Factors Affecting Voluntary Childlessness and Providing Solutions for Childbearing Among Highly Educated Women: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: It is projected that urban women, particularly those with higher education, will exhibit a greater tendency toward voluntary childlessness. This trend is expected to intensify as education levels and urbanization continue to rise. This study aimed to systematically review the evidence on factors affecting voluntary childlessness and solutions for childbearing in women with high education.

Search Strategy: The PRISMA statement was used to guide the conduct of this systematic review. A computerized search was performed using multiple keywords in the following databases: Medline, Cochrane, Google Scholar, and EMBASE. Without any specific criteria, the number of articles eligible for inclusion based on the following topics—childbearing, voluntary childlessness, women, and high education—reached as high as 2,000 on April 25, 2024. This count included titles and abstracts of the retrieved publications. After screening by two reviewers, studies that did not meet the above criteria (letters, viewpoints, commentaries, and editorials) were excluded. Articles were limited to English and Persian. Access was obtained to 99 complete articles, of which 19 were finally selected based on our criteria.

Results: The results were categorized into two main areas: factors affecting voluntary childlessness: (1) developmental idealism, (2) social-cultural diversification (residence, educational attainment, and job security), (3) leftover women (still unmarried, despite being highly educated and successful), (4) changes in lifestyles and fertility concepts, (5) perception of childbirth as a threat for couples, and (6) high levels of happiness (among both the men and women). Suggested solutions: (1) provide accurate information about childbearing, (2) engage with various media sources, (3) develop policies to alleviate some of the anxieties faced by women, (4) encourage active male involvement in childcare responsibilities, and (5) urge policymakers to expand multidimensional programs.

Conclusion and Discussion: The modern fertility transition seems to stem from the adoption of innovative behaviors rather than merely an adaptation to new socioeconomic conditions. The consequences of childlessness are as extensive and varied as its causes. Couples require accurate information to make informed decisions about childbearing access to this information can significantly assist them. The government should develop a reproductive policy aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of pregnancy and postpartum.

Keywords: Fertility, Systematic review, Women

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