Working on a baby boom

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CareerOne

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By Tamara McLean

Employers need to do more for mothers, writes Tamara McLean

COUPLES need more support at work and job security if Australia is to halt its fertility rate slide, a new report warns.

The Federal Government-funded study has confirmed the fertility rate has stabilised in the historically low range of 1.81 children per woman.

This is slightly higher than the lowest recorded figure of 1.73 set in 2001, probably thanks to increasing financial parenting incentives such as the one-off baby bonus payment, which was introduced in 2004.

It is far below the rate of earlier generations and experts behind the paper warn it still falls well short of the level required to ``replace" Australia's population.

Lead researcher Dr Matthew Gray and his colleagues at the Australian Institute of Family Studies say it also is well below the number of children Australians of child-bearing years want to have.

Recent research suggests most prefer, in order of preference, two, three, four or more children, with far fewer considering one child or no children their ideal.

``Our findings suggest governments need to use a combination of approaches, recognising that a low fertility rate is not due to a lack of wanting children," Gray says.

``Despite our economic prosperity, people lack confidence in their ability to create and maintain a family environment in which children are nurtured and supported, financially and emotionally," he says.

The report, Fertility and Family Policy in Australia, found that economic concerns, job insecurity, fluctuating house prices and difficulties getting access to child care are key drivers for keeping the birth rate down.

Fewer people are committing to long-term partnerships and statistics show an increase in relationship breakdowns and a lack of confidence in the ability to be good parents, the report says.
Attempts to start a family are occurring later in life when the chance of fertility problems, such as miscarriage, are higher.

The researchers conclude that lowering the direct and indirect costs of raising children to families and supporting women to combine paid employment with child-rearing are likely to boost fertility rates.

They say this support must last beyond a child’s preschool years.

``Australians certainly need to hear the message that raising children has an intrinsic richness and is an enjoyable part of life,'' the authors wrote. "Couples need a secure income stream, a loving and stable relationship and the skills and confidence to be parents."

Facts

'Good employers' by state of head office: NSW (42), VIC (30), QLD (10), SA (6), WA (6), ACT (3), NT and TAS (1)

Queensland and national employers of choice for women, abbreviated list:

* Brisbane Girls Grammar School
* Credit Union Australia Ltd
* Griffith University
* John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd
* Queensland University of Technology
* Rio Tinto Aluminium Ltd
* St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School
* The University of Queensland
* UnitingCare Health
* University of the Sunshine Coast
* American Express Australia Pty Ltd
* AMP Ltd
* Blake Dawson
* Boral Ltd
* Cisco Systems Australia
* Citi
* Commonwealth Bank of Australia
* EMI Music Australia Pty Ltd
* Ernst & Young Services
* Freehills
* Hays
* IBM Australia Ltd
* Kimberly-Clark Australia Pty Ltd
* Lend Lease Corporation
* Mallesons Stephen Jaques
* McDonald’s Australia Pty Ltd
* National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc
* Origin Energy Ltd
* Westpac Banking Corporation
* ANZ Bank
* Australian Council for Education Research
* Cummins South Pacific Pty Ltd
* ExxonMobil Australia Group of Companies
* Ford
* GM Holden Ltd
* Goldman Sachs JBWere Services Pty Ltd
* KPMG Australian Services
* Mars Australia Pty Ltd
* National Australia Bank Ltd
* Shell Co. of Australia Pty Ltd
* World Vision Australia
* Alcoa of Australia Ltd
* For a full list: www.eowa.gov.au