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# There are more Cat Guys than Cat Ladies (#CrazyCatMen & #CrazyCatWomen)

by Fertility Matters at Work | Sep 17, 2024



Blog<sup>1</sup> by [Dr Robin A Hadley](#).

Vice President and Presidential nominee Kamala Harris's fertility history has been the focus of much attention: #CrazyCatLady. In the mid-2010s former UK Prime Minister Theresa May's childless status became an issue during her leadership campaign. Her husband's childlessness was not mentioned: no #CrazyCatMan. According to ChatGPT [1] there is no equivalent to 'crazy cat lady' the nearest being 'crazy cat man' or 'cat guy.' ChatGPT notes that the male version does not have the same stigma or cultural recognition as #CrazyCatLady.

Increased life expectancy and lower fertility rates has implications for individuals and nations. In 2021 Pew Research Centre [2] found an increasing number of childless US adults don't expect to become parents. Unfortunately, Pew don't give the levels of childless men and women. In Europe approximately 25% of men compared to 20% of women are childless [3] while a British cohort study found that 25.4% of men and 19% of women were childless [4]. Nonetheless, caution is needed as the statistics on childlessness in Europe, UK, US and many countries are uncertain because they are only based on the mother's history data collected at the registration of a birth [5].

Most people want or expect to be parents and the achievement of biological parenthood in most cultures and societies offers the surest way to a positively valued social identity. Factors that influence fertility decisions and outcome include the timing of exiting education, entry in to the workforce, relationship formation and dissolution, partner selection, economics, health and age [6, 7]. Stereotypically, women are often defined by motherhood and men as ambivalent towards fatherhood. A diagnosis of potential or actual infertility can have significant life-long implications for mental and physical health, wellbeing, and close and wider relationships [8]. Post-infertility treatment men have often been reported as 'disappointed but not devastated' by not attaining fatherhood [9: p.142]. This view still holds ground in much infertility literature despite that men have reported the treatment process had a profound effect on men's beliefs about themselves and their place in society [10]. Moreover, many involuntarily and voluntarily childless people have hidden their experience and status, to avoid stigma and/or protect themselves or others from pain [8].

The vast bulk of literature on reproduction is centred on women with little investigation of the male experience. This is based on the 'widely held but largely untested

assumption' [11: p.6] that men are not interested in, and disengaged from, parenthood. Consequently, men have become marginalized as the 'second sex' [12: p.1] in all areas of social science scholarship and in the general media. There is a paucity research on men's experiences on the desire for fatherhood. The little research that does exist concentrates on couples on fertility treatment, fertility intentions, fathers to be or those who are already fathers. Studies of health datasets have shown that childlessness has an impact on men's health and wellbeing [13, 14].

## **What happens to those #CatGuys?**

Let's start by busting the myth that men are not bothered about fatherhood [15]. In order to see if that claim was true, I self-funded a study to try and find the level of 'broodiness' [16-19] in men and women, non-parents and parents. I found that 59% of men and 63% of women said they wanted children. The main influences on men's wishes to have children were 'cultural and family expectations' with an underlying factor of 'biological urge' and 'personal desire.' Furthermore, non-parent men were as likely to want

children as non-parent. However, they felt more isolated, depressed, angry, and sad than women were.

Of the men that wanted children:

- 69% had experienced yearning for a child, compared with 71% women.
- 50% had experienced isolation because they did not have any children, compared with 27% women.
- 38% had experienced depression because they did not have any children, compared with 27% women.
- 25% had experienced anger because they did not have any children, compared with 18% women.
- 56% had experienced sadness because they did not have any children, compared with 43% women.
- 56% experienced jealousy of those with children, compared with 47% of women.

- No men had experienced guilt because they did not have any children, compared with 16% women.

In an earlier study I interviewed 10 men [20] about their experience of wanting to be a father. Fatherhood was viewed as a re-connection, repayment, repeat or replacement of their childhood experience. All the men reported having experienced depression: eight of the men thought that childlessness was an element in their mental health. The men also talked about feeling bereaved and isolated and some showed issues with alcohol and substance abuse [20]. My PhD [see 21] challenged the view that men are not as affected by involuntary childlessness as women. The 14 men who took part in the study spoke of 'missing out' on the father-child relationship. The majority of infertility literature highlights a transition from grief to acceptance. However, all the participants' expressed a complex constant negotiation of the loss of experience, identity, role, and intimate and wider relationships. Moreover, the continuity of disruption affects present and future agency: economic, existential, genetic,

identity, legacy of familial stories and material, relational, role, and socio-cultural.

## More on #CatGuys

- European data shows fathers have higher incomes than childless men, regardless of their partner history [22, 23].
- European research found older childless men have smaller social networks and poorer behaviours in terms of health, diet, self-care, and well-being than those married with children [21-26].
- Dutch data showed that single non-parent men aged 45–59 were poorer socio-economically and psychologically compared to men in relationships [14].
- In the UK unmarried and childless men face greater risks of poor midlife physical function (functional decline) in than married men with children. There were no differences in outcomes among women [27].
- An Australian study found that men, five years after a diagnosis of infertility, who did not become fathers suffered poorer mental health compared to men who become fathers [28].



- A study of North American coworkers revealed divorced, widowed, and never-married childless men reported higher rates of loneliness compared with women in similar circumstances [29].
- Divorced, and widowed childless men showed higher rates of depression than divorced and widowed women [29].
- A Swedish study revealed that both lone childless men and lone non-custodial fathers had an increased risk of death through suicide, addiction, injury, poisoning, lung and heart disease [30]. A cross-country study found that formerly married childless men recorded the highest incidence of excessive smoking and drinking, worse physical health, depression and sleeping difficulties [31].
- European research found childless men have higher mortality risks than fathers Dykstra [22, 23].
- In the UK The National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health [32] reports over 60% (38% were parents) of the cases were probably childless at the time of their suicide.

- A Norwegian study found childless men in late middle age had higher mortality than fathers [33].
- A Swiss population study indicated that generally, men had over twice the rate of unassisted suicide and a similar level of assisted suicide compared to women: accounting for underlying health problems (for example, cancer) the rate for unassisted suicide for men was nearly five times the rate for women Steck [34].

Childless men – for whatever reason circumstances (and economics is a very big factor), choice or infertility – are made invisible and not listened too [35, 36]. The situation surrounding #CrazyCatMen is complex. A more nuanced understanding and approach to male reproductive health and childless men is needed. As I wrote in a recent #Blog [14], “It is imperative that societal attitudes evolve to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by childless men. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and empathetic society that acknowledges and supports the needs of all individuals, regardless of gender.”

In recognition of [World Childless Week](#) my book, ‘[How is a man supposed to be a man? Male childlessness – a](#)

[Life Course Disrupted](#) is being discounted (ends 31st October 2024).

Use these codes at the publisher's website:

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I am a [World Childless Week](#) Ambassador. This year's World Childless Week takes place on 16th-22nd Sept 2024 where I am co-hosting a webinar with [Anne Altamore](#), 'Work Life Unbalanced – slings and arrows' on the 20th September.

Details of my research can be found at my website:

[www.robinhadley.co.uk](http://www.robinhadley.co.uk). Check out Manchester

Metropolitan University E-Space for my publications

(many are free to download) – just search my name: [e-](#)

[space \(mmu.ac.uk\)](#)

1. [This piece is adapted from a Substack post.](#)

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