

Do I Want Kids? None of Your Business

More young people are deciding not to have children so why is this even up for debate?



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Despite societal expectations, the movement toward childlessness in many developed countries is increasing, in part is due to choice. Voluntary childlessness is not a new phenomenon. When parenthood is framed as normative, the preference to not have a child is often treated as deviant and associated with stigma. Women's bodies seem to be up for some light discussion in this patriarchal society which also dictates that being a woman is tied to motherhood.

Childbirth is just terrifying: even watching many episodes of the hit BBC show *Call the Midwife* puts me off despite it being the most natural thing in the world; it just isn't for me. I just don't feel the urge to reproduce. It's not something I can envision, just as building a full-on career isn't for every woman.

As young woman of 26, now is the time most people think about what they want in their future. Does it involve children, or do I want a childfree life? The answer is NO, simply put I don't want children and I also suffer from PCOS (Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome) which affects how my ovaries work, my choice by societies standards is immoral and selfish. It is thought that 1 in 10 UK women have PCOS and latest figures on Endometriosis UK show that 1 in 10 women of reproductive age in the UK suffer from endometriosis.

Furthermore, there is concern about my mental state and whilst friends and family might help on occasion – the very idea of having a child quite honestly terrifies me, I'm expected to keep a small child alive when I can't look after myself some days. This isn't a decision I've taken lightly, I had long and hard conversations with myself and I feel having a childfree life is better for me, my health and overall wellbeing. I still feel the need to defend my thoughts and choices. And perhaps being raised by a single mother has also influenced this decision.

The difference is, we allow, even encourage, women to not be ambitious. To admit you don't want children, though, seems to go against everything we're taught about femininity and womanhood. Whereas if a man decides not to plant his seed, it is seen as being noble and sensible.

It's a life choice that seems to invite well-meaning but often unsolicited and insensitive opinions and comments from family members to colleagues and beyond. Women's bodies are always up for discussion, and particularly upon turning 30 our reproductive rights seem to be heavily criticised and analysed.

A [study](#) by Leslie Ashburn-Nardo have found that women are often accused of being “selfish” or a “failure” for being childfree. While childfree men face relatively less stigma, they have been found to be less satisfied with their lives compared to childfree women, perhaps because they have less to gain from being childfree.

Childfree implies a choice that many women don't know they have. A freedom. More than that, it's a rebellion against societal expectations and social norms. Women are perceived by society to have a duty to breed and the desire to be mothers due to the over idealisation of motherhood.

One in five British 25-34-year-olds don't want children, according to [recent YouGov statistics](#). And, [New research](#) from Michigan State University suggests that childfree adults are just as happy as their child-bearing counterparts, reporting similar levels of fulfilment in life. Deborah Duley, a psychotherapist and founder of Empowered Connections, a counselling practice that specializes in women, girls and the LGBTQ+ community said, "Children don't define our worth or our value, in spite of what our society wants us to believe."

"More and more people are choosing not to have children for many reasons. If a woman can acknowledge and accept that children don't define us, it's a game changer," she added.



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Emma Gannon 31, author of '*OLIVE*' said "One of few accepted reasons for wanting to be child-free is caring about the environment and this seems to be the more social accepted response, but there are so many other reasons. For me, there's no one

singular reason why I don't want to have children, it's just something that hasn't felt right for me and my path in life."

Whilst (some) people mean well by saying 'you will change mind when you meet someone' or 'it just isn't your time yet', why do people you have never met before or only met in passing feel the need to give their thoughts on someone else's personal choice? Men are being congratulated and the women are being judged on their reproductive right.

"Culturally, we have also completely entwined the notion of womanhood with the notion of motherhood. Many believe that a woman isn't truly a woman until she becomes a mother," explains Dr Amy Blackstone, sociologist and author of *Childfree by Choice: The Movement Redefining Family & Creating a New Age of Independence*.

"When women challenge that idea by embracing the label woman and still opting out of becoming a mother it can be difficult for some people to comprehend. That inability to understand that womanhood and motherhood are two separate and very distinct concepts and not one in the same, can lead to hostility toward women who are not mothers," she adds.

Issues such as poverty, climate change and mental health are some of the reasons for people opting out of having children and it's no wonder as reported by Children's Society, 3 in 10 children live in poverty in the United Kingdom. It is estimated that up to 1 in 5 women develop some form of mental health problem during their pregnancy or in the year after birth, research Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists suggests. Whatever the reason, [research shows](#) most women who choose a childfree life are self-assured in their decision.

Sharn, 31 has known she didn't want children from her teen years and has made it clear that there's no changing her mind despite being in a long-term relationship.

"I do have that maternal instinct and why people call it that I don't know. I've never seen having children something I wanted nor needed, there are many other ways for

women to feel fulfilled without motherhood. I don't hate children; I just don't want them."

"And I think that's another huge pressure (financial, the state of the world or health reasons) and those are completely valid and not spoken about. There is an expectation that you'll be able to raise a child whether or not you can afford too," she adds.

There are many people in the public eye who have opted for a childfree life and fully embrace it such as Tracie Ellis Ross, Oprah Winfrey, Naga Munchetty, Kate Humble, Kim Cattrall, to name a few. These types of individuals have decided not to have children because of careers, personal reasons and so on. They move on but for 'normal' working women, they are constantly questioned time and time again about not wanting children.

Harriet (not her real name), 25, can't pinpoint the moment she 'knew', but simply says she could never see children when she imagined her future.

"When I think of my older self, I've never thought of children being in it. I've thought of owning a house, marriage, but children have never made the cut."

"I never got that excitement when meeting newborns. Usually, when you meet someone out with a baby or someone you know, everyone flocks in awe and asks to hold the child, but that has never been me," she explains.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the number of women having children under the age of 30 has fallen as reported in the Independent, the total birth rate in England and Wales fell from 1.7 children per woman in 2018 to 1.65 children per woman in 2019, one of the lowest ever.

Clare Murphy, from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) adds that financial pressures also "weigh heavily on family planning decisions."

"The job market has never been more precarious, and we know the current crisis has hit women's employment particularly hard."

“As a result, we may well see these trends continue into the future as women and couples choose to delay having children until they are financially stable,” Murphy concludes.

If the economy in various of countries isn't exactly suitable for those who aren't yet having children how can we know what the outcome will be if they do have children?

The cultural norm to have children is very much alive and many women around the world are going against it – deciding to be childfree is becoming the norm especially in parts of Asia. According to a survey by the Hong Kong Women Development Association, more than half of women don't want kids, citing issues such as financial pressures, long work hours and cramped housing.

This shows that fulfilment looks different to women of all races, ages, gender identities, sexualities. It is frustrating that women still feel the need to justify this as a decision but like those before them, we need to have these conversations in order to move forward as a society. Representation and education are a good first step.

It is necessary to normalise having open discussions about not having children as there are probably a lot of women out there that have grown up thinking they have to have children, even if it's not something they necessarily desire. It's so important that we normalise being childfree by choice because women need to be able to voice their opinions whatever the matter, controversial or non-controversial.

In the twenty first century you would hope that society has moved beyond the expectation for women to procreate and just celebrate the fact that women can be even more fulfilled without having a child. It is not egotistic to not want a child, but it is selfish to expect all women to want children. Ultimately, the freedom to choose, one way or the other, is something we should celebrate.