

It's possibly one of the hardest decisions in life to make. Should I have a baby? When should I have a baby? Although for many women and couples, it's really not something they have thought about at all. And perhaps they should.

# australia's fertility facts

The population of Australia is aging and fertility rates are below replacement level

- > Australia's birthrate peaked at 3.5 babies per woman in 1961 (pre-contraception) at the height of the 'baby boom'
- > declined to 1.7 in 2002 due to available contraception
- > rose a little to 1.96 in 2008, and has been declining since
- > the population replacement rate is 2.1
- > Australia's rate is only moderately low compared to some European countries with birthrates of 1.3 to 1.6 and to Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong which are lower still
- > The number of babies born following assisted reproductive treatment rose by 45% between 2004 and 2008 in 2008 it was estimated 3.3% of children born in Australia ART children were the result of assisted reproductive treatment the rate of multiple birth deliveries from ART has dropped from 16.4% in 2004 to 8.4% in 2008
- > The 2008 increase in birth rates was predicted in the 1980s – it illustrates a phenomenon called 'boom, bust and echo' where a peak in population is followed by a decline in the fertility rate and an echo peak 20 to 30 years later.
  - baby boomers born in 1940s-50s-60s had children in 1970-80s
  - their children form the 'echo' peak which is now in their 30s
  - there are more women in their 30s now, and this age group is having babies
- > It is not attributable to the baby bonus, but rather to a healthy economy, more information on

fertility and governments and society placing a higher value on parenting.

- > It is predicted that the 2008 "baby boom" won't last and Australia's birthrate will plateau or decline – generation Y has very different ideas. By 2025, it is predicted that 1/3 of households will be singles, 1/3 will be couples, and 1/3 will include children.

## Age of first births in 2009

- > 30.6 for mums, 32.9 for dads
- > in 1979 most women had babies in their 20s by 1999 nearly half of all births were to women aged over 30 years

## Trends in Australian society

### Meeting later and marrying later

- > couples cohabit then marry when they decide they want children
- > first marriage rates for under 30s dropped in the last 10 years:
- > first births are later, with a longer wait after marriage
- > delaying a first child means fewer second and third babies
- > in the 1970s the peak age for having babies was 20-25 – and they had babies after 1 year of marriage, but in 2000 the age range rose to 25-35 with babies after 3 years

### Reduced partnering and increased divorce and separation

- > 1/3 of men will never marry (by choice or circumstance), 1/3 of married men will divorce
- > there are plenty of single men across the age groups
- > but overall there is an excess of women in their 30s

## Smaller families

- > women and men are having fewer children than they say they want
- > there are more single and couple households
- > decline in teenage births
- > the average new mum is now over 30
- > rich women and poor men have fewer children

## Women are delaying family formation for reasons other than 'career and travel': women are acting responsibly

- > need a financially secure partner
- > need a stable dependable relationship
- > need a partner willing to commit to family formation
- > need to be sure they could raise a child alone if their circumstances changed

## It's society's issue, not a women's issue

### Economic factors

- > Australia's economy needs women to both work and have children
- > two wages are needed now to pay a mortgage for even a modest home
- > women have been entering the workforce and remaining there
- > women now want financial independence before they will have children
- > jobs are more often casual or contract, so loans are hard to get as banks only take into account the lowest hours
- > incomes are less secure – 'waiting to see if the job situation improves' can mean long delays in family formation

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- > women are increasingly the breadwinners or the higher earner in a couple
- > financial commitments may depend on her income; studies indicate that his career is often the deciding factor in delaying children, not hers
- > more jobs require qualifications so more women are completing study
- > women are more qualified, but less likely to use their qualifications than men especially once they have families.
- > increased education means higher HECS debt and difficulty getting a loan/mortgage
- > future HECS debts count in mortgage calculations, even if not payable yet
- > government paid parental leave helps, but is not at the person's income rate
- > extra paid maternity leave is still rare and extra paid paternity leave even rarer
- > more childcare places but
  - no recognition of the high cost of providing baby care
  - long waiting lists
  - childcare is expensive for one child,

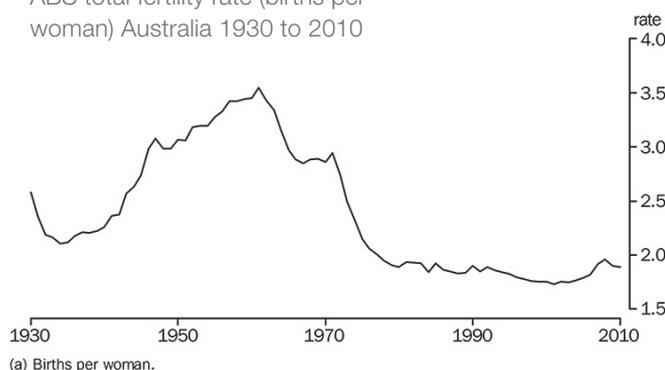
- prohibitive for 2 or 3
- childcare services don't attract a tax rebate for 18 months
- childcare is inaccessible if working hours are long, variable or not Monday to Friday.

## Social factors

- > education extends dependence and delays responsible adulthood
- > "failure to launch" - men are taking longer to grow up and commit
- > studies indicate that the main reason for not becoming pregnant is the absence of a partner or being unable to find a partner who is prepared to commit to having children, rather than personal ambition
- > men and women want to feel securely independent before they have children, and that often depends on the male partner having stable employment
- > definitions of success and happiness for both men and women include a career as well as a family
- > it is more acceptable for women to choose to be single and childless
- > the nuclear family is less common; combined families, step families and de

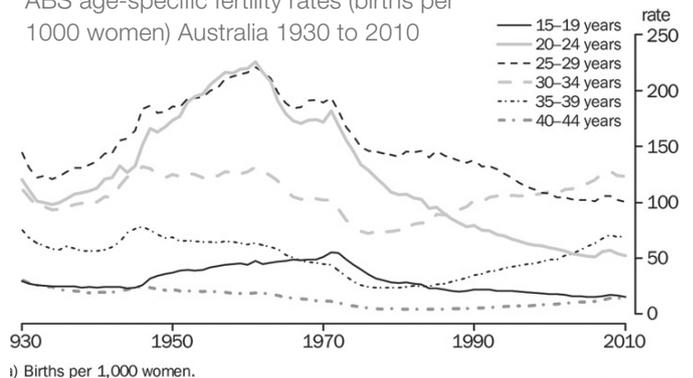
- facto relationships are more common
  - > families are geographically spread and grandparents are not there for emergency childcare even if they are close, and Grandma may still be working
  - > meeting later and marrying later, first marriage rates for under 30s dropped in the last 10 years:
  - > later first births, longer wait after marriage
  - > couples cohabit then marry when they decide they want children
    - in 1970s the peak age for having babies was 20-25 – and they had babies after 1 year of marriage,
    - but in 2000 the age range rose to 25-35 with babies after 3 years
    - now over half of babies are born to women over 30
  - > reduced partnering and increased divorce and separation
    - 1/3 of men will never marry (by choice or circumstance), 1/3 of married men will divorce
    - there are plenty of single men across the age groups
- but overall there is an excess of women in their 30s

ABS total fertility rate (births per woman) Australia 1930 to 2010



(a) Births per woman.

ABS age-specific fertility rates (births per 1000 women) Australia 1930 to 2010



i) Births per 1,000 women.