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Study Reveals Large Number of Older Women are Voluntarily Childless

Common Perceptions Not Always Accurate, Public Health Campaigns May be Misdirected

Hyattsville, Md. - December XX, 2006 – In the last two decades, the U.S. has seen an increase in childlessness among women of older ages. A study in *Journal of Marriage and Family* finds that, in the growing demographic of childless women aged 35-44, the voluntarily childless outnumber women who cannot have children or expect to have them in the future. Using the National Survey of Family Growth, the study determined that the percent of older women who are voluntarily childless is higher than when it was first measured in 1982. In 2002, 42 percent of older childless women had consciously chosen not to bear children.

Contrary to the public perception that all childless women are generally unhappy with their condition, the study shows that assumptions of older, childless women being dissatisfied with their status do not apply to the largest group of childless older women.

“Our research leads to the notion that for some women, childbearing might not have even been part of an equation,” says Joyce Abma, Ph.D., lead author of the study. “Public impressions that all older childless women are eager to start a family and ‘beat the odds’ of increasing infertility stand to be refined.” Public health campaigns to encourage women to begin childbearing before age-related issues begin are, perhaps, not relevant for a larger subgroup of women than previously realized.

The study also found that women who were voluntarily childless are disproportionately educated, are employed full-time and most-commonly white. Although the number of black women in this category is increasing steadily. They are also of higher socio-economic status and more likely to identify themselves as non-religious, when compared to the overall population.

This study is published in *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Media wishing to receive a PDF of this article please contact Journalnews@bos.blackwellpublishing.net

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The *Journal of Marriage and Family* has been the leading research journal in the family field for over 60 years. *JMF* features original research and theory, research interpretation and reviews, and critical discussion concerning all aspects of marriage, other forms of close relationships, and families. For more information, please visit www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/jomf. *JMF* is published on behalf of the National Council on Family Relations, www.ncfr.org.

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