

Between existential fulfilment and economic constraints:

Unpacking the childbearing decision-making process

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Childbearing decision making

Decision to have a first child or have additional children, one of biggest life decisions

Involves consideration of perceived costs and benefits of having a(nother) child.

Large number of scales and instruments created to measure perceived costs & benefits.

Costs/negative motivations: Direct economic cost, foregone wages, stress and worry of raising children, discomfort of pregnancy and labour, limited time for leisure or other activities, potential for relationship stress, concern for overpopulation, environmental problems.

Benefits/positive motivations: Providing purpose to life, carrying on family name, having someone to love, social recognition, companionship for another child, strengthening/growing existing relationship with partner, support in old age



Childbearing decision making

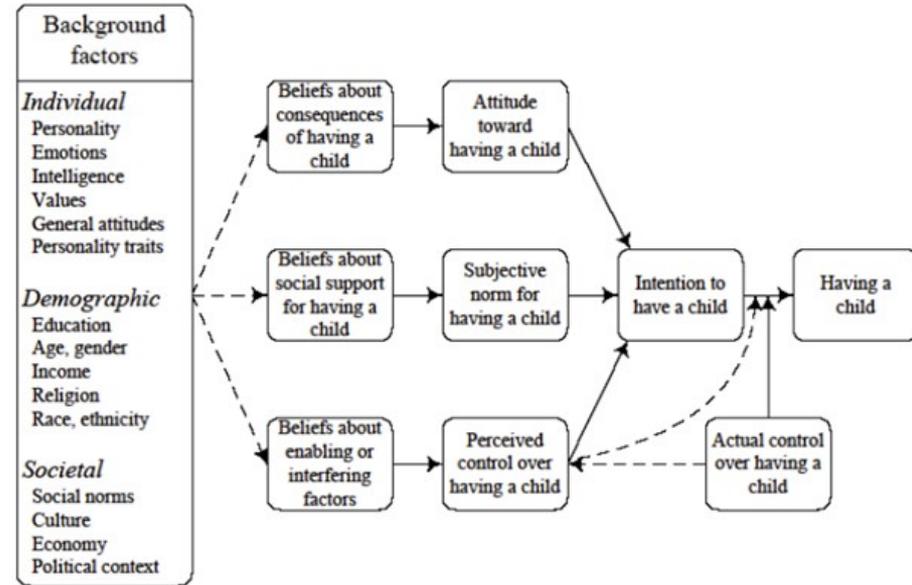
Cost & benefit considerations key component of many theoretical models of fertility decisions.

- Early economic models e.g. Becker (1960)
- 'Value of Children' theory based on psychology

Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1985)

- Beliefs about the perceived positive or negative consequences of having a child collectively, contribute to the development of either a favourable or unfavourable attitude regarding the decision to have a child.
- In turn attitudes towards having a child influence the intention to have a child

Theory of planned behaviour applied to fertility decisions



Source: Ajzen & Klobas 2013

What we know

Bulk of existing research from the 1970s and 1980s

- **Differences over time:**

Importance of instrumental considerations (e.g. assistance in old age) have declined in importance over time, and emotional benefits given higher consideration.

Opportunity cost (economic cost) increased due to increasing female labour force participation?

- **Differences by parity:**

Emotional and psychological benefits more important for first child? (Bulatao, 1981).

- **Differences by gender?**

Women more concerned with opportunity costs and limits to their employment and men more concerned about direct economic costs? (Waren & Pals 2013)

- **Differences across countries?**

- **Differences by socio-economic status?**

Research questions

- Do childbearing considerations differ for men and women in Australia?
- How do childbearing considerations differ by socio-economic status?
- How do considerations differ for those who want or don't want children?

Data & method

2019 Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. Longitudinal national household panel survey that has been conducted since 2001.

All members of a household aged 15+ interviewed. Range of topics including employment, education, childbearing and family life.

Respondents who are aged 18-49 years old (women) or men who have a partner aged 18-49 (regardless of their own age) , or men who have no partner but are aged 18-54

Sample size= **8,261**

Rate importance of different items in considering to have a child or not.

Considerations against

- The stress and worry of raising children
- Having time for leisure or social activities
- The general cost of raising children
- Having time and energy for your career

Considerations for

- Giving your parents grandchildren
- Having someone to care for you when you are old
- Having someone to love
- Providing more purpose to life

Each rated as Not important, Of limited importance, Important, Very Important

Data & method

Dependent variable:

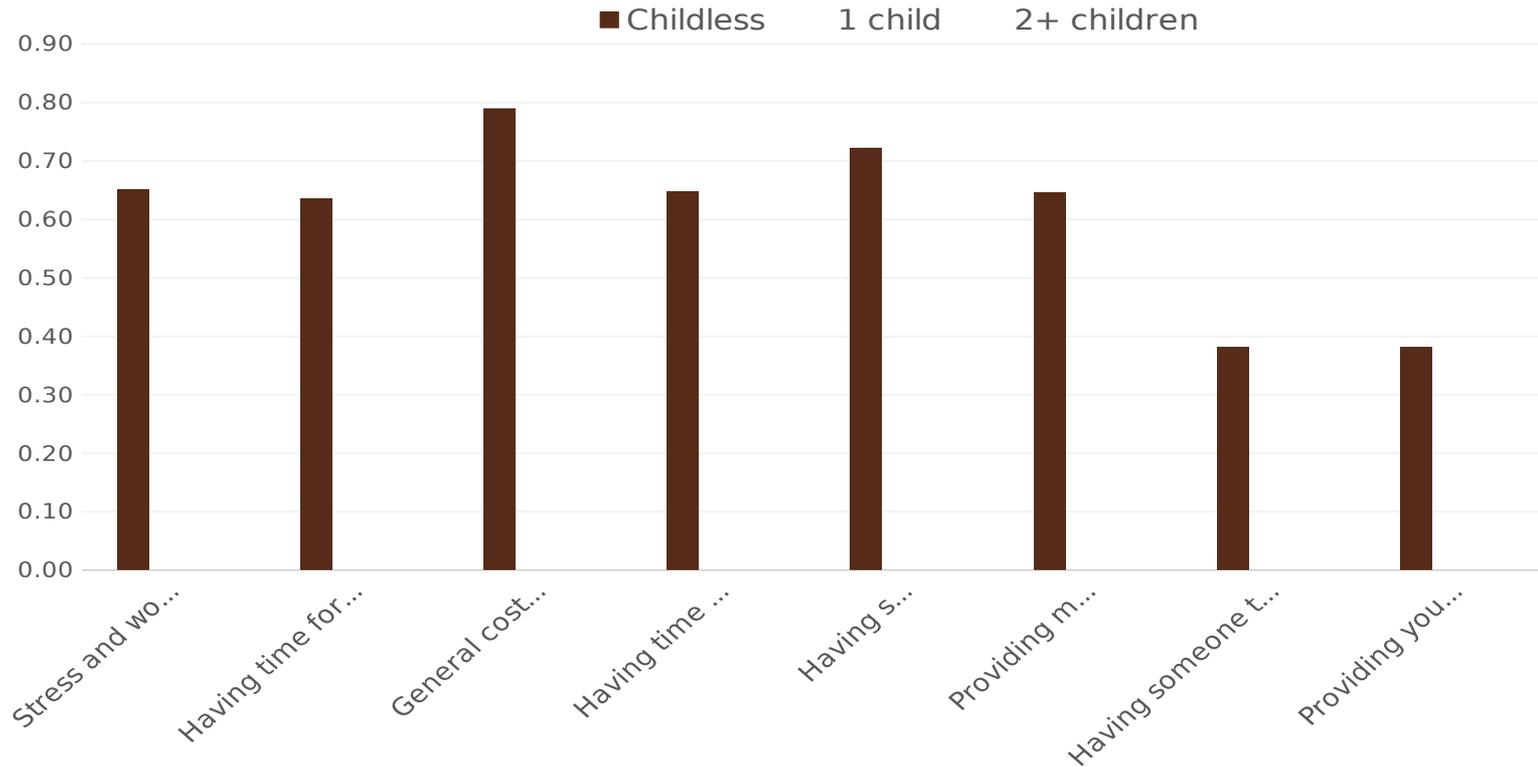
Binary variable: 1 consideration rated as 'very important', 0 otherwise

Independent variables:

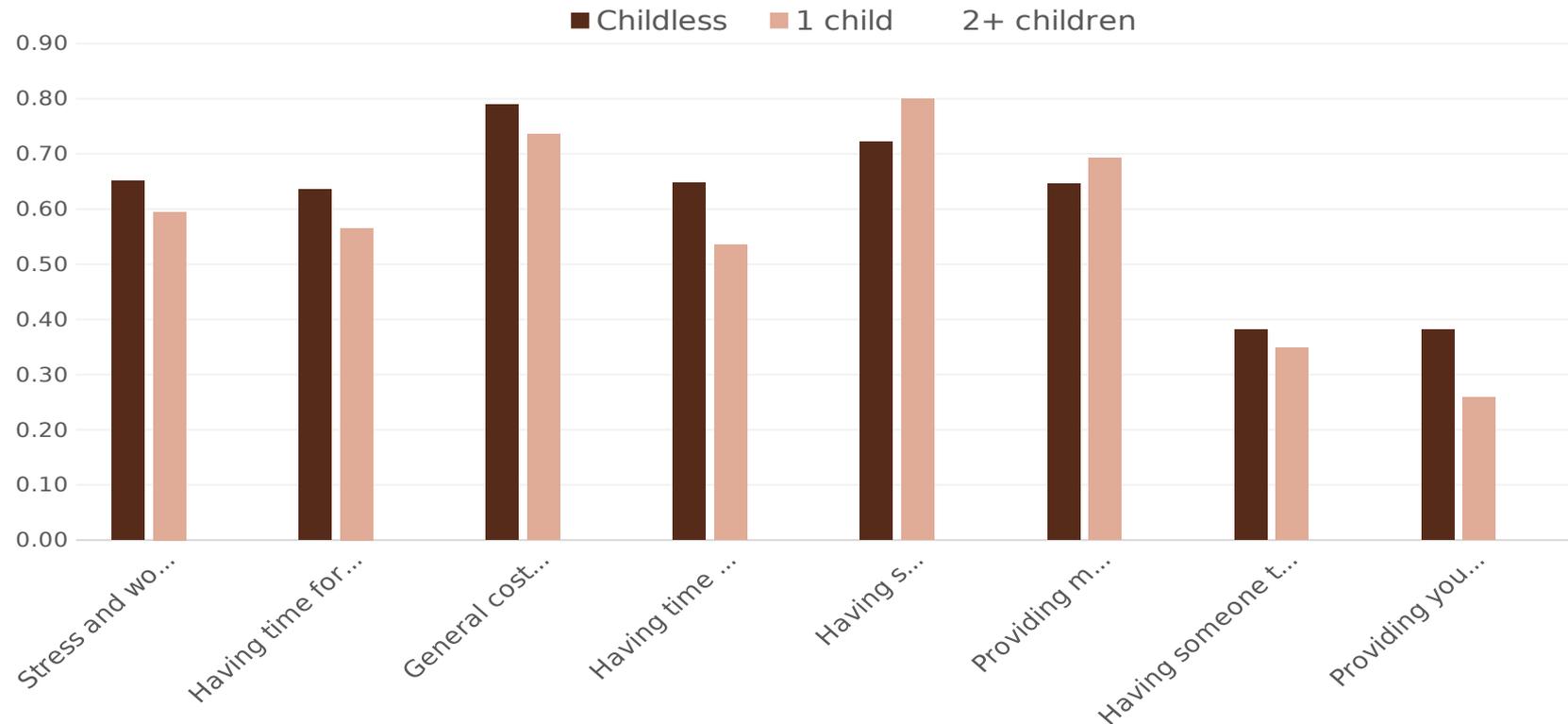
Sex	Age group	Highest education level	Self-assessed financial prosperity	Relationship status	Country of birth	Childbearing desire
Male	18-24	University	Poor/very poor	Married	Australia	Low score (0-3)
	25-29	Diploma/higher certificate	Just getting along	Cohabiting	Other English-speaking country	Medium/ambivalent (4-6)
	30-34	Year 12	Prosperous/very comfortable	Single	Other non-English speaking country	High score (7+)
Female	35-39	Year 11 or below				
	40+					

Separate logistic regression for each consideration, and for each parity

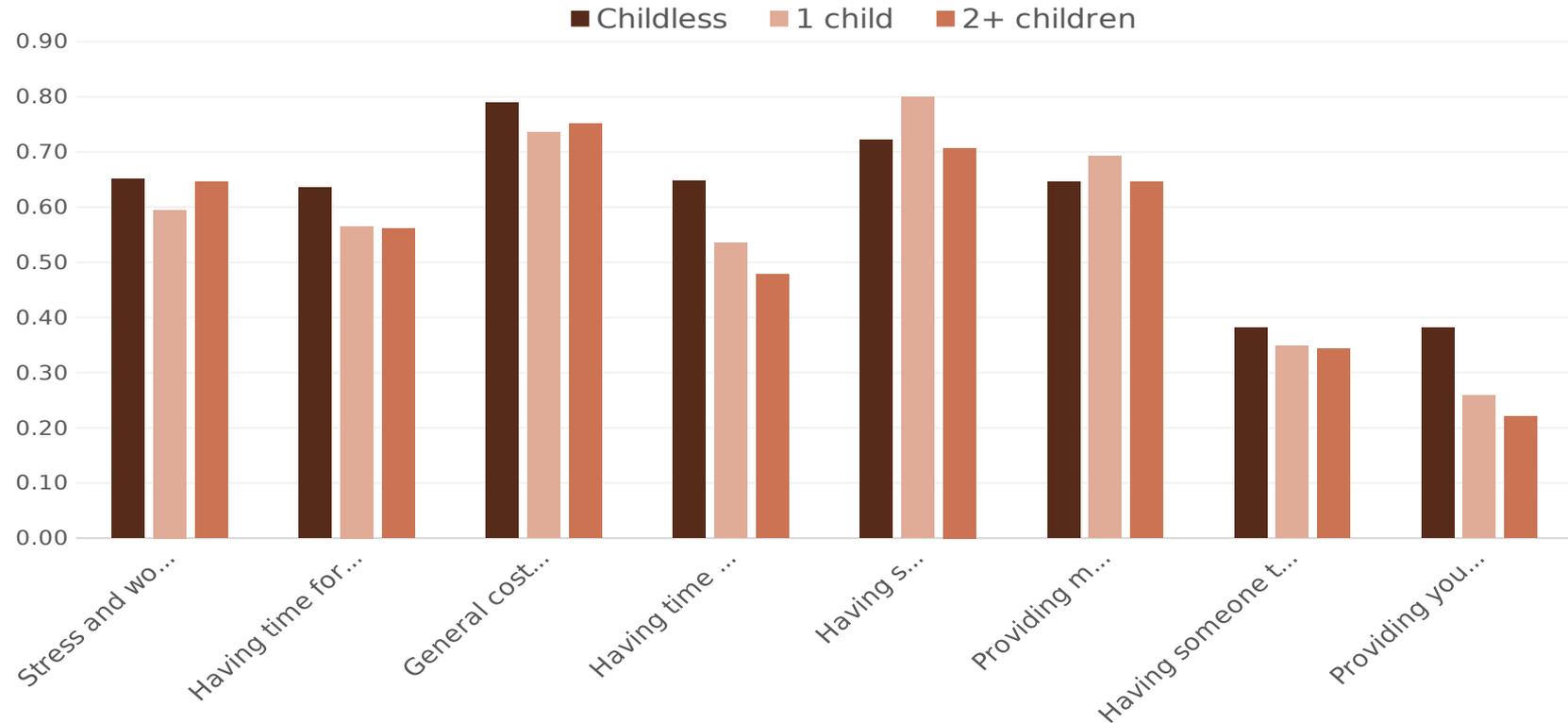
Proportion rating consideration as 'important' or 'very important', by parity



Proportion rating consideration as 'important' or 'very important', by parity



Proportion rating consideration as 'important' or 'very important', by parity



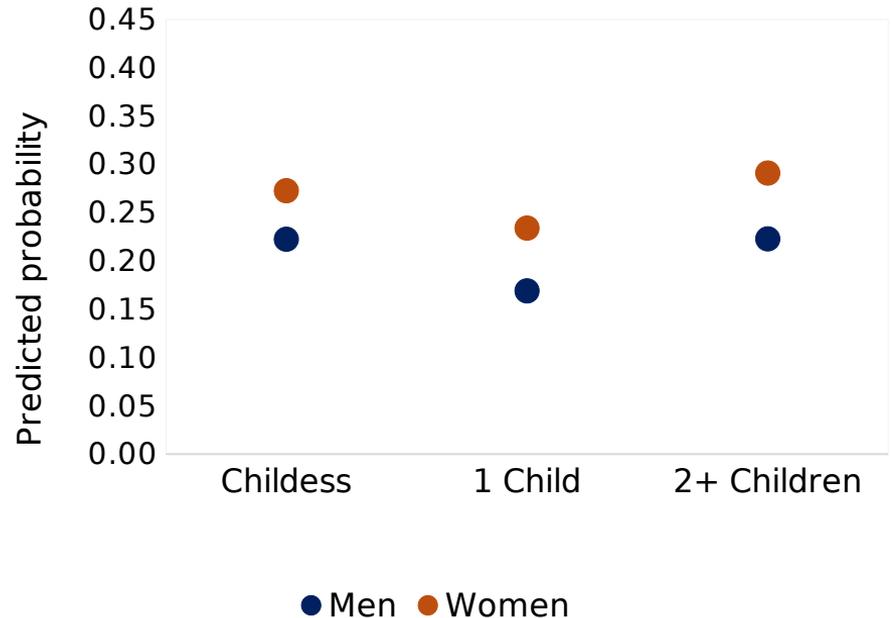
Multivariate results: Gender

Women significantly more likely than men to rate following considerations as very important :

- *Stress and worry of raising children*
- *Time and energy for career**
- *General cost of raising children*

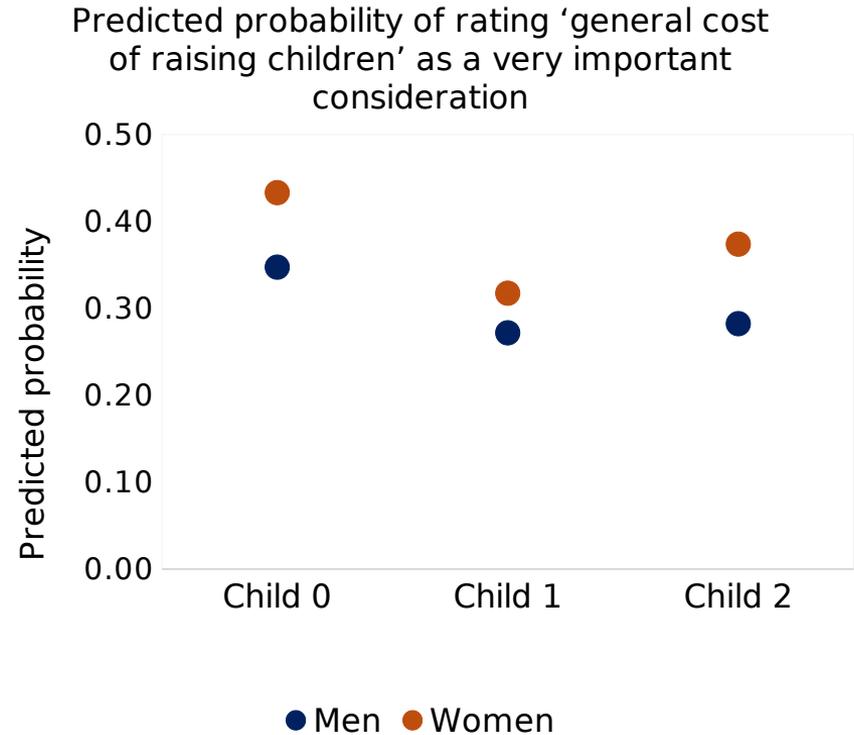
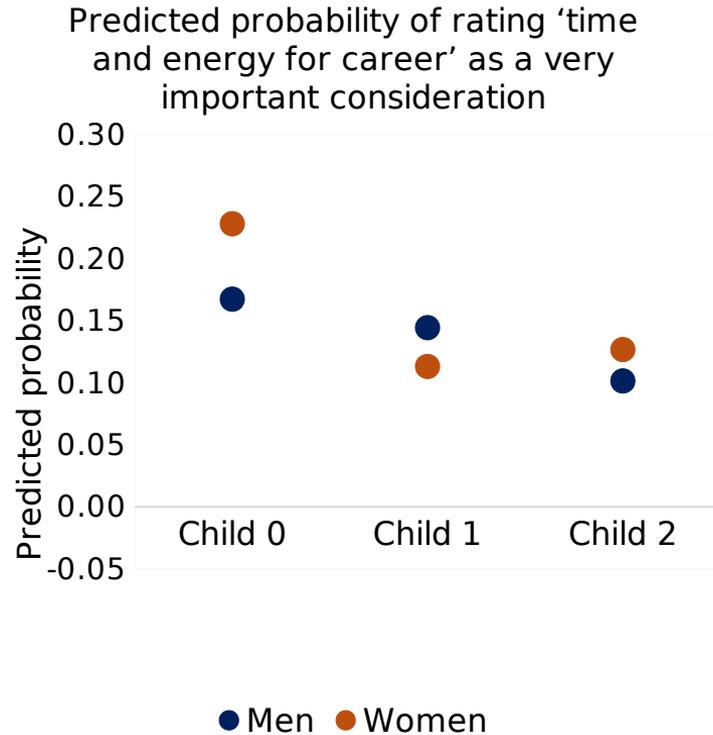
No significant gender differences for other considerations.

Predicted probability of rating 'stress and worry of raising children' as a very important consideration



Note: controlling for age, highest education level, partnership status, country of birth

Multivariate results: Gender

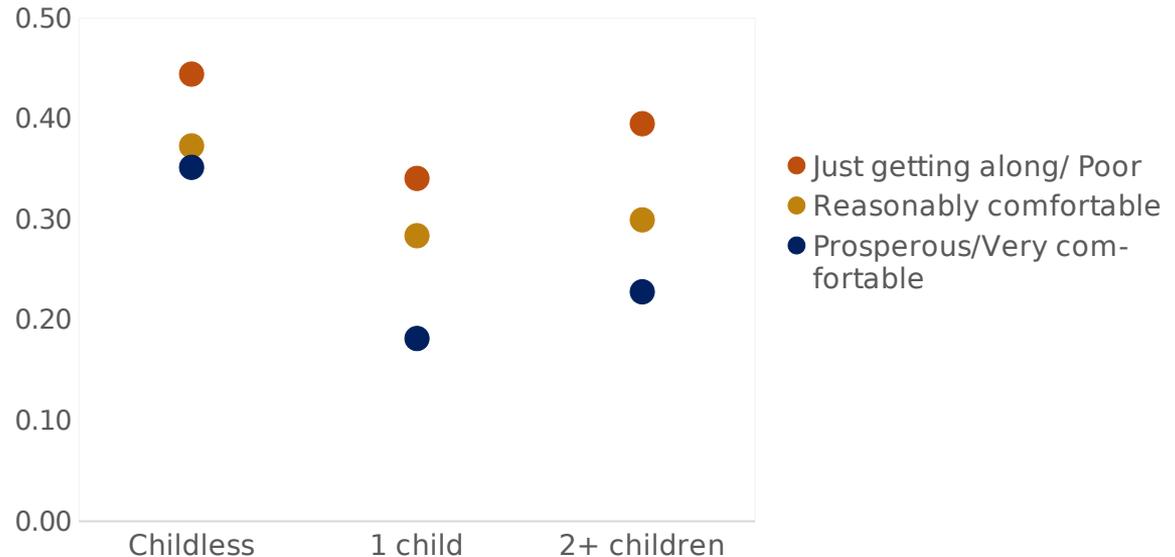


Multivariate results: Socio-economic status

Self-assessed financial prosperity only significant predictor of rating **'general cost of children'** as very important.

Larger difference for those for those with children already.

Predicted probability of rating 'general cost of children' as a very important consideration



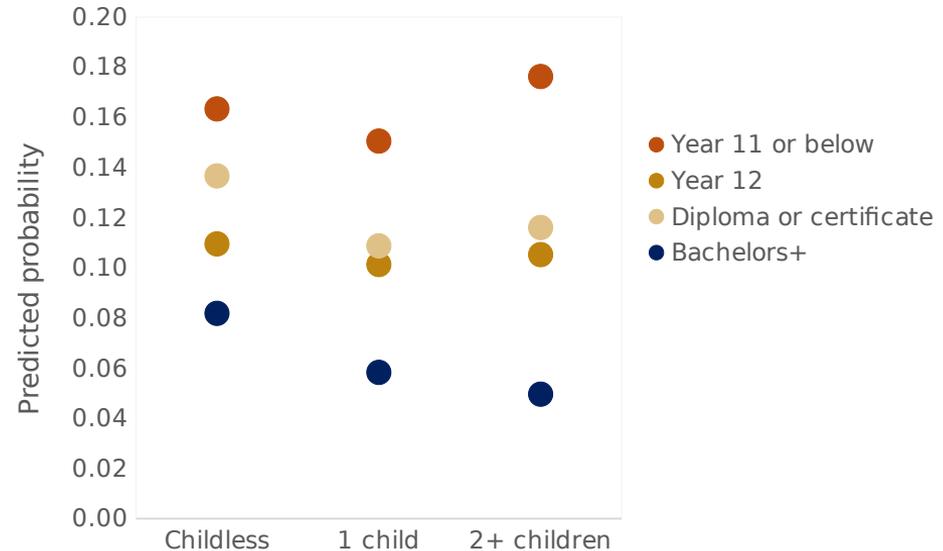
*controlling for gender, age, highest education level, partnership status, country of birth

Multivariate results: Socio-economic status

Education level

- Lower education more importance given to consideration of **having someone to look after you when older** compared to those with a university degree

Predicted probability of rating 'having someone to look after you when you are old' as a very important consideration



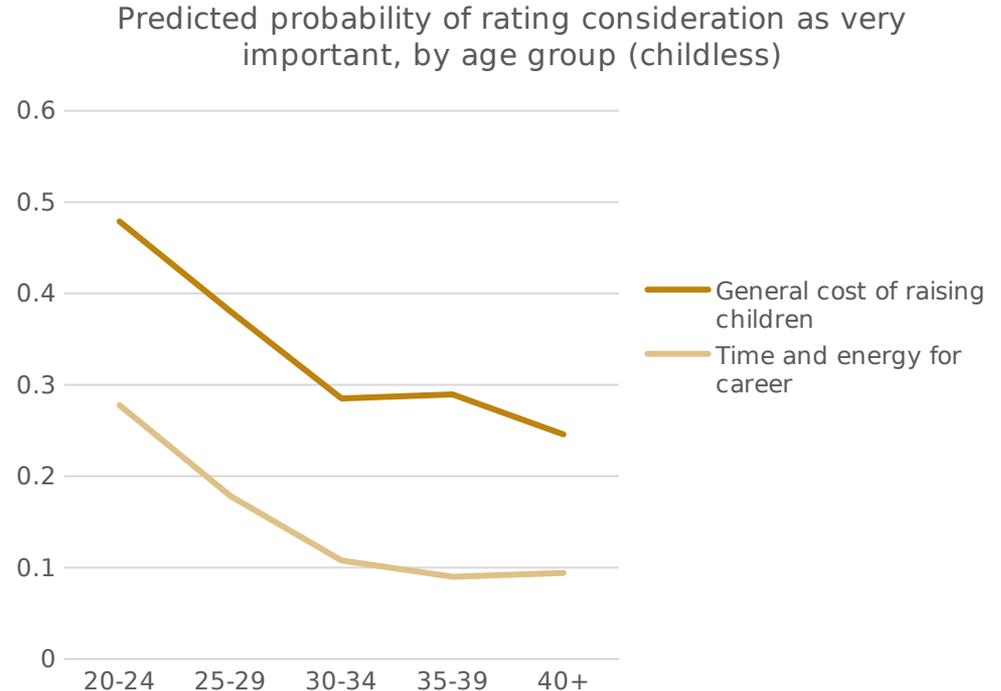
*controlling for age, sex, self-assessed prosperity, partnership status



Multivariate results: Other highlights

Age differences in consideration of general cost of children and having time and energy for career for those with no children.

Having someone to care for you and producing grandchildren rated more important by those from non-English speaking country compared to Australia born.



*controlling for sex, self-assessed prosperity, partnership status



Relationship between childbearing considerations and childbearing desires

Childbearing considerations are strongly related to childbearing desires.

Low
desire

- stress and worry, economic cost
- time for leisure and social activities
- time and energy for career

High
desire

- having someone to love
- providing purpose in life

Conclusion

Considerations that go into decision to have a child or not differ significantly by parity, gender, socio-economic status and age.

Stress and worry	Time and energy for career	General cost	Having someone to care for you
Women (all parities)	Women (childless)	Women (childless and also 2+children)	Lower education level
	Young people (childless)	Lower education level	Non-English speaking country of birth
		Lower self-assess prosperity	

Conclusion

Limited set of costs/benefits studied.

Childless have imperfect information or less information about the costs and benefits of being a parent.

Insight into decision making process* and understanding of current fertility levels.

*only part of process

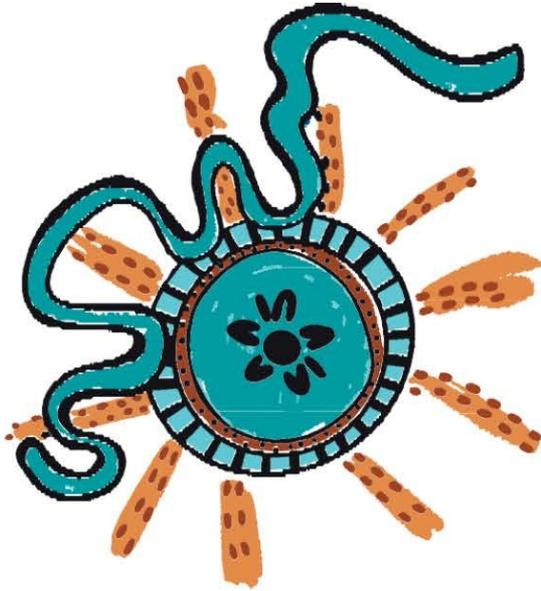


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