

# Reasons for voluntary childlessness: A statistical analysis

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## Objective

**Primary reasons.** The main intent of this project was to establish the most popular reasons for voluntary childlessness (deciding not to have children), and to investigate significant relationships between particular reasons and demographic factors.

**Attitudes towards children.** Further analysis explored the prevalence and strength of negative attitudes towards children.

**Community participation.** Online communities have two types of users: participants, who actively engage in conversation, and lurkers, who read posts but do not contribute. Differences between these groups in the Reddit-based r/childfree community were explored.

**Opinions on derogatory language.** Many childfree online communities, particularly r/childfree, are criticised for using derogatory language to describe parents and children. The extent to which members condone this and the demographics of those who do were explored.

## Methodology

### DATA

5,976 participants participated in the Reddit-based r/childfree community's 2019 demographic survey, which contained 91 questions and was open for two months[1]. Data was wrangled and analysed using R.

### ANALYSES

**Pearson's Chi-Squared Test.** Assesses whether there is a statistically significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies in one or more categories of a contingency table.

**One-Way ANOVA & Tukey's Range Test.** Statistical tests of whether two or more population means are equal.

**Linear Regression.** Assesses the strength of evidence of a linear relationship between two or more numerical variables.

## Results

### PRIMARY REASONS

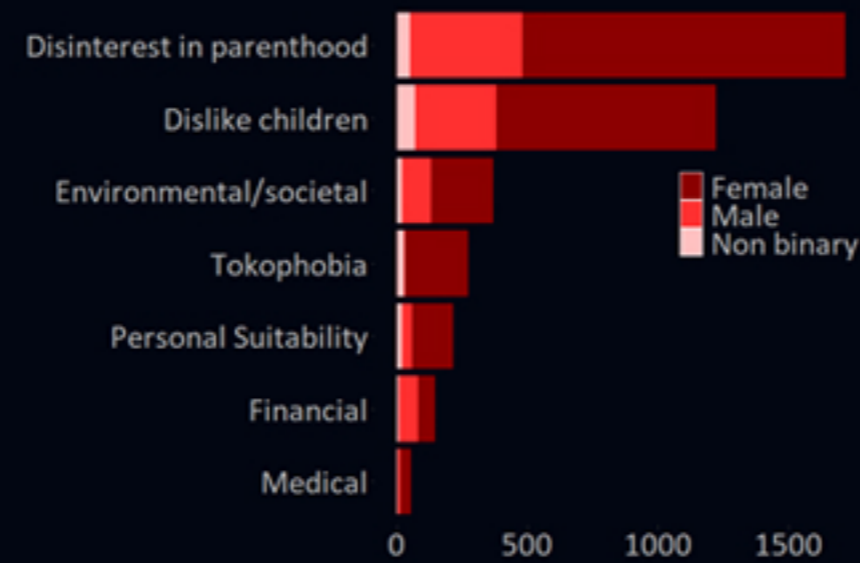


Fig 1: Number of participants citing each reason, by gender

**Disinterest in parenthood.** This was more common among married, heterosexual, highly-educated and higher-income participants who work 40+ hours per week. It was also associated with lower self-rated levels of introversion.

**Dislike of children.** This was more common among single, asexual, lower-income participants who do not work with children. While there were no significant findings regarding age, these demographic factors were all associated with younger people.

**Environmental/societal.** This was more common among those born in Asia.

**Tokophobia.** (A phobia of pregnancy and/or giving birth.) This was more common among female and non-binary participants, those under 25 years old, and those who had actively begun seeking sterilisation.

**Personal suitability.** This was associated with less positive ratings of one's own childhood happiness. It was also more common among bisexual/pansexual participants and those who work with children, and less common among atheists.

**Financial.** Males were more likely to cite this reason.

**Medical.** This was more common among married participants, and those not currently employed.

### ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN

Most participants had unfavourable attitudes towards children, with a mean rating of only 3.4/10. The strongest predictor of favourable attitudes towards children was working with them in paid employment. Christians and agnostics viewed children more favourably, and non-binary participants less so.

### THE REDDIT COMMUNITY

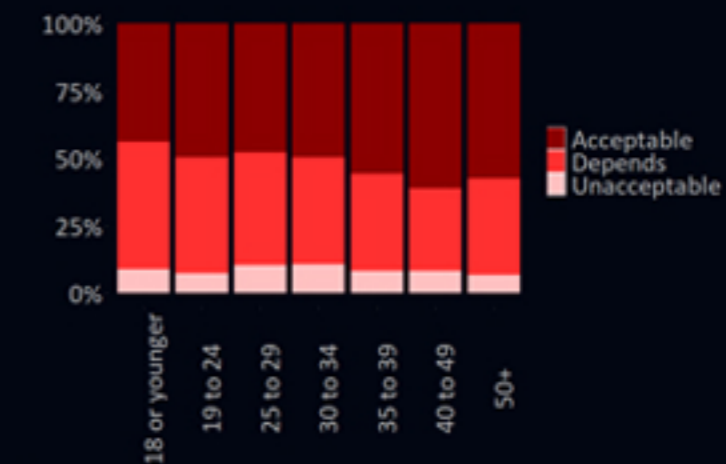


Fig. 2: Opinions on the use of derogatory language describing parents, by age group

**Community participation.** Active participants were more often 35+ years old, married, living in the United States, and either already sterilised or actively seeking sterilisation.

**Derogatory language.** Those who regularly participate in community discussions were much more likely to condone derogatory language than lurkers.

## Conclusion

**Comparison to prior research.** As others have concluded, voluntary childlessness is more often driven by an aversion to parenthood than negative attitudes toward children, particularly among higher-educated and wealthy people [2]. Although the literature suggests this is particularly true for women, results were inconclusive. This project also supports prior findings that financial concerns are more common among men[3].

**Unique contributions.** This project expanded upon prior research in the inclusion of non-binary participants, and sexualities other than heterosexual/homosexual. Prior research has not reported tokophobia as a motivating factor. Results support allegations the r/childfree community is mostly comprised of users with a strong dislike of children, with derogatory language toward parents and children largely condoned.

1. [https://www.reddit.com/r/childfree/comments/ehjdcx/subreddit\\_demographic\\_survey\\_2019\\_the\\_results/](https://www.reddit.com/r/childfree/comments/ehjdcx/subreddit_demographic_survey_2019_the_results/)  
2. Carmichael, G., & Whittaker, A. (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-006-9112-4>  
3. Majumdar, D. (2004). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40969096>