0.626	0.841 *	0.386	0.241
Separated ×	No educational qualifications	-0.455 *	-0.106	0.219	0.114
Married 3 times ×	Born 1940-44	1.485	1.475	0.853	1.575 *
First married aged 25-29 ×	A level qualifications	-0.146	-0.654	0.272	0.895
First married aged 30+ ×	Born 1945-49	0.654 *	0.182	0.959 **	1.664 **
First married aged 30+ ×	Born 1950-54	-0.645	-1.772 *	-0.752	1.586
A level qualifications ×	Born 1940-44	-1.037 *	-0.315	-0.611 *	-0.859 *
No educational qualifications ×	Born 1945-49	-0.345 *	-0.059	0.102	-0.015
First married aged <20 ×	Born 1935-39	0.309	0.312	0.028	-0.279 *
First married aged 30+ ×	Born 1935-39	0.485	0.455	0.509	1.047 *

As might be expected, women marrying as teenagers were least likely to have only one child rather than two, while those marrying at age thirty or above were the most likely to have one child (the exception being the most recent birth cohort as mentioned above). Although late marriage may be associated with very small families due to the shorter time exposed to the risk of childbearing, other factors such as career orientation or low childbearing motivation may promote both late marriage and small families (Kiernan, 1989). In addition, some women still single in their late thirties may decide to marry late in order to have at least one child. Mother's age at first birth is similarly related to completed family size among those with at least one child: 10.6% of women in the sample with an only child were aged 35 or above at the birth, compared to only 1.1% of women who went on to have further children.

Compared to those in stable marriages, women who had separated once by age 45 and those who married twice (but did not experience a second dissolution) were relatively more likely to have one child than two. This was particularly the case for those who married after age 25 and then experienced marital dissolution. Compared to women with O level or equivalent education only those with no educational qualifications had an above average propensity to have a single child or to remain childless. This result is perhaps surprising, but is consistent with more recent US research, that suggests a positive relationship between education and fertility at parities zero and one (Schoen et al., 1997; White and Kim, 1987). The model certainly does not provide any evidence for the suggestion (e.g. Bloom and Trussell, 1984) that very small families are the choice of the most educated among the birth cohorts considered here.

Overall, birth cohort, age at marriage and marital history are strongly associated with the probability of having only one child as opposed to two, with educational qualifications playing a smaller role. It is also noticeable that the factors associated with an above average probability of having one child (e.g. late marriage, marital dissolution) are virtually identical to those associated with childlessness. However, some factors are associated only with the probability of having a small family, for example late marriage, while others, such as remarriage or no educational qualifications are associated with both below and above average family sizes.

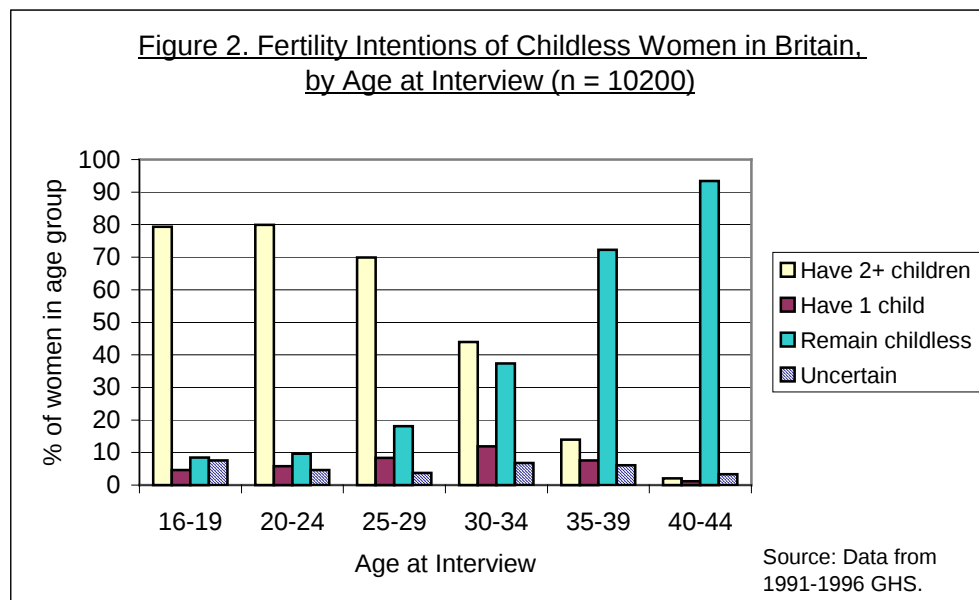
6. Childless Women: Who is Intending to have Just One Child?

Most work examining the fertility intentions of the childless (e.g. Schoen et al, 1997) is concerned with the decision whether or not to have a first child, in other words the decision to embrace parenthood rather than non-parenthood. However, those intending to have a first child encompass those intending to have one, two, three or more children. This analysis is different in aiming to identify the factors associated with intending to have one child only among the childless. Clearly, not all women will know at the childless stage how many children they intend to have, but it is expected here that uncertain women will either respond 'Don't Know' when asked whether they are intending to have a child (characteristics associated with this response are also investigated) or will state the commonly accepted ideal family size of two (Werner, 1986; Shaw, 1989). Therefore we would expect those actually stating an intention to have just one child to be a select group consisting of those who have a fairly firm commitment to this choice or who know that they are unlikely to be able to have more than one due to age or other factors.

This section uses the 1991-1996 rounds of the GHS to investigate the fertility intentions of women who are childless at interview. After excluding pregnant women (as their parity status with regards to fertility intentions is difficult to categorise), the sample consists of 10 200 childless women aged 16-44. Women of all marital statuses are included. The data used come from the responses to two questions – respondents were asked 'Do you think that you will

have any children?’ and if the response was ‘Yes’ or ‘Probably Yes’ they were asked ‘How many children do you think you will have born to you in all?’

Only 6.7% of women in the sample stated an intention to have one child. Nearly two-thirds were expecting to have two or more children, one-quarter to remain childless and 5.5% were very uncertain about their fertility intentions. Figure 2 shows that, as expected, the proportion of women intending to have two or more children declines with age from the late twenties onwards, with a corresponding increase with age in the proportion intending to remain childless. This is partly because the older women in the sample are a more select group of those who are *still* childless at older ages, while the younger women include many who intend to begin childbearing soon. Women aged 30-34 were most likely to state an intention to have one child (12%), with lower proportions at both younger and older ages. Uncertainty regarding fertility intentions is highest among teenagers, followed by women in their thirties. However, for some younger women, uncertainty may be associated with a response of two children, as young childless women may be stating the family size perceived to be ideal rather than predicting their personal fertility: earlier studies have suggested that young women may over-estimate their fertility for this reason (and may be more likely to remain childless or have one child than their intentions would suggest) (Werner, 1986; Shaw, 1989).



Among the under 35s, those intending two or three children were more likely to state a definite intention to have children rather than a probable intention. On the other hand, those expecting one child were more likely to have responded ‘Probably Yes’ than ‘Yes’, suggesting that some of those expressing an intention to have one child may be more reluctant to make a definite commitment to parenthood than those intending to have two or more children.

A crude comparison of various European countries reveals some clear differences in the proportions of childless women intending to have one child relative to not having children. Although the data from the various FFS reports (UNECE/UNPF, 2001) and the GHS in Britain are not directly comparable in terms of year of collection, exact question wordings and proportions responding ‘Don’t Know’, two broad groups of countries may be identified. In the majority of countries - France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia - one-child intentions are much more common than intentions to remain childless among women in their twenties. For

example, 12.3% of Italian women aged 20-24 in the 1995-96 FFS stated an intention to have a one-child family, while only 2.2% intended to remain childless (UNECE/UNPF, 2001). In contrast, British women in their twenties who are childless at interview are more likely to be intending to remain childless than to have one child (figure 2), as are comparable women from Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands, Switzerland and Poland. Poland provides the most extreme example, where 21.5% of childless 20-24 year olds in the 1991 FFS stated an intention to remain childless and only 4.2% were intending to have a one-child family (UNECE/UNPF, 2001). The patterns of fertility intentions are consistent with the actual fertility of the 1955-born cohorts of women in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal (Pearce, Cantisani and Laihonon, 1999). The differences in relative intentions for childlessness or one child cannot be accounted for purely by differences in the timing of childbearing between countries, as a variety of timing patterns exist within each of the two groups. There is also no clear geographical pattern to the two groups. The data instead suggest that many European countries have a social climate or other circumstances that favour any form of parenthood over non-parenthood, while in others childlessness appears to be more accepted than having a one-child family. Data from the 1994 International Social Survey Programme confirm that, among the European countries studied, adults in Great Britain and the Netherlands (along with the Republic of Ireland) are the most likely (>55%) to disagree with the statement that "People who never have children lead empty lives", implying a greater acceptance of childlessness in these countries. (Unfortunately ISSP data are not available for Belgium or Switzerland). Agreement with the statement was lowest in Hungary, followed by Bulgaria and Italy, all countries where the one-child family appeared to be a more commonly stated intention than non-parenthood. Poland is the exception, where agreement with the statement is medium and intended childlessness high relative to intended one-child families among young women. These observations certainly warrant further investigation.

Returning to the British data, a multinomial regression model was used to predict the probabilities of intending to have one child, remain childless, or be uncertain about fertility intentions, as opposed to intending to have two or more children. Covariates entered into the model as dummy variables were the woman's age at interview, union status, presence of stepchildren in the household, highest educational qualifications, current employment status, socio-economic group, housing tenure and income of family unit. All two-way interactions with age and union status were tested. The results are shown in Table 2.

As expected, age is clearly the most important variable associated with the fertility intentions of the childless. Compared to those aged 25-29, women aged 16-24 are less likely to be intending to remain childless and those aged 20-24 less likely to be intending a one-child family, while those aged 30-44 are much more likely to be intending to have one child, remain childless or be uncertain about their plans. These results suggest that uncertainty is higher among older women than younger women, but this may be because uncertain younger women often respond with the norm-value of two children (Werner, 1986; Shaw, 1989).

Marital status does not appear to be associated with the probability of intending to have a one-child family, but single non-cohabiting women, the separated or divorced and the remarried were more likely to state an intention to remain childless than those in first marriages. In addition the single and the remarried were most likely to be uncertain about their fertility intentions. Those in their early forties but not in a current union were less likely to be intending childlessness than other women their age, waiting perhaps for the right partner to appear.

Table 2. Multinomial regression model of childbearing intentions of women who are childless at interview (n = 10 200), with those intending to have two or more children as the reference category.

Significance: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Independent variables		Parameter estimates		
		Intend to have one child	Intend to remain childless	Very uncertain
Intercept		-1.972 ***	-1.598 ***	-3.395 ***
Woman's age at interview	16-19	-0.807	-1.222 **	-0.090
	20-24	-0.611 ***	-0.961 ***	-0.274
	25-29	0.000	0.000	0.000
	30-34	0.946 ***	1.266 ***	1.192 ***
	35-39	1.347 ***	2.912 ***	2.002 ***
	40-44	2.432 **	6.516 ***	5.062 ***
Woman's union status/history at interview	Single (not cohabiting)	-0.259	0.426 ***	1.105 ***
	Single cohabiting	0.175	0.167	0.046
	First marriage	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Separated/ divorced/ widowed	0.058	0.758 ***	-0.669
	Previously married, cohabiting	-0.770	-0.119	0.030
	Remarried	0.119	0.685 **	0.967 *
Step/foster/adopted child(ren) in household?	No	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Yes	1.382 *	1.796 ***	0.928
Highest educational qualifications	Higher education - degree	-0.178	-0.336 *	-0.051
	Higher - below degree	-0.459 **	-0.352 **	-0.248
	A level	-0.020	-0.131	0.044
	O level/ GCSE	0.000	0.000	0.000
	CSE (low)	-0.040	0.048	-0.002
	Other	-0.146	0.157	0.080
	None	0.112	0.528 ***	0.659 ***
Economic activity in previous week	Working full- time	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Working part-time	0.289 *	0.320 **	-0.056
	Unemployed	-0.308	-0.311	0.140
	Keeping house	0.100	0.871 **	0.769
	Permanently sick	-0.133	1.208 ***	0.129
	Student	-0.253	-0/030	0.215
	Other/missing	0.585	0.207	-0.223
Socio-economic group (last occupation)	Employer/ manager	0.112	0.103	-0.636 **
	Professional	0.012	0.096	-0.324
	Intermediate non-manual	-0.176	-0.034	-0.219
	Junior non-manual	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Personal service	0.058	-0.226	-0.187
	Skilled manual	0.067	0.384 *	0.085
	Semi-skilled manual	0.238	0.336 **	-0.140
	Unskilled manual	0.087	0.270	-0.156
	Other/missing	-0.336 *	0.102	-0.100
Housing tenure at interview	Owner-occupied	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Local authority housing	-0.217	0.001	-0.350
	Private/ other renting	-0.130	-0.231 *	-0.306
Weekly income of family unit at interview	<£200	0.027	0.050	0.074
	£200-399	0.000	0.000	0.000
	£400-599	0.065	0.040	0.051
	£600-799	-0.090	-0.224	-0.040
	£800-999	0.129	-0.005	0.011
	£1000+	-0.593 *	-0.305	-0.628
	missing	0.549 *	-0.024	0.303
Interactions				
Age 20-24 ×	Permanently sick	1.433	1.747 **	1.892 *
Age 20-24 ×	Student	0.467	-0.536	-1.546 *
Age 20-24 ×	Employer/manager	-1.496 *	-0.277	0.328
Age 20-24 ×	Local authority housing	0.965 **	0.240	0.905 **
Age 20-24 ×	Privately rented housing	0.295	0.426 *	-0.162
Age 30-34 ×	Higher education – degree	-0.565	-0.475 *	-0.196

Age 35-39 ×	A level education	0.207	0.452	1.015 *
Age 35-39 ×	CSE (low) education	1.250 *	0.754	1.256
Age 35-39 ×	Other qualifications	-0.609	-1.825 **	-0.045
Age 35-39 ×	Unemployed	-1.063	-1.006 *	-1.049
Age 35-39 ×	H/h Income £600-799/week	1.272 *	0.926 *	0.205
Age 40-44 ×	Single	-1.519	-1.461 *	-1.796 *
Age 40-44 ×	Separated/ divorced	-1.169	-1.741 *	-2.698 *
Age 40-44 ×	Other qualifications	-0.493	-2.044 *	-1.510
Age 40-44 ×	Working part-time	-0.423	-1.669 *	-1.567
Single ×	Unemployed	0.871 *	0.667 *	0.213
Single ×	Income missing	-0.829 **	-0.177	-0.080
Single cohabiting ×	Higher education – degree	-0.134	0.528 *	0.972 *
Single cohabiting ×	Income missing	-0.643	-0.943 *	0.123
Sep/divorced ×	H/h income <£200/week	-0.231	-0.820 *	1.398
Sep/divorced ×	Income missing	-0.498	-0.553	2.854 *
Prev.mar.cohab. ×	A level education	1.519 *	-0.161	0.252
Prev.mar.cohab. ×	Personal service occupation	1.573	1.258	3.565 *

As might be expected, women with one or more step, foster or adopted children in the household are significantly more likely to be intending to have a only one child themselves or to remain childless than those without. This confirms that the presence of partners' or others' children may have a dampening effect on intended fertility (unfortunately no data are available from the GHS on partners' non-resident children).

Compared to women with O level or equivalent as their highest educational qualification (usually taken at age 16), only those with higher but below degree level qualifications were less likely to intend to have one child, so education does not appear to be associated with a tendency towards one-child families. The only educational groups with an above average propensity to intend to have one child were women aged 35-39 with low level qualifications and previously married cohabiting women with A level qualifications (see interactions). In contrast, intended childlessness is less common among those with any form of higher education and more common among those with no qualifications than among those with O level or equivalent qualifications, implying that parenthood may be more valued among the more educated. This result may be surprising, but is consistent with the results in Table 1 where an association was found between a lack of qualifications and very small families. It could also be a feature of selectivity in the childless sample, whereby if those with no qualifications tended to start childbearing earlier than average, those still in the sample of childless women at each age will stand out more than their more highly educated contemporaries, many of whom will still be childless by age 30.

Of the socio-economic variables, few were associated with intending to have just one child. Surprisingly, women working part-time were more likely to be intending to have one child than those working full-time, as were unemployed single women. Those with very high household incomes (>£1000 per week) were less likely to state a one-child intention than the reference group (£200-399 per week) and those with no data on income were also significant in various ways but no substantive conclusions can be drawn from this. Among women aged 20-24, those living in local authority accommodation were more likely than average to be intending a one child family or to be uncertain, while employers and managers in this age group were less likely than the reference group (junior non- manual occupations) to state a one-child intention.

Slightly more factors were associated with intended childlessness: those with higher education, very high household income, living in privately rented accommodation (except at age 20-24) or divorced with a very low income were less likely to be expecting to remain childless than women in the reference categories, while those with no qualifications, keeping

house, permanently sick, single and unemployed or in skilled or semi-skilled occupations were most likely not to be expecting any children. Keeping house and part-time work are often thought of as statuses associated with motherhood, while full-time work might be expected to be associated with smaller family size intentions. However, these results suggest that married childless women who are keeping house or working part-time are in fact more likely to intend to remain childless than their full-time working counterparts.

Overall the results lend a limited amount of support to the idea that similar factors are associated with intended childlessness and one-child intentions. Only age, presence of stepchildren in the household and below-degree level higher education were associated in the same direction with intentions to remain childless or have one child. A larger number of factors were associated with intended childlessness than with intended one-child families, perhaps indicating that those intending to remain childless can be differentiated more from those expecting two or more children than can those expecting one; in other words those intending to embrace parenthood in some form may have more in common than those not intending to become parents.

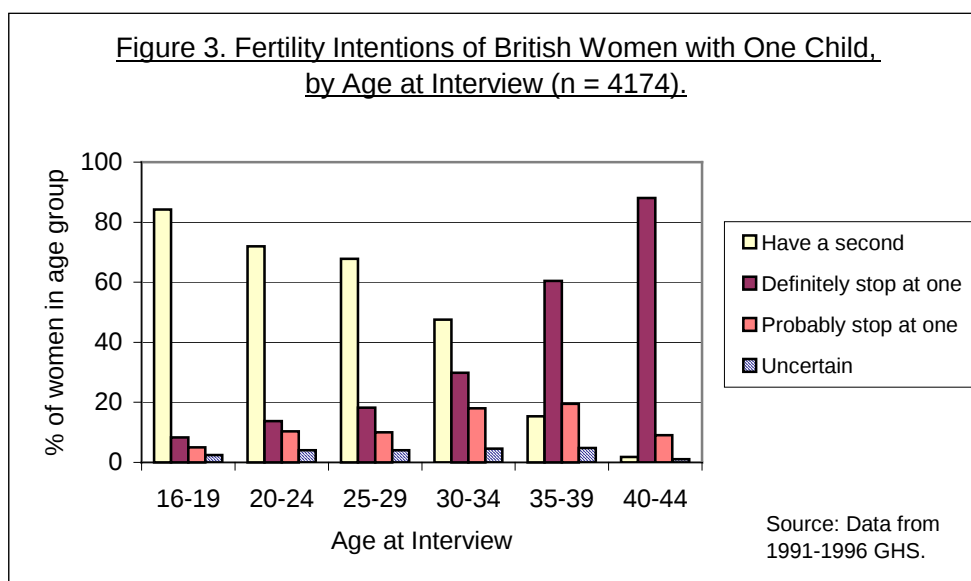
To summarise, a childless woman's age and the presence of other children in the household appear to be most strongly related to her future fertility intentions. As few other variables were significant it is likely that other differences reflect attitudes to childbearing and personal preferences that are not measured here.

7. Women with One Child: Who is Intending to Stop at One?

This section investigates the fertility intentions of women with one child at interview, using the 1991-96 rounds of the GHS. After excluding pregnant women and those whose child was no longer alive by the time of interview, the sample consisted of 4174 women aged 16-44.

Of these women at parity one, 27% were either definitely intending to have a second child, 18% probably intending to do so, 38% stated that they definitely were not intending to have another child, 13% that they would probably not have another child and 4% were very uncertain about their intentions. In all, 35% expressed some form of uncertainty over whether to have a second child: this could be interpreted as the beginning of a transition towards greater acceptance of the one-child family as a possible choice (Morgan, 1982).

As expected, fertility intentions varied considerably by age (figure 3), with the majority of women under thirty intending to have a second birth and the majority of those over 35 not intending to have a second birth. This is not surprising as the population of younger women with one child is likely to include a large number of women who have not yet had an intended second birth, while the population of older women will be more selective of those intending to stop at one. Complete uncertainty is low with less than 4% of women responding 'Don't Know'.



A comparison of figure 3 with figure 2 shows clearly that British women are much more likely to state an intention to stop at one child if they already have one child than they are to state an intention to have exactly one child before becoming a parent. For example 5.8% of childless women aged 20-24 in Britain state that they definitely or probably intend to have a child and expect to have only one, while 24% of those aged 20-24 with one child are definitely or probably intending to stop at one. A similar though weaker pattern can be observed in some other European countries, for example Switzerland and Portugal (UNECE/UNPF, 2001). This greater likelihood of intending to have one child at parity one than parity zero could be interpreted in various ways. It is likely that negative experiences with parenthood cause some women to revise their intentions downwards, so that those initially intending two or more decide to stop at one. It could also be the case that expressing a one-child intention is deemed to be more acceptable among those with some experience of parenthood than among the childless who are considered to be less informed about parenthood.

An examination of data on sterilisation and contraception from the 1998 GHS can shed some further light on the fertility intentions of British women with one child (n = 588 non-pregnant women). Of those stating a definite intention to stop at one child (n = 228), 22.8% were unable to have a second as they or their partner had been sterilised (three-quarters of these were aged 35 or above), while a further 11.8% stated that they would find it difficult or impossible to have another child, mainly due to difficulty in conceiving. This indicates that two-thirds of those definitely intending to stop at one are potentially able to have a child. Virtually all the women stating a definite or probable intention to stop at one child were either sterilised themselves, living with a sterilised partner, using some form of contraception, not having sexual intercourse with a male partner or considered themselves unlikely to conceive. Only 10 women (3.2%) were at risk of a second birth and not using contraception due to not liking it or just not using it, although some of those using less reliable methods of contraception or perceiving themselves to be infertile may be at some risk of pregnancy. Of those intending to have a second child, the majority was also using some form of contraception, presumably for spacing purposes. Only 11.4% were trying to get pregnant at the time of interview. In general, stated contraceptive use appears to match up with stated fertility intentions.

Returning to the 1991-96 data, a multinomial regression model was used to predict the probabilities of stating a definite intention not to have another child, a probable intention not to have another child or uncertainty about fertility intentions, as opposed to intending to have

Table 3. Multinomial regression model of childbearing intentions of women with one child at interview (n = 4174), with those intending a second child as the reference category.

Significance: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Independent variables		Parameter estimates		
		Definitely stop at one	Probably stop at one	Very uncertain
Intercept		-1.668 ***	-2.055 ***	-4.020 ***
Woman's age at interview	16-19	-0.367	0.146	-2.003
	20-24	-0.196	0.147	-0.244
	25-29	0.000	0.000	0.000
	30-34	0.710 ***	1.018 ***	-0.025
	35-39	2.300 ***	1.845 ***	1.471 ***
	40-44	4.153 ***	3.255 ***	2.172 **
Woman's union status/history at interview	Single (not cohabiting)	0.670 ***	0.889 ***	0.120
	Single cohabiting	-0.365	-0.126	-0.637
	First marriage	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Separated/ divorced/ widowed	1.091 ***	0.717 *	0.378
	Previously married, cohabiting	0.715 *	0.354	-1.182
	Remarried	0.664 **	0.436	0.689
Age of child at interview (time since last birth)	0-1 years	-1.198 ***	-1.149 ***	0.875
	2-3 years	0.000	0.000	0.000
	4-5 years	1.057 ***	0.774 ***	0.557
	6-10 years	1.654 ***	1.164 ***	2.934 ***
	11-15 years	2.374 ***	1.321 ***	1.203 *
	16+ years	3.440 ***	1.840 **	1.676
Sex of child	Boy	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Girl	0.181	-0.135	0.204
Step/foster/adopted child(ren) in household?	No	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Yes	0.609	0.826	-0.131
Woman's highest educational qualification	Higher education – degree	-0.978 ***	-0.543 *	-0.949
	Higher – below degree	-0.192	0.001	0.217
	A level	0.065	0.518 *	-0.448
	O level/ GCSE	0.000	0.000	0.000
	CSE	-0.406 *	-0.156	0.114
	Other	0.168	0.260	0.100
	None	0.500 *	-0.358	0.288
Economic activity in previous week	Working full- time	-0.146	-0.350	1.229 **
	Working part-time	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Unemployed	-0.008	-0.112	-0.235
	Keeping house	-0.403	-0.716 **	0.587
	Permanently sick	0.603	-0.633	0.357
	Other/missing	-0.272	-0.818	-0.824
Housing tenure at interview	Owner-occupied	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Local authority housing	-0.029	-0.170	-0.005
	Private/other renting	-0.142	0.009	-0.194
Socio-economic group (last occupation)	Employer/ manager	0.202	0.480 *	-0.948
	Professional	-0.681	-0.571	0.823
	Intermediate non-manual	-0.113	0.185	0.611 *
	Junior non-manual	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Personal service	-0.007	-0.202	-0.236
	Skilled manual	0.043	0.146	0.335
	Semi-skilled manual	-0.138	0.605 *	-1.010
	Unskilled manual	0.216	0.294	-0.189
	Other/missing	-0.054	0.240	0.854 *
Weekly income of family unit at interview	<£200	-0.007	0.081	0.555
	£200-399	0.000	0.000	0.000
	£400-599	-0.050	-0.097	-0.856 **
	£600-799	-0.503 *	-0.052	-1.097 *
	£800-999	0.044	-0.021	-0.312
	£1000+	-0.685 *	-0.653	-1.720 *
	Missing	0.433	-0.068	0.242
Interactions				

Age 20-24 ×	Separated/ divorced	-1.532 *	-0.532	-1.724
Age 20-24 ×	Intermediate non-manual	1.116 **	0.358	0.310
Age 20-24 ×	Semi-skilled occupation	0.048	-1.019 *	0.859
Age 30-34 ×	Separated/ divorced	-1.156 **	-0.211	0.205
Age 30-34 ×	A level qualifications	-1.025 **	-0.949 *	0.538
Age 30-34 ×	No qualifications	0.366	0.331	1.405 **
Age 30-34 ×	Semi-skilled occupation	0.222	-1.327 **	0.588
Age 35-39 ×	Separated/ divorced	-1.324 **	0.123	-0.216
Age 35-39 ×	A level qualifications	-1.101 *	-0.743	-0.125
Age 35-39 ×	Income missing	-1.322 **	0.080	-0.681
Age 40-44 ×	Child is a girl	-0.940	-0.955	-2.254 *
Age 40-44 ×	Higher education – degree	1.497	1.623	3.492 *
Single ×	Child aged 0-1 years	0.961 **	0.343	0.808
Single ×	Child aged 4-5 years	-0.691 *	-0.643	-0.389
Single ×	Income missing	-0.791	-0.500	1.586 *
Single cohabiting ×	Child aged 0-1 years	1.037 **	0.616	0.196
Single cohabiting ×	Child aged 11-15 years	0.475	1.155	3.370 *
Single cohabiting ×	Higher education - degree	-0.645	0.206	2.970 **
Separated/divorced ×	Child aged 0-1 years	0.662	0.643	1.684 *
Separated/divorced ×	CSE qualifications	0.899	1.039 *	0.751
Child aged 0-1 ×	No qualifications	-0.574	1.055 **	-0.352
Child aged 0-1 ×	Working full-time	0.327	0.451	-1.397 *
Child aged 0-1 ×	Keeping house	0.835 **	0.171	-1.322 *
Child aged 4-5 ×	Income missing	0.307	0.152	1.781 *
Child aged 6-10 ×	No qualifications	-0.617 *	0.453	-1.353 *
Child aged 6-10 ×	Working full-time	0.199	-0.142	-1.810 **
Child aged 6-10 ×	Keeping house	0.696 *	0.084	-1.382 *
Child aged 6-10 ×	H/h income <£200/week	-1.019 ***	-1.232 ***	-1.629 **
Child aged 6-10 ×	H/h income £800-999/week	-1.358 *	-2.633 *	-1.597
Child aged 16+ ×	Local authority housing	-1.507	-2.284 *	-0.852
Child is a girl ×	No qualifications	-0.704 **	-0.204	-0.548
Child is a girl ×	Working full-time	0.033	0.576 *	0.208
Child is a girl ×	Keeping house	0.020	0.812 **	0.504

a second child. The covariates tested in the model were the same as those for the previous model for childless women, but two additional variables relating to the first birth were included: age of child at interview (or time since first birth) and whether the child was a boy or girl. All interactions with woman's age, marital status, child's age and sex were tested and those significant in any category kept in the model. The results are shown in Table 3.

The most important factors associated with the fertility intentions of women with one child are clearly the women's age and the age of her child (or time since last birth). Older women were more likely to be definitely or probably intending to stop at one child or to be very uncertain than women in their late twenties, with the differences increasing in magnitude with age. However, no significant differences were found between women aged 16-24 and those aged 25-29 at interview, suggesting that age is not associated with fertility intentions below age thirty. As would be expected, those with a child under two were less likely to state an intention to stop at one than to women whose child was aged two or three at interview, while those with an older child were more likely to be intending to stop at one or be uncertain, again with the magnitude of the difference increasing with age. This confirms that the longer it is since a woman gave birth, the less likely it is that she will intend to have a second birth.

The results for marital status are interesting. Little difference is found in the fertility intentions of single cohabiting women and those in first marriages, suggesting that the formalisation of early unions has little impact on fertility. Non-cohabiting single women, however, are more likely than the married to be intending to stop at one child, particularly if the birth was very recent, as are the separated and divorced at age 25-29 (but not at ages 20-

24 or 30-39). Women in later unions, whether remarriages or postmarital cohabiting unions are more likely than the married to state a definite intention to stop at one. The results indicate that differences in intentions to have a second child exist between women in unions and those outside unions and between earlier and later unions, but not between formal and informal unions (consistent with other models of fertility intentions (Jefferies 2001)).

Surprisingly, having a foster, adopted or stepchild in the household is not significantly associated with fertility intentions (perhaps due to small sample size), nor does it make any difference whether the woman has a boy or a girl apart from in certain subgroups such as those with no qualifications.

As in the previous model, few socio-economic indicators are associated with intentions to stop at one or have a second child. Compared to those with O level or equivalent qualifications, women with a degree are less likely to state an intention to stop at one, as are those with CSEs or those aged 30-39 with A levels qualifications, while women with no qualifications were more likely to state a definite intention to stop at one. This does not indicate a clear relationship between education and propensity to stop at one child, but if any exists it appears to be negative. A possible explanation for this pattern is that the more highly educated experience less conflict between employment and family-building as they are more able to afford good childcare and be empowered to fit their work hours around their families. However, women working full-time were particularly likely to be uncertain about their fertility plans around the time that they might be expected to produce a second child (first child aged 2-5), perhaps being unsure as to whether they could manage a larger family and stay in employment or whether they could afford to give up work to have a second child.

Only those in employer/manager and semi-skilled occupations and those aged 20-24 in intermediate non-manual occupations appear to be more likely than junior manual workers to be intending to stop at one child. On the other hand, women keeping house and looking after a toddler and those in households with relatively high incomes are more inclined than average to have a second child, as are those with a child aged 6-10 and a very low household income or income of £800-999 per week. In simple cross-tabulations, some relationship between economic activity and second birth intentions is apparent, but it is likely that differences in age, marital status and age of child can predict economic activity to a large degree and this explains the lack of significance of economic activity in the model.

To sum up, older women, those with an older child and those who have experienced marital dissolution or are not in a current union are most likely not to be intending a second child. Socio-economic variables appear to be poor predictors of intentions to have a second child; there is no clear relationship between education and propensity not to be intending a second child when other factors are controlled. However, if many women are put off having a second birth by negative experiences of pregnancy, childbirth or childrearing the first time round, we might not expect any particular socio-economic differences in such factors.

8. Discussion and Future Work

Despite mean family size in Britain falling to just below replacement levels among the most recent cohorts to finish childbearing, the proportion of women finishing their reproductive years with just one child is relatively low, compared to many other European countries where one-child families are more common both in women's intentions and their actual fertility. Both completed family size and the intentions of childless women in Britain suggest that childlessness is more accepted than the one-child family. Few childless women intend to have just one child, although women who already have one child are rather more likely to intend to

stop at one. These data combined suggest that more women actually have just one child than initially intend to do so, an observation that is not confined to Britain¹.

This work has provided an initial exploration of the factors associated with having or intending to have a one-child family in Britain. The results tend to be consistent with the majority of one-child families arising passively from circumstances or choices in other spheres rather than from a deliberate choice to have one child. For example, in the first model, late age at marriage or childbearing initiation were found to be associated with having a one-child family, suggesting that the decision to postpone family formation may lead to having only one child due to lower fecundity at older ages. Similarly not being in a union at the time of interview was associated with intending not to have a second child among those at parity one, indicating that union circumstances may play an important role. Therefore decisions to delay the initiation of childbearing or decisions whether and when to form or dissolve unions may lead to a passive rather than active decision to have a one-child family.

Although some qualitative sources suggest that some British women are actively choosing to have a one-child family, the low importance of socio-economic variables in the models does not really lend much support to Laybourn's (1994) suggestion that such a choice may be more common among highly educated and aspiring professional women. It is likely then that those who do deliberately choose a one-child family do so out of personal preferences and perhaps a willingness to deviate from social norms. It is also quite possible that women choosing to have just one child share some of the views identified among childless women by McAllister and Clarke (1998), for example, seeing few advantages to themselves in having children. Some of these childless women also viewed parenthood as a large commitment and responsibility and this view may be shared by some women who wish to have just one child and bring it up 'properly' rather than not being able to give enough time to two or more children. It certainly seems that the two-child norm and stereotypes of only children prevent more British women from actively choosing this family size, despite increased diversity in family formation patterns and tolerance of 'alternative' lifestyles.

In some ways, this research has shown that those having or intending to have one child are more similar to those who remain or intend to remain childless than to other parents. Among those born between 1930 and 1955, late marriage, separation or remarriage and a lack of educational qualifications were associated with both childlessness and having just one child. Similarly among currently childless women in the early 1990s, being older and having a stepchild or children living in the household was associated both with intentions towards childlessness and one-child families. However, marital status was associated with intended childlessness but not one-child intentions, while socio-economic factors were slightly associated with both types of small family intentions but in different ways. It might be fair to conclude that some factors predict parenthood, while others predict family sizes below two.

Will Britain embrace the one-child family further in the future or continue to hold back? In 1981, Judith Blake suggested that any future increases in the one-child family (in the US) might not reflect preferences, but simply reflect increased postponement of childbearing and higher rates of marital dissolution. It is certainly plausible that the continuing postponement of childbearing witnessed in Britain in recent years might lead to an increase in one-child families, although it is equally possible that it could simply lead to increased childlessness. While marital dissolution may continue to play a role in influencing completed family size, non-marriage and postponement of marriage may have more influence on the childbearing of women born during the 1960s and later. Again though, this could result in increased childlessness as well as a possible increase in one-child families. Therefore although current trends are consistent with smaller family sizes, it is not clear whether this will lead to an

¹ Symeonidou (2000) has made a similar observation from a study of fertility intentions and actual fertility of Greek women over a 14 year period.

increase in one-child families in Britain, as has occurred in some other European countries, or just to increased childlessness. If, however, one-child families did become more common purely as a result of the postponement of fertility initiation and union formation, this might create a climate that is less disapproving of one-child families and therefore pave the way for an increase in the proportion of women *actively* choosing this family size (see Morgan (1982) for a discussion of the way in which current fertility intentions in a population are influenced by period fertility). The effects of government policies on family size decisions in Britain are unclear. Current policies relating to work and social security seem to be increasingly focused on helping those with children; however the current availability of affordable childcare, though improving, is unlikely to encourage working mothers to have large families. While government policies aim not to discourage childbearing, such policies alone are unlikely to influence the proportion of women choosing a one-child family in a society where the two-child norm is so prevalent.

This study has taken a preliminary look at fertility and fertility intentions relating to the one-child family, but many relevant factors could not be examined due to data restrictions. Future work will use data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS), a cohort study of those born in 1958, to investigate the formation of one-child families. Although these data cannot tell us about the intentions of women currently in their twenties or thirties, as they refer to one birth cohort only, they do have two significant advantages. First, the NCDS provides a much wider range of variables, for example on women's attitudes to childbearing and family life. For those with one child, data is also available on pregnancy and birth complications, another factor that may be associated with revised fertility intentions among some women. Second, the data will enable us to examine women's fertility intentions at age 23 and 33 to see whether intentions change over time and how they may relate to union and socio-economic circumstance and to actual childbearing up to age 43. This will provide much more information about the 'process' of having a one-child family among members of the 1958 cohort.

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