

Wait! More Couples are Having Kids Later, and for Good Reason (Published on DINKlife)

In 2009, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the fertility rate in the US had fallen sharply since 2007, when it reached an all-time high of 70 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44. In two short years the rate dropped to 66.7 births per 1,000 women, and provisional figures show that rates fell as low as 63.4 births per 1,000 women in 2011. It's clear that American couples are putting off having children for a variety of reasons, and research shows that their decision makes sense.

Children and Money

Many experts attribute the drop in fertility to the recent decline in the US economy. Jennifer Hunter, an assistant professor of family sciences at the University of Kentucky told *The Huffinton Post* that many US couples are choosing to delay having children "due to an already strained family budget [and] limited job security." A 2011 government report estimated that the average US family spends \$295,000 to raise a child from birth to age 17. That's 3.5 percent higher than the average in 2010.

Melanie Pinola of *Lifehacker* warns of the high cost of raising children in her article "10 Things I Wish I Had Known Before Becoming a Parent." Pinola says, "Children rack up a lot of surprise costs." Among these costs, Pinola says, are "Diapers. A whole lot of diapers." As a child gets older, Pinola says that things like music lessons, class trips, babysitting, and medical costs "can take you by surprise...Perhaps the biggest shocker, though, is the higher-than-college cost of daycare (it's like you need to take a second job to pay for the daycare that lets you work your first job)." These costs add up, and as a result, a report from *Demographic Intelligence* says, "young adults are now postponing marriage and childbearing in unprecedented numbers."

Children and Career

The declining US economy is not the only reason why many couples are now choosing to wait before having children. Hunter says, "Many women have chosen to delay childbearing for a variety of reasons including... the pursuit of education and an established career."

Many couples feel that they will be able to work full time and still raise children, but it may be more difficult than you think. In her article in *The Atlantic* entitled, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former director of policy planning at the State Department, describes her struggle to hold a high government office while raising her two adolescent children. Eventually, Slaughter says, she came to the conclusion that "juggling high-level government work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible."

Slaughter admits that despite leaving office, she's far from a stay-at-home mom, saying, "I teach a full course load; write regular print and online columns on foreign policy; give 40 to 50 speeches a year; appear regularly on TV and radio; and am working on a new academic book." However, she explains her decision by saying, "the minute I found myself in a job that is typical for the vast majority of working women (and men), working long hours on someone else's schedule, I could no longer be both the parent and the professional I wanted to be."

Slaughter advises those who hope to "have it all" to wait to have children, saying, "I recommend establishing yourself in your career first... You may well be a more mature and less frustrated parent in your 30s or 40s; you are also more likely to have found a lasting life partner." Slaughter points out the difficulties of having children too soon, saying, "if you have children earlier, you may have difficulty

getting a graduate degree, a good first job, and opportunities for advancement in the crucial early years of your career. Making matters worse, you will also have less income while raising your children, and hence less ability to hire the help that can be indispensable to your juggling act”

Children and Relationships

Having children can also put a strain on a couple’s relationship. Aida Seetner, a registered marriage and family therapist, told *Canadian Living* that having a baby draws attention away from a relationship. “Couples tend to underestimate the significant emotional impact that a child can have on their marital relationship,” Seetner says. She suggests that a couple devote time to building a solid relationship before making the decision to have a child, including working out any unresolved issues they may have. “With any kind of added stress, any unresolved issues will actually become intensified,” she says, “and they will be a lot more difficult to resolve once a child is around.” Pinola agrees, saying, “Your relationship with your partner will change... parenting changes the other person too and how you look at him/her.”

Seetner advises couples to be prepared for a complete lifestyle change once a child is in the picture. “Conversations can start reverting to just the concrete details around caring for a child,” she says, “so you quickly lose sight of the connection between the two of you and what’s happening in each of your lives.” Seetner says that it’s important to establish good communication between you and your significant other before having a child. “Ensure that you have open, respectful communication and that you both feel heard, validated and understood by your partner.” She suggests checking in with each other for at least 15 minutes a day to discuss matters that are not baby-related.

Children and Happiness

The experts agree that much hard work, saving and reflecting should be done before a couple considers having a child, and the payoff can be a happier family, and a happier life. A 2011 study reported in *The New York Times* found that parents over the age of 40 are much happier than parents under 30. In fact, the study found that “for people under 30, happiness declines with each additional child... but with parents between the ages of 40 and 50, the number of children has no impact.”

It seems clear that when it comes to having children, later is better. So if you and your significant other are considering having a child: Wait! Save your money, build your career, strengthen your relationship, and make sure you’re fully prepared for the changes to come. With the right planning, you will be much happier in the long run.