

Freedom lost, love and affection found

Couples examine pros, cons of having children

The most common disadvantage of having children is the loss of freedom, according to American parents questioned in a University of Michigan study.

The advantages most frequently mentioned are "love and affection" and the feeling of being a family, "stimulation and fun," and "expansion of self" or "having someone to carry on after you have gone."

The findings were reported by Lois Hoffman and Jean Manis, researchers with Survey Research Center, a unit of U-M Institute for Social Research.

They interviewed 1,569 married women between the ages of 15 and 39, and the husbands of about a third of the women, to learn more about the psychological satisfactions of having children.

Although overpopulation may be this planet's most difficult and crucial problem, we know surprisingly little about why people have children—or why in the United States over the last decade couples have been declining to have fewer children, the researchers point out.

"If we do not understand what motivates people to have children, we are in no position to predict—let alone

affect—fertility trends," they explain.

Economics and women's careers can have an important effect on desired family size, the researchers note. They asked the women in their study how many children they would like to have and asked for their reasons not to have more than that number.

The most common reason given for not wanting children, they found, is financial burden.

"On this evidence, one might conclude that zero population growth may not be around the corner if prosperity is lurking around the same corner," Hoffman and Manis suggest.

However, in answer to a general question about the disadvantages of having children, the women who wanted smaller families—one or two children, or no children at all—were far more apt to mention the loss of freedom associated with having children than they were to cite financial problems.

More than half of the women in the survey were employed, and 49 percent of the women with children were working.

"The women who are not working now and who do not anticipate working

in the future expect to have larger families, and they are more apt than other women to feel that large families are desirable," Hoffman and Manis report.

Since four-fifths of the women who were not working said that they would like to work in the future, the implication is likely to be smaller families, they add.

The study also found that larger families were desired by those mothers who counted on having "something useful to do" as one advantage of having children, a response which came more often from mothers without jobs.

In order to understand the value of children to their parents, the researchers first asked the respondents: "What would you say are some of the advantages or good things about having children, compared with not having children at all?" They coded the responses into nine basic groups of values.

The primary advantage of children for the adults questioned were associated with the desire for love and affection and the feeling of being a family. Among parents, 66 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men gave this type of answer. With non-parents, 61 per

cent of women and 51 per cent of men made that reply.

A close second in importance was the value "stimulation and fun." This included statements such as "there is always something going on," or "children bring liveliness to your life," or "we love playing with them." Couples with children were more likely to mention this advantage than those without children.

About one-third of respondents mentioned values related to "expansion of self"—answers such as "having someone to carry on after you have gone" or "having new growth and learning experiences."

Only about one in 10 persons in the U.S. study mentioned the economic advantages of children.

The most common disadvantage of children is the loss of freedom, according to parents questioned. This response was mentioned by 53 per cent of the mothers and 49 per cent of the fathers. Among women without children this was also the most frequently cited disadvantage. Among men who were not parents, the financial cost of having children was seen as the biggest disadvantage.

The researchers explain that one purpose of the study was to see

whether having alternative ways of satisfying the psychological needs that might be met by having children would affect the values attributed to children.

They report that several findings support this "alternative" hypothesis. For example, white respondents with more than average education—a group which on average has more economic or financial resources than blacks or less well-educated whites—were less likely to mention various economic or practical advantages of having children: that they could help the parents financially, take care of them in their old age, and the like.

Similarly, women who held traditional values about sex roles—that women generally should not work outside the home—were more likely to say that having children provided the woman with an appropriate adult role. Working women, particularly those in professional or higher status jobs, were less apt to cite children as a source of stimulation in their lives.

"Non-parents," Hoffman and Manis note, "are less likely to see children as essential to achieving satisfactory adult status, and they are more concerned about the economic costs associated with having a family."

Other highlights from the study:

- Seventy per cent of childless couples wanted to have children eventually—with the majority preferring two children. Seven per cent did not want children, and another eight per cent were uncertain. The rest were already expecting.

- Most couples preferred a family mixture of both boys and girls, but when forced to make a choice by sex, the majority chose boys. Most also said that girls cost more to raise.

- There was strong sentiment that one-child families are not a good idea. Parents were more opposed to one-child families than non-parents. Seventy-six per cent of the mothers and 78 per cent of the fathers said that one-child families were not a good idea, compared to 70 per cent of women without children and 61 per cent of the men without children.

- In response to a series of hypothetical choices on preferred family size, 58 per cent of both mothers and fathers said they would choose to have six children rather than none at all.
- Most of the adults surveyed felt that the most expensive thing about children is the cost of clothing. Food and education were the next most often mentioned expenses.

Fireplace safety suggestions listed

With another winter upon us, fireplace owners should note some simple precautions to insure safe, warm evenings by the hearth.

- Check your chimney at least once a year. Creosote and wood ash, byproducts of a cheerful fire, are highly inflammable, and in as little as three months time a chimney can gather up to an inch of this residue. Chimney fires can be prevented with regular checkups and proper maintenance.

- Check the handle of your damper. Some occasionally become unattached and will prevent the damper from closing properly.

- Check your ash pit, if you have one. If it is overfull, you'll have a messy cleanup task.

- Make sure your damper is open and do make sure it is closed after a fire is completely out. An open damper can eat up a great deal of heat from a room when the fireplace is not in use.

- Do not use green or damp wood like newly chopped branches and trees. Unseasoned wood is difficult to ignite, causes a great deal of smoke and will not throw off as much heat as fire made with well-seasoned, dry wood.

- If you store your wood outdoors, protect it with plastic sheeting. This

will help it dry and the sun's rays will even help to reduce the existing moisture content.

- Do not use combustible fluids to start a fire. Kindling and crumpled-up newspaper will be a most efficient job. Combustible fluids can start a chimney fire—or worse.

- Do not load your fireplace with too many logs. Three well placed logs are ample to keep the bonfire burning.

- Use sturdy, noncombustible tools to tend your fire and make sure they have long handles, to avoid singed clothing and painful burns.

- Use andirons or a grate. A fire needs room to breathe, and air must be allowed to circulate around and under the logs.

- Use a fire screen. Sparks may fly from wood or kindling and a closed screen can prevent a fire elsewhere other than your fireplace.

This advice comes from Clifton Briener, director of engineering for Majestic, an American-Standard company that has been engineering fireplaces and fireplace components for more than 40 years. Recently Majestic introduced an energy saving, heat-circulating fireplace, with an exclusive heat exchanger, designed for more energy efficiency.

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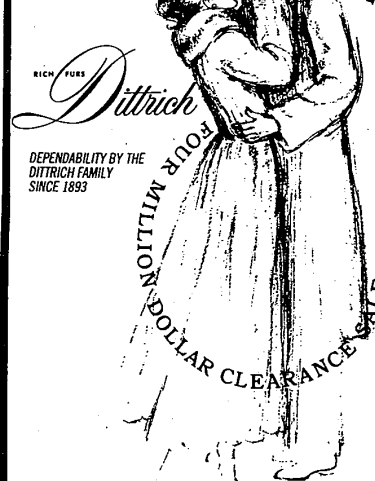
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