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Men and the desire for fatherhood: The effects of male broodiness on involuntarily childless men

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The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of the desire for parenthood (broodiness) in childless men compared to non-parents and parents. The vast bulk of studies examining reproductive behaviour, intentions, and outcomes focus on women and couples. There are very few studies exploring men's desire for fatherhood. This study is a sequential quantitative–qualitative mixed-methods online survey on the influences, motivations, and reasons for men and women's desire for parenthood. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive, univariate, and bivariate techniques. Qualitative data were analysed using a latent thematic analysis. Recruitment was done via the snowball email method. The sample was formed of 232 respondents with a mean age of 41.37 years ($SD = 10.83$), a central tendency to be female; the majority were White British, degree-educated, professional, and heterosexual. The main finding identified that non-parent females and males showed similar levels of desire for parenthood, with females scoring slightly higher than males. A higher number of childless men desired parenthood (51.9%) than did not (25.9%). For non-parents, economic and social factors were the main influences on their decision to parent. Female and male parents demonstrated an equal desire not to repeat parenthood. The results from this study did not support the hypothesis (and common belief) that men are not interested in or affected by the desire for parenthood. Compared to equivalent women, childless men may experience higher levels of depression and isolation.

Keywords: fatherhood; mental health; male broodiness; social exclusion; social psychology