

Remaining childless in France: Being outside social norms

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Introduction

In the low European fertility context [1], French fertility, with two children per woman in 2008, is one of the highest in European Union [2]. Furthermore it's quiet a stalled level since twenty-five years [3]. This sustained fertility is also driven by a strong norm: few women remain childless [4], and even fewer couples [5]. In such a context, childlessness is a limited phenomenon, which can be the result of various situations: postponement or rejection of parenthood, fertility difficulties, or life pathways in which a childbearing project could not be realised [6]. Moreover, childlessness is more important among highly educated women as well as among poorly educated men, which are more excluded from the marital market [7,8].

Globally the social pressure to have a child is strong and voluntary childlessness is quiet limited: around 95 percent of people declare they want at least one child [9].

Problematic, assumptions and data

The aim of this paper is to analyze the place of voluntary childlessness in the French context, analyzing behaviours as well as values, and focusing on gender differences.

We don't know if social status of men and women are so polarized when we focus on voluntary childlessness, but we assume that they are important.

We don't know to what extent remaining childless can be thought as a positive life pathway? We assume this representation is one of a minority.

We don't know if people who remain childless or who like to have no child have specific attitude or characteristics.

We will use data from the French version of the Generation and Gender Survey. We intend to elaborate indicators that will give a measure of the phenomenon on several dimensions: frequency of people who are childless (1), who don't want to have children (2), who declare that it's not necessary to have children to be satisfied in life (3).

Using data collected among women as well among men, we assume that childlessness, considered as a behaviour as well as a life project that can be considered positively, is quiet rare and that the indicators are different for men and women. This paper will explore childlessness, driven by three main questions.

- Is voluntary childlessness increasing?
- Can the idea of not becoming parent be considered on a positive way, for women as well as for men, according to men and women?
- Do people who consider childlessness as a positive life pathway and/or who choose to remain childless have specific profiles?

First results

The paper will update further indicators of childlessness. First, around 12% of women born in the nineteenth sixties will certainly remain childless. Secondly, 95% of people declare they want

at least one child. Childlessness indicators don't seem to increase a lot among new generations. What about representations? Between 10% and 13% of men and women declare it's not necessary to have children to be "satisfied" in life. It seems so that representations of men and women are not very different.

In a second part, the paper will focus on those men and women who are "outside social norms" (regarding to their opinions or their reproductive behaviours): Do they belong to specific socio economic status? Do they have other specific attitudes or behaviours? It's already known that men and women who remain childless (by coercion or by choice) don't have the same characteristics: the share of childless people is more important among higher educated women and among lower educated men. But if we focus on voluntary childlessness, are gender differences less important?

This paper will discuss the choice to be childfree in France, i.e. being outside social norms.

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