

How and Why Marriage, Divorce, and Fertility Rates Change Over the Years in Australia

Word Count: 1003

I. Introduction

Shown in Figure 1, the marriage rate was unstable until it reached its peak at 1940s. And then it decreases continuously from 1950s to 2020s, including a notable increase in 1970s.

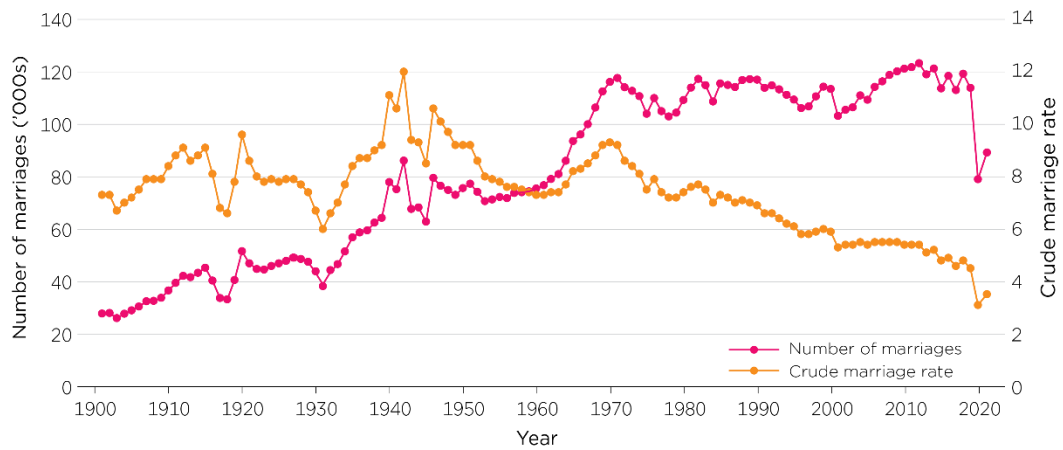


Figure 1 Number of marriages registered and crude marriage rate, 1901–2021¹

It is clearly shown in Figure 2 that both number of marriages and marriage rate reached their lowest point at 2020 and quickly bounced back to the level (even further) before 2020. Therefore, pandemic heavily affect marriage rate in a negative way.

¹ Adopted from aifs.gov.au/research/facts-and-figures/marriages-australia-2023



Figure 2 Number of marriages registered and crude marriage rate, 2002-2022²

The lines in Figure 2 have a similar trend which they both peak at 1976 (when no fault divorce was introduced) and grow slowly from 1900s to 1970s. After that, crude divorce rate started to decrease. The rate rebounded at 2020 but is still lower than the highest level after 1980s.

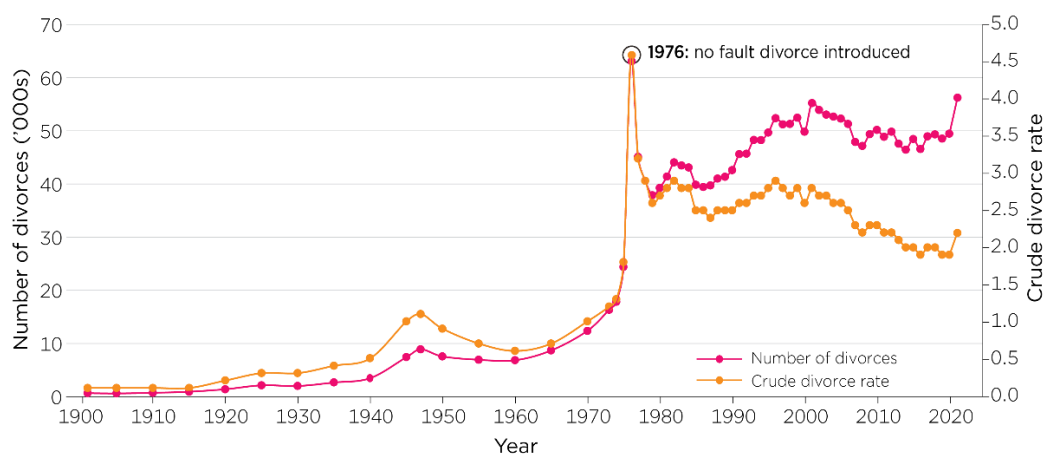


Figure 3 Number of divorces and crude divorce rate, 1901-2021³

² Adopted from www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release

³ Adopted from aifs.gov.au/research/facts-and-figures/divorces-australia-2023

In the past 20 years, as shown below in Figure 4, the highest divorce rate is about 3.5 (2002). During the pandemic period, even though the rate rebounded instead of stabilizing as in 2019 and 2020, the rate still stayed in a relatively low level. Based on data given, pandemic brought a slight negative impact on divorce rate.

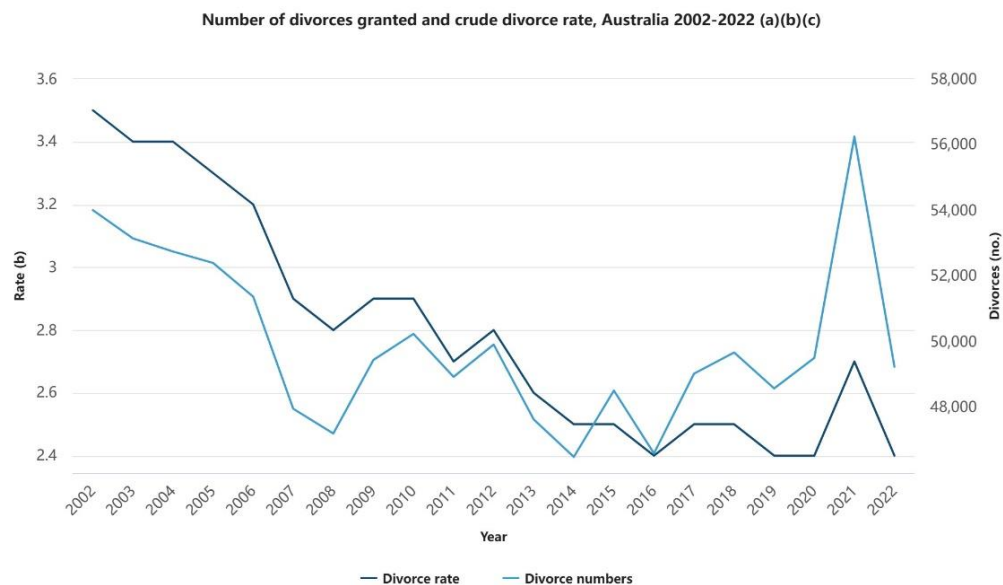


Figure 4 Number of divorces granted and crude divorce rate, 2002-2022⁴

⁴ Adopted from www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release

As shown in Figure 3, total fertility rate once peaked at over 3.5 and fell to 1.75 at 2021.

The rate started to fell from 1960s and generally continued this trend. Before 1960s, the low-level period was during 1930s.

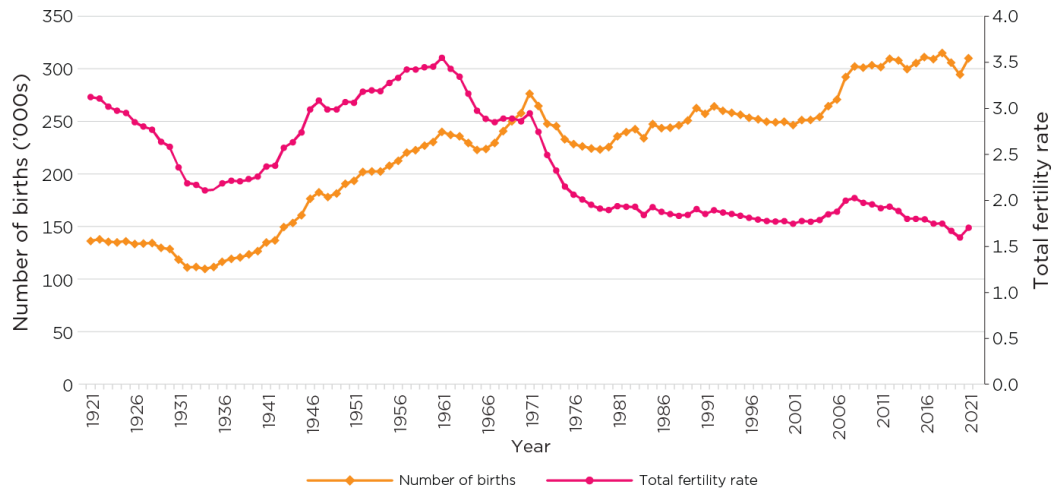


Figure 5 Number of births and total fertility rate, 1921–2021⁵

Figure 6 takes a closer look at total fertility rate before and after the pandemic. After COVID-19 broke out, the rate first increased and then decreased. The number fluctuate around 1.75 in the past ten years. As a result, pandemic slightly affect total fertility rate both positively and negatively.

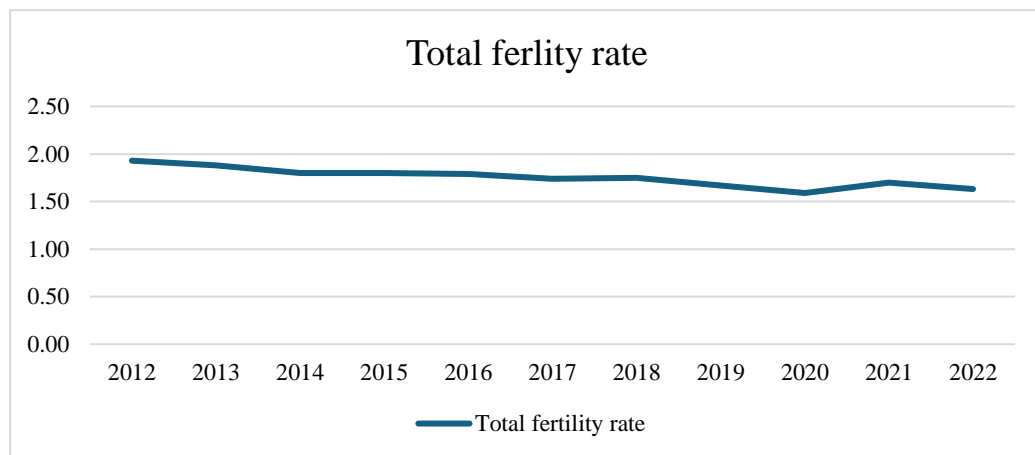


Figure 6 Total fertility rate, 2012–2022⁶

⁵ Adopted from aifs.gov.au/research/facts-and-figures/births-australia-2023

II. Analysis

A. Factors/Policies that Brought Effects

1. Marriage

a. Development of Technology

With the development of technology, the requirement for specialization within household decreases. Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) concluded that “The opportunity cost of remaining single rather than marrying falls. (p. 42 - 43)” This will lead to a decrease in marriage rate.

b. Changes of Laws

Years ago, laws set many limitations about who could marry and who could not (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007, p. 45). By removing these laws, more people's right are protected and their benefit increased. Marriage rate will rise.

c. Changes of Wage Structures (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007, p. 44)

When wage gap gets smaller, those might be housewives tend to work as this will increase benefits for themselves. As a result, marriage rate will fall.

2. Divorce

a. Policy that reduces cost

Before No-Fault-Divorce started to exist, the only way Australians can have a divorce is to “prove your spouse was to blame” (Edraki & Phillips, 2020). Sometimes even private investigators would be involved in this process. The

⁶ Adopted from www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/births-australia/latest-release

desired proof was both time and financial consuming. By introducing the policy, the cost to divorce is decreased. This will increase divorce rate, to some extent.

b. Young Offspring

Divorce can bring negative impacts on children, especially psychological impacts. This will affect them not only during childhood but also during adulthood. Without this concern, divorce rate only goes higher (Broadwell, 2023).

c. Rising awareness of gender equality.

This will lead to contradiction between two parties involved in a marriage, especially at early rising stage. When they both find being single brings more benefits than staying in marriage, divorce occurs. This will lead to an increase in divorce rate.

3. Fertility

a. Policy that reduces cost and alleviate parenting pressure – The Baby Bonus Payment

This payment is a form of substitution that can help parents have less financial pressure related to children-raising. While the benefits come from giving birth stays at the same level, people are more willing to give birth and fertility rate will increase.

b. Development of Technology – The Pill

c. Policy that increases women's benefit as they are empowered with more rights – Abortion

Both factor b & c provide females with more choices. The direct impact would be lower fertility rate from both factors as they will terminate pregnancy (The Abortion Pill | Get the Facts About Medication Abortion, n.d.). However, when females are aware that their right are being protected, their willingness to have offsprings might be higher, leading an increase in fertility rate. These function both positive and negative towards fertility rate.

B. Change of Manners

Before online dating went popular, people got to know their romantic partners through their family and friends (Rahoumi, 2020). As the relationship goes deeper, even if they met through online dating, they still need to go to ‘offline’ and meet their potential partners in person. During COVID-19, social distance is eliminated due to health concerns. After COVID-19, more people tend to choose online dating apps to meet romantic partners (Gjorgievska, 2024).

C. Policy recommendation

Policy – Invest more on infants and kids’ products such as multi-function trolleys

Unintended consequences – Products with better quality may be sold at higher prices, putting higher financial pressure on household and couples’ willingness to give birth goes down.

III. Conclusion

Marriage, divorce and fertility rates are all more or less affected by COVID-19. Pandemic brought mostly negative impacts which three trends show different recovery behaviour about. Development of other fields can affect them as well, such as progress achieved in technology and law. Investing more on kids-related products is just an example of specific policy that can make couples feel both emotionally and financially safe to have more offsprings. And this goal must be chased consistently as raising fertility rate requires more long-term efforts.

IV. References

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