

Survey offers insights on childlessness and childcare in the UK

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A comprehensive new survey reveals the changing face of UK families amid recent economic, social, and political turmoil.

The methodology and initial findings from the UK Generations and Gender Survey are being presented today [Friday, 19 January] at a meeting of academics and stakeholders in London. The presentations include two issues confronting UK adults today: the use of [childcare](#) and the decision whether or not to have [children](#).

The survey, which has been carried out in the UK for the first time, was led by researchers at the University of Southampton in cooperation with the international Generations and Gender Programme. The team collected data on partnerships, marriages, and fertility histories from a representative sample of 7,000 people aged 18-59 in the UK. They asked respondents about their families, economic and housing situations, and inter-generational relationships, as well as attitudes on issues like Brexit and the environment.

Rise in young adults intending not to have children

UK birth rates have been falling for the past decade—especially among [young adults](#). Researchers wanted to see if the decision not to have children was associated with concern for the environment. The survey found:

- 15% of Gen Zers (aged 18 to 24) said they are definitely not intending to have a child. That compares with between 10 and 15% of people who were the same age between 2005 and 2007. A further 11% of the Gen Zers said they are probably not intending to have a child, while 22% said they were unsure.
- Less than half of younger millennials (25 to 34 years old) said they definitely or probably intend to have a child.
- Among childless older millennials (35 to 41 years old), around a third say they will definitely not have a child, with a further 20% saying they probably will not.
- Childless millennials (especially older ones) with stronger

environmental concerns were less likely to intend to have a child.

- The opposite was true for Gen Zers—those who are more likely to intend to have a child are also more worried about climate change.

"Whilst we found that [environmental concerns](#) are a factor for older millennials intending to remain childless, our study suggests this isn't the case for Gen Z," says Professor Brienna Perelli-Harris from the University of Southampton, who led the UK Generations and Gender Survey.

"This may be because some younger people do not intend to have children for other reasons, or it could be that Gen Zers who would like to have children are more worried about the planet that their children will inherit."

Childcare differs greatly by household income

Researchers also explored one of the challenges facing those who do have children—high childcare costs. Finding affordable childcare is a challenge for many families and pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis, shortage of childcare workers and closure of childcare settings due to the pandemic have made things more difficult. The survey found:

- Lower-income households spend a larger percentage of their income (20 to 30 percent) on childcare compared to higher-income groups (around 10%).
- Parents who pay for childcare spend an average of £560 a month (for all children in the household). A quarter paid over £800 and 15% paid over £1,000.
- Nearly two-thirds of parents with children aged 0-5 use some form of childcare.
- A fifth of parents only used formal childcare, like nurseries or

childminders. Higher-income families were most likely to do this.

- A quarter of parents relied exclusively on help from parents, relatives or friends.
- A fifth used a combination of formal and informal childcare—middle-income families often relied on this kind of arrangement.
- A third of parents don't use any childcare at all. Those with the lowest incomes are the least likely to use any type of childcare, especially paid-for.

Dr. Bernice Kuang, also from the University of Southampton, said, "Our findings suggest a lack of affordability may be stopping low-income families from using childcare services, and at the same time preventing parents from working more hours. So-called 'early years care deserts' in disadvantaged areas may also restrict access to high-quality childcare. This is particularly concerning given that disadvantaged children and children with [special educational needs](#) benefit from exposure to the early years curriculum, resources, and the socialization available in formal childcare settings."

These are the first findings from the UK Generations and Gender Survey. Further insights from this comprehensive online survey will be revealed when the full results are published and researchers have had the opportunity to study the details.

The [survey](#) took place between 2022 and 2023 and is similar to surveys in 20 other countries around the world. As the results from the Generations and Gender Programme become available, researchers will be able to compare the UK results with other countries.

Provided by University of Southampton

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