

FACTORS INFLUENCING DOUBLE INCOME NO KIDS CULTURE IN THE CITY OF MUMBAI

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ABSTRACT

In this era of globalization too many of us tend to worship self-indulgence. It's hard to ignore what Jimmy Carter said - Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. This has widely resulted into Consumerism which is a social and economic order that encourages the purchase of goods and services in ever greater amounts. The result is accelerated rise in materialism amongst township youth is reaching epidemic proportions. Today, there is a great deal of scholarship that describes the possible reasons—a national cultural shift, the equalization of educational opportunities, the modernization of healthcare—that are affecting couples' willingness to postpone childbearing. Due to the emergence of globalization today there is a high level of American influence found among most of the Indians especially those living in metropolitan cities like Mumbai. My research is trying to understand the level of influence of this DINK culture in the city of Mumbai. This research project focused on the social and cultural phenomenon known as Double Income No Kids (DINK), specifically investigating how DINK couples in the Mumbai negotiated the decision of having children.

Keywords: Double Income; No Kids

INTRODUCTION

DINK. It is an acronym for Double/Dual Income No Kids, which Merriam-Webster defines as “a couple with two incomes and no children” (Merriam-Webster 2011). Although the term came into existence alongside the expression “yuppie” in the 1980s, its solidification into the English language came about in 2002.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To get insights about the level of influence of DINK culture in the city of Mumbai.
2. To understand various factors that has contributed to the decision of adapting the DINK culture.
3. To investigate how DINK couples in the Mumbai negotiated the decision of having children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Never before in recorded history—not in the Great Depression, not in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and not in ancient times—has fertility been so low for whole societies as it is now in the industrialized world” (Davis 1986:48).

Additionally, the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics has documented that between 1980 and 2004, the number of women giving birth at age 30 has doubled, at age 35, tripled, and after age 40 has almost quadrupled (Newman 2008).

This trend of childlessness has risen across all socioeconomic differentiators, with the exception of women with advanced degrees. For this highly educated group, there has been a small decrease in the number choosing not to have children. Whether a couple's ultimate choice is to be DINK for the short, mid, or long term, what cannot be denied is that while they were "once considered a fleeting and transitional stage of early adult life, these early child-free years have now become a life stage in their own right" (Whithead 2008:7).

Improvements in healthcare have also provided more flexibility for couples as they decide their next steps in life. Birth prevention techniques, like the birth control pills, the IUD and even the morning after pill have had immediate repercussions on the birth rate overall (Jayson 2009).

Education also plays a part in this social shift. In a study of states' education levels, it was found that in "states with high shares of college-educated adults, men and women marry at older ages, indicating that highly educated individuals marry and thus, have children later in life" (Cohn 2009).

As presented in this section, there is a great deal of scholarship that describes the possible reasons that are affecting couples' willingness to postpone childbearing. Due to the emergence of globalization today there is a high level of American influence found among most of the Indians especially those living in metropolitan cities like Mumbai. My research is trying to understand the level of influence of this DINK culture in the city of Mumbai

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to have firsthand information regarding the lifestyle changes due to the influence of the DINK culture in the city of Mumbai questionnaire survey was undertaken. A DINK in this study is defined as a person who: is married; does not have children; is between the ages of 25-50; is self-identified with any race/ethnicity; is college educated; and has a career or is studying for a higher degree The selected respondents represented to this criterion set. In all 30 individuals (15 couples) were selected from the city of Mumbai and surveyed using Semi-structured questionnaire and personal interview method. Convenience sampling method was used. Use of secondary data is also made to certain extent to establish the background for the study.

SURVEY RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The research participant criteria for this project were developed purposefully and based on current economic and health indicators in order to ensure the most representative data set possible. The age range was assumed to be on an average 25 years old for having children. Delineating participants within this age range indicates they are already falling behind the national norm for first-time birth, thus statistically delayed. What this "delay" means to them or whether they even perceive it as "delay" is, of course, a question that is investigated in the context of the interviews.

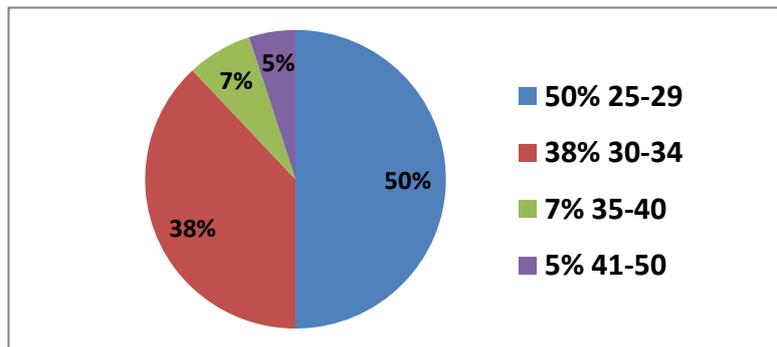


Figure 1. Age analysis of respondents

But it is more likely indicative of the fact that most Indians choose to be only short-term DINKs. One survey participant speaks to this sentiment: “I definitely see the attraction of having children and that is something I want one day. I just feel like my husband and I are too young and unprepared.” The sentiment of this participant captures what the majority of the DINKs in the research project assume—one day, they would try to start a family.

Education is critical to this group of individuals. One participant commented, “Everyone has their own priorities and makes their own choices about children according to those priorities. Up until this point, I have valued my education.” This individual was not alone in this prioritization, at least in temporal terms, of education before children.

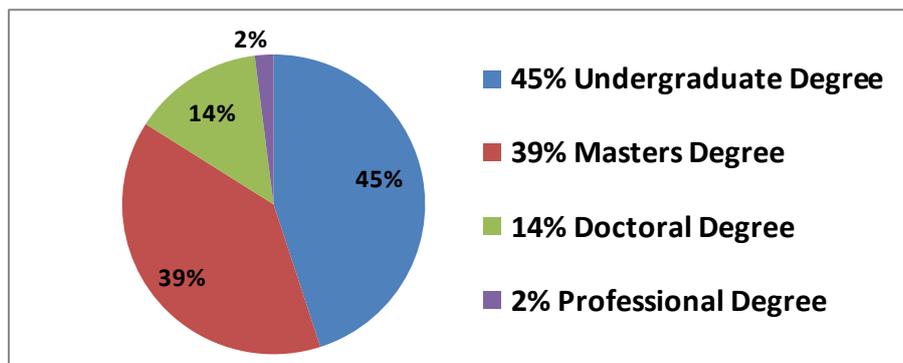


Figure 2. Education analysis of respondents

Education often leads to a successful and thriving career for many DINKs. As a possible correlate, the majority of the individuals surveyed were financially secure. Over 62 percent of the individuals surveyed made over Rs.25, 00,000 a year. The next highest group made between Rs.10, 00,000 and Rs.25, 00,000 a year. Additionally, there were a few individuals who were currently in graduate school with limited income.

Most of the participants had only been married for a handful of years at the time of survey. While about 43 percent had been married between zero to two years (a relatively short period of time to try to have children), another 47 percent had been married from three to five years—giving them a longer amount of time to start considering the possibility of children. Only three percent had been married for over ten years. These percentages most likely correlate with the age of the participants surveyed and might suggest that by the time these couples are older; they will actually have kids, or at least might hope to. A quote from a survey participant explains, “We really wanted to spend the first years of marriage as a

couple, learning more about each other and spending quality time together. We didn't want to rush into having a baby which would take up all of our free time.” It appears that the older individuals become the more likely that they will forgo being DINK.

Participant Demographics

It's argued that as people live their lives they must assess the variety of lifestyle choices available, consider the risks of each option, and then choose. While cultural, economic, social, and political restrictions tie the hands of the poor and bar real choice, for two educated, salaried, and childless adults, opportunities can seem to stretch forward endlessly. On the one hand, choice is liberating; these couples have the resources, in time and money, to truly follow their dreams. On the other hand, having competing options can create emotional stress as individuals try to define just who they are. In the past people made decisions that were linked closely to socio cultural expectations of moving through specific rites of passage; however, in contemporary Indian society, individuals are forced to choose from many different *right* options.

As argued, DINKs are motivated to make choices they feel are right for them and their spouse, even if it means resisting the status quo. They follow their own chosen path, venturing down the road less traveled if it progresses them to their goals. But, like all human beings they are socialized from birth and so do not make these choices in a vacuum. It's a fact that “human action does not simply reflect the autonomous will of an individual subject, but is always situated within social, cultural, and political-economic structures of power.” Sometimes the pressure is overt, seemingly forcing a course of action. Other times the influence is so subtle the person does not even realize it is there. In the end, it is not as though these couples make unique, individual choices and then other people interfere; rather, their goals are actually formulated in conversation with the influences from others. The question is how aware are people of being shaped by what they see others do? Do they consciously follow others' examples or avoid what they see as the “wrong” choices others have made?

The data told a complex story as to why individuals and couples delay having children. Some point to emotional scars left from their childhood; others describe a quest for self-improvement, and still others talked about prioritizing their marital relationship before children.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	30.00%
Agree	55.00%
Neutral	5.00%
Disagree	8.00%
Strongly Disagree	2.00%

Figure 3. My parents have always supported my decision-making

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	5.00%
Agree	20.00%
Neutral	10.00%
Disagree	40.00%
Strongly Disagree	25.00%

Figure 4. My parents put a lot of pressure on me to have children.

Diving deeper into the data, there uncovered another layer of understanding. When the respondents expressed their feelings about their parents, many acknowledged that they do sometimes feel mild pressure from family, but they choose to ignore it. One respondent commented, “The only person who I need to talk to about having kids is my husband. No matter how many family members ask and want a baby in our family, it is not their decision.” This reflected how most survey respondents felt. No matter the amount of prompting and encouraging from their parents and other loved ones to have children, the choice was not theirs. The ultimate decision on whether and when to have children lay with the couple.

Peer Influence

On the survey, respondents were asked series of questions about how peers influenced the participants’ childbearing timing. One of the questions I stated, “I feel left out not having children yet” (see *Figure 5*). I had asked this question to gauge if participants might feel like they were falling behind their peers in this presumable next life step. At first glance, the respondents’ peer group seemed to have little influence on their choice to have children. Looking at the survey data, the majority of people did not “feel left” out because their friends had children. This could be because more than half of the individuals surveyed said they spent the majority of their free time socializing with other childless couples.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	5.00%
Agree	15.00%
Neutral	10.00%
Disagree	40.00%
Strongly Disagree	30.00%

Figure 5. I feel left out not having children yet.

Additionally, when I asked how the respondents perceived the relationships of their friends who were married and had children (see *Figure 6*), raw data showed that only 25 percent of respondents agreed that children have negatively influenced their friends partnerships. This question was asked to understand if in confirming, this might be a reason the couples I surveyed were not having children of their own—as they were trying to protect their relationship from the same fate.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	5.00%
Agree	20.00%
Neutral	15.00%
Disagree	55.00%
Strongly Disagree	5.00%

Figure 6 Having children seem to have negatively influenced some of my friends' marriages.

Taking both of these statistics at face value one might assume that the respondents' peers had minimal influence. But later there is a different story that emerges on in depth analysis of their opinions. "Many of my friends have struggled with the shift in priorities once children come into the picture. This has led to infidelities, resentments, and other negative behaviors." *Survey Respondent*. This indicates that there lies definitely peer pressure on their DINK decision.

Hence, converse to the majority in the raw data, when asked to reflect on their peers in their own words a number of respondents did believe that having children was negatively impacting their friends' marriages. There were various opinions citing various issues including a lack of sleep, an imbalance in parenting expectations, and a shift in emotional focus from partner to child that had challenged the happiness of their peers' relationships. Many DINKs see this new tension between husband and wife as a warning flag for having children.

Fulfilling self

This study explores how the individuals and couples saw themselves as being internally motivated to delay childbearing after marriage. After all, like many adamantly expressed during their interview, they see themselves ultimately as doing what they want. First looking at the survey data, 95 percent of survey respondents agreed to "feeling free to decide my own life path, despite what my family, friends, or society expects." One respondent explained, "I am not living my life to please others or gain their acceptance. If someone does not agree with my life choices, quite frankly I do not care." (See *Figure 7*)

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	47.00%
Agree	40.00%
Neutral	5.00%
Disagree	5.00%
Strongly Disagree	3.00%

Figure 7. I feel empowered to make choices in my life.

Not only do the participants feel like they have the option of living a self-directed life, but the majority also feel like they are actively striving to achieve that image as seen in *Figure 8*. One DINK commented, "I decide my own path and I pursue it on a daily basis. I go after what I want." While we do not know the details about these individuals' lives, the fact that

they agreed strongly to these questions reflects the kind of sensibility.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	30.00%
Agree	50.00%
Neutral	10.00%
Disagree	5.00%
Strongly Disagree	5.00%

Figure 8. I know the direction I want my life to take and work towards it every day.

So what exactly is it that the participants want—what direction do they want their lives to take? Right now, the majority of survey respondents want not to have children. The question is why? The chief reason that emerged for their reluctance to produce offspring at this stage in life is because they lack a feeling of personal readiness, they have not completed their reflexive projects of self. One survey respondent commented, “I still have things to check off my bucket list and I’ll be too old when my kids leave the house, so I’d like to check them off now while I’m still young”. She was not the only one to feel this way; over 98 percent of survey respondents claimed that they are “not prepared to have children yet”. The key word in the previous sentence is the word “yet”. For although they do not want to have children at this time as mentioned before, most see it as a long-term objective. In the meantime, they are focused on activities of self-improvement.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	5.00%
Agree	10.00%
Neutral	15.00%
Disagree	45.00%
Strongly Disagree	25.00%

Figure 9. I am worried to have a child right now because of the current economic situation.

When looking at the changing demographic trends in marriage and parenthood, it’s noticed that they coincided with the downturn of the economy. As such, in the survey there is focusing on this potential influence and what was found was surprising. The respondents, over 85 percent, did in fact believe that having children would “affect the type of lifestyle my partner and I enjoy” which I would have assumed to be the case, knowing that the social evidence support this. But when asked more specifically about money, the story was not so straightforward. Looking at the raw data, the downturn in the economy seemed to have little effect on the timing of having children for the majority of the respondents (see Figures 9 and 10).

Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	10.00%
Agree	7.00%
Neutral	10.00%
Disagree	50.00%
Strongly Disagree	23.00%

Figure 10. The recession has affected my partner and my decision to have children right now

Similarly, when asked to confirm if “Money is the main reason my partner and I have not had children yet,” only 25 percent agreed that it was, making it one of the least ranked items on the entire survey. When asked to list the reasons for not having children yet in the comment section of the survey, financial preparedness was the most common issue that participants listed, but it was almost always addressed with secondary importance to their decision making. One respondent commented, “While money isn't a significant factor, if we were ready to have kids, we would prefer to be a little more financially prepared.” Unquestionably, money was an important consideration in childbearing timing, but ultimately a lack of funds was not a deal breaker.

This laissez-faire attitude towards money was common among the couples interviewed. One respondent commented, “We know from talking to people you are never ready financially, so it isn't a big deal.” It was not that the research participants did not see the importance of being financially ready for children, and it was that they did not view it as the key determinant for when to have children

Crafting a career

As a first step to crafting their careers, they saw earning a quality education as paramount. Almost 100 percent of survey respondents felt that “earning bachelor's degree was very important.” For many others, continuing their education beyond a Bachelors degree was seen as integral part towards developing oneself for a future career.

Putting Partner First

Included in this is a mutual respect for each other's personal goals, even if that means delaying having children. One respondent shared, “We enjoy our independence as a couple and separately having a child would limit that and potentially stress the relationship.” This commitment to keeping the other satisfied necessitates a constant give and take between partners, as well as constant communication, especially on the topic of children. Therefore, like a pure relationship, commitment between DINKs balances precariously on each individual's ability to express their own needs. Without doing so, the other person may leave them at any time due to a change of heart.

This sensitive state of the marriage makes the decision to have children that much more charged. It is no surprise then that over half of the survey respondents agreed with the item that stated, “One of my main concerns for having children is that it will change my relationship with my partner.” These concerns manifest differently for each individual, but center on a few core themes. First, many survey respondents believe that having children will shift focus away from the marital relationship to the child.

Many couples feel a deep connection with their partner and worry about what a child might do to that bond—along the lines of “Two is a company, three’s a crowd”. A second key concern for childless couples was the idea of having to change how they currently spend their free time with their partner. For example, 20 (out of 100) individuals specifically mentioned travel as a reason they have not had children yet. Other couples had different ways they valued their time with their partner.

A last main concern in regards to the effect that having children would have on the partnership was felt explicitly by the females of the survey population. Many women worried that by having children, they would be expected to step up as the lead nurturer in the family. “I worry about having to shoulder most of the burden” says a survey respondent.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the individuals researched perceived Double Income No Kids as a preparatory phase that they pass through because they do want children one fine day. These individuals view the steps they take before having children not as detours or distractions, but as necessary steps to building a solid foundation for family. Dedicating a considerable amount of time, to earning their education is seen as extremely beneficial. A degree, or two, or three, is believed to provide the skills necessary to secure a job that makes them financially secure. More importantly for many DINKs, this effort is perceived as a necessary step to securing an emotionally satisfying career, for both men and women alike.

The “dual” of Dual Income No Kids is by far the most important factor pushing back the time line for having children amongst the research participants. Like in a pure relationship, focusing on the partnership first provides a number of benefits they regard as crucial to a successful marriage. The participants feel spending alone time with the partner allows them to grow and mature the relationship through an evolved understanding of the others expectations. Correspondingly, they believe this childless time allows for improved communication and conflict resolution due to a less stressful setting. On a different note, through engaging in personal activities they enjoy together, they believe they are balancing their personal desires against the needs of their future children. All of this, they feel, helps prepare them to withstand the stress that having children will bring. Never the less its worth to remember what Jenny McCarthy said “Having children makes you realize the importance of life.”

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