


Please cite the Published Version

Hadley, Robin  (2023) The impact of male involuntary childlessness on men's health across the life course: implications for individuals, healthcare providers and practitioners. In: The Men's Health World Congress 2023 (MHCW2023), 11 December 2023 - 13 December 2023, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. (Unpublished)

Version: Presentation

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/634121/>

Usage rights:  In Copyright

Additional Information: Slides of a presentation given at The Men's Health World Congress 2023 (MHCW2023)

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

The impact of male involuntary childlessness on men's health across the life course: implications for individuals, healthcare providers and practitioners.

Dr Robin A Hadley

Manchester Metropolitan University

Email: r.hadley@mmu.ac.uk

Website: www.robinhadley.co.uk

Men's Health World Congress 2023, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

#MHW2023

Who are the childless?

- European figures show that 25% of men and 20% of women are lifetime childless (*Tanturri et al, 2015*)
- Childlessness cuts across all levels of society: a heterogeneous population
- Typically seen as a binary: involuntary and voluntary:
- Includes: never married, expected to be childless, childless-by-choice, childless-by-circumstance (biological, economic, social, relational), estranged from children, pre-deceased children or whose children have left home. (*Dykstra, 2009; Murphy, 2009*)
- Societies are pronatalist: childless labeled as 'other', 'stigmatised' and feel and treated as 'outsiders' and often subject to discrimination, exclusion, isolation, and mistrust from men and women. (*Letherby 2010, 2012*)
- Men's fertility history is not collected at birth registration: it is not possible to assess the level of childless men compared to women in the UK or much of the world.

'If you are not counted, you don't count, and if the people who do the counting won't count you, then you are doubly discounted.' (*Sheffield, 1979; Hadley, 2021; p. 271*)

Social networks and ageing

- Relationships and social support **are as important as physical health towards** well being **& preventing** isolation, loneliness **&** exclusion. *(White et al., 2020; Victor and Scharf, 2005)*
- **Older** childless adults **have an increased risk of** loneliness, social isolation, depression, **&** ill health. *(Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007)*
- **Network** size **and** type **affect** health: **those with** least resources **tend to have** poorer health behaviours. *(Wong and Waite, 2015)*
- **Marriage** is important to well being **in later life** – if the relationship is ‘good’. *(Wong and Waite, 2015)*
- Older men **especially see their** partner **as a** primary source **of** care **and** support. *(Arber, 2004; Arber and Davidson, 2003)*
- Older men **are** more likely **to have** very small networks **of** one person **or** less **compared to** equivalent women. *(Phillipson et al 2001)*

Ageing and childlessness

- Majority of informal care provided by family. *(Hadley, 2021)*
- Older childless adults are not disadvantaged when their health is good. When health deteriorates there's limited informal support = earlier entry into formal care and for longer. *(Albertini & Mencarini, 2014)*
- Older childless men have smaller social networks and poorer health and well-being behaviours than men married with children. *(Dykstra and Keizer, 2009, Keizer et al., 2009).*
- A Norwegian study found childless men in late middle age had higher mortality than fathers. *(Grundy and Kravdal, 2010)*
- A Canadian study found Social Isolation a '**potent driver**' in men's suicidality. The author reported 15% of the men were fathers. *(Oliffe et al, 2018)*

Ageing, Male Childlessness and Health 1

- Unmarried and childless men face greater risks of poor midlife physical function than married fathers. There were no differences in outcomes among women (*Guralnik, et al., 2009*).
- Formerly married childless men showed poorer physical & mental health, increased sleeplessness, excessive drinking & smoking than men with partners. (*Kendig et al, 2007*)
- North American study found divorced, widowed, & never-married childless men reported higher rates of depression and loneliness compared to similar women. (*Zhang and Hayward, 2001*).
- Childless men have higher mortality risks than fathers (*Dykstra and Keizer, 2009, Keizer et al., 2009*).

Male Childlessness, Ageing and Health

- Childless men & non-contact fathers have higher mortality through suicide, risky health & social behaviours than comparable fathers. *(Weitoft et al, 2004)*
- UK 'Suicide & Safety in Mental Health. 2021' report found >60% of 'middle aged men' were 'childless' at the time of their suicide. *(Appleby, et al., 2021).*
- A Swiss study found 'Living alone, having no children and no religious affiliation' were associated higher rates of unassisted and assisted suicide. Excluding underlying health issues, the rate of unassisted suicide for men was nearly five times the rate for women. *(Steck, et al., 2018)*

PhD: Methodology and sample

- Draws on Chambers (2002) 'feminist life course perspective' based on: Social/critical gerontology, Life course, Auto/Biography, Biographical & Feminist approaches.
- Semi-structured Biographical Narrative Interview Method. (Wengraf, 2001)
- Latent Thematic Analysis. (Braun & Clark, 2006)
- 14 self-defined Involuntarily Childless men were interviewed: 27 interviews in total.
- 13 White-British; 1 Anglo-Celtic Australian.
- Age range: 49 – 82 years.
- 12 heterosexual, 2 non-heterosexual.
- 7 single (5 solo living), 7 in relationships (1 LAT).

Socio-cultural context: 'The Ideal Life Arc and Lifescape'

(Hadley & Hanley, 2011)

"I just naturally, in growing up, rather assumed I would leave school, do university, get a job, get married, and have a family." David (60)

"I always imagined I would have children." Harry (70)

"I'm never going to be able to say, "This is my grandson" am I?" Harry (64)

Pathways to childlessness

- **Economics:** *“The bloody interest rates hit 13% - so that made me delay, you know, overtures in those directions.” John (59)*
- **Social clock:** *“Nobody wants a 70 year old father when you’re 20.” Martin (70)*
- **Biological clock:** *“We just don't want to let time go by and let nature take the decision for us.” John*
- **Partner choice:** *“My ex-wife stated that she didn't want children, I just quickly put those inklins’ to one side...” James (65)*
- **Timing:** *“My parents had me in their 40’s. So, I thought it would be like falling off a log basically.” Edward (60)*
- **Changing relationship dynamics:** *“She said, “I never thought you are responsible enough to have children” Which, I guess, is the time I started drinking seriously.” John*

Social impact: Isolation

“People have no conception of just how isolated someone who hasn't got kids in middle age is..” Russell (55)

“I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't get out... if I go on the train, I don't speak to anybody but there's voices around me...at least I feel like I'm on the planet you know?”

Raymond (70)

“... you're shut out along with everything else.” Russell

“There's no inner circle, no. [...] Loads of activities around here from people we knew. I've dropped out of that because I hate going on my own. [...] A problem – I'll solve it. I'm the only one - I don't know anyone. [...]” Harry (64)

Future

Health: *"Who's gonna take us to the hospital? Who's gonna push us? When we fall on the floor, who's gonna pick us up?" Michael (63)*

"You're suddenly aware you're no longer invincible." John (59)

Threat: *"I don't want people saying, 'Oh, he's a bit of a paedophile, this one, looking at the kids'."* Raymond (70)

Legacy: *"There is a richness of family history, which it's nice to pass on, again no one to pass it on to." David (60)*

Existentialism: *"How is a man supposed to be a man?" Frank (56)*

Summary

1. Circumstantial childlessness: a disenfranchised grief where some losses are not socially valid = loss of expected self; social identity; status; present & future role. Add losses associated with ageing. (Doka 2002)
2. The older childless are an increasing population.
3. Men are blamed for not accessing 'health care'. Or does 'health care' not access them?
4. Masculine stereotypes & expectations embedded in service delivery - adds to exclusion, isolation & stigmatisation of childless and older men.
5. Older men are viewed as 'other': genderless & sexual threat. (Walz, 2002).
6. Policy: The childless: 'a non-category' an ignored but increasing demographic:

Who is going to care for you if you have no family?

No candle

*No candle to light,
no cake to cut, no nappies smelly,
no teeth to keep, no hand to squeeze, no stories read,
no surprise to feign, no plays to see, no shoes to clean,
no sports-day drama, no parties to piece/police, no presents to buy,
no amends to make, no scrapes to clean, no kiss-it-betters, no tears to dry, no
hearts to mend, no embarrassment to give, no graduation photos snapped,
no 'Can you help with this?' No now-empty nest, no grandchild to hold,
no legacy to give, no one to call, no one to catch the fall, no wishes heard,
no life-lived described, few tears shed,
no candle lit.*

(Hadley, 2021)

Thank you!

Book: How is a man Supposed to be a Man: Male Childlessness – a Life Course Disrupted':



Discount codes (ends 31-12-2023):

Paperback, **25%:** HADL1296

E-book, **25%:** HADL3924

Hardback **50%:** HADL1875



Dr Robin A Hadley, Manchester Metropolitan University

Email: r.hadley@mmu.ac.uk

Website: www.robinhadley.co.uk

Men's Health World Congress 2023, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

#MHW2023

References A-I

- Appleby L, Kapur N, Turnbull P, Rodway C, Graney J, Tham S-G. The National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health: Suicide by middle aged men. 2021. Healthcare Quality
- Archetti, C. (2020). Childlessness in the age of communication: Deconstructing silence. London, Routledge.
- Albertini, M. and L. Mencarini (2014). "Childlessness and Support Networks in Later Life: New Pressures on Familistic Welfare States?" Journal of Family Issues 35(3): 331-357
- Arber, S., Davidson, K. & Ginn, J. (2003). Changing Approaches to Gender and Later Life. In Arber, S., Davidson, K. & Ginn, J. (Eds.), Gender and Ageing. Changing Roles and Relationships (pp. 1-14). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Arber, S. (2004). Gender, marital status, and ageing: Linking material, health, and social resources. Journal of Aging Studies 18(1), 91-108
- Bengtson, V. (2001). Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds. Journal of Marriage and Family, 63, 1-16.
- Berrington A (2015) Childlessness in the UK. Working Paper 69. Centre for Population Change, University of Southampton, Working Paper Series.
- Beth Johnson Foundation/Ageing Without Children (2016). Our Voices. London, Beth Johnson Foundation & Ageing Without Children.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77 - 101.
- Carroll, Katherine. 2013. 'Infertile? The emotional labour of sensitive and feminist research methodologies', Qualitative Research, 13: 546-61.
- Chambers, P. (2002). Hidden lives: Multiple narratives of later life widowhood. PhD Thesis, Keele, Keele University.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). Masculinities. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Doka, K. J., Ed. (2002). Disenfranchised Grief. New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice. Champaign, Illinois, Research Press.
- Dykstra PA, Keizer R. The wellbeing of childless men and fathers in mid-life. Ageing & Society 2009;29: 1227-1242.
- Dykstra, P. A. & Hagestad, G. O. (2007). Roads Less Taken: Developing a Nuanced View of Older Adults Without Children. Journal of Family Issues, 28(10), 1275-1310.
- Dykstra, P. A. 2009. "Childless Old Age." In International Handbook of Population Ageing, edited by P Uhlenberg, 671-690. Houten: Springer.
- Fisher, J. R. W. and Hammarberg, K. (2017) 'Psychological Aspects of Infertility Among Men', in Simoni, M. & Huhtaniemi, I. (eds.) Endocrinology of the Testis and Male Reproduction. Cham: Springer
- Grundy E, Kravdal O. Fertility history and cause-specific mortality: A register-based analysis of complete cohorts of Norwegian women and men. Social Science & Medicine 2010;70: 1847-1857.
- Guralnik JM, Butterworth S, Patel K, Mishra G, Kuh D. Reduced midlife physical functioning among never married and childless men: evidence from the 1946 British Birth Cohort Study. Aging Clinical and Experimental Research 2009;21: 174-181.
- Hadley, R. A., & Hanley, T. S. (2011). Involuntarily childless men and the desire for fatherhood. Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 29(1), 56-68.
- Hadley, R. A. (2021). How is a man supposed to be a man? Male childlessness - a Life Course Disrupted.. Berghahn Books.: New York
- Hugill, K. 2012. 'The 'auto/biographical' method and its potential to contribute to nursing research', Nurse Researcher, 20: 28-32.
- Keizer, R. (2010). Remaining childless. Causes and consequences from a life course perspective. Faculty of Social Sciences. Netherland, Utrecht University: 170.
- Keizer R, Dykstra PA, Poortman A-R. Life Outcomes of Childless Men and Fathers. European Sociological Review 2009;26: 1-15.
- Kendig, H., Dykstra, P. A., Van Gaalen, R. I. & Melkas, T. (2007). Health of Aging Parents and Childless Individuals. Journal of Family Issues, 28(11), 1457-1486
- Kimmel, M., et al., Eds. (2005). Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities. Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Inhorn, M. C., et al. (2009). The Second Sex in Reproduction? Men, Sexuality, and Masculinity. Reconceiving the Second Sex: Men, Masculinity, and Reproduction. M. C. Inhorn, T. Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, H. Goldberg and M. la Cour Mosegaard. New York, Bergham Books: 1-17.

References I-Z

- Inhorn, M. C. (2012). *The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NY
- Letherby, G. (2010). When Treatment Ends: The Experience of Women and Couples. In Crawshaw, M. & Balen, R. (Eds.), *Adopting after Infertility: messages from practice, research, and personal experience* (pp. 29-42). Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London
- Letherby, G. (2012). 'Infertility' and 'Involuntary Childlessness': Losses, Ambivalences and Resolutions. *Understanding Reproductive Loss: Perspectives on Life, Death and Fertility*. S. Earle, C. Komaromy and L. Layne. Farnham, Ashgate Publications Limited: 9-21.
- Letherby, Gayle. 2014. 'Feminist Auto/Biography.' in M. Evans and C. Hemmings (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory* (SAGE Publications: London).
- Lloyd, M. (1996) 'Condemned to be meaningful: Non-response in studies of men and infertility', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 18(4), pp. 433-454.
- Mann, R. (2007). Out of the shadows?: Grandfatherhood, age and masculinities. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(4), 281-291.
- Marsiglio, W., et al. (2013). "Framing Men's Experience in the Procreative Realm." *Journal of Family Issues* 34(8): 1011-1036
- Murphy, M. (2009). "Where have all the children gone? Women's reports of more childlessness at older ages than when they were younger in a large-scale continuous household survey in Britain." *Population Studies: A Journal of Demography* 63(2): 115 - 133.
- Office for National Statistics. *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales: 2020*. London: Office for National Statistics; 2022. Office for National Statistics. *Living longer: implications of childlessness among tomorrow's older population*. London: Office for National Statistics; 2020. p. 1-14.
- Office for National Statistics (2014). Email communication with R. A. Hadley: the number of childless men in the UK, 21st January 2014.
- Oliffe J.L, Broom A, Popa M, Jenkins EK, Rice SM, Ferlatte O, Rossnagel E. (2018) Unpacking Social Isolation in Men's Suicidality. *Qualitative Health Research* 29: 315-327.
- Sheffield, H. (1979). As I See It: If You don't get counted, you don't really count. *Michigan Chronicle*. Detroit, Michigan Chronicle.
- Stanley, L. 1993. 'On Auto/Biography in Sociology', *Sociology*, 27: 41-52.
- Steck N, Egger M, Zwahlen M. Assisted and unassisted suicide in men and women: Longitudinal study of the Swiss population. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 2018;208: 484-490.
- Tanturri ML, Mills M, Rotkirch A, Sobotka T, Takács J, Miettinen A, Faludi C, Kantsa V and Nasiri D. (2015) State-of-the-art Report: Childlessness in Europe (Families and Societies Project, Working Series No. 32). Brussels: European Union.
- Tarrant, A. (2012). Grandfathering: the construction of new identities and masculinities. In Arber, S. & Timonen, V. (Eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting: Changing family relationships in global contexts*, (pp. 181-201). The Polity Press: Bristol.
- Timonen, V. & Arber, S. (2012). A new look at grandparenting. In Arber, S. & Timonen, V. (Eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting. Changing family relationships in global contexts*, (pp. 1-24). The Polity Press: Bristol.
- Townsend, N. W. (2002). *The Package Deal: Marriage, Work and Fatherhood in Men's Lives*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia
- Throsby, K. and R. Gill (2004). "'It's Different for Men': Masculinity and IVF." *Men and Masculinities* 6(4): 330-348.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing. Biographic Narratives and Semi-Structured Methods*. SAGE Publications Ltd: London
- Walz, T. (2002). Crones, Dirty Old Men, Sexy Seniors: Representations of the Sexuality of Older Persons. *Journal of Aging and Identity*, 7(2), 99-112.
- Weitoft, G., Burström, B. & Rosén, M. (2004). Premature mortality among lone fathers and childless men. *Social Science & Medicine*, 59(7), 1449-1459.
- White A, Taylor T, Cooper R. Social isolation and loneliness: a hidden killer. 2020. *Trends in Urology & Men's Health*;11: 31-35.
- Zhang Z, Hayward MD. Childlessness and the Psychological Well-Being of Older Persons. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 2001; 56: S311-S320.