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Postponement and childlessness - Evidence from two British cohorts

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Abstract

This paper starts by reviewing existing projections of childlessness among British men and women. Low current fertility implies high eventual childlessness unless the postponement of parenthood is taken into account. Such re-timing of first births appears to be occurring differentially across social groups. Exploiting the disaggregated evidence of two British cohort studies, the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Survey, this paper investigates the extent of postponement across cohorts and projects its impact on eventual levels of childlessness. Men and women are considered separately in our models of a population stratified by educational attainment. We find the most striking postponement occurring among graduate men. Among graduate women, after taking family building intentions into account, we estimate that about a quarter of 1970 born graduate women will remain childless, rather than something nearer 40 per cent as had been conjectured elsewhere.

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