

***What Women (and Men)
Want: Births, Policies and
Choices***

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Executive Summary

The *Families, Fertility and the Future* study was prompted by increasing public concern over Australia's falling national birthrate and on-going political debate regarding the role and provision of paid maternity leave and other initiatives designed to encourage or support those Australians planning or raising families.

We looked at the specific groups in contemporary Australia: women or men with no children; women or men with one child; women or men with two or more children; young women or men (under twenty-six years); and women raising children alone, who have attracted attention in the national debate about population, fertility and the future. We concentrated on these groups, ones on which media and policy makers have been focused, in order to find out what it that these women and men really think and what's important to them when they decide whether or not to have children.

Qualitative interviews were used to produce a snapshot of how individuals assess the costs and benefits of having children and how women's reproductive choices, in particular, are negotiated in relation to career, personal and relationship goals. One hundred and fourteen Victorian women and men were interviewed during 2002 and 2003.

This study sought to:

- examine in detail how women and men determine whether or not to have children and, if so, their number and timing;
- understand how changing public policies, family obligations, gender roles and labour market patterns inform these decisions;
- contribute significant new insights into the reasons behind falling fertility rates and illuminate relevant policy issues.

Key findings of the study:

- **Common stereotypes about how differently situated women consider motherhood and its relationship to paid work, government benefits and policy were challenged.** For example: women choosing not to have children did not reflect the common image of them as career-driven high achievers or women who can't find partners; women with multiple children featured strongly among those exhibiting significant and on-going attachments to the labour market.
- **Single policy initiatives and entitlements did not directly influence the decisions made about fertility, but they did form the landscape in which women and men negotiated their choices about families, work and life.** Rather than operating as a direct inducement, policy initiatives formed the backdrop that encouraged and shaped women's decisions, in particular. Although policies and

entitlements were not generally identified as the factors which directly influenced first birth timing or decisions about having children, they were significant in what occurred afterwards and were particularly important to women choosing to have more than two children.

- **Policies that are specifically focused on managing parenting, and mothering in particular, such as maternity and paternal leave were most significant to women who have already had a child.** A number of women without children did view parental leave provisions as likely to feature in their future decisions, but these women were as likely to cite cultural pressures and expectations of motherhood as important to their choice not to have children as they were to focus on potential benefits. The exception to this was issues of work/life balance, which women in all groups identified as a challenging and often difficult balancing act.
- **Access to maternity leave is not yet universal, and only a quarter of the women in the study had access to paid maternity leave.** While most said that the availability of paid maternity leave did not factor in their decision to have children, one third believed it to be important, primarily as a way of providing additional financial support and as a crucial way to maintain a connection with the labour market. There is a substantive difficulty with asking women to determine how much maternity leave affected their decisions when so few women have access to it. Many women in this instance are being asked about an initiative that is not currently a real-life option for them.
- **Broader social services, most particularly affordable child care, appropriate health care and education were identified as important by women, when describing their reproductive experiences and decisions.** When women talked about deciding about children, health issues, child care availability and other community services were important to them. The cost of education; both retraining for themselves, and education for their children, was often mentioned. Despite the high number of references to these issues, there was little anger expressed about the diminution of these services, such as limited visits to maternal and child health care centres, the expense of child care and access to medical care, with most women and men accepting this is the way things work now.
- **Overall, many women ended up lowering their expectations about what both governments and employers would provide in supporting their fertility decisions.** The women and men in this study generally accepted what Kerreen Reiger has identified as a new phase in Australian social history where “the production of children is now viewed more and more as a private choice rather than a social contribution” (2001: 4). They recognised the low level of support as part of what they had to negotiate when thinking about children.

- **Focus on fertility “decision-making” obscures the extent to which reproductive patterns are the result of situation and circumstance.** Amongst the women with children, the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy was startling. Almost half of first pregnancies were described as either totally accidental or occurring much earlier than had been foreseen by the women concerned. This indicates that in our community reproduction is less planned than is often assumed. It supports our conclusion that **policy initiatives will be more central in women’s choices to move from one child to more children.** Very often, it was the decision about a second child that respondents characterised as a clear and thoughtful decision, where they weighed up available support and other life options. The experiences they had with their first children were crucial here.
- **Workplace experiences were a crucial part of women’s considerations about reproduction.** Many women recounted incidents of difficulty in combining working and motherhood that they had experienced or that they had observed. For women with and without children, these incidences reflected an ambivalent attitude in our society towards combining mothering and paid work, where genuine flexible support was lacking. Given that all of the young women interviewed intended, if they became mothers, to continue in paid employment, this finding is an important one.
- **The centrality of flexible, available and satisfactory part-time work to the reproductive decisions women made** was further supported by the stories of women with three or more children, who very often cited their supportive work circumstances as central to their decisions about a second or third child.
- **Women who were not in the workforce described the pressures and difficulties faced in trying to combine a satisfactory working life and motherhood as important to their choices.** Limited possibilities for education and retraining were identified as a concern even where women were not immediately contemplating a return to the workforce. There were often anxieties about future opportunities and security expressed, even when women with children did not want to work at the present time.
- **Most of the women in this study felt that motherhood was viewed quite ambivalently in our society.** While most of the women indicated that they personally felt it was a positive and important role, **even if they were not planning to become mothers**, they considered that mothers were not accorded a high status position and that their social contribution was not always valued. For women with children, this often meant that they valued their paid work as a crucial aspect of their identity. For women choosing not to have children, this lack of support was often mentioned in how they had decided motherhood was not for them.

- **Despite consistent public debate that focuses on competition and tension between women with children and women without children, the women in this study were overwhelmingly respectful of all decisions about reproduction.** For women who were mothers, even when they themselves found it to be the most important decision they had ever taken; there was no criticism of women who decided not to have children. Similarly, women without children were often genuinely appreciative of mothers and the work they do, without feeling the need to be the “same”. This finding is a crucial one: the lively mother wars, as Barbara Pocock has described them (2003:7) that underpin most media discussions of policy and social attitudes about family in Australia were not reflected in how women talked about each others’ choices.
- **Men and women approach thinking and talking about fertility in different ways.** The issues that were most important for men were not necessarily the issues that were most important for their partners, or for the other women who participated in this study. Reflecting society-wide constructions of men as breadwinners and providers, the males tended to be far concerned more about money, age and lifestyle and far less concerned (if at all) about career interruption, difficulties associated with birthing or child care arrangements

Preamble

What Women (and Men) Want: Births, Policies and Choices brings together the voices of 114 Victorians (the great majority of these women) talking about what influences their reproductive choices. For the past several years in Australia, debates about national birthrates and fertility decision-making have sparked extensive media coverage, vigorous debate, industrial and governmental responses and a range of policy proposals. *What Women (and Men) Want* explores how people have understood these questions in their own lives and what impact, if any, the policies, the discussions and the governmental appeals have had on their reproductive choices and how they talk about them.

The decision in 2001 by the Australian Catholic University to offer one year's paid maternity leave to female staff generated vigorous debate concerning fertility, families, and policy in Australia. The exploration of the issue of paid maternity leave in 2002 by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner intensified this debate (HREOC, 2002b). These public debates took place against the background of Australia low fertility rate - in 2002 the total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.75 babies per woman (ABS, 2003) - a trend that reflects patterns throughout the developed world. Replacement level is a TFR of 2.1. Demographers have identified various other trends in Australia's fertility patterns. Women are waiting until they are older before having their first child, more women are choosing not to have children and increasing numbers of women are having children outside a partnered relationship (McDonald 1998:5). These patterns indicate further decline in the TFR, as the greatest drop in child-bearing is among females in their twenties and this shortfall is not made up by women in their thirties.

Researchers have proposed several theories to account for these patterns (Barnes, 2000; De Vaus, 2002; McDonald, 2000) from rational choice theory (where women make judgments about the costs and benefits of having children) to gender equity theories (linking fertility rates to relative degrees of gender equity inside and outside family units) and risk aversion theory (where actual or potential economic, social or relationship instability prompts individuals to opt for "safe" or "low-risk" life choices).

Policy initiatives have generally focused on remuneration for women at the time of birth. These schemes have included the "Baby Bonus" and the Family Tax Benefit Part B. Such initiatives have generally been identified as failures, since they have done little to reverse the declining fertility rate and take-up has been low (Wolfers & Leigh, 2002). The new Maternity Payment proposed by the ALP follows this pattern of bonus payment without addressing the long term needs of women with children. Recent tax changes may not assist families (Davidson, 2004). The apparent lack of fit between people's needs and policy developments indicates that demographic information underpinning these policies and the deductions arising from it need to be supplemented by more information about what people want. Our findings here suggest that more sustained attention needs to be given to the intersection of work/life options, policies to assist in family choices, long-term economic issues, and the social and cultural factors that affect women's and men's experiences of parenting (see also Whitehouse, 2002).

Feminist scholars such as Anne Summers (2003) and Barbara Pocock (2003) have pointed to employment patterns and workplace culture as critical to understanding the decisions women make. The release of the Sexual Harassment report by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner (HREOC, 2004) and the *2003 Australian census of women in leadership* report (Eowa, 2003) reinforce their arguments that gender equity is still a long way off in Australian workplaces. At the same time, services such as Medicare and other social and community resources are acknowledged to be under severe pressure. There is evidence that there are increasing numbers of working poor in Australia (Eardley, 1998). Understanding how fertility patterns relate to this data is crucial if we are to develop policies that address the needs of Australian workers and support those who choose to have children. Yet to date, insufficient attention has been paid to how these various spheres interact in women's and men's deliberations when it comes to having children, and how women and men see these pressures as they negotiate their reproductive years.

While in no way challenging the efficacy of social demography in mapping population change, we felt that a qualitative approach — one that captured the voices of individuals — could offer valuable new insights. For this reason, *What Women (and Men) Want* focuses on the lived experiences and personal attitudes of more than one hundred Victorian women and men and offers an in-depth insight into what factors people take into account when they make decisions about reproduction and family formation. It gathers the views of Victorians, living in different parts of metropolitan Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria, living in partnerships and alone, with children and without them. From these voices, *What Women (and Men) Want* presents a snapshot of how individuals assess the costs and benefits of having children, the way various social and cultural factors influence individual decision-making and how women's reproductive choices, in particular, are negotiated in relation to career, personal and relationship goals. The findings suggest that narrow policy initiatives that seek to reward fertility will not be enough to encourage and support child-bearing. If governments are serious about addressing fertility levels, then policy needs to be coordinated across the areas of employment, health, education and family services. As a society, we need to consider also the impact our attitudes and expectations about parenting are having on women and men.

What Women Want: The Case Studies

*Ella's story**

Ella has one child who is three. She is in her late thirties and has been together with her partner for six years. They have been married for four years. Ella worked overseas for twelve years and she was planning to have children, but fell pregnant unexpectedly and returned to Australia in 2001 to raise her child. Currently, despite having a university level education and professional experience, she works casually and as a volunteer.

Despite having clearly defined some financial and parenting goals for herself, Ella's plans did not come to fruition in the way she expected.

We wanted to have a child [but] it was a lot quicker than we thought. We returned to Australia when I was seven months pregnant to bring up the child in Australia.

I was late in falling pregnant because we were building up finances and so we knew we had to have money if I was not going to work.

Her return to Australia has proved a shock in terms of the support she has been able to access to combine paid employment and mothering.

[I thought] that good quality child care would be available and ... I would [be able] to retrain to get back into the workforce. The educational issue; it's absolutely impossible for us ...and the child care issue is too, sadly. My child is in child care two days a week and I had applied for three days a week, but when the three days came up, we could not afford to pay [for] it.

Ella feels that she and her family are not secure:

We are a really low income earning family. It's a struggle... The whole superannuation issue is just frightening.

She and her husband have decided that they will only have one child.

I love our child to pieces, he drives me to distraction. It is a little sad, I found I think, that after a year ... I thought it wouldn't have been bad to have another child but it was absolutely out of our reach financially.

We did think that we would have one child because we didn't feel financially secure enough to have two, not the birth thing, but the future.

**Pseudonyms have been used for each participant and any identifying details have been omitted.*

Maureen's story

Maureen has three children, has been married seventeen years and is about to complete her Master's degree. She feels relatively financially comfortable and works a nine day fortnight in the public education system.

Her first child was planned and "it worked out pretty much the way we wanted it to". There was unpaid maternity leave available: twelve months, but Maureen returned to work before the year was out.

I actually worked part-time. I think I had about six months off. I knew there was the availability of part-time; certainly that was part of our consideration at the time.

She was always the primary carer as "[her husband] was in a job that earned more money", but Maureen continued to work all throughout the early years of her children's lives. She worked part-time for nine years, before returning to full-time employment. She had "found it quite difficult being at home as a full-time Mum", and "[got] the stimulation" she needed from part-time work.

I felt I was making a really good compromise... I varied the amount I worked. Some years it was one day, some years it was two, some years it was three days, so I did what I was comfortable with for the time.

Her access to holidays and on-going part-time work were important in her reproductive choices, but Maureen still took some time to decide about having a third child.

There was probably a bit of indecision about whether I, it wasn't so much whether I wanted a third [but] whether I felt content with two. There is a difference.... I wasn't satisfied that [two] was enough.

Her parents have always lived close by and have been a great support, and Maureen's sisters, who also work in education and have children, have been supportive too. And Maureen said,

My partner's ... fantastic with the kids and certainly never had any hang-ups about changing nappies... If he hadn't done that, I don't think we would have had a third.

Maureen won't have any more children.

I guess I was ready to move on and wanted to do things that I knew I wouldn't be able to do with another baby.

Miriam's story

Miriam is twenty-two years old, is employed full-time after a successful apprenticeship and lives with her partner in a house they have just purchased. She has five siblings, and as the eldest daughter, she had felt very responsible for them; "I was Little Miss Bossy Boots". Her partner was one of nine children. But Miriam doesn't see herself having children in the future.

I don't think that just wanting to have kids is enough to give you a right to actually go out and have one. I think you need to be able to plan it, you need to be able to – you know, what you can offer this child if you bring it into the world. More or less anything can happen.

For Miriam, finances are very important in this decision.

Financially we're a good ten years off having enough money in the bank to be able [to afford a child]. I suppose [my partner and I] were lucky ... that we didn't want to further our education to [uni level] because both of our parents just really wouldn't be able to afford it. And there's no way we'd want to bring a child into this world unless we knew we had the financial backing to be able to give that child [what it wants].

Miriam said that she thought that maternity leave was very important for women, but didn't focus on child care because she felt that children should stay primarily with their mothers.

I can't believe that these women that have children ... and then go back to work how many weeks after.

If kids are raised by other people ... they're usually little brats; you hear some wicked stories about child care... You should be able to take care of them yourself.

If Miriam ever was to reconsider her decision not to have children, a stable relationship, a committed father for her baby and a flexible and well-paid job would be the crucial elements of that choice.

Families, Fertility and the Future: The Findings

- i. What do people think about government initiatives to support their choice to have a family?**
- ii. What are the key factors in women's decisions about how to manage work and reproductive activity?**
- iii. Do women choosing to be without children really fit into the category of career-driven and self-focused?**
- iv. What are the factors women with one or two children talk about in their decisions about whether to have more children?**
- v. What role do men play in how families are formed and reproductive decisions are made?**
- vi. How are women's choices affected by social expectations about mothers' duties and children's needs? How real is the concept of reproductive "planning" in understanding how women decide to become mothers?**
- vii. How do young people talk about the prospect of having children?**
- viii. How do single mothers talk about the factors shaping their reproductive choices?**
- ix. What do women with more than two children say about how they managed their reproductive decision-making?**

i. What do people think about government initiatives to support their choice to have a family?

In Australia, 56 per cent of women of working age are in the paid labour market, and participate in both full-time and part-time work. This compares with a participation rate of 48 per cent in 1978. Yet despite this entrenched position, Australian women do not have access to a national paid maternity leave scheme. Indeed the United States and Australia are now, in 2004, the only western, liberal democratic nations that do not provide all their women workers with the entitlements of paid maternity or parental leave. Recently this issue has taken centre stage in the public policy arena in Australia, with considerable coverage given to the issue by the media, as politicians, women's organisations, relevant government authorities and other interest groups offered their perspectives (see HREOC, 2002b).

This coverage suggested a picture in which women who undertook paid work as mothers, or potential mothers, were pitted against those women who had chosen to be full-time mothers. It was suggested in the media that the latter would be discriminated against should a paid maternity leave scheme be introduced. While the voices of a few women were included in the prominent stories in the press, these were often portrayed in a way that enforced the divide between mothers at home and mothers in paid work (Curtin, 2003). Our research findings indicate that such a divide appears spurious. In terms of maternity leave, for example, almost one quarter of respondents had access to some kind of paid maternity leave, although the number of weeks varied according to whether they were in the public or private sectors. Another fifth were entitled to unpaid maternity leave, meaning that almost half of the respondents had access to maternity leave of some kind, paid or unpaid. Moreover, access to maternity leave was not restricted to a particular group of women but rather cut across the entire sample. In other words, women with no children, one child, or a number of children, were all represented in the group who said they could or would take maternity leave.

Of those who had no access to maternity leave, most were either ineligible because of the contractual or casual nature of their employment, or they chose (or felt forced) to resign while they were pregnant. For a small number of respondents, maternity leave was not a possibility because they were self-employed or students at the time of giving birth. Six women were not eligible for maternity leave for their subsequent children because they had chosen not to return to the workforce after the birth of their first child.

However, just as the Australian Institute for Family Studies has revealed (Glezer, 1988), there were still some women in our sample who were in the work force but were unaware of their entitlements. Miriam said:

“If you fell pregnant in that company they want your career, they want your accounts, everything, you resign. So it [maternity leave] never even crossed my mind and it wasn't until I actually got my staff manual and I was learning how they get paid three months' maternity leave and I thought 'what'?”

Virginia recounted a difficult experience where she was unable to access entitlements she thought she had.

“I was expecting I was getting maternity leave and my local office thought I was getting maternity leave but an hour before I was due to leave the head office ... said, ‘no I wasn't entitled to maternity leave because I had actually been a casual employee’, ... I thought I had been permanent part-time.”
(Virginia)

Much has been made of the extent to which policies such as a government-sponsored paid maternity leave scheme might encourage women to have more children. Cross-national evidence suggests that there is not a direct relationship as such between the provision of paid maternity leave and an increase in the fertility rate (Hantrais, 1997; McGovern et al, 1992). While two thirds of the respondents in our study maintained that the provision of maternity leave had no definite impact on their decision to have children, the remaining one third indicated that the availability of paid maternity leave would influence their fertility choices, primarily because they felt some kind of financial support was vital during those early months of their baby's life. This was a common response amongst those who had not yet had children, while one woman who had four children maintained that having access to seven years unpaid maternity leave as a teacher had significantly influenced her decision to have a large family.

More specifically, of the twenty six women and five men in this study who had one child, seventeen said they were considering having more children. Of these, nearly half said that access to paid maternity leave would be one of the factors which would influence their final decision. Given that an increase in the fertility rate depends not only on women choosing to start a family, but also on women choosing to have more than one child (Kippen, 2004; McDonald, 2001), such a finding suggests that policies such as the provision of paid maternity leave are seen an important means of support for women. Pauline said:

“In the whole picture it [paid maternity leave] did [matter] in the sense that financially I felt secure that okay, if I have to take unpaid leave, at least I would get paid for about 12 weeks, I can actually give about five to six months to my child. So yes, it's just security, that's what it provided.”

Helena said:

“If I could take paid maternity leave now I may have reconsidered having a second child...I don't think it will matter in the sense of will I or won't I have another child but it would be of great help and it may affect the timing of having more children.”

In discussions about child care for young children, around sixty per cent of respondents favoured the use of child care, either family day care, family members or centre-based facilities. Moreover, one third indicated that the availability, quality and affordability of child care were factors they took into consideration when deciding to have their first or subsequent child. Grace said:

“Yes, my partner once did a cost-benefit analysis of child care and said it would be enough to put you off having children.”

Rory echoed this when he described the impact of childcare on him and his partner.

“As the economic need for both of us to work happened by the time the last one came around [child care] certainly became an issue and I think she went back to work when the last one was 3 or 4 years old and it was very frustrating because the cost of child care almost negated her wage. It was so expensive.”

Of the twenty six women with one child, eleven said that the availability and affordability of child care had become important in their decision to have children. This contrasts with the twelve in our sample with two children, who were less concerned about child care and more concerned with having access to part-time and flexible working arrangements. Indeed, a significant minority of the study population had sought to organize their working lives in such a way that they were able to be more flexible in the way they managed their care arrangements, with a number of women working from home or taking on part-time work.

However, in only seven cases were both parents able to alter their work patterns to share the care of their children. This may not be through a lack of desire on the part of fathers. Overall, access to paternity leave seldom featured in decisions about fertility. A number of respondents noted they were unaware of what paternity leave options were available to them, and several men found that their choice to become involved fathers was not always supported. Lisa said:

“...I had the twins and [my husband] came back [to the hospital from work] and the boss actually docked him a day’s pay.”

Rory noted that:

“I was not popular for taking [paternity leave]. Because it cost a replacement for five days of course but it was there and I was going to take it if I was able.”

It is clear that the decision to become a mother or a father is a complex one, influenced by a vast array of intersecting issues, incentives and desires. These findings indicate that the provision by either governments or employers (or both) of paid maternity leave, parental leave, affordable and accessible child care and flexible working practices are often an important part of that decision. Because access to maternity leave is not yet universal, and only a quarter of respondents had access to paid maternity leave, many women can only speculate or imagine what security paid maternity leave might offer, since for many it is not yet a real-life option.¹

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¹ We think this lack of access is an important aspect not considered when commentators expect there to be a direct and definite response to issues about maternity leave. See, for example, Angela Shanahan, ‘If you ask the right question, maternity leave isn’t the answer’, (*The Australian*), FEATURES; Pg. 11, September 17, 2002; Angela Shanahan, ‘Follow US example, not the feminists’ (*The Australian*), FEATURES; Pg. 13, August 13, 2002; Cathy Sherry, ‘Pay On Need Not Status’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*), News And Features; Opinion: Pg. 11, December 10, 2002; Cathy Sherry, ‘A Media Vibe Based On Motherhood Myth’, *Sunday Age*, News; Opinion; p.21 November 17, 2002.

ii. What are the key factors in women's decisions about how to manage work and reproductive activity?

“The social pressure on women to return to work I think is more than just financial ... but the realities of working, especially full-time and bringing up children is just ... it's just too plain hard.” Sinta

For most of the mothers, the combination of work and mothering was an everyday reality, one that they negotiated willingly while acknowledging the difficulties.² There were very few women who did not make some reference to the impact of children on career aspirations, but almost all of the women with children identified the combination as an important one to achieve for their own self-image and the quality of their life experience. All the women in this group described some form of work-related activity, even when they primarily identified themselves as out of the paid workforce. There had been endeavours at part-time work, volunteer and community sector work, or some form of study. Only eleven of the fifty-eight women with children identified as primarily at home; seven of these women had worked while they had children and four of them indicated that they would again, given the opportunity. Interestingly, especially given the preponderance of women with university education, there were not a substantial number who identified as currently undertaking some form of study, with only six women with children being involved in some form of study. This suggests that the cost of further education, mentioned specifically by three of the women, was a barrier to pursuing retraining.

Working “two jobs”

The women seeking to balance paid work and mothering identified a range of employment issues that impacted upon them in their endeavour to be mothers and workers simultaneously. As Rita, who had decided not to have children noted, “I can see it being a real dent in your career”, although she also said that “fathers are ... far less impacted upon”. The gender wages gap, where male partners' greater earning power impacted on work and child care decision, was often cited by women with children, as were the availability of part-time work, workplace attitudes, and a lack of opportunity and respect for choices to combine both types of activity (McDermott, 1996; Hunter 1996). Susan decided to have only one child “in order to progress” in her career. She found the issue of employment “absolutely huge”. Many women shared Peta's frustration about workplace options and part-time work where she observed:

“it is still at the Mickey Mouse level not what you feel as a full-time worker...I have spoken to a few people who have also experienced the same if they have had an extended period away from full-time work or even if you dabbled in part-time, which I have.”

Sinta reflected that:

² For some international comparisons of mothers and work, see Albrecht et al, 2000; Bianchi 2000; and England, 1996.

“the talk about the glass ceiling and so forth is actually related to that, that women who have two children and realise they just can’t do the whole lot and make choices, make choices not to extend their career.”

Cherry recounted surveillance of her reproductive choices in her workplace.

“There was quite a lot of negative feedback about the fact that I had a baby and [there was] a perception that I couldn’t be trusted not to run off and have another one.”

Norah said she had needed to stay in touch with the workforce and this had influenced her decision to keep working while she was raising her children. But, like most of the other women working in paid employment and mothering, there were factors of enjoyment and stimulation that were also influential in that decision.

“I decided not to stop because, just because I didn’t want a really hard road back into the workforce and I didn’t get quite enough stimulation.”

By contrast, positive workplace support often resulted in renewed commitment to work (McGovern et al, 1992; cf Hakim, 2003). Chloe identified a good response from one of her two workplaces regarding maternity leave and entitlements and said:

“My entitlements there have been just fantastic. I had 16 weeks paid leave. I’ve been really well looked after and it has certainly made me much keener to go back to that job.”

Lisa Barrow has sought to measure the economic indicators that determine a woman’s return to paid work and has suggested that higher income and lower child care costs are likely predictors (1999:432). These economic negotiations formed part of these women’s descriptions, with decisions about expense, degree of difficulty and partner income forming part of the negotiations. Barrow also suggests that there is a consistent pattern of women being more likely to combine paid work and mothering at higher level of education (1999:450). This was borne out here to some extent here with only seven of the thirty-one women with university education being currently out of the workforce.

The women in this study, however, did not focus solely, or perhaps even primarily on economic factors when they discussed combining paid work with mothering. They often described “life balance” and “something for themselves” as important benefits of paid work. Susan Lambert has argued that job autonomy and opportunities are important in assessing women and men’s satisfaction with work and personal life (1993:244) and these women described paid work as an important aspect of a satisfying life for them. Even though Peta did not see herself as a career woman, she found combining motherhood and paid work offered a benefit to her life and sense of self-worth.

“I would never have considered myself all that career-minded; however going back two days a week provided ... a nice balance. I was enjoying being at home with my baby and I was also enjoying those two days [at work].”

As Norah said of her paid employment:

“It’s not as such, work. It’s more something I really enjoy, so it’s a part of my life that I find really stimulating. ... I find [that] sort of fundamental to my personality.”

There were also a large number of women in this study who talked about access to education as important in their choices and aspirations (see also Wu & MacNeill, 1992; Forest et al, 1995). For women without children, barriers to education were important and these issues were also identified by women with children observing or contemplating struggles to re-train. As Caitlin with four children noted:

“The price of education now makes it very difficult for women at home to take up [education] as an option. Because not only are they not earning but they will have to pay for more education and the money is not there. I think this is another big issue for women, the cost of education.”

The findings suggest that nearly all the women with children see paid work as central to their life experience and that these women don’t generally define their working experience as separate from their mothering. Despite the notion of intractable conflict that informs both scholarly and popular discussions of working mothers (Hakim, 1995; Pocock, 2003; Kruseman et al, 2003), women with children in this study suggest that mothering is combined with paid work for a range of reasons, and some of those are not economic. These women looked for flexible and supportive ways to achieve this combination and this was a central aspect of the decisions they made about reproduction. Peter McDonald has noted ‘the high and increasing level of attachment to the labour force of Australian women in the ages associated with the bearing and rearing of children based on their actual behaviour’ (2001:17). The voices of the women in this study suggest that this attachment to the labour force is certainly developed in response to economic pressures, but is also due to women’s desire to negotiate other life aspirations in conjunction with motherhood.

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iii. Do women choosing to be without children really fit into the category of career-driven and self-focused?

Media coverage of Australia's falling birthrate has focussed considerable attention on why some women in our community are choosing not to reproduce. Within cultures like ours that still hold to the idea that it is "natural" for women to desire children, voluntarily childless women are often considered "unnatural". An analysis of current cultural representations in the media and other popular literature revealed that dispassionate images of women who have chosen childlessness are extremely rare and stories that validate their decisions virtually non-existent (Dever and Saugeres, forthcoming).

In the Australian media, voluntarily childless women are imagined to be exclusively middle-class professionals holding down high-powered corporate appointments. Feminism's role in producing a new generation of childless career women is also a key feature of this coverage (Dever and Saugeres, forthcoming). Media stereotypes portray such women as selfish, as anti-mothering, as steadfastly single and/or unsuccessful in partnering, and as doomed to live unfulfilled lives. It is commonly suggested that these women have invested in education, careers, self-development and/or consumerism at the expense of their all-too-brief window of reproductive opportunity: something it is implied they will later regret.³ Such is the intensity of this angle in media coverage that one woman was reported in *The Age* in February 2003 expressing her "frustration" with the "narrow focus of a debate that puts the fertility choices of ... women like [me] under the microscope" (Szego, 2003).

Despite strong media interest in this question, voluntarily childless women are very rarely given a public voice, which may account for the high number of voluntarily childless women who were eager to participate in our research. The forty-two women interviewed in this group ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-two. Approximately half had made a firm decision not to have children, while the rest had not yet finalised their decision in the context of their other life goals.

Ten out of the forty-two could be classified as "early articulators". This means that they knew from an early age that they did not want children. These women did not feel that they had actually made an active choice; they had just never imagined themselves as having children. For example, Vera, thirty-four, said:

"Even as I was growing up, and I don't really know what the basis was but from an early age, you know how people say from an early age I knew, well from an early age I just thought that I didn't want to get married or have children."

The remaining women interviewed can be broadly classified as "postponers". Some of the younger women here were still looking ahead to the possibility of having children;

³ See, for example, Elisabeth Wynhausen, 'Bye-bye, Baby', *The Weekend Australian*, 28-29 October 2000, p.19; 'Indulging in a Life of Self-Sufficiency', *The Australian*, 29 October 2002; Pamela Bone, 'Why This Country Needs More People', *The Age*, 18 October 2001; 'Material Pursuits Delay Babies', *The Australian*, 29 July 2002; Paul Kelly, 'It's Breeding Obvious', *The Australian*, 4 September 2002; Chris Gallus, 'A Chilling Proposal For Women', *The Age*, 20 September 2002.

some of the older ones in particular were experiencing varying degrees of indecision. Many in this latter group had always imagined or assumed that they would have children, but were currently unable to reconcile motherhood with their other life aims and values and therefore postponed making any firm decision. Esther, thirty-nine, expressed it this way:

“Well, I have certainly felt like, as I have gone through my 30s that if I was going to decide, I had better hurry up because I was getting — you know, I was getting into my mid-30s and then my late 30s ... it’s just a funny factor because it feels like the decision is still not final, because I could still change my mind, yes.”

The most striking finding was that only three out of the forty-two women interviewed described themselves as “career women”, while a further two talked about their own businesses as being at the centre of their lives. For example, Abigail, thirty-two, said:

“I’m a career person and not interested in having kids, I don’t want to stay at home and be a mother, I’ve always had career aspirations and direction and the other thing is I’m yet to find a bloke suitable, maybe my standards are too high...”

Abigail would seem to come close to the stereotypical childless career woman. However, her decision to remain childless was not the direct result of her desire for a career. All the early articulators and some of the postponers locate the basis for their lack of desire to have children to how they experienced growing up in their families. Abigail talked about how her parents’ divorce when she was four and seeing her mother raising children on her own were big influences on her lack of a desire for children. Others spoke of the financial struggles associated with their own childhood and their wish to forego children rather than repeat that pattern.

Contrary to media discourses, our research shows that images of the highly educated middle-class women in executive jobs may not be typical of the women who decide to remain childless. The majority of women interviewed some said that they were not very interested in having careers or simply did not think about their paid employment as a “career”. Several of the women interviewed were from working-class backgrounds, and even though most of them had achieved some form of post-secondary education, few of them held very high-powered jobs. For instance, Gwen, thirty-nine, said:

“it wasn’t a career thing ... to be honest I think coming from the kind of family that I did I didn’t have any expectations of working or a job or a career or anything. Like, mum didn’t work and my aunts didn’t work. And I had decided I didn’t want children before that when I had, you know, no expectations of going on and doing – having a career or going to uni or anything.”

While the pursuit of a career was not a key factor for most of the voluntarily childless women interviewed, the vast majority of them had other goals and aspirations that they viewed as incompatible with having children. For these women, freedom, independence, flexibility, not having to be responsible for somebody else, embarking on a journey of self-discovery, and looking for fulfilment by pursuing either work or

non-work activities were very important. Generally, they viewed having children as a potentially major disruption in their lives and irreconcilable with the lifestyles that they were used to and wished to preserve. Xena, twenty-six, married, worked as a teacher but did not see herself as having a career. She talked of her needs this way:

“I’m the type of person who needs a lot of time by myself and a bit of personal space and yeah I just do not see that happening if you have children ...”

Voluntarily childless women are often represented as lacking in “caring” and “nurturing” instincts. However, the women interviewed certainly did not talk about themselves in those terms. For instance, Lisa, thirty-two, who is a self-employed as a marketing and PR consultant, talked about how she was “nurturing her baby business”. A significant number of others talked about environmental concerns using a similar language of care. All the women interviewed were very aware of the potential for society at large to view them as selfish and immature and they were critical of this. Some could not help worrying that perhaps they were selfish and immature, because they had internalised the notion that women should structure their lives around children. Others countered this idea by pointing out the equally selfish reasons that motivate people to have children. A number characterized their choice of childlessness as the less selfish and more socially responsible choice in the light of the adverse environmental impacts of population growth.

The idea, prominent in media representations, that childless women must have failed to partner successfully and that this can account for their childless state, is challenged by our findings. Of the forty-two women interviewed, eighteen were currently partnered and, of the sixteen who weren’t, a number had previously been in long-term de-facto or married relationships where the opportunity for children was at least present. While some of the unpartnered women expressed the idea that locating a suitable partner might lead them to have children in the future, those who were already partnered did not view children as a necessary or inevitable next stage in that relationship. Indeed, they worried that having children would in fact interfere with the quality of their relationship. Rita, twenty-nine, talked about it this way:

“I mean, my partner and I are really happy and we really enjoy the time that we have with one another and we have lots of things in common and, you know, it just seems that when you have a child it not only impacts on your life and your career, but also your relationship with your partner so that, you know, you possibly can’t devote as much time that you would like to to one another, that you have this other focus, which can be positive, but you know, can also detract from your own relationship and we’re quite happy going along the way that we are. I just don’t feel like we need this other being in our family for it to be a family.”

The idea that women who forego children later regret this decision was not borne out by our interviews. These women did not talk of their lives as “lacking” or “empty” because they did not have children. In fact, some talked about the fear of having children and later regretting that decision, as Elisabeth, thirty-eight, indicated:

“It just seems like such a huge responsibility, you know, to have children and the fact that I’m not overwhelmingly wanting one. I just worry if I did that maybe I’d regret it ...”

Other women did not have any regrets. Selma, forty-three, divorced, decided at an early age that she would not have any children, and said:

“Oh I feel wonderful...It is the best decision I’ve ever made in my life, the one I’m most happy about, the one I’ve never, ever had a regret about.”

The findings presented here challenge the popular perception that rising rates of voluntary childlessness are the direct result of a feminist-inspired commitment among middle-class professional women to the pursuit of high-powered, high-paying careers. The women interviewed here bore little resemblance to the images of power-suited professionals promulgated in the media, coming as they did from a diverse range of class, educational and employment backgrounds. While many found fulfilment in paid employment, these women did not frame their childless status in terms of the work/mothering tension so central to popular images of voluntarily childless women.

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iv. What are the factors women with one or two children talk about in their decisions about whether to have more children?

Women with one or two children formed the majority of women with children in this study (thirty-eight of fifty-eight) and ranged in age from twenty-one to forty-four years of age. Sixteen of these women were professionally employed in either full-time or part-time work. Ten of this group of women were single. Twenty seven of these women identified as financially comfortable. Peter McDonald has identified the two-child family as a highly normative construct in Australia (Kippen, 2004; McDonald, 2001), but these findings suggest that many of these women are prepared to consider one child as a complete family for them. For these women, the experience of combining a range of life aspirations often led to a reduction in their proposed family size. Of the twenty-six women with one child, eleven were not considering having more children, despite earlier thoughts of having a larger family in the majority of cases. Four women with one child were pregnant at the time of interview. Only three of the twelve women with two children were considering having any more. Rebecca Kippen has argued that 'given that the fall in fertility is the result of changes in first-birth and second-birth rates, research designed to identify ways of facilitating the transition to first birth, and the transition from first to second birth would seem prudent' (2004: 37). In our study, this group were highly conscious of the difficulty of balancing paid work and family, acutely aware of the cost of child care and recognised the long-term employment consequences of their fertility decisions.

Managing children, work and services

Susan Walzer has suggested that the transition to motherhood for women in contemporary Western countries who have focused on employment and education can be a challenging one. The choices they make about work and family reflect their multiple allegiances and they do not expect these aspirations to mesh easily. Walzer says, 'I think that for many mothers these internal conflicts are the prices they pay for their jobs. Their jobs per se are not generally problematic and may even support the quality of their mothering when they're home. But the stress comes from negotiating their desire to see themselves as good mothers and good workers at the same time' (1998:154-5, see also England, 1996). This group of women talked extensively of this process of negotiation and its challenges. Work was seen as important for financial, social and personal reasons, but did present difficulties that were not easily resolved.

Tamara said:

"I mean we are better off if I do go back to work; two incomes. Paul is on a lot lower income and I suppose I enjoy my work as well... I mean you can't do both but, yes."

Ron, reflecting on the struggles he and his partner Alice had experienced, said:

"I think [the lack of child care] would have been a huge problem for us, because one of us would have had to give away our career or put it on hold and I think that would have been a really difficult thing."

Norah said:

“I think people like me and this generation tend to sort of think of things in more of a practical sense, like rather than emotions. You might think well, this is my income and this is what I want to have out of life and then think, you know, whether with the second child, you can actually achieve all that.”

Pauline described the impacts of immigration, financial security and children’s needs as relevant to the timing of her first child, but also important to whether she would go on to have another.

“We’re new immigrants and we had to establish ourselves and feel financially secure before we actually wanted to start the family, so it was quite important that I continued to work once I came to this country ... And we want to give our child a good education and everything else.”

These considerations were important for Estelle and her partner too (with one child) although she was feeling that a second child might be an option. That would complete her family however.

“[Two] seemed like a good time to stop. I was one of three and Mike was one of three ... and we had a bit of a chat about the strain it puts on the family unit by having three, in terms of financial [matters].”

Often, a real understanding of the costs of fertility decisions did not manifest itself until after the birth of the first child (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). It is at this point that a number of women recognised that paid maternity leave would provide much-needed additional financial support – so much so that some were putting off having a second child until they were either eligible for paid maternity leave or had sufficient savings to provide equivalent financial support themselves.

In addition, very few women were opposed to the idea of using child care, but many voiced concerns about the financial cost of formal, institutional care(see also Craig, 2002; cf Fisher, 2002). It is not surprising then, that we see most women with two children in our study choosing to avoid the costs of child care, instead using casual, family-based child care arrangements to enable them to undertake part-time paid work. For some, these costs were deemed prohibitive.

Workplace consequences were described by this group of women as very important in their future planning for children. Susan was clear that she would not go on to have any more children. Her first pregnancy was unplanned, and although she indicated that she enjoyed motherhood, the experience had reinforced “[her] belief that motherhood was the hardest thing in the world”. At the time, she had no access to maternity leave. Her long-term future, despite secure employment, has been most critical to her thinking:

“Once you give up that income earning potential, that starts to go. I’m just recovering from the first one in financial terms. Things are getting better and better and better now that we don’t have to pay for child care and, you know, school costs are much cheaper than child care ever was ... For that reason,

we're getting ahead all the time, ... [and] able to save money and that to me is a greater priority than having a child."

For Susan, the current policy context had impacted negatively. She was grateful that her maternal and child health nurse had ignored the Kennett restrictions on number of visits and felt the Federal government was no better.

"The federal government as well, after '96, started to make it extremely hard for mothers in the workforce I felt."

For these women, the combination of motherhood with paid work was a challenging and sometimes isolating experience. They identified real barriers to combining it with other forms of activity and they said that these barriers were inevitably part of their decisions about whether to go on having children.

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v. What role do men play in how families are formed and reproductive decisions are made?

It is not especially clear from previous research what role men play in fertility decision-making (see Thomson, 1997). In partnered relationships, are decisions about children largely the preserve of women, given that is they who are more likely to be the primary caregiver and have to negotiate career issues? Is the recent policy and media interest in “involved fatherhood” reflected in men’s decisions about having children? Our study sought to understand these kinds of questions better by gathering the views of men on the various issues they have to face have when it comes to deciding on how many children they wish to have and what role they play in reproductive decisions.

The fourteen men in our study comprise of three groups: three men with no children, five men with one child and six men with two or more children. The average age of the men without children was twenty-eight, for the men with one child it was thirty-eight and for the men with two or more children it was forty-two years. Ten men were employed in professional occupations (teachers, scientists), two were unemployed, one was a tradesman and one was a student. All the men apart from one (who had no children) were living in a partnered relationship (either married or cohabiting). None of these men were divorced or living in blended families.

Unlike a substantial number of the women with whom we spoke, the male informants claimed that having their first children was a planned process to some degree (thus requiring some form of decision-making). In terms of deciding *when* to have the first child, the men felt that they had approached an “age and stage” when having children seemed like a logical step for them. From the men’s point of view, this “age and stage” involves a number of things: being together with their partner for a certain period of time, a general desire on their own part to want to be a father and, most importantly, feelings that the appropriate age in the life course had been reached. By way of illustration, Jason, a forty-two-year-old father of four, observed:

“It was planned and we were quite looking forward to it. And we had been married for about five or six years by that stage [having first child] and we sort of decided it was a time when we wanted to start a family so ... it was more a case of it was the direction we were both heading in ... and I think sort of after about six years we mutually agreed that we had reached a time in our lives when it seemed about right to start looking towards having a family.”

Once couples have had their first child, the inevitable question arises: how many more? For the five men with one child, the interview focused very much on the future; the various factors which were influencing their thinking about having subsequent children. Three of the men with one child desired one more while the other two men with one child wanted no more.

The reasons these men gave for limiting the number of children they intended to have were grouped around similar themes: concerns about their age and affordability. Forty-two -year-old Peter said:

“When Jane [his daughter] turns 18 I’ll be looking at retiring so we’ve put a few things in place, for example we’ve signed her up with the Australian College Fund whereby we put \$7 a week away now so that when she turns 18 her university degree is paid for rather than me having to look at finding the money out of my superannuation. I must admit that the only drawback with having kids is that it is fairly sleep depriving for the first years and I admit that 10 years ago or 20 years ago it would have been far easier to have had them from a mere physical recuperation view point.”

Declan, a father of one who wanted no more, observed:

“Well basically we realized we can’t afford it any more. That’s about why. We rent an apartment at the moment. We have to find a bit bigger place if we have two children.”

Issues that women might have when thinking about how many children to have – fears about reprising the childbirth experience, further career interruption, body-image issues, access to maternity leave – were certainly of concern to the men, but less central to their thinking about whether or not to have more than one child.

Six men in the sample had more than two children. None of these men wanted any more. The reasons offered for having *no more* were mostly centred on concerns about age, the physical toll associated with caring for children and a satisfaction with the family size they had already achieved. Surprisingly, concerns about money did not rate much of a mention for these men. Tony, a forty-three-year-old father of six noted:

“Ok, foremost in my thinking [about not having any more children] is a situation where I work for a certain lawyer and that lawyer remarried later on in life and had a new family. I think he was 72 or something and he wanted to retire but he couldn’t because he had a child to support. I swore black and blue I would never be in that situation.”

In like manner, forty-year-old Daniel, father of three said:

“I am not planning on having any more children. I think that three is enough and that we’re decided that we don’t want to go through the process of bringing up young children but also it is a size that is comfortable for us.”

Such answers were typical; the men were keen to move onto the next “stage” in their life course. Concerns about age and fatigue were also shared by the women. Daniel’s wife, Jocelyn, when asked if there were any health issues that were important in her decision-making about how many children commented: “No, the only health issue would have been energy levels” Generally, however, greater emphasis was placed by women on the physical toll of having children.

Overall, gender differences do appear to be a factor in the ways in which men and women approach thinking and talking about fertility; some of the issues that were most important for men were not necessarily the issues that were most important for their partner, or other women who participated in this study. Reflecting society-wide constructions of men as breadwinners and providers, the males tended to be far more

concerned about money, age and lifestyle and far less (if at all) about career interruption, difficulties associated with birthing or child care arrangements (see Bittman & Hoffmann, 2004). By way of illustration, Ron said:

“I guess, in our discussions I guess I tended to calculate the cost just so that we would be aware of it and she tended to talk – tended to suggest that the costs were not particularly great.”

While the concern about “getting too old” was common to men and women, the men’s concerns about their age centred primarily on their ability to perform a fathering role effectively.

The results from our study also suggest that men like to think of themselves as active participants in fertility decision-making processes and discussions. For example, forty-three-year-old Jack, father of one, who replied to this question in the following way.

Interviewer: *“You talk very much in terms of being partners ... does that translate for you that you’re as involved [as your partner] in the same way in terms of choosing how many children and when?”*

Jack: *“I think I’ll probably be having more to say about that because I want to have two and my partner wants to have three and I’m quite definite about that, I don’t want to go beyond two and she says ‘Oh, we’ll see’. ... But I’m quite strong, have strong feelings about not going beyond two.”*

In like manner, Bill, forty-two, a father of three children said:

“... I was very much ready to have children. My wife is some seven years younger than myself and I’m not sure that she was as ready as I was at the time but we made the decision, she is a professional person and she made, or we made a decision that children would be, there was no need to have children before the career started or after the career was established. It was important to try and do both things.”

To be sure, couples will never be exactly alike; decisions about children invariably take place against a backdrop of concerns about careers, child care availability, cost, timing, age, and the experience of having children, all of which differs from couple to couple. Modes of decision-making are also mediated by the ways in which couples relate to one another. Nonetheless, it appears that men do see *themselves* playing an important part in these discussions and that they have agendas and issues which can differ to those of their partners, by virtue of the fact they are male.

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vi. How are women's choices affected by social expectations about mothers' duties and children's needs? How real is the concept of reproductive "planning" in understanding how women decide to become mothers?

All the women in this study, whether they had children or not, recognised the high expectations that society lays down for women entering motherhood (see Leblanc 1999; Maushart, 1997, for discussions of mothers in Australia). Tolerance, patience, flexibility, financial security; these were some of the factors most commonly identified as necessary to adequately fulfil the role of the good mother. But all the women in this study also noted that there was social ambivalence toward mothers in general. For Anthea, who indicated that she did want to have children, motherhood was sometimes a diminished role.

"Mothers and their children, there are sort of some spaces where they're not highly regarded ... I see it as a really important role."

Elizabeth identified the same trend, noting that her own positive view of motherhood would not, however, influence her to have her own child.

"Personally I think it's quite positive but I think [in society]... it doesn't have the value that it probably should have. I just can't make the leap to see myself in that context."

Women with three or more children also noted criticism of their decisions to have more than the "usual number" of children. Susan McDaniel has suggested that 'the discourse of glorified motherhood parallels the enhanced societal need for unpaid reproductive and caring labour' (1996:92) and women with and without children were aware that this was the price of motherhood.

There were some important divergences about the best way to mother and raise children between women with children and women without. The most significant of these divergences centred on the role of the mother as primary care-giver and the consequent use of child care. Women without children were much more likely to identify mothering as a full-time job and express ambivalence towards the use of child care, particularly for younger children. Elizabeth, for example said, "I don't think I believe in having a child and both parents continuing full-time work". These women were more likely to identify negative impacts on children, and children's behaviour that could arise from women trying to work and combine mothering. The requirement that mothers "be there" (Boyd, 2002) seemed significant to some of the women choosing not to have children. This meant that that motherhood was often described as overwhelming, and a potential threat to identity and other life goals. The reasons for this varied; a significant number did indicate that the standards expected of mothers were too high, and this was an important aspect of their decision-making. In line with social expectations of mothers to be selfless and devoted, often at great personal cost, women without children often described sisters and friends struggling with expectations, expensive child care and diminished work conditions and wondered whether it was worth it. It is important to note, however, that it was not the motherhood itself that these women identified in this way, but rather the expectations

for and experiences of mothers in a climate that was recognised as relatively unsupportive. Abigail said:

“I’ve got a friend who’s got 2 kids, who can’t. She’s lost her husband and can’t work because she can’t work because she can’t get her kids into crèche. ... She wants to go back to work but the support is not there from society.”

Women with children expressed the same views about how society responded to mothers, despite communal lip-service to valuing motherhood. The strongest of these views came from women with larger numbers of children who had stayed home, but felt that they had been judged for this. Caitlin said:

“If you have four [children] people look at you strangely. There isn’t a lot of community support for having four I don’t think.”

Susan offered a nuanced and thoughtful account of deciding to have only one child, and used the word “selfish” to refer to her own choice about stopping there. In conclusion, she said:

“It’s interesting to hear myself answering these questions as honestly as I can and ... that it’s okay. I know there are women out there ... who aren’t maybe as selfish as me, but you know ... it’s just the questions you asked validated the way I feel about certain things.”

Women with children however, were less inclined to present pictures of good mothering as requiring total devotion and consequent risk to self and other projects. Women with children evaluated their mothering pragmatically, with Esme bluntly saying, “sometimes I do a really good job and sometimes I do a crap job” (see also Maher, forthcoming). Helena too reflected the culturally complex views about motherhood when she made ironic reference to the “so-called joy of motherhood”, even though she also said, after the birth of her first child, she was “so glad that [she] did” have a child.

Women with children were more likely to talk about the need for fun and development in other spheres of life, and even when they indicated that mothering was a first priority for them, they still expressed a clear need to achieve a balance of activities. Grace said:

“I think you can take it too far the other way [toward maternal self-sacrifice], and I’ve seen people who do that and I don’t think that’s a good thing either. I think, you know – what do they call it – a healthy balance [is important].”

Barrow has suggested that female role models are an important variable in women’s decisions about combining work and childrearing (1999:450) and this seemed significant here with a number of women talking about how seeing women work and mother had affected their decisions and choices. When Madison was talking about how she decided to have children, she recounted the following experience.

“While I was at university I had a lecturer who was a very successful academic and very active... and she had four children, so she was a great role model.”

Tess described how her sister's recent positive experience of working and mothering forced some re-evaluation of previous views she had held about this possible life decision.

"It's been quite positive, much more positive that I guess colleagues of mine who've really struggled to have a career and maintain a work presence. ... They'd ... need grandparents to do a lot of fetching and carrying and picking up kids or whatever. And so ... that was another reason it didn't seem particularly feasible to have children."

Reproductive Planning?

This study suggested that the concept of reproductive decision-making itself may need rethinking. Common accounts of reproductive choices focus on careful planning and thoughtfulness in decision-making, such as this one.

Listen to a group of thirtysomething would-be mothers and the conversation is far removed from the old notion of "falling pregnant". These women don't fall anywhere, they make informed decisions: there are supplements to take, tests to be had, results to be analyzed. (Schultz, 2004: 9)

Catherine Hakim has argued that women's control over fertility allows us to understand their preferences (2003: 55; see also Manne, 2001). But amongst the women with children (fifty-eight in total), twenty-eight of the group identified their first pregnancy as an accident in some way or another i.e. a complete accident or an accident of timing. In that group of twenty-eight, it was only eight who said it was an accident of timing; the rest simply identified their pregnancy as accidental or unexpected. These women crossed the spectrum in terms of age, partnering status and educational attainments and employment status. Only three of these women expressed strong anti-abortion sentiments as the reason for their decisions to continue with these unexpected pregnancies. Two others had had abortions previously, but didn't want to again, as had some in the group of women without children. The rest indicated that the decision to continue with the pregnancy had been a process of negotiation whereby they had come around to accepting the presence of children in their lives, even when they had reservations initially. Thus Estelle's story, below, was quite typical.

"[It's been] a bit of a culture shock; um, it's been far more rewarding than I ever expected it to be, it's been easier than I thought it would be."

There were also twenty-one women with no children who expressed some open-mindedness about having children, which is half of the childless women that we interviewed. These findings suggest that distinctions between women with children and without children on the basis of preference may not be the most useful way to think about women's reproductive decisions. It suggests that there may be as many reproductive occurrences as there are clear choices, with a high degree of chance and circumstance being crucial to reproductive outcomes for women with and without children.

Barbara Pocock has suggested that we are labouring in Australia under the weight of 'unrenovated models of mothering' (2003:1). Women with and without children share an understanding of that social expectations and pressures on mothers, where unrealistic ideals and a lack of real choice about *how* to be a mother in our society are clearly important in how women negotiate their fertility outcomes and their other aspirations.

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vii. How do young people talk about the prospect of having children?

There were only a small number of young women, and even fewer young men, who responded to the community advertisements and recruitment flyers for this study. Sixteen young women and one young man aged twenty-five years or under took the opportunity to participate. This further indicates that discussions about fertility and associated policy become important to people, and women in particular, at the time when they are needed. It also indicates that the issue of decisions about children is still primarily seen as “women’s business”. Over half in this group were students currently completing studies and only two women in this group had children. Nine of the group were partnered. Three-quarters of the group identified as financially comfortable. But, despite the low numbers here, there were some strong and perhaps unexpected views about the value of motherhood expressed by the young women here.

Becoming a mother

Of the fourteen women in this group without children, only two were definite about not having any children. Most of these young women felt that, in time, they would choose to become mothers, although they were certainly not ready yet. Almost all of these young women expressed positive view about motherhood, even when they were among those who had decided not to become mothers themselves. Generally, demographers predict that 20-25% of young women growing to adulthood today (Merlo and Rowland, 2000) will not become mothers. The young women in our study may not therefore be representative of that general trend, but there were key issues that were identified by this group as crucial to their reproductive thinking and these centred on issues of financial security and access to paid work. Policies such as paid maternity leave were seen as important and, by and large, were expected, but questions of adequate financial resources were central to how these young women thought about motherhood and how they would make decisions when the time came. These young women expressed uncertainty about how they would negotiate what they perceived to be complex and difficult choices (Bryson, 2001; see also Ex and Janssens, 2002; McLaren, 1996).

The cost of motherhood

The issue of financial security rated most highly for this group. Nine of these young women identified this as a central part of their decision-making about timing for children and about the numbers of children they might wish to have. This certainly applied in other age groups, for women who had no children like Ruth who considered her need for “a bit more money for [her own] education” as a clear barrier to having children. It was also sometimes present in the group of women with children like Peta who said “to keep it to two [children] makes it more financially attainable”. But it was the group of women twenty-five years and under who exhibited the strongest degree of concern about the financial impact of having a child, in contrast to women in the twenty-six - thirty-five year age grouping, where economic concerns were more likely to hold medium significance and the group of women over thirty-five where economic concerns held less weight again. As Sally said:

“You’d have to be earning enough to give [a] child the quality of life that I think it should have.”

McDonald and Evans have noted ‘that young people have increasingly taken on a risk aversion strategy in negotiating their life courses’ (2002:2) and this is borne out here. McDonald and Evans also suggest that it is ‘the perceived indirect or opportunity cost of having children (lost earnings) appears to be the central constraint that leads to differing fertility levels in wealthy countries’ (2002:9). It is interesting to note that the young women here were reflecting on both direct and indirect costs in their future planning for children.

Plans for Motherhood

While the young women in the study were generally positive about motherhood, like Nicoletta who saw children as really “substantial outcome” in life, these young women also shared the sense of the broader group of women about social and structural ambivalence toward motherhood in our society and this impacted on their own aspirations to become mothers. As Isabella noted, despite her own mother’s example of working and mothering and her general view that motherhood was a good thing, she would probably not be having children. She cited the lack of support services and lack of support within workplaces as important to that choice.

Sally said, despite observing that the experiences of family members and even her own mother of mother hood had been “really positive” said:

“But even in the future, just having watched parents bring up children, but life in general, but there’s things like I want to own property and I want to, you know, renovate and things like that and I just don’t think – yes, I just don’t see children fitting in with the things that I want to do.”

Most of the young women expressed similarly ambivalent views about how they would negotiate these life decisions about children. Marsha’s pronounced desire made her unusual: “I want to be a mum”.

These young women did not view motherhood as a lesser life option, but they did often question their own capacity to fulfill the financial, social and emotional obligations attached to mothering in contemporary Australian culture. They identified economic uncertainty and concern about their future security as important. Most of these young women also suggested that they were open to motherhood, but would need to make that decision in the right context and saw that combining motherhood with paid employment would be important for them (Bryson, 2001). Only three were *determined to become* mothers, no matter what else happened in their lives.

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viii. How do single mothers talk about the factors shaping their reproductive choices?

The mothers raising children alone in our study challenged conventional pictures of such women in the media. Nearly half of the fourteen women in this grouping were university-educated and six of them were currently working in professional occupations. Only three of these women had no substantive relationship with the labour market. While this group clearly does not represent the experience of all women raising children alone — the *Valuing Parenthood* report indicates that only 25% of women raising children alone are in the labour force (HREOC, 2002a) — it clearly indicates that this group of women are diverse and will have differing needs. All of these women had combined work and parenting at some time during their parenting and a number of the women currently in work indicated that paid work was hard when you were on your own with children. There was no substantial variation from the rest of the women in the study in terms of views about mothering, combining mothering and work and perceptions of social and community support. Women raising children alone identified issues of child care, maternity leave and the flexibility of employment as crucial to their access to the labour market. But as Sinta remarked,

“family friendly workplaces are (a) hard to find, (b) hard to run”.

Becoming a single parent

Of the fourteen women raising children alone in this study, six of those identified the birth of the first child as a complete surprise or totally unplanned, but only two of these pregnancies had emerged outside relationships. One woman planned a child without a partner and the other become pregnant unexpectedly while not in a relationship. Nine of the women had separated from their partners after bearing children; three of them had become pregnant at early stages in a new relationship.

A substantive number of women in this group spoke **very** positively about their mothering experiences — they were clear that their roles as mothers were vitally important to them. As Esme said, “I like kids now. I didn’t before and I do now. I really really love kids.” Overall, this relationship with positive mothering was stronger here than in the group of partnered mothers who were more ambivalent about their roles as mothers.

The desire to work

In particular, six of these women focused on the importance of combining their mothering with good, satisfying paid work, while ten of these women specifically identified the combination of paid work and mothering as an important one for them.

Marie said:

“Things got better for me in terms of my own work satisfaction and everything ... mainly because I was doing something I really loved... and my bosses were happy for my son to come there after school.”

Two women in this group noted that their career development (one as a policy worker; the other as a counsellor) was directly related to their status as single mothers and access to professional circles through the Single Mothers' organisations that they went to for help. Milly said, "I actually had a very interesting career after my eldest son was born, but it sort of came about through being a single mum". But others, like Leigh noted that there were particular issues related to being single and trying to raise children.

"You have to think twice before you tell people that you are from Moe and that you are a single mother."

Michelle said her desire for a career was informed by this prejudice against mothers raising children alone. For her, it was "very important to avoid stigma". Martin, Roach Anleu and Zadoroznyi have argued that 'mothers who are sole parents face dilemmas, tensions and disadvantages that can be traced to deeply held images of motherhood and of women's appropriate place in the labour market' (2002: 325) and the women in this study identified motherhood as defining of their life experience. They focused on the importance of paid work as part of "being a good mother" in the context in which they lived. In many ways, this group of women shared the same concerns as partnered women with children about mothering, finding suitable employment and accessing social services to support a balanced life (see also Gray, 2002), but recognised that their specific circumstances raised some special challenges which often made combining paid work and mothering more difficult.

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ix. How do women with more than two children describe their reproductive patterns and choices?

Of the fifty-eight women with children in the study, most women with children (thirty-eight in all) had either one or two children. Only twenty women had three or more children. These women were by and large married (only four identified as single) and thirteen of the group were university educated. At the time of interview, five of these women had no contact with the workforce and thirteen of them were working in professional occupations. There was one woman receiving a pension and one semi-skilled worker.

Seven of this group indicated that their first pregnancies had been unplanned or had occurred earlier in their life pattern than they had expected. In this, they were slightly different to the overall cohort of women with children where this rate of unplanned conceptions was higher (nearly half). So it is possible to make an argument that this group were more focused on child-bearing, if we were following a Hakim preference line (Hakim, 2001), but there are a number of countering factors in the stories these women told. Generally half of the entire group of women with children were professionally employed, but thirteen of these women with three or more children were employed in professional occupations. This suggests a strong degree of commitment to work amongst this group of women, who were clearly also committed to motherhood.

“Natural” Mothers

This group of women, like the broader cohort of women with children, did not identify themselves as particularly maternal. Maureen said, “I found it quite difficult being at home as a full-time Mum” and Lilian echoed this, saying, “I’m not a person who was ever particularly fond of children, or babies or things like that... I ... surprised myself with my own”. Louise who now has five children identified a big change in her life. “When I first got married I wasn’t having children, I had absolutely no intention of having children”.

These women also, and somewhat surprisingly to us given the current focus on falling fertility rates, noted that their decisions to have more than the usual or expected number of children did not gather social approval. Molly, with six children, said:

“There were a few people there who said ‘oh you’re not having another one, are you?’. I said ‘yes’... It is almost like they think you have got the plague when you have six children”.

This group of women described motherhood in diverse ways and their experience of motherhood as generally good, but also hard work. Like Sinta, they often identified their decision to go on having children as the one to which they gave the most thought.

“In the beginning – well it was something that a woman did, have children, and I suppose the second time round it was a woman thing. In every case it

was something I wanted to do but perhaps the third time around I was much more aware of what I was doing”.

Their descriptions of workplace conditions however showed a higher incidence of flexible and available part-time work options than had been available to women with one or two children. And a number of these women indicated this flexibility had played a crucial role in their choices about children.

Work Choices

Seven of the women employed in professional occupations specifically talked about the flexibility of their workplaces as part of their planning and thinking around having more children (see also McKie et al, 2002; Morehead, 2002; Gray & Tudball, 2002). Maureen said, “I knew there was the availability of part-time, certainly that was part of our consideration at the time” ... “I felt I was making a really good compromise ... I varied the amount I worked”. She also noted that her husband “was in a job that earned more money”, indicating that this has impacted on how they had configured the working/caring roles. Brenda said “I certainly did challenge the idea that you had to choose [work] or [motherhood]”. Even when they did not focus on career as the central issue, the possibility of maintaining contact with the workforce was important to them. Although Lucinda said she was not career driven, the longest she had been out of the workforce was two years. Women who had combined work and family in this group reflected on how important maternity leave and the possibility of part-time work had been for them. This flexibility had not only been important for the economic benefits they were able to gain. These women suggested that work was important for other reasons, too. Rosemary said, “I will be flat out with three children and that in itself is a full-time job, but just something for myself, that I work and I’ve got another identity”.

Sometimes, these women felt their workplaces were unsupportive of their endeavours to combine work and motherhood. These experiences ranged from questioning of their commitment to disapproval of their mothering. Cherry said, after her first child, “There was a perception that I couldn’t be trusted not to run off and have another [baby]”. Lucinda said, “I guess the expectation [was] that it wasn’t quite the done thing to work”.

Women in this group who were currently not in the workforce also identified barriers for women with children. Caitlin felt that women were pressured back to work. “Yes I think a lot of people go back because they are scared [they] might never be able to get back into the workforce... There is not the support”. Stella was in accord, noting that, “In all honesty there is not a lot of incentive to get mums back into the workforce financially”.

What’s the Cost?

This group of women were quite distinct in their rejection of the importance of economic factors as useful in determining decisions about children. Kim said:

“100 years from now it won’t matter how much money you had in the bank or what kind of car you drove; what will be on-going is the influence you had on a child.”

Lilian argued that:

“material things weren’t really important ... I do think it would be shame for people to limit families for financial reasons.”

Caitlin said:

“This thing of breaking down how much children cost is quite alien to me. I find it quite odious.”

Overall, this group showed a strong commitment to work and a distinct lack of attention to idealised ideas about motherhood. The themes of hard work and satisfaction were present in these interviews generally, with workplace difficulties, the expense of child care and social attitudes forming the background in which mothering was negotiated. These women also indicated a relatively high degree of knowledge about policies to assist them: this was a group of women with a stronger commitment to maternity and paternity leave even when they had not received them.

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Conclusions and Future Implications

Susan McDaniel has argued that “fertility, child-bearing, and reproduction are the focus of several profoundly different contemporary social debates. It is at the convergence of these debates that the synthesis of demographic and feminist perspectives can be most fruitfully explored and developed into a new framework” (1996:34). Gathering the voices of women and men offers an important avenue for bringing together these two perspectives to better understand how people manage fertility choices and how they view policy and social factors in this area. The picture of fertility choices and experiences in Victoria that emerges here is a complex one, where the women and men who participated in this study did not locate structural or cultural constraints as **central** to their fertility choices and patterns, but revealed in their life stories that these factors significantly influenced them in the choices they made.

This study also suggests that the terms and ***stereotypes that are used in debates about family, fertility and employment do not capture the experiences of women and men as they negotiate individual aspirations, social imperatives and structural constraints***. What was also surprising was the ***lack of resentment about and expectation of*** governmental support and initiatives. There were a number of women particularly that identified changes that had impacted negatively on their work/family choices, but overall the people in this study were resigned to limited assistance in how they negotiated the challenges of work and family.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Current debates need to be broadened to include a more nuanced understanding of choices, families and decision-making.

The ***Families, Fertility and the Future*** study findings contest common assumptions about women without children being primarily career-focused and antipathetic to motherhood; about women with multiple children being strongly self-identified as maternal; and about fertility patterns reflecting women’s active choices or planning around reproduction. Instead, we found strong degrees of career attachment in women with children, respect for motherhood among women without children, and a substantive number of women describing their fertility outcomes as “accidental” or unintended. These findings suggest that that the current range of stereotypes do not represent women’s and men’s experiences.

But it is not only important to reflect people’s experiences accurately. Women deciding not to have children were ***as likely*** to cite the social pressures and expectations about mothering as policy limitations in describing what was important to them in thinking about reproductive outcomes in their lives. Women with one child or two children cited a sense of shock often about the effect of children on their lives: at the cost and availability of child care; and at the near impossibility of managing work expectations and parenting. Socially conservative images of motherhood and family — seldom held by women themselves, but sometimes held by their partners,

immediate family and society — impact on the decisions women make. They contribute to the experiences of isolation and workplace struggle experienced by women with one or two children in this study; experiences which were formative influences as they charted their future reproductive choices.

Writing in 1992 about the United States, Patricia McGovern, Dwenda Gjerdingen and Debra Froberg said, ‘policy development in [the area of parental leave policy] has been inconsistent, reflecting our cultural ambivalence on critical issues. First, as a society, we are undecided as to whether or not it is in the public interest to make it easier for mothers of infants to work outside the home’ (1992:113; see also Probert & Murphy, 2001). Recent arguments advanced by Belinda Probert (2002a), Anne Summers (2003) and Barbara Pocock (2003) suggest that these ambivalences are relevant for contemporary Australia too.

These ambivalences and inaccuracies also influence the way policies develop. Accurate accounts of how women and men make choices, manage the unexpected and understand the role of their fertility choices in the broader social fabric are crucial if policies are to be designed to address people’s real needs. Social policy approaches that focus on the apparently divergent needs of women and men with children and those without ignore the similarity of needs and expectations demonstrated here about life balance and access to adequate social services by all groups in the study population.

A “whole of government” approach that critically addresses employment equity for women and men is necessary if policies are to be effective in addressing fertility outcomes.

The one hundred and fourteen women and men in this study, whether they were childless or not, in full-time or part-time employment or out of the workforce, reported the importance of flexible work, supportive workplaces, community services and cultural attitudes to how they chose to negotiate their varying life aspirations. Belinda Probert has argued ‘employees are reporting that they are finding it harder rather than easier to combine [work and family responsibilities]’ (2002a: 8) and there were many in this study who noted that they felt less secure now than they had previously. While women with children did focus more specifically on maternity leave, all the women interviewed talked of issues of work/life balance as important for them. It was clear that single policy initiatives addressing reproduction will be more effective if they are provided in the context of broader social, community and workplace support for women and men (see also Charlesworth, Campbell et al, 2002).

These findings suggest that policy settings that address families without also addressing employment not going to be effective in addressing women’s and men’s needs and aspirations. Although some research has suggested that there is resentment about entitlements between groups with and without children (Hakim, 2003),⁴ there was no negativity recorded about policies to support child-bearing and child caring

⁴ A number of newspaper articles too have focused upon an apparent element of resentment among those without children who feel their taxes pay for family benefits and policies they do not access. See, for example, M. Steketee, ‘Conceiving a new family structure’, *The Weekend Australian* 1-2 September 2001, p.23 and T. Nankivell, ‘Snouts in the trough’, *The Australian*, 3 September 2001, p. 11.

choices even where women or men did not plan to access them. Women firmly committed to remaining childless, for example, did not question paid maternity leave or workplace assistance for women seeking to combine paid work and family. They also did not consider (except for a very small number of negative comments) that other women's access impacted negatively on them.

Susan Lambert has argued that most family-responsive or family-friendly policies in fact 'make it easier for workers to adjust their family life to conform to work requirements rather than altering work requirements to accommodate family responsibilities' (1993: 238) and that the 'increasing number of women in the labour force has accentuated [the] ill fit between existing work requirements and personal responsibilities' (1993: 240) for women and men. Belinda Probert has suggested that 'Australia's declining fertility ... has been a more persuasive argument with male politicians than a desire to move forward to eliminate gender discrimination in the workforce or promote gender equality more generally' and argued for a continuing role for government in fertility choices and decisions (2002b:2). Whatever the impetus for looking at fertility questions, the voices gathered here speak with remarkable consistency about fertility choices always being part of a broader social landscape, where the opportunities to participate in paid employment, to care for children, to gain meaningful education and achieve other life aspirations could not be separated for the women and men who participated in this project.

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Appendix 1:

Study Outline and Demographic Locations

The *Families, Fertility and the Future* study interviewed 114 women and men over an eighteen-month period. Appropriate ethical approval for the project was gained through the Monash Standing Committee for Ethical Research with Humans.

Of the respondents, 14 were male and 100 were female. Participants ranged in age from 21-52 years of age. The education levels achieved by study participants ranged from Year 9 to PhD level and the employment experiences were varied: doctors, hairdressers, teachers, taxi drivers, IT technicians; employed full-time, part-time or seeking work; inside and outside the paid workforce.

The interviewees were drawn from five different areas across Victoria. The City of Port Phillip in central Melbourne was identified as having one of the lowest fertility rates in the state of Victoria. The South Eastern region of Melbourne, centred around the City of Casey was identified as having a higher fertility rate with a high proportion of lone parent families. The North Western region of Melbourne, centred around the City of Maribyrnong, was identified as having a high fertility rate with a diverse range of ethnicities living in the municipality. Gippsland was identified as having an average fertility rate with a substantial proportion of families facing some form of social or economic disadvantage due to falling employment patterns in the region over the past two decades. Central Victoria, centred around the City of Greater Bendigo, was identified as having a high fertility rate with a high proportion of young women giving birth.

In each of these areas, participants were recruited from the following five groups: women or men with no children, women or men with one child, women or men with two or more children, young women or men (under 26 years); women raising children alone. This recruitment pattern was designed to ensure that we achieved a small-scale but substantially representative account of fertility decision making across the community. By recruiting from each of these groups in each of our target areas, we were able to achieve social, economic and geographical diversity as well as representing a variety of reproductive decisions. The only group that were excluded from the study were those who identified as involuntarily infertile, since this study was focused on how people made decisions about reproduction.

Each person was asked the same questions; questions which aimed to elicit women's and men's views about fertility decision-making processes, the range of social, economic and cultural factors that they took into account in those processes, and how they described them. A qualitative approach was identified as the most appropriate to canvas views and perceptions about fertility and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate data-gathering method since they allowed participants to describe and discuss more fully all of the factors that had influenced their fertility decision-making.

In reporting the findings here, we have focused on a series of important questions that inspired the terms of the study. We have looked at specific groups of the population that both media and policy makers have been interested in, seeking to find out what it that these groups of men and women really think about the social and policy conditions for having children and what's important to them when they decide whether or not to have children.

Appendix 2:

Recruitment Strategies and Data Analysis.

Approval from the Monash University *Standing Committee for Ethical Research with Humans* was obtained prior to the commencement of recruiting. Participants were recruited using a variety of strategies. Flyers and information material were distributed to targeted locations with each area; these included public libraries, community health centres, and the YWCA where appropriate. Community advertisements were placed in the local newspapers in each of the areas. Tertiary education institutions, and email distribution lists were contacted. At later stages in the project, radio approaches were made to specific groups in some areas, women with no children for example, in order to ensure recruitment targets were met. Snowballing was used where appropriate.

Once the information material and flyers had been distributed, interested respondents were invited to contact the research team and a suitable time for interview was arranged. Explanatory statements were provided and consents, written or verbal, were gathered. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via the telephone. Each interview was taped and later transcribed. In some instances, after discussion with participants, a group interview was conducted. In these instances, consent was sought from each participant. Interview duration ranged from twenty minutes to one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed in full. The research was carried out over a twenty-month period from January 2002, until October 2003.

The questions were open-ended and asked participants to describe their social and economic circumstances, their health status, their fertility decisions, their experience of familial, social and cultural expectations around child bearing and rearing, and the importance of government services and policies to their fertility decisions.

Each interview was taped and fully transcribed. Initially key words and concepts were highlighted in the transcripts. Central themes were then identified in each participant's response. Similarities with themes appearing in other interviews were then compared and examined. Themes that were prevalent in the interview transcripts were then considered in conjunction with existing literature on family formation, views of parenting, combining parenting and paid work.

Publications from the project

CURTIN, Jennifer. 'Representing Women's Interests in the Paid Maternity Leave Debate'. Australasian Political Science Association Refereed Conference Proceedings, University of Tasmania, 29 September – 1 October 2003, <http://www.utas.edu.au/government/APSA/RefereedPapers.html>

DEVER, Maryanne and CURTIN, Jennifer. 'The politics of reproduction: The Howard government, paid maternity leave and family friendly policy'. *Fertility, Families and the Future Working Paper No 3*. February 2004, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University.

DEVER, Maryanne and MAHER, JaneMaree. 'Families, Fertility and the Future: Preliminary Thoughts and Findings'. *Fertility, Families and the Future Working Paper No 1*. October 2002, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University.

DEVER, Maryanne and SAUGERES, Lise. 'I forgot to have children!': Untangling links between feminism, careers and voluntary childlessness. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*: Special issue on 'Mothering and Work/Mothering as Work'. Forthcoming 2004.

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MAHER, JaneMaree and DEVER, Maryanne. 'What matters to women: Beyond Reproductive Stereotypes'. *People and Place*, Sept 2004.

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This project was approved by the Monash University Standing Committee for Ethical Research with Humans.