

CHILDLESS COUPLES IN ADVANCED PARENTAL AGE AND THEIR FERTILITY INTENTIONS: A STUDY FOR ITALY

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Abstract [291 words]

Singlehood, postponed union formation, union dissolution and re-partnering are among the known determinants of fertility postponement and childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary. Fertility postponement and childlessness, however, increasingly characterise also individuals in co-residential partnerships and result in an increasing share of couples, married or in non-marital cohabitation, who are childless in advanced parental age, i.e., age 35 or above for women and 40 or above for men, when it becomes more difficult to conceive. This contribution focuses on Italy, the country with the highest mean maternal age at first birth and the highest share of births to mothers aged 40 in Europe. We show, using official statistics, that the share of childless couples in advanced parental age is increasing over time. Despite this increase, little is known about the fertility preferences of childless couples who are approaching the end of their reproductive lives. We find that a non-negligible share of childless men and women in advanced parental age still intend to become parents: about 39% of childless women aged 35-49 and 46% of childless men aged 40-49 want to have a child in the near future. Also, we find that parenting intentions differ by gender and age of the respondent and his/her partner, as couples in which the male partner is in APA are more likely to intend to have a child compared to couples in which the female partner is in APA. These findings raise questions about the biological and social age limits to childbearing, the acknowledgement of these limits, and the access and use of Medically Assisted Reproduction (MAR). As MAR can only partially compensate for fertility postponement, promoting a culture of fertility awareness among both men and women appears to be a pressing need in the Italian context.