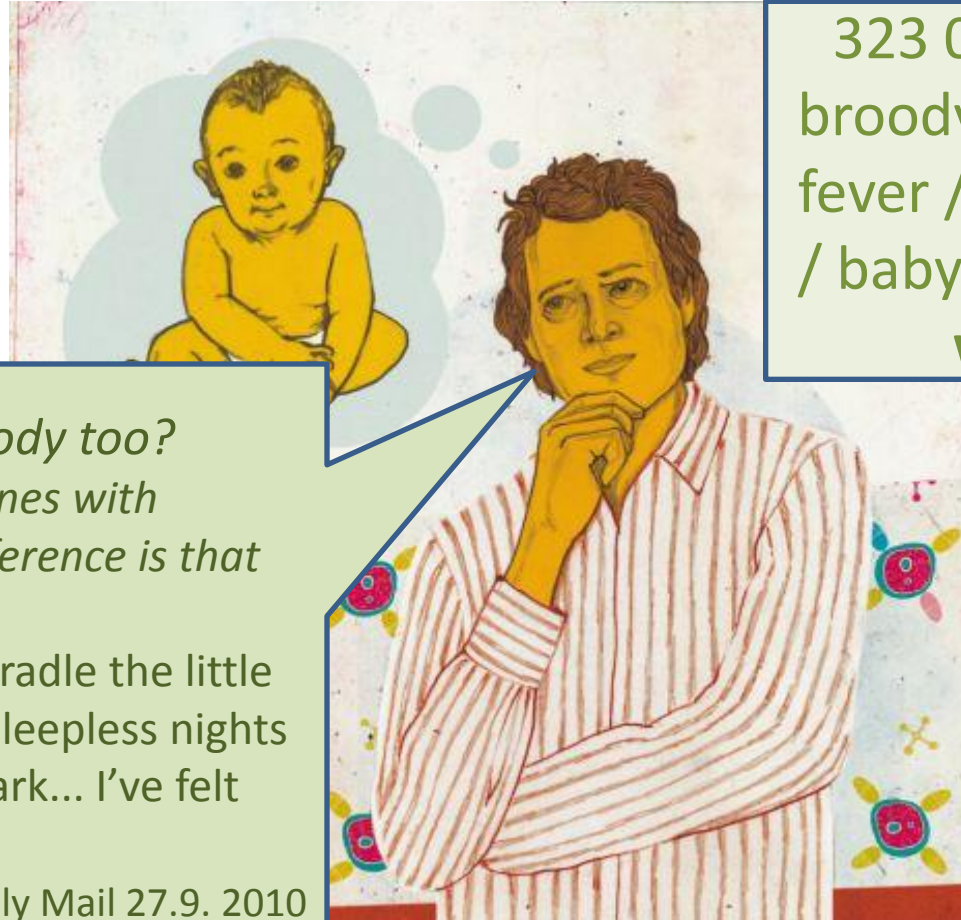


# Men longing for children

## Social and situational characteristics



323 000 blogs on broodiness or baby fever / baby hunger / baby lust, most by **women**

*Why can't men be broody too? Women aren't the only ones with biological clocks. The difference is that they can talk about it.*

I want a baby. I want to cradle the little mite in my arms. I want sleepless nights and -afternoons in the park... I've felt this way for a few years.

Dave Mills in The Daily Mail 27.9. 2010

Anna Rotkirch & Stuart Basten 3.12.10

Väestöliitto, Finland and OXPOP, University of Oxford

"Reproductive behaviour in contemporary societies" project

<http://www.helsinki.fi/reproductivebehaviour/>

# Baby lust as a proceptive influence in the 'age of conception'

Towards a theory of the reproductive mind (W.B.Miller) and integrated understanding of the ABC of demographic behaviour (Hobcraft)

## **Talk outline**

- i. What is "baby fever"?
- ii. Do men get it, and when?
- iii. Impact of social and situational factors on men's longing for children

# Research materials from Finland

*Late fertility 2008*, a representative survey of 0- and 1-parity Finns (N=3058, response rate 44.2 %)

*Family barometer 2007*, nationally representative survey, N=1560

*Family barometer 2009*, nationally representative survey, N=2000

*In-depth interviews* from an ongoing study on men and women with three or more children

Survey questions:

- *'Have you ever felt a strong wish to have a child of your own (baby fever)?'* No / Yes once or a few times / Yes, often, asked, 07+08
- *'What did this wish lead to?'* 7 alternatives + open answer, 07
- *'Did you have a child as a result of this?'* no/yes, 08
- *'In which life situation did you first feel a strong longing to have a child?'*  
*'In youth, when fell in love, when friend / kin had child, after first child', etc., 08*

*What affected the choice you have your last child?*, alternatives include partner's and own baby fever, 1+ parity respondents with child under 18, 09

## *i. What is baby fever?*

# Defining baby fever

Baby fever (baby lust, baby angst, broodiness...) is defined as a **strong longing to have a child**.

It is part of "wanting / desiring a child", is not identical to intentions or attitudes, but may **precede, modify and sustain intentions**.

It can have **psychological** and **physiological** expressions (dreams, daydreams, jealousy, ache, yearning, "stomach pain", etc) and **affect behaviour** (eg. start or end relationships, change career plans) .

Rotkirch 2007: All that she wants is another baby?

Longing for children as a fertility incentive of growing importance, J of E.vol Psych

The cause(s) and neural/hormonal pathways of baby longing are yet unclear.

Unlike popular perceptions ("a biological instinct"), it is probably not a "hardwired" instinct. However, baby longing appears among other primates and sorrow due to childlessness is a universal human (female?) phenomenon.

Baby longing is currently under selection if genetically mediated.

## *i. What is baby fever?*

# Stimuli for baby longing

Baby longing may have **multiple causes** or **one main cause** (eg hormonal trigger?) acting through **different pathways**, including:

*Individual propensity* (e.g. personality disposition with high nurturing)

*Emotional pathway* (eg hormonal mediation when falling in love, after abortion and miscarriage)

*Environmental pathway* (own childhood family, peer behaviour , media representations and cultural norms, exposure to children)

*Behavioural pathway* (child as alternative/ break from work; child to please / keep partner)

*Big life events*: divorce, death, existential crisis

*ii. Do men get baby fever?*

## Do men have 'baby fever'?

### Mixed views in in depth interviews (1/2)

–I haven't. Of my friends nobody has at least admitted to it so it must be women who have more baby fever, their biological clock ticks and those things.

(37-year old doctor, first child when 32 years old)

–No, I don't think men have it. It's a woman's disease. ... for men it takes a bit longer to grasp that a baby is on its way. I had a bit when we waited for it to be born... a kind of anticipation. But not so that I would have begged to my wife lets make a baby, like women may do.

(37-year old engineer, first child when 25 years old)

*ii. Do men get baby fever?*

## Do men have 'baby fever'?

### Mixed views in interviews (2/2)

–Yes, I've had it. It can also give you sexual kicks, the thought that you are conceiving... I may get those periods when you gobble to other people's babies because it appears to fulfill some kind of need. You can say that it's baby fever. ... If men get some joy from children at all, which they clearly do once in a while, it is clear that they can also long for it.

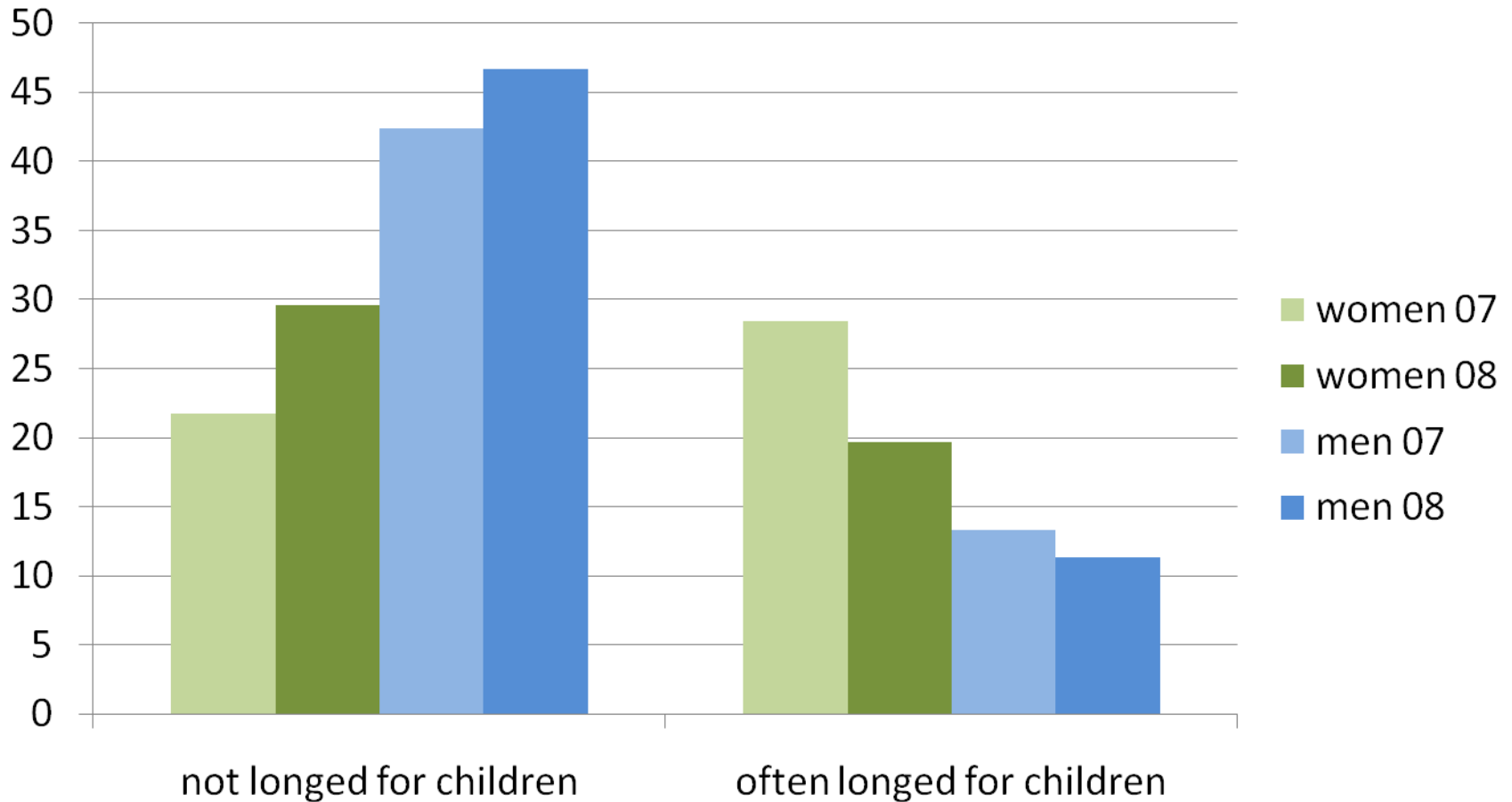
(32 year old IT-consultant, first child at age 21)

– Yes, I think they do. The symptoms... they are more difficult to define, but I'd say they do. I must have had it but it was quite mild, maybe just over 37 centigrades (laughs), a slight temperature.

(44-year old musician, first child at 33)

*ii. Do men get baby fever?*

## Longing related to gender and parities

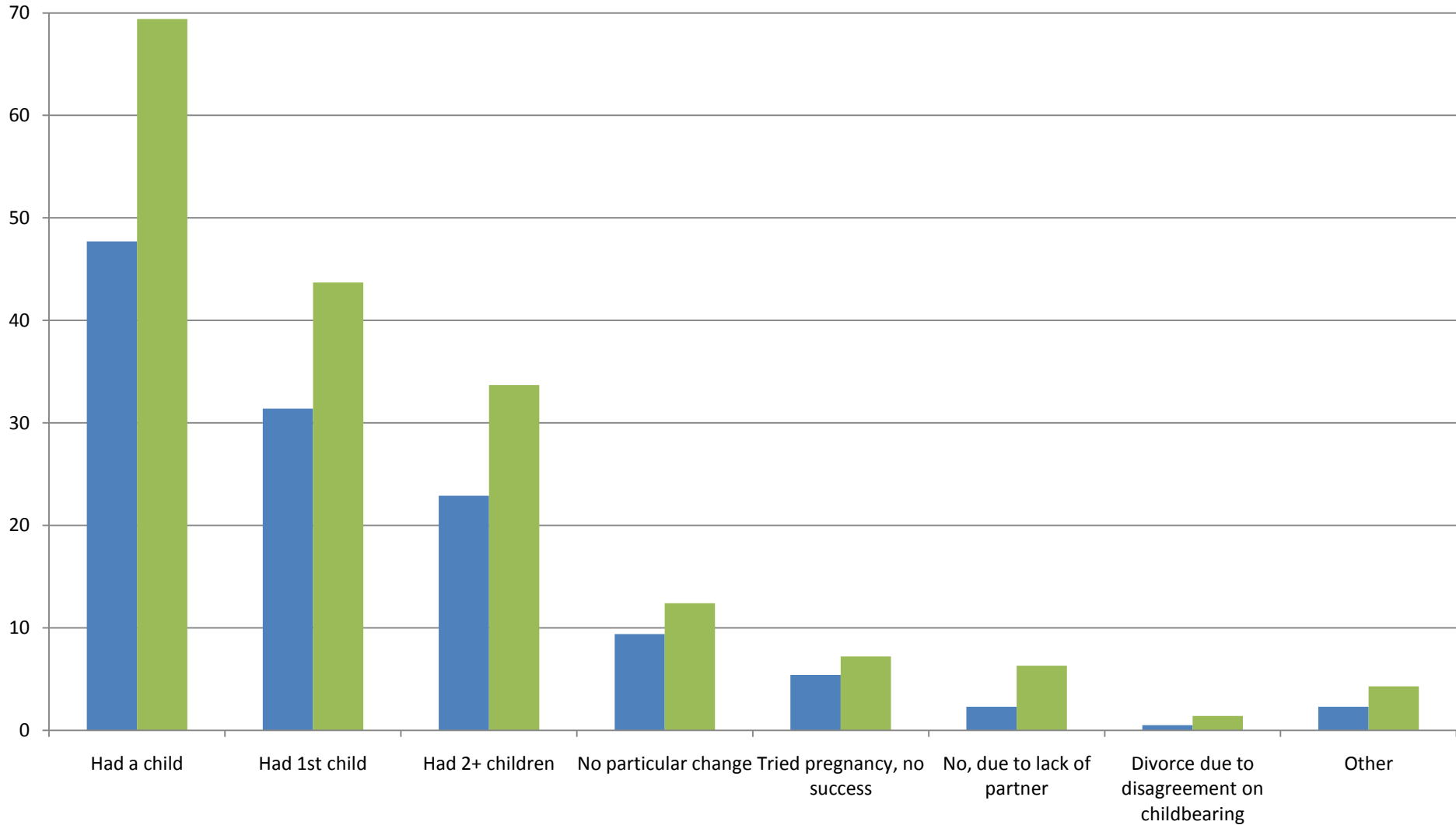


58 % of men and 78 % of women report feeling a strong longing to have a child (20-54 year old Finns, all parities 07)

*ii. Do men get baby fever?*

# What did 'baby fever' lead to?

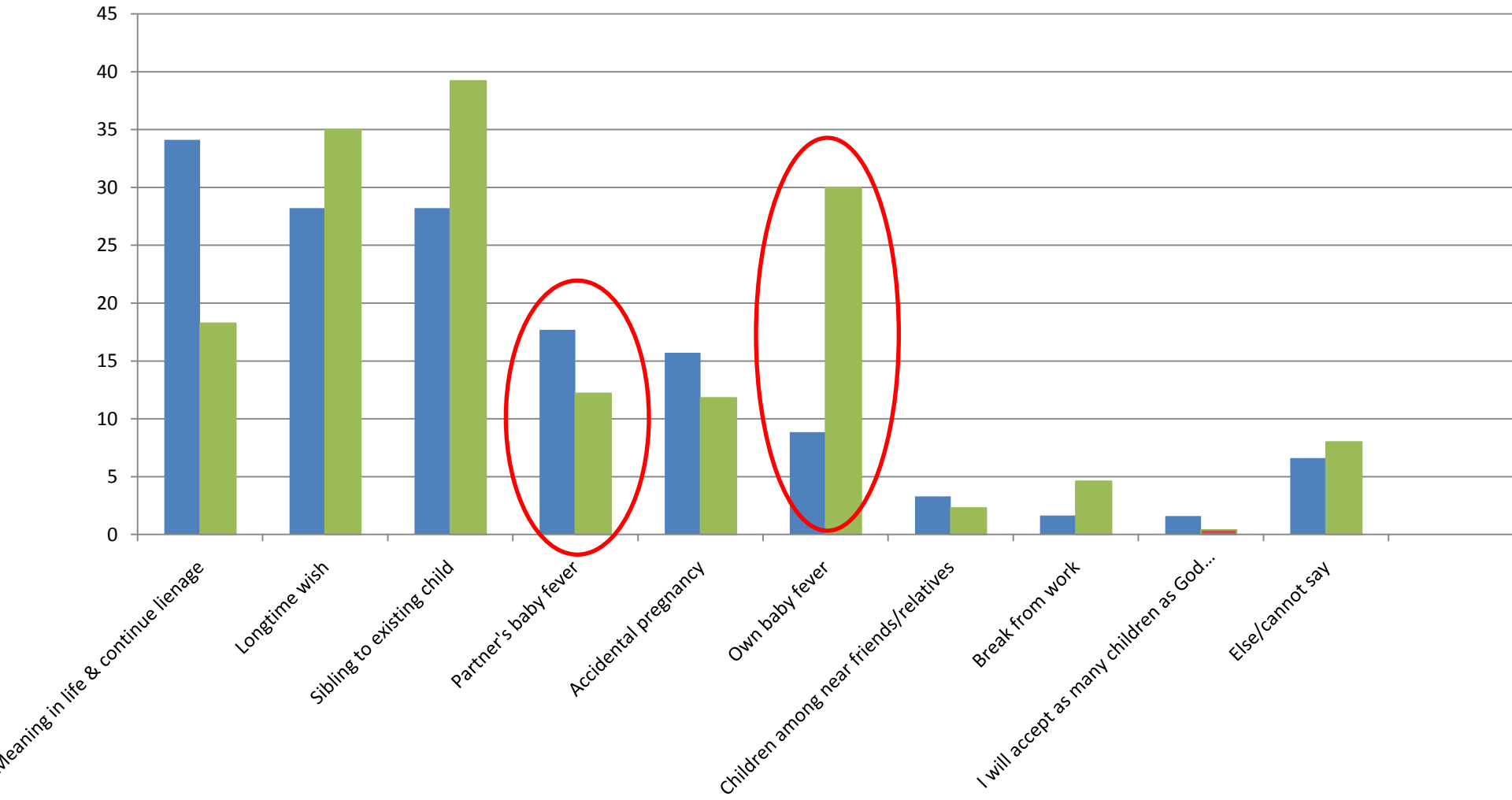
Men and women, all parities 07



*ii. Do men get baby lust?*

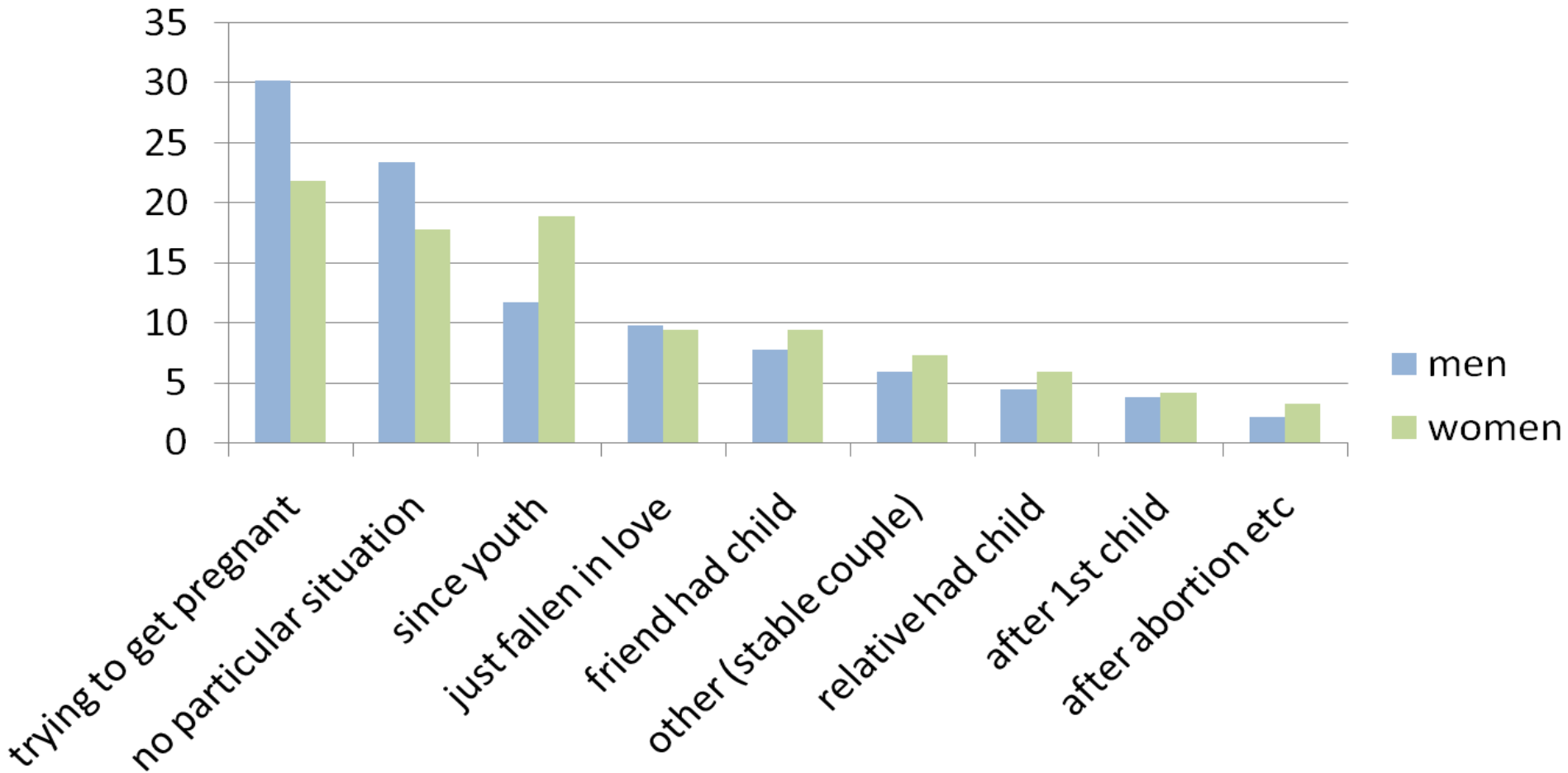
# What contributed to your last child?

Men and women, all parities 07



*ii. Do men get baby fever?*

# When did you first feel strong longing?



% of respondents reporting longing for child, Late fertility survey of 0 and 1 parity Finns 08

### iii. Impact of social and situational characteristics among men

## Descriptive statistics (men, N=1235)

Age	25-29	29.3	Number of unions	0	18.4
	30-34	28.7		1	38.8
	35-39	22.0		2	24.6
	40-44	19.6		3	8.5
				4+	4.7
Parity	0	47.8			
	1	41.1			
Edu- cation	Low	45.3	Fertility intentions	No children	20.6
	Middle	28.3		Can't say	31.1
	Higher	25.7		Yes maybe	32.4
				Yes try	8.6
Current union	None	29.9		Pregnant	7.3
	Cohabitation	29.6			
	Married	39.5			

### iii. Impact of sociodemogr. Variables on babyfever (no/yes)

Model 1	Sociodemogr.	Characteristics, OR	CI
<b>Education</b>	<i>Middle</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>Lower</i>	1.28	(0.91-1.80)
	<i>Higer</i>	1.04	(0.71-1.53)
<b>Age</b>	<i>25-29 years</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>30-44 years</i>	1.13	(0.82-1.56)
<b>Parity</b>	<i>0</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>1</i>	<b>1.99***</b>	(1.45-2.74)
<b>Current union</b>	<i>None</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>Cohabiting</i>	<b>1.76+</b>	(1.19-2.60)
	<i>Married</i>	<b>2.59***</b>	(1.72-3.91)
<b>Number of unions</b>	<i>0 or 1</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>2 +</i>	<b>1.99***</b>	(1.47-2.70)

<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 1 + fertility intentions</b>		
	Variables	OR	CI
<b>Age</b>	<i>25-29</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>30-44</i>	<b>1.49*</b>	(1.03-2.15)
<b>Parity</b>	<i>0</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>1</i>	<b>1.99***</b>	(1.39-2.84)
<b>Current union</b>	<i>None</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>Cohabiting</i>	<b>1.35</b>	(0.86-2.11)
	<i>Married</i>	<b>1.91+</b>	(1.20-3.04)
<b>Number of unions</b>	<i>0 or 1</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>2+</i>	<b>1.90***</b>	(1.36-2.60)
<b>Intends to have child</b>	No and cannot say	1.00 (ref)	
	Yes and pregnant	<b>4.01***</b>	(2.85-5.64)

Logistic regression, 0 and 1 parity Finnish men, Model 2, controlled for education which remains insignificant

<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 2 + infertility experience</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Confidence intervals</b>
<b>Age</b>	<i>25-29</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>30-44</i>	1.31	(0.90-1.95)
<b>Parity</b>	<i>0</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>1</i>	<b>2.00***</b>	(1.39-2.87)
<b>Current union</b>	<i>None</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>Cohabiting</i>	1.27	(0.81-1.99)
	<i>Married</i>	1.57+	(0.97-2.52)
<b>Number of unions</b>	<i>0 or 1</i>	1.00 (ref)	
	<i>2+</i>	<b>1.86***</b>	(1.32-2.61)
<b>Intends to have child</b>	No and cannot say	1.00 (ref)	
	Yes and pregnant	<b>3.56***</b>	(2.52-5.04)
<b>Infertility experience</b>	No	1.00 (ref)	
	Yes	<b>2.75***</b>	(1.68-4.49)

Logistic regression, 0 and 1 parity Finnish men, Model 3, controlled for education (not significant)

## Outcomes of regression analysis

**Union status and numbers** significantly explain occurrence of male baby fever, having **trying to have a child** (successful or not) also.

This may indicate a psychological mechanism for higher male fertility in serial monogamy, eg through extraversion, or falling in love/baby longing?

Jokela, M., A. Rotkirch, I.J. Rickard , J.Pettay and V.Lummaa (2010) Serial monogamy increases reproductive success in men but not in women.

*Behavioral Ecology* 21: 906-912.

“I had three serious relationships during my 20s, but marriage and children were never on the cards. I was too busy doing all the things you’re supposed to do before settling down and being a grown-up — travelling, partying and enjoying the freedom of being child-free.”

Dave Mills in *The Daily Mail* 27.9. 2010

# Preliminary conclusions: “a slight rise of temperature”?

**Importance of longing for childbearing.** Baby longing is involved in about 60% of births in Finland and is especially relevant for the first child. More than one third of Finns report own or partner’s baby fever as important reason to have their latest child.

**Gendered differences.** Men report longing **less often** and **less intensely** than women do, and report higher partner longing than women do. Compared to women, men first felt longing more often when **trying pregnancy** or in no particular situation.

Of social and partnership factors, only **number of unions** retained significance when intentions and infertility experiences were included in the model. Thus men more often start longing once “in action” (trying to achieve pregnancy, facing infertility, anticipating birth).

Is men’s longing important for **sustaining intentions** and **preparing for fatherhood**, but less important for guiding fertility decisions than women’s emotions?

# Thank you for your attention!

Special thanks to Anneli Miettinen, Markus Jokela and Heini Väisänen, as well as the “Reproductive behaviour in contemporary societies” project and the Kone foundation.

