

Baby boom suburbs [AU] ^[1]

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These children are the fashionable face of inner-Sydney living, part of a baby boom that has seen the number of under-fours in some suburbs increase by 240 per cent.

Research reveals couples in more affluent suburbs, many of whom put off having children until later in life, are responsible for the increase in toddlers.

"Many suburbs are becoming more child-friendly but retain that cosmopolitan lifestyle that is so important to 30-somethings," Macquarie University urban geographer Robyn Dowling said.

"It's this group who are predominantly having children."

Areas such as Manly, Woollahra, Hunters Hill and Sydney City account for the biggest growth in the number of children aged under four.

The Sydney City Council area, which includes Pyrmont and Ultimo, topped the list, with a 239.8 per cent jump in the five years to the end of 2001.

The average growth for the metropolitan area was three per cent. There are 1213 under-fours living in the City area.

After an 18 per cent surge in toddlers, Hunters Hill now has 755 under-fours, while Manly and Woollahra each experienced a 15 per cent jump, with around 1500 pre-schoolers each.

PRD Nationwide research manager Zoe Heinzl, whose firm compiled the data, said cashed-up Generation X-ers were pushing up the baby growth rates.

"A lot of the middle-ring areas, such as Willoughby, Manly and Concord, specifically have an older age group profile," Ms Heinzl said.

"Socially, people who are having children later in life are used to their lifestyle, have more money behind them, and don't want to make big lifestyle changes if they can help it."

Ms Dowling pointed to the gentrification of inner and middle-ring suburbs.

"Childless couples living immediately next to the city are moving to the adjacent suburbs to start a family, because you get bigger homes and more land," she said.

Manly mayor Jean Hay said her area was suffering a child-care crisis.

"Our biggest council-run child-care centre, The Roundhouse, has a waiting list of around 700 children," Ms Hay said.

"There is a changing demography in Manly in favour of young professional families."

A Woollahra Council spokesperson said population change had also resulted in a child-care shortage in that area.

Ms Heinzl said the 25- to 40-year-olds raising families in affluent areas were contributing to a change in property styles.

"These people will increase the demand for larger units and townhouses, because they are more affordable than free-standing houses," Ms Heinzl said.

The areas that recorded the biggest increase in young children are, in order, Sydney, Camden, Baulkham Hills, Liverpool, Concord, Hunters Hill, Drummoyne, Willoughby, Manly and Woollahra.

In another study, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that women living at Blacktown, in the outer western suburbs, have the highest fertility rate in Sydney.

With an average of 2.2 babies born to every woman living in the suburb, Blacktown mothers are having more than three times as many children as inner-city women, who had an average of 0.68 babies each in 2001.

The second-highest fertility rate was among Auburn women, with 2.19 babies each, followed by Liverpool, with 2.15.

-Reprinted from The Daily Telegraph

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