

New book available December 2010

The Future of Motherhood in Western Societies: Late fertility and its consequences

Gijs Beets¹, Joop Schippers² & Egbert R. te Velde³ (eds.)

¹NIDI, ²Utrecht University School of Economics, ³Utrecht University Medical Centre & Erasmus University Medical Centre Rotterdam



Netherlands Interdisciplinary
Demographic Institute NIDI
The Hague
beets@nidi.nl

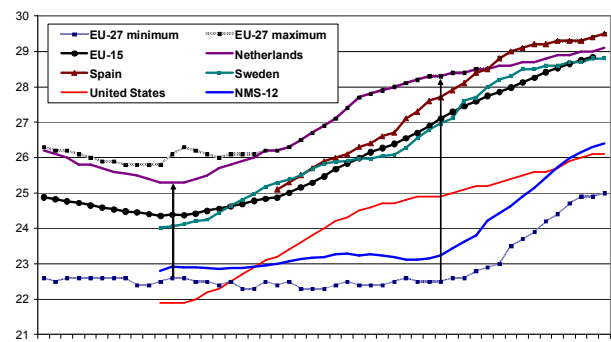
Is women's emancipation still compatible with motherhood in Western societies?

A new (edited) Springer book with contributions by

Elisabeth BECK-GERNSHEIM, The post-career mom: reproductive technology and the promise of reproductive choice; **Gijs BEETS**, The demography of the age at first birth: the close relationship between having children and postponement; **Gøsta ESPING-ANDERSEN**, The importance of children and families in welfare states; **Catherine HAKIM**, Women's lifestyle preferences in the 21st century: implications for family policy; **Karen HENWOOD**, **Fiona SHIRANI** & **Joanne KELLETT**, On delayed fatherhood: the social and subjective 'logics' at work in men's lives; **Joop SCHIPPERS**, The economic rationality of late parenthood; **Dick F. SWAAB**, Sexual differentiation of the human brain and male/female behaviour; **Egbert R. TE VELDE**, Is women's emancipation still compatible with motherhood in Western societies?; **Dirk J. VAN DE KAA**, On the societal impact of modern contraception; **Anneke VAN DOORNE-HUISKES** & **Ingrid DOORTEN**, The complexity of parenthood in modern societies; **Jan A.R.A.M. VAN HOOFF**, Males and females: the big little difference.

This interdisciplinary book holistically overviews the process of postponement and its backgrounds, both at the personal and the societal level. Contributions come from reproductive, evolutionary biological and neurological sciences, as well as from demography, economy, sociology and psychology. It holds not only at women but also at men becoming first time fathers. The discussion boils down to a new policy approach.

Most people still highly value to have children. But what is the optimal moment to have the first child? The answer varies per person as it depends on personal circumstances and considerations: is a partner available, what are partner's views, the housing accommodation, job availability, income, and free time activities. On average people doubt about (when) having children much longer, as well as discuss much longer how to cope with their family and labour market careers simultaneously. Postponement is an easy outcome but disadvantageous for health although in many respects advantageous for society:



Mean age of mother at first birth, selected countries, 1960-2008

DISADVANTAGES FOR HEALTH

On average from age 30 onwards woman's fecundity starts to diminish

Women trying to have their first baby from age 30 onwards (and their partners) suffer much more frequently from:

- Conception problems
- Malconceptions
- Gestational problems (miscarriage)
- Childlessness
- Caesarian delivery
- Preterm delivery
- Adverse child's mental and health consequences
- Perinatal and infant mortality
- Developing breast cancer later in life

(DIS)ADVANTAGES FOR SOCIETY

On average later childbearing coincides with:

- Higher educational levels
- More time for finding partner, exploring the world, getting career going; more solid financial and welfare situation, more ready for parenthood
- Higher employment rates and tax incomes
- Larger intergenerational distances (later grandparenthood)
- Higher rates of assisted reproductive technology
- Higher rates of (emotions around) involuntary childlessness
- More intensive population ageing
- Lower population increase
- Lower teenage pregnancy rate

IS A LOWER AGE AT FIRST BIRTH ILLUSION OR GOAL WITHIN REACH?

Doing nothing means a higher age at first birth, as educational level rises further, many jobs are insecure, the search for the perfect partner takes time, and broken parental families do not offer good examples.

If Western societies would have more age-related fecundity information in the school curriculum – awareness of unhealthy fecundity boundaries – and →

→ create more flexible opportunities for labour market participation – the book makes suggestions on coherent packages of supportive measures – then a more child and gender friendly society may arise. A society in which pregnancies and child care are not perceived as a problem but as a common responsibility of parents, employers, employees and society.

Source: Beets, Schippers & Te Velde (eds.) (2010), *The future of motherhood in Western societies: late fertility and its consequences*. Springer Science+Business Media. ISBN: 978-90-481-8968-7

