

## 5 Common Demographic Myths Investigated!

The seven year marriage itch, half of all marriages ending in divorce, today's children the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents- we've heard the statements but are they true? Social analyst Mark McCrindle investigates five commonly-held assumptions.

### Myth 1 – “Half of all marriages end in divorce”

This statistic is certainly daunting for Aussies about to say, “I do”, but is there any truth behind it? Actually there are fewer divorces today than there were in 2006 – even though there are more marriages than ever before. Also the divorce rate (the number of divorces per 1000 married people) has been declining for more than 30 years and at around 12, it is one-third lower than it was in 1976. Marriages that do end in divorce are lasting at least two years longer today than they did 20 years ago and of all people who marry, only 1 in 5 will marry twice. Of those who tied the knot between 2000-2002, the probability that the marriage would end in divorce is 33%.

*Fact: The commonly believed statistic that 50% of marriages in Australia end in divorce is **false**. Currently just 1 in 3 marriages will end in divorce.*

### Myth 2 – The 7 year itch

The 7 year itch was a concept made famous in the 1950s film starring Marilyn Monroe and it refers to the idea that a marriage loses its gloss after seven years.

So, should husbands and wives alike still celebrate on their seventh year anniversary or enrol in couple therapy? Of marriages that break up, until the 1990's the median length of time to separation was around 7 years however this has lengthened to almost 9 years today. And the length of the marriage to the point of divorce has similarly been increasing from 10.2 years in 1989 to 12.3 years in 2010.

*Fact: The belief that marriages last seven years is **false**. The length from marriage to separation is 8.8 years and marriage to divorce is 12.3 years (ABS, 2010).*

### Myth 3 – The baby bonus has led to an increase in the number of teenage and young mums

When the 2002 Baby Bonus was first introduced a decade ago, it was predicted by some that the incentive would lead to an increase in teenage, single and young mums.

However, the ABS data shows that the fertility rate for mums aged between 16 and 19 has actually declined over the last decade. In fact, the fertility rate for teenagers has been declining

for more than three decades now, and for example, the fertility rate of sixteen year old women has decreased by 55% since 1982.

Rather, the trend over the last decade has been increasing fertility rate amongst older women. For the last decade, the fertility rate of women aged 35-39 is greater than women in their early twenties and the fertility rate of a 32 year old is ten times greater than that of a 17 year old!

*Fact: This myth is **false**. Despite the baby bonus incentives, the fertility rate of teenage and young mums has decreased.*

## Myth 4 - Today's young people will be the first generation of children who won't live as long as their parents

The rise in childhood obesity, increased "screen-time" and associated sedentary lifestyles, and modern "lifestyle" diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease has given rise to this assumption.

However the longevity seen in developed nations over the last half century is the product of public health measures, medical improvements, pharmaceutical advancements, and astonishing increases in survivability rates across all age groups. For example, in 1990, the mortality rate for children this age was 0.4 deaths per 1,000 yet it has since declined by more than half! Australians are amongst the longest-living in the world. Life expectancy at birth for both males and females has been on a steady increase since records began in 1901. A boy born in Australia today can expect to live to 80 years, while a girl can expect to live to 84. Having survived to age 60, men can expect to live another 23 years and women another 26 years. The increase in life expectancy is one of the factors contributing to the ageing of Australia's population.

*Fact: This myth is **false**. Despite childhood obesity, life expectancy has not decreased but increased and it continues to do so!*

## Myth 5 – There are more people alive now than have ever lived

With the global population hitting 1 billion in the year 1800, taking another 130 years to hit 2 billion, and having added 4 billion in the last 52 years to surpass 7 billion people, it has been posited that there are more people living today than the total number of people who have ever lived.

However, according the calculation of experts in the area of historic populations, rather than the total number of deaths ever numbering less than 7 billion, Carl Haub, a demographer at the

Population Reference Bureau calculates that 106 billion is more likely. Whilst there are debates surrounding the reliability of such calculations of the overall human population, even the more conservative estimates exceed 45 billion - more than 6 times more than the current world population.

*Fact: The statement that more people are alive now than have ever lived is **false**. The number of people alive now is a significant yet small proportion of the total number of people who have ever lived.*

**Video summary:**

To see a video summary of this release, go to <http://bit.ly/5mthbustd>

**For further analysis:**

For more information or to organise an interview with demographer and social analyst Mark McCrindle, please contact Francesca Dalton on 02 8824 3422 or email

[francesca@mccrindle.com.au](mailto:francesca@mccrindle.com.au).