Family Figures:
Family Dynamics and Family Types in Ireland, 1986-2006

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FOREWORD

Families, as the bedrock of our society, are ever changing and evolving. Knowing the extent and nature of the shifts in family life is vital if we are to cater for the needs of families. In the current environment of uncertainty as to the level of resources available to support families, it is even more crucial that we have accurate and comprehensive information on Irish family life.

This study provides us with in-depth first hand information on the changes in Irish families over the last 20 years. For the first time ever, the Central Statistics Office gave the authors of the study collaborative access to full 2006 Census data. The enhanced access to Census data facilitated the ground-breaking exploration of influences which have impacted on the shifts in family life described in the report. The Family Support Agency wishes to acknowledge and thank the Central Statistics Office for extending this privilege to the authors.

Striking features of the changes described in the report include shifts in patterns of marriage, cohabitation, the impact of non-Irish nationals, same sex couples, marital breakdown, fertility and lone parenthood. Some of the findings presented which are particularly relevant to areas of policy currently under scrutiny include the growth in same-sex couples (in the context of civil partnership legislation) and the impact of the arrival of the first child on marital breakdown (pertinent to providers of relationship counselling, including counselling organisations funded by the Family Support Agency). The detailed and complex nature of marital breakdown in Ireland depicted in the study, has particular resonance for the Agency's Family Mediation Service, which helps couples to negotiate the terms of their separation, once they have made that decision to separate. All of the findings and the overarching themes presented by the authors will undoubtedly help to inform deliberation of many aspects of policy, as we face challenging times ahead.

As Chairperson of the Family Support Agency whose remit is specific to families, we are acutely conscious of the need to facilitate family policy which is evidence led. This report represents a significant contribution to supporting evidence-led decision making for families and will act as a yardstick for future studies. I would like to thank the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin, T.D., and the staff in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, for providing the resources and guidance to facilitate the execution of the study. Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation, and that of the Agency, to the authors of the report, Messrs Lunn and Fahey and Ms Hannan, for providing us with a clear, concise and unambiguous picture of family life in 21st Century Ireland.

Michael O'Kennedy, S.C.,
Chairperson, Family Support Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This study examines family patterns and trends in Ireland over the twenty years from 1986 to 2006. Its primary objective is to use the available data and various quantitative techniques to elucidate trends in family structures and to explore what might lie behind them.

Headline statistics on family types are well documented and reveal a mixture of stability and change. Throughout the period in question, a standard path of family formation – progression from singlehood to marriage and parenthood – remained dominant and standardised around a new norm of the two or three child family. Some old forms of diversity in family life faded away, as represented for example by the decline of the very large family, of three-generational households and of households comprised of unmarried adult siblings. Other alternatives to the norm became more common: lone parenthood more than doubled; births outside marriage rose sharply up to the late 1990s; marital breakdown increased during the 1990s, along with the numbers in second partnerships; same-sex couples became more common; and the latter half of the period saw a very steep rise in unmarried cohabiting couples. These trends were matched by changes in the typical life course of partnership and childbearing. Increasing numbers of young adults delayed forming unions and having children, relative to the generation who were young adults during the 1970s and early 1980s. This contributed to a large decline in marriage and birth rates between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, followed by something of a rebound, as many who had delayed family formation began to form partnerships and have children from the mid-1990s onwards.

Aims

The present report delves deeper into the available data. The aim is to present a more detailed description of changing family structures and, in doing so, to offer an analysis of possible driving forces behind the changes, including changes in the life course of partnership and childbearing.

Family structures can be the subject of much public debate. This report aims to be neutral on such debates, not because we seek to negate them, but because our intention is to inform the arguments rather than to resolve them. Our contention is that whatever one's perspective, the various debates are more productive if they are well informed.

Data and Methods

Our primary data source is the *Census of Population*. In addition to the published Census volumes from 1986 to 2006, we make use of the *Census of Population Sample of Anonymised Records* (*COPSAR*), which provides microdata for a randomly selected 5 per cent of records from 1996 onwards. More significantly, under the Central Statistics Office's new policy on access to data, we also sought and obtained controlled and collaborative access to the *2006 Census Research Microdata File (CRMF)*. This represented a welcome opportunity for original family research in Ireland. Analysis of the 2006 *CRMF* is behind most of the new findings we report.

The availability of the *2006 CRMF* enabled multivariate statistical models to be built, with the aim of identifying the determinants of different family structures from among a range of background characteristics. Our results are based on these multivariate models (which appear in the Appendices of the main report).

Findings

In this summary, we group our findings under two headings: Statistical Results and Themes. We provide statistical results relating to:

- Marriage and Cohabitation
- Marital Breakdown
- Fertility
- Lone Parenthood

Then, looking across all these categories, we highlight some broad themes that emerge.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

Marriage and Cohabitation

While most people in Ireland still marry, the likelihood of remaining unmarried increased among young adults between 1986 and 2006. There was some counterbalancing increase in marriage among those in their 30s and older, though it remains to be seen whether present young adults will fully catch up with entry into marriage by the time they have reached their 40s. The trend away from marriage among young adults is partly due to the large rise in cohabitation. At age 25 in 2006, twice as many people cohabit as are married. Cohabitation peaks at 28 years, after which marriage becomes more popular. Mostly, cohabitation appears to be a prelude to marriage, but the increase in cohabiting couples with children suggests that a minority of cohabitees may prefer continued cohabitation.

Later marriage is a phenomenon that exists across all social classes, rather than being driven by the increased size of the middle-class following the economic boom. Those in lower social classes are more likely to marry young, but across society marrying young is now rare. At later ages, those in the middle of the range for social class and educational attainment are most likely to cohabit or marry. The incidence of marriage among people in higher occupations (professionals, managers etc.) catches up by the late 30s, but those educated to degree level continue to have a lower likelihood of couple formation throughout adulthood. People in especially disadvantaged categories (the unemployed or disabled) are less likely to be in partnerships. Travellers are particularly likely to marry young.

Couple formation, particularly marriage, is more strongly related to nationality, ethnicity and religion. Non-Irish nationals are more likely to be married – a result of higher levels of marriage among people from the ten EU accession states and from outside Europe. With respect to ethnicity, those describing themselves as White Irish are more likely to be unmarried at all ages. Turning to religious affiliation, Muslims and non-religious people stand out from the mainstream. Muslims are more likely to marry and less likely to cohabit than the majority Catholic population, while for non-religious people the precise opposite holds.

While the incidence of same-sex couples remains relatively low, it is rising rapidly. The recorded trend could be somewhat overestimated by a greater willingness of same-sex couples to report themselves as such. There is a strong cohort effect. *Census 2006* records many more people in their 30s and early 40s in same-sex partnerships than people in their 50s. Same-sex couples are much more common among people with third-level education and are heavily concentrated in Dublin. Compared with Catholics, people of all other religious affiliations are significantly more likely to be in same-sex partnerships.

Marital Breakdown

Ireland still has a low rate of marital breakdown by European standards, even once separations and divorces are combined. The evidence suggests no significant upward shift in marital breakdown as a result of the advent of divorce in 1997, nor has divorce taken over from formal and informal separation as the preferred means of legal resolution of marital breakdown. By the early part of the present decade, the increase in marital breakdown that had been evident in the 1990s had all but levelled off, particularly when one adjusts for the 'imported' divorce that accompanied the upsurge in immigration in the years of economic boom.

There is a cohort effect in marital breakdown: people currently in their 40s are at greater risk than those born a decade or more earlier. Marital breakdown is much more prevalent among lower socio-economic groups. There is one interesting exception: graduate women in their 50s (but not women in higher occupations) also have higher than average risk of marital breakdown. It is also more common among Non-Irish nationals, non-Catholics (with the exception of Muslims) and those living in Dublin.

Among those whose marriages have broken down, women in higher occupations are more likely to proceed to divorce, but the same effect is not present among more educated women. This suggests that divorce may be a more viable option for women with higher income. Most people who have experienced marital breakdown now live without a partner, especially females. Of those who have a new partner, most cohabit rather than re-marry.

Fertility

Delayed fertility has become the norm. In 2006, the majority of women delay childbirth beyond 30 years of age, at which there is a very sharp increase in the likelihood of giving birth. Extrapolating from the cross-sectional data for 2006, it would seem that fully half of women who are childless at age 29 years have a child by 35 years, after which the likelihood of having a first child decreases very rapidly. Having two or three children is also now the norm. Among 45 year-old women in 2006, the proportion having four or more children was less than half that among those who were 14 years older (59-year olds), while childlessness was higher at 17 per cent compared to 13 per cent among 59-year olds.

The majority of childless women are unmarried, although they appear no less likely to cohabit than women with children. This suggests that the link between marriage and the desire to have children remains strong. However, a significant proportion of couples continue to cohabit after they have had children. Many couples may now consider marriage only after the birth of a first child, with a small but increasing proportion preferring to remain

unmarried. For those who do get married, a striking finding is that the risk of marital breakdown increases by 25 to 30 per cent for those who have had one child, when compared with married couples who have had no children, yet falls back again for those who have had two children. Our favoured explanation is that a first child can put strain on the relationship, while having more children is a sign that any strains were overcome.

There are strong relationships between fertility and social background, especially educational attainment. In 2006, over half of 32 year-old women graduates are recorded as childless, compared with less than one-quarter with lower second-level qualifications or less. Again comparing 59 year-olds with 45 year-olds in 2006, the relationship between fertility and educational attainment did not change appreciably. Hence, the large decline in fertility between the 1970s and 1990s occurred across the socio-economic spectrum. Fertility also varies by religion, nationality, ethnicity and region. Muslims have more children than Catholics, non-religious people fewer. Non-Irish and Non-whites tend to have higher fertility than the native white population. Childlessness is much more common among women in Dublin.

Lone Parenthood

In 2006, a substantial proportion of lone parents, 35 per cent, had experienced marital breakdown, while 8 per cent had been widowed. Never married lone parents are mostly aged between 20 and 35 years and are overwhelmingly female. The relationship between low educational attainment and the likelihood of becoming a lone mother is extremely strong. One-quarter of women with lower second-level qualifications are never married lone mothers by their mid-20s, compared to less than 15 per cent with upper second-level qualifications and just 3 per cent of graduates. Women who describe themselves as Catholic or Church of Ireland are considerably more likely to become never married lone mothers than are members of minority religions and non-religious people. There are also strong effects of ethnicity.

There are over 10,000 lone fathers (9 per cent of lone parents), most of whom have experienced marital breakdown. The pattern of lone fatherhood following marital breakdown by age is very similar to that of becoming a lone mother by the same route. We estimate that one in eight of the children of a broken marriage live with their father.

THEMES

We identify five themes in our results.

First, some trends in family structure occur evenly across social groups, while others are concentrated in particular sections of society. For instance, cohabitation is remarkably consistent across social groups, much more so than the pattern of marriage. Thus, the four-fold increase in cohabitation between 1996 and 2006 appears to have swept all sections of society along with it. This contrasts with the strong increase in the likelihood of being in a same-sex couple, which is concentrated among the better educated, or of becoming a lone parent, where the reverse is true.

Second, certain periods of the life course have strong impacts on family structures, indicating powerful forces of change at specific ages. These key periods include: a sharp increase in the likelihood of living with a partner

after age 25, an increase in the likelihood of marital breakdown in the late 30s, a very rapid increase in fertility after age 30 years for women with high educational attainment, and a dramatic rise in lone parenthood during the early 20s among women with low educational attainment. These relatively short sections of the life course appear to have powerful influences.

Third, members of the present cohort of adults, especially the more educated, have chosen to delay the process of family formation and childbearing, relative to their parents' generation (although less so relative to earlier generations). This delay may well increase the risk that people have fewer children than ideally they would like and may also lead some couples in their 30s to consider marriage only after they have children.

Fourth, there are some definite cohort effects and some debatable ones. We can be sure that the cohort currently in its 40s has a higher risk of marital breakdown than the cohort just 10 to 15 years older. This cohort has also rapidly developed a two to three child norm. Similarly, the cohort currently in its 30s contains far more same-sex couples. Yet, while those currently in their 20s and 30s are clearly following a different pattern from preceding generations, it is harder to determine the degree to which their lower fertility and higher rates of cohabitation will continue throughout their lives, or whether marriage and childbirth are merely being delayed.

The final theme we highlight relates to the importance of cultural background. We find that religion, nationality and ethnicity are strongly linked to the likelihood of partnership and parenthood, more so in most cases than socio-economic indicators. These cultural influences only account for a limited amount of the variation in family types across the population as a whole, because the large majority of the population remains Catholic, Irish and white. Thus, while socio-economic influences are weaker, they still account for more of the total variation. Still, the power of cultural influences is important to note if the aim is to understand what determines family structures. Thus, while economic circumstances are often suggested to be very important in relation to family structures, many of our findings are not easily explained by them, but appear more explicable in terms of the influence of social networks, identity and norms.

Policy Implications

Socio-Economic Impact of Expenditure Cuts

The economic crisis has produced extreme pressure on Ireland's public finances and substantial cuts in public expenditure are likely, including in family-related payments and services. This report does not examine the economic vulnerability of families, assess the effectiveness of welfare schemes for families in reducing their risk of poverty, evaluate the effectiveness of family support programmes, or examine who benefits from the policy interventions targeted by family structure or perceived vulnerability. Nevertheless, our findings give an indication of which sections of society are most in *need* of support. Those in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be lone parents, to marry young, to experience marital breakdown and to have large families. Thus, whatever cuts may or may not be imposed, it is important that the redistributive weighting of those supports in favour of the less well-off is at least preserved and preferably enhanced.

Incentives for Marriage

Our findings suggest that the potential for policy to alter trends in family structures and types through financial incentives is limited. The growth in cohabitation has been very rapid and evenly spread across social groups, with a significant proportion of couples considering marriage only after starting a family. These changes have occurred despite the tax advantages of being married over cohabiting (notwithstanding the partial move towards individualisation of income tax that occurred in 2000). The forces at work are more social than economic and, therefore, likely to be relatively unresponsive to financial incentives.

Rights and Duties of Unmarried Partners

The proposed Civil Partnership Bill provides a scheme for the registration of same-sex couples, which accords rights in relation to property, finances, succession, taxation, social welfare and pensions. With respect to cohabiting couples (opposite-sex and same-sex), the Bill proposes to recognise cohabitant agreements and to provide a redress scheme. Our findings suggest that the rise in the number of cohabiting couples is likely to continue. Thus, assuming it is enacted, this legislation will increase the options and protections afforded to a large and increasing number of couples. The degree of enforceable rights and duties will depend, however, on active decisions made by the couples involved. In an increasingly complex legal context, it is very likely that well-being will be improved if such decisions are well informed. Our findings, therefore, suggest that good public information might bring significant benefits. While we do not address potential mechanisms for providing public information here, the Law Reform Commission (2006) report on cohabitation did recommended that legislation be preceded by a public awareness campaign involving the Family Support Agency.

Support for First-time Parents

The finding that first-time parents face substantially higher risk of marital breakdown is one of our more striking results. We cannot know whether policy interventions to support first-time parents would counter this increased risk, but it is something policymakers might consider. Given that the most likely explanation surrounds the strain a first baby places on relationships, the finding strengthens the case for better statutory paternity leave, at least for first children. More broadly, the present findings may offer a justification for greater generosity in public supports for families in relation to first children or, at a time when supports are more likely to be reduced than increased, greater preservation of financial support in relation to first children. Policymakers might also consider whether there are possible interventions that might help people to be better prepared for parenthood.

Lone Motherhood

The strength of the association between low educational attainment and lone parenthood is quite arresting. Combining this finding with other published research (see Chapter 6), it is clear that women with lower educational attainment face a very much higher risk of becoming lone mothers following crisis pregnancy, and that there are significant deficits in this group's knowledge regarding sexual matters. The potential benefits of interventions to improve knowledge and discussion of sex and reproduction among this social group could be considerable.

Fertility

Following substantial falls prior to the mid-1990s, the recent rise in the birth rate and the total fertility rate might seem to dispel any policy concerns surrounding low fertility in Ireland. But the very rapid move to a situation where the majority of women at peak childbearing age have a third-level qualification, combined with the strong pattern of fertility by educational attainment that we reveal, suggests that the recent rebound in Irish fertility may not continue for long (see Chapter 5). Whether government has any business encouraging people to have more children is a lively public debate in many parts of Europe, but barely features in Irish policy discussion. However, given the likelihood of low fertility emerging as a political issue in the not too distant future, there is a good case for beginning such a debate. Ireland is in the advantageous position of being able to consider this issue while its fertility rate is still comparatively high, unlike many other European countries.

Further Research

The access to the *2006 CRMF* granted to facilitate this study has permitted us to tackle research questions that previously could not be addressed quantitatively. Yet there is much more that can be achieved using this data source. Our results are based on individual-level analysis, but investing the research time to conduct investigations at the household level would permit a further range of important issues to be addressed. These include: the degree to which couples cross national, ethnic and religious boundaries; a more conclusive examination of whether cohabitation is replacing marriage for some people; a detailed analysis of factors that influence the decision to have children; the links between family structure and the age-structure of children; the effect of marital breakdown on children's living arrangements; and an analysis of step-relationships. The potential returns for policymakers could be considerable, not only with respect to family and social welfare policy, but also in policy areas such as employment, migration, education, health, housing and planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1
Background**

Since the passage of the divorce referendum in 1995, topics connected with the family have been less prominent in public controversy than they were in the three decades prior to then and there is a sense in which the pace of change in family life has slowed down. The period from the 1960s to the 1990s was the era of the gender revolution, when women broke out of their traditional confines within the home, and of the sexual revolution, when both women and men cast off longstanding constraints on sexuality. The transformation of family life in these decades was evident in such developments as the sharp decline in family size, the rapid increase in births outside of marriage, the rise of marital breakdown, and the new freedom for married women to enter the labour force (for an overview, see Kennedy, 2001). That period of turbulent politics of the family and of rapid transformation of family behaviour tapered off in the 1990s. Change in family life has undoubtedly continued since, but in a less radical, mould-breaking way than previously. In some areas a new stability has emerged, such as the bottoming out of fertility decline and the levelling off of marital breakdown (Fahey and Layte, 2007).

This study examines family patterns and trends over the twenty years from 1986 to 2006 and thus captures both change and stabilisation in family behaviour. While it remains the case that a majority of people get married and then have children, there have been substantial increases in alternative family arrangements. For instance, over the period studied in this report, lone parenthood more than doubled, driven partly by a growth in births outside marriage and partly by increased marital breakdown. The latter half of the period, meanwhile, saw a very steep increase in the number of unmarried cohabiting couples, a sizeable proportion of whom have children. The growth in marital breakdown also produced a corresponding rise in the number of people in second partnerships, both remarried and not. And although still small in absolute number, same-sex couples also became more common.[1]

These new sources of diversity in family types have been somewhat counterbalanced by a growing standardisation of other aspects of family formation. Chief among these is the newly emerged dominance of the small family. Two generations ago, family sizes covered the whole range from one child up to eight or more children, with a clustering around modal values of four to six children. By the 1990s, a new standard of two to three children had emerged and while families with five or more children could still be found they had very quickly become the exception. This change represents

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[1] Throughout this report, same-sex couples are counted and considered separately from cohabiting couples, by which we mean opposite-sex, unmarried couples. We adopt this approach for ease of explanation, although same-sex couples clearly could also be classified as cohabiting.

the normalisation in Ireland of a core transformation of family life in the twentieth century, namely the capacity of couples (or individual women) to control their fertility. Other established family patterns that went into decline included the extended family household, especially households consisting of three generations of the same family, and also the household consisting of unmarried adult siblings, both of which had been common in Ireland for much of the twentieth century.

These trends in the incidence of different family structures have been accompanied by changes in the typical life course of partnership and childbearing, to the extent that there is one. During the period, many adults in Ireland delayed forming unions and having children until later in adulthood, especially relative to the preceding generation that went through young adulthood in the 1970s and early 1980s. This trend contributed to a large decline in marriage and birth rates between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. There has followed something of a rebound over the most recent decade, especially in the marriage rate, as many of those who had delayed family formation began to form partnerships and have children. Other factors may also have contributed to this recovery in levels of union formation, including the major economic changes that were ongoing during much of the period.

The headline trends just described are well documented in the publications of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), most notably the five-yearly *Census of Population* and the *Vitals Statistics* series. However, the details of what has happened are less clear, much less the forces driving change. The present report, therefore, analyses the available data with more sophisticated statistical techniques, in order to present both a more fine-grained descriptive account of the recent evolution of family patterns and an analysis of the factors associated with change.

Despite the centrality of family life to people's well-being, there has been relatively little quantitative research into the dynamics of union formation and dissolution in Ireland, or into the underlying causes of changes in fertility. Research on the family occupied a central place in the early development of the social sciences in Ireland, mainly on account of the classic study of rural family life by the American anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball. Published in 1946 under the title *Family and Community in Ireland*, this study was reissued in 2001 with an extended, informative new introduction by contemporary scholars (see Arensberg and Kimball, 2001). In the late 1940s, another American, Alexander Humphreys, provided an urban parallel to Arensberg and Kimball in his study of family life in Dublin (Humphreys, 1966). As a native Irish social science community developed in the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of Arensberg and Kimball loomed large, as a result of which the rural family was a central preoccupation for some key figures. The most notable of these was Damian Hannan, who was responsible for two major works on rural family life, one of which examined the contemporary situation among farm families (Hannan and Katsiaouni, 1977) and the other of which analysed the decline of the peasant family model over the preceding decades (Hannan, 1979).

However, following that early period of activity, there has been a dearth of research on the contemporary family. Historical studies on aspects of family life have continued to emerge (e.g. Bourke, 1993, on women's role in the family, and Guinnane, 1998, on family demography) and Kennedy (2001) provides a good overview of developments of family life in the

twentieth century. But there have been no large general studies of family patterns in Ireland today. Such works as have emerged have come from a social policy rather than general social science background and have focused on problems that concern policymakers – such as crisis pregnancy (Mahon *et al.*, 1998), lone parenthood (McCashin, 1996; 1997) and legal aspects of marital breakdown (Fahey and Lyons, 1995) – rather than on mainstream families. The dramatic changes that were evident from demographic data on the family, such as the sharp fall in fertility in the 1980s and early 1990s, have received some attention (Fahey, 2001; Fahey and Russell, 2001), but until recent improvements in the extent and accessibility of data, there were limits as to what could be said on these topics.

There are, however, grounds for optimism regarding the future possibilities for quantitative family research in Ireland. Two significant longitudinal research projects will soon provide much improved data on family life. First, the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (NLSCI), known also as the Growing Up in Ireland project, has begun to survey two representative samples of families of 9-year-olds and newborns, and will repeat survey interviews at regular intervals, providing a rich new source of data on families with children. Second, the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) is a new project which will gather survey data on a representative sample of people aged over 50 years, and which will collect longitudinal and retrospective information on family formation and dissolution. In addition to these new undertakings, policies that allow improved access to the wealth of CSO data, as exemplified by this project (see below), may allow researchers to build a much more complete quantitative understanding of the dynamics of Ireland's families.

This is very much to be hoped, because trends in family structures raise issues of considerable social importance. Internationally, research suggests that family structures have strong impacts on the material and psychological well-being of adults and children, including their likely outcomes in later life (e.g. Clark and Oswald, 1994; Haveman and Wolfe, 1995; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001; Jonsson and Gähler, 1997; Amato, 2004). Changes in family structures may also have broader economic and demographic consequences. For instance, on the one hand delayed family formation is likely to contribute to greater flexibility, mobility and labour market participation among young adults, while on the other it is associated with lower fertility, possible negative population growth and thus a higher dependency ratio (the ratio of working people to non-working people) in decades to come.

Given the consequences for personal well-being and the broader consequences for society, it is unsurprising that changes in family structure are of interest to policymakers. Two broad approaches can be distinguished, which one might loosely term proactive and reactive. First, policy might proactively aim to alter trends in family structures. There are contentious issues here about the goals for family life that policy should seek to pursue. For instance, what one person might view as appropriate support for marriage another might view as discrimination against those who live in less traditional arrangements. Whatever one's perspective on such matters, however, there are also great uncertainties about how much difference policy can make in these areas. Changes in family behaviour reflect profound social, cultural and economic shifts. It is difficult enough to understand what these shifts are and how they affect family life, much less to intervene surgically so as to direct them towards particular ends. The second possible

role for policy in this area thus comes into play, namely, how policy reacts to family change and tries to cope with its consequences. Family law has had to adapt to changing patterns of family formation and new ideals of family life, and the social welfare system has had to adjust to the decline in the male breadwinner model of the family and the growth of lone parenthood. Thus, whether proactive or reactive with respect to changes in family structures, policy decisions on financial and legal matters are forced to take account of different family structures.

This report aims to remain as neutral as possible regarding the political debates over family structures, not because we seek to negate them, but because it is our intention to inform the arguments rather than to resolve them. Our contention is that whatever one's perspective, the various debates are more productive if they are well informed. The final chapter does draw some policy implications from the findings, pointing out where the results appear most relevant to current policy. But our primary objective is to use the available data to elucidate the trends in family structures and to try to uncover as much as we can about what might have caused them. Moreover, in pursuing this end, we hope that the findings are of interest and use beyond policy debates. Practitioners in areas such as the law, or in our social, health and education services, may be able to gain some relevant insights into social change from the findings. More generally, significant changes in the norms of family life can be challenging and frequently prove to be a source of conflict between people of different generations. Our hope is that this report leads to greater understanding of the subtleties involved.

We have been greatly assisted in our task by the CSO, which made available the *Census Research Microdata File (CRMF)* for 2006. This file contains anonymised records for the entire population and, therefore, permits much more extensive analysis than has been possible in this area to date. In particular, it has enabled multivariate analysis of the determinants of different family structures, employing a large range of quite detailed background characteristics. Many of the findings we report are the product of this multivariate analysis and are therefore new, at least in the Irish context. In fact, the opportunities for improving our understanding of family dynamics offered by the *CRMF* extend well beyond what we have been able to achieve for the present report, which like all research projects is constrained by resources and time. Given the size of the data file and the range of information it contains, a deeper analysis would almost certainly reveal more and in each chapter we highlight the potential for future research in this area offered by the availability of this data source. Nevertheless, the access granted by the CSO represents a major and welcome opportunity to perform original analysis.

1.2 Research Questions and Report Structure

Where possible we have tried to establish concrete research questions and to test relevant hypotheses relating to the changes in family structures against data. In some cases the test proves more conclusive than others, depending on the available data, all of which is cross-sectional (see Section 1.4). This section outlines the research questions and their structuring within the report.

The analysis begins with two chapters dedicated to the process of couple formation. The first (Chapter 2) examines the trends in marriage and singlehood since 1986. More specifically, it asks the following: How has the likelihood of getting married changed since 1986? How does the rise in

cohabitation contribute to trends in couple formation, as distinct from marriage? Is there any evidence that cohabitation is emerging as a longer-term alternative to marriage? Are the changes in the propensity to marry in recent decades driven by socio-economic change, specifically the increased size of the middle-class, or were the forces at work consistent across social classes? The second chapter on union formation (Chapter 3) makes more extensive use of the *2006 Census Research Microdata File* to ask: How does the likelihood of marriage and cohabitation vary by social group? Is the rise in same-sex couples a phenomenon that exists across social groups, or is it being driven by certain groups? The particular characteristics of interest are gender, age, educational attainment, nationality, ethnicity, religion and region (although some other associations are also noted).

Chapter 4 moves on to union dissolution. We begin by setting out the unusual legal situation (internationally speaking) surrounding marital breakdown in Ireland. The research questions then addressed are: How does marital breakdown in Ireland compare internationally? Is there any evidence that it increased following the introduction of divorce? Is the increased risk of marital breakdown specific to a particular cohort of adults? How does the risk of breakdown vary by social group? How does marital breakdown vary by region? What are the main influences on the likelihood of divorce (rather than separation) following marital breakdown? What is the pattern of re-partnering for those who are no longer in marriages?

Hence, the first three analysis chapters deal with partnerships between adults and make only brief references to children. Chapter 5, by contrast, makes use of the fertility question that was reintroduced in *Census 2006*, in order to explore influences on childbearing and its relationship with partnership. It asks: How does the pattern of fertility change by age? Is there also evidence of change by cohort? How does fertility relate to union formation? Is there a relationship between fertility and marital breakdown? How does fertility vary by social background characteristics?

Lastly, Chapter 6 employs the *Census 2006* data to focus on a specific case of overlap between family structure and fertility: lone parenthood. The analysis considers the following questions: What are the different categories of lone parent? How do lone fathers differ from lone mothers? How does the likelihood of lone motherhood among never married young women relate to educational attainment? What are the other determinants of this type of lone motherhood?

The final chapter (Chapter 7) draws conclusions about the extent to which the data have allowed us to answer each of these questions. In addition, it draws some general conclusions that seem to apply across the analysis of different family types. Finally, some policy implications are offered.

1.3 Data and Methods

The primary data source for this report is the *Census of Population*, although we also make use of CSO *Vital Statistics* at various points. At an early stage of investigation, we did look to other sources of data, including the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and, particularly, the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). In the event, we concluded that Census microdata was the most useful vehicle for addressing our research questions.

These surveys have advantages in that they contain richer indicators of socioe-conomic status than the Census, but for the present purposes these advantages are outweighed by disadvantages. With respect to EU-SILC, the most important disadvantage is the much smaller sample size than is available for the Census. The survey typically involves interviews with approximately 5,000 – 6,000 households annually, which makes it difficult to examine less common family types. One potential advantage is that EU-SILC asks respondents about their relationships with all other household members, allowing a full matrix of intra-household relationships to be constructed, which in theory allows family types to be accurately identified. However, our initial analyses indicated that some family types were under-represented (relative to the Census) in the EU-SILC data, most notably cohabiting couples. The combination of the lower sample size and concerns about accuracy of reported relationships, therefore, led us to prefer working with Census data. Turning to the QNHS, the sample is considerably larger than EU-SILC and the socio-economic indicators gathered in the survey are relatively rich. For family research, however, the major drawback is that QNHS datasets do not contain a full matrix of intra-household relationships. An analysis of marital status is possible, but we wished to look at other aspects of family structure also. Lastly, a drawback with both EU-SILC and the QNHS as data sources for family research is that both surveys have undergone considerable methodological changes within the last decade, which makes comparison with data provided by their previous incarnations (Living in Ireland and the Labour Force Survey respectively), more difficult than comparison across Censuses.

The Census data we employ exist in three different forms. For years prior to 1996, we rely on the extensive tables provided in successive Census publications. For these years, it is not, therefore, possible to conduct any kind of multivariate analysis, only to relate family structures to those variables the CSO selected for tabulations. From 1996 onwards, we make use of the *Census of Population Sample of Anonymised Records (COPSAR)*, which provides microdata for a randomly selected 5 per cent of the Census records for 1996, 2002 and 2006. The *COPSAR* allows more sophisticated analysis of the associations between family types and a variety of background characteristics. It is nevertheless limited by both sample size and the fact that the *COPSAR* does not include information relating to all of the categories listed on the Census form, or to responses to the fertility question. Lastly, however, under a revised policy on access to data adopted by the CSO, we were permitted access to the *2006 Census Research Microdata File (CRMF)*. This data source contains a full set of anonymised records, including every enumerated individual (over four million) and responses to every question asked on the Census form, plus a smaller number of variables derived at the household level. This degree of access to data represents a substantial and welcome innovation in the research environment in Ireland. The dataset was analysed on-site at the CSO Census Office in Swords, under conditions designed to ensure that the confidentiality and security of Census records relating to individuals were protected in line with the Statistics Act of 1993. Given the clear superiority of the *CRMF* and the opportunities it offers, we concentrate much of the analysis on this data source.

One consequence arising from the availability of data just described is that the amount and quality of data we have to go on is much greater for the latter half of the period of interest (1986-2006), once the *COPSAR* becomes relevant, and vastly superior at the very end, due to access to the *2006 CRMF*. In many cases, therefore, we try to infer likely causes of trends from

detailed cross-sectional analyses that are concentrated towards the end of the period under study.

Although the *2006 CRMF* is a massive and very detailed data set, it nevertheless has some limitations. Although comprehensive in its coverage, the Census is still bound to miss some individuals living in Ireland who, for whatever reason, were not enumerated. It is likely that these individuals come disproportionately from marginalised sections of society, such as illegal immigrants and homeless persons. The Census also enumerates a substantial number of people who are in the country on Census night but who are not usual residents, e.g. tourists, visitors etc. These are excluded from the analysis. Since the focus is on family structures, we also exclude those living in various institutions. Our analysis is based on adults aged 15 to 59 years, who are usual residents living in private households. This includes people who are usual residents but were temporarily absent on the specific night of the Census, who are effectively reunited with their family for statistical purposes. These criteria produce a population of interest of approximately 2.7 million people.

More significantly, like any other survey that relies on self-report, there is likely to be a degree of inaccuracy in people's responses. One striking example of this applies to men and marital status (see next section), whereby we have good reason to believe that a significant number of males fail to acknowledge marriages that have broken down when reporting their status. But there may well be other examples that are less clear. The very rapid increases in the incidence of cohabiting couples and same-sex couples doubtless reflects genuine increases, but there is a significant chance that the trends are also influenced by individuals being more willing to report these relationships as such. We discuss these matters further in the relevant chapters. For now, the point is that like any other self-report survey, the Census may give rise to some systematic biases in the data.

A further factor that limits the analysis is that the Census is designed very much as a general survey. The available socio-economic indicators are, therefore, not as detailed as would be the case in a survey like, for example, EU-SILC, which contains detail on household and individual income. There are no questions relating to income in the Census. We make extensive use here of educational attainment and social class as indicators of socio-economic status. The Census also contains no questions relating to psychological states other than to mental health. Hence, it is not possible to relate family structures to subjective well-being, attitudes or other psychological indicators that may be important determinants of family life.

For the present report, all analysis pertaining to the *2006 CRMF* was conducted at the individual rather than the household level. A number of useful variables relating to relationships are recorded or derived at the individual level: marital status, partnership status (i.e. whether someone cohabits, or is in a same-sex couple), fertility (females only) and family structure (no children, lone parent or parent in a couple, with age categories of youngest and oldest children). Given the time and resources available for this report, these individual-level variables offer opportunities for extensive analysis of family structures. But there remain more avenues open to analysis, especially if the time were invested to transform the individual-level *CRMF* microdata into a household-level data set. This transformation is not a small undertaking in terms of research effort, but would expand the opportunities considerably. It would allow the socio-economic and socio-

demographic information from both partners in couple households to be combined, along with the number and age of the children in the household. Further research questions would then come into range including: the degree to which partnerships occur across or within social groups, associations between adult relationships and overall family structures (i.e. number, age and gender of children), the nature of reconstituted families (i.e. families including step-parents), and more. Perhaps most significantly, by matching the information gained from the fertility question with the present family structure and ages of the children, it may well be possible to disentangle the factors influencing the significant changes in Irish fertility occurring in recent times. Given the resources available for the present report, these questions remain largely out of reach. It should be noted that while a transformation to household-level data would allow these additional issues to be addressed, it would not allow household-level analysis of the factors influencing specific transformations in family structures. The Census provides only cross-sectional data and, therefore, tells us only about the household an individual resides in at the time of the survey. For instance, the *CRMF* allows us to identify and analyse subsamples who are lone parents or who have experienced marital breakdown, but it does not provide information about their household at the time they became lone parents or when their marriage broke down.

The nature of the data set has implications for appropriate statistical methodology. Throughout this report we primarily employ individual-level multiple regression, specifically logistic regression (both binary and multinomial), which is appropriate for categorical data. In preliminary work, some other methods were tried, but with a dataset of over four million observations, there is a trade-off between methodological sophistication and computer processing time – the larger statistical models reported in the Appendix each took several hours of processing time. Since the present report is intended for general readers rather than those with statistical expertise, we have relegated the regression models to Appendices. The charts, tables and commentary in the main text are based on these multivariate models.

1.4 Marriage and Partnership

Before turning to the specific research questions, as outlined in Section 1.2 above, this section presents an initial tabulation of the population of 15 to 59 years-olds, according to the *Census 2006*. The aim here is to set the scene by giving a flavour of the variety of partnerships and an initial indication of their incidence.

Table 1.1 presents a comparison of marital status, as stated on the Census form, and individual living arrangements. Some explanation is required here regarding the first column – 'Not living with a partner'. The vast majority of married individuals live with their spouse, but this column contains people who state that they are married (i.e. they choose the 'married' option over the 'separated' option on the form) but who appear to live apart from their spouse. It is not possible to tell from the Census information whether they live alone because of enforced temporary separation, e.g. due to reasons of work, or whether they live alone because the marriage is no longer truly functioning. Note also that the first column includes people who live with their parents (or members of their extended family), lone parents and people who live in house shares.

Table 1.1: Marital Status by Partnership Status of Males and Females Aged 15 to 59 Years

	Not Living with a Partner	Living with a Spouse	Cohabiting (Not with Spouse)	In Same-Sex Couple	Total (%)
Males					
Never married	608,262		98,961	2,231	**52.3**
Married	27,616	537,154	1,440	101	**41.8**
Remarried (widowed)	159	1,668	26	*	**0.14**
Remarried (dissolution)	757	12,091	160	*	**0.96**
Separated	27,233		8,709	45	**2.65**
Divorced	14,012		7,526	54	**1.59**
Widowed	7,578		485	*	**0.59**
Total (000s)	**685,617**	**550,913**	**117,307**	**2,436**	**(1,356,273)**
%	**50.6**	**40.6**	**8.65**	**0.18**	**100**
Females					
Never married	522,517		103,247	1,431	**47.1**
Married	12,751	577,570	1,194	44	**44.4**
Remarried (widowed)	95	2,040	27	*	**0.16**
Remarried (dissolution)	394	10,703	132	*	**0.84**
Separated	45,835		6,562	47	**3.94**
Divorced	19,970		6,917	68	**2.02**
Widowed	19,468		935	*	**1.53**
Total (000s)	**621,030**	**590,313**	**119,014**	**1,597**	**(1,331,954)**
%	**46.6**	**44.3**	**8.94**	**0.12**	**100**

Source: Census Research Microdata File (CRMF) 2006.

Table 1.1 has a number of striking features. First, there are significant gender differences. Because the men in marriages tend to be a little older than women (the average age difference is just over two years), it is not surprising that more women than men aged 15-59 years are married. However, this small effect cannot be the explanation for the very large gender difference in the numbers who state that they are divorced or, especially, separated. What underlies this difference? It is possible that men and women have different patterns of migration following marital breakdown. But the gap is too large for this to explain it and, in any case, if separated or divorced men are more likely to emigrate then by the same logic they ought also to be more likely to immigrate. There is also some confusion regarding the term 'separated', which has both a common and legal usage, referring both to the de facto situation of a married couple who no longer live together and the legal status of a married couple who have a judicial separation agreement. There is, however, no reason to believe that this confusion means that men and women interpret 'separation' differently. Thus, the much more plausible explanation is that men are not being as honest in their answers to the marital status question on the Census form. Some men who are separated (and to a lesser degree divorced) instead classify themselves as single or married. This may partly explain the higher number of men who state that they are married but who do not live with their spouse. We return to this issue in more detail in Chapter 4.

Turning to the column relating to cohabitation reveals another reason why an individual's marital status is not necessarily an accurate guide to their partnership status. For instance, while a significant proportion of those who have divorced are remarried, there are also a similar number of divorced and

separated people now cohabiting. Both remarriage and cohabitation following marital breakdown are more common among men. In addition, a not insignificant number people record their marital status as 'married' but cohabit with someone other than their spouse. On a much smaller scale, it is also apparent from the adjacent column that some 'married' and formerly married people are now living in same-sex couples. In total, there are just over 240,000 people in the age range (9 per cent) who are cohabiting with an opposite-sex or same-sex couple, of which over 34,000 are either married to someone other than their present partner or are formerly married.

Table 1.1 is a useful staring point for understanding the potential and actual complexity of family structures. Of course, it remains the case that the large majority of individuals are contained in the first two columns of the table; that is, they are either single or in a married couple. Most either live with no partner and have never married or are in their first marriage and living with their spouse. Between them, these two cells account for 84 per cent of males and 83 per cent of females, although the former figure is slightly higher than it ought to be, owing to the under-reporting of broken marriages described above. The high proportion of individuals in these two cells implies that the traditional path from singlehood to married life remains well trodden. What must be borne in mind, however, is that almost 114,000 of those who are living alone are also lone parents. Moreover, given the trends in family structures outlined at the beginning of this chapter, we know that every other cell in Table 1.1 is increasing in size relative to these two most populated ones. It is to these trends we now turn.

2. SINGLEHOOD AND COUPLE FORMATION SINCE 1986

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account of trends in singlehood and couple formation over the period 1986 to 2006 and looks in some detail at how these trends varied by social class, the social factor for which trend data on marriage patterns are reasonably extensive. This sets the scene for a more detailed analysis of the social influences on couple formation based on *Census Research Microdata File (CRMF)* 2006, which is provided in the following chapter.

There are some ambiguities in the everyday language we use to refer to aspects of singlehood and partnership and these carry over into complexities in the data collected in the *Census of Population*, the main data source we use here. One ambiguity concerns the term 'single', which in Census terminology, as in much everyday usage, refers to those who have not married. Published Census data have traditionally provided much information on the incidence of singlehood understood in these terms. However, a growing proportion of single people are cohabiting and it is now, therefore, useful to distinguish between the single who are alone, a category for whom we do not have a widely used everyday label, and those who are in couples (here we will refer to single people who are not cohabiting as 'alone', but – possible confusion again – this does not necessarily mean that they live alone in a one-person household). It was only in 1996 that the Census began to measure cohabitation and even since then published Census data provide less information on cohabitation (relationship status) than they do on marital status. The *CRMF 2006* enables us to examine the interplay between singlehood and cohabitation, but similar detail is not available for the *Censuses* of *2002* and *1996*, and there is no information whatever on cohabitation prior to 1996. Thus it is more difficult to identify recent trends in couple formation (including both cohabitation and marriage) than in marriage alone.

In addition to the new forms of partnership that have to be taken into account, there are also some problems arising from inconsistent reporting or misreporting of marital and relationship status. As described in Chapter 1, it would appear that the count of men who are single may be somewhat overstated since some men whose marriages have broken down do not acknowledge that fact and instead classify themselves as single or married. (We present a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon in Chapter 4.) There are also those for whom the terms 'married' and 'separated' may be ambiguous – legally they may still be married but de facto they may be living apart. The Census forms provide no guidance on which marital status

category people in those circumstances should allocate themselves to, and while it is likely that people will more commonly report the de facto rather than the legal situation, it is not clear how universally this is so. We will take account of these complexities wherever possible in what follows, but it always has to be borne in mind that there is a margin of uncertainty in precisely what the data are capturing, even though that margin is likely to be small enough so as not to seriously distort the realities our classifications relate to.

2.2 Internalional Trends

The years around the middle of the twentieth century were something of a golden age for marriage in Europe and much of the developed world: more people married, and married at a younger age, than at any other time in the modern era. In addition, the modern rise of divorce had not yet begun to take off so that marriages were durable. The cohorts born in the 1930s and early 1940s were the most married and longest married generation in modern Europe (Therborn, 2004, p. 194). Since then, however, the turn away from marriage has been sudden and dramatic. In the EU-15, the marriage rate dropped from 8 per 1,000 population in 1960 to 4.8 per 1,000 in 2004 (*Eurostat 2006*, Table G-3), the significance of marriage itself weakened as the boundaries between formal marriage and various kinds of cohabitation and informal union became blurred, and as we shall see in a later chapter, the divorce rate rose sharply in most countries between the 1960s and the 1990s. In a longer historical perspective, the reduced position of marriage today is not entirely new: many countries in Europe have gone through previous bouts where marriage avoidance was common, where various forms of informal marriage were tolerated and widely practised, and where early death among spouses was just as disruptive – and much more damaging – to family life as divorce is today (Therborn, 2004).

By the early years of the present decade, the tendency for young adults to stay single had become widespread in Europe but also varied a great deal between countries, while among mid-life and older adults, staying single was still relatively unusual. Figure 2.1 illustrates these patterns by showing the percentage single among women at ages 25-29 and 45-49 years in a number of European countries in 2001. Among 25-29 year-old women, Sweden and Ireland had the highest levels of singlehood (76 per cent and 73 per cent single respectively), while at the other extreme, Slovakia and Lithuania had only 31 per cent and 26 per cent single respectively. Among women aged 45-49 years, international variation was narrower and Ireland was less of an extreme case, though outside of the Nordic countries, where cohabitation is more common than elsewhere in Europe, it still had among the highest levels of singlehood in this age group.

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Women Who Are Never-Married at Ages 25-29 Years and 45-49 Years in European Countries, 2001
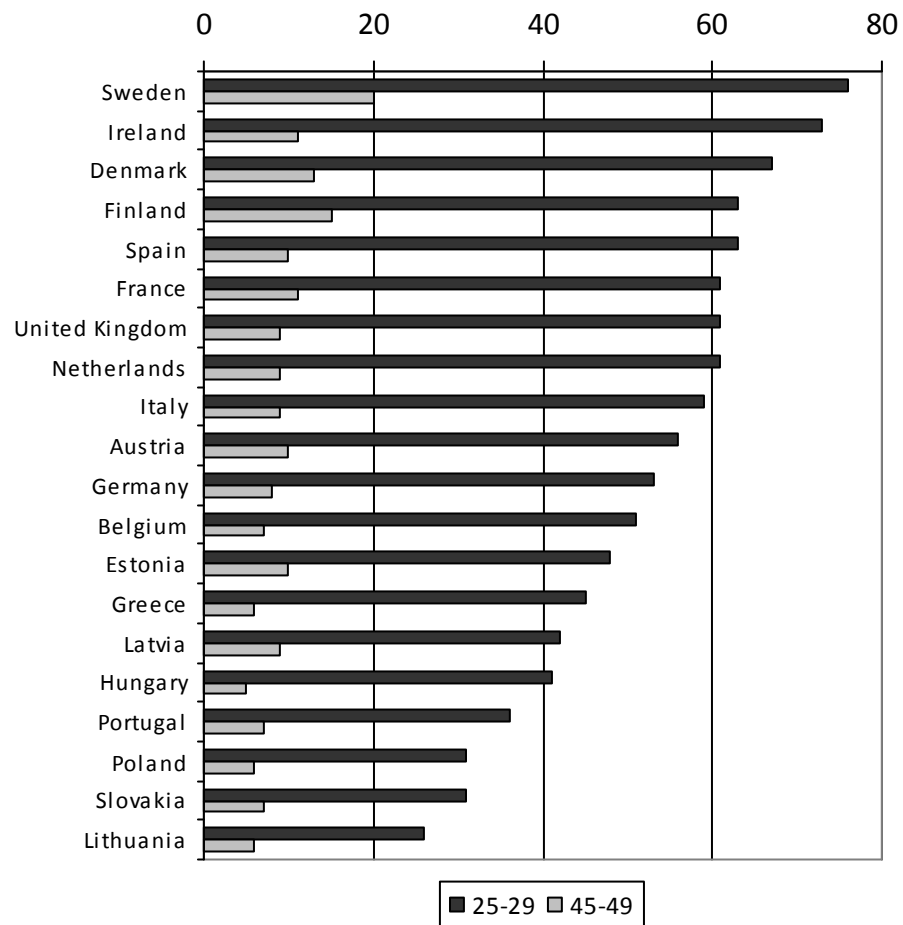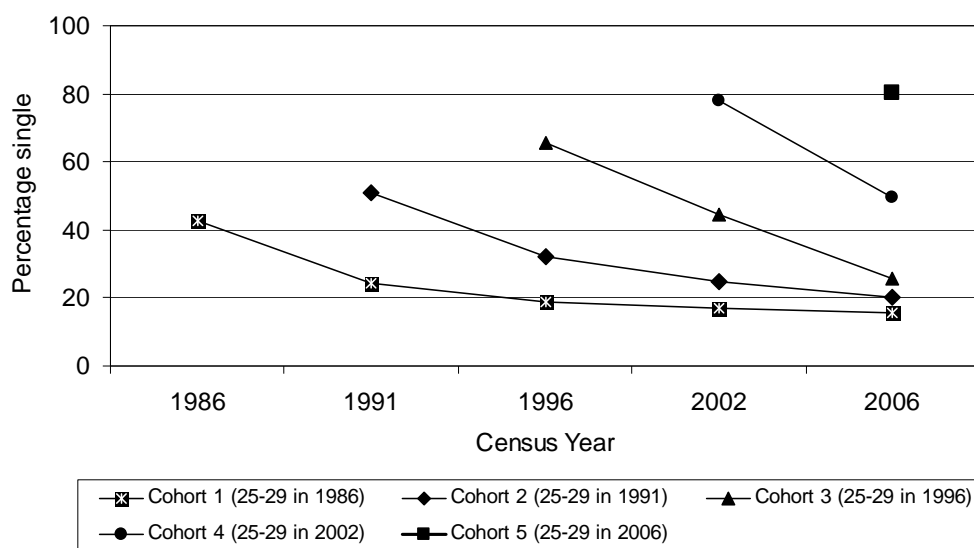

Source: *Eurostat* database, *Census 2001* round.

2.3 Staying Single in Ireland

The relatively high levels of singlehood in Ireland compared to most of the rest of Europe shown in the previous section is nothing new. As has previously been well documented (Kennedy, 2001; Fahey and Field, 2008), Irish people have a long history of either marrying late or not marrying at all. It was only for a period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s that youthful and widespread marriage became the norm. Since the mid-1980s there has been a reversion to levels of singlehood and delayed marriage last seen in the 1940s and 1950s. Figure 2.2 shows this development for the period since 1986 by tracing the persistence of singlehood among successive cohorts of 25-29 year olds up to 2006. The bottom line in this figure shows the trend for what by Irish standards was a high-marrying age-group – those who were aged 25-29 years in 1986. In 1986, 43 per cent of that age-group were single, and by the time they had reached the age of 45-49 years (that is, by 2006) the proportion single among them had dropped to 16 per cent. This contrasts with the situation a decade and a half later (the year 2002), when almost 80 per cent of 25-29 year-olds were single. By 2006, when this cohort was aged in their early 30s, singlehood had dropped but only to 50 per cent – a level of singlehood higher than that found among the 1986 cohort when they were still in their late 20s. The likelihood is that it has dropped further since then but it is open to question whether it will eventually fall to the 16 per

cent level which had been achieved by the 1986 cohort of 25-29 years by the year in 2006.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of the Irish Population Single by Age Cohorts, 1986-2006

The surge in marriage in the 1970s had brought the average age of marriage down to historically youthful levels by Irish standards – just over 26 years for men and 24 years for women in 1974. By the end of the 1980s, average age at marriage had risen by two years and it jumped by a further four years between 1991 and 2005, rising to 33.1 years for men and 31.0 years for women – late ages of marriage not seen since the 1940s (CSO, 2007). At the same time, however, the annual number of marriages, which had been falling throughout the 1980s, rose sharply after the mid-1990s and was 40 per cent higher in 2006 than in 1995. This combination of rising age of marriage and rising number of marriages was unusual. It arose because as people in their 20s delayed marriage during the 1990s, they compensated later on, giving rise to a new bulge in marriage rates among those aged over 30 years, particularly in the years 1996-2002. This pattern is captured in Figure 2.3, which shows marriage rates (i.e. the number of marriages per year rather than the number who are married) by five-year age group for 1991, 1996, 2002 and 2005. In 2005, the marriage rate among men and women aged 20-24 years was in the region of a quarter of what it was in 1991. The marriage rate among men in the age group 25-29 years also declined sharply but less so for women. On the other hand, marriage rates among those aged 30-34 years more or less doubled for men and women, and rose for older age groups also.

Figure 2.3: Marriage Rates by Age Group for Males and Females, 1991-2005 (Marriages per 1,000 Corresponding Population in Each Age-Group)
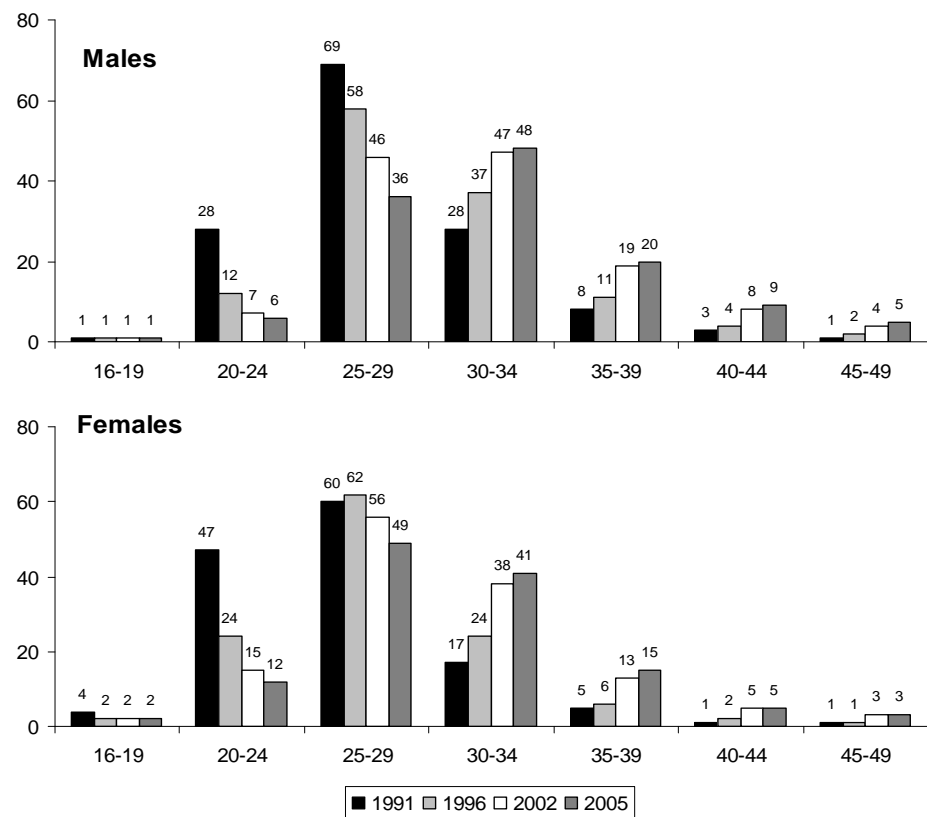
*Source*: Central Statistics Office, 2007.

2.4 The Impact of Cohabitation

The social significance of the delay in entry into marriage that has occurred in most developed counties in recent years is greatly modified by the rise of the alternative form of couple formation represented by cohabitation. Reliable comparative data on cohabitation across countries are not available from official sources. Researchers have relied instead on sample surveys where sample sizes are often small and response patterns are variable. Although these sources provide useful information, the level of precision involved is uncertain. Using Eurobarometer data, , Kiernan (1999) found wide variation in the incidence of cohabitation across a number of European countries, with high levels in the Nordic countries and low levels in Ireland and the southern European countries of Portugal, Spain and Greece. For example, among women aged 25-29 year olds, she found that one-third of women were cohabiting in Sweden and Denmark compared to 3 per cent in Ireland (Kiernan, 1999, p. 26).

Although they may have been relatively uncommon in Ireland in 1996, the number of cohabiting couples grew fourfold between then and 2006, rising from 31,300 to 121,800 couples over that period. They are thus now numerous enough to represent a significant new form of partnership and need to be taken into account in assessing present-day patterns of couple formation. As we shall see in a later chapter, some 15 per cent of cohabitees are previously married persons who are in a second or subsequent

relationship. But the majority, just over 200,000 persons in 2006, are single people for whom cohabitation represents their first entry into partnership.

Drawing on the *CRMF 2006*, we can focus on single adults and among them distinguish between those who are cohabiting and those who are not. Figure 2.4 shows the resulting distributions by single year of age for the year 2006. This shows that cohabitation among single people is most common between the early 20s and the mid-30s. At age 25 years, for example, almost 91 per cent of the population are still single (i.e. 9 per cent are married) but only 72 per cent are alone, indicating that some 19 per cent are cohabiting. This means that cohabitation is twice as common as marriage at that age. The numbers cohabiting peak at around age 28 years: at that point, 75 per cent of the population are single (i.e. 25 per cent are married) and 53 per cent are alone, which means that 22 per cent are cohabiting. This means also that by age 28 years, marriage has overtaken cohabitation as a form of coupledom. From that age on, the numbers cohabiting decline as more people enter marriage but up to the early 30s cohabitees represent a slightly larger share of the population who remain unmarried. At age 31 years, for example, cohabitees amount to 17 per cent of all 31 year-olds but 30 per cent of 31 year-olds who have not yet married. Single cohabitees decline in number among those aged in their late 30s and early 40s and dwindle to small levels by age 50 but even at the latter age they account for 10 per cent of 50 year-olds who have not married.

Figure 2.4: Persons Who Are Single, Alone and Cohabiting by Single Year of Age, 2006
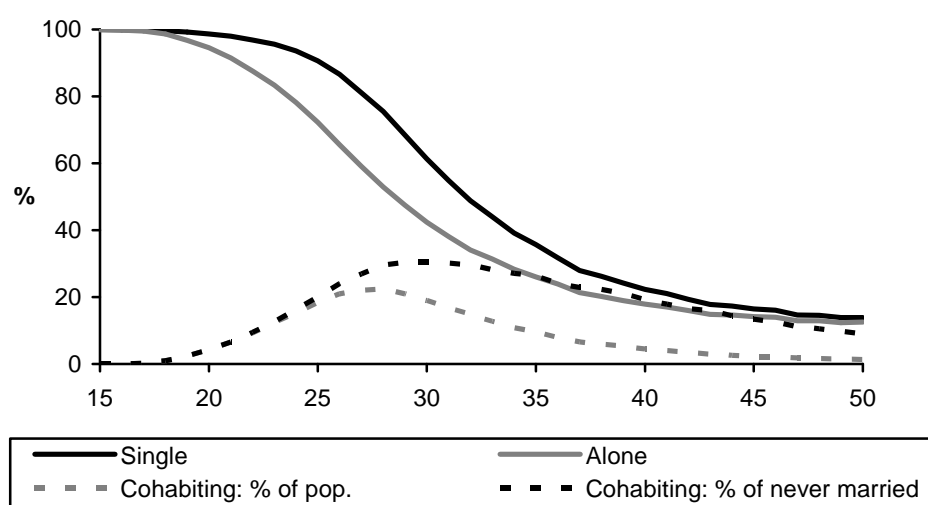
Source: CRMF 2006.

Taking cohabitation into account we obtain a different impression of trends in couple formation than emerges from looking at marriage alone. Figure 2.5 indicates the significance of cohabitation for couple formation in the period 1996-2006 among the two adjacent age-groups where its impact was greatest – those aged 25-29 years and 30-34 years – and places that in the long-term context of the changing proportions single in these age-groups since the 1920s and 1930s, the previous era when singlehood was at a high

in Ireland.[2] For 25-29 year-olds, the percentage single was at 80 per cent in 2006, a level exceeding the previous high for singlehood in that age-group reached in 1936. However, only 60 per cent of that age-group was alone in 2006. This is higher than the percentage single in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the era of marriage boom in Ireland, but a good deal lower than the peaks of singlehood reached in the 1930s. A similar pattern holds for 30-34 year-olds, though at lower overall levels of both singlehood and being alone. These patterns indicate that while the rise of cohabitation has off-set the rise of singlehood in these age-groups in recent years, it has done so only partially: there has been a real rise over the past two decades in the incidence of people in their late 20s and early 30s who are not in couples even after we take cohabitation into account.

Figure 2.5: Percentages Single and Alone in the Age-Groups 25-29 Years and 30-34 Years, 1926-2006
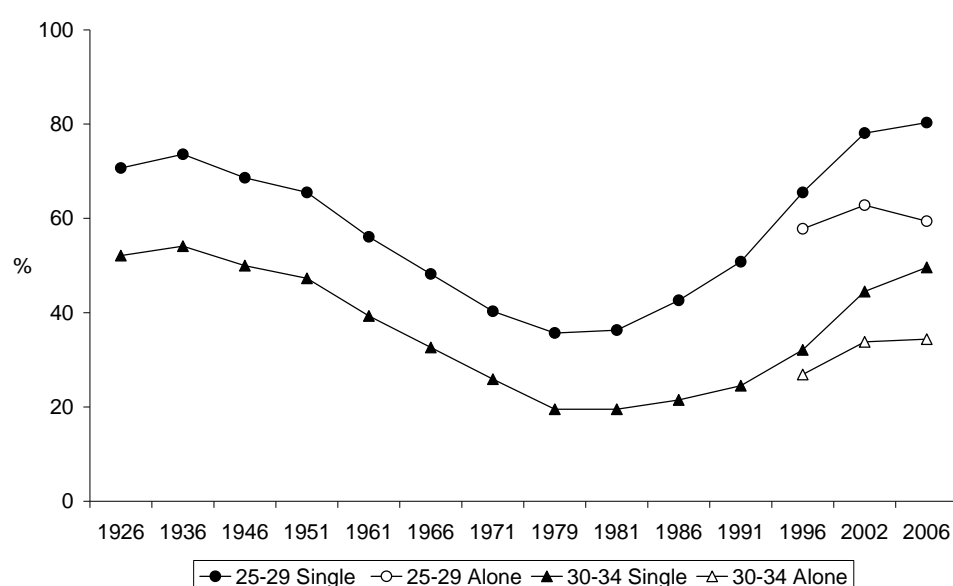

Sources: Census data and CRMF 2006.

The data on cohabitation we have looked at here give point-in-time snapshots and do not tell us about the stability or duration of the cohabiting relationship. The heavy concentration of cohabitees in the age-range from about 25 years to 35 years and the fall-off as marriage rises in older ages is consistent with findings from previous research that cohabitation is usually a transient state that ends either with a breakdown of the relationship or a transition into marriage (Halpin and O'Donoghue, 2004). Such a conclusion needs to be drawn cautiously, however, since the numbers of cohabitees in this age range has increased sharply and it is not, therefore, clear that they will be as inclined to progress to marriage as the preceding cohort.

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[2] Data on cohabitation for 1996 and 2002 are available only from published Census reports. Data on percentages alone by age-groups presented here are arrived at by assuming that the age-distribution of cohabitees in 1996 and 2002 is the same as that revealed by microdata from *Census 2006*. Since this assumption may be in error to some degree, the estimates of the percentages alone in 1996 and 2002 presented in Figure 2.4 should be regarded as approximate.

Another indication of the nature of cohabitation can be gleaned by looking at the proportion of cohabiting couples who have children. Between 1996 and 2006, there was some shift in the proportion of such couples with children: in 1996, almost 60 per cent had no children while in 2006 that figure had risen almost to 66 per cent (Fahey and Field, 2008, p. 18). Microdata from *CRMF 2006* reveal that childlessness is at its highest – between 70 and 80 per cent – for cohabiting women in their 20s, but the proportions of women who have had children (particularly with two children) rise among cohabiting women in their late 30s and early 40s: some 60 per cent of those between ages 37 and 44 years have at least one child (Figure 2.6 – the data here refer only to *single* female cohabitees and so do not include separated or divorced cohabitees, who might be more likely to have had children). These single cohabitees in their late 30s and early 40s with children may represent a group for whom cohabitation is a longer-lasting form of partnership than it is among younger cohabitees. After age 45 years, as we have seen earlier, the number of cohabitees becomes small and among these it is more common to have no children.

**Figure 2.6: Single Female Cohabitees by Number of Children, 2006**
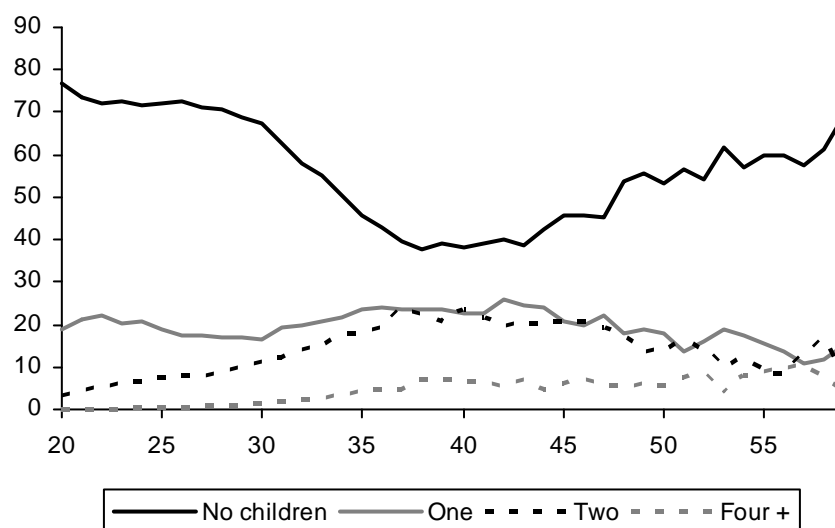
Source: CRMF 2006.

2.5 Singlehood in Middle Age

Along with delayed entry to marriage, the historical pattern of marriage avoidance in Ireland included a tendency for substantial proportions never to marry at all – or at least not to do so before the potentially most active phases of family building had passed, that is, by the time they had reached their 50s. The recurrence of marriage avoidance among younger adults just outlined can be expected eventually to feed through into higher levels of singlehood in middle age. However, as yet, feed-through from the marriage boom of the 1970s means that singlehood has been in *decline* among the middle-aged population in recent years (keeping in mind that those aged in their late 50s in 2006 would have been at peak marriageable age in the 1970s and early 1980s). It is only among those at the lower edges of middle age (those aged in their late 40s) that indications of a resurgence in singlehood are beginning to emerge. As Figure 2.7 shows, for example, the proportions of men aged 55-59 years who are single dropped from 25 per cent in 1986 to 15 per cent in 2006, while for women in the same age-group the drop over the same period was from 16 per cent to 10 per cent. In the cohorts that are

ten years younger, by contrast, (those aged 45-49 years), the drop in singlehood was already bottoming out by the early 1990s and the first movements towards a rise have become evident by 2006. We have seen earlier that in 2006 cohabitation was at low levels among people aged 50. But as the incidence of singlehood among people at that and higher ages is likely to grow in the years ahead, arising from the feed-through effects of recent declines in marriage, it is likely that we will also see a growth in cohabitation among the over-50s.

Figure 2.7: Proportion Never Married by Age and Gender, 1986-2006
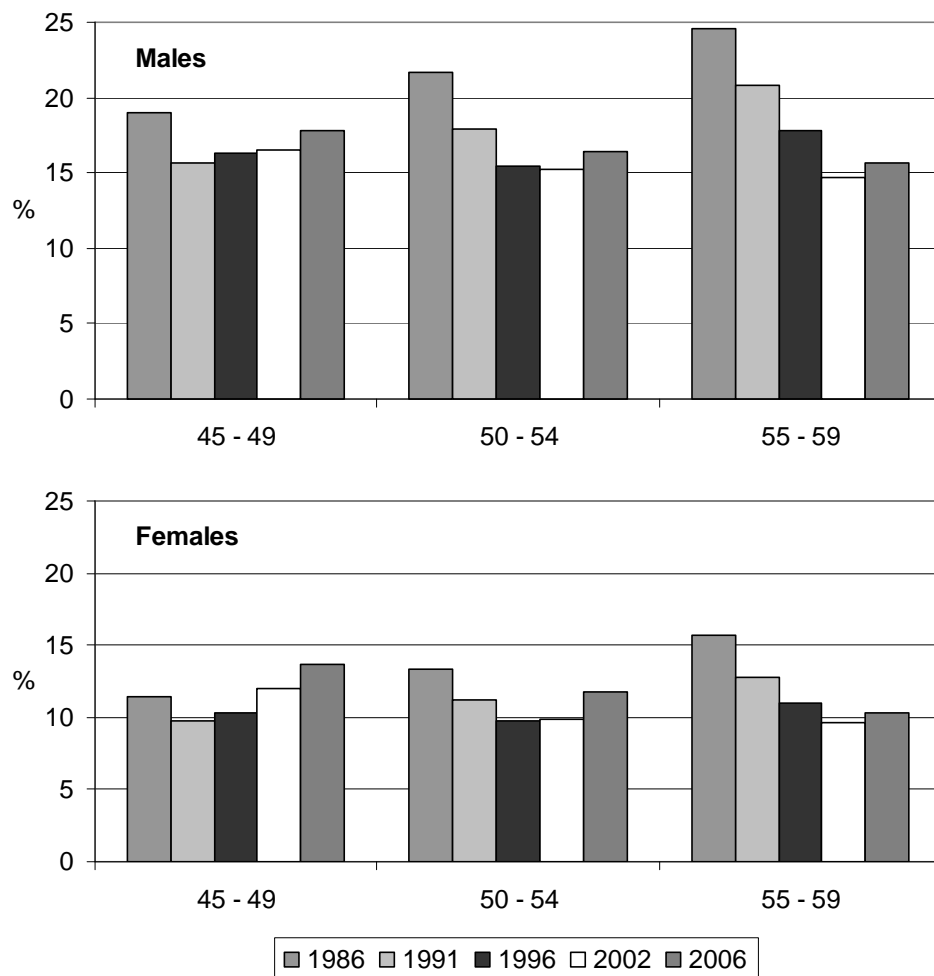
Source: Census 2006.

2.6 Evolution of Class Differences in Marriage

In the following chapter, we will examine the data from *CRMF 2006* in order to examine the social influences behind different forms of singlehood and partnership, an exercise that is not possible with the less detailed published data available for earlier years. However, published Census data provide information on one social factor that has differentiated marriage patterns in the past, namely, social class, and so here we examine the changing social class profile of marriage for the period since 1986. Of particular interest to us here is the possible interaction between trends in marriage since 1986 and the changing social class composition of the population. In Ireland in the past, the propensity to delay or avoid marriage was differentiated by social class, with delayed entry to marriage evident among the higher social classes. The expansion of middle and upper class

occupations since the 1980s might therefore have been expected to give rise to later average ages of marriage on its own, independently of any change in behaviour within each social class. Here we want to explore whether this possible social class composition effect was in fact a significant contributor to the rising age of marriage or whether cross-class change in behaviour was a more important influence.

In exploring this issue, it would be desirable to examine the effects of social class among men and women separately. This is particularly so since social class and occupational opportunities might have especially strong influences on women's approach to marriage. It is often argued, for example, that in the past women in the professional classes were more likely to delay marriage or not marry at all. This reflected the longer time they spent in education and the effect of higher earning power on the cost of leaving jobs to have children, not to speak of the effects of the 'marriage bar' (the prohibition on the employment of married women in many white-collar jobs, including almost all jobs in the public service) which was in place until 1973. However, for present purposes, Census data on the social class position of women are too incomplete to allow us to bring women's social class position into the analysis: social class is measured on the basis of occupation, and up to the mid-1980s only a minority of married women (one-fifth in 1987, for example) were in jobs outside the home, with the result that the majority were allocated a social class position in Census data based on their husbands' occupations. For this reason, therefore, we focus here on the relationship between marriage and social class for men only. Detailed tables on which the present analysis is based are presented in Appendix A.

Let us begin by looking at early marriage. Those who marry at a moderately young age have long been a small sub-section of the Irish population and they have become smaller in recent times. In the 1986 Census, 11.3 per cent of all men aged 20-24 years were married, and this had dropped to 2.6 per cent by 2006 (Table 2.1). In 1986, working class men (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers) and agricultural labourers were most likely to marry at this young age, while farmers and professionals were least likely to marry young. Over time, marriage rates for 20-24 year-olds declined for all social classes. In strict statistical terms, the

Table 2.1: Percentage of 20-24 Year-Old Men Ever-Married by Social Group, 1986-2006

| % Groups Ever-Married	1986	1996	2006
Farmers	3.2	2.8	0.8
Other agricultural	12.5	2.3	1.2
Higher professionals	2.4	1.3	0.5
Lower professionals	5.4	1.2	0.6
Employers and managers	8.3	2.5	1.7
Own account workers	6.9	6.2	2.6
Non-manual workers	12.6	2.0	1.8
Skilled manual workers	14.1	2.9	2.3
Semi-skilled manual workers	15.8	3.8	3.3
Unskilled manual workers	15.4	4.1	3.3
Unknown	6.1	3.2	4.7
Total % ever-married	11.29	2.9	2.6
N	16,283	216	224

Source: Census 1986; Census of Population Sample of Anonymised Records (COPSAR) 1996 and 2006.

decline did not change the broad shape of social class differentials in marriage – the rank-order correlation between years (Spearman's rho) in Table 2.1 is 0.63 and is strongly significant. Thus, unskilled manual workers and farm labourers are still most likely to marry earlier in life. However, the differentials now arise at such low absolute levels of early marriage that it is reasonable in real terms to speak of cross-class convergence on the almost total avoidance of marriage among men in their early 20s.

Kennedy (1973) surmised that the groups who marry young displayed more conservative attitudes and preferences towards the family. Another possible influence is earlier exit from school and entry into jobs among the working class, which obviates the need to defer marriage for the sake of continued education. Among farmers, who in 1986 had the lowest rates of entry into marriage of all social groups, marriage postponement has been related to factors such as the tradition of waiting to inherit the family farm before marriage (Kennedy, 1991), the lesser availability of single women in rural areas because of women's out-migration and the growing reluctance of rural women to settle for life on a farm (O'Hara, 1998). Over the period 1986 to 2006, the likelihood of marriage among young farmers declined, so that by 2006 less than one in every 10 farmers under the age of 30 was married. On the other hand, young farmers had by then become very few – in *Census 2006*, only 1.5 per cent of men aged in their 20s listed farming as their main occupation.

In order to test more systematically how these social class transformations contributed to marriage postponement, a simple standardisation exercise was carried out on the data on proportions married across social class categories, the results of which are plotted in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Observed and Predicted Percentages Ever-Married by Age-Cohort, 1986-2006 (Males)
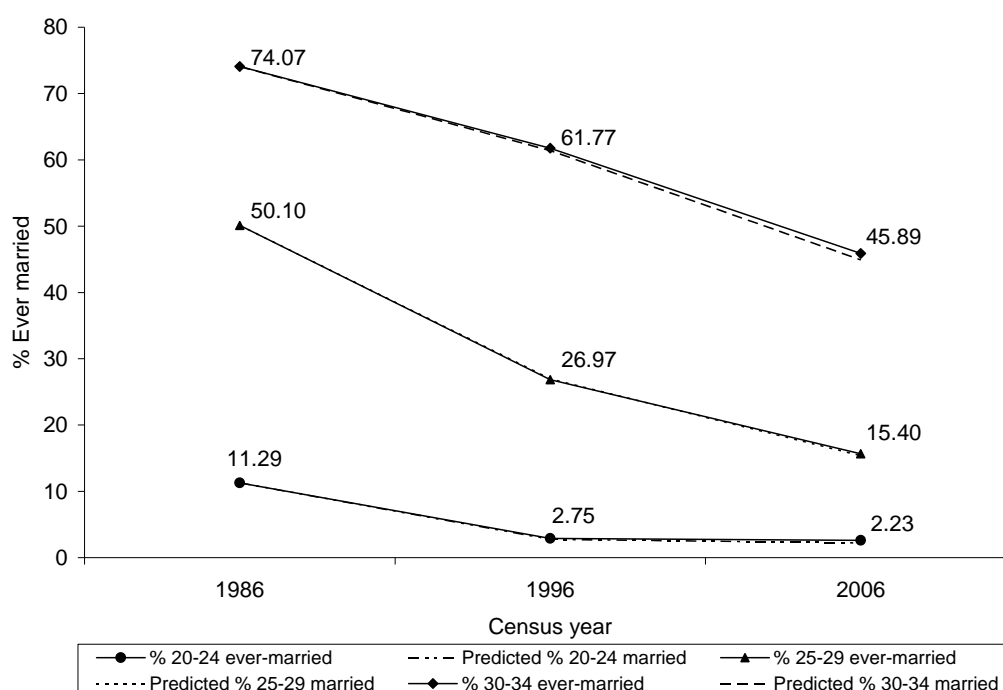
Source: *Census 1986, COPSAR 1996 and 2006.*

The unbroken lines present the actual percentages who were ever-married in each of three age-bands (20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 years) in 1986, 1996 and 2006. The downward sloping lines reflect the increasing postponement of marriage among all age-groups. Over this time, for example, the percentage of men who were married at ages 25-29 years declined from 50 per cent in 1986 to 15 per cent in 2006. In the standardisation, we consider the possible impact of changes over the period in the class composition of the male population. Results of the standardisation, presented in the broken lines, suggest that holding the population of the class positions constant at the levels observed in the *1986 Census* would have produced a very similar pattern to what was observed. In effect, then, changes in the class position of these men account for virtually none of the marriage postponement that was observed. Even if the occupational structure of society had not changed during this period, Ireland would have still recorded a substantial reduction in the percentages of men marrying aged between 20 and 34 years.

2.7 Class Differences in Singlehood in Middle Age

As we have seen earlier, patterns of singlehood among the middle-aged are a hangover from the marriage boom of two to three decades earlier and so differ from those observed among younger adults. Looking at the evolution of social class differences in these patterns over the 1986-2006 period, we see a mix of declines and increases in the risk of non-marriage (Table A3, Appendix A). Farmers, farmers' relatives working on the home-farm, agricultural labourers and unskilled manual workers benefited from the marriage boom but by 2006, these groups still had the highest rates of singlehood, and we still find a strong albeit weakening relationship between singlehood and social class. The highest rates of non-marriage were found among those men who were at the bottom of the class structure; with men listing small farming and farm labouring as their main occupation most likely to be never-married by ages 45 to 59 years, regardless of Census year.

At the other end of the class structure, men in higher professional occupations such as doctors, dentists, vets and engineers also benefited from a marriage boom. Of men aged 50-54 years at the time of the Census, for example, 27 per cent were unmarried in 1986 but by 2006, this rate had halved, with only 13 per cent unmarried. The position of men occupying middle-class positions was varied. Of the youngest age cohort, who represent more recent trends, rates of non-marriage increased for all middle and upper working class positions (Table A3, Appendix A). This meant that there was less variation in singlehood rates within this age-cohort by 2006 (the coefficient of variation fell from 66 in 1986 to 39 in 2006). In other words, class differences in singlehood have narrowed. Of the older age-cohort, men occupying middle-class positions did not benefit from a marriage boom. For this cohort, however, class differences in non-marriage also narrowed but to a lesser extent than for the other cohorts.

As before, to assess the importance of compositional change in accounting for changes in rates of non-marriage, a standardisation exercise was carried out as presented in Figure 2.8. We continue to hold the population class structure constant at 1986 levels, and assess what would have happened to rates of male singlehood among three age-bands. This is in a context where the social class composition of the male population in these age-bands changed dramatically, with the proportion of men working in the most marginal categories declining substantially: almost one third of the male labour force aged 50-54 years worked in farming, agricultural and skilled manual jobs in 1986, compared with only 13 per cent in 2006 (Table

A2, Appendix A). By contrast, one-fifth of the same male labour force were in upper or middle class positions in 1986 and this doubled to 41 per cent in 2006.

In the simulated scenario, if nothing had changed in the class structure, non-marriage would have been slightly higher than observed – it would have shown a somewhat smaller reduction than actually occurred. With the class structure held constant, singlehood would have fallen by 9.4 per cent among 55-59 year-old men as opposed to the observed fall of 10.1 per cent. The distance between the broken and unbroken lines presented in Figure 2.9 is a measure of the importance of compositional change and shows that it was slightly more influential for the oldest cohort (55-59 year old). Changes in the class composition of the male population have, therefore, had a measurable impact on non-marriage among the middle-aged. Increases in the economic prospects of these older men in terms of growth in professional and middle class positions brought with it a substantial reduction in rates of non-marriage. If by 2006, a large number of men were still working as full-time farmers and in unskilled manual jobs, the incidence of singlehood would have been higher than was observed.

Figure 2.9: Observed and Predicted Percentages Never-Married by Age-Cohort, 1986-2006 (Males)
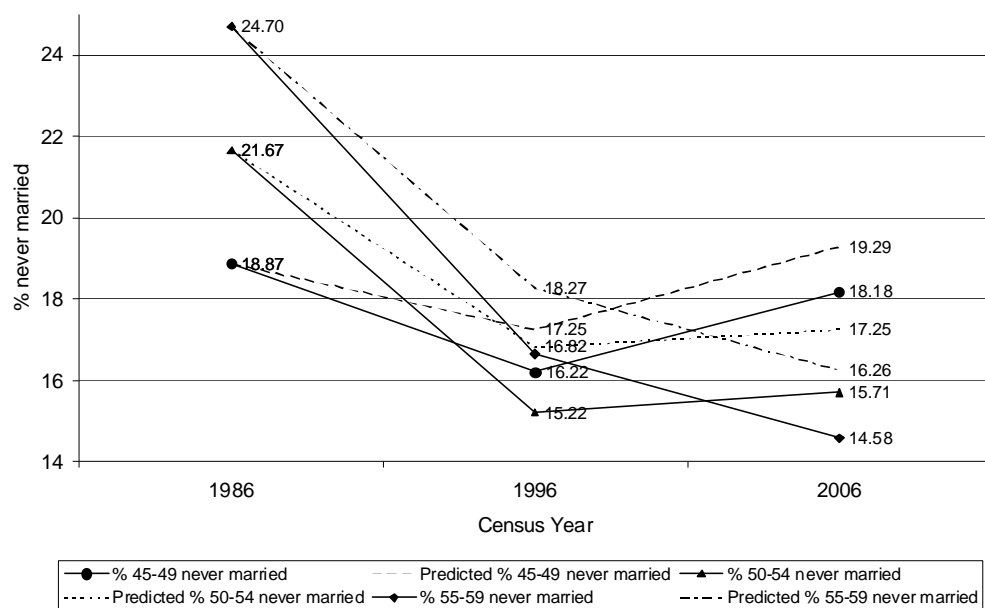
Source: Census 1986, COPSAR 1996 and 2006.

2.8 Summary

The exceptional period of youthful and widespread marriage that occurred in Ireland in the 1970s and early 1980s has given way to later and more restricted marriage in the years since then. Recent patterns bring Ireland back to a level of postponed marriage that was last witnessed in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the incidence of marriage today understates the incidence of couple formation. This is particularly true among those aged from around 25 years to 35 years, for whom cohabitation is most prevalent. The proportions of young adults who are alone, in the sense that they are neither married nor cohabiting, is well below the proportions who were single in the 1930s and 1940s, yet it is still higher than the proportions who remained single in the period of marriage boom of two to three decades ago.

Thus, despite the impact of cohabitation, there has been a real decline in couple formation since the mid-1980s.

Among middle-aged adults, singlehood is still quite low since they come from the cohorts who were marrying at such a high rate in the 1970s and 1980s. It is likely, however, that the more recent decline in couple formation now evident among younger adults will soon feed through into a higher incidence of singlehood, perhaps combined with a higher incidence of cohabitation, among the middle-aged of the future.

Social class differences in the propensity to marry early which were evident in the mid-1980s have become less important in recent years (at least among males – relevant data for females are not complete enough to draw a full picture in their case). It still is the case, as it has been in the past, that working class males are more likely to marry young than those from the professional classes, but now the absolute incidence of early marriage is small overall and the more striking feature is the degree to which delayed marriage has become the norm in all social classes. There is some indication among older males that the changing social class composition of the population has had an impact on the incidence of singlehood and marriage. But generally that impact is small and the weakness of social class as a differentiating factor is now notable.

3. SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON COUPLE FORMATION IN 2006

The previous chapter provided an account of trends in singlehood and couple formation over the period 1986-2006. In this chapter, we take advantage of the level of detail available on these issues from the *Census Research Microdata File (CRMF) 2006*, in order to assess the social influences on various forms of singlehood and partnership. In the body of the chapter, we do so by considering the links between cohabitation and marriage on the one hand and, on the other hand, a number of social factors taken in sequence, beginning with age and gender and then considering in turn educational attainment, nationality and ethnicity, religion and Dublin/non-Dublin location. Underlying the assessment of these factors considered in isolation are multivariate statistical models of the links which they and other factors have with cohabitation and marriage considered simultaneously. The output of the models is presented in Appendix B. The models take a reference category for each variable included in the analysis and show the likelihood (the 'odds ratio') that the other categories in the variable are cohabiting or married relative to that reference category. We will make repeated reference to these models in the course of the chapter.

It should be noted that while the likelihood of cohabiting or being married varies according to most of the social characteristics we look at, by far the greater share of the variance in partnership status is probably *not* accounted for in this way.[3] This does not mean that there is reason to doubt the relevance of the relationships we find to be statistically significant, but it does mean that much of what shapes differences between people, in terms of their likelihood of entering cohabitation or marriage, is personal and is not socially structured (or at least is not structured according to the variables we look at here). This is simply to recall that much of partnership behaviour is dictated by individual circumstances and personality and cannot be accounted for in a deterministic way.

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[3] To some extent this is suggested by the 'adjusted R-squared' statistic in the second-last row of the table in Appendix B, which gives an approximate indication of the overall strength of the relationship between the explanatory variables and partnership status. Based on experience of other models of this type, the adjusted R-squared statistics are relatively low.

**3.2
Age and
Gender**

Let us first recall the broad age distribution of couple formation in 2006 as identified in the previous chapter (Figure 2.3). The percentages who are alone and never married remain high in the teenage years but then fall among people aged in their 20s. Figure 3.1[4] shows that this decline is due initially to rising cohabitation, but that marriage takes over as the dominant form of union from age 28 years onwards. Cohabitation among the never-married dwindles but remains significant throughout the 30s. As suggested in Chapter 2, cohabitation may change character among those in their late 30s and early 40s, as it evolves towards ongoing partnership rather than a transient state. Note that Figure 3.1 only relates to the first partnership decision, so that those who marry but then experience marital breakdown are in the 'entered marriage' category. (Chapter 4 provides an account of cohabitation among those previously married, a category not dealt with here.) People aged in their 50s belong to the cohorts who married in large numbers back in the 1970s and 1980s and so the proportion of that age-group who are single in 2006 is small by Irish historical standards, at around 15-20 per cent, and possibly also by the standards of what will emerge in the future as the current cohorts aged in their 20s and 30s move into their 50s.

Figure 3.1: First Partnerships, 2006
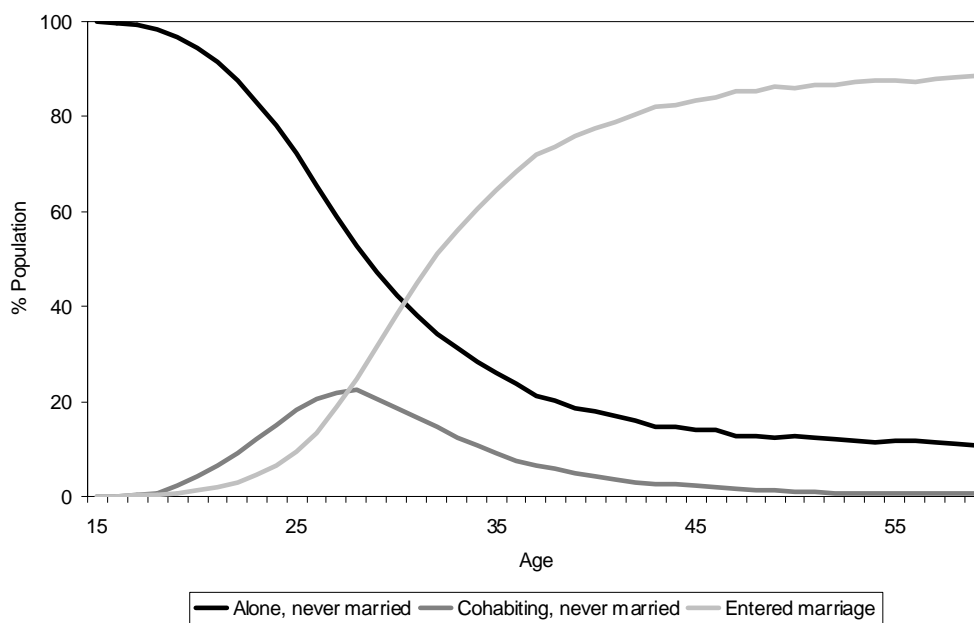
So far, we have looked at these patterns for men and women together. Figure 3.2 presents the picture differentiated by gender, with the solid lines representing females and the dotted lines males. As expected, the general shape of the patterns is similar for women and men but with an age difference – men enter cohabitation and marriage at a slightly later age than women. Marriage registration data show that the gender gap in average age of marriage was marginally over two years in 2005, at 33.1 years for men compared to 31.0 years for women (CSO, 2007). This lag on the part of men results in quite wide differentials in the proportions who are married or cohabiting in any single year of age. At age 30, for example, as revealed in Figure 3.2, 40.9 per cent of women are married compared to 31.6 per cent of men. But if we compare women with men who are about two years older,

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[4] Data sources are not given for the charts in this chapter, since all charts are derived from the *CRMF 2006*.

the differential disappears – thus men at age 32 years are in fact slightly more likely to have married (43.9 per cent) than women at age 30 (40.9 per cent).

Figure 3.2: First Partnerships by Gender, 2006
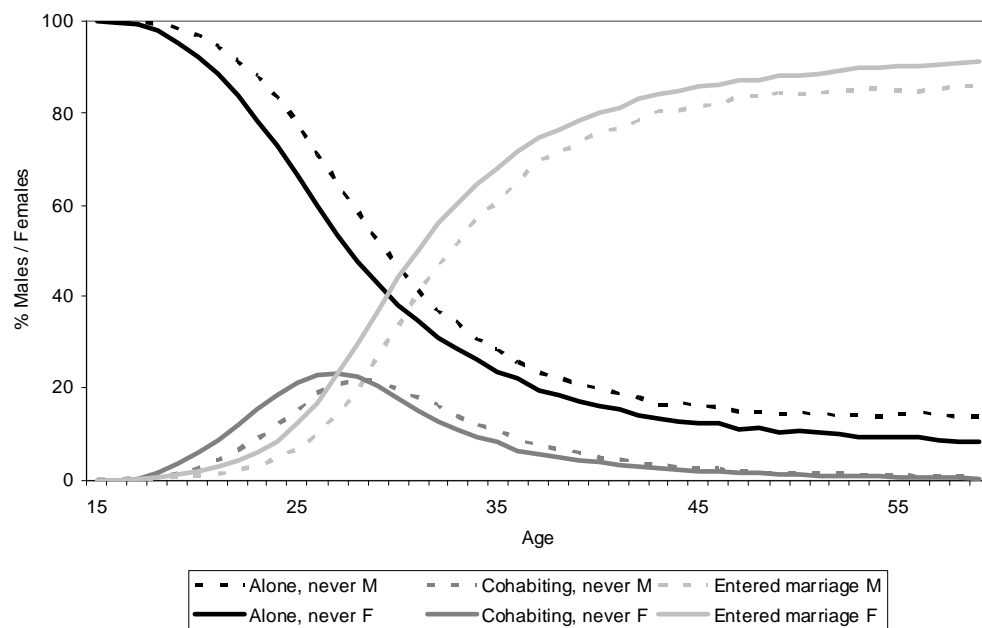
However, the 'lag' explanation for the gender differential in partnership by age breaks down when we look at those aged in their 50s. In each individual year of age in that age-group, there are consistently more ever-married women than ever-married men and more single men than single women, patterns that must be due at least in part to some degree of misreporting of marital status. Doubts about the data do not arise so much in connection with the currently married, among whom the numbers of males and females at each year of age who report that they are married are close to what one would expect. The mismatches arise rather among those who are separated or divorced, among whom the excess of women over men, coupled with an excess of single men over single women at the same ages, would suggest a tendency for separated or divorced men to report themselves as single. This is a topic we will return to in the chapter below on union dissolution.

**3.3
Variation by
Educational
Attainment**

Educational attainment is a good proxy for many aspects of social standing and so it is instructive to examine variations in partnership status by educational level. Figure 3.3 first does so by contrasting the partnership profiles of those at two points of the education spectrum that are well removed from each other, third-level graduates and those with lower second-level qualifications (or less).

**Figure 3.3: First Partnerships by Educational Attainment, 2006**
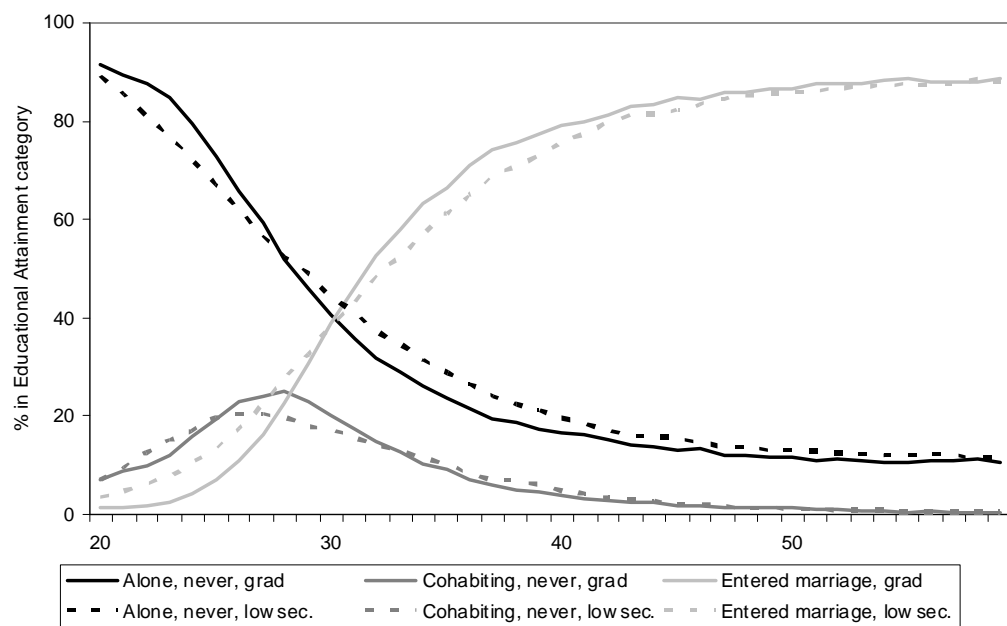
The results reveal a cross-over pattern: among those aged in the early 20s, the less educated are more likely to have married and, to a lesser extent, to cohabit, but from the late 20s on the pattern reverses, especially in that third-level graduates are more likely to have married during their 30s and into their early 40s. For a period in their late 20s third-level graduates are also more likely to cohabit than those with lower secondary education. If one were to read this graph as an approximation of patterns over time (rather than what it really is, which is a snapshot by age at a particular time) one might conclude that extended education causes people to delay partnership, and especially marriage, in their 20s but to more than catch up in their 30s. However, change in union formation has been so rapid in recent years – especially with the decline in marriage and rise in cohabitation among people in their 20s – that it is not advisable to rely too much on this cross-sectional picture as a representation of recent or future trends over time.

We can obtain a more detailed and precise estimate of the effect of educational level on partnership by computing the odds ratios for marriage and cohabitation for different levels of educational attainment in a number of age-categories in 2006, controlling for the effect of a range of other variables (gender; nationality; time spent abroad; religion; ethnicity; health status; unemployment; occupation and region). These odds ratios are derived from a multinomial statistical model of the first partnership decision (Appendix B), which simultaneously estimates the likelihood of entering cohabitation and marriage at a range of ages. We take those with higher second-level education (mainly the Leaving Certificate) as the reference category (that is, we set the odds of their being married or cohabiting rather than being single at 1) and express the likelihood of others being married or cohabiting as a ratio of that. The results, relating to those at ages 25, 30, 35 and 40 years, are presented in Figure 3.4.[5]

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[5] The model includes a small proportion of people who did not respond to the educational attainment questions on the Census form (listed as 'Missing' in Appendix B). Since we do not have sufficient information to discuss this group meaningfully, they are removed from the analysis, although it is the case that they are less likely to marry or cohabit at all ages.

If we look first at marriage among 25 year-olds, we find the strong differentiation by education: the lower the educational level, the greater the likelihood of being married at that age. Those with primary education only are approximately 1.3 times more likely to be married than those with higher secondary education, while those with education to degree level are only 0.46 times as likely to be married as those with higher secondary education. Comparing the two extremes of the education spectrum, therefore, those with primary education only are nearly three times as likely to be married at age 25 years as those with a degree.

Figure 3.4: Odds Ratios for Likelihood of Entering Marriage and Cohabitation by Educational Attainment at Age 25, 30, 35 and 40 (Ref = Higher Second-Level Qualifications)
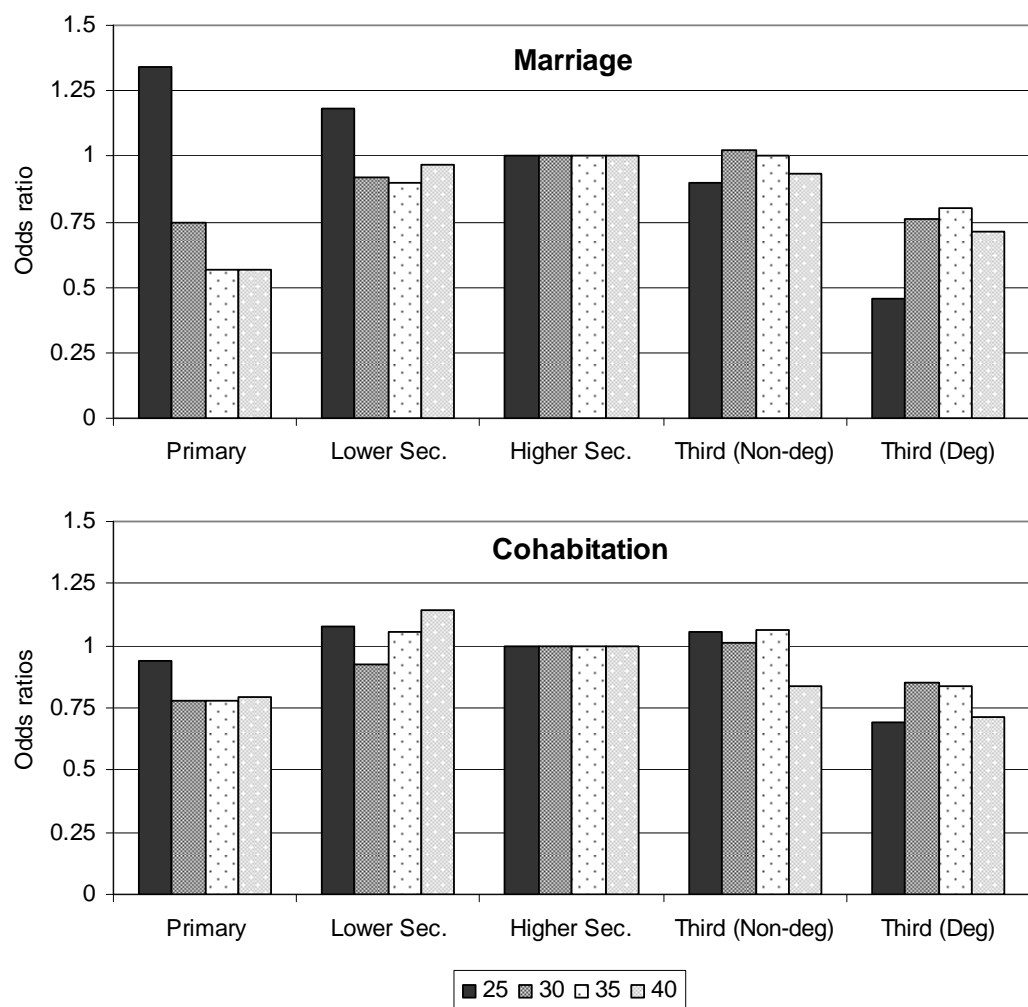
However, the greater propensity of the least educated to have entered marriage by age 25 years is not replicated at older ages. By ages 35 and 40 years, those with primary education only are the *least* likely of any educational category to have married – the reverse of the pattern that holds for 25-year olds. The most educated – those with third-level degrees – are also below the norm on this count. This is so not just among 25-year olds with degrees, where the relative odds of marriage are particularly low (0.46), it also arises at ages 30, 35 and 40 years, where the odds ratio for entering marriage compared to those with higher secondary education hovers in the range 0.7 to 0.76. Aside from these two extremes of the education spectrum,

the marriage profile of the mid-level educational categories – those with lower and higher secondary education and with sub-degree third level qualifications – is reasonably uniform. At age 25 years, those with lower secondary education are somewhat more likely to be married than those with higher secondary education, but otherwise differences between the mid-level educational categories on this count are small and generally show a somewhat stronger propensity to marry than those at the extremes of the education spectrum.

Turning to cohabitation, we find again that those with highest and lowest education are the outliers: they have consistently lower levels of cohabitation across all four ages than those in the middle of the educational range. At age 25 years, the lower likelihood of cohabitation among the least educated might be explained as the counterpart of their greater likelihood of being married at that age noted above. However, at older ages for the least educated and at all ages for the best educated, the lesser likelihood of cohabiting compared to those with higher secondary education is in *addition* to their lesser likelihood of getting married. Viewed on a life course basis, therefore, rather than in terms of behaviour in the early 20s viewed in isolation, these patterns indicate a markedly lower propensity to enter unions of any sort among the least educated and best educated compared to the rest.

It is quite likely that this common tendency to hang back from partnership at the two extremes of the education spectrum reflect quite different social influences. In the case of the highly educated, extended years in full-time education and investment in early career building are likely to be distractions from partnership. Indeed, the odds ratios for partnership among students are especially low (Appendix B). Among the least educated, the pattern may instead reflect the limited appeal of forming unions with people who have poor earnings and career prospects. However, a full analysis of these possibilities would require detailed examination of partnering patterns (who marries or cohabits with whom) that is beyond the scope of the present analysis. Such an examination is possible using the *CRMF*, but requires a considerable extra investment of research time to organise the data for analysis at the household level (see Chapter 1).

3.4 Variation by Nationality and Ethnicity

One of the less noted consequences of the surge of new immigrants into Ireland during the economic boom of recent times is the somewhat distinctive patterns of union formation the immigrants have brought with them, though the nature of this distinctiveness varies across their different regions of origin. Figure 3.5 shows the broad picture, based on a simple distinction between Irish and non-Irish nationals. The key pattern is that the Irish are less likely to marry than the non-Irish, particularly at younger ages, and also have slightly fewer young cohabitees. This is a surprising difference since migration among young adults is usually associated with weaker partnership connections than is found among settled host populations. At age 25 years, for example, foreign nationals are over three times more likely to be in a partnership than the native Irish, with almost 20 per cent of foreign nationals either having married or cohabiting compared to 6 per cent of natives. The differential becomes narrower as we go up the age-range but never fully disappears. The more detailed breakdowns (Appendix B) indicate that the non-Irish are themselves internally differentiated on this score. Those from the UK are more likely to cohabit, while people from other former EU-15 nations are less likely to marry than the native Irish.

Contrastingly, people from the new EU member states (the EU-10) and many other parts of the world have distinctively high levels of early marriage and cohabitation.

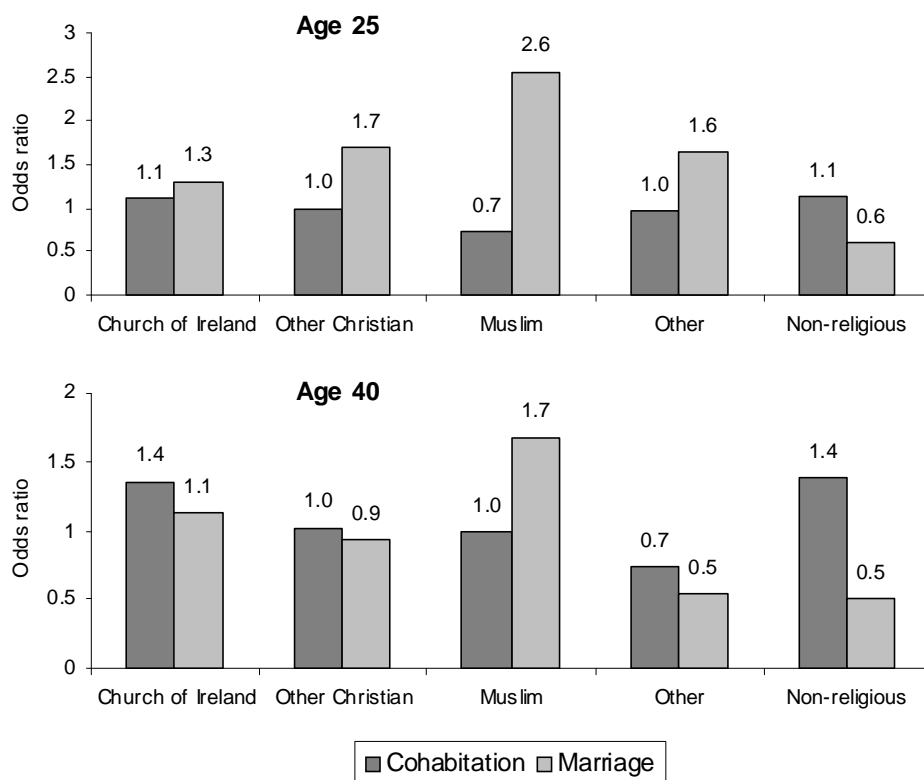**Figure 3.5: First Partnerships by Nationality**
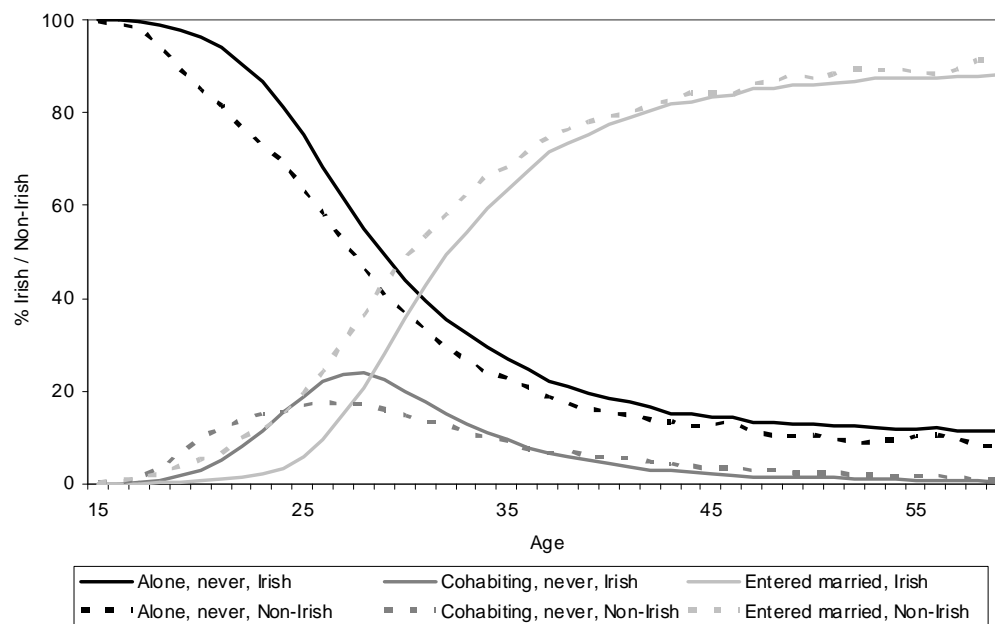
Appendix B also shows the likelihood of cohabitation and marriage by ethnicity. Here, the categories are White Irish (the reference category in the analysis), Traveller, Other White, Black, Chinese, Asian and Unstated. The outstanding variation by ethnicity is the exceptionally high incidence of marriage, and especially early marriage, among Travellers. At age 25, for example, Travellers are twenty times more likely to have married than their mainstream White Irish counterparts who have a similar profile on other characteristics, i.e. age, education, employment, health, etc. (i.e. White Irish who are highly disadvantaged). The differential for Travellers narrows at older ages, but even at age 40, they are five times more likely to be married than mainstream White Irish with a similar profile on other characteristics. The other ethnic categories are also more likely than the White Irish to be married, though at younger ages with less of a marriage excess than is found among Travellers.

**3.5
Variation by
Religion**

In addition to the cultural differences reflected in the distinctive behaviours of immigrants and those of other than mainstream White Irish ethnicity, cultural differences are also evident in variations in partnering behaviour according to religious affiliation. Figure 3.6 shows the odds ratios at ages 25 and 40 years for the likelihood of cohabiting or being married for the main religious affiliation categories, with Catholics as the reference category. Looking across the four ages in general, those from the Church of Ireland are perhaps most similar to Catholics, while Muslims are probably the most different. At age 25 years, Muslims are two and a half times more likely to have married than Catholics with a similar social profile and three-quarters less likely to be cohabiting. Those who are non-religious also stand out for their high level of cohabitation and low level of marriage at age 40 years, suggesting perhaps that they tend to be non-conformist in their partnering behaviour as well as in their religious identification.

Figure 3.6: Odds Ratios for Having Entered Marriage and for Cohabitation (Never Married) by Stated Religion, at Age 25 and 40 (Ref = Catholic, Takes Value 1.0)

Age 25

	Church of Ireland	Other Christian	Muslim	Other	Non-religious
Cohabitation	1.1	1.0	0.7	1.0	1.1
Marriage	1.3	1.7	2.6	1.6	0.6

Age 40

	Church of Ireland	Other Christian	Muslim	Other	Non-religious
Cohabitation	1.4	1.0	1.0	0.7	1.4
Marriage	1.1	0.9	1.7	0.5	0.5

■ Cohabitation ■ Marriage

3.6 Dublin Versus the Rest

There are also regional variations in partnership, especially with respect to Dublin versus the rest of the country.[6] As Figure 3.7 shows, residents of Dublin are slower to marry than those who live outside Dublin and, while Dubliners in their 30s cohabit to a marginally greater degree than others, cohabitation among Dubliners does not counterbalance their lower level of marriage. At age 30, for example, 48 per cent of Dubliners are alone (single and not cohabiting) compared to 40 per cent who are alone outside of Dublin. The odds ratios for detailed regional breakdown provided in Appendix B shows that the higher incidence of marriage outside of Dublin is common to all non-Dublin regions for all ages. The regions closest to Dublin – the Mid-East, Midlands and South-east – also have a somewhat higher level of cohabitation than Dublin.

The regional distinctiveness of Dublin in regard to marriage avoidance is most likely an artefact of the attractiveness of the city to adults, especially young adults, who are in the pre-family formation stages of the life course. This in turn is likely to be a function of the concentration of rented accommodation in the built-up urban area: people live in urban rented accommodation while they are alone but move to suburban housing as they form families. However, that the level of cohabitation in Dublin is very

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[6] Arguably this difference is not associated with region, but with living in a large city. Other results not reported suggest that some similar effects may apply to the other larger cities (i.e. Cork, Limerick and Galway), although results for Dublin continue to stand out in comparison.

Figure 3.7: First Partnerships for Those Living in Dublin and Outside

3.7
Other
Influences
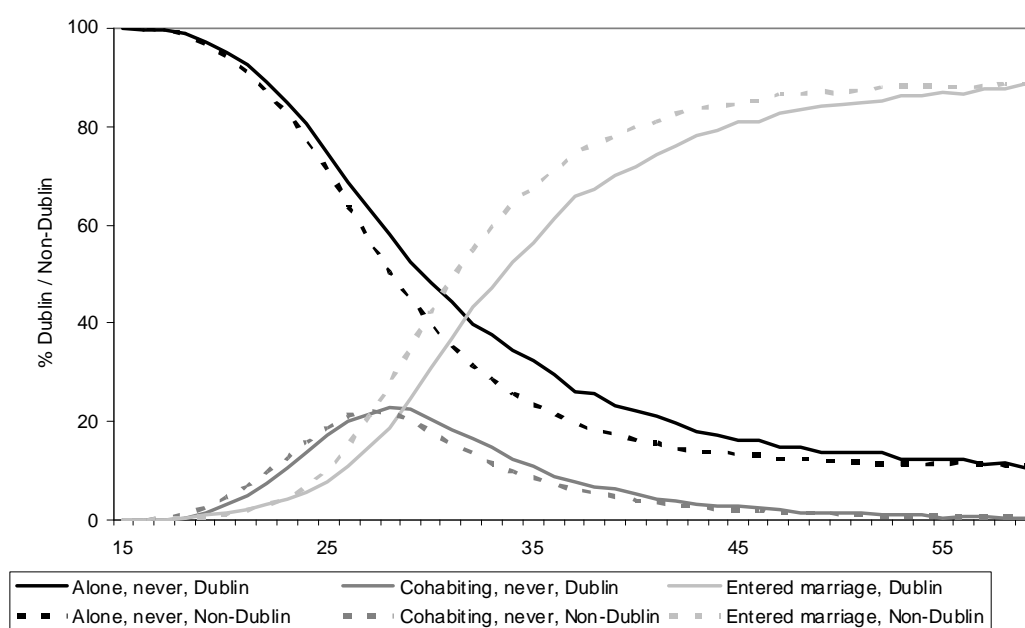
similar to the rest of the country is something of a surprise, since the more transient kind of partnership that cohabitation usually represents might be expected to cluster where rented housing is more widely available.

The full details of the patterns revealed in Appendix B are too extensive to be presented here, so we will simply refer to some remaining highlights. In regard to occupational level, we see again the tendency for the middle of the range to have the strongest levels of partnership, as was noted earlier in connection with education. At age 25 years, compared to those in skilled manual occupations (the reference category in the analysis), people in all other occupational groups are less likely to have entered marriage or cohabitation. At older ages, the higher occupational groups tend to catch up with, and in some cases slightly exceed, the partnership levels of those in skilled manual occupations, while those in semi-skilled and unskilled occupational groups remain behind.

When it comes to labour market related factors, a particularly strong connection exists between unemployment and non-partnership – at ages 35 and 40 years, the unemployed are only about half as likely to have entered marriage as those who are not unemployed (that is, either in jobs or not active in the labour market). When we recall that these data relate to 2006, when unemployment was at historically low levels, it is likely that being unemployed and not being married might both reflect limited personal capacity and thus limited attractiveness in the partnership 'market'.

Other aspects of personal capacity that strongly affect the likelihood of partnership are illness and disability. At all ages, those with intellectual disability and to a lesser extent those with long-term illness are much less likely to be in partnerships than the disability-free. At age 40, for example, those with intellectual disability are less than one-fifth as likely to have married or to be cohabiting as those who are free of disability.
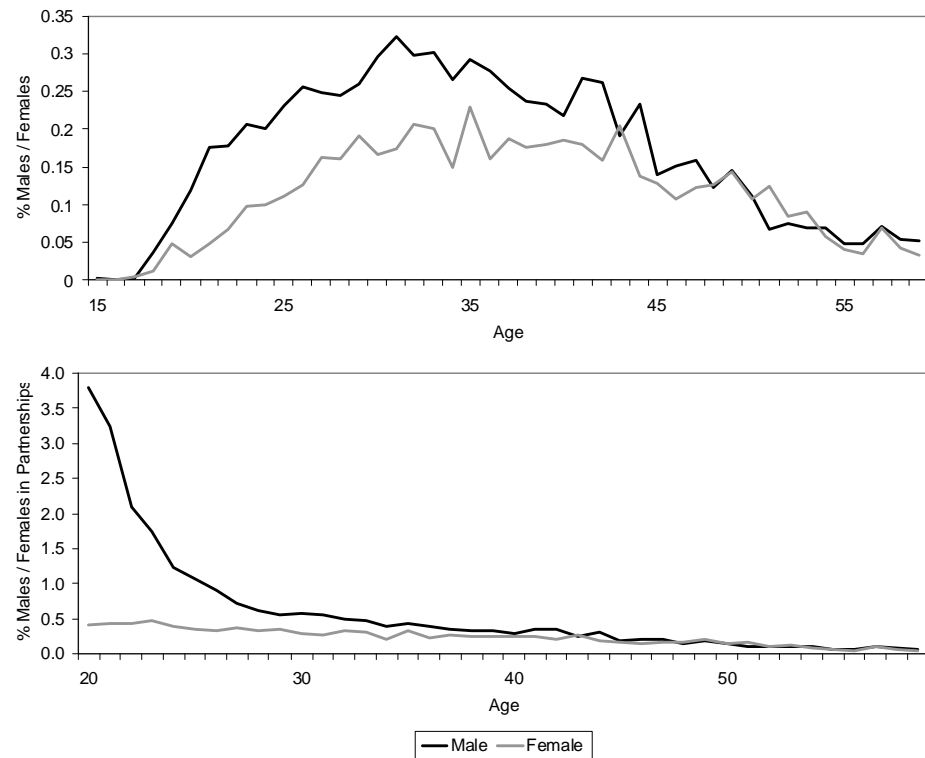
3.8 Same-sex Couples

The preceding analysis has dealt exclusively with opposite-sex couples. The *CRMF 2006* makes it possible, for the first time, to produce an analysis of the social influences associated with same-sex couples. Figures from the *Censuses of 1996, 2002* and *2006* record a very steep increase in the number of same-sex couples, rising from 150 to 2,090 over the ten-year period. It is highly likely, however, that a substantial proportion of this increase is due to a change of question wording with respect to partnership. In 1996, 'living together as a couple' was listed as a response option, while in 2002 this changed to 'partner'; a change which coincides with the much greater part of the jump in recorded numbers. Furthermore, it remains very possible that a substantial number of same-sex couples in 2006 did not report themselves as such, either because of continuing reluctance to classify themselves with opposite-sex couples, or because of concerns relating to privacy and social acceptance.

The Census counts 4,033 people between the ages of 15 and 59 living in same-sex couples in 2006, of which 2,436 are male. It must be emphasised that although the incidence of same-sex partnership is growing, this amounts to a very small fraction of the population, at just 0.15 per cent of those within the age range. The variation in the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership at different ages contrasts markedly with the equivalent variation for opposite-sex relationships. Figure 3.8 charts this likelihood for males and females as a proportion of the male and female population and as a proportion of those in partnerships. The likelihood of being in a same-sex couple (top chart) has an inverted-U shape, which peaks in the mid-30s for both sexes, strongly suggesting that there is a cohort effect involved. That is, people currently in their 30s are more likely to form same-sex couples than people in the cohort born one or two decades earlier. One obvious hypothesis is that the growing social acceptability of same-sex relationships is leading to a greater proportion of the population choosing to be in one, or perhaps being prepared to live as a same-sex couple in Ireland rather than elsewhere. Either way, one implication of this cohort effect is that the number of same-sex couples is likely to continue to grow.

An interesting finding emerges when the incidence of living in a same-sex couple is expressed as a proportion of those individuals who are in partnerships (Figure 3.8, bottom chart).[7] The proportion in same-sex partnerships is highest in the early 20s, especially for men. This finding does not have an obvious explanation. One (admittedly speculative) possibility is that it relates to an increased desire among some young gay people to seek meaningful relationships outside their family home.

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[7] Note that the proportions are not given for those aged below 20 years, because the figures become unreliable owing to the very small number of teenagers in partnerships.

Figure 3.8:Same-Sex Couples by Gender, Expressed as a Proportion of the Population (Top) and as a Proportion of Those in Couples (Bottom)

In addition to gender and age, there is a range of other background characteristics associated with the likelihood of being in a same-sex couple. Figure 3.9 shows that those with third-level education are much more likely to be in same-sex couples. Because of the inverted-U shape of the age profile, it is difficult to determine statistically whether the gap between the educational attainment groups is somewhat narrower among younger adults, say below age 35 years, although that does appear to be a possibility.

Figure 3.9: Same-Sex Couples by Educational Attainment
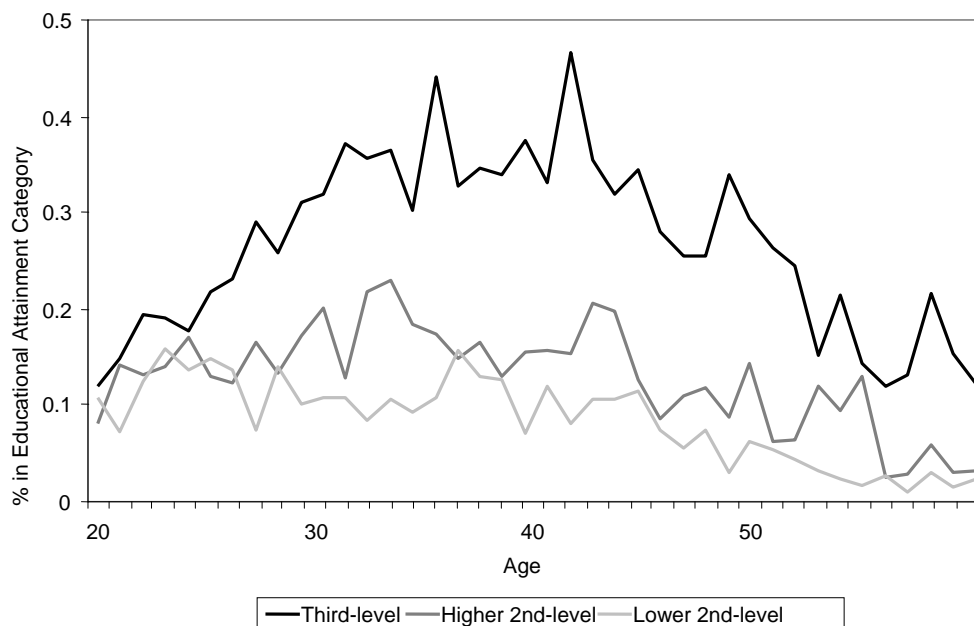
Religious affiliation is strongly associated with the likelihood of being in a same-sex couple. Figure 3.10 shows odds ratios for being in a same-sex couple, derived from a multivariate model that controls for gender; educational attainment; nationality; time spent abroad; religion; ethnicity; health status; unemployment; occupation and region (Appendix C). Relative to Catholics, members of every other religious group have a substantially higher chance of being in a same-sex relationship, rising to between four and five times the likelihood for those with less common affiliations and those with no religion. Note that religious affiliation is as stated on the Census form in 2006, not the religious affiliation of an individual's family, and it is therefore possible that people's relationship experiences have had an impact on their religious affiliation, as well as the other way around.

Figure 3.10: Odds Ratios for Being in a Same-Sex Relationship by Stated Religion (Ref = Catholic, Takes Value 1.0)
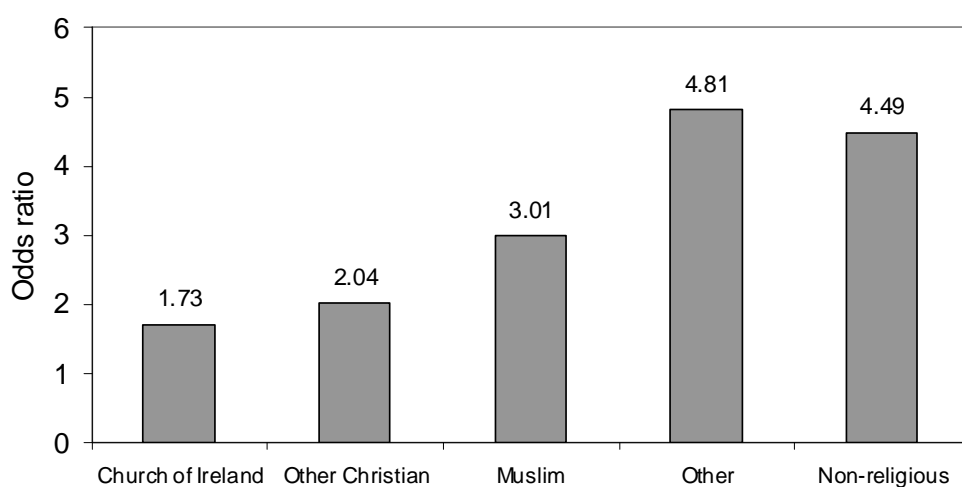
Two other factors, according to the multivariate analysis, are strongly associated with being in a same-sex partnership. People whose ethnicity is Black, Chinese or Asian are respectively 0.87, 0.32 and 0.39 times as likely as someone classified as White Irish to be in a same-sex couple. Lastly, there is a very strong regional effect, which is more accurately characterised as a Dublin effect. People living in the capital are two to three times as likely to be in a same-sex partnership as people living anywhere else in the country. Obviously, it is very likely that this result reflects the chances that gay people choose to live in Dublin.

3.9 Summary

Although we find a large number of significant associations between family structure and social background, arguably the most important finding of this chapter is the degree to which family structures are *not* the product of social background. For instance, although belonging to certain religious groups tends to increase the likelihood of marriage and, to a lesser extent, decrease the likelihood of cohabitation, probably the more striking result is that the likelihood of cohabitation is significant across all social groups and varies so little between them. From this we can infer that the dramatic increase in cohabitation has not been driven by a particular subsection of the population, but is a much broader phenomenon that has emerged relatively evenly across all social groups.

The previous chapter noted that, following a surge in early marriage in the 1970s and early 1980s, Irish people have more recently reverted in large numbers to the historical Irish pattern of late marriage (that is, marriage after age 30). The rise in cohabitation among people in their 20s has counterbalanced this tendency to some – but only some – degree, so that overall there has been a recent rise in the proportion of adults in their 20s and 30s who do not live with a partner. In this chapter, we have identified some variations around this overall pattern.

The results show that avoidance of partnership is not straightforwardly associated with social advantage or disadvantage. Thus, for example, the least educated and the best educated are similarly averse to partnership, though the least educated are over-represented among the minority who marry early. However, among people in their late 20s and 30s, it is those in the middle of the educational range who are most likely to both cohabit and marry. Some forms of disadvantage are clearly inimical to partnership, particularly unemployment, intellectual disability and long-term illness. As a further indication of the tendency for social disadvantage to inhibit partnership, there is also a marked tendency for those in the lowest occupational categories – the semi-skilled and unskilled – to be unmarried between 30 and 40 years of age. However, a contrast is provided by the most disadvantaged group of all, Travellers, who have a very strong tendency not only to be married but also to be married at a young age. This reflects the distinctive family culture of this group.

A cultural explanation for early marriage among Travellers is also likely to apply to other cultural, ethnic and national groups who marry earlier than the mainstream White Irish population. Muslims are particularly likely to marry and to avoid cohabitation, especially at young ages, while those of no religious affiliation are more likely to do the reverse – cohabit and avoid marriage. Immigrants from eastern Europe and the world outside Europe are more likely to marry and cohabit than the native Irish, particularly at younger ages, while other ethnic groups (especially Blacks and Asians) show similar tendencies. Hesitancy about partnership could thus be said to be particularly characteristic of the mainstream, native Irish Catholic population.

Lastly, the *CRMF 2006* allows an analysis of the social influences associated with same-sex couples. Although still accounting for a very small proportion of the population, same-sex couples are subject to a cohort effect, whereby the current generation aged 25 to 45 years is very much more likely to form same-sex couples than the preceding generation. Being in such a couple is associated with high educational attainment, having a non-mainstream or no religion and White Irish ethnicity. Same-sex couples are more prevalent in Dublin.

4. MARITAL BREAKDOWN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines marital breakdown in three steps. First, it outlines the evolution of the legal treatment of marital breakdown in Ireland since the 1980s. This is necessary since the legal context not only influences the meaning and nature of marital breakdown but also helps account for some of the peculiarities of the data on this topic that need to be taken account of here. Second, the chapter briefly recapitulates on previously available accounts of trends in marital breakdown over the period 1986-2006 and positions Ireland in an international comparative context on this question. Headline data suggest that marital breakdown has increased considerably since the 1980s but is still relatively low by international standards. However, the term 'marital breakdown' embraces a number of different forms of disrupted marriage, so the data need to be probed in order to uncover the underlying reality. The third topic explored in the chapter is the social correlates of marital breakdown. We include not just an analysis of the social characteristics associated with marital breakdown but also, given marital breakdown, the factors that predict whether couples will proceed to divorce. As with other topics explored in this report, the richest data available to us on this subject is the *2006 Census Research Microdata File (CRMF)*, which relates only to the year 2006 but provides a great deal of detailed and previously unavailable information. In addition, public-use samples from the Census, which are available from 1996 onwards, contain data that enable us to say something about how some of these correlates have evolved over the ten years from 1996-2006, though with less detail than is possible for 2006 on its own. Prior to 1996 none of the standard social statistical sources provided usable data on marital breakdown, largely because the share of the population affected was so small that sample surveys did not have enough relevant cases to provide statistically reliable information. As a result, while we will provide some account of how the likelihood of marital breakdown in various social categories in Ireland has changed over the ten years from 1996 to 2006, much of our treatment of this topic will focus on a detailed analysis of the situation in the year 2006 alone.

4.2 Legal Context

The general pattern in the western world in the second half of the twentieth century is that the law on marital dissolution has been steadily liberalised and the incidence of marital breakdown has greatly increased (Therborn, 2004; Goode, 1993). There is an extensive but inconclusive international literature on whether the permissiveness of the law in this area has been one of the causes of the modern rise in divorce or whether liberal divorce regimes are themselves simply the consequence of the same underlying social and cultural shifts that have reduced the stability of marriage (e.g. Wolfers, 2006; Kneip and Bauer, 2008; Gonzalez and Viitanen, 2006; Binner and Dnes, 2001).

Ireland is of interest in this context as a late and hesitant entrant into the club of countries with liberal divorce laws, though Irish divorce law still remains a good deal less liberal than in most other western countries. The historical barrier obstructing the advent of divorce in Ireland during the international wave of liberalisation of the 1960s and 1970s was a clause in the Irish constitution, which had been in place since 1937, prohibiting the introduction of legislation to dissolve marriage. However, family law in Ireland in this period did respond to marital breakdown in other ways. Until the 1980s, longstanding legislation had provided for judicial separation, which was available through the Circuit Court and High Court. Its terms were so restrictive and cumbersome that applications to the courts for separations were few (in 1982, for example, there were only five applications for judicial separation). Other legislation introduced in the 1960s and 1970s enabled the District Court to deal in a speedy and simple manner with a range of specific aspects of marital breakdown, including custody and access to children and maintenance payments for spouses and children. In addition, legislation on domestic violence enacted in 1976, which also lay within the jurisdiction of the District Court, came to play an important role in family law. Use of these District Court remedies for family conflict grew during the 1980s, over and above the very limited utilisation of judicial separation procedures available in the Circuit Court (Fahey and Lyons, 1995).

Reform of the law on marital breakdown, including a proposal to permit divorce, came on the agenda in the 1980s, but an attempt by the government to remove the constitutional ban on divorce was heavily defeated in a national referendum in 1986 (Hug, 1999). The law on judicial separation was nevertheless overhauled in the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, 1989. This legislation related only to family law proceedings at Circuit and High Court levels but at those levels provided for what amounted to a 'no fault' regime of legal separation. It echoed the terms of no fault divorce law, which by then was the norm in other western countries, save that it did not allow for remarriage. The advent of the 1989 Act was followed by a steady growth in applications for judicial separation to the Circuit Court, although this remained but one means of resolving the legal consequences of marital breakdown and was availed of by only a minority of separating couples. The majority continued to rely on the existing piecemeal remedies available in the District Court under legislation on domestic violence, maintenance, custody and access. The incidence of District Court family law cases was poorly recorded in the data and was difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, taking account of uncertainties in the data and counting all forms of marital breakdown together, best estimates suggested that by the mid-1900s, while the rate of marital breakdown was on the increase, it was still low by international standards (Fahey and Lyons, 1995).

In 1995, a second attempt to remove the constitutional ban on divorce was accepted by the narrowest of margins in a national referendum (the majority in favour was 50.28 per cent). In order to sway an electorate keen to avoid what was widely portrayed as the social evil of easy divorce, the government in advance of the referendum had framed a divorce bill that was quite restrictive by international standards in that couples had to be separated for four years before they could apply for divorce. The narrow victory for the referendum, which was made possible only because of this restrictive approach, allowed this bill to proceed and it became the Family Law (Divorce) Act in 1996 (Hug, 1999). The new legislation came into force in February 1997, thus ending Ireland's outlier status as a western country that did not permit divorce. It might be said that this belated acceptance of

divorce finally brought Ireland into line with the international norm. However, the unenthusiastic manner in which Irish voters adopted it indicated a continuing hesitancy about divorce that may help to explain the low take-up of divorce after the new legislation came into effect (Fahey and Field, 2008).

The advent of divorce in 1996 added a new legal remedy for marital breakdown but it did not displace the existing ones. As the overall family law caseload grew both before and after its arrival, District Court proceedings, which did not include either judicial separation or divorce, continued to play a numerically dominant role. This is shown in Table 4.1, which compares the distribution of family law applications between the District Court and Circuit Court in 1994 (two years before divorce arrived) and 2006 (ten years after divorce legislation had been enacted). The data show that the volume of family law applications doubled over this period, but also that the increase occurred equally in the District Court and Circuit Court. In the Circuit Court, applications for judicial separation (which had made up almost all of family law business in the Circuit Court prior to 1996) declined in number and were overtaken by divorce applications, which by 2006 accounted for 70 per cent of family law business in the Circuit Court. But there was no shift of applications from the District Court to the Circuit Court, even though the District Court continued to lack jurisdiction in regard to judicial separation and divorce. In 1994, there were five family law applications in the District Court for every one in the Circuit Court, while in 2006 that ratio, at 5 to 1, remained the same.

Table 4.1: Numbers of Family Law Applications in District Court and Circuit Court, 1994 and 2006

	1994	**2006**
District Court	14,274	29,172
Of which: Domestic violence	*7,548*	*9,924*
Circuit Court	2,806	5,775
Of which: Judicial separation	*2,806*	*1,789*
Divorce		*3,986*
Total	17,080	34,947

Source: Statistical Abstract 1995, Courts Service Annual Report 2006.

Thus, a pattern that had been established in the pre-divorce era persisted after divorce became available: parting couples who had recourse to family law continued to rely more heavily on the simpler, more piecemeal remedies available in the District Court than on the more formal comprehensive settlements represented either by judicial separation or divorce in the Circuit Court. This meant that the legal status of couples whose marriages had broken down continued to be highly varied. This is so particularly when one recalls that in addition to couples who went to court to deal with aspects of their separation, there were others who dealt with their affairs by means of private separation agreements, which did not require processing through the courts, or who simply parted with no legal formalities of any kind (no recent estimates are available for the numbers in the latter categories, but for a discussion of the situation in the mid-1990s see Fahey and Lyons, 1995). The variety of legal statuses that resulted ranged from de facto separation unaccompanied by any legal resolution though various kinds of partial legal resolution obtained in the District Court to the fullest types of legal settlement available in the form of judicial separation or divorce in the

Circuit Court. In addition, even before divorce became available in Ireland, there had long been a small proportion of the population who had obtained a divorce abroad. These were added to in recent years by new immigrants with no previous connection with Ireland among whom, as we shall see further below, divorce was a good deal more common than it was among the native Irish.

While the varied legal situation of couples with broken marriages is notable in its own right, it is also of interest to us here because of the difficulties it creates in measuring the incidence of marital breakdown. Data on family law business in the courts are of limited value in this regard, as they provide annual counts of family law applications made and orders granted but do not indicate the number of *cases* that these applications and orders relate to. The problem here is that an individual couple might make a number of different applications so that counts of applications and orders overstate the number of cases by a considerable and unknown margin. It is likely that this overstatement is greater at District Court than Circuit Court level since a wider range of remedies is available in the District Court and give rise to a greater number of applications by individual couples. But even at Circuit Court level, applicants for divorce may previously have applied for judicial separation so that there is likely to be considerable double-counting in the data on these two procedures. The upshot of this is that counts of divorce orders granted by the courts provide a meaningful measure of the incidence of divorce but otherwise court data cannot be used to generate a measure of marital breakdown that includes the large proportion of cases that stop short of divorce.

Given these problems with court data, we have to rely instead on Census data to estimate marital breakdown rates. These data are not entirely satisfactory for this purpose for two broad reasons. One is that they measure the *stock* of people whose marriages have broken down rather than rates of entry into marital breakdown. It is only by making certain simplifying assumptions (mainly in regard to mortality and migration) that we can derive estimates of marital breakdown rates from stock data, as explained further below when we attempt to generate such estimates. The second broad problem arises from the self-reported nature of the data. The Census question on marital status provides seven response options of which three (separated, divorced, remarried following previous dissolution of marriage) identify those who have experienced a marriage breakdown. People's self-classification using these options is liable to inaccuracy and misreporting, most notably in connection with separated men who report themselves as single (on which further below). In addition, it is unclear to what extent those who legally are still married but de facto have separated report themselves as married or separated, since in their case both classifications would be valid. For all these reasons, Census data do not allow for precise measurement of the marital breakdown rate. Nevertheless, in the absence of anything better, they can be relied on as a basis for estimating the order of magnitude of the marital breakdown rate in Ireland and how it has changed over time.

**4.3
International
Comparisons**

Although for reasons just outlined, the divorce rate captures only part of the marital breakdown rate in Ireland, it is nevertheless useful for comparative purposes to place Ireland's divorce rate in a European context. Figure 4.1 shows trends in divorces per 1,000 married population in EU-15 countries since the 1960s (i.e. the countries that were EU member states prior to the eastern enlargement of 2004). This graph indicates the sharp upward movement in divorce which occurred in most of Europe from the late 1960s but also highlights a small group of southern European countries – Italy, Greece, and Spain – that did not participate in the overall rise. When Ireland arrived on the divorce scene in 1997, it entered the ranks among the group of southern European low-divorce countries. Following an adjustment period as the flow-though of divorces became established in the years after 1997, the Irish rate levelled off from the year 2000 at a point somewhat higher than that of Italy and slightly lower than that of Spain and Greece.

Figure 4.1: Annual Divorces Per 1,000 Married Persons in EU-15 Countries, 1960-2003
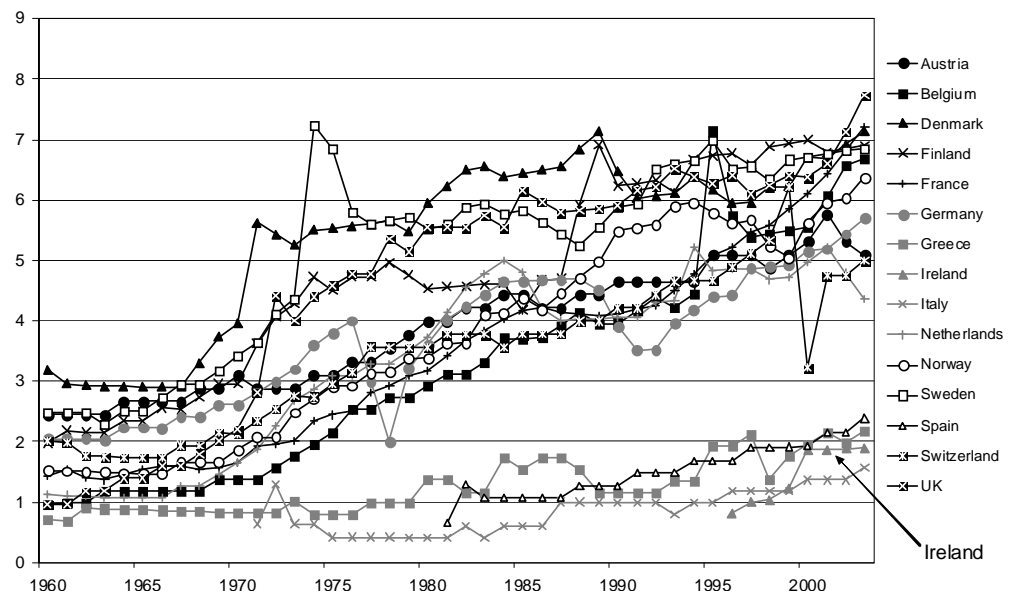
Source: Compiled from Eurostat sources by Thorsten Kneip and Gerrit Bauer, to whom we are grateful for supplying data. See also Kneip and Bauer (2008).

Using a somewhat cruder indicator – divorces per 1,000 population – it is possible to present a recent comparison for a wider range of countries, including countries in eastern Europe, which have recently become significant for Ireland because of immigrant inflows from those countries (Figure 4.2). This comparison shows Ireland as occupying the bottom place in the European league table along with Italy. The comparison can be misleading to some degree, since by presenting divorce rates relative to the entire population it does not take account of differences between countries in the proportion of the population who marry, that is, who are at risk of divorce in the first instance. Thus, for example, Sweden, where divorce rates for those who do marry are very high, emerges as having a moderate divorce risk on this indicator because of the large proportion of the population who do not marry. Nevertheless, the comparison is of interest in indicating broad orders of magnitude in the relative incidence of divorce. In particular, it is worth noting that all the eastern European countries that have become major countries of origin for recent immigration into Ireland have

considerably higher divorce rates than Ireland. For example, Poland, the main country of origin for new immigrants into Ireland, has more than double the divorce rate of Ireland, while the divorce rate in Lithuania, the second largest country of origin, is four times that of Ireland. In addition, the UK, a longer-established source country for immigration into Ireland, has three times the divorce rate of Ireland. We will have cause to refer to these comparisons again later when we look at differences in marital breakdown by nationality in Ireland.

Figure 4.2: Divorces Per 1,000 Population in European Countries, 2005

Country	Divorce rate
Lithuania	3.3
Czech Republic	3.1
Estonia	3
Belgium	2.9
Switzerland	2.9
Denmark	2.8
Latvia	2.8
Finland	2.6
United Kingdom	2.6
France	2.5
Hungary	2.5
Germany	2.4
Austria	2.4
Norway	2.4
Luxembourg	2.3
Portugal	2.2
Sweden	2.2
Slovakia	2.1
Cyprus	2
Netherlands	2
Bulgaria	1.9
Iceland	1.9
Poland	1.8
Spain	1.7
Romania	1.5
Slovenia	1.3
Turkey	1.3
Greece	1.2
Croatia	1.1
Ireland	0.8
Italy	0.8

Source: Eurostat.

It is of course possible that Ireland's low position in the international league table of divorce can be explained partly by the incompleteness of the divorce rate as a measure of marital breakdown in Ireland, as noted earlier. However, it is not clear how far that explanation takes us since there is little by way of comparative data that would enable us to assess whether a similar gap between divorce and marital breakdown arises in other countries. It is quite possible that such a gap is particularly present and significant among the low-divorce countries to which Ireland belongs, though it could occur elsewhere also. In Italy, for example, family law imposes a restriction on divorce that echoes that which applies in Ireland: couples must be separated for three years before they can be granted a divorce (the parallel restriction

in Ireland is four years of separation, though in Ireland de facto separation is sufficient to fulfil this requirement while in Italy a legal separation is required). Court data for Italy indicate that, as in Ireland, not all those who obtain a legal separation go on to get a divorce. There are 80-90 per cent more legal separations than divorces in Italy per year, while it is possible that there is an additional number who separate informally without any legal proceedings at all (see ISTAT, 2007).[8] It is possible, therefore, that the marital breakdown rate in Italy could be up to double its divorce rate, which would bring it closer to the divorce rate in the group of high-divorce countries but without closing the gap entirely. How far similar gaps between divorce and marital breakdown arise in other countries is beyond the scope of this study to examine.

4.4 Estimating Marital Breakdown in Ireland

The best approximation to a measure of marital breakdown in Ireland that takes account of divorce and separations (whether formal or informal) is the Census counts of people who are separated, divorced or remarried following a previous dissolution of marriage. Figure 4.3 shows trends in the numbers of people in each of these categories and in the sum of the categories totalled together in each Census year from 1986 to 2006. Figure 4.4 expresses the same numbers as percentages of the ever-married population. Some understatement of marital breakdown could occur in these data arising from emigration or death among those whose marriages dissolved over this period and are, therefore, not included in Census counts.

Given the upsurge in immigration since the mid-1990s, a more serious distortion is likely to arise from the inflow of divorced non-nationals, that is, those whose marriage breakdowns occurred in other countries. In 2006, non-Irish nationals (measured on a 'usual residence' basis) accounted for 10 per cent of the total population and of the married population, but they accounted for 18.7 per cent of those who had experienced a marriage breakdown, that is, were either separated, divorced or remarried following divorce (see Table 40, *Census 2006*, Vol. 4). This is consistent with the higher incidence of divorce in the main countries of origin for immigrants into Ireland just noted in the previous section. Looking at the different types of marital breakdown separately, non-Irish nationals were under-represented among the separated (of whom they accounted for 8.7 per cent) but were heavily over-represented among the divorced and those who have remarried following divorce (27 per cent of the divorced population and 39 per cent of those who were remarried following divorce were non-Irish nationals).

Non-Irish nationals were not separately identified in Censuses in the 1990s and earlier so that it is not possible to estimate their impact on Census measures of marital breakdown in those periods.[9] It is likely that such an impact was present then, but because immigration was so much lower its significance was less than what it has become over the past decade. Thus, in drawing on Census data to assess trends in marital breakdown, it would appear that the 'import' of marital breakdown through the immigration of divorced non-Irish nationals has an exaggerating effect on the upward movement in the numbers – but also that it is not possible to be precise about how large that effect is. Consequently, in reading those data, it is best

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[8] We thank Chiara Saraceno for drawing our attention to this source.
[9] Information regarding place of birth was available, but this is a less reliable indicator, since it combines non-Irish immigrants with Irish people born abroad.

to regard them as indicating the upper bound to the trend in marital breakdown, with a likelihood that the real trend among the native Irish is somewhat lower than the data suggest.

Figure 4.3: Numbers of Persons (000s) Who Are Divorced, Separated and Remarried Following Dissolution of Marriage, 1986-2006
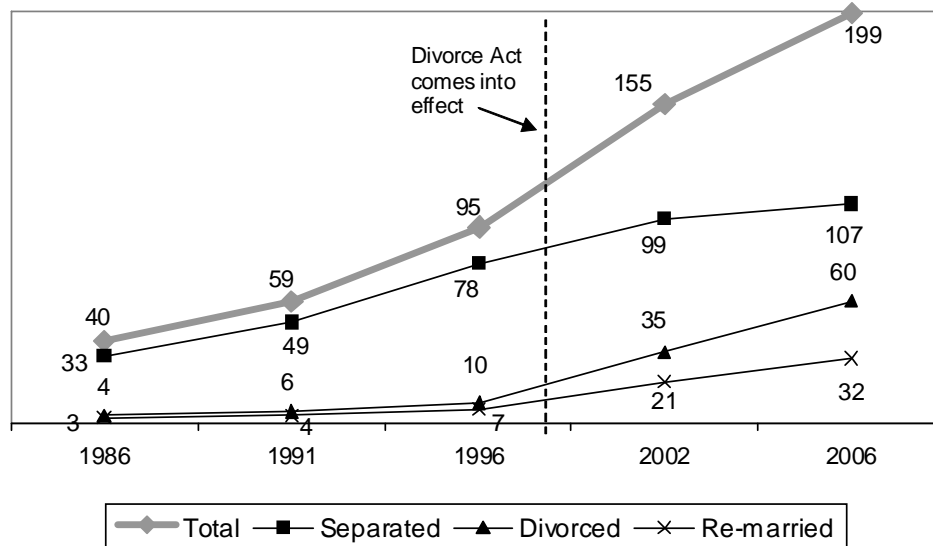
Source: Census.

Figure 4.4: Separated/Divorced as Per Cent of the Ever-Married Population*
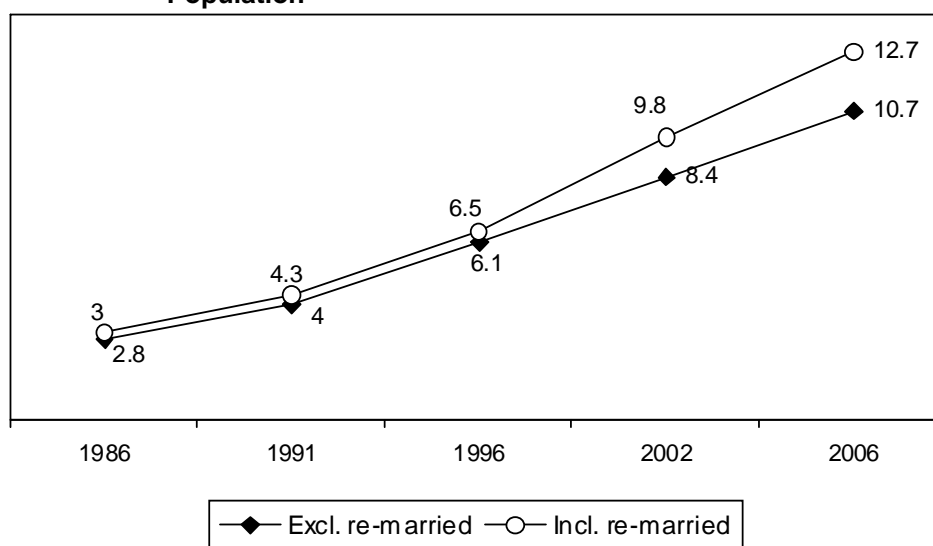
* Excluding Widowed.
Source: Census 1986-2006.

Between 1986 and 2006, the total number of people in Ireland whose marriages have broken down increased five-fold, from 40,000 in 1986 to just under 200,000 in 2006 (of the latter, 36,000 were non-nationals). The upward slope of the trend became slightly steeper in the period 1996-2002, that is, after divorce was introduced, but this is partly an artefact created not only by the inflow of non-nationals but also by a wider interval between the

Censuses of those years.[10] In any event, the data do not suggest that the advent of divorce was followed by a major immediate increase in marital breakdown, particularly when the effect of non-nationals is taken into account. The numbers divorced did show a sharp increase after 1996 but this was counterbalanced to a certain degree by a slower growth in the numbers who were separated. Expressed as a proportion of the ever-married population (Figure 4.4), those whose marriages had broken down increased more than four-fold between 1986 and 2006, from 3.0 per cent to 12.7 per cent (if non-nationals are excluded, the latter figure reduces to 10.8 per cent). Here again, there is no indication of a major upward shift in the trend after the introduction of divorce.

The picture just looked at refers to the stock of persons whose marriages had broken down and not to the annual rate at which marital breakdowns occur. In view of the incompleteness of divorce data as a measure of marital breakdown mentioned earlier, we can now to attempt to derive rough estimates of a trend measure that includes separation as well as divorce. This can be done by calculating the average increase in the numbers of persons who are separated, divorced or remarried following divorce for each year in the intervals between the *Censuses* of *1986, 1991, 1996, 2002* and *2006*. Here we do so by focusing on the data for women, since it appears that as noted earlier women are more likely to provide an accurate report of their marital status than men (see below).

Table 4.2 sets out relevant numbers for each inter-Census interval over the twenty years 1986-2006. The average annual increase in the numbers of women who were separated, divorced or remarried following divorce was 2,330 in the period 1986-91. It had risen to 5,531 by 2002-2006, a two-and-a-half fold increase. Measured as a rate of marital breakdown per 1,000 married population (the indicator utilised in Figure 4.1 above), the increase was from 1.77 in 1986-91 to 3.74 in 2002-06. The latter is just about double the corresponding divorce rate for Ireland in 2003 presented in Figure 4.1, which was 1.9. This differential between Ireland's divorce rate and its marital breakdown rate is primarily due to the inclusion of various forms of separation in the marital breakdown rate, but there is also likely to be a significant effect from the "imported" marital breakdown represented by immigration of divorced non-Irish nationals. However, even if we were to compare this higher estimate of marital breakdown with the divorce rate for other countries presented in Figure 4.1, the Irish rate would still be quite low: it would rise above that of the measured divorce rate of low-divorce countries but would remain significantly below that of the large group of high-divorce countries. Since, as already mentioned, the marital breakdown rate in low-divorce countries other than Ireland is likely to exceed the measured divorce rate, it is possible that on a like-for-like basis, Ireland would still emerge in a low position in European comparisons of marital breakdown comprehensively measured.

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[10] The Census scheduled for 2001 was postponed until 2002 on account of foot-and-mouth disease, so that the increase in separated/divorced persons recorded in that Census was accumulated over six years rather than the usual five; correspondingly, the increase recorded up to 2006 was accumulated over only the four years that had elapsed since 2002.

Table 4.2: Marital Breakdown Estimates for inter-Census Intervals, 1986-2006

Inter-Census Interval	Average Annual Increase in No. of Women Separated, Divorced or Remarried Following Divorce	Average Annual Marital Breakdown Per 1,000 Married Persons	
		Rate	Change Since Previous Period
1986-1991	2,330	1.77	-
1991-1996	3,927	2.92	65.2
1996-2002	5,055	3.62	24.0
2002-2006	5,531	3.74	3.3

Source: Census 1986-2006.

The *timing* of the increase in marital breakdown since 1986-91 revealed in Table 4.2 is also of interest, particularly in regard to the possible effects of the introduction of divorce in 1997. Looking at the breakdown rate per 1,000 married persons, the biggest increase was between the periods 1986-91 and 1991-96, that is, before divorce was introduced and before large-scale immigration occurred (the increase in the rate was 65.2 per cent between these periods). A further increase was registered in the period 1996-2002, but it was much smaller, at 24 per cent, than in the previous period. By 2002-2006, the annual increase, at 3.3 per cent, had almost flattened out. It would thus appear that rather than causing an upward shift in the marital breakdown rate, the introduction of divorce was accompanied by a slowing down and eventual levelling off in the rate of growth of marital breakdown, at least over the ten years since divorce legislation has been in place. Factors that might have contributed to this outcome include the reduction in the marriage rate and the decline in early marriage that occurred during the 1980s and much of the 1990s. As we outlined in Chapter 2 above, entry into marriage declined sharply in the 1980s and even though there has been a recovery since the mid-1990s, recent increases in marriage have been heavily concentrated among people aged over 30 years. Among people in their 20s, increased cohabitation has compensated in part, but only in part, for the decline in marriage. To the extent that early marriage increases the risk of divorce, the gathering tendency to delay marriage that emerged in the 1990s, along with the growing practice of testing relationships through cohabitation before entering marriage, may help explain the stabilisation in marital breakdown rates in recent years. It may yet emerge in the longer term that marital breakdown will return to an upward trend, perhaps in the form of a greater take-up of divorce. As yet, however, no clear signs of such an outcome have emerged.

4.5 Marital Breakdown and Gender

We now turn to an analysis of the differential risk of marital breakdown across different categories of the population using the *CRMF 2006*. The definition of marital breakdown adopted for this section of the analysis is people who recorded their marital status on the Census form as separated, divorced or remarried, but in addition we include people who state that they are married but live as a partner with someone other than their spouse.

It is necessary first to take account of the significance of gender: the presence of substantial differentials between men and women is likely to indicate problems with the data, since there should be a divorced or separated man for every divorced or separated woman. As noted in Chapter

3, there is an excess of single men over single women among the middle-aged and this seems to reflect a tendency on the part of men whose marriages have broken down to report themselves as single. Figure 4.4 provides more detail on this issue by setting out for each year of age the numbers of women and men who report themselves as separated or divorced. For the purposes of this graph, those who have remarried following a previous dissolution of marriage are included with the divorced (we return later to differences in second union formation among men and women who have separated or divorced).

Figure 4.5: Numbers of Separated and Divorced* Females and Males by Single Year of Age, 2006
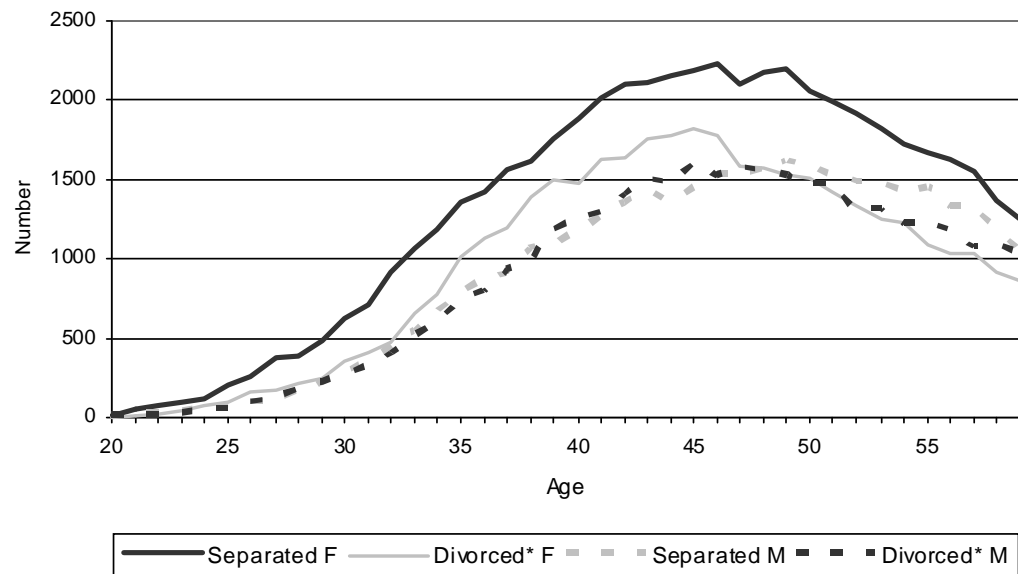
* Includes those who have remarried following dissolution of previous marriage.

The data show that among the separated and divorced, there is an excess of women over men at most ages. The only exception is that from age 47 years upwards, the numbers of divorced women drops more or less to match that of divorced men, though an excess of separated women over separated men remains in those ages. The size of the gender gap is quite large: at age 45 years, for example, the separated and divorced combined number 4,014 among women compared to 3,060 among men, a 4 to 3 ratio. Some of this difference is accounted for by the age-gap between husbands and wives (which effectively shifts the male curves two years to the right). In principle, it might also be affected by differential migration – either excess outward migration among separated or divorced men or excess inward migration among separated or divorced women. There might even be a small contribution from differential mortality (with more deaths among separated/divorced men than among separated/divorced women), though since overall mortality at these ages is relatively modest, this is unlikely to be a substantial influence. Otherwise, the only remaining plausible explanation for the gender gap is under-reporting of divorce and, especially, separation among men. The alternative possibility of over-reporting of separation and divorce among women seems too unlikely to be taken seriously. Hence, for the most part, we make use of the female data only in our analysis of the social correlates of marital breakdown in this chapter.

A further notable aspect of Figure 4.5 is the peak in the numbers of separated and divorced among those aged in their late 40s. The upward slope to that peak from the early 20s is understandable as the outcome of an accumulation of marital breakdown as people age. However, the downward slope among people aged in their 50s indicates a cohort effect: across their lives to date, people in their 50s in 2006 had a lower risk of marital breakdown than those a decade younger. It is interesting to ask whether this cohort effect results from social change that is associated directly with being born later, or whether it reflects differences in the composition of the cohort, such as higher levels of educational attainment or the different occupational status of women. We tested for this cohort effect using multivariate models based on the 1996, 2002 and 2006 *COPSAR* data. Younger cohorts are at greater risk of marital breakdown across this ten-year period even after educational attainment, occupational status, religion, nationality, ethnicity, health status and region are controlled for.[11] It is possible, in principle, that those at present aged in their 20s and 30s will end up with an even higher accumulation of marital breakdown than those now in their 40s, but the apparent levelling off in the marital breakdown rate since the early years of the present decade (see above) would suggest that for the time being at least, such an outcome will be muted, if it occurs at all.

**4.6
Marital
Breakdown
and
Nationality**

It has been noted in Chapter 3 that non-nationals in Ireland are more likely to marry and to marry at a younger age than the native Irish. Once married, however, as noted already in this chapter, non-nationals in Ireland are also more likely to have their marriages break down (and following the logic outlined earlier, the practice of early and widespread marriage among non-nationals may itself be one of the reasons that their subsequent marital breakdown rate is high). Figure 4.6 shows that, taking all forms of marital

Figure 4.6: Proportion of Males and Females Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown by Nationality and Gender
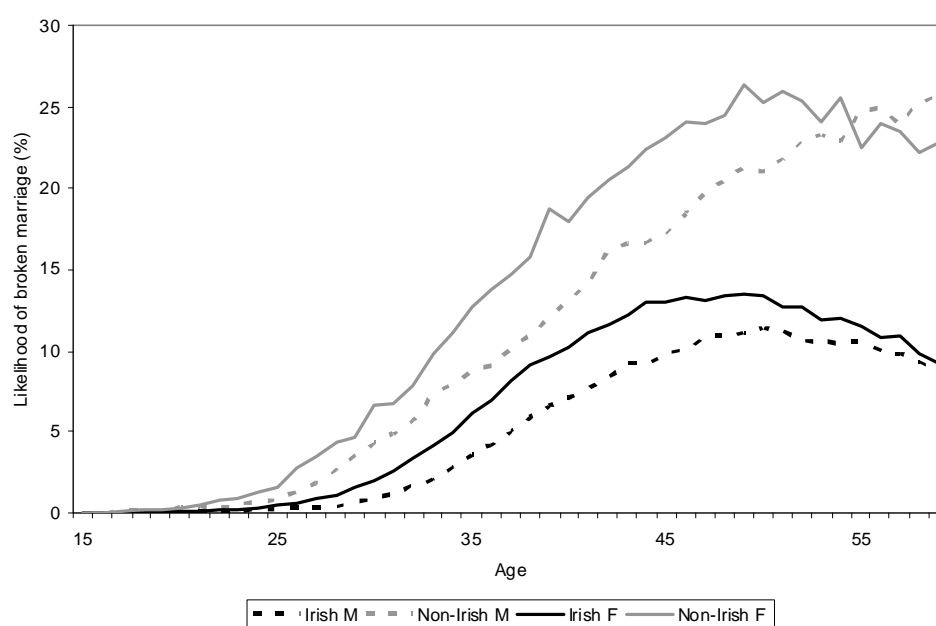
[11] For reasons of space, these multivariate models based on the *COPSAR* are not reproduced in the Appendices. They are available from the authors on request.

breakdown together, the proportion of non-Irish who have had marriage breakdown is for most ages a multiple of at least twice the corresponding proportion among the native Irish and at younger ages rises to a multiple of three or more times. At age 30 years, for example, 2 per cent of the native Irish women have had a marriage breakdown compared to 6.7 per cent among non-Irish women. At age 35 years, the corresponding proportions are 6 per cent among native Irish women compared to 12.7 per cent among non-Irish women, while at age 45 years the proportions are 12.9 per cent and 23 per cent respectively. The fall in marital breakdown among native Irish men and women aged in their 50s is not paralleled to the same degree among non-Irish women and does not occur among non-Irish men, among whom the incidence of marital breakdown continues to rise. Thus the national/non-national gap in this area remains high at older ages.

Further breakdowns of the data not shown here indicate that the gap is particularly high among non-nationals from eastern Europe while there is no gap among non-nationals from Africa. It is also notable that among non-nationals, men report a lower level of marital breakdown than women, so that the male tendency to under-report marital breakdown is not limited to the Irish. In attempting to explain the higher level of marital breakdown among non-nationals, one might look in part to migration itself as a contributory factor. Movement between countries might cause couples temporarily to live apart, difficulties of adjustment to the host society might put a strain on marriage, or there might be some element of selective emigration among those who have marital difficulties in their home countries. However, the more obvious explanation is that noted earlier – simply that most immigrants come from countries with much higher rates of marital breakdown than Ireland. Thus it is quite likely that immigrants have simply brought with them the levels and patterns of marital breakdown that already existed in their home countries.

4.7 Marital Breakdown, Education and Social Class

Figure 4.7 shows that for most ages, the likelihood of marital breakdown among ever-married females is greatest among those with lowest educational attainment, that is, those with lower second-level education or less. Among

Figure 4.7: Proportion of Ever Married Females Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown by Educational Attainment
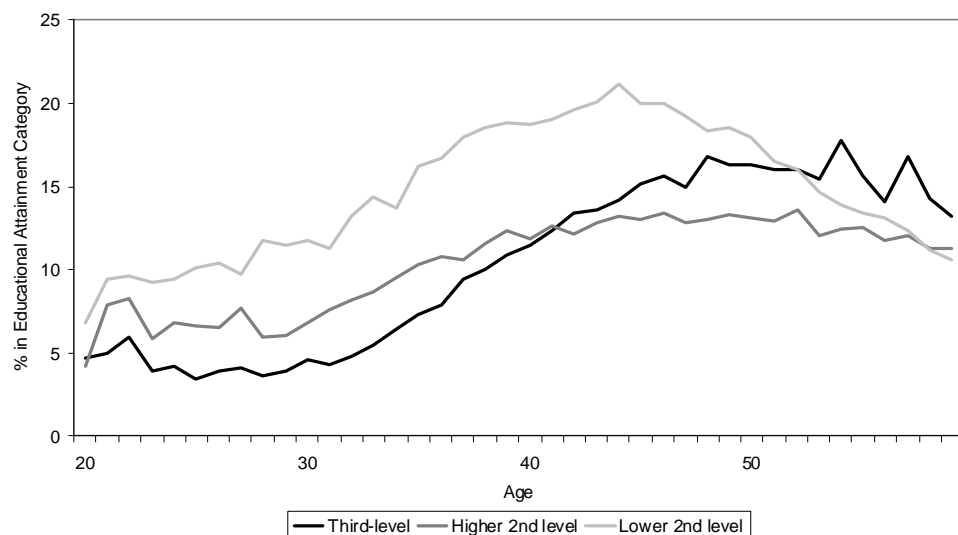
those aged in their 20s and 30s, graduates have the lowest risk of marital breakdown, but there is a cross-over as we go into older ages – by the mid and late 50s, graduates have the highest risk of marital breakdown. This may indicate that while the better educated were the pioneers in seeking separation or divorce, the less educated have taken over as marital breakdown has become established as a social practice.

Interestingly, however, this crossover pattern is not evident by occupational class, where a higher risk of marital breakdown among women in lower occupations is present across all ages (Figure 4.8). At most ages, the proportion of women in semi-skilled or unskilled manual occupations who have experienced a marriage breakdown is in the order of double the corresponding proportion among those in professional, managerial and technical occupations. While these relativities narrow somewhat among women aged over 50 years, they still remain substantial. It is not immediately clear why the crossover that occurs after age 50 by educational attainment is not found by occupational level, but we can confirm that it is present in the multivariate analysis in Appendix D, once other background factors have been controlled for.

One possible explanation for the contrasting pictures centres on the women within the over-50 cohort who are highly educated yet either do not work in an equivalent occupation (i.e. are "underemployed") or do not work at all, since this latter group are included in the 'Other' occupational category.[12] A higher level of marital breakdown among educated yet non-working or underemployed women is consistent with both the contrasting patterns of Figures 4.7 and 4.8 and the lower likelihood that educated women within the cohort concerned work in professions that match their educational attainment.

Figure 4.8: Proportion of Ever Married Females Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown by Occupational Class


_____
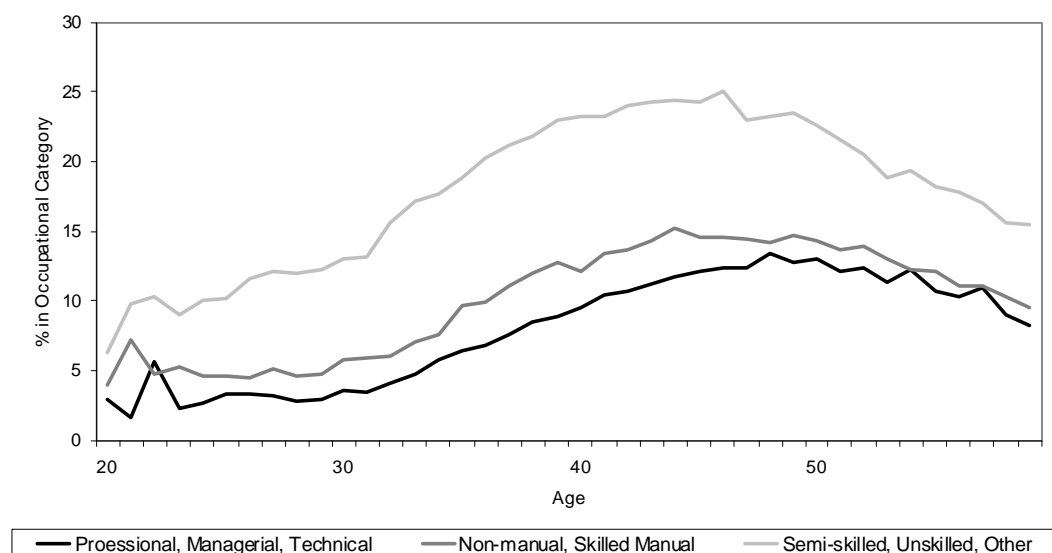
[12] The difference in rates between educational and occupational categories is not evident only for those in the lowest categories, so it cannot be solely accounted for by a behavioural difference between those women in work and those not.

**4.8
Marital
Breakdown,
Religion and
Ethnicity**

As with many other areas of family behaviour, marital breakdown is likely to be strongly linked to cultural beliefs and values. The indicator available for Census data that best captures such beliefs and values is religious affiliation. Nationality is also relevant in this context, since cultural differences are likely to be a major influence on the wide differences in marital breakdown rates by nationality that we have already examined. A third relevant factor that is measured in Census data is ethnicity, which might have an effect over and above nationality and so is worth examining here. To assess the influence of these factors on the likelihood of marital breakdown, we draw on a number of large multivariate models which are too detailed to be reported on fully. These models include controls for nationality, time spent abroad, religion, ethnicity, health status, unemployment, occupation and region and are calculated for women at ages 30, 40, 50 and 59 years. The present account provides an illustrative selection of findings on the effect of religion and ethnicity drawn from these models, focusing in particular on women at ages 40 and 59 years, for which the models are reproduced in Appendix D. An important factor that is not measured in the data and so cannot be controlled for is age of marriage. Youthful marriage is likely to be a significant risk factor for marital breakdown at the individual level and changing age of marriage over time is likely to contribute to cohort differences in the incidence of marital breakdown. The lack of information on this factor in our data amounts to a serious limitation in the analysis we can carry out.

Looking first at religion, Figure 4.9 shows that Muslim women have a distinctively low risk of marital breakdown at both ages 40 and 59 years (the odds ratios are 0.4 and 0.6 respectively relative to Catholics, the reference category). Other Christian religions have a somewhat higher risk of marital breakdown than Catholics, but the stronger and perhaps more important influence is the much higher risk of marital breakdown among those who report no religious affiliation. At age 59 years, women in the latter category are 2.8 times more likely than Catholics to have experienced a marriage breakdown. There is some possibility of reverse causality here: people may abandon identification with a religion because their marriages fail. But the finding is more likely to indicate a secularisation effect, whereby those with no religious affiliation may consider separation or divorce to be more culturally acceptable. Thus, if religious non-affiliation increases in the future,

Figure 4.9: Odds Ratios for Marital Breakdown (Given Marriage) by Stated Religion of Females, at Age 40 and 59 Years (Ref = Catholic, Takes Value 1.0)
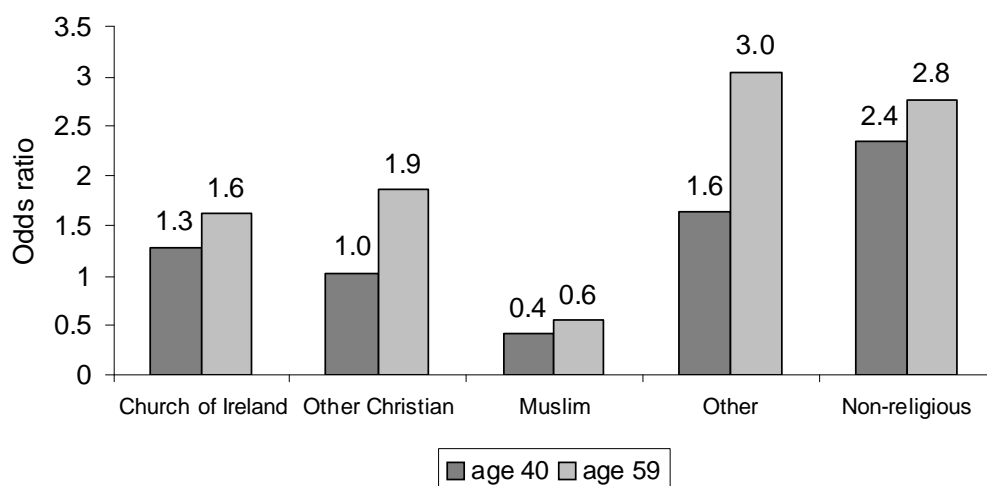
it may exert an upward influence on the marital breakdown rate. However, this influence may be counterbalanced by a downward influence of religious non-affiliation on entry into marriage, perhaps in that the religiously non-affiliated may be more likely to cohabit than marry, especially at younger ages – see Chapter 3 above. Thus the net effect of secularisation on the marital breakdown rate is not easy to predict.

The model results show some independent effect of ethnicity on risk of marital breakdown. There is some evidence that Chinese and Asian people have somewhat lower rates of breakdown and that Black people may have higher rates (care must be taken here, because the large odds ratios presented in Appendix D are based on small samples, meaning that the direction of the effect is more reliable than its estimated magnitude). A stronger pattern is evident for Travellers, who have a higher likelihood of marital breakdown compared to mainstream White Irish by age 30 years, yet a lower likelihood at older ages (Figure 4.10). This pattern is likely to be a direct result of the very high incidence of early marriage among Travellers noted in Chapter 3. By age 30 years, many more Travellers have been married long enough to have had a substantial risk of exiting marriage. However, as marriages of similar duration accumulate among the settled community, their risk of breakdown catches up with and far surpasses that of Travellers. Thus, the import of Figure 4.10 is that while the overall risk of marital breakdown among Travellers is low, they enter into marital breakdown at younger ages than the settled community and so in the early part of the family life-course stand out for a time as having a relatively high risk of marital breakdown. That said, it is possible that the younger cohort of Travellers has a higher incidence of marital breakdown than preceding cohorts.

Figure 4.10: Odds Ratios for Marital Breakdown (Given Marriage) Among Female Travellers by Age (Ref = White Irish, Takes Value 1.0)
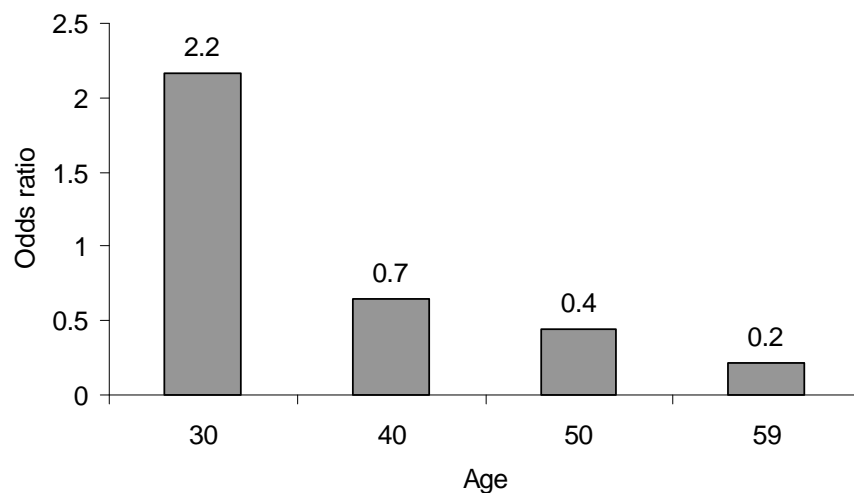
4.9 Marital Breakdown by Region

Most of the influences on the likelihood of marital breakdown presented thus far are derived from the *CRMF 2006*. As described above, we did conduct multivariate analysis on the *COPSAR* data for 1*996, 2002* and *2006* as well. This data set does not have the richness of background information contained in the *CRMF 2006*. However, working on the three waves of the *COPSAR* does allow us to see whether the effects we highlight have

changed over time. For the most part, we find that those variables that have a strong relationship with marital breakdown in 2006 also do so in the data for 2002 and 1996. However, there is one particularly interesting exception to this, which is the variation in marital breakdown by region.

Odds ratios for the likelihood of having experienced marital breakdown by region are presented for each of the three waves of the *COPSAR* in Figure 4.11. The first aspect of this chart to note is that there is a much higher likelihood that a woman living in Dublin has had a marital breakdown (controlling for other background characteristics). This may not necessarily indicate that people from Dublin are more likely than people from other areas to experience marital breakdown, because it is also possible that those whose marriages fail are more likely to relocate to the city. But the effect is quite large: the likelihood that a woman living in Dublin has had a marital breakdown is more than one-third higher than is the case for women in the rest of the country.

Figure 4.11: Odds Ratios for Ever-Married Women Aged 15-59 Years Experiencing Marital Breakdown by Region (Ref = Dublin, Takes the Value 1.00)
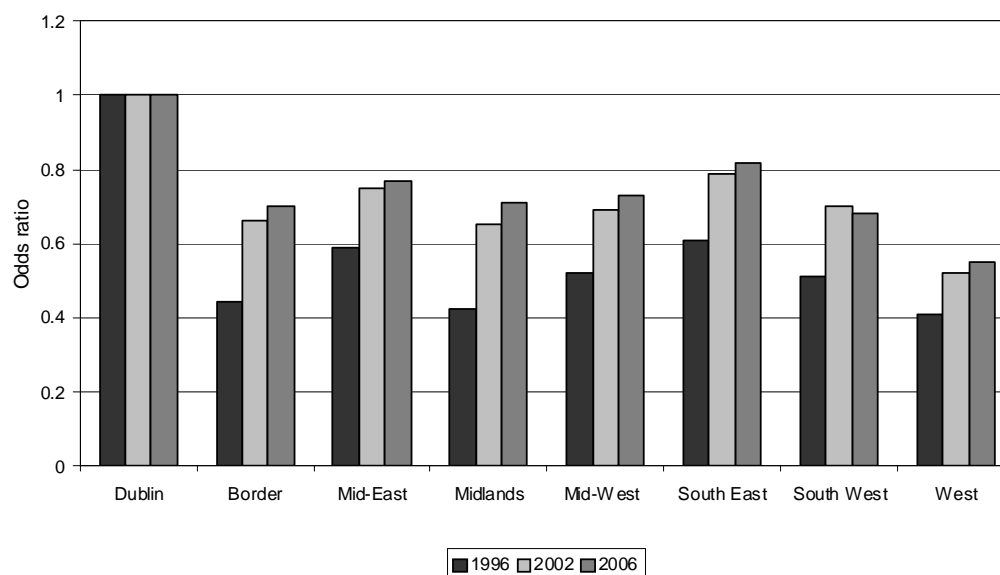
Source: COPSAR 1996, 2002, 2006.

Unlike most of the other correlates of marital breakdown we cover in this chapter, however, this regional effect is changing consistently and rapidly over time. Controlling for other background characteristics, the likelihood of marital breakdown in all regions outside the capital is moving closer to that recorded in Dublin. One possible explanation here is that fewer people who experience marital breakdown are subsequently inclined to relocate to Dublin. More likely is that the increase in marital breakdown in recent decades proceeded at a different pace in different parts of the country, with the Dublin region pioneering and the other regions then catching up.

**4.10
Divorce or
Separation?**

As we have seen earlier, a characteristic feature of marital breakdown in Ireland is the limited recourse to divorce among couples whose relationship runs into difficulty. In 2006, ten years after divorce had been enacted in Ireland, some six out of ten women whose marriages had broken down reported themselves in the Census as separated rather than divorced. Thus divorce is still something of a minority experience even among those who have experienced marital breakdown. This leads us to ask what the social characteristics are of those who, given marital breakdown, proceed to divorce rather than remain separated. Here we focus on occupational class, education and nationality as key influences, but as before, the analysis is restricted to women for reasons of data reliability and is based on a multivariate model that includes controls for the same wide range of background characteristics as used in the models of marital breakdown.

The results in Figure 4.12 relate to occupational class and education. They show that there is a considerable though not dramatic occupational class gradient in the likelihood of divorce among those who have experienced marital breakdown. Those in professional occupations are most likely to proceed to divorce while those in the unskilled occupations and the unclassified are least likely to do so. This gradient is the opposite of that noted earlier for the likelihood of marital breakdown – those in professional occupations are least likely to experience marital breakdown, but they are most likely to get divorced if their marriages do break down. The graph for education shows that, having controlled for the effect of occupational class and the other variables included in the model, there is no independent direct effect from education. Since education is linked to occupational class and other variables, it is likely to have an indirect effect through its role in positioning people in the occupational system.

Figure 4.12: Odds Ratios for Divorce (Given Marital Breakdown) Among Females by Occupational Class (Ref = Skilled manual) and Educational Attainment (Ref = Higher 2nd Level Qualifications)
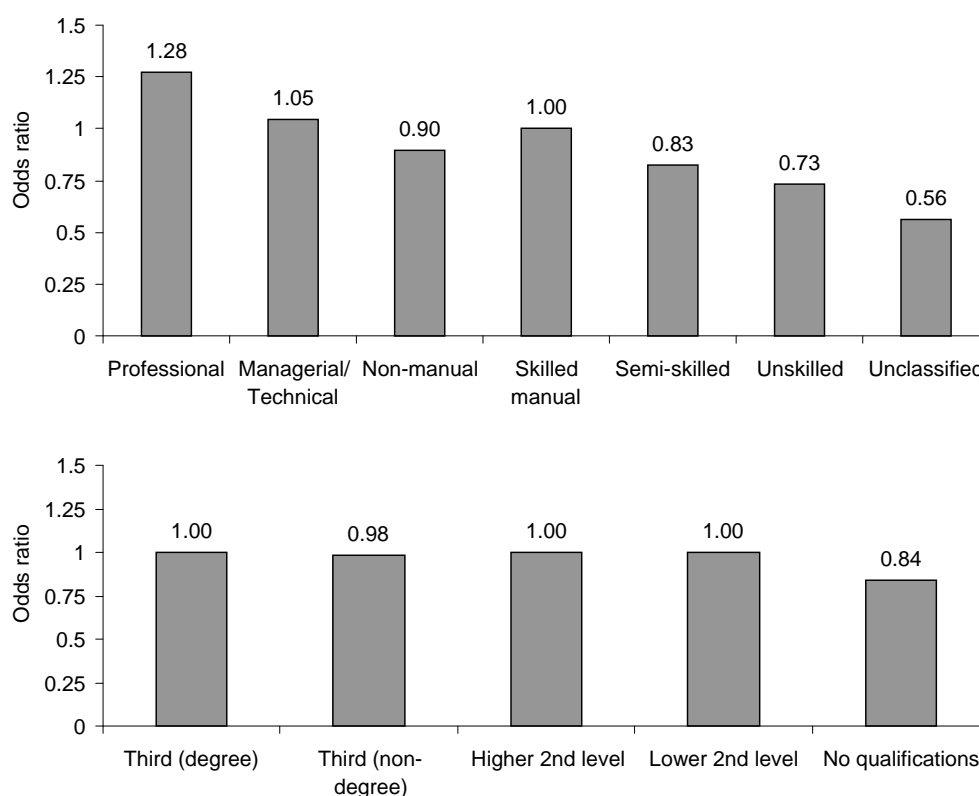
A further factor worth taking note of is nationality (Figure 4.13). The results here show that, as well as being more likely to experience marital breakdown, non-Irish nationals are more likely to obtain a divorce following marital breakdown than are the native Irish. This is particularly so among nationals of the EU-10 member states (those that joined the EU in the 2004 enlargement), among whom take-up of divorce is more than four times higher than it is among the native Irish.

Further data not presented here indicate that there is also a Catholic effect. People of all other religious affiliations are more inclined to get a divorce following marital breakdown, with odds ratios varying between 1.46 and 1.86, relative to Catholics.

Figure 4.13: Odds Ratios for Divorce (Given Marital Breakdown) Among Females by Nationality (Ref = Irish, Takes Value 1.00)
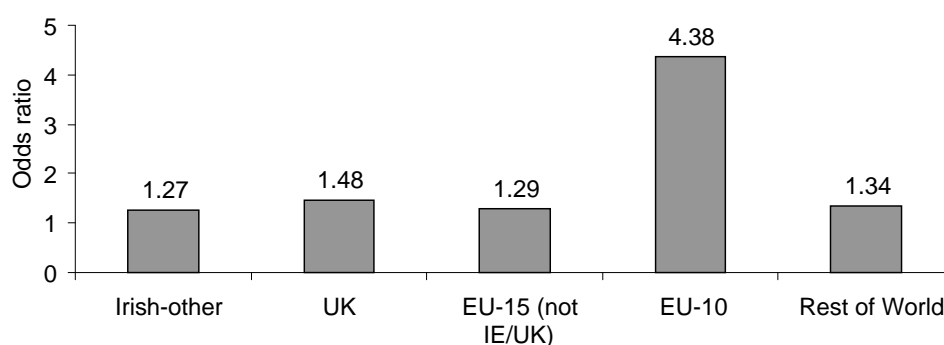
4.11 Partnership After Marital Breakdown

In the aftermath of a marital breakdown, whether or not people get divorced could be considered to be of less social consequence than the partnership status they find themselves in. Here the main options are that they remain alone (i.e. not in any partnership), they cohabit or they remarry. One could multiply many sub-variants of these outcomes, depending for example on whether those who cohabit are divorced or separated, what the marital status of their partner is (single, separated or divorced), and whether or not there are children in the second union (or indeed in the first). However, full treatment of these issues would require a lengthy analysis that is beyond the scope of this study. Here we will limit attention solely to the question of the partnership status of those who have had a broken marriage. It is of interest in dealing with this question to look at the situation of both men and women, even though for men, as has been noted earlier, the data are less reliable than they are for women given the apparently substantial proportion of separated and divorced men who report their marital status as single. The latter group is not possible to identify in the data and so must be omitted, with the result that the analysis for men may be distorted to some degree.

The results presented in Figure 4.14 show that for women and men, the dominant partnership outcome that follows marital breakdown is that they are alone. This is particularly so among women: the proportion who are alone exceeds 60 per cent at all ages and from age 46 upwards it exceeds 70 per cent, rising almost to 80 per cent by age 59 years. For men, the proportion alone is above 50 per cent at all ages, and is higher at younger ages and to a lesser extent at older ages than it is in the 40s. This gender gap in the proportions alone may be partly an artefact of the men's misreporting of their marital status – if all the separated and divorced men who misreport

themselves as single were included in the picture, the gender gap in proportions alone might narrow.

Figure 4.14: Partnership Status of Males and Females Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown
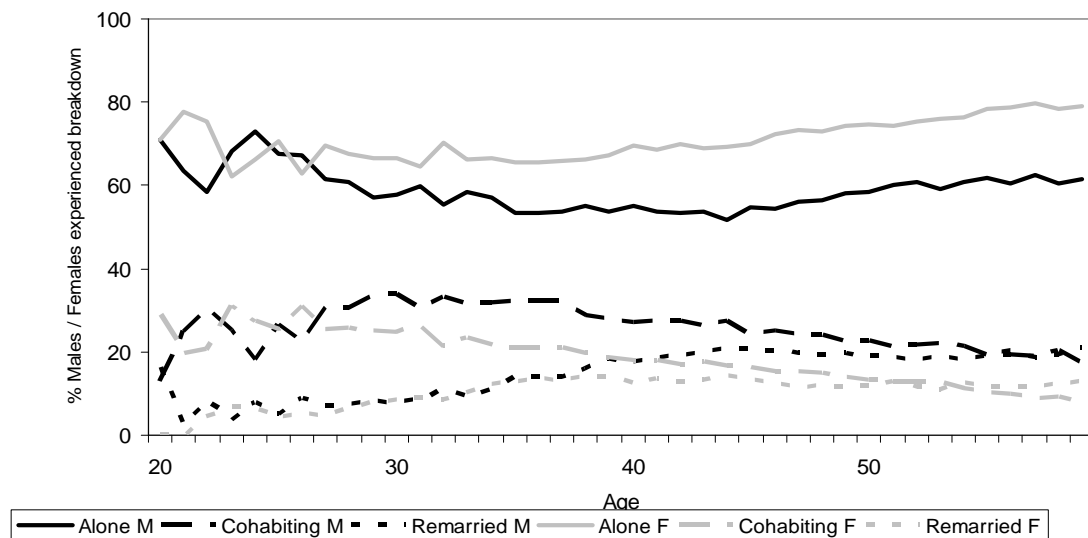
The second most common partnership status following marital breakdown is cohabitation. There are again significant gender differences. Men are considerably more likely to begin another cohabiting relationship following marital breakdown. The importance of cohabitation declines with age, largely because remarriage becomes more prominent as people get older, with the proportion remarrying again higher among men. Among men in their late 50s, remarriage is almost as common as cohabitation following marital breakdown and for women at that age, remarriage is marginally more common than cohabitation. In general, however, for the minority of the population with broken marriages who enter second partnership, cohabitation is the preferred form of second partnership.

4.12 Summary

A consequence of Ireland's complex and contested history of dealing with the legal consequences of marital breakdown is that a patchwork of legal remedies for marital breakdown has evolved over the decades. Even today, more than a decade after divorce legislation was enacted, that patchwork is still used in all its variety. The legal status of people whose marriage has broken down ranges from different kinds of de facto and legal separation to full divorce. Apart from whatever social implications this situation might have, it gives rise to methodological problems in measuring marital breakdown and has obliged us to use indirect and not entirely satisfactory means of estimation.

Looking at divorce alone, Ireland has a low marital breakdown rate by European standards. Better measures of marital breakdown, which include various kinds of separation as well, almost double the measured breakdown rate, but even then Ireland is still placed low down on the international league table of marital breakdown. It also seems that, having risen quite rapidly from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the present century, the marital breakdown rate has levelled off.

The data strongly suggest that a proportion of formerly married males are averse to describing themselves as such, so the data for marital breakdown among females are more reliable.

There is a strong cohort effect. Women at present in their 40s are substantially more likely to have experienced marital breakdown than those born a decade or more earlier. This cohort effect applies to both Irish and non-Irish nationals, among whom there are much higher rates of marital breakdown. The risk is related to social advantage and disadvantage. For those aged under 50 years, the less educated and those in lower occupational class positions are substantially more likely to experience a marriage breakdown. However, graduate women in their 50s, but not those in higher occupations, have a greater risk than women with lower educational attainment.

Cultural influences are strong. Catholics are less likely to have broken marriages than Non-Catholics, with the exception of Muslims, who are the least likely to experience failed marriages. This is noteworthy, because Muslims are also more inclined to marry early, which is generally a major risk factor for marital breakdown. Indeed, this is the likely explanation for the fact that Travellers have higher than average rates of marital breakdown at age 30 years and lower rates from 40 years onwards, when marriages among the rest of the population have reached similar durations. Lastly, we find a strong regional effect, with marital breakdown more likely among those in Dublin, although this regional disparity has reduced significantly since 1996.

Background characteristics also influence the likelihood that divorce follows marital breakdown. While educational attainment has no impact, occupational level shows a strong gradient, such that women in higher occupations are more likely to divorce. This suggests that independent income increases the attractiveness of divorce for women whose marriages have failed. There is a also a greater likelihood that non-Irish nationals are divorced, especially those from the EU-10 accession states.

Most men and women who have experienced marital breakdown live alone, although this proportion is higher for women. Of those who do not, the majority have formed new cohabiting relationships, with remarriage increasing in likelihood with age, such that cohabitation and remarriage are similarly likely among those in their 50s.

5. FERTILITY

**5.1
Introduction**

Substantial movements in birth and fertility rates in Ireland over the past 50 to 60 years have been well documented (see Fahey and Russell, 2001; Punch, 2007; Fahey and Field, 2008). The main feature of recent trends has been the rise in fertility during the economic boom. The fertility rate, or number of births per woman, had been on the decline since the early 1970s and reached a low point by the early 1990s. However, the total fertility rate[13] (TFR), which stood at 1.84 in 1995, rose slightly to 1.90 in 2006 and rose further to 2.1 by 2008. The increase between 2006 and 2008 was quite sharp, amounting to 10 per cent. It may have reflected the tail end of a positive impact of the economic boom on the propensity of women in Ireland to have children. Alternatively, it may have been the consequence of a sharp increase in the numbers of women aged in their late 20s and early 30s in these years, a possible influence that we refer to further below. It remains to be seen whether the onset of recession since mid-2007 will be followed by the return of a decline in the birth rate – the indications are that the latter part of 2008 is already showing a slight fall.[14] The somewhat smaller age-cohort now arriving into their late 20s and early 30s could intensify downward movement, so that a considerable contraction in birth rates over the coming years would not be surprising. However, developments since 2006 are not our main focus here as we lack detailed data for that period.

The slight rebound in Irish fertility over the past decade masks two more substantial countervailing trends. The first is the trend towards smaller families. The CSO *Vital Statistics* series, which records the number of births by birth order, shows a consistent decline in the number of fourth and fifth births, which has been ongoing for several decades. The second trend, meanwhile, has been an increase in new family formation. First births rose by 57 per cent between 1994 and 2006. As with the increase in marriage over the period, this trend in part reflects a rise in the numbers of women around peak childbearing age, but is also due to an increase in the propensity to form families. One possible explanation for the rise in family formation and fertility is the improved employment prospects of women. International research suggests that high fertility rates were, prior to the 1980s, associated with poor employment prospects for women, but that this relationship has since reversed, such that countries with better job opportunities for women now have higher fertility rates, all else being equal (see Fahey and Field,

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[13] The TFR is the number of births a hypothetical woman would have were she subject to the fertility rates (probabilities of giving birth during the year) for women across all childbearing age groups during a given year. More simply, it can be thought of as the number of children a woman would give birth to if her life were representative of women across all childbearing ages at a given point in time, i.e. the fertility of a representative woman.

[14] Quarterly births data show that the birth rate peaked in the first quarter of 2008, remained quite high in the second quarter and declined somewhat by the fourth quarter. This would be consistent with the view that conceptions began to show real decline in the second half of 2007, after the first signs of recession had become evident.

2008, for review). While it is always tempting to relate such changes in Ireland to the recent economic boom, it is worth recalling that substantial increases in the educational attainment of women began well before this period and may have had a substantial influence on fertility during the period. We return to this issue below.

This chapter aims to add to our understanding of fertility in Ireland by making use of the *2006 Census Research Microdata File*. While the data is cross-sectional, the sample size nevertheless permits some new insights. Specifically, we examine fertility by individual year of age, by partnership status and by various background characteristics. First, however, we set the Irish case in context by looking briefly at broader European trends.

5.2 International Comparisons

By the early 1990s, replacement level fertility (that is, a TFR of 2.1 or less) had become the upper limit of fertility virtually throughout the developed world. In much of Europe, fertility had already fallen below replacement by the mid-1970s but it shifted further downwards until the mid-1990s, at which point it bottomed out at a low level. Since then, the TFR in the European Union has hovered around 1.5, with some indications of a small increase in recent years. The lowest fertility levels on record have occurred in southern and eastern Europe since the early 1990s. Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine and Latvia all dipped below 1.2 between 1995 and 1999 (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 74).

Viewed in a longer historical perspective, Europe's fertility decline since the 1960s could be seen as a return to a downward trend that was already underway as far back as the 1880s but was interrupted by a brief resurgence in the period after World War II (Therborn, 2005; Chesnais, 1992). France, the historical pioneer of fertility decline, already had a total fertility rate below 3 in the 1890s and fell below 2 in the years between 1915 and 1920. In the 1930s, low fertility spread over much of the most developed regions of Europe – both in Germany and in England and Wales, for example, experienced total fertility rates were below 2 in this period (Chesnais 1992, p. 543).

In the last few years, total fertility rates in many European countries have begun to edge slightly upwards, indicating that Ireland is not alone in showing some recovery in birth rates. In 2008, for example, England and Wales had their highest birth-rate for 35 years, with a TFR of 1.97 compared to 1.63 in 2001. The full range of national fertility rates found in the EU in 2007 is presented in Figure 5.1. This shows that the highest fertility in the EU is found in the countries of the north-west rim, with Ireland on top closely followed by France, the UK and the Nordic countries. The fertility rate drops as we move southwards and eastwards, It is lowest in a number of former communist countries in eastern Europe, though Italy is also quite low.

Figure 5.1: Total Fertility Rates in EU Countries in 2007

Country	Rate
Ireland	2.01
France	1.98
Sweden	1.88
Denmark	1.84
UK*	1.84
Finland	1.83
Netherlands	1.72
Estonia	1.63
Czech Rep	1.44
Bulgaria	1.42
Greece	1.41
Latvia	1.41
Spain	1.4
Cyprus	1.39
Austria	1.38
Slovenia	1.38
Germany	1.37
Malta	1.37
Italy*	1.35
Lithuania	1.35
Hungary	1.32
Poland	1.31
Slovakia	1.25
EU27*	1.53
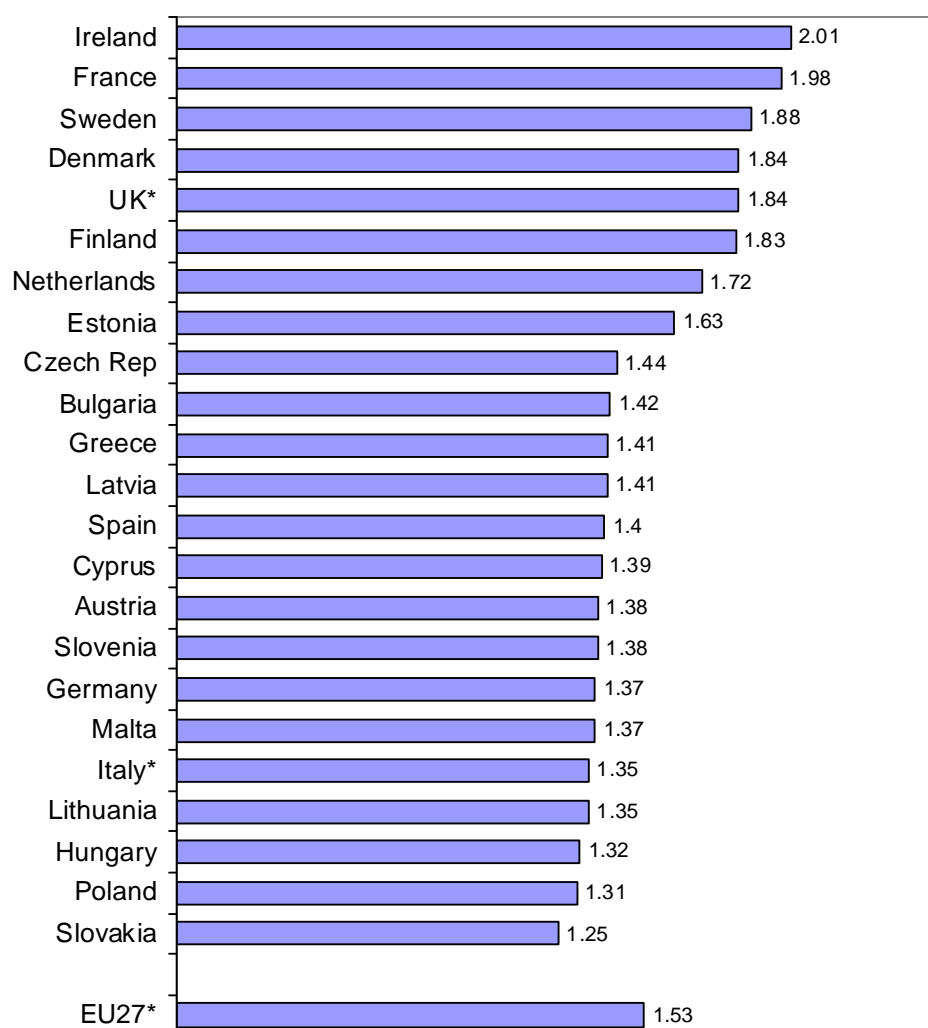
* 2006
Source: Eurostat.

5.3 Fertility and Census 2006

Census 2006 reintroduced a question on fertility that was previously asked of married women in 1981 and earlier censuses. This time around the question, which was asked of all women, requested that they state the number of children (born alive) they had given birth to. The responses to this question form the basis of our analysis.

The sensitivities surrounding this question, particularly with respect to stillbirths and children given up for adoption, may have been responsible for a higher level of non-response than for other Census questions, although the level of response was 97 per cent for women over the age of 20. It is very likely that the non-response group are atypical in respect of fertility and hence the variable comes with a degree of measurement error and possible downward bias. Nevertheless, the size of the differentials between groups that we report below are so substantial that different behaviour among this non-response group is very unlikely to be responsible for anything more than a fraction of it.

The data is further limited by the fact that the information given in response to the fertility question provides only the *number* of children born to each woman. It does not tell us anything about their ages, or whether the mother continues to live with them. Potentially, the responses to the fertility question can be matched with other responses relating to the household composition in order to gain greater insights into recent fertility trends, but this lengthy process of data matching and manipulation is beyond the scope of the current report. We make some recommendations in relation to the substantial possibilities that such an investment of research effort could bring in the final section and in Chapter 7.

Similarly to the analyses of union formation and dissolution in previous chapters, most of the charts we present express the relevant states of individuals at different ages as proportions, not as absolute numbers. The reason for this is that the aim is to illuminate processes and decision-making relating to fertility and so it is helpful to ask what proportion of women at each age belong to which category of interest, netting out the variation due to peaks and troughs in the age profile of the population.

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing the population profile in mind, since there is substantial variation within it. Figure 5.2 shows the numbers of women by individual year of age. This rise in the number of women of childbearing age in recent years is very clear, as is the likelihood of a forthcoming fall. Also of note is that the population profile has been substantially altered by recent immigration and may alter again over the next few years, either by immigration or, perhaps more likely given the current economic climate, emigration. Data are provided separately for Irish nationals and non-Irish nationals in Figure 5.2, which gives some feel for the impact of immigration, although any forthcoming emigration may well involve a mixture of Irish and non-Irish nationals.

This age profile is in itself instructive with respect to fertility trends. There is a striking blip in the number of females who were in their mid-20s in 2006. At that time, there were 12.4 per cent more 25 year-olds than 30 year-olds, or 6.1 per cent more if the analysis is limited to Irish nationals. Given that the number of births by individual year of age rises very substantially between the ages of 25 and 33 (CSO, 2009, Table 4), it seems likely that there will be a fairly sharp short-term increase in the number of births in Ireland, beginning around the present time, followed by a longer decline. Birth rate data for 2007 referred to earlier confirm that such a rise is underway.

Figure 5.2: Age Profile of the Female Population
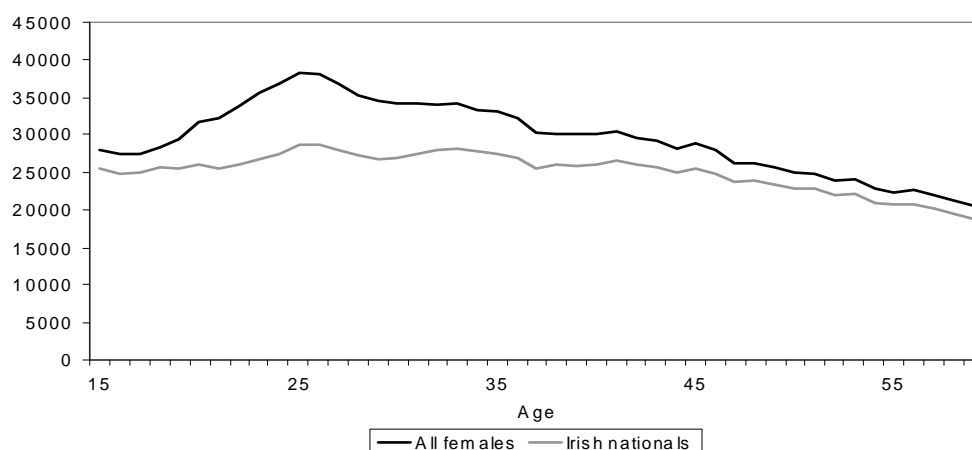
5.4 Fertility by Age

As with union formation and dissolution, by far the most powerful influence on fertility is age. Figure 5.3 shows how the proportion of women with different numbers of children currently varies across the life-cycle. As in previous Chapters, it is not possible when using cross-sectional data to know for sure whether the variation in the proportions across the chart reflects an age effect or a cohort effect. Nevertheless, the steepness of the curves between the late 20s and mid-30s is strongly suggestive of the powerful influence of belonging to this age group.

For instance, consider the curve for 'No children'. It steepens considerably just before 30 years of age, such that between 29 and 35 years the number of childless women halves. After this period, however, the likelihood of having a first child declines sharply between 35-40 years. For example, the curve suggests that of the just over one-quarter of women who are childless at 36 years, 10 per cent will have a first child over the following year, but of childless women aged 38, just 5 per cent will have a first child over the following year. This very rapid decrease in the likelihood that a childless woman over 35 years will have a first child may reflect the fact that those women who want to have children have done so by this age, or it may reflect other constraints on having children. The data reveal the rapidity of change at this specific age but not the cause of the change.

Figure 5.3: Proportion of Women with Different Numbers of Children Born Alive, by Age
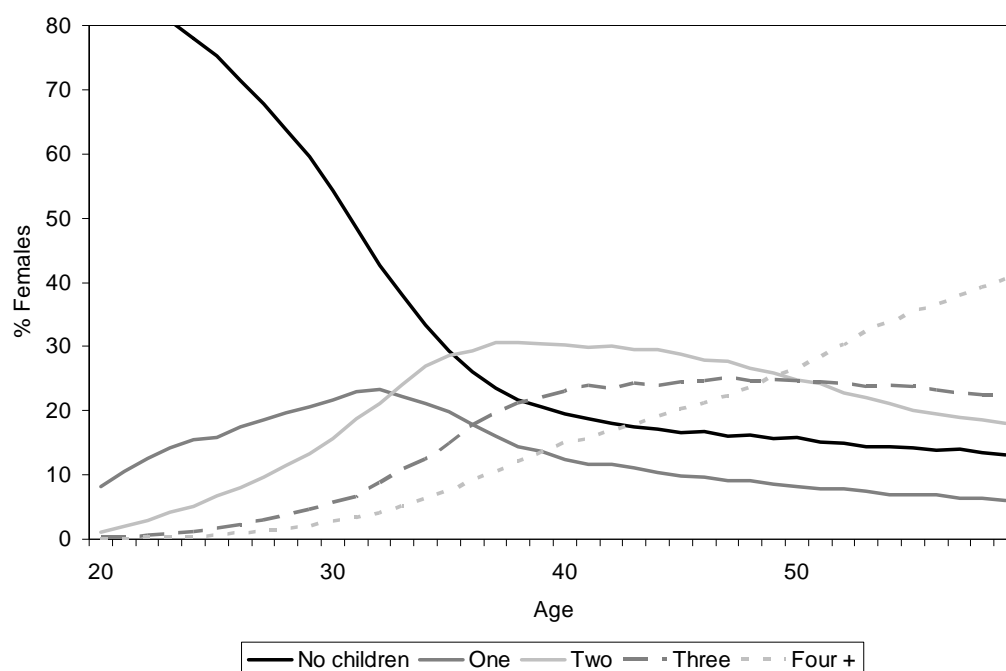
There are also steep increases between the ages of 30 and 35 years in the proportion of women with two and three children, with the curves flattening out beyond 35 years of age. These patterns are again strongly suggestive of age effects. In contrast, the much more gradual and steady increase in the proportion of women with four or more children, which extends well beyond the 40 years, indicates a longer-term cohort effect. The current cohort of women in their 40s is much less inclined to have large families than the cohort only 10-15 years older.

This conclusion is reinforced by the comparison of numbers of children born to women aged 45 years in 2006 and those aged 59 years, which is presented in Figure 5.4. These pie charts are effectively slices through the curves of Figure 5.3, taken at two ages. Births after 45 years of age are very rare, so the pattern approximates well the final fertility for women in these two age brackets. The decline in the likelihood of having four or more children, from 41 per cent to 20 per cent between women born just 14 years apart, is severe. Placing this change more clearly within an historical context, those in the 59 year-old group would have had most of their children between 1970 and 1985, while the 45 year-olds would have given birth to their children mostly during the late 1980s and especially the 1990s. This pattern, therefore, illustrates that reduction in family size was a major factor in the reduced fertility rates throughout the 1980s, in keeping with the evidence from the CSO *Vital Statistics* regarding the number of births by birth order.

The comparison in Figure 5.3 is also consistent with the emergence of a two-to-three child norm (Fahey and Field, 2008), which applies to more than half of the 45 year-old group. That said, the largest proportionate growth between these two groups is in the smallest category of women, those who have had just one child.

Figure 5.4: Number of Children Born Alive to 45 Year-Old and 59 Year-Old Women
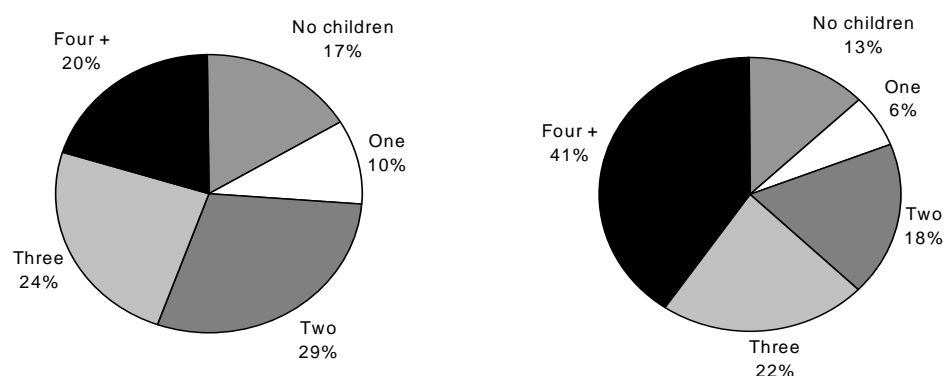
5.5 Fertility and Union Formation

Prior to 1980, the proportion of births outside marriage was less than 5 per cent. By 1999, it had risen to just over 30 per cent, although it appears to have stabilised at around this level since. For first births, the proportion has remained around 44 per cent in recent years. In an international context, these figures for Ireland are not atypical. Although there is substantial variation in levels across countries, large increases in births outside marriage in recent decades have been widespread. While it is tempting to interpret the increase as the breaking of the traditional link between fertility and union formation, it is important to note that the majority of the births outside marriage occur to women who are in some form of long-term relationship, are cohabiting, or are planning to cohabit or marry (e.g. Mahon *et al.*, 1998). The social significance of the trend towards non-marital births is therefore very difficult to interpret (Fahey and Russell, 2001).

One potential consequence of non-marital birth, lone parenthood, is the subject of the next chapter. This section, meanwhile, briefly examines the relationship between fertility and partnership status more generally. There is a substantial number of plausible causal connections between union formation and fertility. Unplanned (or even planned) pregnancy may hasten cohabitation or marriage. Living together, married or otherwise, may hasten pregnancy. Cohabiting couples may be, on average, less sure of their relationship than married ones and so less likely to stay together following pregnancy or childbirth. Married couples may be, on average, more inclined to have children for the same reason. Alternatively, if marriage is now considered by some to be desirable primarily for legal protection and tax reduction rather than for public blessing, recognition or acceptance, then the most logical time to get married, for them, may be following the birth of a first child. For people who take this view, having a child may be the greater form of commitment and, hence, the greater priority within a successful partnership. This may be especially true where women have children late and risk difficulty in conceiving; organising a wedding might actually further delay starting a family. Finally, given that attitudes to and the incidence of sex outside of marriage have also changed greatly in recent decades, it is possible that the link between marriage and the desire to have children has in fact strengthened, because marriage is less of a requirement for an active sex life. All of these connections (and doubtless more) are possible.

In the Irish context, there has been no study focused on outcomes for adults and children following the birth of a child to people at various stages of relationships, including to cohabiting couples. The most cited study of cohabiting couples in Ireland is that of is that of Halpin and O'Donoghue (2004), who pointed out that cohabiting couples are less likely to have children, especially a large family, and concluded that cohabitation is not developing as an alternative to marriage but rather as a precursor to it. However, the data for this study involved just 175 cohabiting relationships and therefore did not permit any detailed breakdown by age. Furthermore, given the four-fold increase in cohabitation that has occurred over the past decade, the forces at work may be changing rapidly. As the data presented in Chapters 2 and 3 show, cohabitation has become the norm for couples in their early and mid-20s in a short space of time. Hence, the typical cohabiting relationship in Ireland may well be quite different from the typical cohabiting relationship of just ten years ago, in terms of the likely profiles of the couple and their expectations for the future of the relationship, including the prospect of children. Results gathered from couples who were cohabiting a decade ago may or may not still apply.

The comparison of the top and bottom charts of Figure 5.5 shows, straightforwardly, that there is a very a strong link between fertility and union formation at all ages. Across the age spectrum, the likelihood that a childless woman has never married is very much greater than is the case for a woman who has had at least one child. Over half the childless women (top chart) over 30 years of age do not cohabit and have never married – a proportion that is remarkably stable beyond 30 years of age. Whatever the underlying causal mechanisms, partnership, marriage and having children remain powerfully associated. Turning to women who have had children (bottom chart), for those in their early 20s, cohabitation is more common than marriage. As for the population generally, cohabitation then falls away with age, as a rising proportion of women get married. Of course, given the simple comparison of the number of children born at any stage of a woman's life, we do not know whether childbirth preceded or followed the

formation of these partnerships or marriages, nor whether the partner is the father of the child(ren).

Figure 5.5: Likelihood of Cohabitation and Ever Having Married for Childless Women (Top) and Women Who Have Had at Least One Child (Bottom)
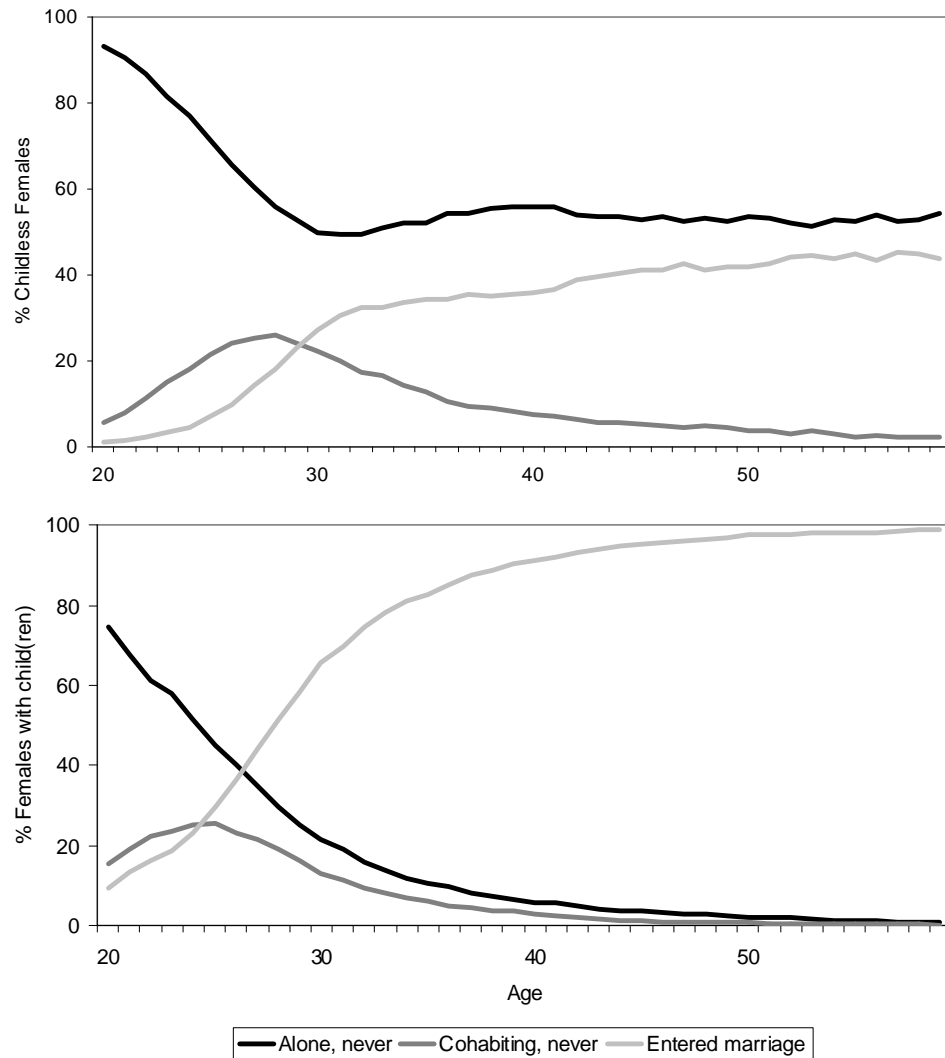
To get a clearer idea of the relationship between cohabitation and fertility, Figure 5.6 plots the likelihood of cohabitation for women who have not had a child, have had one child and have had two or more children. Thus, the percentage figure gives the proportion of (never married) women within the fertility category that cohabits at each age. In one respect, this picture fits quite neatly with the two notions that, first, cohabitation is a prelude to marriage and, second, marriage remains the preferred form of partnership for bringing up children. At any given age, women with children are more likely to have been in a relationship for a longer duration and, hence, are more likely to have passed through a phase of cohabitation and into marriage. The similarities between the shapes of the curves, plus the displacement to the left of the curve for women with children, fit this story neatly. However, the data for women who have had one child is intriguing. The fall-off in cohabitation with age is much slower. Recalling the steepness of the drop in the 'No child' curve in Figure 5.2 above, it is quite likely that a

significant proportion of women with one child at this age have recently become mothers. One possible explanation for this finding, then, is that many cohabiting couples put off marriage until after the birth of a first child, but are then likely to call on the protections of marriage. This possibility is in keeping with the idea of relationship priorities outlined above. However, it cannot be the whole story, since the tail of the curve remains substantially above that for women with more than one child at ages well beyond the period of childbearing. There are clearly a small number of families who continue to prefer cohabitation to marriage even following the birth of a child.

Figure 5.6: Likelihood of Cohabitation (Never Married Women) by Number of Children
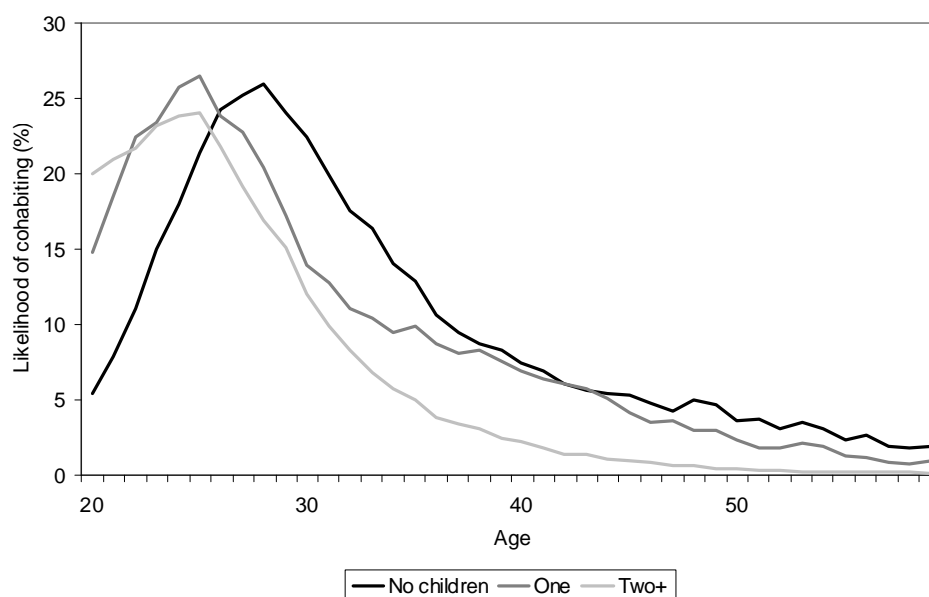
The present analysis is necessarily limited by the nature of the fertility variable, which does not indicate the age of children. Hence, this is an area where the additional research time required to aggregate the individual Census records and match the fertility variable with the household composition information, might yield substantial insights. Specifically, a household-level analysis of the Census data could identify whether the partner in a cohabiting relationship is the father of the child(ren) and compare the likelihood of cohabitation by the ages of the child(ren) and of the parents.

5.6 Fertility and Marital Breakdown

A large body of international research relates to the consequences of marital breakdown for both adults and children (see Amato, 2004, for review). This work primarily focuses on the psychological and economic well-being of individuals coping with the aftermath of separation and divorce. However, while the impact of marital breakdown on children has received much attention, the impact of having children on the prospects for the marriage has received less. Most research looking at the determinants of marital breakdown has suggested that having children mostly reduces the likelihood of breakdown (Wu and Hart, 2002), although a more recent study in the UK suggests that this may have changed since the 1990s (Chan and Halpin, 2002). Most of these studies do not differentiate between the

number of children involved and, moreover, this question has not been examined in Ireland.

Figure 5.7 plots the proportion of women who have experienced a broken marriage from among those who have ever married, by the number of children they have given birth to. The outcome of this exercise is fairly emphatic. For younger adults below 34 years, having children is associated with a higher risk of marital breakdown. This is likely for at least two reasons: first, those with children are likely to have got married at a younger age, which is known to be associated with greater rates of breakdown, and second, there is a greater chance at this age that the children predate the marriage, which is also known to influence the likelihood of breakdown. Once these factors diminish with age, an interesting separation of the curves emerges. Marital breakdown appears to be significantly more likely for women with just one child.

Figure 5.7: Proportion of Ever Married Women Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown, by Number of Children
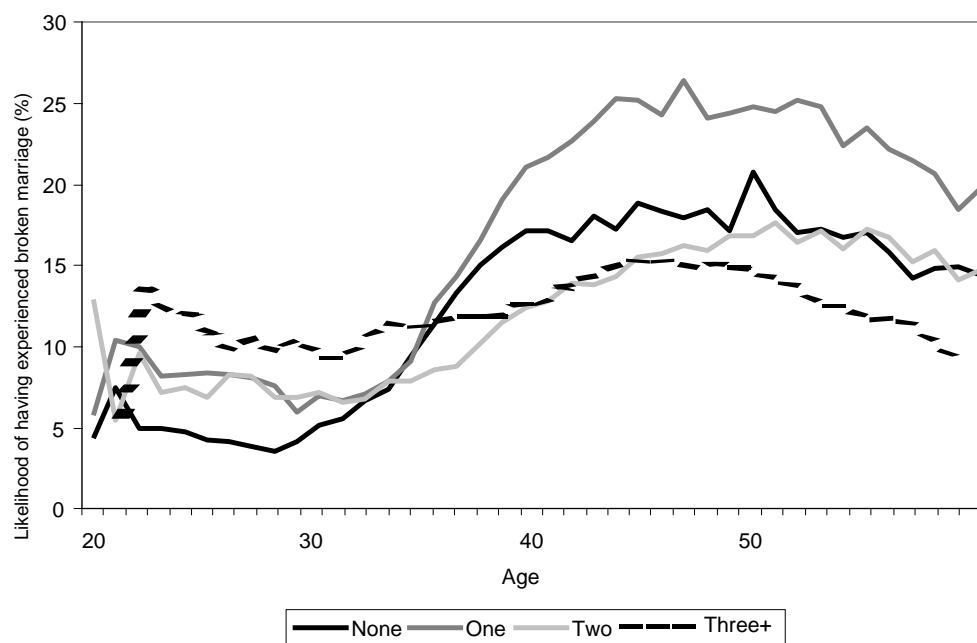
Given that fertility is related to a variety of background characteristics (see following sections), it is important to establish whether this finding holds once a range of such characteristics is controlled for. When the fertility variable is added to the multivariate models of marital breakdown presented in Appendix D, which control for educational attainment, nationality, religion, time spent abroad, ethnicity, health status, unemployment, occupation and region, having one child increases the odds of having experienced marital breakdown by over one-quarter, while having more than one child reduces it by a similar amount. One possible interpretation of this finding is that having a first child places a high level of stress on some married relationships, while having more than one child is an indication of having coped with the arrival of the first.

Given this association between number of children and marital breakdown, it is interesting to ask whether the presence of children has any impact on the likelihood that a broken marriage results in divorce. Figure

5.8, which plots the likelihood that a woman who has experienced marital breakdown is also divorced, reveals that indeed it does – the greater the number of children the less the likelihood of divorce. Again, this effect is apparent in the multivariate analysis, which controls for other background characteristics relating to divorce. One potential explanation is that women with fewer children may have a greater desire to remarry, although other explanations are possible.

Figure 5.8: Proportion of Women Who Have Experienced Marital Breakdown Who Are Divorced, by Number of Children
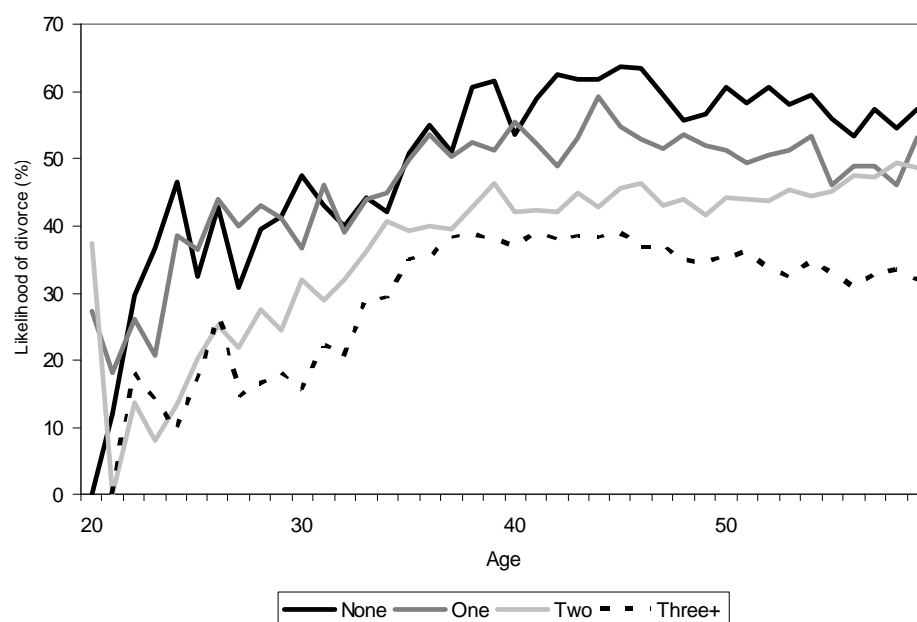
5.7 Fertility and Educational Attainment

While the complex relationship between fertility and partnership is clearly a very important part of family formation, there are a range of other background characteristics that are linked to fertility and, therefore, have a role in determining the make-up of Irish families. The results reported in this section outline the most significant of these, based on a series of multivariate models, a subset of which are reported in full in Appendix E. Separate statistical analyses were conducted to examine the likelihood of having children at ages 25, 30, 35 and 40 years, and of having families of varying sizes at each of these ages. The charts presented in this section are selected so as to give a digestible account of the results arising from the multivariate models.

One of the most consistent findings across all measures of fertility and all ages is that fertility is strongly linked to educational attainment. Figure 5.9 plots the proportion of women who have had at least one, two and three children by three levels of educational attainment: lower second-level (Junior, Group or Intermediate Certificate) qualifications or less, higher second-level (Leaving Certificate or equivalent) qualifications and third-level qualifications (including diplomas and certificates). This telling picture offers insights and raises questions. It is, therefore, worth dwelling on.

Figure 5.9: Number of Children Born Alive by Educational Attainment
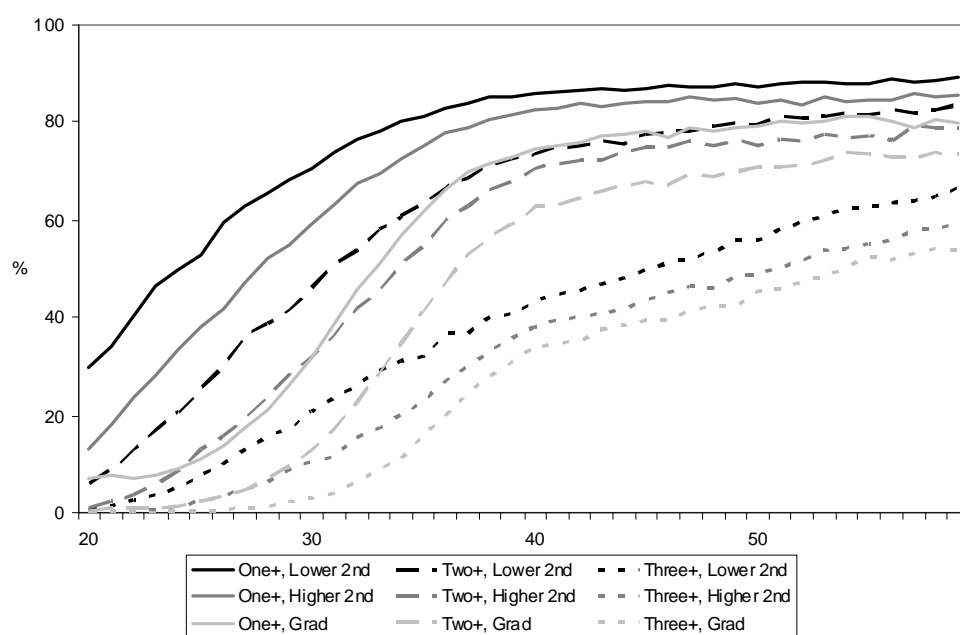
Most obviously, those of higher educational attainment are substantially less likely to attain each family size in turn. Furthermore, the shape of the curves is different, such that women with third-level qualifications appear to leave childbearing until later and then attempt a rapid catch-up. But it is important to note that the confounding of age and cohort effects has a strong bearing on the interpretation of this chart. Assuming that the fertility rate of 30 year-olds did not change between 2004 and 2006, fully one-in-seven graduate women had a child in the two years following their 30th birthday. This is the steepest section in any of the curves and the slight kink at exactly this age supports the notion that there may be a genuine psychological impact associated with reaching the milestone of 30 years. Yet we cannot be sure that the behaviour of 30 year-olds has not changed. We do not know whether those who were aged 32 years in 2006 had the same number of children at 30 years, in 2004, as 30 year-olds in 2006 did. This possibility of important cohort effects becomes more real the greater the age gap being considered.

Nevertheless, much can still be concluded from the picture presented. It is perhaps instructive to consider the other end of the chart, in order to compare cohorts for whom childbearing has ceased. Women aged 59 years in 2006 are more likely to have had more children, especially three or more children, than those aged 45 years. But the separation between the lines for different levels of educational attainment changes little between these ages, suggesting that the relationship between education and fertility did not alter appreciably between the cohort whose childbearing years have just ceased and the cohort 14 years older. This finding is noteworthy, since overall fertility was falling at an historically rapid level during the period when these two cohorts were having families. It, therefore, suggests that the decline in fertility that occurred between the 1970s and 1990s was not subject to a strong socio-economic skew, at least as measured by educational attainment.

This comparison of 45 and 59 year-olds may make us more inclined to believe that the relationships between these curves are determined more by

age than by cohort, but there is no guarantee of that for those still of childbearing age. Still, while it is true that women of higher educational attainment have fewer children, the bigger effect probably surrounds when they have them. At age 30 years, the likelihood that a woman with a third-level qualification has had a child is less than half that of a woman with lower second-level qualifications. It is possible that this delaying of childbearing is not without risks. The very rapid decline in the likelihood of childless women having a first child after 35 years, noted in relation to Figure 5.2 above, derives primarily from the highest educational attainment group. At 36 years, three-in-ten graduate women are childless. Of these, the curve suggests that 12 per cent will have a first child over the following year, but by age 38 years, when more than a quarter of graduates are still childless, the likelihood of having a first child drops to less than 4.5 per cent.

Before moving on, one crucial hidden aspect to this chart requires discussion, which may help to explain recent patterns of fertility. The proportion of women who fall into each of these educational categories varies very considerably across the age range. Of those aged 50 years, 46 per cent are in the lowest attainment category, while for 30 year-olds the figure falls to just 23 per cent. Meanwhile, fully 57 per cent of 30 year-old women have some kind of third-level qualification, compared to only 27 per cent of 50 years-olds. This radical change in the proportions of women with higher levels of education, which resulted from changes in Irish society prior to the economic boom, may help to make sense of the increases in family formation and the birth rate that occurred during the boom. If a generation of women has a lower rate of fertility overall, yet also delays childbearing, the resulting downward trend in the birth rate is liable to overshoot and then recover to its new level – a so-called 'tempo effect' – once those who have delayed childbearing start to have children. It is possible that this effect, driven by the changing educational composition of the female population, is at least partly responsible for the recent increase in births following years of decline. However, this tempo effect has to be weighed against two other factors. First, those with higher educational attainment do ultimately have fewer children, so the continuing change in the educational composition exerts further downward pressure on fertility rates. Second, the cohort of women of peak childbearing age is still increasing, although it will begin to fall quite rapidly in the medium term (Figure 5.1). Given this combination of factors, the current increase in fertility appears unlikely to be sustained in the longer term.

Although very instructive, the use of just three categories of educational attainment and three categories of fertility, while helpful for graphical purposes, is somewhat misleading. Furthermore, it is important to confirm the results suggested in Figure 5.9 in multivariate analysis, since many other characteristics associated with fertility are also related to educational attainment. Thus, Figure 5.10 compares odds ratios across five categories of attainment (including the reference category) derived from three multivariate models (see Appendix E) with three different dependent variables: (1) whether a woman has had a child at age 30 years (2) whether a woman has had a child at age 40 years and (3) whether a woman aged 40-44 years has had four or more children.

The broad picture is consistent with the previous discussion, in that there is a steep gradient such that the odds of having had a child by 30 years of age decrease with educational attainment. This gradient is present but less severe at 40 years of age – those in the higher categories have done some

catching up. Figure 5.9 does add some further findings, however. A similar gradient is also present for the likelihood of having four or more children. The odds of having a large family are particularly high for those of low educational attainment. There is also a significant difference regarding all three outcomes between women with a third-level qualification below degree level and those with a degree. The odds ratio of 0.5 at age 40 years for this latter group is strikingly low.

Figure 5.10: Odds Ratios for Having Had a Child by Age 30 Years, a Child by Age 40 Years and Having a Family of Four or More Children at Age 40-44 Years, by Educational Attainment (Ref = Higher 2nd Level, Takes Value 1.0)
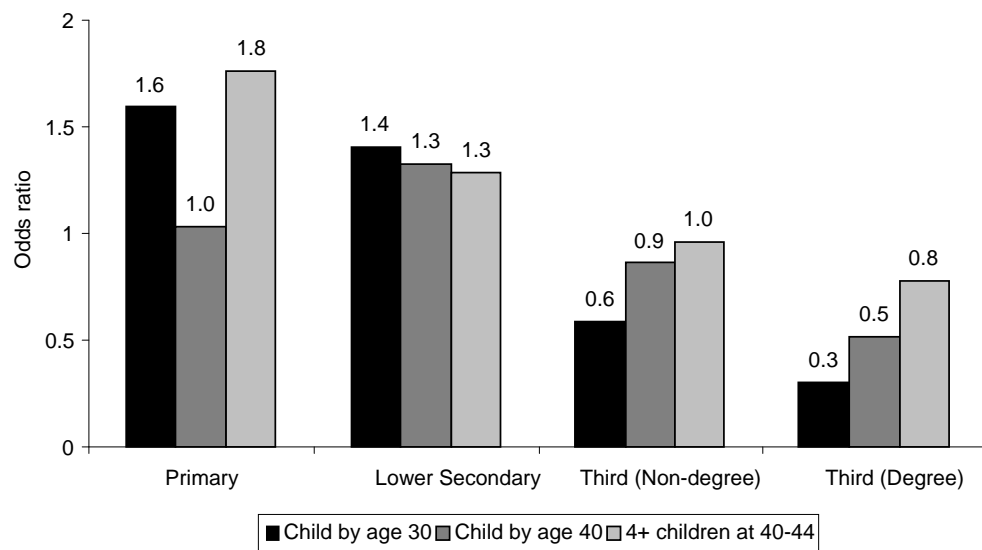
5.8 Other Determinants of Fertility

Our analysis also suggests that, as with union formation and dissolution, there are strong cultural influences on fertility. Religion again turns out to have a strong impact, though not in the form of the very high fertility found among Catholics in the past. Figure 5.11 compares five categories of

Figure 5.11: Odds Ratios for Having had a Child by Age 30 Years, a Child by Age 40 Years and Having a Family of Four or More Children at Age 40-44 Years, by Religion (Ref = Catholic, Takes Value 1.0)
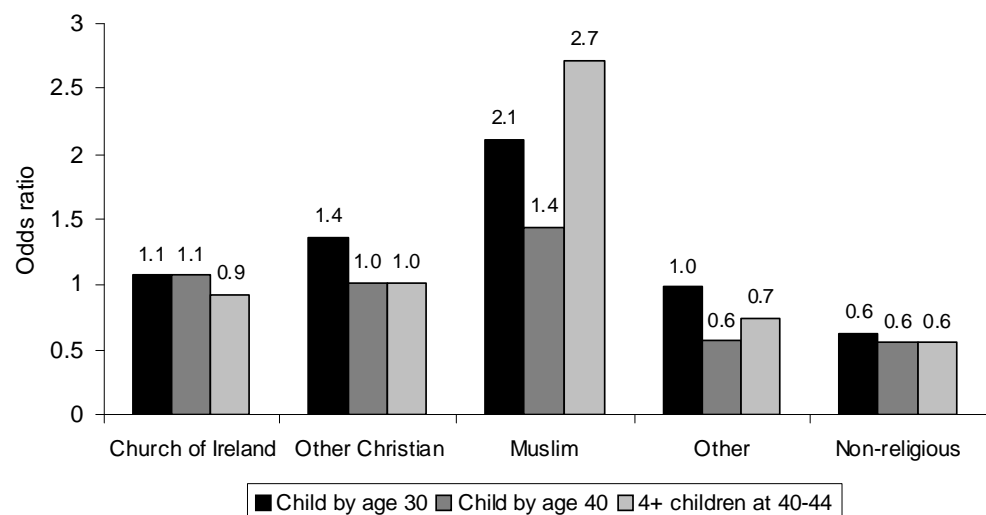
religious affiliation using the same method as Figure 5.9. According to our model of 40-44 year olds in 2006, there is little difference between Catholics and other Christian denominations in the likelihood of having a large family, but Muslim women are more than two-and-a-half times as likely to have a family of four children or more. Indeed, Muslims and non-religious people stand out in these comparisons, the former for high fertility and the latter for the opposite.

A second significant variable is nationality. Figure 5.12 shows that women with joint (Irish-other) nationality and UK nationals have somewhat higher fertility than the reference category of Irish nationals. Both groups contain significant proportions of women from Northern Ireland and it may be that higher fertility among this group is responsible for the finding. Women from the fifteen older EU states appear to have brought their fertility habits with them, since the low levels of fertility characteristic of Europe are replicated among this group in Ireland. The majority of women from the ten states that acceded to the EU in 2004 are recent arrivals and the figures, therefore, probably say more about the life-stage of those willing to travel than of their experience in Ireland. Lastly, the odds ratios for the 'Rest of World' category confirm that, despite our geographical location and long-standing membership of the EU, the fertility of Irish nationals is more typical of non-European countries, although there is clearly a very large amount of variation within that large category.

Figure 5.12: Odds Ratios for Having had a Child by Age 30 Years, a Child by Age 40 Years and Having a Family of Four or More Children at Age 40-44 Years, by Nationality (Ref = Irish, Takes Value 1.0)
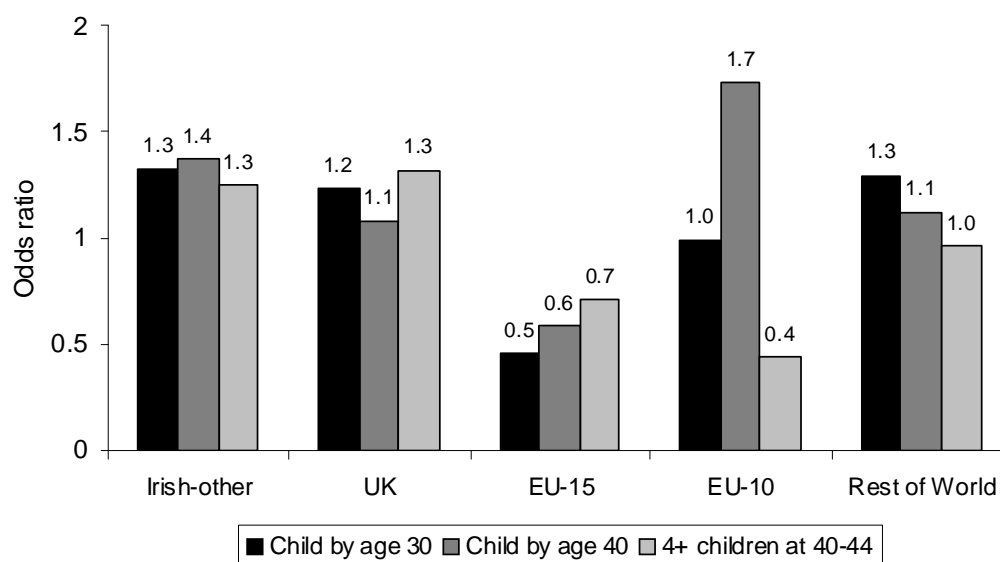
The final variable we examine in detail is ethnicity, for which there are again strong effects, as shown by Figure 5.13. Relative to those categorising themselves as White Irish, women of every other ethnicity are more likely to have children, especially at a younger age. The likelihood of large families in the Traveller community stands out, as does the very high fertility of Black women on all measures.

These effects of religion, ethnicity and nationality suggest that cultural norms are important determinants of fertility. Since many of the women not in the reference categories in Figures 5.10-5.12 are immigrants, the findings also suggest that people carry the norms of their communities with them. Because immigration to Ireland is a recent phenomenon, it is interesting to ask whether the influence of these norms will fade over time or persist into subsequent generations.

Figure 5.13: Odds Ratios for Having had a Child by Age 30 Years, a Child by Age 40 Years and Having a Family of Four or More Children at Age 40-44 Years, by Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish, Takes Value 1.0)
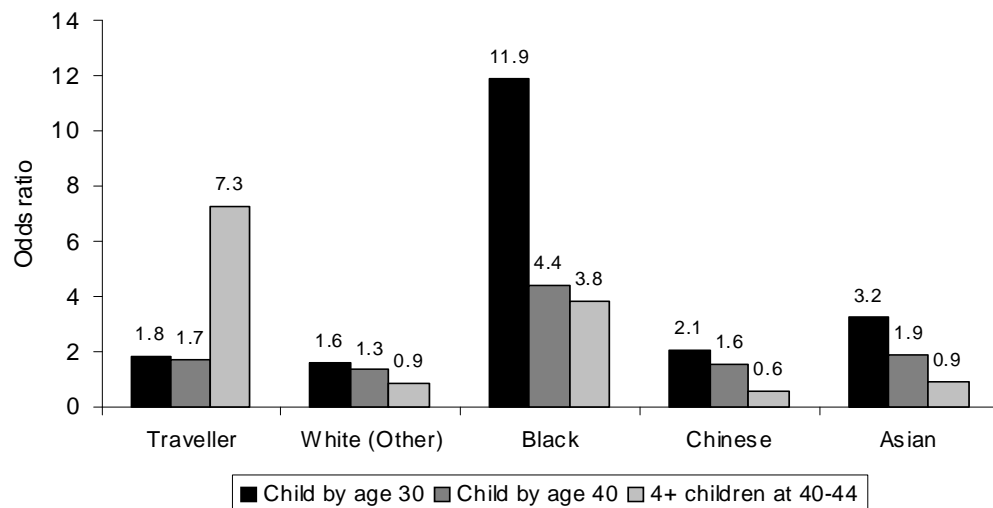
It is important to note that although these cultural effects are highly statistically significant and considerable in extent, they may have less implications than the findings for educational attainment presented in the preceding section. The reason for this is that with respect to religion, nationality and ethnicity, there is a dominant group that form a large majority. In each case, over 80 per cent of 15-59 year-old women are categorised as Catholic, Irish and White Irish respectively. Thus, variations in fertility among these groups have much less impact on the overall fertility of the population than variations by educational attainment.

One final finding of interest is that there are quite strong regional effects with respect to fertility, as depicted in Figure 5.14. The most notable of these is that on every measure, fertility in Dublin is lower than for all other regions in Ireland. The region relates to where the individual was enumerated in the Census, not to where they are originally from, so it is possible that the result is driven by the attractiveness of Dublin as a place to live for childless people, or of the other regions as places to have a family. There are also some particularly high odds ratios for certain regions with respect to early fertility and large families.
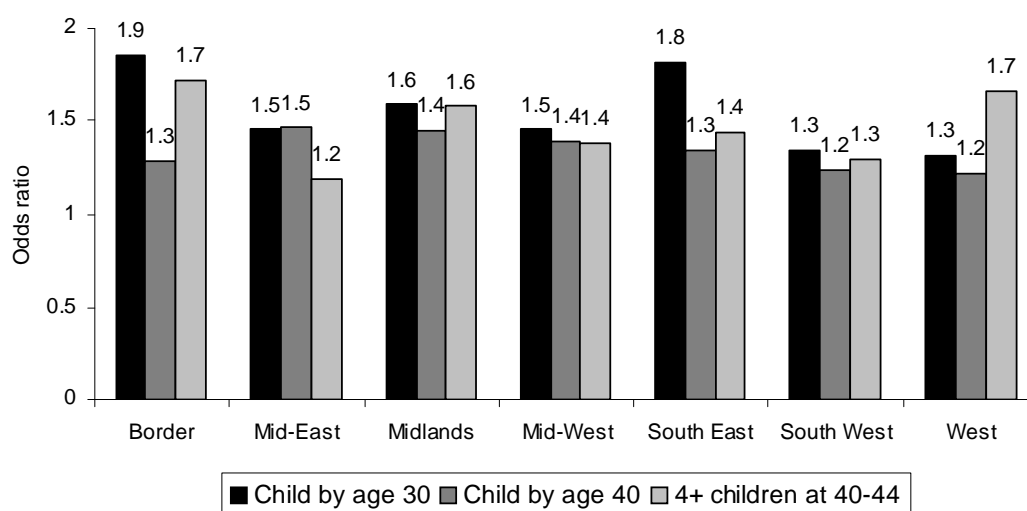
Figure 5.14: Odds Ratios for Having Had a Child by Age 30 Years, a Child by Age 40 Years and Having a Family of Four or More Children at Age 40-44 Years, by Region (Ref = Dublin, Takes Value 1.0)

Legend: ■ Child by age 30 ■ Child by age 40 □ 4+ children at 40-44

5.9 Summary

This chapter has carried out a more extensive analysis than has previously been possible of the responses to the fertility question asked of women in Census 2006. The responses were analysed by individual year of age and then by partnership, marital status and other background characteristics, employing multivariate analysis where appropriate.

The data confirm the reduction in the numbers of large families that has taken place in recent decades and the high concentration of childbirth amongst women in their late 20s and early to mid-30s. There remains a strong link between fertility and union formation. Women with children are much more likely to enter partnerships, especially marriage, with cohabitation more likely among younger women. The data are consistent with the idea that having children increases the likelihood of switching from cohabitation to marriage, although there is a significant proportion of women with one child who prefer to cohabit into their late 30s and beyond. This is an area where additional research effort could lead to significant new findings, should the fertility variable in the Census 2006 records be related to household composition and further examined by social group.

There are significant and sizeable effects relating the number of children born to a woman and the likelihood of experiencing marital breakdown. Women with one child are considerably more likely than women with none to experience marital breakdown, while the likelihood for those with more than one child is reduced. Given that a woman has had a broken marriage, she is less likely to get divorced the more children she has.

Turning to the determinants of fertility more generally, there is a very consistent and strong relationship between a woman's educational attainment and her likelihood of having children, right across the range of family sizes. Those with third-level education are inclined to delay having children, many of them until it is almost (or perhaps actually) too late to do so (Figure 5.8). A comparison of 45 year-olds and 59 year-olds suggests that this relationship may have remained consistent over recent decades, despite

the very considerable economic growth Ireland has experienced. This pattern by educational attainment may well be a greater contributing factor to the recent decline and slight recovery in the Irish birth rate, since well before the Celtic tiger was up and running there were dramatic shifts in the educational attainment of women, which appear very likely to have been a primary influence on fertility during the period.

Cultural factors too are important determinants of fertility. We find religion, nationality and ethnicity to be important factors in the number of children women have. Controlling for a range of other background characteristics, women living in Dublin are also less likely to have children.

Although much of the above contains new findings in relation to Ireland, it may well be possible to uncover much more. Combining the fertility and household composition information within the Census data would allow account to be taken of age of children and the background characteristics of partners, as well as permitting greater insights into the differences in family structures between social groups and what may be driving them.

6. LONE PARENTHOOD

6.1 Introduction

Relative to the other areas of family research examined in this study, the causes and consequences of lone parenthood in Ireland have probably been subject to a greater volume of previous research. This reflects the costs and potential effects on children's welfare associated with the increase in lone parenthood in recent decades, and the consequent interest of policymakers.

Nevertheless, trends in lone parenthood over the past two decades are not entirely clear. The *2006 Census* counts just over 98,333 lone parent families with children under 15 years of age. Compared with the figure of 36,353 for *Census 1986*, this implies that lone parenthood has increased by a factor of 2.7 in 20 years, but there are at least three reasons to believe this overstates the increase in the likelihood of becoming a lone parent. First is the possibility that lone parenthood was undercounted by Censuses in the past because of the failure to identify lone parents who lived within larger family units. As Callan *et al.* (2007) show, the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) (and its predecessor, the Labour Force Survey), which was more effective in identifying such family units, recorded up to 30 per cent more lone parent families in the mid-1990s than did the Census. By 2006 these two data sources had returned to closer agreement as a more complete method of recording family units was deployed in the Census. Second, the number of all family units has increased considerably over the period so that the increase of lone parent families as a share of total (a 2.5 times increase) is somewhat less than the 2.7 times growth in absolute numbers. Third, the different age profiles of one-parent and two-parent families means that the increase in the size of the female cohort which occurred since 1986 will have translated more quickly into the count of one-parent families than that of two-parent families. As the apex in the female population (at age 25 years in 2006) passes through the peak childbearing age over the next few years, the opposite effect may occur. Given these subtleties relating to the incidence of lone parenthood, it is not easy to be precise about the increase in the likelihood that an adult in Ireland becomes a lone parent. We might conclude that it has probably roughly doubled since 1986; perhaps a little more than doubled.

This trend has, therefore, been more than matched by the increase in the proportion of births outside marriage, which rose from just less than 10 per cent in 1986 to 32 per cent in 2005 (Punch, 2007). Mothers who are not in a relationship account for a minority of births outside marriage (Mahon *et al.*, 1998) and much of the increase reflects births to mothers in cohabiting relationships, in keeping with the increasing age profile of women who give birth outside marriage.

It has been well established that lone parenthood is a much more likely occurrence among lower socio-economic groups. Lone parents tend to have lower educational attainment, are less likely to be owner-occupiers,

tend to be members of lower social classes and are less likely to be employed (Hannan and Ó Riain, 1993; Fahey and Russell, 2001; Callan *et al.*, 2007). That said, as this chapter will show, lone parents are far from a homogeneous group.

The aim here is to use the advantages of the large cross-sectional sample of the *2006 Census Research Microdata File* to add to what is known about lone parents and the potential causes of lone parenthood. The data permit a more detailed analysis of different types of lone parenthood, including lone fatherhood, and of the extent to which lone parenthood varies with age and social background characteristics.

**6.2
Lone
Parenthood
by Individual
Year of Age**

The majority of previous research into lone parenthood has concentrated on parents who have at least one child under 15 years of age, which is the definition underpinning the figures cited above. The logic of adopting this definition is that it matches the availability of data, especially QNHS data, but it is not ideal. Being a lone parent of one or more children in their late teens may be equally as challenging as being a lone parent of younger children. Lone parents can also continue to claim welfare payments and tax credits in relation to older children. Furthermore, the children's age cut-off used to define lone parents has an impact on the apparent balance between types of lone parent, because where lone parenthood results from marital breakdown, there is a greater probability that children are older.

Figure 6.1 charts the proportion of the adult population who were lone parents in 2006 according to three definitions of lone parenthood: lone parents with at least one child under 15 years, lone parents with at least one child under 20 years and lone parents with a child of any age. Included in the definition of lone parents here are those who live with non-family members or with their parents (or extended family members). There are approximately 98,000 lone parents with at least one child under 15 years, but the figure climbs to 120,000 with the definition expanded to at least one child under 20 years. It is worth noting that this change in definition also increases the proportion of lone fathers. For the age group we focus on (15 to 59 years) there are just under 114,000 lone parents of which just under 10,200 are male, equating to 9 per cent.

Figure 6.1: Proportion of the Adult Population Who Are Lone Parents According to Three Separate Definitions
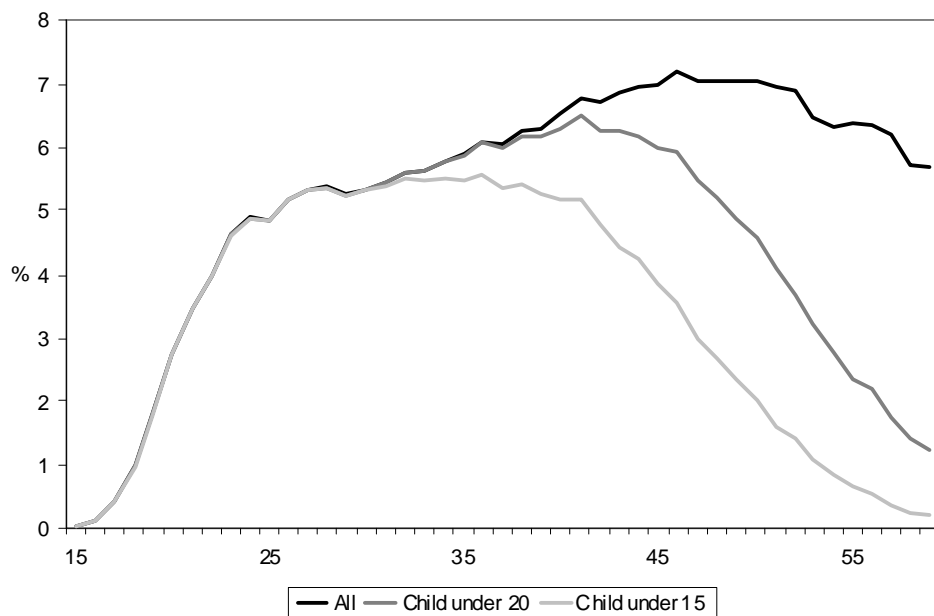
Taking these totals into consideration, the definition of lone parenthood adopted for the remainder of this chapter is that of a parent who does not live with a partner and who has a child under 20 years of age, i.e. a lone parent of at least one teenager or younger child.

Figure 6.1 is also interesting in terms simply of its shape. If lone parents were like other parents, we would expect the shape to resemble the fertility curves of the previous chapter. Instead, it rises much more steeply to a plateau by the mid-20s. The implication is that many lone parents have children at a younger age, in line with what has been noted previously (Hannan and Ó Riain, 1993; Fahey and Russell, 2001). Still, lone parenthood is a fairly constant feature of adulthood: between the ages of 26 and 48 years, 5 to 6.5 per cent of the adult population consists of lone parents. In order to gain more insight, it is helpful to break this sub-population down further into categories of lone parent.

**6.3
Types of
Lone Parent**

There is a limited number of possible routes into lone parenthood. Lone parents may have either: had a child outside of cohabitation or marriage; had a child within a cohabiting relationship that has since dissolved; had a child within a marital relationship that has since dissolved; or had a child within a cohabiting or marital relationship where their partner has died. Because the Census does not gather information on past cohabiting relationships, only marital relationships, it is possible to distinguish only three of these possibilities from the data.

Figure 6.2 decomposes the lone parent population by type of lone parent, separately for males and females. (Note the large change of scale on

Figure 6.2: Proportion of Female (Top) and Male (Bottom) Lone Parents by Category of Lone Parenthood
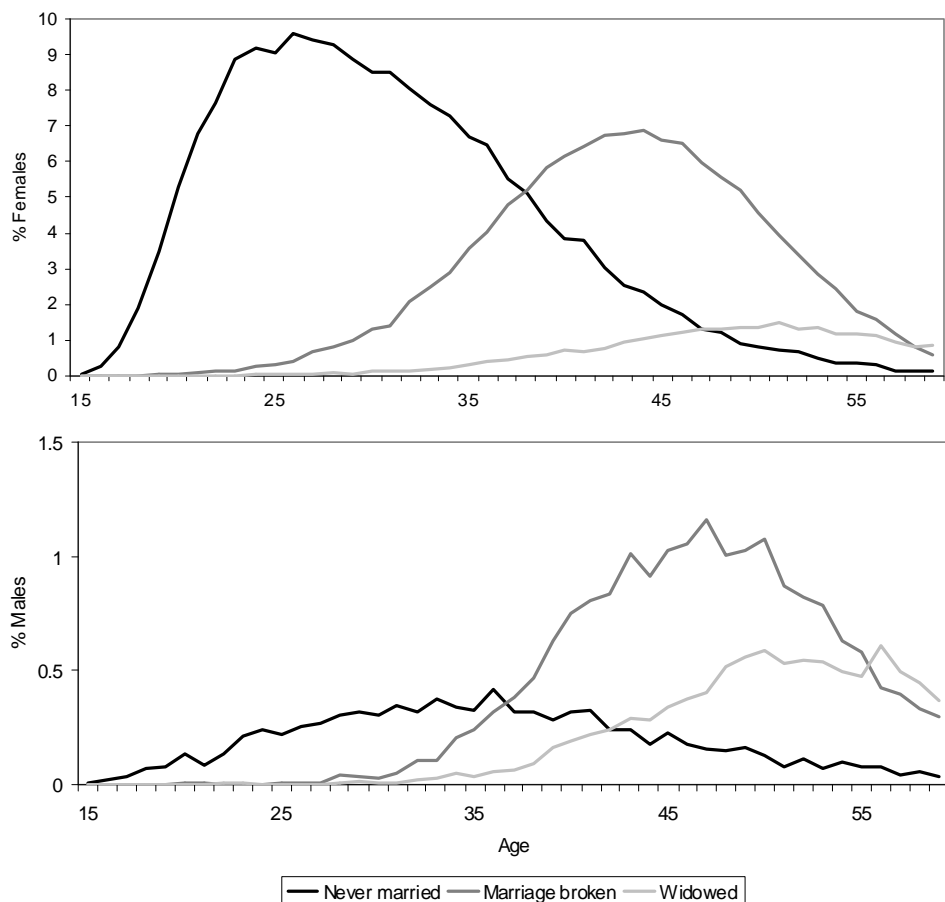
the vertical axis.) It is worth emphasising that, contrary perhaps to common perceptions of lone parents, a substantial proportion of them have been married. Overall, 35 per cent of lone parents aged 15-59 years have experienced a broken marriage and 8 per cent are widowed, leaving 57 per cent with a child aged under 20 years who have never married. For females, the equivalent figures are 34, 6 and 60 per cent respectively. For males, the proportions are radically different, at 50, 23 and 27 per cent.

Perhaps the most eye-catching element of this chart is the steepness of the rise in lone parenthood among never married young women. By age 24 years, over 9 per cent of women have a child yet have never been married and are not cohabiting. This proportion is fairly constant up to age 28 years, after which it begins to fall off. This decline results from a balance between three influences that the data cannot distinguish. First, we know there is a cohort effect. Because the incidence of lone motherhood has risen, fewer of the cohort of women in their 30s would have been lone mothers in their 20s. Second, a significant proportion of people who were lone mothers in their 20s will have entered cohabitation or marriage. Third, there will be an additional group of women who become never married lone mothers in their 30s. The retrospective fertility and relationship data necessary to disentangle these different possibilities do not exist. We analyse this group of young women further in the next section.

A significant number of lone mothers are derived from broken marriages and after age 37 years they are more common than never married lone mothers. The curve peaks at 44 years, when almost 7 per cent of women are lone mothers as a result of marital breakdown. Given the increased prevalence of marital breakdown among this cohort (see Chapter 4), it is very likely that this proportion has increased significantly over the last ten years.

The comparison with lone fatherhood is instructive. There are very few young lone fathers and the bulk of never married lone fathers are over 30 years of age. It seems quite likely that many of the never married lone fathers are the result of broken cohabiting relationships, although this is not possible to test. Given a slight age difference (on average) between husbands and wives, the curve for lone fathers arising from broken marriages has an almost identical shape to that for equivalent lone mothers, although it peaks at just 1 per cent of males, which contrasts with just under 7 per cent of females. Comparing these two curves further, we can deduce a rough estimate of the likelihood that the children of a broken marriage are living with their father, which comes out at almost exactly one-in-eight, but this is only a rough estimate, because where the mother or father of a broken marriage cohabits with someone else or remarries, they do not count as a lone parent and so cannot be factored into the analysis.

**6.4
Lone
Motherhood
and
Educational
Attainment**

The analysis of Chapter 4 on the determinants of marital breakdown could equally form the basis for an analysis of who is most likely to become one of the 35 per cent of lone parents who enter lone parenthood via broken marriage. Similarly, lone parenthood resulting from widowhood is underpinned by factors affecting early mortality. Hence, the following analysis focuses on never married lone parents and, therefore, on lone parenthood among young women.

In Appendix F we present a multivariate statistical model that aims to identify the determinants of lone motherhood. Technical statistical issues make this task less than straightforward. Our chosen model in fact estimates the determinants of lone motherhood versus childlessness for just over 68,000 never married, non-cohabiting women, aged 25 to 27 years. That is, married and cohabiting women are excluded from the analysis.[15]

A second difficulty concerns the disentanglement of the causes of lone motherhood from its consequences. The relationship between lone motherhood and educational attainment is a good example and, in any case, merits considerable discussion. Figure 6.3 presents the proportion of women who are never married lone mothers and who are lone mothers following marital breakdown within three classes of educational attainment, defined as in previous chapters. This image is compelling. One quarter of women who have only lower second-level qualifications are never married lone mothers by their mid-20s. This compares with just 3 per cent of graduates. This chart very strongly suggests that low education (and perhaps socio-economic status more generally) greatly increases the chances of becoming a lone mother.

Figure 6.3: Lone Mothers Who Have Never Married or Have Experienced Marital Breakdown, by Educational Attainment

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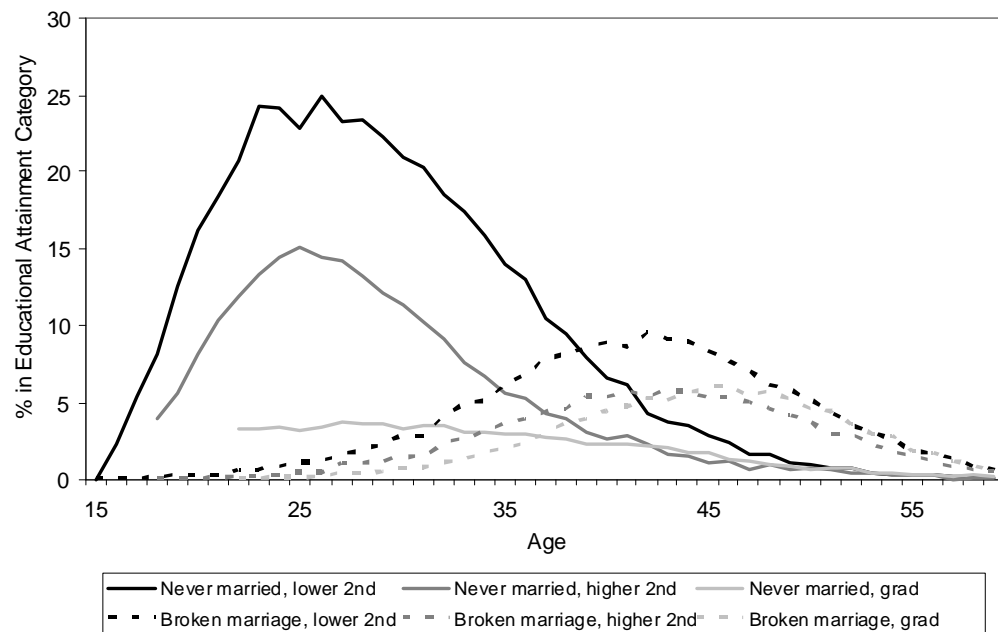
[15] The methodological problem here is that since cohabiting and married people cannot be lone mothers by definition, a model that does not exclude them confounds the event of interest (becoming a lone mother) with factors that influence whether people form partnerships irrespective of motherhood. Once people in partnerships are excluded, the odds ratios relate to the influence of background characteristics on becoming a lone mother versus staying single and childless. This is not ideal, because one route to avoid lone motherhood is to become a partner – a route not accounted for in the model. To be precise, then, the model focuses on factors relating to whether single people avoid pregnancy and childbirth.

However, the causal connections between lone parenthood and educational attainment may run in both directions. For those who became pregnant as teenagers, early parenthood may have prevented them from obtaining further qualifications that they otherwise might have achieved. This possibility may be even more significant regarding the contrast between those with higher second-level versus third-level qualifications, because the likelihood that pregnancy and motherhood overlapped with full-time education would be higher and so the potential disruption to their education would be greater. This is another area where investment in further research, aggregating and analysing the Census data at the household level, matching mothers to the precise age of children, would be useful. It is in principle possible to determine in the majority of cases the precise age of the mother when she gave birth and hence to disentangle competing hypotheses. Still, the curves for the three categories continue to diverge rapidly well beyond the age at which the large majority of women would have left full-time education, suggesting that to a considerable extent, those of lower educational attainment are more likely to become lone mothers throughout their early 20s.

To give a further idea of the strength of this relationship between lone motherhood and educational attainment, Figure 6.4 provides odds ratios by educational attainment for the likelihood of being a lone mother at age 25 to 27 years, versus being a single woman with no partner. The comparison between the groups is stark. Higher attainment reduces the odds dramatically, with the biggest effect by far occurring for graduates. A female graduate is over ten times less likely to become a lone mother than a female with lower second-level qualifications. (In an attempt to control to some degree for reverse causality, i.e. for the likelihood that becoming a lone mother when still in full-time education reduces educational attainment, the analysis was conducted separately for lone mothers only with children aged 0-4 years. The odds ratio for those with degrees increases only slightly to 0.17, so the effect remains dramatic.)

Figure 6.4: Odds Ratios for Being a Lone Mother Versus a Single Childless Female at Age 25 to 27 Years, by Educational Attainment (Ref = Higher 2nd Level, Takes Value 1.0)
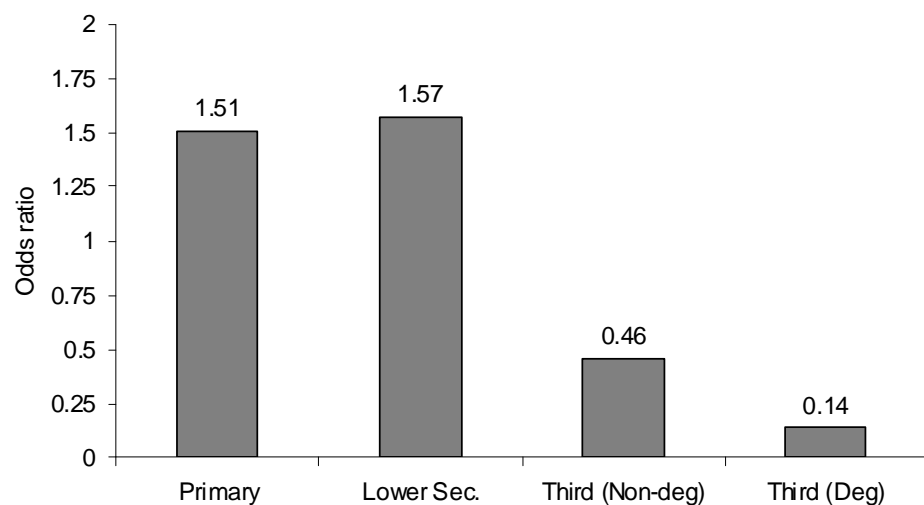
In light of this relationship, it is worth considering more carefully the chain of events that leads to lone motherhood. To become a lone mother requires: having sex; either not using contraception, using it incorrectly, or suffering a contraception failure; not resorting to the emergency contraceptive ("morning after") pill, or having it fail to prevent ongoing pregnancy; not opting for a termination abroad; not having the option of living with the father, or choosing not to live with the father; and not having thereafter formed a partnership. Rundle *et al.*, (2004) examined various links in this chain, based on a representative survey of over 3,000 18-45 year-olds. They found that 42 per cent of pregnancies involving women aged 18-25 years were crisis pregnancies, most of which had resulted from not using contraception. Those who described a pregnancy as a "crisis" pregnancy did so because it was unplanned or because it did not occur within the right kind of relationship. Rundle *et al.* also recorded a lack of knowledge with respect to fertility and emergency contraception. More than one-third of women did not know at what stage in their menstrual cycle they were most fertile and a majority of people did not know the time limit for use of emergency contraception. Those of lower educational attainment were least likely to have such knowledge. In addition to knowledge, the likelihood and outcome of a crisis pregnancy probably depend on confidence and articulacy. Young women with better education are more likely to have educated parents and social networks that may assist their decision-making, alter the norms of sexual behaviour, or simply make more options available. Furthermore, those with higher education have different future prospects and hence face different incentives, both with respect to engaging in risky behaviour and with respect to tough decisions faced following a crisis pregnancy. General survey data cannot easily disentangle these potential causes, but Figures 6.3 and 6.4 reveal the strength of the socio-economic effect they ultimately produce.

More insight can be had by examining the relationship between motherhood and partnership status. We know from the analysis in the previous chapters that women with low educational attainment are more likely both to marry and to have children at a young age. Figure 6.5 compares the partnership status of mothers with lower second-level and upper second-level education. Over the age range when women are at greatest risk of becoming never married lone parents, those with lower second-level qualifications are more likely to be married with children and to be cohabiting with children, compared to women with higher second-level education. Thus, rejection or breakdown of partnership does not appear to be a critical factor in the very high rate of lone motherhood among the lower educated group, which has significantly more partnered mothers as well as lone mothers.

Given the strength of the association between lone motherhood and educational attainment, there is a strong case for investment in further research to examine the socio-economic influences at each stage in the chain that leads to lone motherhood.

**Figure 6.5: Mothers by Partnership Status and Educational Attainment
(Lower Second-level Versus Upper Second-level)**
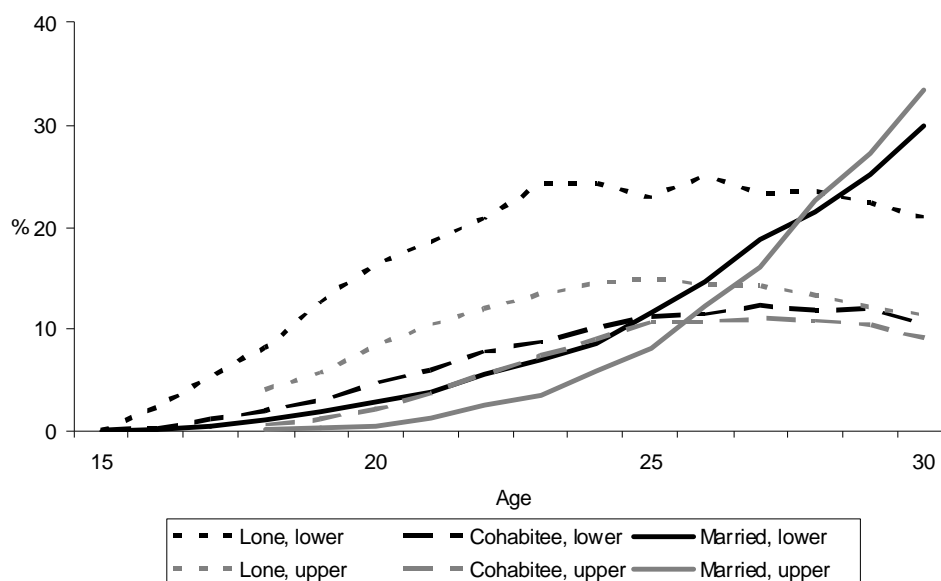
6.5
Other
Determinants
of Lone
Motherhood

Although the relationship with educational attainment is perhaps the most striking, there are other significant relationships between lone motherhood and background characteristics.

Women of Irish nationality are very much more likely to be lone mothers than women of non-Irish nationality, with the exception of UK nationals (a category that includes many people from Northern Ireland). Irish nationals are approximately six times more likely to be lone mothers than women from other EU states and over twice as likely as those from the rest of the world. This result is unsurprising, because most of the women with non-Irish and non-UK nationality are recent immigrants who would not have travelled to Ireland had they been lone parents. That is, they are a self-selecting sample.

More tellingly, there is again a significant influence of religious affiliation. Figure 6.6 presents odds ratios for being a never married lone mother at 25 to 27 years of age by religion. Controlling for a range of other background characteristics, Catholics and those affiliated to the Church of Ireland are significantly more likely to become single mothers in their mid-20s. In light of the pathway to lone motherhood, described above, this finding is arguably not surprising. Especially in the case of the Catholic church, a number of steps are made more likely if the views of the church on the matters concerned hold any sway. Obviously, it is not possible to determine whether the differences shown in Figure 6.6 are due to women from these mainstream Christian denominations being more or less likely than women from other groups to have an unplanned pregnancy, or due to the decisions they subsequently make in the event that they have one.

Figure 6.6: Odds Ratios for Being a Lone Mother Versus a Single Childless Female at Age 25 to 27 Years, by Religion (Ref = Catholic, Takes Value 1.0)
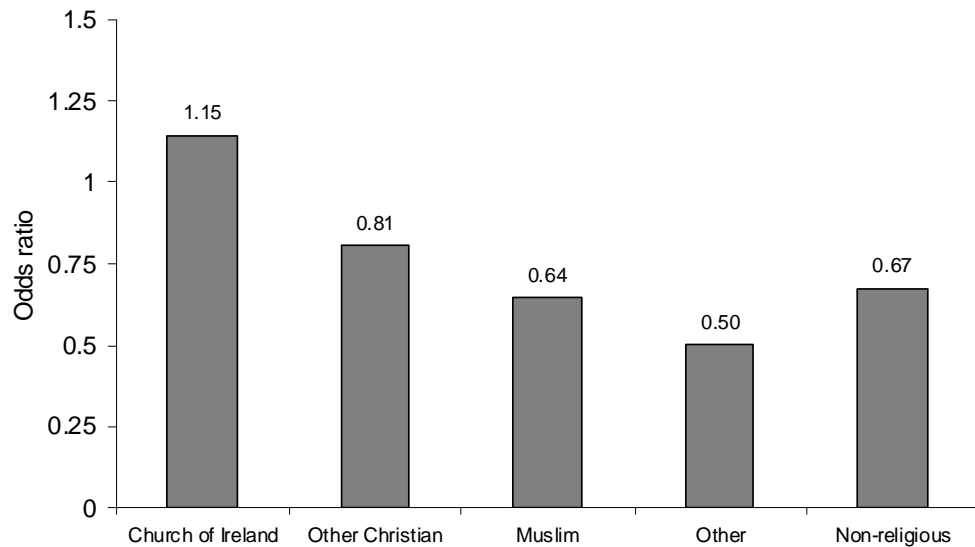
Figure 6.7 provides similar odds ratios by ethnicity, the impact of which is very pronounced. Black women are almost seven times more likely to become lone mothers than those who describe themselves as White Irish, while Chinese people are almost ten times less likely. The low odds ratio for Travellers is also noteworthy, since these figures represent the likelihood of becoming a lone mother as against a never married single woman, and so marriage at a young age does not explain the result. Overall, and as for fertility more generally, there seem to be very strong cultural effects that determine the likelihood of lone motherhood.

Figure 6.7: Odds Ratios for Being a Lone Mother Versus a Single Childless Female at Age 25 to 27 Years, by Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish, Takes Value 1.0)
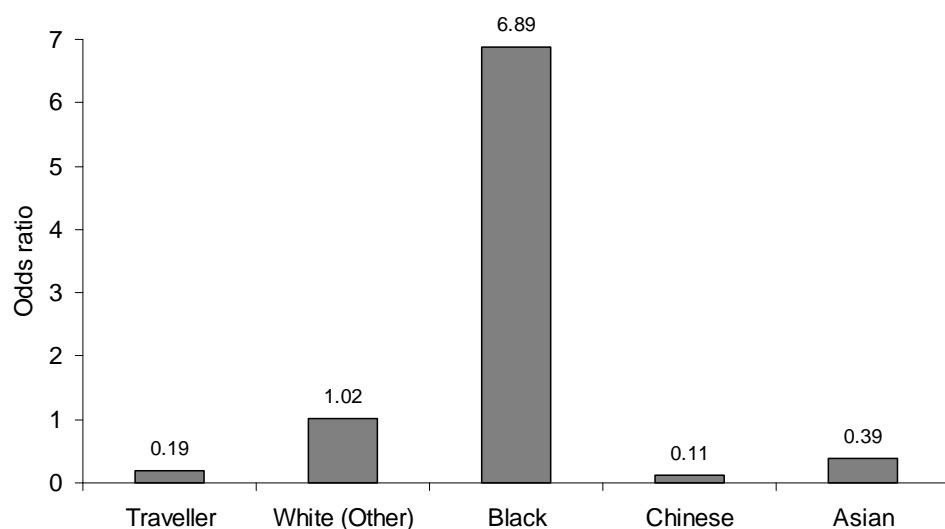
This impression is arguably confirmed by the fact that there are once again statistically significant regional effects, although these are less strong. Women in the Border and South East regions are significantly more likely to become lone mothers than women in the rest of the country, while those in the West and South West are significantly less likely.

6.6 Summary

In making use of the *CRMF 2006*, this chapter has built upon previous findings relating to lone parenthood in Ireland.

The data permit a broader and more relevant definition of lone parenthood to be employed, i.e. lone parents with at least one child still a teenager or younger. By this definition, 9 per cent of lone parents are fathers and, perhaps contrary to its image, lone parenthood is a consistent feature of adult life, such that between the ages of 26 and 48 years, the proportion of the adult population that consists of lone parents hovers between 5 and 6.5 per cent.

This consistency arises because of the overlap of two distinct groups of lone parents: younger never married lone parents, who are overwhelmingly female, and lone parents who have experienced broken marriages, some one-in-eight of whom are male. The likelihood of being a never married lone mother peaks at 26 years of age, when almost 10 per cent of the female population falls into this category. By 37 years, the greater proportion of lone parents have experienced broken marriages.

There is a very strong relationship between lone motherhood among young never married women and low educational attainment, although it is not clear which causes which. At age 26 years, one-quarter of women with only lower second-level qualifications are never married lone mothers, compared to just 3 per cent of graduates. Controlling for other background characteristics, graduates are more than ten times less likely to become a never married lone mother between 25 and 27 years of age.

Cultural background is a strong determinant of lone motherhood. Those who state their religious affiliation as Catholic or Church of Ireland are more likely than those of other religions or no religion to become never married lone mothers by their mid-20s. There are very strong effects of ethnicity, with Black women being almost seven times more likely than those classifying themselves as White Irish to become never married lone mothers, while Travellers and other non-white ethnicities are very much less likely.

Given these patterns, lone parenthood appears to be a far from simple phenomenon and, therefore, unlikely to conform to a simple explanation. There are many steps on the pathway to lone parenthood and different cultural influences may arise at each point. Yet the very strong association with low educational attainment stands out and demands further investigation.

7. CONCLUSIONS

**7.1
Introduction**

This report set out to answer a specific set of research questions relating to families in Ireland, as outlined in Section 1.2 of Chapter 1. The research questions have been answered to varying degrees and this final chapter summarises those answers in the next section. It is in the nature of research, however, that possibilities and questions are thrown up that go beyond the research questions as originally conceptualised. Results can emerge that are unexpected and findings can be characterised by broader themes that are only apparent when a number of similar research questions are considered together. A further section highlights these less anticipated outcomes. The final section draws some policy implications from the research.

**7.2
Research
Questions
Revisited**

Research questions relating to couple formation were mainly addressed in Chapters 2 and 3:

How has the likelihood of getting married changed since 1986?

While the large majority of the population still marry, the likelihood of remaining unmarried has increased significantly, certainly until later in adulthood and perhaps across the life course as a whole. Over the period, people have become less likely to marry in their 20s and more likely to do so in their 30s and older.

To what extent does the rise in cohabitation alter our understanding of trends in couple formation, as distinct from marriage?

Following the four-fold increase between 1996 and 2006, cohabitation has a distinct age-profile. Twice as many people cohabit at age 25 years as are married. Cohabitation peaks at 28 years, after which marriage becomes the more popular form of partnership. Taking cohabitation into account dampens but does not eliminate the apparent increase in singlehood that has occurred since the 1980s, especially for those aged 25-34 years.

Is there any evidence that cohabitation is emerging as a longer-term alternative to marriage?

The fall-off in the incidence of cohabitation with age occurs simultaneously with the rise in marriage, indicating that cohabitation is a prelude to marriage in most cases. However, analysis of cohabiting couples with children suggests the possibility that a minority of cohabitees may continue with cohabitation as a preferred state. The likelihood of cohabitation is related to having children, but less so for those with only one child (i.e. more recent parents), especially in their late 30s. Meanwhile, a majority of never married cohabitees aged 35-45 years have children.

Are the changes in the propensity to marry in recent decades driven by socio-economic change, specifically the increased size of the middle-class, or were the forces at work consistent across social classes?

It remains the case that those in lower social classes are more likely to marry young. But the incidence of young marriage is now very low. The main driver of changing marriage patterns is not the increased size of a middle-class that marries later, but the likelihood of marrying later across all social classes.

How does the likelihood of marriage and cohabitation vary by social group?

Although the general pattern of couple formation is similar right across society, there is some variation across social groups. The relationship between socio-economic status and partnership is less than straightforward. While those who marry young are in a small minority no matter what the level of education, that minority is largest among those with lowest qualifications. However, at later ages, those in the middle of the education range step up their entry into marriage, and to a lesser extent cohabitation, and bypass the least educated in this regard. This pattern is also true of occupational status, with those in the middle of the range (skilled manual occupations) being most likely to have partners, although higher occupations (professionals, managers etc.) catch up in their late 30s. People in especially disadvantaged categories, such as the unemployed or those with a disability (in particular an intellectual disability), are significantly less likely to be in partnerships. The exception to the negative influence of disadvantage on partnership is Travellers, who are very much more likely to be married, especially in young adulthood.

Much stronger effects of social background on couple formation arise for religion, nationality and ethnicity, particularly with regard to marriage. Non-Irish nationals are more likely to be married, especially in young adulthood, than Irish nationals – the opposite of what might be expected for migrants in general. This effect is entirely driven by higher levels of marriage among people from the ten EU accession states and those from outside Europe. Turning to ethnicity, those describing themselves as White Irish are between two and five times more likely to be unmarried across all ages. Religious affiliation is also a determinant of partnership, with Muslims and non-religious people standing out most from the mainstream. The former are considerably more likely to marry and less likely to cohabit than the majority Catholic population, while for the latter the precise opposite holds.

Is the rise in same-sex couples a phenomenon that exists across social groups, or is it being driven by certain groups?

There is a strong cohort effect in the incidence of same-sex couples, 60 per cent of which are male, such that people in their 30s and early 40s are considerably more likely to be in same-sex partnerships than the cohort now in its 50s. Same-sex couples are much more common among people with third-level education. There are also strong cultural influences on the likelihood of being in a same-sex couple. Compared with Catholics, all other religious affiliations (especially non-mainstream religions and the non-affiliated) are significantly more likely to be in same-sex partnerships; compared with the majority White Irish population, all non-whites are less likely. Same-sex couples are heavily concentrated in Dublin.

Chapter 4 examined union dissolution. The legal context for marital breakdown in Ireland is unusual in the international context, primarily due to the relatively late introduction of divorce and the array of possible *de facto* and legal separation arrangements. A further complication when analysing this issue is that a proportion of separated men appear to be averse to categorising themselves as such in surveys. Employing data for females on divorce and separation, a series of research questions concerning marital breakdown was addressed:

How does marital breakdown in Ireland compare internationally?

Ireland has a very low rate of divorce by European standards, comparable to the southern European nations of Italy, Greece and Spain. Even once separation is accounted for, which almost doubles the breakdown rate, the rate of marital breakdown in Ireland remains low.

Is there any evidence that it increased following the introduction of divorce?

Once we take account of the pre-existing upward trend in marital breakdown, the impact of the growing number of non-Irish nationals who were divorced and the balance between separation and divorce, the evidence suggests that there was no significant upward shift in marital breakdown as a result of the divorce legislation. Our estimates of the average annual rate of divorce indicate that by 2006 the increase had all but levelled off.

Is the increased risk of marital breakdown specific to a particular cohort of adults?

People currently in their 40s are at greater risk of marital breakdown than those born a decade or more earlier. This cohort effect applies to the native Irish population to a greater extent than the non-Irish population, suggesting that the older cohort of Irish people were more averse to marital breakdown.

How does the risk of breakdown vary by social group?

Marital breakdown is substantially more likely among lower socio-economic groups, as defined by educational attainment and occupation. There is one interesting exception to this, in that graduate women in their 50s (but not women in higher occupations) have a higher risk of breakdown. Non-Irish nationals are considerably more likely to have experienced marital breakdown. The same is true of non-Catholics, with the exception of Muslims, who have a much lower rate of breakdown.

How does marital breakdown vary by region?

There is a significantly higher incidence of marital breakdown in the Dublin region relative to the rest of the country, such that the likelihood of broken marriage is about one-third higher after controlling for background characteristics. To some degree, it may be that formerly married people are drawn to the city, rather than Dubliners being more prone to broken marriages. However, the regional difference was even greater in 1996, suggesting the possibility that the recent increase in marital breakdown occurred earlier in Dublin than elsewhere.

What are the main influences on the likelihood of divorce following marital breakdown?

Divorce is more likely if the woman is in a higher occupation, but is unaffected by educational attainment. This suggests that divorce may be a more attractive option for women with higher income. Non-Irish nationals are more likely to divorce once separated, especially those from the EU-10 accession states.

What is the pattern of re-partnering for those who are no longer in marriages?

Most people who have experienced marital breakdown now live alone (i.e. without a partner, but possibly with children or others), although the proportion of women in this situation is higher than the equivalent proportion of men. Of those who have moved in with a new partner, most cohabit, although remarriage is almost as common among those aged over 50 years.

Questions involving childbearing were addressed in Chapter 5, making use of the reintroduced fertility question in *Census 2006*:

How does the pattern of fertility change by age?

Although the majority of women now delay childbirth beyond 30 years, there is a dramatic increase in the likelihood of giving birth around this age, such that between 29 and 35 years, fully half of childless women have children. The likelihood that a childless women will have a first child decreases very rapidly thereafter.

Is there also evidence of change by cohort?

Comparing 45 year-olds with 59 year-olds in 2006, the most telling change is with respect to large families. The proportion of women having four or more children fell from 41 per cent to 20 per cent between these two cohorts, born just 14 years apart. Two or three children is now the norm, although childlessness increased from 13 per cent to 17 per cent between these cohorts.

How does fertility relate to union formation?

There is a very strong relationship between having children and partnership status, particularly with respect to marriage. The majority of childless women are unmarried, although they appear no less likely to cohabit. This suggests a strong link between the desire to have children and marriage as the preferred form of partnership for doing so. However, there is a significant proportion of women who continue to cohabit after having children, especially if they have only one child. It may well be that some couples now prioritise having a first child above getting married, while an increasing proportion shun marriage altogether irrespective of having children.

Is there a relationship between fertility and marital breakdown?

One striking finding is that marital breakdown is considerably more common among married couples with one child than among those with none. Once a married couple has two children, marital breakdown becomes less common. This finding holds while simultaneously controlling for an extensive range of background characteristics. Our favoured explanation is

that having a first child puts strain on the relationship, while having more children is a sign that those strains were overcome. Once marital breakdown has occurred, the likelihood of divorce is greater where fewer children are involved.

How does fertility vary by social background characteristics?

There are very strong relationships between fertility and a range of background characteristics, perhaps most notably educational attainment. People with third-level education delay having children. Over half of women graduates are childless at 32 years of age. For women with lower second-level qualifications or less, the equivalent proportion is less than one-quarter. Although women with higher education do some catching up, they never obtain the same fertility levels as those with lower educational attainment. A comparison of 59 and 45 year-olds, meanwhile, shows that the relationship between fertility and educational attainment did not change appreciably between these cohorts. Hence, the large decline in fertility between the 1970s and 1990s does not appear to have been subject to a strong socio-economic skew, but occurred across the socio-economic spectrum, at least as measured by educational attainment. It should be noted, however, that the proportion of women in the lower educational groups has changed radically in recent years, such that fully 57 per cent of women aged 30 years in 2006 had a third-level qualification, compared with 27 per cent of 50 year-olds.

Fertility also varies by religion, nationality, ethnicity and region. Muslims have significantly more children than Catholics, while non-religious people have fewer. Non-Irish nationals tend to have higher fertility than Irish nationals, with the exception of women from the old EU-15 countries, who have markedly lower fertility. Non-whites and especially those who state their ethnicity as Black have particularly high fertility rates. Lastly, childlessness is much more common among women living in Dublin.

The final chapter of results, Chapter 6, concerned lone parenthood, which was defined as living without a partner with at least one child aged under 20 years. The *CRMF 2006* was used to answer the following:

What are the different categories of lone parent?

Broadly speaking, there are three types of lone parent: never married, those who have experienced marital breakdown and widowed. While the first of these categories is the most common, at 57 per cent of lone parents aged 15 to 59 years, the remaining two categories account for 35 and 8 per cent respectively. The age profiles of these types of lone parent are very different. Never married lone parents are concentrated in the 20s and early 30s, but are less common than lone parents resulting from marital breakdown by age 38 years, with the latter group reaching a peak in the early 40s.

How do lone fathers differ from lone mothers?

Between age 24 and 28 years, over 9 per cent of women are never married lone mothers. Contrastingly, there are very few never married lone fathers and very few lone fathers of any description under 30 years. The likelihood of being a lone father through marital breakdown follows a very similar pattern by age to that of becoming a lone mother by the same route. From

the relative incidence of each, we estimate the likelihood that the children of a broken marriage live with their father to be one-in-eight.

How does the likelihood of lone motherhood among never married young women relate to educational attainment?

The relationship between educational attainment and the likelihood of becoming a lone mother is extremely strong. One quarter of women with lower second-level qualifications are never married lone mothers by their mid-20s, compared to just 3 per cent of women with a third-level qualification. This partly reflects the effect that motherhood has on the likelihood of completing educational qualifications, as well as the impact of low education on the likelihood of becoming a lone mother.

What are the other determinants of this type of lone motherhood?

The likelihood of becoming a never married lone mother varies significantly by religious affiliation. Women who describe themselves as Catholic or Church of Ireland are approximately half as likely again to become never married lone mothers by their mid-20s as members of minority religions and non-religious people. There are also strong effects of ethnicity. Asian and Chinese people are much less likely to become never married lone mothers than those who state that they are White Irish, while those describing themselves as Black people are some seven times more likely.

7.3 Themes

The previous section summarises findings specific to the research questions we set out to answer. In addition to these findings, there are some broad themes that emerge when the results are considered as a whole.

One such theme is that certain trends in family structure appear to occur fairly evenly across social groups, while others are driven more by particular sections of society. For example, although there are some statistically significant differences between social groups, the rise of cohabitation is remarkably consistent across them – to a much greater degree than marriage, which is more strongly related to socio-economic status, religious affiliation, ethnicity, nationality and region. This might be considered quite surprising given the rapidity of the four-fold increase in cohabitation, which has occurred in a single decade. This transformation to a situation where cohabitation is a normal prelude to marriage (and perhaps for some a more permanent form of partnership) appears to have swept all sections of society along with it. This can be contrasted with the strong increases in two other family types: same-sex couples and lone parents. In these cases, the likelihood of being in both family structures is strongly related to socio-economic circumstances and other background characteristics.

A second theme to emerge is the degree to which key periods in the life course determine family structure. This is at its most striking in some of the charts that present the incidence of a particular family type by single year of age, where the data reveal steep curves that suggest powerful forces of change at specific ages. Particular instances of this include: the sharp increase in the likelihood of living with a partner after age 25, the increase in the likelihood of marital breakdown in the late 30s, the steepness of the fertility curve at age 30 years for women with higher educational attainment, and the dramatic rise in lone parenthood during the early 20s among women of lower educational attainment. Events that occur during

each of these relatively short sections of the life course appear to have a powerful influence on subsequent family life.

A further aspect of the family life course features across both partnership and childbearing: delay. Relative to their parents' generation, although less so relative to earlier generations, members of the present cohort of adults have chosen to delay the process of family formation and childbearing, especially among the increasing proportion who have third-level education. This delay may well increase the risk of failing to obtain fertility ideals. Although it is hard to disentangle various causal links using individual-level cross-sectional data, an associated phenomenon suggested by the relationship between fertility and cohabitation (as detailed, for example, in Figures 2.5 and 5.5) may be that some couples in their 30s prioritise having children over getting married. A related hypothesis is whether there are links between late family formation, childbirth and the risk of relationship breakdown, but this cannot be assessed without data that contains information on relationship history.

The lack of longitudinal data on family structures is a limiting factor more generally, but does not entirely prevent us from identifying some cohort effects, where the key factor is not age but the generation to which people belong. For the most part, we cannot tell from the age profile of a given family type whether it approximates the current family life course or shows differences in family structures between subsequent generations. Nevertheless, in some cases the incidence of a particular family type is higher among the younger cohort and strongly signals lasting change. Marital breakdown is one such example. It is clear that the cohort currently in its 40s has a higher risk of marital breakdown than the cohort just ten to fifteen years older. Similarly, comparing the same two cohorts, there has been a reduction in typical family size, such that the younger cohort has a two to three child norm. Likewise, the higher incidence of same-sex couples among the generation currently in its 30s is very likely to mean that this generation will have a higher proportion of same-sex couples throughout adult life. Assuming that there is no decline in same-sex couples in the cohort that follows, we can therefore anticipate a continuing steep increase in the number of same-sex couples. The higher incidences of marital breakdown and same-sex couples in younger cohorts makes inferring a cohort effect relatively straightforward. But in cases where, rather than surpassing the previous generation, the next one has much catching up to do, it is harder to be sure that a cohort effect is there. Consider the curves for fertility by individual year of age and educational attainment. When the increased proportion of younger women with higher educational attainment is taken into account, it seems a good bet that despite the recent increase in the birth rate in Ireland, the longer term trend is more likely to be downwards. But the inference of a cohort effect in this case is less solid than in the examples above.

One of the most consistent and perhaps more surprising findings of the present report relates to the prominence of cultural influences. Religion, nationality and ethnicity are strong determinants of partnership and of fertility. In most cases, these cultural background characteristics have a stronger association with family structure than educational attainment and occupation – the two main socio-economic indicators used throughout the analysis. This finding needs to be contextualised, however, because despite the recent influx of immigrants from many world regions, Ireland's population remains relatively culturally homogeneous. Of the 15-59 year

age group, almost 85 per cent describe themselves as Catholic, 84 per cent are Irish nationals and 84 per cent state their ethnicity as White Irish, with very extensive overlap between these groups. Thus, although cultural influences on family structures are very strong, they only account for a limited amount of the variation in family types across the population as a whole. Socio-economic influences, which are in many cases weaker determinants of family structure, still account for more of the variation across the population, because there is greater socio-economic variation than cultural variation among people in Ireland. Still, the power of cultural influences is important to note if the aim is to understand what determines family structures. Furthermore, it suggests that immigrant communities in Ireland have, at least in 2006, largely retained patterns of family formation and fertility associated with their place of origin. Culture is not static, however, and one of the notable findings across the analysis as a whole is the different behaviour of non-religious people, who relative to the mainstream Catholic population, cohabit more, marry less, have greater risk of marital breakdown, lower risk of (never married) lone motherhood and tend to have fewer children overall. In addition to cultural norms associated with membership of groups, belief systems may matter too.

Arguably, stressing the importance of cultural influences in people's decision-making is not very intellectually fashionable. There is probably a greater tendency to seek explanations for changes in the family that prioritise the economic incentives individuals face. Economic incentives no doubt matter, but many of the findings of this report are not easily explained by them. It is interesting to note how many of the trends in family structure predated and survived the economic boom, which is so frequently the chief suspect when people seek to identify the cause of a social change. Hence, many of the forces driving the increases in lone parenthood and marital breakdown, or the declines and subsequent recoveries in marriage and fertility, must also predate the Celtic tiger. The rise in cohabitation is a more recent phenomenon in Ireland, but it too seems to ignore simple economic logic, since one would predict higher levels of cohabitation in Dublin, where housing is more expensive and rental accommodation more prevalent – a prediction that does not hold. Even where there are strong effects of socio-economic status, as for fertility and lone parenthood, it is not clear that economic opportunity is the crucial factor determining family structures, although it doubtless plays a part.

The primary purpose of this report is not to relate our findings to academic theories, but to give a useful quantitative account of the dynamics of family structures in Ireland. Yet many of our findings appear more explicable in terms of the influence of social networks, identity and norms than narrowly defined economic incentives.

7.4
Policy
Implications

As stated in Chapter 1, it is not the goal of the present exercise to resolve political debates over family structures. The aim is, instead, to inform them. The following (non-exhaustive) list of policy implications does not, therefore, constitute recommendations or definitive statements regarding policy, but instead seeks to interpret our findings as they appear most relevant to policy. Furthermore, we would hope the findings are of use beyond high-level policymaking, offering some insights into social change that may be useful for practitioners and service providers in various fields.

Socio-economic Impact of Expenditure Cuts

The economic crisis has produced extreme pressure on Ireland's public finances and substantial cuts in public expenditure are likely. At the time of writing, it is unclear precisely where the budgetary axe will fall, but expenditures directed at families with children are such a large element of total expenditure that they are unlikely to escape reduction. Child Benefit, which accounted for €2.45 billion expenditure in 2008, is the largest of these (after old age pensions) and the second largest scheme in the social welfare system. Payments for lone parents (the One Parent Family Payment) are also large, amounting to €1.07 billion in 2008. Furthermore, the *Special Group on Public Service Number and Expenditure Programmes* ("An Bord Snip Nua") has proposed the discontinuation of a number of services designed to support families, including mediation services. It has not been our purpose in this report to examine the economic vulnerability of families, to assess the effectiveness of welfare schemes for families in reducing their risk of poverty, to evaluate the effectiveness of family support programmes, or to examine who benefits from the various policy interventions targeted according to family structure or perceived vulnerability. Our findings do give an indication, however, of which sections of society are most in *need* of support. While at various points we have stressed that factors other than socio-economics contribute very significantly to family structures, the strength of such influences is nevertheless plain. Those in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be lone parents, more likely to marry young, more likely to experience marital breakdown, less likely to formalise the post-breakdown situation through formal divorce proceedings and more likely to have families with three or more children. Whatever cuts may or may not be imposed on family-related payments and services, therefore, it is important that the redistributive weighting of those supports in favour of the less well-off is at least preserved and preferably enhanced.

Incentives for Marriage

There is a history of policy debate surrounding financial incentives and marriage, especially with respect to taxation (Callan, 2006). Yet our findings suggest that the potential for policy to alter trends in family structures and types through financial incentives is limited. The growth in cohabitation has not only been rapid, but is spread surprisingly evenly across social groups, such that a period of cohabitation prior to marriage appears to have become a norm. Furthermore, a significant proportion of couples are choosing to prioritise having children over getting married, some of whom may not be intending to marry at all. These developments, which constitute a major historical departure, have occurred despite improvements in the relative taxation position of married couples relative to cohabiting couples (the removal in 1980 of the so-called "marriage penalty") and an ongoing taxation advantage to being married over cohabiting (notwithstanding the partial move towards individualisation of income tax that occurred in

2000). In short, it seems that the forces at work are more social than economic and, therefore, likely to be relatively unresponsive to financial incentives.

Rights and Duties of Unmarried Partners

In summer 2009 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published the Civil Partnership Bill. The proposed legislation provides a scheme for the registration of same-sex couples, which accords rights in relation to property, finances, succession, taxation, social welfare and pensions. With respect to cohabiting couples (opposite-sex and same-sex), the Bill also proposes to recognise cohabitant agreements and to provide a redress scheme for cohabitants living together for more than three years (or two years where there is a child of the relationship). Our findings suggest that the number of cohabiting couples (both opposite-sex and same-sex) is likely to continue to rise. Thus, this legislation, assuming it is enacted, will increase the options and protections afforded to a large number of people in long-term non-marital relationships.

The degree of enforceable rights and duties will depend, however, on active decisions made by the couples involved. For instance, the Bill is 'presumptive', in that cohabiting couples wishing to avoid some of its obligations must actively opt out from them. Concerns about people's understanding of their own legal situation led the Law Reform Commission (2006) report on cohabitation, which informed the design of the policy, to recommend that legislation be preceded by a public awareness campaign involving the Family Support Agency. Although our findings are not relevant to the mechanism employed to provide public information, they do suggest a need for it. In addition to concluding that the number of cohabitees is likely to rise further, our analysis suggests that cohabitation occurs across the social spectrum and that an increasing number of children are likely to be born into cohabiting relationships. Moreover, although we cannot directly assess the incidence of lone parenthood resulting from the breakdown of cohabiting relationships, our finding that the likelihood of marital breakdown increases following the birth of a first child is likely also to apply to cohabiting relationships. Hence, even with the greater automatic protections offered by the proposed legislation, the well-being of the rapidly rising number of adults and children living in non-marital families will be affected by partnership decisions taken in an increasingly complex legal context. It is very likely that well-being will be improved if such decisions are well informed.

Support for First-time Parents

The finding of increased risk of marital breakdown for first-time parents is one of the more striking results reported here, especially in respect of the size of the increased risk (the odds of marital breakdown for a married women with one child are between 25 and 30 per cent higher than a married woman with no children and significantly higher again than a woman with two children). We cannot know whether policy interventions to support first-time parents have the capacity to counter this increased risk, but it is something policymakers might wish to take into account.

Given that the most likely explanation surrounds the strain that having a first baby places on relationships, the finding probably strengthens the case for statutory paternity leave. At present, not all fathers are entitled to parental leave, which is unpaid and can in any case be postponed by

employers. If the cost implications of introducing paternity leave are a concern, then the finding offers a potential justification for introducing it for first-time fathers (or first children in a family) only.

Existing policy interventions that aim to support parents do not discriminate between first-time parents and parents of more than one child, except in so far as that rate of child benefit per child increases for families with three or more children – an anti-poverty measure targeted at large families. Maternity leave (26 weeks paid; 16 unpaid) and parental leave (14 weeks unpaid) entitlements are the same for each child. Again, the present findings may offer some justification for greater generosity towards parents in relation to first children or, at a time when public supports for families are more likely to be reduced than increased, greater preservation of financial support in relation to first children.

Lone Motherhood

Another striking finding of the present analysis is the relationship between educational attainment and lone parenthood among young never-married women. Although further research is required to uncover more precisely the causal nature of the relationship, the strength of the association is quite arresting (Figures 6.3 and 6.4). Combining this finding with other published research (e.g. Rundle *et al.*, 2004), it is clear that women with lower educational attainment face a very much higher risk of becoming lone mothers following crisis pregnancy, and that there are significant deficits in the knowledge of this group regarding sexual matters. The potential benefits of interventions to improve knowledge about sex and reproduction (and perhaps the ability to discuss such matters openly) among this social group could be considerable.

Fertility

The recent rise in the birth rate and the total fertility rate would seem, at first glance, to indicate that concerns surrounding low fertility in Ireland are slight, at least for the time being. On the other hand, the very rapid move to a situation where the majority of women approaching peak childbearing age have a third-level qualification, combined with the pattern of fertility by educational attainment revealed in Chapter 5, suggests that the recent rebound in Irish fertility, which may largely be due to a "tempo" effect of delayed fertility, is unlikely to continue for long. Whether government has any business encouraging people to have more children is a lively public debate in many parts of Europe, but barely features in Irish policy discussion. However, given the likelihood of low fertility emerging as a political issue in the not too distant future, there is a good case for beginning such a debate. One empirical finding to note in this context is that there is an emerging shortfall between the actual number of children people have and the number of children they consider to be ideal, with the largest gap occurring among the better educated (Fahey, 2007). That is, on average, people do not seem to have as many children as they wish. From an uncompromising rational-choice perspective, it might be argued that children are simply another thing that people tend to want more of and that the trade-off individuals reach between children and career merely reflects people's opportunities and priorities, offering no grounds for state inducements in either direction. Yet the implications of individual fertility decisions have implications for society as a whole and, furthermore, the terms of that trade-off are necessarily set by a policy environment, in particular with respect to work-life balance and workplace rights.

Meanwhile, Ireland is in the advantageous position of being able to consider this issue while its fertility rate is still comparatively high, unlike many other European countries.

7.5 Further Research

The access to the *2006 CRMF* granted to facilitate this study has permitted us to tackle research questions that it was previously not possible to answer quantitatively. We have been able to build multivariate models to examine the determinants of couple formation (including same-sex couples), marital breakdown, fertility and lone parenthood. Nevertheless, there is very much more that can be achieved using this same data source. All of the results reported here are based on individual-level variables. Investing the research time to transform the data and conduct investigations at the household level would permit a further range of research questions to be addressed.

Comparing background characteristics within partnerships, it is possible to look at the extent to which couple formation crosses boundaries between social groups. Of particular interest is the large number of recent immigrants to Ireland. To what degree have couples formed between immigrants and the native Irish population? Aggregation of the data to the household level would allow this question to be addressed, including an analysis by recency of arrival and across different immigrant groups. Other social boundaries of interest include those defining religious and socio-economic groups.

One of the major advantages of aggregating to the household level is the possibility of including in the analysis more detailed information on children. This would allow important research questions to be addressed regarding fertility, marital breakdown, lone parenthood and step-relationships. On fertility, it is in principle possible to reconstruct a fertility history for women within a given age range and, therefore, to model the determinants of fertility in a much more sophisticated way than was possible in the present report. Research questions would include: What are the implications of delayed fertility for the number and age structure of children? How does this vary by social group? How important are the father's characteristics? What is the relationship between children's age and the likelihood of cohabitation versus marriage? Regarding marital breakdown, international research suggests a possible relationship between the gender and age structure of children and the likelihood of marital breakdown (Wu and Hart, 2002). Is this the case in Ireland? And how does the number and age structure of children affect likely living arrangements after marital breakdown? On lone parents more generally, specific ages for children would allow a more revealing analysis of socio-economic influences on the likelihood of lone motherhood among young women, as well as a more detailed analysis of the differences between lone motherhood and lone fatherhood. Lastly, while it was not possible in the present report to analyse step-relations, if the data is aggregated to the household level, relevant questions can be answered. How does step-parenthood vary by age of parents and children? What are the social correlates of step-parents?

It is in the nature of research that interesting or important questions arise that were not envisaged at the beginning of the exercise. In addition to the list of possibilities just raised, there would doubtless be more avenues of inquiry that would open up if the *CRMF* were to be analysed at the

household level. The return on this investment in research time might well be considerable.

Non-availability of data has hindered past attempts to study family structure in Ireland. Access to the *CRMF* is of great benefit in this regard, but it is not the only potential new source. It is anticipated that the first wave of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (NLSCI) will be available before the end of 2009. This will provide very detailed information on a representative sample of families of nine year-olds, due to be followed up at age 13 years. Data from a sample of nine month-olds, to be followed up at age 3 years, will also be available in the near future. The NLSCI project offers an unprecedented opportunity to relate family structures to various aspects of the lives of Ireland's children, as well as to examine the factors influencing the changing structures of families. Lastly, the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) will also provide longitudinal data on people aged over 50 years. These data-sources offer the possibility to test a number of hypotheses raised in the present report, especially regarding cohort and age effects in union formation, marital breakdown and fertility.

After many years when there has been insufficient data to address some of the more interesting family research questions, the present time offers greater opportunities for quantitative investigation. It should be possible to build considerably on the findings of the present report in the not too distant future, and hence to understand more about family dynamics and family types in Ireland.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Marriage and Singlehood by Social Class, 1986-2006

Table A1: Ever-Married 25-29 Year-old Men by Social Group (Per Cent) 1986-2006

	1986	1996	2006
Farmers	28.7	18.6	9.2
Other agricultural	44.8	22.5	16.0
Higher professionals	35.5	15.1	11.2
Lower professionals	41.8	20.2	10.9
Employers and managers	56.9	31.3	15.1
Own account workers	52.6	43.3	15.9
Non-manual workers	53.3	26.6	14.0
Skilled manual workers	58.9	32.7	18.2
Semi-skilled manual workers	55.6	28.4	18.2
Unskilled manual workers	50.1	26.9	18.6
Unknown	26.8	15.9	17.4)
Total % ever-married	49.95	26.8	15.7
N	64,476	1,704	1,501
Spearman's rho (to 86)		0.84**	0.61
Coefficient of variation[15]	20.75	30.61	22.67

** $p < 0.05$.
Source: Census of Population 1986, COPSAR 1996 and 2006.

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[15] The calculation of the coefficient of var iation and rank correlation exclude the unknown class category.

Table A2: Males by Socio-economic Group (Per Cent) and Age-Cohort 1986-2006

20-24 year olds	1986	1996	2006
Farmers	7.17	2.4	1.5
Other agricultural	3.65	4.2	0.9
Higher professionals	3.45	4.0	4.4
Lower professionals	3.27	5.8	5.9
Employers and managers	3.65	6.4	7.7
Own account workers	2.38	2.6	2.2
Non-manual workers	26.93	16.5	16.7
Skilled manual workers	27.07	21.9	23.8
Semi-skilled manual workers	6.75	12.5	10.7
Unskilled manual workers	6.93	9.5	5.4
Unknown	8.74	14.4	20.9
N	144,112	7,475	8,573
25-29 year olds			
Farmers	7.45	4.4	1.6
Other agricultural	3.52	3.9	0.8
Higher professionals	5.34	7.3	8.2
Lower professionals	4.96	8.0	8.8
Employers and managers	4.99	9.7	10.8
Own account workers	2.93	4.6	3.9
Non-manual workers	25.99	15.3	15.6
Skilled manual workers	26.51	21.0	21.2
Semi-skilled manual workers	6.00	11.7	10.7
Unskilled manual workers	8.29	8.1	5.2
Unknown	4.02	6.0	13.3
N	129,086	6,349	9,562
30 to 34 year olds			
Farmers	8.55	6.9	2.7
Other agricultural	3.16	3.0	0.8
Higher professionals	5.9	6.4	9.6
Lower professionals	5.6	6.3	9.6
Employers and managers	7.37	12.9	16.3
Own account workers	2.97	6.7	5.8
Non-manual workers	23.57	14.8	11.3
Skilled manual workers	25.97	20.1	17.3
Semi-skilled manual workers	5.4	10.3	10.8
Unskilled manual workers	8.2	8.1	4.5
Unknown	3.3	4.6	11.1
N	122,198	6,344	8,860
45-49 year olds			
Farmers	15.71	10.2	6.4
Other agricultural	3.19	2.4	0.9
Higher professionals	4.73	5.8	5.8
Lower professionals	3.93	6.7	7.0
Employers and managers	9.48	14.8	19.0
Own account workers	2.88	8.5	9.4
Non-manual workers	21.74	10.2	9.2
Skilled manual workers	20.54	18.5	15.3
Semi-skilled manual workers	4.94	9.3	11.0
Unskilled manual workers	8.18	8.4	5.1
Unknown	4.68	5.2	11.1
N	82,769	5,698	6,829

Table A2 Continued:

50-54 year olds	1986	1996	2006
Farmers	19.35	12.5	7.3
Other agricultural	3.49	2.0	1.0
Higher professionals	4.59	5.8	6.2
Lower professionals	3.38	5.9	7.6
Employers and managers	8.58	15.4	18.0
Own account workers	2.77	7.8	8.9
Non-manual workers	20.69	9.6	9.6
Skilled manual workers	18.83	16.1	14.7
Semi-skilled manual workers	4.73	10.6	9.8
Unskilled manual workers	8.05	8.4	5.2
Unknown	5.53	6.0	11.8
N	75,156	4,830	6,092
55 to 59 year olds			
Farmers	23.42	15.0	8.8
Other agricultural	3.73	2.4	1.0
Higher professionals	4.06	4.5	5.9
Lower professionals	2.82	5.3	7.6
Employers and managers	7.48	12.0	15.4
Own account workers	2.49	6.8	8.5
Non-manual workers	19.54	9.4	9.0
Skilled manual workers	16.29	16.0	14.6
Semi-skilled manual workers	4.55	11.4	10.1
Unskilled manual workers	8.43	9.1	4.9
Unknown	7.19	8.3	14.3
N	70,514	4,036	5,707

Source: Census of Population 1986, COPSAR 1996 and 2006.

Table A3: Never-Married Males by Social Group (Per Cent) and Age Cohort 1986-2006

45-54 year olds	1986	1996	2006
Farmers	32.94	24.9	27.4
Other agricultural	38.15	37.5	27.9
Higher professionals	21.40	15.2	13.8
Lower professionals	9.64	13.1	14.0
Employers and managers	4.27	5.3	6.8
Own account workers	5.63	9.8	14.0
Non-manual workers	12.62	12.8	17.0
Skilled manual workers	10.52	10.8	15.2
Semi-skilled manual workers	16.33	15.6	19.2
Unskilled manual workers	30.60	28.2	27.1
Unknown	49.34	43.8	39.7
Total % never-married	18.88	16.2	18.2
N	15,625	924	1,259
Spearman's rho (to 86)		0.94**	0.81*
Coefficient of variation	66.01	56.81	38.9
50-54 year olds			
Farmers	36.16	27.9	26.4
Other agricultural	39.34	32.0	23.9
Higher professionals	26.79	16.1	12.7
Lower professionals	8.98	9.2	13.7
Employers and managers	4.03	3.8	4.9
Own account workers	5.62	8.2	8.8
Non-manual workers	13.37	10.6	12.5
Skilled manual workers	11.92	8.7	13.5
Semi-skilled manual workers	16.84	14.1	14.1
Unskilled manual workers	32.07	25.0	21.9
Unknown	51.95	39.6	36.8
Total % never-married	21.67	15.2	15.8
N	16,288	734	962
Spearman's rho (to 86)		0.99**	0.84**
Coefficient of variation	66.82	61.25	44.42
55-59 year olds			
Farmers	37.83	29.0	23.4
Other agricultural	42.40	43.2	29.3
Higher professionals	30.60	16.0	12.8
Lower professionals	9.77	10.8	10.3
Employers and managers	4.87	3.5	5.9
Own account workers	6.96	8.0	7.0
Non-manual workers	14.61	7.9	9.2
Skilled manual workers	13.04	10.7	9.4
Semi-skilled manual workers	16.45	12.4	14.3
Unskilled manual workers	32.53	25.7	25.0
Unknown	51.92	33.8	30.2
% never-married	24.7	16.6	14.6
N	17,415	670	832
Spearman's rho (to 86)		0.91**	0.93**
Coefficient of variation	65.26	73.32	56.27

* P<0.01, **P<0.05

Source: Census of Population 1986, COPSAR 1996 and 2006.-

Appendix B: Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of First Partnership (Ref = Alone, Never Married)

	Age 25		Age 30		Age 35		Age 40	
	Cohabiting	Married	Cohabiting	Married	Cohabiting	Married	Cohabiting	Married
Frequency	14,159	7,288	12,904	26,734	6,280	43,116	2,588	47,140
	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Male	0.55***	0.33***	0.87***	0.56***	1.00	0.73***	0.90	0.73***
Educational attainment (Ref = Upper 2nd level)								
Missing	0.80**	0.81**	0.74***	0.56***	0.87	0.52***	0.89	0.55***
Primary	0.94	1.34***	0.78***	0.75***	0.78**	0.57***	0.80	0.57***
Lower second-level	1.08**	1.18***	0.92*	0.92**	1.06	0.90***	1.14	0.97
Diploma/Cert	1.06*	0.90*	1.02	1.02	1.06	1.00	0.84	0.93
Degree	0.70***	0.46***	0.85***	0.76***	0.84**	0.80***	0.71	0.71
Student	0.39***	0.21***	0.49***	0.36***	0.61**	0.40***	0.53***	0.42***
Nationality (Ref = Irish)								
Irish-Other	0.84	1.62**	1.04	1.30*	1.18	1.06	1.03	1.16
UK	1.28*	0.82	1.25*	0.99	1.53***	0.89	1.40	1.08
EU15	1.14	0.70**	0.87	0.42***	1.12	0.38***	1.53	0.58***
EU10 (accession)	1.26*	2.10***	0.55***	1.25**	0.56***	0.99	0.22***	1.32
Rest of world	1.02	2.96***	0.71***	1.79***	0.80	1.30**	0.62**	1.12
Year returned (Ref = Never lived abroad)								
2004 - 2006	0.90**	0.79***	0.91*	0.67***	0.80*	0.77***	1.18	0.85

Appendix B: Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of First Partnership (Continued)

2000 - 2003	1.36***	1.51***	1.24***	0.77***	1.27***	0.86***	1.54***	1.00
1990 - 1999	1.16*	1.27*	1.30***	1.05	1.27***	0.98	1.49***	1.17***
< 1990	0.90	0.98	0.85*	0.84*	0.95	0.97	1.19	1.05
Not stated	0.91	0.83**	0.86*	0.68***	0.78	0.72***	1.31	0.88
Religion (Ref = Catholic)								
Church of Ireland	1.10	1.30**	1.11	1	1.14	1.07	1.36	1.13
Other Christian	0.99	1.69***	0.88*	1.37***	0.94	1.00	1.02	0.94
Muslim	0.73*	2.57***	0.42***	1.45***	0.84	1.58***	0.99	1.67**
Other non-Christian	0.98	1.64***	0.90	1.08	1.58	0.74**	0.75	0.55***
No Religion	1.12**	0.60***	1.13**	0.55***	1.27	0.49***	1.39***	0.51***
Unstated	0.80	0.84	0.91	0.70*	0.81	0.70*	0.66	0.82
Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish)								
Traveller	1.19	20.37***	1.11	12.09***	1.34**	6.79***	2.25	5.08***
Other White	1.58***	3.68***	1.77***	2.55***	1.49	2.49***	1.67**	1.74***
Black	0.92	5.86***	1.01	4.28***	1.47	4.81***	2.61**	4.80***
Chinese	1.19	3.69***	0.86	3.18***	0.62	4.13***	1.06	5.24***
Asian	0.50***	3.72***	0.68***	3.27***	0.71	3.10***	0.34*	2.06***
Unstated	1.05	2.60***	1.27*	1.57***	1.17	1.34***	1.29	0.94
Health/disability								
Physical disability	1.01	1.04	0.71***	0.70***	0.89	0.85	0.84	0.75***
Intellectual disability	0.52***	0.50***	0.25***	0.26***	0.29***	0.19***	0.19***	0.17***
Long-term illness	0.74***	1.05	0.64***	0.64***	0.63***	0.65***	0.49***	0.55***

Appendix B: Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of First Partnership (Continued)

Unemployed	0.63***	0.94	0.66***	0.60***	0.71***	0.50***	0.94	0.45***
Occupation (Ref = Skilled manual)								
Professional	0.81***	0.56***	0.93	0.93*	0.78**	1.13***	0.65**	0.95
Managerial/Technical	0.91**	0.77***	0.93*	0.96	0.85**	1.03	0.75***	0.90**
Non-manual	0.91**	0.70***	0.82***	0.81***	0.77***	0.79**	0.62***	0.65***
Semi-skilled	0.86**	0.73***	0.82***	0.69***	0.78***	0.72***	0.79*	0.65***
Unskilled	0.74***	0.76***	0.72***	0.61***	0.64***	0.56***	0.64***	0.50***
Other	0.52***	0.64***	0.49***	0.51***	0.50***	0.50***	0.47***	0.46***
Missing	0.10***	0.07***	0.24***	0.28***	0.62	0.58**	1.38	1.24
Region (Ref = Dublin)								
Border	0.99	1.89***	0.90***	2.13***	0.93	1.78***	0.85	1.37***
Mid-East	1.36***	1.78***	1.50***	2.19***	1.43***	2.11***	1.51***	1.96***
Midlands	1.36***	2.31***	1.16**	2.21***	1.03	1.85***	0.77	1.65***
Mid-West	1.07*	1.53***	1.02	1.66***	0.93	1.62***	0.87	1.47***
South East	1.28***	1.63***	1.12**	1.79***	1.30***	1.81***	1.10	1.59***
South West	0.95	1.38***	0.91**	1.54***	0.96	1.52***	0.88	1.42***
West	0.92*	1.40***	0.89**	1.53***	0.85	1.48***	0.73**	1.24***
Adj. R-Squared	0.19		0.14		0.11		0.10	
N	77,637		69,112		67,012		60,673	

* $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$ (Wald test of $\beta_i = 0$, or odds ratio greater than or less than 1.00)

Appendix C: Logistic Regression Model of Living in a Same-Sex Couple in 2006 (15-59 Year-Olds)

	Odds Ratio		Odds Ratio
Frequency	4,033		
Male	1.58***	**Ethnicity (Ref = White** Irish)	
Educational attainment (Ref = Upper 2nd level)		Traveller	1.05
Primary	0.55***	Other White	0.80
Lower Second-level	0.75***	Black	0.87***
Diploma/Certificate	1.44***	Chinese	0.32***
Degree	1.44***	Asian	0.39**
Student	0.66***	Unstated	0.62
Missing	0.63***	**Health/disability**	
Nationality (Ref = Irish)		Physical disability	0.99
Irish-Other	0.79	Intellectual disability	0.94
UK	1.21*	Long-term illness	1.53***
EU-15	1.32*		
EU-10 (accession)	1.05	Unemployed	0.86*
Rest of world	1.00	**Occupation (Ref = Skilled manual)**	
Year returned (Ref = Never lived abroad)		Professional	1.44***
2004-2006	1.09	Managerial/Technical	1.98***
2000-2003	1.50***	Non-manual	1.77***
1990-1999	1.47***	Semi-skilled	1.75***
< 1990	1.44***	Unskilled	1.33*
Not stated	1.41***	Other	2.09***
Religion (Ref = Catholic)		Missing	1.36
Church of Ireland	1.42***	**Region (Ref = Dublin)**	
Other Christian	1.73***	Border	0.38***
Muslim	2.04***	Mid-East	0.49***
Other Non-Christian	3.01***	Midlands	0.43***
No Religion	4.81***	Mid-West	0.44***
Unstated	4.49***	South East	0.37***
		South West	0.49***
		West	0.46***
		Individual year age controls	YES
		Adj. R-Squared	0.09
		N	2,684,194

* p<0.1; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001 (Wald test of $\beta_i = 0$, or odds ratio greater than or less than 1.00).

Appendix D: Logistic Regression Models of Marital Breakdown (Females Aged 40 and 59 Years)

	40 years	59 years
Frequency	**3,398**	**2,119**
	Odds ratio	**Odds ratio**
Educational attainment (Ref = Upper 2nd level)		
Primary	1.61***	0.87*
Lower Second-level	1.43***	0.83*
Diploma/Certificate	1.15*	0.97
Degree	0.97	1.38**
Student	1.71**	1.73
Missing	1.24*	0.94
Nationality (Ref = Irish)		
Irish-Other	1.21	1.09
UK	1.53***	1.81**
EU-15	1.10	2.48***
EU-10 (accession)	2.31***	2.82*
Rest of world	1.11	1.02
Year returned (Ref = Never lived abroad)		
2004-2006	1.55***	2.24***
2000-2003	1.26***	3.73***
1990-1999	1.10*	3.54***
< 1990	0.97	1.24**
Not stated	1.35*	1.74**
Religion (Ref = Catholic)		
Church of Ireland	1.30*	1.62***
Other Christian	1.02	1.87***
Muslim	0.42**	0.56
Other Non-Christian	1.64*	3.04***
No Religion	2.35***	2.77***
Unstated	0.79	0.93
Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish)		
Traveller	0.65*	0.22*
Other White	1.2	0.99
Black	1.12	7.74**
Chinese	0.58	0.12*
Asian	0.44**	1.08
Unstated	0.88	1.06
Health/disability		
Physical disability	1.29*	1.74***
Intellectual disability	1.11	2.97***
Long-term illness	1.24*	1.67***
Unemployed	1.40***	1.95***
Occupation (Ref = Skilled manual)		
Professional	0.66**	0.80
Managerial/Technical	1.19*	1.09
Non-manual	1.60***	1.85***

Semi-skilled	1.77***	2.00***
Unskilled	1.49***	1.84***
Other	4.41***	3.47***
Missing	1.70	1.82***
Region (Ref = Dublin)		
Border	0.89*	0.66***
Mid-East	0.85*	0.86*
Midlands	0.94	0.59***
Mid-West	0.96	0.77**
South East	1.10	0.68***
South West	0.78***	0.63***
West	0.76***	0.63***
Adj. R-Squared	0.10	0.13
N	20,743	18,748

#* p<0.1; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001 (Wald test of $\beta_i = 0$, or odds ratio greater than or less than 1.00).

Appendix E: Logistic Regression Model of Having One or More Children (Females at 30 and 40 Years) and Four or More Children (Females at 40-44 Years)

	One or More Children at 30 Years	One or More Children at 40 Years	Four or More Children at 40-44 Years
Frequency	14,962	23,825	
	Odds Ratio	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**
Educational attainment (Ref = Upper 2nd level)			
Primary	1.60***	1.04	1.77***
Lower second-level	1.41***	1.33***	1.29***
Diploma/Certificate	0.59***	0.86**	0.96
Degree	0.31***	0.52***	0.77***
Student	0.22***	0.36***	0.87*
Missing	1.02	0.88	1.27***
Nationality (Ref = Irish)			
Irish-Other	1.32*	1.37*	1.25***
UK	1.23*	1.08	1.31***
EU-15	0.46***	0.59**	0.71**
EU-10 (accession)	1.00*	1.73**	0.44***
Rest of world	1.29*	1.12	0.96
Year returned (Ref = Never lived abroad)			
2004-2006	0.42***	0.58***	0.55***
2000-2003	0.56***	0.83**	0.59***
1990-1999	0.94	0.98	0.77***
< 1990	0.99	1.15*	1.11***
Not stated	0.49***	0.69**	0.74***
Religion (Ref = Catholic)			
Church of Ireland	1.08*	1.07	0.92*
Other Christian	1.36***	1.01	1.01
Muslim	2.11***	1.44	2.72***
Other Non-Christian	0.98	0.57***	0.74*
No Religion	0.62***	0.56***	0.55***
Unstated	0.55*	0.77	1.00
Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish)			
Traveller	1.82*	1.75*	7.29***
Other White	1.60***	1.34*	0.87*
Black	11.92***	4.41***	3.83***
Chinese	2.06***	1.59*	0.58**
Asian	3.24***	1.88**	0.93
Unstated	1.61***	1.10	1.02
Health/disability			
Physical disability	0.68***	0.69***	0.76***
Intellectual disability	0.11***	0.09***	0.33***
Long-term illness	0.85*	0.61***	0.71***
Unemployed	0.92	0.60***	0.87***

Occupation (Ref = Skilled manual)			
Professional	0.38***	0.60***	0.86***
Managerial/Technical	0.45***	0.46***	0.65***
Non-manual	0.48***	0.39***	0.49***
Semi-skilled	0.61***	0.45***	0.74***
Unskilled	1.07	0.72**	1.00
Other	1.26***	0.68***	1.05*
Region (Ref = Dublin)			
Border	1.86***	1.29***	1.72***
Mid-East	1.46***	1.46***	1.19***
Midlands	1.59***	1.45***	1.58***
Mid-West	1.46***	1.39***	1.38***
South East	1.82***	1.34***	1.43***
South West	1.34***	1.24***	1.29***
West	1.31***	1.22***	1.66***
Adj. R-Squared	0.27	0.09	0.07
N	32,791	25,588	145,083

* $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$ (Wald test of $\beta_i = 0$, or odds ratio greater than or less than 1.00).

Appendix F: Logistic Regression Model of Lone Motherhood (at Age 25-27 Years, Never Married)

Frequency	10,620		
	Odds Ratio		**Odds Ratio**
Educational attainment (Ref = Upper 2nd level)		**Ethnicity (Ref = White Irish)**	
Primary	1.51***	Traveller	0.19***
Lower second-level	1.57***	Other White	1.02
Diploma/Cert	0.46***	Black	6.89***
Degree	0.14***	Chinese	0.11***
Student	0.17***	Asian	0.39**
Missing	0.43***	Unstated	0.55***
Nationality (Ref = Irish)		**Health/disability**	
Irish-Other	0.97	Physical disability	0.60***
UK	1.48*	Intellectual disability	0.16***
EU15	0.16***	Long-term illness	0.77***
EU10 (accession)	0.18***		
Rest of world	0.49***	Unemployed	0.99
Year returned (Ref = Never lived abroad)		**Occupation (Ref = Skilled manual)**	
2004 - 2006	0.23***	Professional	0.33***
2000 - 2003	0.60***	Managerial/Technical	0.48***
1990 - 1999	1.12	Non-manual	0.73***
< 1990	0.86	Semi-skilled	0.99
Not stated	0.44***	Unskilled	1.57***
Religion (Ref = Catholic)		Other	4.10***
Church of Ireland	1.15*	Missing	0.32**
Other Christian	0.81*	**Region (Ref = Dublin)**	
Muslim	0.64	Border	1.16***
Other non-Christian	0.50**	Mid-East	1.08*
No religion	0.67***	Midlands	0.99
Unstated	0.36***	Mid-West	1.00
		South East	1.17***
		South West	0.91*
		West	0.71***
		Adj. R-Squared	0.38
		N	68,173

* $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$ (Wald test of $\beta_i = 0$, or odds ratio greater than or less than 1.00).

Notes: The model is a binary logistic regression, where the individual is given the value 1 if they are a never married lone mother (at age 25-27 years) and 0 if they are a never married female without children (at age 25-27 years). That is, married and cohabiting people are excluded from the analysis.