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Family Support Agency



# Attitudes to Family Formation in Ireland

Findings from the Nationwide Study

Margret Fine-Davis





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# Attitudes to Family Formation in Ireland: Findings from the Nationwide Study

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## About the Author

Dr. Margret Fine-Davis, a social psychologist, is Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Social Attitude and Policy Research Group in the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin. Her primary research interests are changing gender-role attitudes and behaviour, social psychological aspects of women's employment and related policy issues. She was Principal Investigator of the study "Changing Gender Role Attitudes and Behaviour: Implications for Family Formation in Ireland," supported by the Family Support Agency, of which this report presents the nationwide results.

She previously directed the Work-Life Balance Project, a consortium of the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, IBEC, ICTU, Age Action Ireland, Aware and FÁS, under the EU EQUAL Initiative. This four year project examined the effects of flexible working on work-life balance and social inclusion of working parents, older people and people with mental health problems.

With colleagues from France, Italy and Denmark, she carried out the cross-cultural, collaborative study: *Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance*, which examined reconciliation of work and family among working parents with young children in these four European countries. This study, co-funded by the European Commission and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, was published in 2004 by Kluwer Academic Publishers and in Italian by Il Mulino (2007).

## Foreword

As Chief Executive Officer of the Family Support Agency, I am very pleased to welcome “Attitudes to Family Formation in Ireland – Findings from the Nationwide Study” which was funded by the Family Support Agency under its Call For Research Programme and which I am confident will greatly inform the future development of policy and support services for families in Ireland.

Research is a key responsibility for the Family Support Agency in developing its clearly defined role in the area of family services and policy. 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 parents and children, it is even more crucial that we have accurate and comprehensive information on Irish family life.

This study examines attitudes to family formation and having children in a sample survey of 1,400 Irish men and women between the age of 20 and 49 from various family structures and from a variety of socio-economic groups. The findings provide an enthralling insight into how changes in Irish society in recent decades have greatly transformed the landscape with regard to family formation, child-bearing and family well-being.

This study provides us with a greater understanding of the effects of changing attitudes and behaviours towards family formation in Ireland and also provides crucial information that will help focus minds on the economic and social issues currently affecting family formation in Ireland. This information is critical as it helps us to understand how and why these changes are taking place so that we can fulfil our role in the Family Support Agency to greatest effect in guiding policy for the benefit of future generations.

I would like to thank the researcher Dr. Margret Fine-Davis and her team for this excellent piece of research and I look forward to further research studies of its kind under the Family Research Programme in years to come.

**Pat Bennett**  
**Chief Executive Officer, Family Support Agency**

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Several individuals assisted in conducting pilot interviews throughout the country, which contributed not only to the qualitative report, but also to informing the main study. These were Dr Florence Craven, Amanda Holzworth, Mary McCarthy, Mairead O’Sullivan and Marianna Prontera. Appreciation is expressed to them and to Sinéad Holt who transcribed the pilot interviews.

Appreciation is expressed to the 1,404 respondents who participated in the main study, as well as to the 48 respondents who took part in the qualitative study. Without their cooperation the study would not have been possible. Their views represent the views of many others like themselves and thus their inputs were invaluable.

The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Family Support Agency.



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# Chapter 1

## Executive Summary



## Chapter 1 **Executive Summary**

### **1.1 Background and Context to the Study**

#### **1.1.1 Major Social Trends**

The study was carried out against a backdrop of major social change. Since the 1960s there have been vast social changes which have led to changing gender roles, changes in the nature of the family and a falling birth rate in Ireland and in Europe. In Ireland, we have witnessed major shifts in gender role attitudes and behaviour, including notably a major increase in women's labour force participation, and these shifts have been accompanied by changing patterns of family formation.

#### **1.1.2 Demographic Trends in Ireland – the Family**

Comparisons of Census data from 1986 to 2006 have revealed major demographic changes in Ireland in recent years which have affected the nature of the family. These include an increase in cohabitation, postponement of marriage, an increased likelihood of remaining single and delayed fertility (Lunn, Fahey and Hannan, 2010). The fastest growing category is families consisting of couples, both married and unmarried, without children (CSO, 2007). This group increased 130% from 1986 – 2006. The average number of children per family decreased from 2.2 to 1.4 during this period.

#### **1.1.3 Trends in Fertility in Ireland over Time**

Social and attitude change, including women's increasing labour force participation, have been associated with a decrease in the birth rate. Ireland's traditionally high fertility rate has fallen from a total fertility rate (TFR) of four children per woman in 1970 to two children in recent times, representing a decrease of 50%. While Ireland still has a comparatively high birth rate in a European context, it is predicted that this will further decrease. In spite of the fact that we have recently witnessed a slight increase in the birthrate, most commentators predict that births will continue to decline, as has been the pattern in other European countries (CSO, 1999, 2007; Walsh, 2009; Lunn et al., 2010).

#### **1.1.4 Increase in Single People and in Childlessness**

In addition to decreases in the birth rate, the proportion of the population which is single is increasing. To some extent this is the result of delayed marriage. However, it also would appear to be related to women's increasing time spent in education. The proportion of childless women has increased to 17.5% (CSO, 2007). Lunn et al (2010) found on the basis of the 2006 Census data that over 50% of 32 year old women graduates were childless, compared with less than 25% women with lower second level or less. Such trends are already established in other European countries, such as Germany, where one third of the cohort of women born in 1965 is childless (Kohler et al., 2002).

#### **1.1.5 Why Are these Issues Important?**

At a time of high unemployment when we are having difficulty providing enough jobs for the population, a falling birth rate might seem to be a blessing in disguise. However, in the long run a falling birth will have quite negative consequences. In particular it will have major implications for provision of pensions and health care for our ageing population. While currently there are four people of working age for every person over 65, by 2050 this ratio will have dropped to two workers for every pensioner (European Commission, 2006) – a situation referred to as the 'demographic time bomb.' This scenario is expected on the basis of a combination of falling birth rates, rising life expectancy, and the retirement of the baby boom generation, which are features of most European countries, including Ireland. While the demographic time bomb is not as immediate a threat to Ireland

as it is to other EU countries, it is likely that it will become a concern as Ireland's demographic characteristics become more like those in other EU countries.

The changing demographic patterns that we are witnessing in Ireland are also of concern because they suggest that we are likely to see:

- an increased prevalence of lone parent households with associated risks of poverty and social isolation;
- increased prevalence of single person households, with associated risks of social isolation and lesser well-being; and
- the increased likelihood of childlessness, which also carries risks of potentially lesser well-being.

While we know from Census data that the traditional nuclear family is being replaced in many cases by new family forms, we do not know the reasons why people are making these choices or if these choices are leading to greater well-being. We also do not know if cohabitation is actually a new form of family or a step in a progression towards marriage. It is necessary to understand the reasons behind these changes in order to develop appropriate social policies to support the variety of families and other social units which are emerging in our society.

## 1.2 Aims of the Study

The aims of the study were:

- to examine attitudes to family formation and childbearing in the context of changing gender role attitudes and behaviour;
- to identify and understand the forces, both demographic and attitudinal, determining family formation – or a lack of family formation; and
- to determine whether or not recent trends in family formation are leading to greater well-being.

## 1.3 Research Design and Methods

The study was carried out in three phases:

- **Phase I: The Qualitative Study.** An in-depth qualitative study was conducted in with 48 male and female respondents of childbearing age, who varied by family status – single, married, and cohabiting. The qualitative study informed the development of the main nationwide study reported here. The results of the qualitative study are presented in a separate report (Fine-Davis, 2009), available online at [www.fsa.ie](http://www.fsa.ie).
- **Phase II: The Pilot Study:** A study of 150 male and female respondents of childbearing age, also varying by family status, was carried out throughout the country to pilot the questionnaire for the main study.
- **Phase III: The Main Quantitative Study:** The main study was carried out in 2010 on a nationwide representative sample of 1,404 people in the childbearing age group (20-49), who varied by family status, presence or absence of a child, rural/urban location, and education. The findings of this study are presented in this report.

## 1.4 Main Findings

### 1.4.1 Attitudes to Gender Roles

Attitudes to family formation were examined in the context of changing attitudes to gender roles. One of the prime questions which the present study addressed was whether or not changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour were affecting family formation.

The study found strong support among both men and women for women's financial independence. The overwhelming majority endorsed the view that it is good for a woman to be financially independent in a relationship and that both men and women should contribute to the household income. While most respondents were supportive of women's economic independence, single people were particularly so, as were people without children. Associated with this were very positive attitudes to maternal employment. The findings revealed the emergence of more integrated thinking in which maternal employment is now seen as contributing to women's fulfilment and the economic well-being of the family unit, as well as to the well-being of children, rather than merely as something which may or may not affect the well-being of children. These attitudes reflect significant change in people's perceptions of male and female roles.

In spite of the widespread support for women's economic independence, their progress in the workplace was perceived by more than half of the sample as posing a threat to some men. In view of the fact women are now more likely to be in supervisory positions, it is noteworthy that over half of the sample felt that "most men could find it difficult taking orders from women at work." Such perceptions indicate that there is still some way to go to achieving full equality in the workplace, since it would appear that attitudes have not entirely kept pace with equality legislation and with actual changes in behaviour. A comparison of gender differences surprisingly revealed that women were more likely to hold these views than men were. While 56% of women thought that "men don't really like it that much that women are getting higher positions and climbing the scale," only 36% of men actually felt that way. Similarly, while two-thirds of women thought that most men could find it difficult being supervised by a woman, only 43% of men actually felt this way.

The results showed that perceptions of women in the workplace are related to attitudes concerning male/female relations in the personal sphere. Close to half of the sample (45%) felt that "most men would find it intimidating to go out with a woman who has a high-powered job" and more than half (57%) felt that "career oriented women can be more threatening to men." These findings suggest that women's achievements in the workplace may come at a personal price and it is evident that many women fear there will be a personal backlash to their success. Yet a comparison of men's and women's views reveals that such a fear is not entirely justified. While more than half of women (55%) felt that most men would find it intimidating to go out with a woman who has a high powered job, only 35% of men felt this way. Similarly, two thirds of women felt that career oriented women can be more threatening to men, yet only 48% of men agreed this was the case. Working class men were more likely to perceive a threat of women's career advancement than men in the middle and higher socio-economic groups. The study found that women in the higher socio-economic groups had more anxiety about the effect of their role in the workplace and less reason to do so, as their male counterparts were not particularly concerned with this. While clearly a proportion of men are threatened by women's advancement in the workplace, women are significantly overestimating the extent to which this is the case.

In spite of the support for female economic independence, there was still evidence of support for traditional roles in terms of a wish for men to provide "the kind of support that men have traditionally

given them.” There was also a belief on the part of half of the sample that “being a wife and mother are the most fulfilling roles any woman could want,” yet this attitude is far less strong than it was 30 years ago, when 78% believed it to be the case (Fine-Davis, 1988a). Those most likely to endorse traditional views about male protection and support were married people and people with children. Somewhat surprisingly, younger people were more likely to endorse these views than were older people – a finding that indicated that younger people tended to be more idealistic about relationships than their older counterparts.

Thus, on the one hand there is widespread support for women’s role in the labour force, while at the same time some support for traditional gender roles, at least in a psychological sense. It is clear that gender role behaviour is undergoing change and this was reflected in a degree of male role ambiguity. Forty-two per cent of the sample felt that “with all the changes in gender roles, it’s hard to know who’s supposed to do what.” A similar proportion felt that “a lot of men are confused about their roles because they are less defined than they used to be.”

Men’s participation in the domestic sphere was a key component of current gender role attitudes. More egalitarian attitudes concerning caring were evident: the vast majority thought that fathers could be as nurturing as mothers could, though half still thought that caring for children was best done by mothers, indicating that an underlying ambivalence about who should do the caring. This also extended to the area of housework. Most respondents felt that while men recognise that women have to spend less time on housework, they don’t recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to. Women were much more likely than men to feel this way than men (73% of women versus 48% of men) and mothers - who are most likely to bear the burden of housework - were most likely to do so. These findings support research on time use of Irish men and women which found that women - and particularly mothers – spend significantly more time on housework and childcare than men do (McGinnity and Russell, 2007). The issue of housework was linked in the present study with perceptions of men’s respect for women, with one third of the sample thinking that men respect women more at work than at home.

#### **1.4.2 Attitudes to Marriage and Cohabitation**

The study found strong support for marriage as an institution and it is a state that most people aspire to. The vast majority feel that marriage means as much to men as to women and men were even more likely to express this view than women were. People see marriage as involving more commitment than cohabitation, but cohabitation is widely accepted and seen as a step in a progression towards marriage.

A surprisingly high proportion of the sample (84%) believes that it is better to live with someone before you marry them. Younger people and cohabiters in particular strongly agreed that this was so. The widespread acceptance of cohabitation may in part be explained by the fact that the vast majority (85%) believes that the religious reasons for marriage have become less important. The decreasing importance of religion in people’s lives was reflected in the relatively low level of church attendance, with only 19% attending religious services once a week or more and 61% saying they attended only “a few times a year” or “rarely or never.” There was general consensus that marriage provides security and stability for children, however only 47% felt that people who want to have children ought to get married. This reflects the growing acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative household arrangement, even when there are children. Over two thirds of the sample believed that deciding to have a child together would be a far greater commitment than getting married. This suggests that norms have changed and marriage is no longer the strongest indicator of commitment; people are now placing a higher value on having a child together.

### **1.4.3 Cohabiting Behaviour and Related Attitudes**

In addition to examining attitudes to cohabitation, the study also asked respondents about their experience of cohabitation. The results showed that almost half of the sample had cohabited at some point, however most had done so only once. There were no appreciable demographic differences in cohabiting behaviour, with such behaviour equally common among men and women, urban and rural dwellers, and all age and socio-economic groups. The average period of cohabitation was just under four years, with a quarter of cohabitations lasting less than 18 months, a quarter lasting 18 months to three years, a quarter lasting three to five years and the remainder lasting more than five years. More recent cohabitations were likely to last longer than previous cohabitations, suggesting that the more experience people have cohabiting the more likely they are to form longer lasting relationships. The fact that cohabitation is often a step towards marriage is suggested by the fact that 43% of cohabiting people said that they definitely would marry their partner. The remainder were less certain, indicating that while cohabitation is a step in the progression towards marriage for many, it is not so for all. There were many common drivers towards cohabitation and marriage, the primary of which were psychological factors. The main barriers to marriage for cohabiting people were financial, particularly the high cost of housing and weddings and the wish to have a secure job/income first.

### **1.4.4 Attitudes to Being Single**

The study found that it is now more acceptable to be single than it used to be. There was a general perception that people are staying single longer because they are ‘more choosy’ about relationships. This may help to explain the later age at marriage evident in the latest Census results. This greater selectivity in looking for the ideal partner may relate to the greater freedom people have, including sexual freedom, and the greater options available to them, including educational opportunities, as well as the possibility to cohabit. There is, in addition, a greater acceptance of single parenthood. Over half of the sample felt that one parent could bring up a child as well as two parents, with women being more likely to hold this view. While there was widespread acceptance of being single, there was also some ambivalence towards this status. Almost two-thirds of the sample said “I don’t think anybody chooses to be single and on their own if they are really honest.” It was also evident that there was a feeling of social pressure to be in a couple - a pressure which impinged disproportionately on women, especially those in their late 30s. In spite of the pressure on women to get married, the results showed that it is more difficult for them to find a partner. This was also true of older people (35-49).

While there were few differences among men of all social classes in terms of their ease in finding a partner, among women, those in the middle and highest social class groups found it significantly more difficult to do so. Given the disparity in men and women’s educational and occupational status - with women being more likely to have third level education as well as more likely to hold jobs of higher occupational status - it is not surprising that women felt men were threatened by their career advancement. While men did not endorse this to the extent that women feared, better educated women, particularly those over 35, are finding it more difficult to find a partner. This is undoubtedly one of the contributors to the increasing proportion of single people in the population, as well as the later age at marriage, older age of women at the birth of their first child and the decreasing birth rate overall.

### **1.4.5 Attitudes to Having Children**

The study revealed discrepancies between people’s ideal, expected and actual number of children. When asked how many children they would “ideally” like to have, the average number was 2.73. However, when asked how many children they expected to have over the course of their lifetime, the



average was 2.41 children. People thus expect to have fewer children than they would ideally like to have. The actual number of children that the average woman has when she completes her childbearing (total fertility rate) is currently approximately 2, which is far less than people's ideal or even expected family sizes. However, attitudes to having children have changed considerably over the last 25 years. In the 1970s the ideal number of children that people wanted was four (Fine-Davis, 1976). People no longer think that it is necessary to have a child in order to be fulfilled and attitudes to childlessness are much more accepting than they were before, reflecting a change in attitudes over the last 25 years. Previous attitudes favouring larger families are being replaced with new attitudes favouring smaller families. Almost three-quarters of the sample believe that having fewer children is better since they "are being had by choice" and two-thirds believe that having fewer children is better because "you can give more to each child." However, the results also show that economic factors are having a major influence on people's attitudes to having children and their childbearing intentions. More than three quarters think that "these days most couples simply cannot afford to have more than two children" and more than two-thirds said that the cost of living was restricting the number of children that they would have.

#### **1.4.6 Attitudes to Childcare, Work-Life Balance and Related Policies**

The study explored people's attitudes to childcare, work-life balance and related social policies in relation to their attitudes to having children. There was almost unanimous support for the universal provision of childcare and a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school aged children. Most supported a policy for free preschool education available to all children in the same way that primary education is. Given that such facilities do not exist at present and most parents have to pay a significant portion of their income on child care, there was strong support for tax concessions for child care costs. The vast majority felt that if people had to spend a lot on childcare they would be less likely to have more children. It was clear that choices regarding family size are being significantly influenced by child care costs.

Flexible working policies were also seen as relevant to childbearing decisions. Over 60% felt that if people had flexible working conditions, this would make it more likely that they would have more children. In terms of new social policies, there was strong support for fathers to have a right to paid paternity leave. There was also moderate support for maternity leave to be changed into leave for one or the other parent. The results also showed quite a high support for 'co-parenting.' Half of the sample felt that both men and women should ideally work part-time and co-parent. While this was the wish of many, part-time working and job sharing were seen by some as leading to career disadvantages, particularly for men. Nevertheless, these attitudes signal a readiness for greater sharing of childcare between men and women.

#### **1.4.7 People's Priorities and Values**

An examination of the relative priority people put on various aspects of their lives showed that men put a higher priority on having a job/career than women did and saw this as contributing most to their happiness and well-being. For men, this was followed by being in a relationship. While men and women did not differ in terms of the importance of being in a relationship or having children, women - perhaps surprisingly - put a slightly higher priority on their freedom and independence.

Married people, followed by cohabiting people, put a very high priority on having a relationship, while single people were least likely to say a relationship was crucial to their well-being. Having children was also highly important to married people, followed by cohabiting people and least so to single people. People who already had children were significantly more likely to say that having

children was important for their well-being, in contrast to those without children. Married people and parents were more likely to attend church services than other groups, suggesting that marriage and parenthood are more associated with traditional values, while cohabitation, being single, and not having children are associated with less traditional values.

Single people were the group most likely to place a high value on freedom and independence, with married people least likely to feel this way. Single people also put a high value on autonomy (having one's own time and space and being particular about the things one likes) and this was also a high priority for women, older people and those without children. These findings reflect the individualistic values which are becoming more common in our society and they act as a counterpoint to the traditional values which were more common in the past. It is notable that these values are associated with the likelihood of forming different kinds of unions or of remaining single.

#### **1.4.8 Effects of Family Status on Well-being**

While much research has documented demographic changes which have been taking place in our society and in societies around us, relatively little research has examined the effects of these changes on people's well-being. The present study compared the well-being of single, cohabiting and married people. Married people were found to have the highest level of well-being on most measures, including social integration, life satisfaction, positive life experiences, etc. They were followed by cohabiting people. Compared to married and cohabiting people, single people had the lowest level of well-being and were more socially isolated. Single mothers had the lowest life satisfaction and were the loneliest of all groups. Their life satisfaction was less than that of single women with no children and less than that of single fathers. While there is an acceptance of single parenthood and a belief, especially among women, that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents, it is clear that this comes at a high price in terms of the poorer wellbeing of this group.

Socio-economic status was also found to be related to well-being. Men in the highest socio-economic group were the most likely to say their life is "close to how they would like it to be," followed by women in this group. The group least likely to feel this way was men of lower socio-economic status, who also manifested lesser psychological well-being on a range of measures. This group had the highest level of unemployment, which undoubtedly contributed to their lesser psychological well-being. As other results found, this group of men was also more likely to feel threatened by women's career advancement, not surprisingly, given their own vulnerable circumstances.

## **1.5 Policy Implications**

The increasing education of women and their greater role in the labour force is leading to postponement of couple formation and childbearing. In addition the increasing value placed on autonomy, freedom and independence is also contributing to changes in family formation. As a result, young men and women who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development, are facing dilemmas. These issues are particularly facing women with higher education, who are making strides in the labour force. They are postponing family formation because of extended time in education, followed by a focus on their careers. When they are ready to form more permanent relationships - often in their mid thirties - they find that it is difficult to find a partner. This is so because potential male partners do not have the same biological clock exigencies and also have a wider pool of potential partners, since it is more usual for men to marry younger women.



If women do have a partner it is often difficult to make the choice to have a child since childcare is so expensive and flexible working not always available. Women know that they are the ones who will be expected to provide domestic work and child care and they are the ones who will be expected to work part-time, rather than their partners, and many are not ready to relinquish satisfying full-time jobs at a time when their career development is at an important stage. While many people would like to 'co-parent', this is rarely possible since most flexible working arrangements tend to be more available to women than to men, in addition to the fact that child care costs are prohibitive. As a result people are having fewer children than they ideally would like to have. Such findings underscore the need for new social policies to address the dilemmas faced by young people who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development. Provision of necessary supports such as universal child care and more widespread availability of various modes of flexible working that are compatible with parenthood will be essential if men and women are to be able to perform the dual roles of worker and parent. Unless social policy facilitates the sharing of childrearing by both parents, women will continue to face dilemmas which prevent them from forming families at an optimal time and having the number of children that they ideally wish to have.

While some social policies will be beneficial for all groups, different social policies may also need to be targeted to different groups. Those with less education are actually having more children than they would ideally like to have and are less able to afford to raise the children they have. As Lunn et al.(2010) have suggested in their analysis of demographic trends in family formation, outreach programmes to assist with family planning may be required for this group. Accessible and affordable childcare is also essential to enable people to obtain the training and education needed to fully participate in the labour force. A lack of childcare was the main barrier to employment cited by single mothers in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (Fine-Davis et al., 2007). While many respondents in that study said that having childcare provided at FAS training centres would greatly assist them in availing of training, the study found that it was not provided because of insurance issues. Solutions to problems such as this will need to be found to break through the cycle of poverty which is endemic to most single mothers (OECD, 2003).

The policy response for well-educated women who are deferring family formation needs to be different and may involve linkages between educational and family policy. For this group, awareness programmes may need to be introduced into educational settings to make young women aware of the need to have children before fertility begins to steeply drop. Beginning to form relationships and hoping to have children in one's mid thirties may be too late. Social policy should also address the need for supports to enable women to remain in the labour force if they so choose and at the same time to have children. This means policies which go beyond maternity leave and parental leave. They need to include high quality childcare which is flexible and affordable, as well as flexible working arrangements for men and women. These must truly be flexible and include such practices as tele-working and flexible hours, which do not impinge on income, as this has been found to be a critical barrier to male take up of flexible working (e.g., Drew et al., 2003). Consideration also needs to be given at policy level to the synchronisation of child care times and parental working times, as much research has shown that parents make many ad hoc child care arrangements to fit in with their employment and that unsatisfactory child care arrangements lead to stress in the workplace and lesser well-being.

Unless social policy facilitates the sharing of childrearing by both parents, women will continue to face dilemmas which prevent them from forming family relationships at an optimal time in terms of their

fertility. Family policies, such as maternity leave, primarily acknowledge women's role in childcare. It is time for these policies to broaden to acknowledge the role of father as parent.

There is evidence of significantly poorer well-being and social isolation of single people, particularly single mothers, but also of older single women, as well as working class men. As noted above, single women are under pressure to form relationships, marry and have children, while at the same time they have increased educational qualifications and more opportunities in the workplace. Women are caught between their biological clocks and their wish to continue actively in the labour market. It is apparent that these factors are contributing to delays in couple formation, delays in marriage, postponement of the first birth, an increase in the proportion of single people and an increase in childlessness. These trends are likely to have a long term cost in terms of a decreasing population and diminishing ability to support the ageing population, as seen in other countries. However, other social costs are also being paid in terms of the greater social isolation and lesser well-being of single people. These issues need to be addressed in the development of social policies which support not only families but also the increasing proportion of single people in the population.

# Chapter 2

## Overview of Key Issues and Previous Research



## CHAPTER 2 **Overview of Key Issues and Previous Research**

### **2.1 Rationale for Study**

The last several decades have witnessed major changes in gender roles and family patterns, as well as a falling birth rate in Ireland and the rest of Europe. While the traditional family is now being replaced in many cases by new family forms, we do not know the reasons why people are making the choices they are and whether or not their choices are leading to greater well-being. Demographic research has attempted to explain these new trends in family formation, yet there has been virtually no research on people's attitudes towards family formation and having children.

Lunn et al. (2010) point out that “despite the centrality of family life to people's well-being, there has been relatively little quantitative research into the dynamics of union formation in Ireland, or into the underlying causes of changes in fertility” (p. 6). Their most recent work, comparing Census data over the period 1986 – 2006, builds on other key analyses of recent Census data by Punch (2007) and Fahey and Field (2008). Lunn et al. (2010) acknowledge that the data available in the Censuses do not include information on psychological states other than mental health and “hence it is not possible to relate family structures to well-being, attitudes or other psychological indicators that may be important determinants of family life” (p. 13).

While demographic research identifies trends it does not identify people's motivations for behaving the way they do or the psychological effects of their choices. Such explanatory data is necessary to augment the analyses of demographic data in order to more fully understand the phenomena we are seeing and to guide policy in this area.

### **2.2 Background and Context of Present Study**

Since the 1960s there have been vast social changes which have led to changing gender role attitudes and behaviour and changes in the family in Western developed societies (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). These include the increasing wealth of countries and the increasing educational attainment of populations, especially women. The 1960s saw the widespread availability of contraception through the development of the contraceptive pill, which made it possible to control fertility. This, in turn, gave women more choices, including the choice to remain in education and to enter and remain in the labour force.

### **2.3 Changing Gender Role Attitudes and Behaviour**

The vast social changes which have occurred in other developed Western societies have also occurred in Ireland, although somewhat later. The major changes in women's roles began to occur in the 1970s, a time of great social and legislative change in the area of gender equality, with many of the deterrents to married women's employment removed through legislation in areas such as equal pay, equal employment opportunity, contraception, etc. and, as a result, women's increasing role in the labour force was one of the most dramatic social shifts of this period.

Concomitant with these significant legislative and administrative changes came major shifts in attitudes to gender roles (Fine-Davis, 1983a, Fine-Davis, 1988a; Whelan and Fahey, 1994), which have continued up to the present time (Fine-Davis, et al., 2005; Craven, 2006; Fine-Davis, 2011). These have included a greater acceptance of women's role outside the home, including an increased acceptance of maternal employment. The influence of the Catholic Church on gender role behaviour also began to diminish during this time, as women were now able to control their fertility and increasingly move out of the private sphere into the public sphere (Inglis, 1987, 1998; O'Connor, 1998; Kennedy, 2001; Ferriter, 2009). The increasingly secularisation of Irish society, together with the social policy and attitudinal changes, was accompanied by a major increase in women's labour force participation, particularly among married women.

Married women's labour force participation was almost negligible in the 1960s, with only 5.2% employed in 1961. By 2009 the figure had increased ten fold to 54%. The participation of women in the prime childbearing age group of 25-34 increased at an even more rapid rate than that of other groups of women.

## **2.4 Demographic Changes and the Emergence of New Family Forms**

Over the last three to four decades there have also been many changes in demographic patterns and in the nature of the family. A primary one has been a change in marriage patterns. Punch (2007) points out that the 1970s were "a period in which a high proportion of men and women in their twenties were marrying, such that by the mid to late 1980s only one in six males and one in nine females aged 35-44 years were (never-married)" (p. 4). However, since then there has been a decline in the marriage rate, together with a postponement of marriage. This has resulted in higher proportions of those in the 35 to 44 year age bracket being single (27.7 % of males and 22.3 % of females) as of the 2006 Census. The average age at which women marry has increased from 24.7 years in 1980 to 31 years in 2005. This has affected the average age at which women have their first child in marriage. While this was 25 years of age in 1980, it rose to 31 in 2005 (Ibid.). It is likely that attitudes toward marriage, expectations and social norms regarding the 'right' or ideal age to get married and have children have changed. Demographic data suggest that women and men's lifestyles and life expectations regarding family formation and children have shifted. Another reason why the age at marriage and at first birth is rising for women is that they are staying in education longer. This is equipping them to participate at a higher level in the labour market.

The lesser prevalence of marriage has been accompanied by a greater variety of living arrangements (Punch, 2007). The traditional nuclear family is now being replaced in many cases by new family forms (Drew, 1998; Family Support Agency, 2005; Fahey and Field, 2008; Lunn et al., 2010). While having children used to take place primarily in the context of marriage, it is now becoming more common for childbirth and parenting to take place also outside of marriage – either in a situation of cohabitation or single parenthood. Punch (2007) points out that "the strong link which formerly existed between marriage and fertility has weakened in the last few decades. Up to 1980 births outside marriage accounted for less than 5 per cent of all births. However, during the 1980s and 1990s the percentage increased rapidly reaching a figure of 31.1 per cent by 1999. The figure has since stabilised at around 31 to 32 per cent (p. 7)". Since Punch wrote this in 2007, the rate has increased to 33.8% (Central Statistics Office, as reported in *The Irish Times*, by Smyth, 2011). Of these, approximately

half or 18.3% of total births were to unmarried parents with the same address, indicating births in cohabiting relationships (*ibid.*).

The increase in births outside of marriage has been associated not only with cohabitation, but also with a greater prevalence of single headed families. Families consisting of single mothers with children have more than doubled from 1981 to 2006 and now constitute 15 per cent of all families. Far fewer single headed families are headed by males. This figure of 2.5% has been rather stable for the last 25 years (Punch, 2007).

The fastest growing category is families consisting of couples (whether married or not) without children. Their number increased 130% in the 20 years from 1986 – 2006. Many of these couples are cohabiting. Punch (2007) observes from the 2006 Census data that those who are cohabiting tend to be young: 41% of the males and 53% of cohabiting females were less than 30 years of age. However, he points out that it is not clear to what extent cohabitation is a precursor to marriage or whether it is a more permanent form of relationship replacing marriage.

In the 20 years from 1986-2006 the average number of children per family decreased from 2.2 to 1.4 during this period (Punch 2007). Women and men are therefore choosing to have fewer children than in previous generations.

Another significant demographic change is an increase in the proportion of childless women – which now stands at 17.5% (CSO, 2007). Among women born in the 1960s, who may be assumed to have completed their fertility, approximately 20% did not have children as of the 2006 Census (Punch, 2007). More recently, Lunn et al. (2010) reported that over 50% of 32 year old women graduates were childless, compared with less than 25% women with lower second level or less. The trend of increasing childlessness has also occurred in some other countries. For example in Germany, one third of the cohort of women born in 1965 is childless (Kohler, Billari and Ortega, 2002). Factors such as attitudes toward marriage and children, family policies, and employment patterns are seen by some authors as contributing to this trend.

## **2.5 The Relationship between Women’s Labour Force Participation and Fertility**

Concomitant with the demographic changes cited above, particularly women’s increasing labour force participation, together with the changes in attitudes to gender roles, has come a steep fall in the birth rate in many EU and OECD countries, including Ireland, as illustrated in Table 2.1. The continuing downward trend in fertility in European countries was reversed in France and Denmark in the 1990s due to the introduction of family policies to support both women’s labour force participation and their fertility (Fagnani, 2008). Villa (2002) points out that “Among other factors, the increasing burden on women, having to continue paid work with family responsibilities, has played a major role in lowering fertility” (p. 16).

**Table 2.1: Total Fertility Rate, 1960-2007 for Selected High and Low Fertility EU Countries**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2004	2006	2007
<b>HIGH</b>								
Ireland	3.76	3.93	3.25	2.11	1.90	1.99	1.90	2.03
France	2.73	2.47	1.95	1.78	1.88	1.90	2.01	1.98
Denmark	2.57	1.95	1.55	1.67	1.77	1.78	1.85	1.85
<b>LOW</b>								
Poland	2.98	2.20	2.28	2.04	1.34	1.23	1.27	-
Italy	2.41	2.42	1.64	1.33	1.24	1.33	1.35	1.34
Germany	2.37	2.03	1.56	1.45	1.38	1.36	1.34	1.39
EU-15	2.59	2.38	1.82	1.57	1.50	1.54	-	-
EU-25	2.59	2.34	1.88	1.64	1.48	1.49	-	-

Sources: Eurostat (2006), *Population Statistics*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, from Table D-4, p. 76. Eurostat (2008), *Statistics in Focus*. Luxembourg: Eurostat, Table 4, p. 6. CSO (2009a), *Measuring Ireland's Progress 2008*. Dublin: Stationery Office, Table 7.9, p. 58.

Ireland's traditionally high fertility rate has fallen from a total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.93 children in 1970 to 1.90 in 2006, representing a fall of over 50% during this period. This downward trend reflects the downward trend in Europe as a whole, which went from 2.38 to 1.54 during this same period. Ireland started from a higher base than most other European countries since the social changes in women's roles began later, in addition to the fact that fertility and gender roles were strongly influenced by the Catholic Church in Ireland at that time which promoted traditional values and pronatalist attitudes (Inglis, 1987, 1998; O'Connor, 1998; Kennedy, 2001).

The decrease in fertility in Ireland over the last three decades mirrors the increasing labour force participation of married women during the same period, as shown below in Table 2.2. While Ireland currently has one of the highest total fertility rates in Europe this still reflects a significant decrease of roughly 50% over the last three decades. It has been predicted by the Central Statistics Office that this will further decrease (CSO, 1999, 2007) and that Ireland's birth rate is likely to continue to fall in line with European norms (approximately 1.5) unless policies intervene to change this trend.

**Table 2.2: Relationship between Married Women's Labour Force Participation and Total Fertility Rate in Ireland 1960 - 2009**

	1960/61	1970/71	1980/81	1989/90	2000/01	2004	2009
Employment Rate – All Ages	5.2%	7.5%	16.7%	23.7%	46.4%	49.4%	54%
Employment Rate Ages 25 - 34	4.8%	8.8%	21.6%	39.0%	64.7%	65.5%	72.6%
Total Fertility Rate	3.76	3.93	3.25	2.11	1.90	1.99	n.a.

Sources: CSO (various) and Eurostat (2006).

While the CSO (1999, 2007) predicted a falling birth rate over the next 20 years, recent figures have shown that the birth rate has actually increased slightly from 1.90 in 2006 to 2.03 in 2007 and 2.1 in 2008 (CSO, 2009b). Lunn et al. (2010) observe that this may reflect "the tail end of a positive impact



of the economic boom” (p. 86). Conceptions for births in 2007 took place in 2006, which was an economic boom time in Ireland. Data on birth rates during recessionary periods indicate that they tend to fall (Walsh, 2009). As we are currently in a recessionary period, it is likely that births will fall, as people will be less likely to be able to afford to have children (Lunn, et al., 2010).

## **2.6 The Effects of Family Policies on Women’s Labour Force Participation and Fertility**

D’Addio and Mira d’Ercole (2005) concluded that fertility rates below replacement level are likely to be a persistent feature of most OECD countries in the coming years. They attribute this to women’s higher educational attainment and their increasing labour force participation, as well as changes in their values, which include increased financial autonomy and a less traditional attitude toward family roles. However, they point to the U.S., France and the Nordic countries as exceptions to this trend, all of which have fertility rates close to replacement. They say that the factors which contribute to “success” in these countries include policies which contribute to the lower cost of having children, namely direct transfers and tax advantages, but more importantly “investment in education and childcare facilities, access to a variety of caring arrangement, affordable housing, leave provisions and features of their labour market that do not penalise women for their decision to have children and that facilitate the sharing of family chores and the reconciliation of work and family life for young couples” (d’Addio and Mira d’Ercole, 2005, p. 70).

In Ireland family policy has tended to concentrate on cash transfers, such as child benefit and the childcare supplement, the latter of which is being phased out. There has been relatively low investment in pre-school education compared to other countries (OECD, 2004); however, the recent introduction of support for part-time child care for three year olds is to be welcomed. Leave provisions, e.g. for maternity leave and parental leave, have improved considerably in recent years, but do not reach the levels in some other countries which have maintained women’s employment and fertility (i.e. the Nordic countries and France). Work-life balance policies, while supported by the social partners, are not equally available to all employees (Drew et al., 2003; Fine-Davis et al., 2005).

### **2.6.1 The Impact of Childcare on Women’s Labour Force Participation and Fertility in Ireland**

While the trend in most European countries, notably the Nordic countries and France, has been toward greater state provision of pre-school facilities, Ireland is one of the countries with the lowest level of provision and its expenditure on pre-primary education (for children age three and older) is the lowest of all of the EU countries compared by the OECD (2004).

The OECD points out that “childcare costs can be a barrier to work in Ireland” (Ibid). This has particular implications for women, as the National Women’s Council of Ireland (2001) points out: “The availability and cost of childcare and the difficulties around reconciling employment and family lives are the most significant barriers to women accessing and participating in the labour force.”

Childcare costs are a particular barrier to single mothers. For a lone parent with average earnings living in Dublin “the cost of childcare for one child is equivalent to 30% of after-tax net income, and it would be another 30% for a second child” (OECD, 2003, p. 148). A recent study found that the most important barrier to single mothers entering employment was childcare arrangements (Fine-Davis,



Craven, McCarthy, Holzworth, and O’Sullivan, 2007), a finding supported in a recent paper by the OECD (2009).

### **2.6.3 The Effect of Work-Life Balance and Childcare Policies on Pregnancy Decisions and Well-being**

To what extent do the lack of flexible working and childcare facilities influence decisions of young people concerning pregnancy and childbirth? Redmond, Valiulis and Drew (2006) concluded that “many working parents are experiencing increasing levels of stress due to two main factors: the lack of work-life balance arrangements in the workplace and the lack of affordable childcare.” They refer in particular to research by Murphy-Lawless, Oakes and Brady (2004) who found that the young women who were not currently planning on having children had “serious doubts about their ability to cope with the demands of motherhood and the labour market.” These findings further underscore the fact that inadequate childcare provision and work-life balance policies are already affecting the decisions of young Irish women concerning whether or not to have a child.

## **2.7 Attitudes to Family Formation**

In view of the vast changes in family structure and fertility patterns we are seeing, it is critical to understand the attitudes underpinning them. Castles (2003) believes that “what we are witnessing . . . is a long-term change in preferences concerning family size” (p. 211). While it is known that falling birth rates are in part due to economic conditions, availability and affordability of childcare and availability of flexible working, little or no research has examined the social psychological factors which contribute to people living in various types of family units and having fewer children or no children. Such social psychological factors – in particular, attitudes – constitute a set of variables which Hakim (2003) has referred to as ‘preferences’ – an important set of potential predictors which she believes has been overlooked. The notion of preference or choice is a theme echoed by van de Kaa (2002) who argues that individuals have greater choice in post-modern societies and this may be affecting their fertility decisions. Sleebos (2003) also points out that with the emergence of post-materialist values, self-realisation and quality of life issues may take precedence over wishes to bear children. Individual preferences may also influence the form of relationships people seek and this may impinge on fertility.

D’Addio and Mira d’Ercole in a comparison of men and women’s attitudes towards family and gender roles from the World Values Survey (2000) found a widening gap between desired and observed fertility, to the effect that people were having fewer children than they would ideally like to have. They concluded that “This divergence between desired and observed fertility rates suggests the presence of constraints that prevent women to achieve their expectations about children” (p. 44).

These findings further underscore the need to take into account attitudes, preferences, lifestyle choices and perceived constraints in trying to understand family formation and fertility behaviour. The influence of attitudes on behaviour has been well established in the social sciences. Their importance in understanding partnership and fertility decisions has recently been highlighted by Cliquet (2002), commenting on the U.N.’s Family and Fertility project: “Despite the number and diversity of the comparative projects tackled so far, there are still some important issues that are under-researched and deserve further attention. . . In particular, these include . . . The influence of values and beliefs on partnership and reproductive behaviour. . .” (p. 24). Thornton, Axinn and Xie (2007) concur that

“Attitudes, values and beliefs are central factors in theoretical models of family formation behaviour and key elements in understanding changing patterns of family formation” (p. 225).

## **2.8 The Economic and Social Effects of Decreasing Fertility on Society**

The social changes that we are witnessing in terms of the changing nature of the family and a decreasing birth rate will in turn have other effects on society. A low birth rate means that there will be fewer young people to enter the labour force, resulting in a smaller base of workers to support the increasing numbers of older people in the population. There are currently four people of working age for every person over 65. Falling birth rates, rising life expectancy, and the retirement of the baby boom generation mean that, by 2050, this ratio will have dropped to two workers supporting one pensioner, an issue referred to as the ‘demographic time bomb’ (European Commission, 2006). This issue is one faced by many developed societies. In the current recession in Ireland taxes have already been increased to help provide for the budget deficit. Further increases to support pension funds and health care will put additional strain on disposable income and may contribute to a decrease in economic growth and quality of life. While in the short term Ireland does not need more workers and the current birth rate is not an issue, in the longer term it will be necessary to ensure that there is continuing population growth, to support the ageing population. The majority of care of older people has traditionally been provided by the family. However, it is apparent that this will become less likely as childlessness increases (Evandrou and Falkingham, 2004). If the current trends continue, this will be a critical issue of the future.

## **2.9 Psychological Implications of Demographic Changes and the Changing Nature of the Family on Individuals and on Society**

While much research has documented the major demographic changes which have been taking place in our society and in societies around us, little research has examined the effects of these changes on people’s well-being.

### **2.9.1 Effect of Relationship or Family Status on Well-being**

There has been extensive international research examining the effect of marital status on psychological and physical well-being (e.g. Verbrugge, 1979; Gove, 1973; Gove et al., 1983). This work found that marriage was related to greater well-being than being single, divorced or widowed. It also found that marriage had more of a protective effect on men than on women. In a more recent review of over 130 empirical studies, Coombs (1991) concluded that “the evidence consistently supports the protection/support hypothesis.” Stack and Eshleman’s (1998), review of data from 17 countries collected in the context of the World Values Study also supported previous research linking marital status and happiness – “In 16 out of 17 analyses of the individual nations, marital status was significantly related to happiness . . . The results offer perhaps the most sweeping and strongest evidence to date in support of the relationship between marital status and happiness” (p. 534).

Given the increasing rates of cohabitation, research has begun to examine its characteristics and similarities and dissimilarities to marriage. Stack and Eshleman (1998) found that while “cohabitants, who also have a live-in partner to enhance social integration, were happier than other categories of single persons . . . marriage increases happiness substantially more than cohabitation” (p. 534).

However, in a more recent longitudinal study, Musick and Bumpass (2006) concluded that the differences between cohabitation and marriage tend to decrease over time and are not as important as the similarities. In a Norwegian study, Hansen et al. (2007) also did not find significant differences between marriage and cohabitation on measures of happiness or life satisfaction and very small differences in well-being.

The first study to examine family well-being in Ireland was carried out by McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003). These authors found that the quality of the relationship did not differ significantly between married and cohabiting mothers and fathers. These authors initially found that “married mothers have the highest level of psychological well-being, followed by cohabiting mothers, separated mothers and, finally, single mothers, who have the lowest level of psychological well-being” (p. 33). However, upon further analysis, they found that the relationship between women’s well-being and family form “practically disappears” when other factors were included, such as personality traits, feeling financially secure and the quality of their relationship with their child. In fact, the significance only remained for single mothers.

### **2.9.2 Effects of Demographic Changes and Changes in the Family on Social Integration**

Several social theorists have identified the increasing individualisation in society, which is in part an outgrowth of post-materialist values which focus more on self, self-actualisation and quality of life (e.g. Giddens, 1994; Putnam, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). This trend may be one of the forces contributing to changes in the family, as people pursue their own needs to develop and self-actualise. These motives may contribute to the extension of the period of singleness and postponement of partnership formation, marriage and childbearing. As a result, we see an increase in smaller households, a decrease in the number of children per family and the greater prevalence of single person households. The potential social psychological effects of these changes in terms of social integration vs. social isolation and well-being vs. ill-being are an understudied phenomenon. Given that we are witnessing an increase in the proportion of single people in the population, together with an increase in single mothers and an increase in divorced and separated people, it is likely on the basis of previous research that a greater proportion of our society will become vulnerable to poorer psychological well-being. Our society is changing from one which was previously richer in social networks and is now characterised by greater social isolation. These are issues which have not been studied to any great extent in the context of the recent demographic changes and are explored in the present study in the context of the changing nature of the family.

## **2.10 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study was to examine people’s attitudes to family formation in the context of changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour and the profound demographic changes that are taking place in Ireland. These include an increase in cohabitation, a later age at marriage and at the birth of the first child. They also include a 50% drop in the birth rate over the last 30 years and a consequently smaller family size. While it is known that falling birth rates are in part due to economic conditions, availability and affordability of childcare and availability of flexible working, little or no research has examined the social psychological factors which contribute to people living in various types of family units and having fewer children or no children. Such social psychological factors – in particular, attitudes, choices or preferences - constitute a critical set of potential predictors which have not been examined in the literature to date. The literature demonstrates that women and men now

have greater choice and the factors impacting on how these choices are made may be affecting family formation and fertility outcomes. The present study was designed to explore people's attitudes towards these issues to help us to better understand the reasons behind these social and demographic changes, i.e. why are people making the decisions which are leading to these changes? We do not have attitudinal data of this nature from earlier periods, since this is the first time that attitudes to family formation have been systematically studied in Ireland. Thus we cannot compare current attitudes with previous attitudes. However, we do have time series data on demographic behaviour such as marriage rates, age at marriage, birth rates and so on. We also have time series data on women's labour force participation and on gender role attitudes. It is in this context of other trends that we expect the new attitudinal data to shed light on the new behavioural and demographic patterns that we are seeing. In addition, the present study will examine well-being among people in different family situations, with and without children, in order to better understand the psychological effects of the changing nature of the family on people undergoing these transitions. It will do this in light of the existing social policies to support the family and the extent to which these policies affect people's attitudes and decisions in relation to family formation and childbearing.

# Chapter 3

## Method



## CHAPTER 3 Method

### 3.1 The Qualitative Study

An in-depth qualitative study was carried out in late 2008 - early 2009 as a precursor to the present quantitative study. As well as providing important qualitative insights into attitudes to family formation and childbearing which could not be obtained from a quantitative approach, that study also played an important role in identifying key issues for inclusion in the questionnaires administered in the quantitative study, which is the subject of the present report.

The sample used in the qualitative study consisted of 48 adults selected to mirror the types of respondents to be included in the main quantitative phase. The sample was stratified by gender, age (20-34/35-55 years), family status (single/cohabiting/married and living with spouse), socio-economic status, and geographic location (Dublin/other towns and cities/rural areas).

Most of the questions were open-ended and designed specifically for this study. Interviews were carried out on a one to one basis in a variety of locations. They were conducted primarily in the respondent's home, the interviewer's home or in Trinity College Dublin. All interviews were tape recorded. Interviews lasted from 39 minutes to one hour and 58 minutes, with the average interview length being one hour. The full results of the qualitative study are presented in Fine-Davis (2009). Selected quotations from this study are presented for illustrative purposes in the presentation of the main quantitative results in this report.

### 3.2 Pilot Study

Following the development of an extensive questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out in the summer of 2010 on a stratified sample of 150 respondents throughout the country. The results of the pilot were used in developing the questionnaire used in the main study. Factor analyses were carried out to identify underlying dimensions of attitudinal items and to provide an empirical basis for retaining the best items for inclusion in the main questionnaire.

### 3.3 Research Design, Sampling and Fieldwork for Main Study

#### 3.3.1 Research Design and Sample

The population under investigation was adults of child-bearing age (20-49 years) in the Republic of Ireland. A stratified sampling design was employed. This was based on gender, family status (single, cohabiting, married), age (20-34 and 35-49 years), having one or more children or not, and rural vs urban location. "Single" was defined as not living with a partner; it did not refer to marital status *per se* and "married" was defined as married and living with one's spouse. Presence of a child was defined as the respondent having given birth, fathered or adopted one or more children; it did not require that the child be resident with the respondent. This design was employed so that the sample would include people in all possible combinations of these characteristics, including married with children, married without children, single with and without children, etc. as this would enable us to use analysis of variance – one of the main multivariate statistical techniques used in the study. This technique enables one to identify significant "main effects" of each of the independent demographic variables on key dependent measures of attitudes, while simultaneously controlling for each of the other demographic

variables. It also enables one to identify significant interaction effects between two or more independent variables in predicting the dependent variables. The technique is analogous to multiple regression, with the additional advantage of providing simultaneous information on interaction effects. A major goal in creating this design was to allow us to examine differences between single, cohabiting and married people, while controlling for the effects of gender, age and other key demographic variables.

The sample for the main study consisted of 1,404 respondents.

**Table 3.1: Fieldwork: Frequency and Distribution of Contacts**

<b>CONTACTS</b>			
	<b>Absolute Numbers</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Not eligible	4,073	1,923	2,150
Not at home	3,434	1,452	1,982
Derelict	97	74	23
Refused	1,588	760	828
Achieved	1,404	795	609
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,596</b>	<b>5,004</b>	<b>5,592</b>
Total eligible respondents, either refused or achieved	2,992	1,555	1,437
Total response rate (achieved as a percent of all eligibles)	47%	51%	42%
	<b>Distribution</b>		
Not eligible	38%	38%	38%
Not at home	32%	29%	35%
Derelict	1%	1%	0%
Refused	5%	15%	15%
Achieved	13%	16%	11%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Total eligible respondents, either refused or achieved	28%	31%	26%
Total response rate, (achieved as a percent of all eligibles)	28%	31%	26%

A multi-staged quota controlled sampling design with randomly selected starting addresses from the Geo Directory was used. This was based on a total of 200 randomly selected sampling points throughout the country with six interviews conducted per point. A ‘random walk’ from the random starting point was adopted within each sampling point. A total of 1,254 interviews were conducted during the main fieldwork phase, with the additional 150 pilot survey questionnaires boosting the sample to 1,404. Because of the comparability of the questionnaires and the quality of responses elicited at the pilot stage, the pilot data were thus incorporated into the final dataset prior to analysis.



In order to obtain the final sample of 1,404 a total of 10,596 contacts were made. Of these, 38% were ineligible, 32% were not at home and 1% were derelict properties. Twenty-eight percent of the total contacts were eligible, i.e. they fulfilled the characteristics of the quota sample design. Of these eligible respondents, there was a 51% response rate in urban areas and a 42% rate in rural areas, for an overall response rate of 47%.

### **3.3.2 Fieldwork Methodology**

All interviewing was conducted on a face-to-face basis in respondents' homes by experienced and pre-briefed interviewers. Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI) was utilised. Some of the sections of the questionnaire were self-completed by respondents on the laptops – Computer Aided Self-Completion Interviewing (CASI). This protected the privacy of the respondent in providing answers to more sensitive questions and, accordingly, enhanced data quality. Fieldwork for the main survey took place from mid August to early November, 2010. The average interview time was 45 minutes.

## **3.4 Instrument of Main Study**

The questionnaire used in the main study included sections measuring the following sets of variables:

- Demographics
- Attitudes to Relationships
- Relationships and Relationship History
- Factors leading to the Decision to Cohabit
- Factors leading to the Decision to get Married
- Dating Behaviour
- Attitudes to having Children
- Factors contributing to having Children
- Attitudes to Gender Roles
- Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies
- Happiness and Well-being

Most of the items were developed on the basis of the qualitative study, while others were replications of items used in previous research by the author and others. Some of the items concerning gender role attitudes were replicated from Fine-Davis, (1983a, 1988a) and some items measuring attitudes to work-life balance were replicated from Fine-Davis et al. (2004, 2005). Selected items measuring attitudes to childcare and other family policies were replicated from Fine-Davis (1983a, 1983c) and Fine-Davis et al. (2004, 2005). Some of the items measuring decision to cohabit were replicated from Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2009). Items measuring social isolation and social integration were replicated from the U.N. Generations and Gender Survey (Vikat, Beets and Billari, et al., 2005) and other measures of well-being were replicated from the NESI (2009) and the Second European Quality of Life Survey (Anderson et al., 2009).

Likert items were used extensively. These were presented on 7-point scales ranging from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Within each set, items were presented in a randomised order for each respondent, so that there would be no ordering effects.



# Chapter 4

## Characteristics of the Sample Population



## Chapter 4 **Characteristics of the Sample Population**

### **4.1 Weighting of the Sample and Comparison with Population Estimates**

In line with best practice in all sample surveys, the completed sample was statistically adjusted or re-weighted to ensure that it reflected the socio-demographic structure of the relevant sub-group of the population under investigation. Table 4.1 presents details on the structures of (a) the unweighted sample, (b) the weighted sample and (c) the relevant subgroup of the population. Forty-eight individual weighting variables were set which reflected the population breakdown of 20 to 49 year olds in terms of gender, age, family status, presence of children and area. Additional educational and SES (occupational status) weights were applied. All population figures were derived from the 2006 Census of Population.

A comparison of Sections A and C of Table 4.1 illustrates that the completed sample, notwithstanding the quota controls, was slightly under-represented in terms of family composition by single and married respondents and over-represented in terms of cohabitees. This is due to the fact that certain groups, including cohabitees, were oversampled in order to have sufficient respondents in each cell of the design to make it possible to carry out analyses of variance. Other groups are represented in the completed sample largely in line with the population figures.<sup>1</sup> Comparison of Columns B (the re-weighted sample) and C (the Census figures) shows that the structure of the re-weighted sample is very close to the population figures. Thus, we may be confident that the re-weighted data is representative of the population in the childbearing age group.

In the final weighted sample there are 50% males and 50% females. There are 54% in the age group 20-34 and 46% in the age group 35-49. The final weighted sample consists of 45% single people, 44% married people and 11% cohabiting people.

The breakdown by occupational status shows that 8% of the re-weighted sample consists of professional workers, 29% managerial and technical workers, 22% non-manual workers, 22% skilled workers, 15% semi-skilled workers and 5% unskilled workers.

The proportion of rural and urban respondents is 40% urban and 60% rural in the final re-weighted sample. Again, this was adjusted somewhat by the weighting to conform to the proportions of these groups in the population.

The final re-weighted sample includes 54% people without children and 46% with children, reflecting a minor readjustment from the original sample.

<sup>1</sup> Note that the Census figures on Social Class contain an undefined 'Other' category which was not in the survey data.

**Table 4.1: Comparison of Unweighted Sample, Weighted Sample and CSO Population Estimates for Key Demographic Characteristics**

A. UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE			B. WEIGHTED SAMPLE		C. CSO POPULATION ESTIMATES (Census 2006)		
<b>OCCUPATIONAL STATUS</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	Excluding 'All others'
Professional workers	8%	107	8%	111	7%	128,878	8%
Managerial and technical	24%	338	29%	412	25%	479,715	29%
Non-manual	29%	403	22%	303	18%	352,530	22%
Skilled manual	19%	267	22%	305	18%	354,492	22%
Semi-skilled	16%	225	15%	205	12%	238,308	15%
Unskilled	5%	64	5%	68	4%	78,944	5%
All others	0%	0			15%	283,947	
<b>GENDER</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	
Male	49%	691	50%	706	50%	964,396	
Female	51%	713	50%	698	50%	952,418	
<b>AGE</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	
20 to 34	56%	780	54%	759	54%	1,035,825	
35 to 49	44%	624	46%	645	46%	880,989	
<b>FAMILY STATUS</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	
Single	42%	590	45%	625	45%	853,319	
Married	36%	510	44%	619	44%	845,442	
Cohabiting	22%	304	11%	160	11%	218,053	
<b>PRESENCE OF CHILDREN</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	
Without Child	52%	735	54%	753	54%	1,027,689	
With Child	48%	669	46%	651	46%	889,125	
<b>LOCATION</b>							
	%	Sample (n)	%	Weighted Sample (n)	%	Population estimate (n)	
Total	100%	1,404	100%	1,404	100%	1,916,814	
Urban	43%	609	40%	556	40%	759,251	
Rural	57%	795	60%	848	60%	1,157,563	

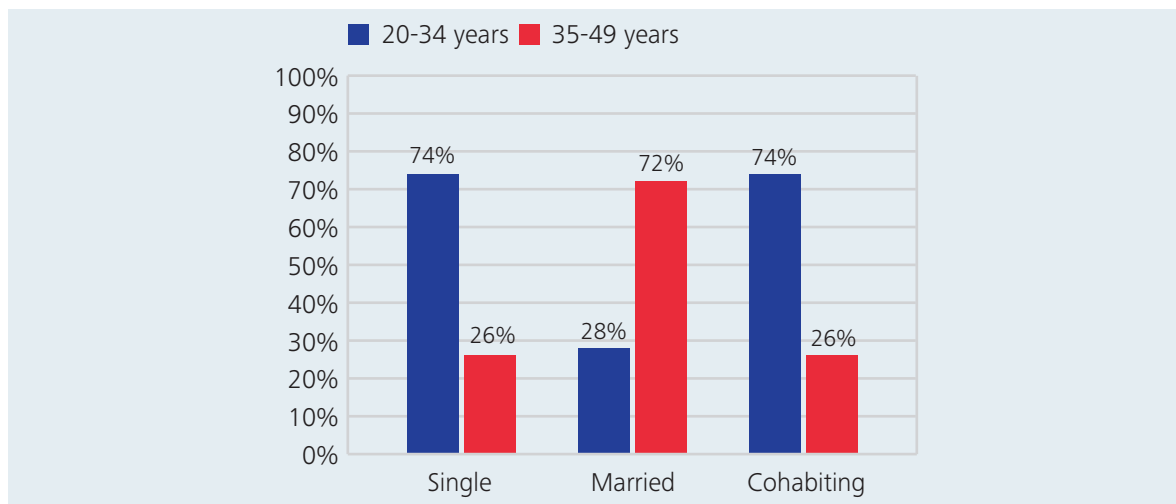
## 4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

In the following figures we present further breakdowns illustrating the demographic characteristics of the sample. As shown in Figure 4.1, three-quarters of the single respondents are in the age group 20-34 with just one-quarter aged 35-49. Married people tend to be in the older age group: 72% of married people in the sample were 35-49, while 28% were in the age group 20-34. In this study “single” is defined as not living with a partner. Single people may technically be never married, divorced, separated, widowed, etc. “Cohabiting” is defined as living together with a partner, but not being married to them. “Married” is defined as married and living with your spouse.

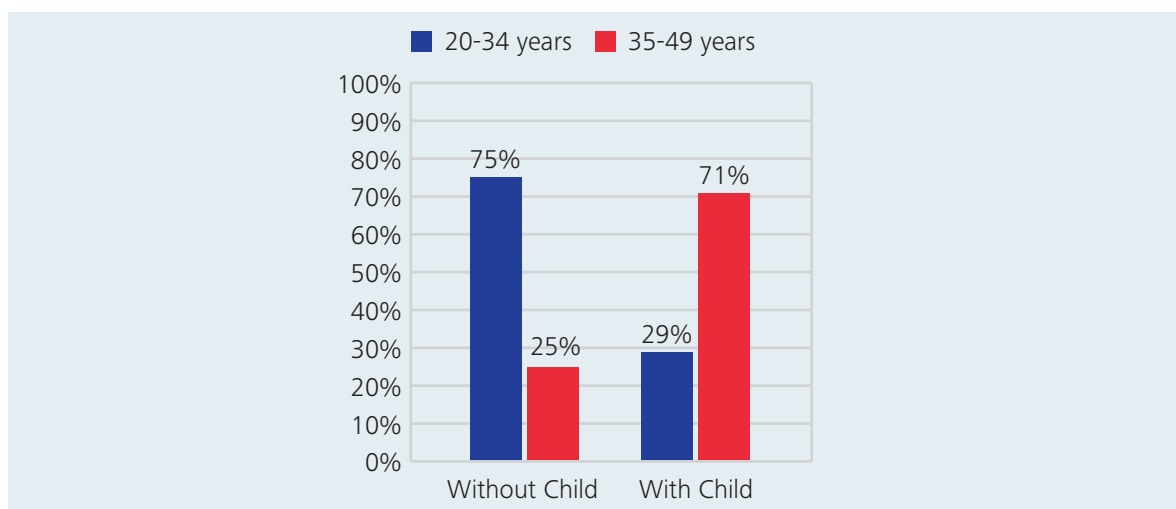
Those without children were more likely to be in the age group 20-34 (75%), whereas the majority with children (71%) tended to be in the age group 35-49 (Figure 4.2).

Younger people were more likely to be better educated: 64% of those with third level education were in the younger age group, 20-34, whereas only 36% of those aged 35-49 had third level education (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.1: Comparison of Single, Married and Cohabiting Respondents by Age Group**



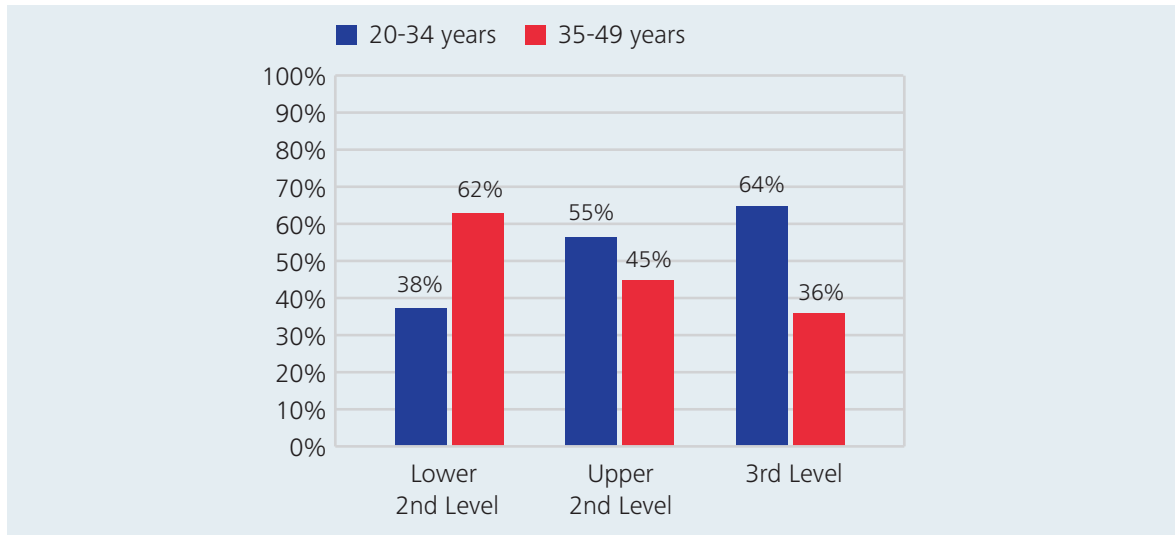
**Figure 4.2: A Comparison of Respondents with and without Children, by Age**



Slightly more than half of the sample (53%) had no children, 13% had one child, 17% had two children, 10% had three children, and 6% had four or more children. The mean number of children

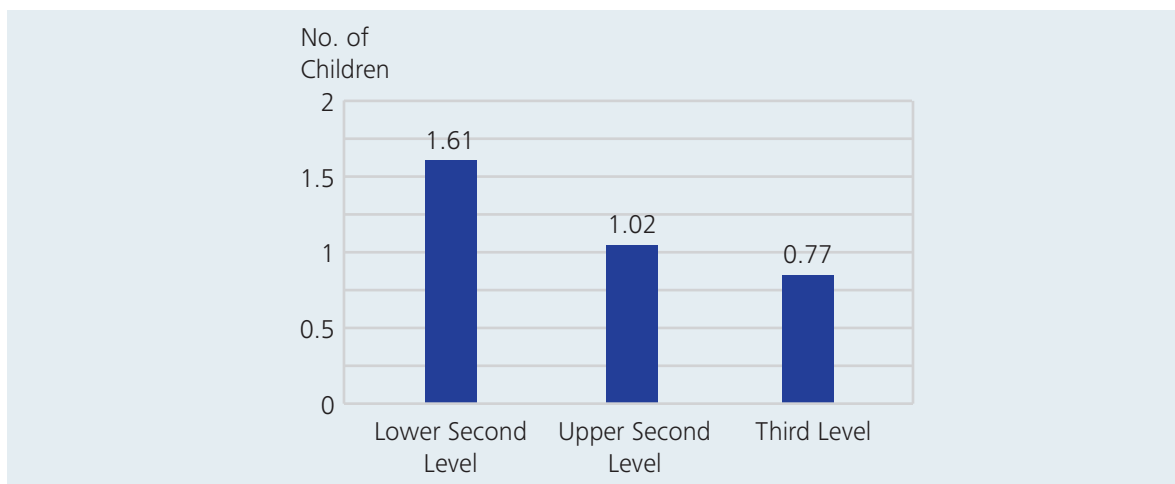
overall was 1.08. It was significantly higher for those aged 35-49 at 1.83. Most of those in the younger age group (20-34) had no children (74%); whereas in the older age group (35-49) 29% had no children. Married people were most likely to have children, followed by cohabiting people. While 89% of married people had one or more children, only 38% of cohabiting people did. Eighty-five per cent of single people had no children and 15% had one or more children.

**Figure 4.3: Age Breakdown of Respondents by Educational Attainment**



Those with more education tended to have fewer children. Sixty-three per cent of those with third level education had no children, while just 37% had one or more, whereas of those with lower second level the reverse was true: 60% had one or more children and 40% had no children. There is a negative linear relationship between education and mean number of children. It is 1.61 children for those in the lowest educational group, 1.02 for those in the middle educational group and .77 for those in the highest educational group. It should be borne in mind, however, that some of these demographic characteristics are inter-related. For example, younger people are more likely to be single and better educated, whereas older people are more likely to be married and less well educated and this is reflected in the relationship between education and number of children, since marital status is correlated with both number of children and with education. Some of the difference may also relate to timing of having children, with delayed childbearing more common among those with more education.

**Figure 4.4: Mean Number of Children of Respondents by Education**

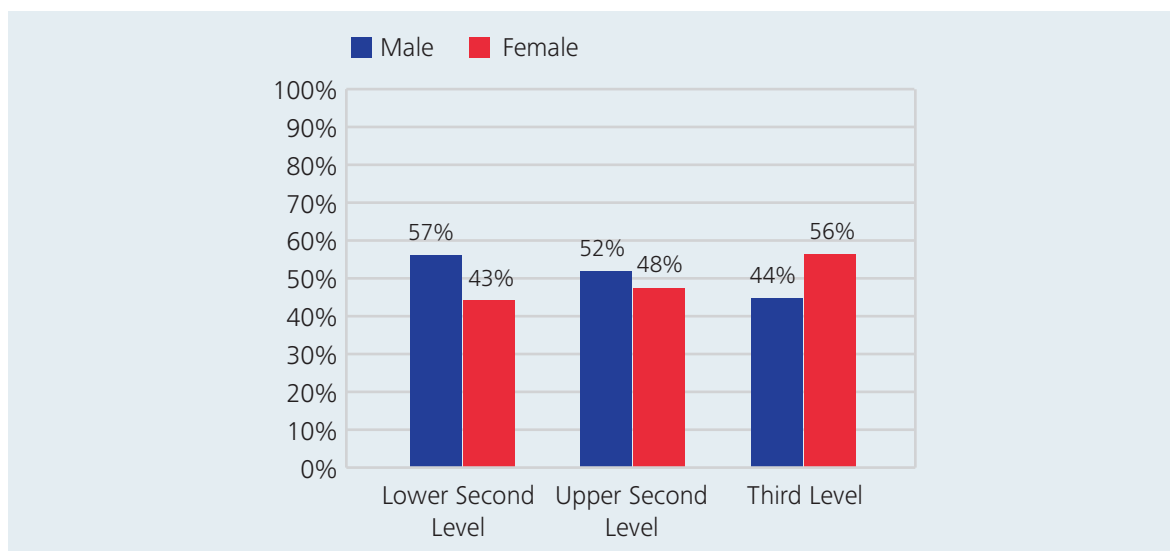


Those living in rural areas tended to have more children than those living in urban areas: 51% of rural dwellers had one or more children, while this was true of only 40% of those living in urban areas.

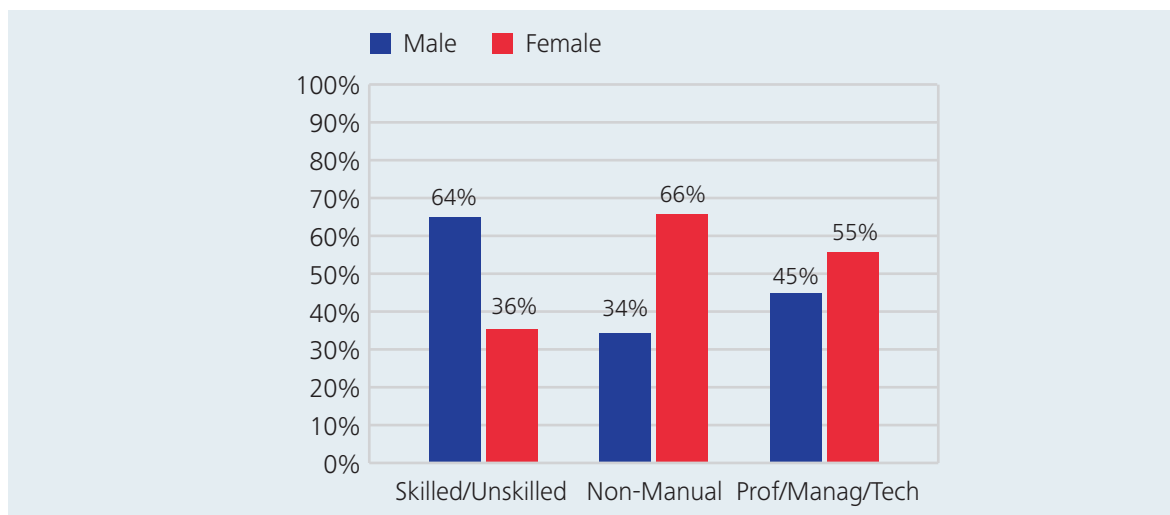
Women were more likely to report having children than men; this may be analogous to a phenomenon noted in the Census in relation to men's reporting of marital status in which men were more likely to say they were single than divorced (Lunn et al., 2010).

Looking at educational attainment by sex, it may be seen that of those whose education had ended at second level, 57% were men and 43% were women, whereas the reverse was true for third level: 56% of those completing third level were women and 44% were men (see Figure 4.5 below). The higher educational attainment of women is mirrored in the gender breakdown of occupational status. Of those in professional, managerial and technical occupations, 45% are men and 55% are women. Men are more likely to be in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. Of those in these occupations 64 % are men and 36% are women. Women predominate in non-manual occupations which include clerical positions and other white collar jobs; 66% of those in non-manual occupations are women, compared to 34% men.

**Figure 4.5: Educational Attainment by Gender**



**Figure 4.6: Occupational Status by Gender**



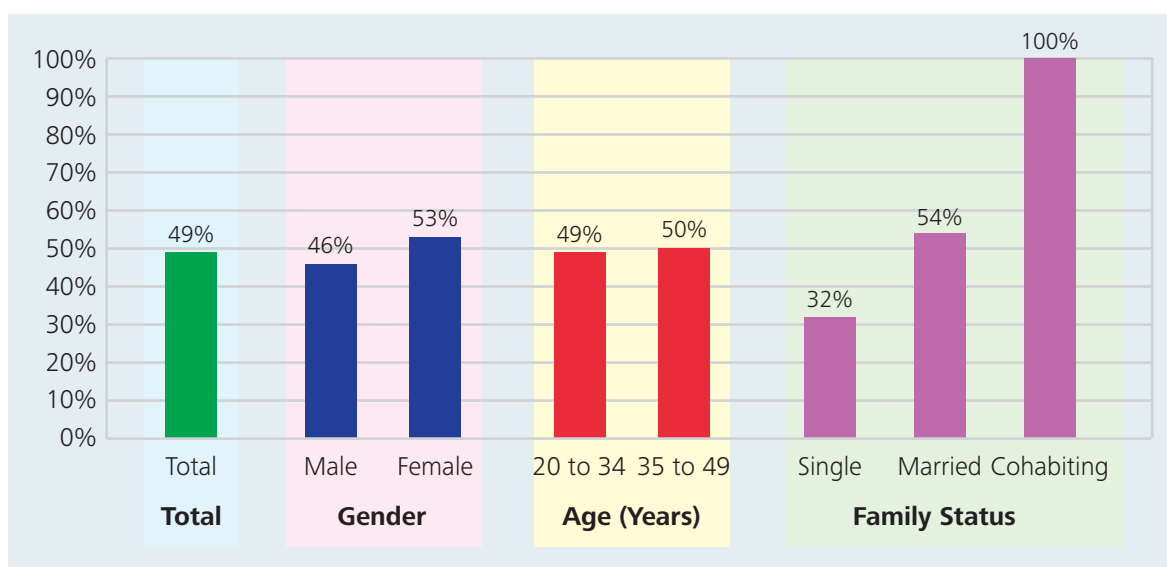
Looking more closely at gender by third level education, it may be seen that 44% of women have completed third level, compared with 34% of men (Appendix Table A1). It is also evident that younger people are more likely to have completed third level (47%) compared with older people (30%). Single people were more likely to have completed third level (43%) than married people (35%) or cohabiting people (39%). Those without children are more likely to have completed third level (46%) than those with children (31%). Of course education is strongly related to occupational status, with 74% of those in professional, managerial and technical occupations having third level, compared to 28% of those in non-manual occupations. While third level is generally not required for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, 13% of people in these occupations hold third level qualifications, suggesting that they are currently under-employed, i.e. in jobs below their level of qualification.

When asked “where were you born?” 89% said Ireland and 11% said another place. In general, those from other countries were more likely to be in the older age group, more likely to be married, and to have children. They were also more likely to have third level education. While among Irish people, having third level education was associated with a greater likelihood of having professional, managerial and technical jobs, in the case of those from other countries, in spite of a high level of third level qualifications (45%), most were in the lowest status jobs (52%), while just 29% were in professional, managerial and technical jobs.

### 4.3 Cohabitation Behaviour

While the Census can differentiate between married and cohabiting people, it does not obtain information on previous cohabitations and thus patterns among the same individuals cannot be determined. In the present study, respondents were asked a number of questions about cohabiting behaviour. Initially they were asked if they had ever cohabited, i.e. ever lived with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Of the entire sample, 49% had cohabited at some point in time (see Figure 4.7 below). This included all of the cohabittees, 54% of the married people and 32% of the single people. Of the male respondents, 46% had cohabited at some time, while 53% of the female respondents had cohabited. There was little difference by age, with 49% of those in the age group 20-34 having cohabited and 50% of those aged 35-49. Those with children were more likely to have cohabited (57%) than those without children (43%).

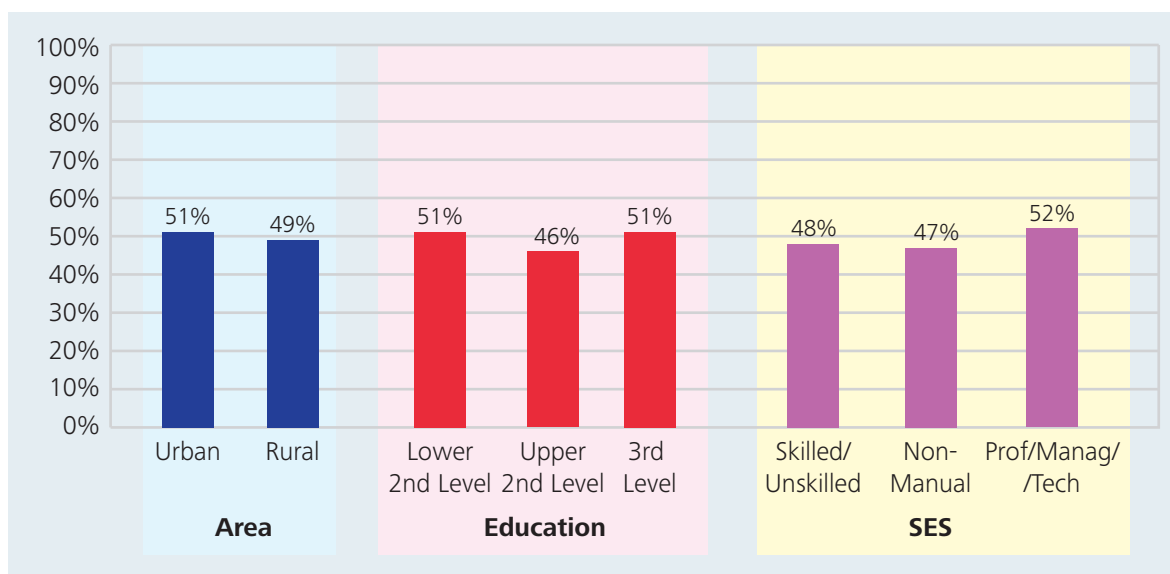
**Figure 4.7: Percentage of People who have ever Cohabited, by Gender, Age and Family Status**



There was little difference between those of different educational levels: 51% of those with lower second or less had cohabited, 46% of those with upper second level and 51% of those with third level. In terms of social class, professional and managerial workers were somewhat more likely to have cohabited, with 52% having done so, compared with 47% of non-manual workers and 48% of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. There were no appreciable rural/urban differences; 51% of rural respondents had cohabited, as had 49% of urban dwellers (Figure 4.8)

Those who had cohabited at least once were asked how many times they had cohabited altogether. Table 4.2 presents these responses by gender and age. As may be seen, most people (79%) who have cohabited have done so only once. Of the female respondents who have cohabited, 80% have done so only once; of the males, 78% have done so only once. Sixteen per cent (16%) of women who have cohabited have done so twice and 17% of men who have cohabited have done so twice. Overall 5% of respondents who had cohabited had done so three times; this was true of 4% of women and 5% of men. Virtually no respondents reported having cohabited more than three times. When comparisons were made by age, it was seen that younger people (20-34) were more likely to have cohabited only once (83%), whereas older people (35-49) were more likely to have cohabited more often. While 13% of younger people had cohabited twice, this was true of 20% of those 35-49. Older people were also twice as likely to have cohabited three times (6% vs 3% of younger people).

**Figure 4.8: Percentage of People who have ever Cohabited, by Rural/Urban Location, Education and SES**



Those who had cohabited were asked how long each of the cohabitations had lasted and whether they thought this would lead to a lifelong commitment and to marriage. Table 4.3 shows that 25% of all cohabitations lasted less than 18 months, 28% lasted from 18 months to three years, 21% lasted from three to five years and 25% lasted more than five years. More recent cohabitations were likely to have lasted longer than previous cohabitations. The mean length of all cohabitations was 47 months, or just under four years. The mean length of the most recent cohabitation was 51 months, or four years and three months. The mean length of the next most recent cohabitation was 35 months, or just under three years and the mean length of the next most recent cohabitation was 23.5 months or just under two years. This suggests that the more experience people have cohabiting the more likely they are to form longer lasting relationships.

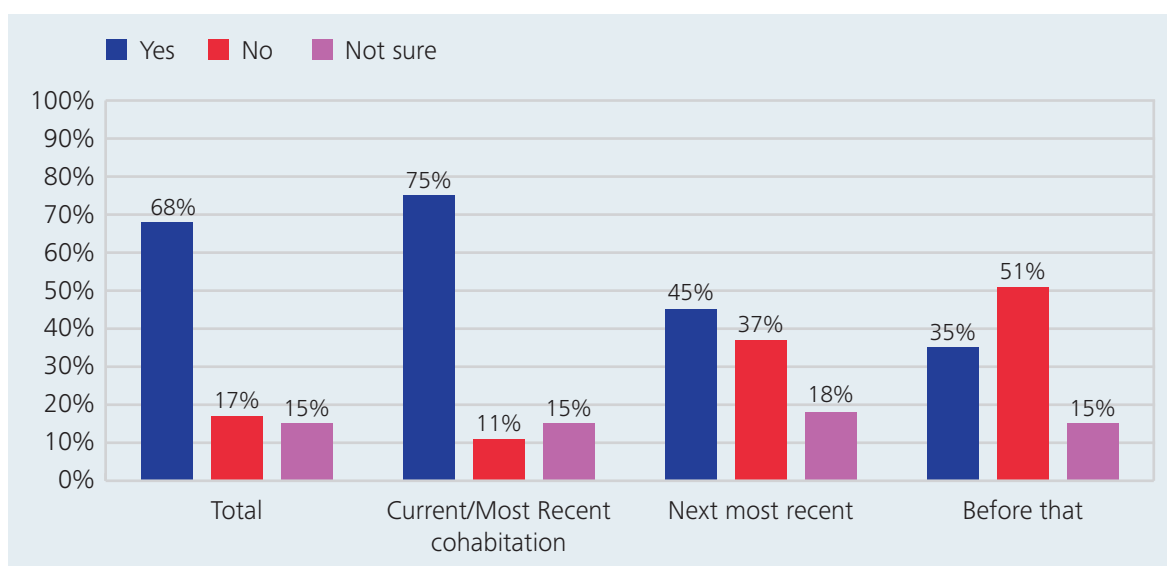


**Table 4.3: Length of Time Living Together in the Last Three Cohabitations (N=873)**

Total is all occasions cohabitated	Total	Occasion number...		
		Most recent	Next most recent	Third most recent
Total	873	693	147	34
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Less than 18 months	25%	20%	42%	58%
From 18 months to three years	28%	30%	23%	20%
From three to five years	21%	23%	17%	10%
More than five years	25%	27%	18%	12%
Don't Know	0%	0%	-	-
Mean number of months	47.41	51.15	35.32	23.55

All of those who had cohabited were asked if they thought each of their last cohabitations would lead to a life-long commitment. Figure 4.9 shows that, overall, 68% thought that their cohabitation would lead to a lifelong commitment. This was most likely in the case of the most recent cohabitation, of which 75% said yes. It was much less likely for the previous cohabitation, in relation to which only 45% said yes, and least likely of the time before that, in which only 35% thought it would lead to a lifelong commitment.

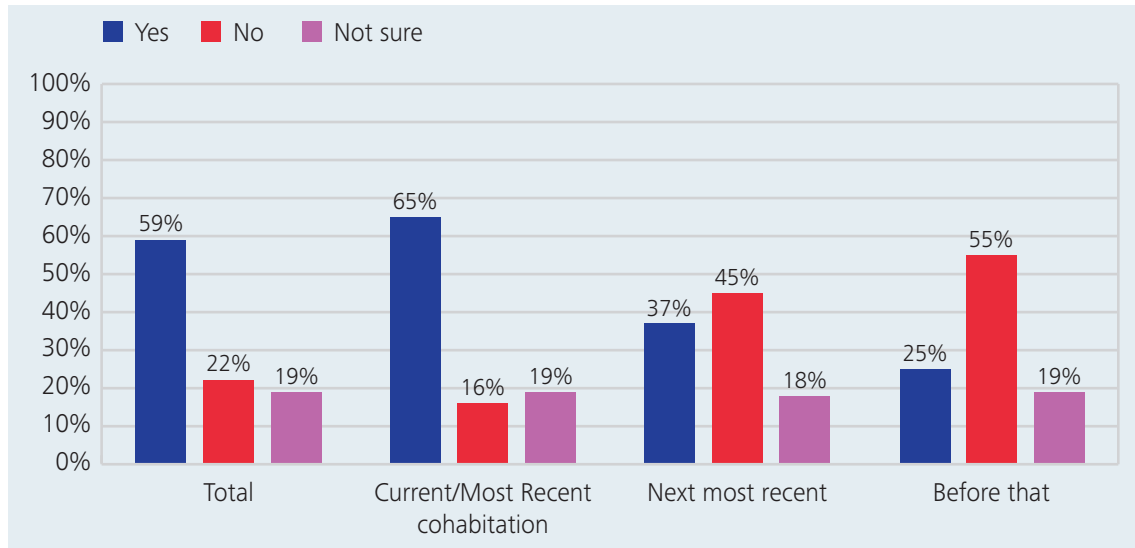
**Figure 4.9: Belief that Cohabitation would lead to a Life-long Commitment (N= 873)**



They were then asked if they thought each of the cohabitations would lead to marriage. A similar pattern was observed (see Figure 4.10 below). Overall 59% thought the cohabitation would lead to marriage, 22% did not think so and 19% were unsure. A high degree of certainty that the relationship would lead to marriage was most likely to be true of the most recent or current cohabitation, in which 65% said they thought it would lead to marriage, while 16% said they did not think it would and 19% were not sure. In the case of the previous cohabitation, 37% said that at the time they thought this relationship would lead to marriage, 45% said they had not thought it would and 18% said they weren't sure. With regard to the cohabitation before that, 25% said they had thought it would lead to marriage, while 55% said they thought it would not and 19% were unsure. As was the case in relation to

perceptions of whether a cohabiting relationship would lead to a “lifelong commitment,” respondents tended to be more likely to think that a current or most recent relationship would lead to marriage than they were to have thought that a previous one would. This would tend to support the “triumph of hope over experience” (Oscar Wilde) or rather it may indicate that people learn from experience to form better and more lasting relationships.

**Figure 4.10: Belief that Cohabitation would lead to Marriage (N=873)**



#### 4.4 Marital Status and Marital History

Table 4.4 below shows in the left hand column the actual marital status of the respondents. It will be seen that 44% were married, 2% separated, 1% divorced, less than 1% were widowed, and 52% had never married. As noted earlier, for the purposes of this study “family status” was defined slightly differently. “Single” was defined as not living with a partner, regardless of one’s marital status. Thus, as may be seen in Table 4.4 below, among the “Single” people, 4% were separated, 2% were divorced, 1% was widowed, and the remainder (93%) were never married. In addition two respondents in this group were married, but this totalled less than 1%. All of the people designated as “Married” under Family Status were married and living with their spouse. Among the Cohabiting, none were married, 3% were separated from a previous spouse, 2% were divorced, 1% was widowed and the vast majority (94%) were never married.

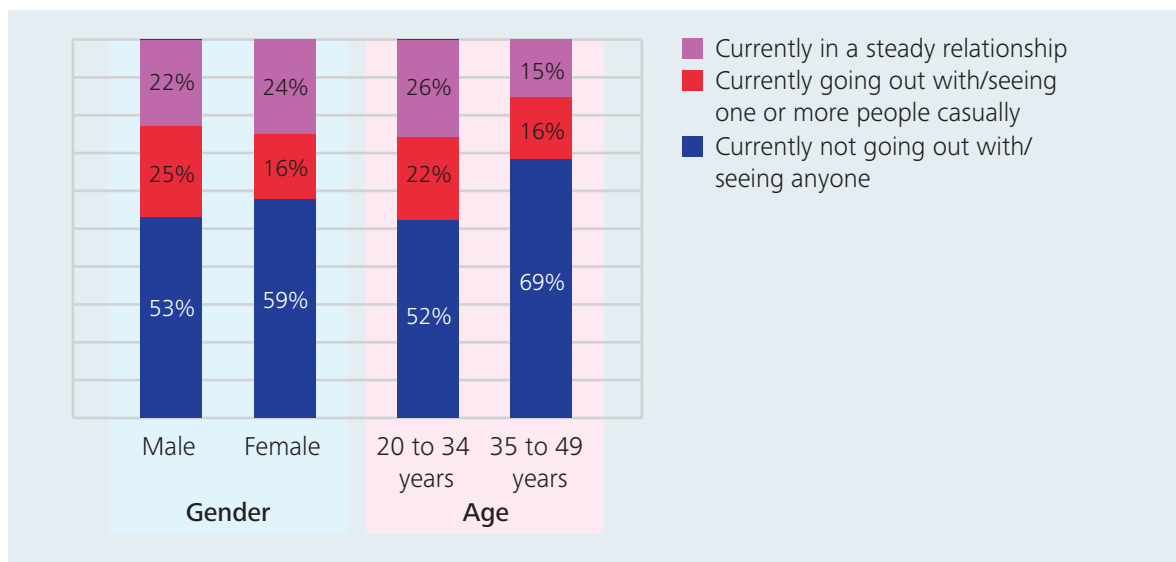
**Table 4.4: Actual Marital Status of Respondents (N=1,404)**

	Total	Gender		Age		Family Status		
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Single	Married	Cohabit
Total	1,404	706	698	759	645	625	619	160
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Married	44%	43%	46%	23%	69%	0%	100%	0%
Separated	2%	1%	3%	1%	3%	4%	-	3%
Divorced	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	-	2%
Widowed	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	-	1%
Never married	52%	56%	49%	75%	25%	93%	-	94%

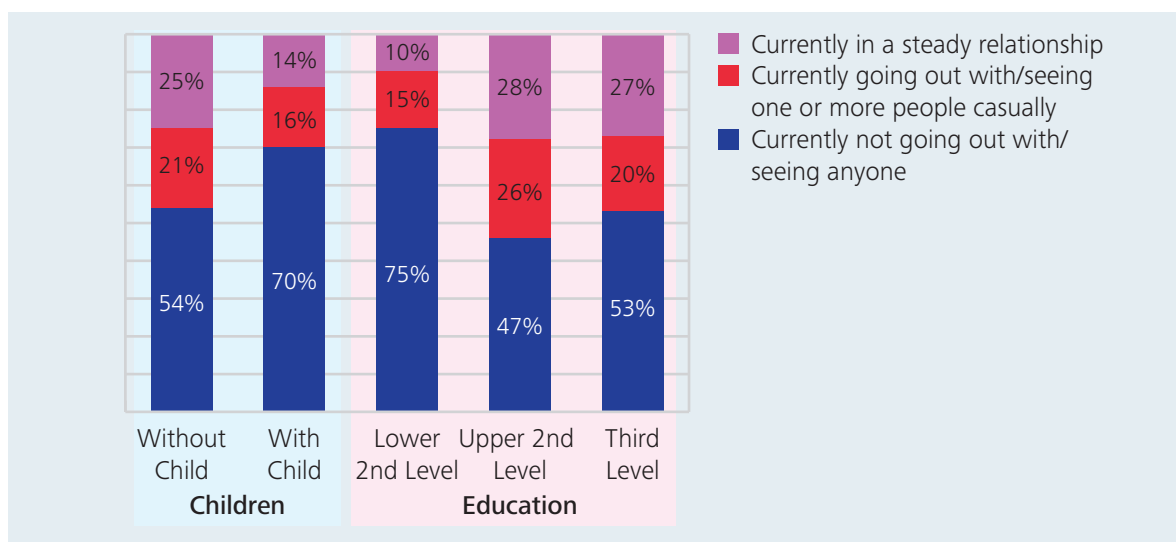
## 4.5 Dating Behaviour

The single people in the study were asked about their current social life and dating behaviour. Over half (56%) described themselves as “currently not going out with/seeing anyone.” This applied to 53% of single men and 59% of single women (Fig. 4.11). Older single people (35-49) were more likely to say they weren’t seeing anyone (69%) than were younger (20-34) single people, of whom 52% said they weren’t seeing anyone. Single people with children were much more likely to be not seeing anyone (70%), as compared with single people without children, of whom 54% said they were not seeing anyone currently. Males were more likely than females to say that they were currently going out with/seeing one or more people casually (25% of males vs. 16% of females). Similar proportions of men and women said they were in a steady relationship (22% of men and 24% of women). Younger singles (20-24) were more likely to be seeing one or more people casually (22% vs 16% of people 35-49) or to be in a steady relationship (26% vs 15% of people 35-49) (see Fig. 4.11). Those with the lowest level of educational qualifications were most likely to not be seeing anyone (75%) and less likely to be seeing one or more people casually (15%) or to be in a steady relationship.

**Figure 4.11: Current Dating Behaviour of Single People by Gender and Age (N=625)**



**Figure 4.12: Current Dating Behaviour of Single People by Presence of Children and Education (N=625)**



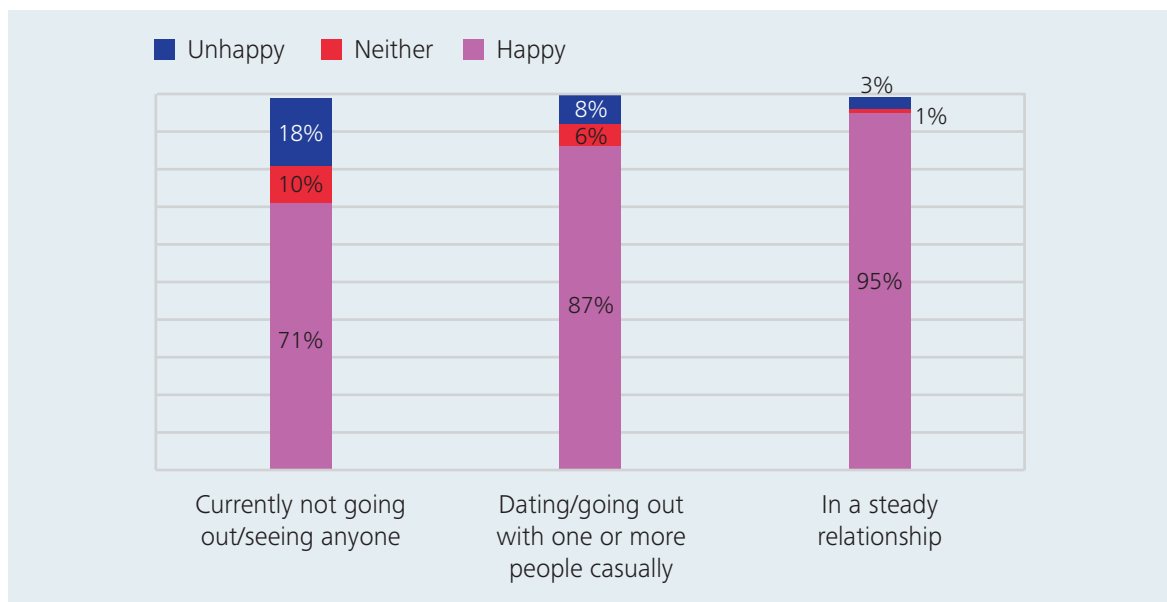
People in each of these three statuses were asked how happy they were with this situation.

**Table 4.6: Happiness Levels of those in Various Dating Situations (N=625)**

	Currently not going out/seeing anyone %	Dating/going out with one or more people casually %	In a steady relationship %
Extremely unhappy	2	1	1
Very unhappy	4	2	1
Quite unhappy	12	5	1
Neither	10	6	1
Quite happy	34	41	11
Very happy	22	33	26
Extremely happy	15	13	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

What is striking is the high level of happiness expressed by all groups, regardless of whether they are seeing no one, seeing one or more people casually or in a steady relationship. Of those not currently going out with anyone, 71% described themselves as “happy” to one degree or another; of those going out with one or more people casually, 87% described themselves as “happy,” and of those in a steady relationship, 95% described themselves as “happy”, as illustrated in Figure 4.13.

**Figure 4.13: Happiness Levels of those in Various Dating Situations (N=625)**



# Chapter 5

## Attitudes to Gender Roles and Gender Relations



## CHAPTER 5 Attitudes to Gender Roles and Gender Relations

### 5.1 Dimensions of Attitudes

Gender role attitudes and behaviour have been changing dramatically over the last 40 years in Ireland. This has included a marked increase in women's participation in the labour force, including that of married women and women with children. The dual earner household is now commonplace. One of the prime questions which the present study addressed was whether or not changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour were affecting family formation. Because gender role attitudes and behaviour have been changing so rapidly it was necessary to develop new measures which adequately captured how people view these issues at the present time. On the basis of the qualitative study, we developed a new set of measures which captures how people view gender roles and gender relations today. Six dimensions or 'factors' emerged from a factor analysis.

Factor analysis is a technique which summarises a larger number of attitudinal items into fewer underlying factors or clusters which have a common theme. It is based on patterns of correlations between items. The advantages of factor analysis are 1) that it summarises a larger number of items into a fewer number of more manageable factors; 2) these factors are more robust and reliable than individual items; and 3) it identifies underlying dimensions among the items which adds to our understanding of the relationships among the items. Several factor solutions were identified in this process and we selected the solution with the greatest psychological interpretability and the one with the best statistical characteristics. The actual factor analysis tables are not presented here for space reasons, however the factors are described below and the individual items and percentage responses are presented later in the chapter.

#### **Factor I: Perceived Threat of Women's Career Advancement**

The first factor concerns women's increasing participation in the labour force. This factor includes statements such as: "some men feel threatened by women's advances in the workplace," "men don't really like it that much that women are getting higher positions – and climbing the ladder." The factor also includes items that suggest that women's increased participation in the workplace may negatively impinge on their relationships with men. These include the statements, "career oriented women can be more threatening to men," and "most men would find it intimidating to go out with a woman who has a high-powered job."

#### **Factor II: Male Role Ambiguity**

This factor taps an attitude cluster concerning perceptions of men's roles in light of changes in women's roles. Those high on the factor tend to agree that "with all the changes in gender roles, it's hard to know who's supposed to do what." This is consistent with another statement in the factor: "a lot of men are confused about their roles because they are less defined than they used to be." Similarly, those high on the factor tend to agree that "as a result of change in women's roles, men are not sure where they stand." As one young man said in the qualitative study:

*I think it's changed men's roles a lot. Over the last 30 years women have been empowered a lot, whereas the offset of that is that men are disempowered. Guys don't know where they stand. The identity of a man at the moment is a bit ambiguous.*

(Male, 29, single, business analyst, Cork)

The factor also includes a statement concerning family formation: those high on the factor are more likely to think that “it’s more difficult for a man to find a partner now because women are putting careers ahead of relationships.” The element of the workplace is clearly represented by the item “women’s gains in the workplace have sometimes been at the expense of men” and “men feel a little redundant because there is so much competition from women.” Thus male role ambiguity is connected to an increasing lack of definition of gender roles and to women’s increasing role in the work place which may be perceived as having some negative consequences for men. In addition, the factor includes an element suggesting that male role ambiguity may in part be related to a feeling of not being needed as a result of women’s changing role, as exemplified by the item, “women can be so independent sometimes that it makes men feel like they’re not needed anymore.”

### **Factor III: Support for Female Financial Independence**

Financial independence was seen by respondents of all social classes as a key element in women’s new role and a key component of the changing nature of the relationship between men and women. This is illustrated by the views expressed in the qualitative study:

*In the past a woman had to ask a man for money. Now you don’t ask the man for money.*  
(Female, 36, cohabiting, architect, Dublin)

*Women are more independent and they pay for more things. Men used to think they had to pay for everything. I’d have no problem paying for the pictures and he pay for something to eat. If we are at the nightclub I pay for my own drinks. I wouldn’t be sending him up to the bar. That’s what I have my own money for.*  
(Female, 20, single, hairdresser trainee, Dublin)

A factor measuring “Support for Female Financial Independence” emerged in the main study. It expresses the view that “it’s good for a woman to be financially independent in a relationship” and “most men are happy for women to pay their own way.” It also contains the belief that “both men and women should contribute to the household income.” This factor also includes an item about maternal employment: “a woman who has a job she enjoys is likely to be a better wife and mother because she has an interest and some fulfilment outside the home.” Linked with support for financial independence appears to be an admiration for women: “I think men nowadays like intelligent women who know what they want out of life.” In contrast to some of the items loading on Factors I and II, this factor expresses a positive view about women’s financial independence in the context of relationships.

### **Factor IV: Belief in Traditional Male Support and Protection**

Factor IV measures a belief in traditional gender roles, with an emphasis on male support and protection of the female. It includes two items which have been used extensively in previous research, e.g., “Most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men have traditionally given them” and “being a wife and mother are the most fulfilling roles any woman could want” (Fine-Davis, 1983a, 1983b, 1988a; Fine-Davis et al., 2005). For the first time a male counterpart to the first item was designed, i.e., “Most men need and want to give the kind of protection and support that they have traditionally given to women.”

### **Factor V: Male Reluctance to Share Housework**

Factor V concerns male participation in domestic activities and is entitled, “Male Reluctance to Share Housework.” The highest loading item is “There’s an awful lot of lip service paid to ‘sharing

responsibilities,' but it's still a man's world at the end of the day." The next highest loading item is "While men recognise that women have to spend less time on housework, they don't recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to." The factor captures the essence of one of today's most difficult problems, that is, how to facilitate sharing of domestic responsibilities in light of women's increasing labour force participation. One young woman in the qualitative study expressed this view about men's response to women's changing roles:

*I think men feel a little lost. I think they recognise that women have to spend less time on housework but don't recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to. Men's roles used to be synonymous with bringing home an income. Women are saying that's not enough anymore – so they might be confused.*

(Female, 28, married, investment executive, Dublin)

The two other items on the factor add further nuances to this issue. The item, "Men respect women more at work than at home," suggests that while women are earning greater respect in the workplace, this does not necessarily translate to the private sphere. The final item on the factor - "If a woman is financially independent it can lead to difficulties in a relationship" - suggests again that women's labour force participation is somehow unsettling the delicate balance of male/female relations, including in the personal sphere.

#### **Factor VI: Belief that Mothers are the Best Nurturers**

The final factor concerns the belief that mothers are the best nurturers of children. In light of women's increasing labour force participation, men's role in child care has come to the fore and such attitudes are therefore increasingly important. Those high on the factor tend to think that "caring for children is best done by mothers" and they tend to disagree that "fathers can be as nurturing to children as mothers can." Those high on this factor also tend to feel that "it's bad for young children if their mothers go out and work, even if well taken care of by another adult." Conversely, those low on the factor tend to think fathers can be as nurturing as mothers and do not feel that maternal employment is detrimental to children.

## **5.2 Prevalence of Attitudes to Gender Roles**

Participants responded to each of the items on seven point scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; however, for simplicity's sake we are presenting the summary 'agree' and 'disagree' percentages. Any difference between these is the "don't know" response. These are shown in the following figures, beginning with Figure 5.1, which present the individual attitudinal items grouped by the six factors discussed above, using the weighted data representative of the population in the childbearing age group.

#### **Factor I: Perceived Threat of Women's Career Advancement**

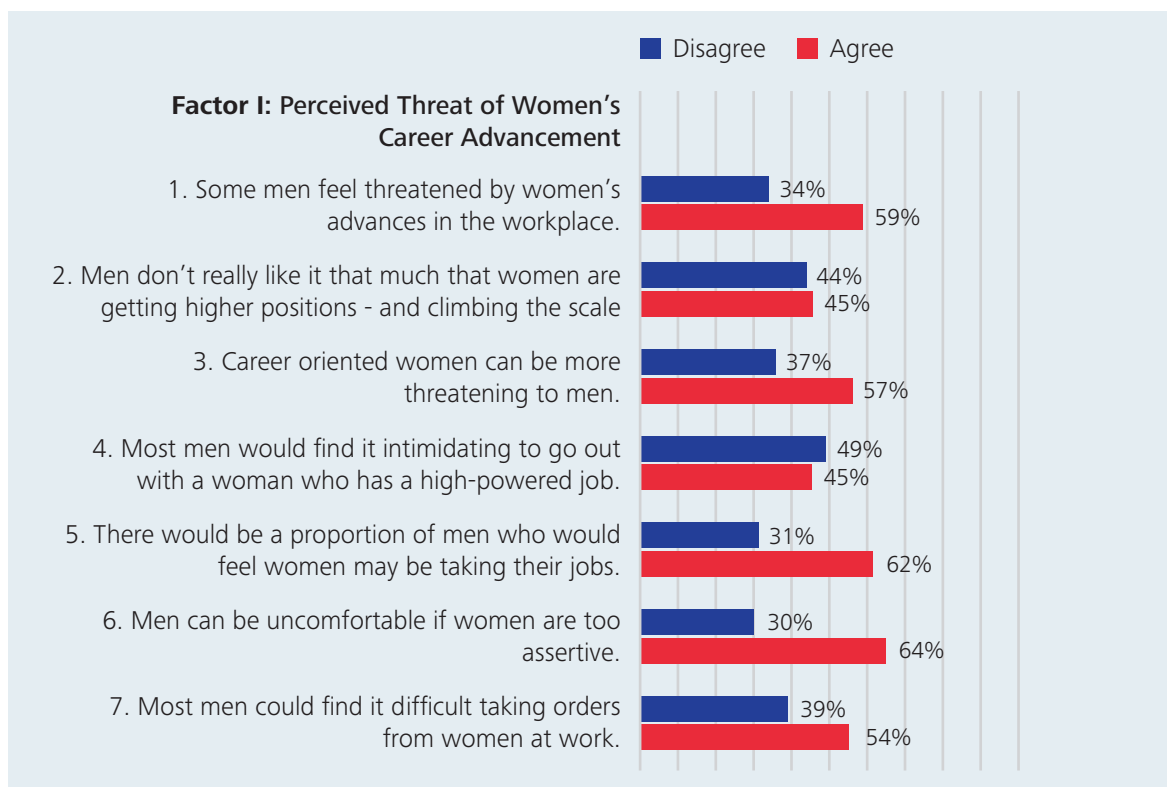
In the qualitative study, while women's progress was noted in positive terms, this was accompanied in some cases by reference to the fact that women's gains have sometimes been at the expense of men. While many men were aware that women's increasing equality posed a threat to some men, they themselves did not appear to be threatened. However, some of the results of the qualitative study suggested that this was a sensitive issue, as illustrated by the quote below:



*Some of the men that I know — one of their biggest concerns is that women can match them with income now. And the second consideration that men have is that women can match them intellectually. I'd say that's a huge transformation in men's thinking, or having to adjust to that. Now sometimes women are better read, better educated.*

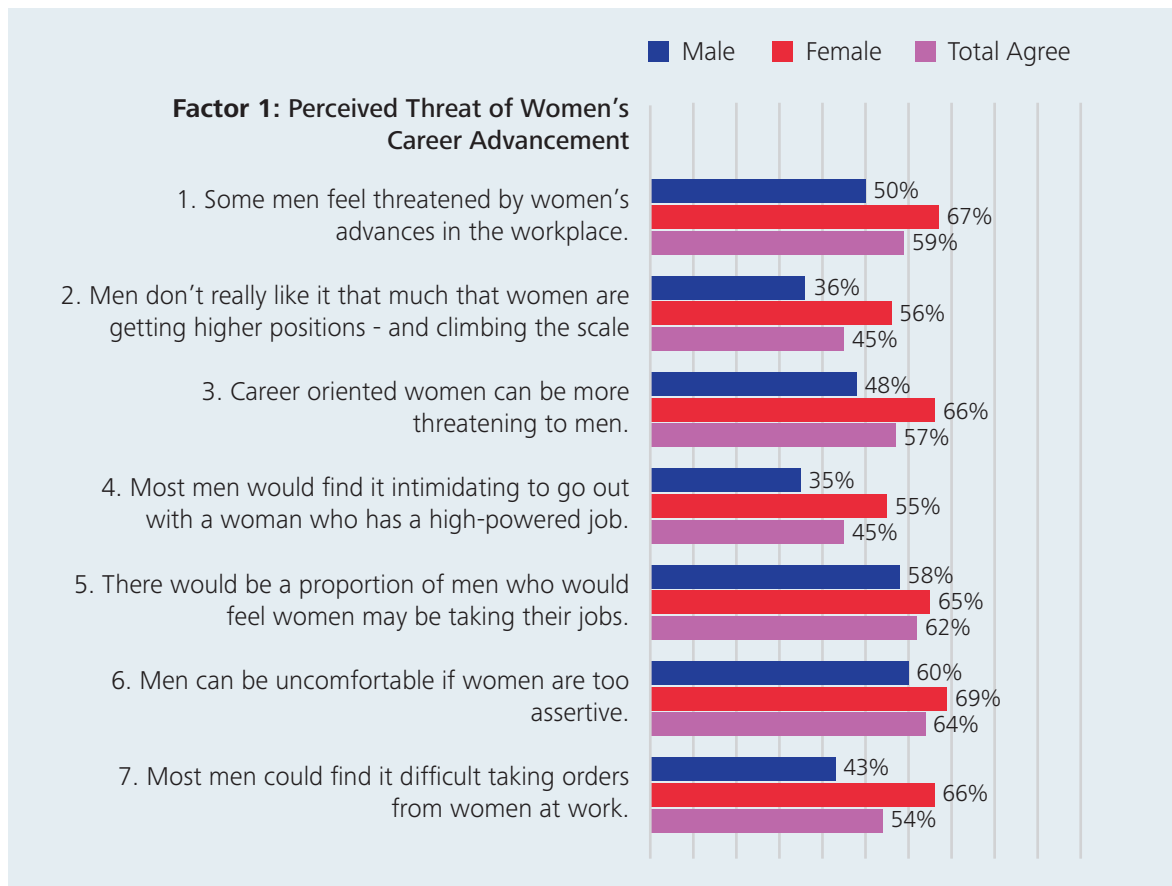
(Male, 51, married, Co. Carlow)

**Figure 5.1: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor I, Perceived Threat of Women's Career Advancement (N=1,404)**



Factor I, “Perceived Threat of Women’s Career Advancement” was the strongest factor in the analysis of attitudes to gender roles. Overall, a majority agreed with six of the nine items and 40-45% agreed with the other three items, indicating that there is a consensus that women’s career advancement is perceived to be posing a threat to at least some men (see Fig. 5.1). For example, 59% agreed with the statement, “some men feel threatened by women’s advances in the workplace.” However it is interesting to note that women were more likely to think this was the case than men were: 50% of men agreed with this statement, whereas 67% of women did (see Fig. 5.1a). Overall 62% of the sample felt that “there would be a proportion of men who would feel women may be taking their jobs.” While 58% of men felt this way a slightly higher proportion of women thought they did (65%). Almost two thirds (64%) of the overall sample felt that “men can be uncomfortable if women are too assertive.” The factor indicated that almost half of the sample (45%) felt that “men don’t really like it that much that women are getting higher positions - and climbing the scale”.

**Figure 5.1a: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses by Gender to Items on Factor I, Perceived Threat of Women's Career Advancement (N=1,404)**



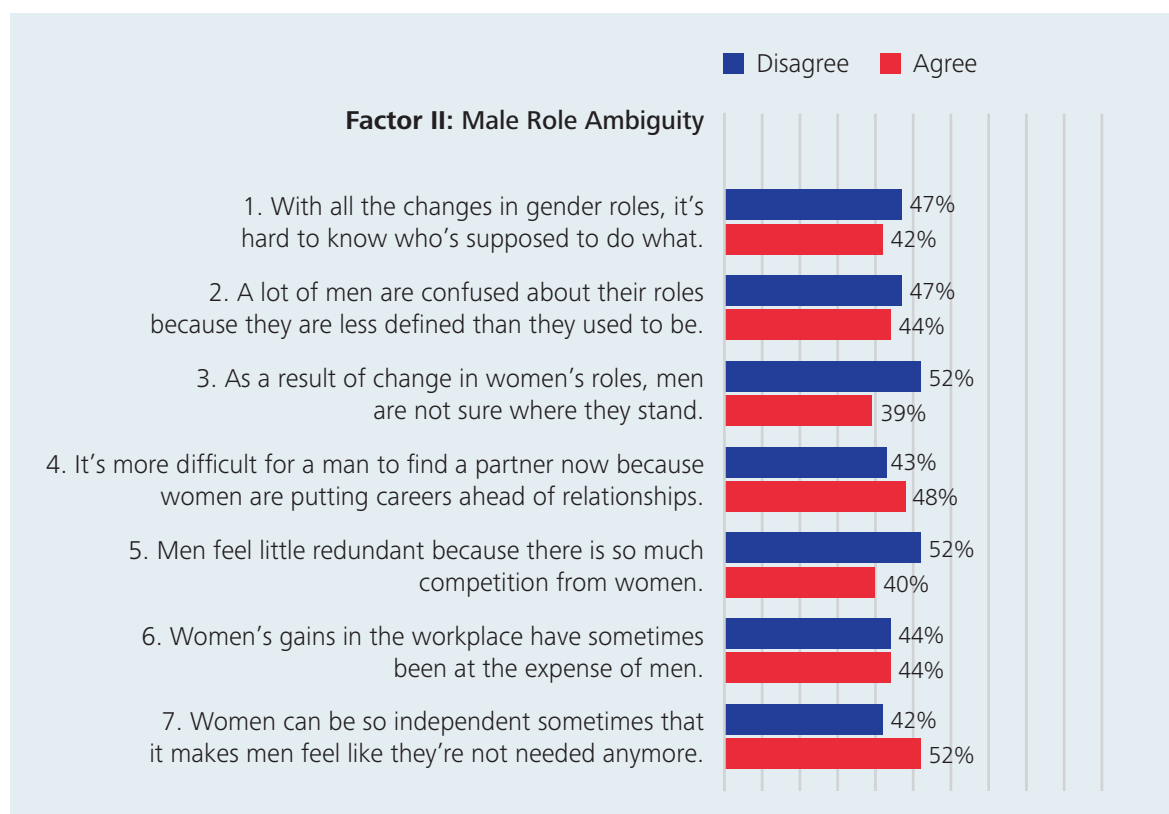
However, a closer examination shows that only 36% of men feel this way, whereas 56% of women think they do. In light of the fact women are now more likely to be in supervisory positions, it is noteworthy that over half of the sample (54%) felt that “most men could find it difficult taking orders from women at work.” However, a closer inspection of the results shows that while 43% of men feel this way, 66% of women think they do.

The attitudes to women in the workplace appear to spill over into the personal sphere, as indicated by the fact that close to half of the sample (45%) felt that “most men would find it intimidating to go out with a woman who has a high-powered job” and over half (57%) felt that “career oriented women can be more threatening to men.” However, some of women’s fears concerning the potential negative effects of their success in the workplace would seem to be unfounded as women were more likely than men to agree with most of the items on this factor. For example, 55% of women felt that “most men would find it intimidating to go out with a woman who has a high-powered job,” whereas only 35% of men actually felt this way. While more than two thirds of women (66%) felt that “career oriented women can be more threatening to men,” only 48% of men felt this way.

**Factor II, Male Role Ambiguity**, is the second strongest factor in this set of attitudes to gender roles. The responses on this factor indicate that the sample is quite divided in its views. For example, 42% agree that “with all the changes in gender roles, it’s hard to know who’s supposed to do what,” while 47% disagree. Similarly 44% agree that “a lot of men are confused about their roles because they are less defined than they used to be,” while 47% disagree. Two of the items reflect a feeling of “redundancy” on the part of men. For example 40% felt that changes in the workplace have left men

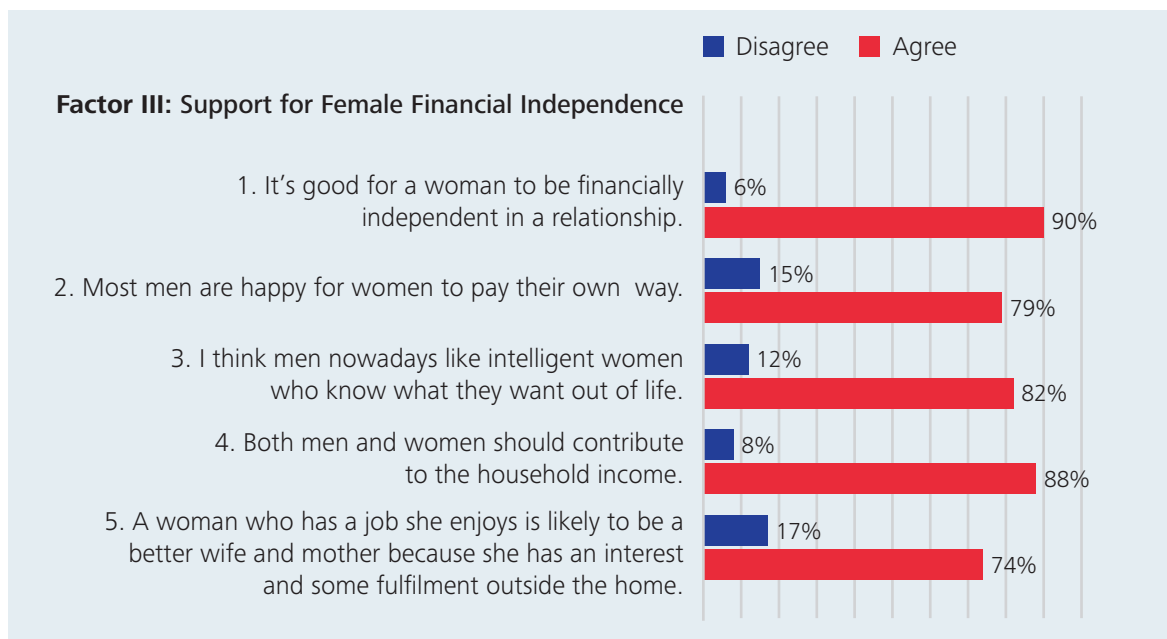
feeling “a little redundant because there is so much competition from women.” This notion of redundancy was echoed in another item which related to the personal sphere, i.e. “women can be so independent sometimes that it makes men feel like they’re not needed anymore.” It is notable that a majority (52%) agreed with this. This suggests that an element in male role ambiguity resulting from changing gender roles relates to a feeling on men’s part that they are not needed. This would seem to be an important psychological element in this cluster of attitudes.

**Figure 5.2: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor II, Male Role Ambiguity (N=1,404)**



**Factor III, Support for Female Economic Independence**, shows a high level of agreement with all of the items on this factor, indicating strong support for women’s financial independence. The vast majority of the sample (90%) agreed that “It’s good for a woman to be financially independent in a relationship.” There was also very strong agreement (88%) that “both men and women should contribute to the household income.” Most people (79%) thought that “men are happy for women to pay their own way.” A majority (74%) endorsed the view that “a woman who has a job she enjoys is likely to be a better wife and mother because she has an interest and some fulfilment outside the home.” The juxtaposition of this item with items about financial independence indicates the emergence of integrated thinking about women’s fulfilment, child welfare and the economic well-being of the family unit, something which has not been seen in previous research in which maternal employment was primarily viewed in relation to children’s welfare.

**Figure 5.3: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor III, Support for Female Financial Independence (N=1,404)**

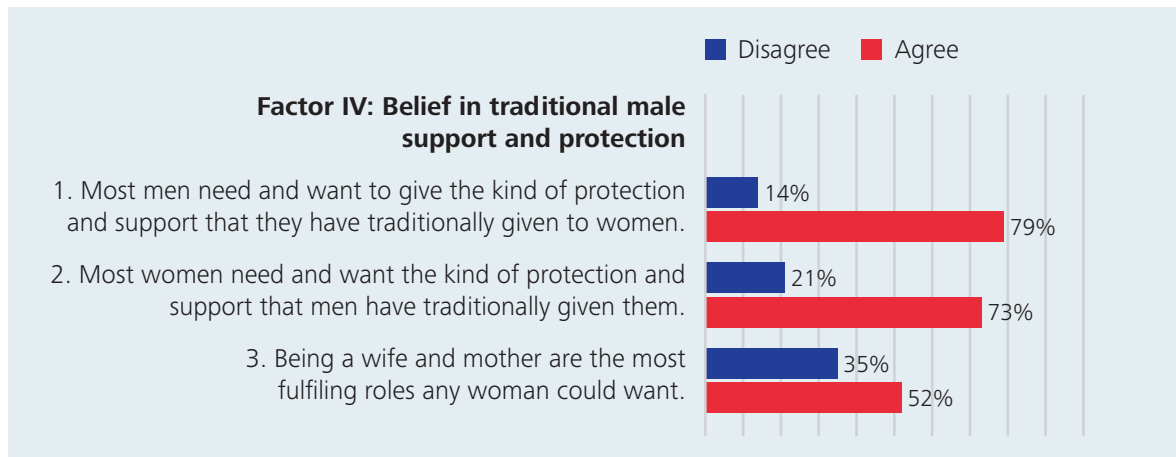


The factor further extends to the personal sphere in the sense that women’s economic independence is associated with other positives, i.e., 82% agreed that “I think men nowadays like intelligent women who know what they want out of life.”

It is thus apparent that there is strong support for female economic independence yet also a recognition on the part of the sample that female economic independence is having an effect on some men’s sense of security in the workplace, as reflected in Factor I, and may be generating a degree of male role ambiguity, as indicated by the responses to items in Factor II.

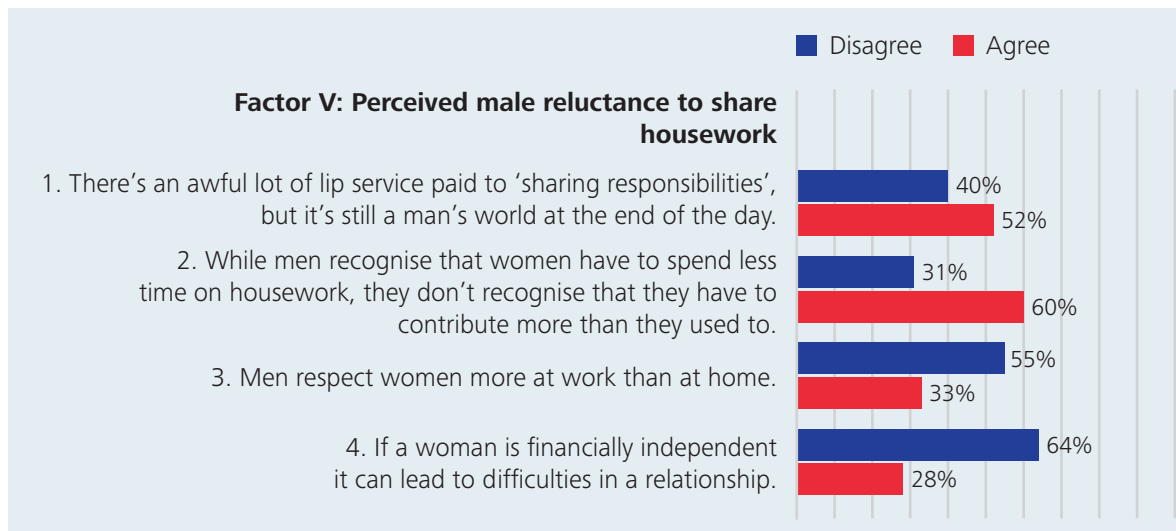
**Factor IV, Belief in Traditional Male Support and Protection** concerns traditional gender roles. A large majority (73%) agree that “most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men have traditionally given them.” This item has been used in several Irish studies over the last 35 years and has been found to be quite stable. For example in 1986 75.4% agreed with this statement (Fine-Davis, 1988a) and in 2005 a high proportion (69%) did also (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). While other measures of gender role attitudes have changed dramatically over time, this item has remained stable at high levels. This suggests that it may be tapping into a psychological need, rather than into gender roles *per se*. As noted above, we added for the first time a male counterpart item. It may be seen that an almost identical proportion (79%) agreed that “most men need and want to give the kind of protection and support that they have traditionally given to women.” There is also much agreement (52%) with the item “being a wife and mother are the most fulfilling roles any woman could want.” In a nationwide study in 1978, 77.6% agreed with this statement (Fine-Davis, 1988a). The level of support dropped to 54.5% in 1986 (Ibid.). However, in 2005 the agreement increased to 66% (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). While some of this difference may be attributed to slight differences in the samples, what is notable is that relatively large proportions in all studies agreed with the item over time, whereas other items showed larger changes in a less traditional direction. This suggests that this item, together with the item concerning the need for protection and support, are tapping into basic needs and beliefs which are not changing to any great degree as a result of social changes in gender roles.

**Figure 5.4: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor IV, Belief in Traditional male Support and Protection (N=1,404)**



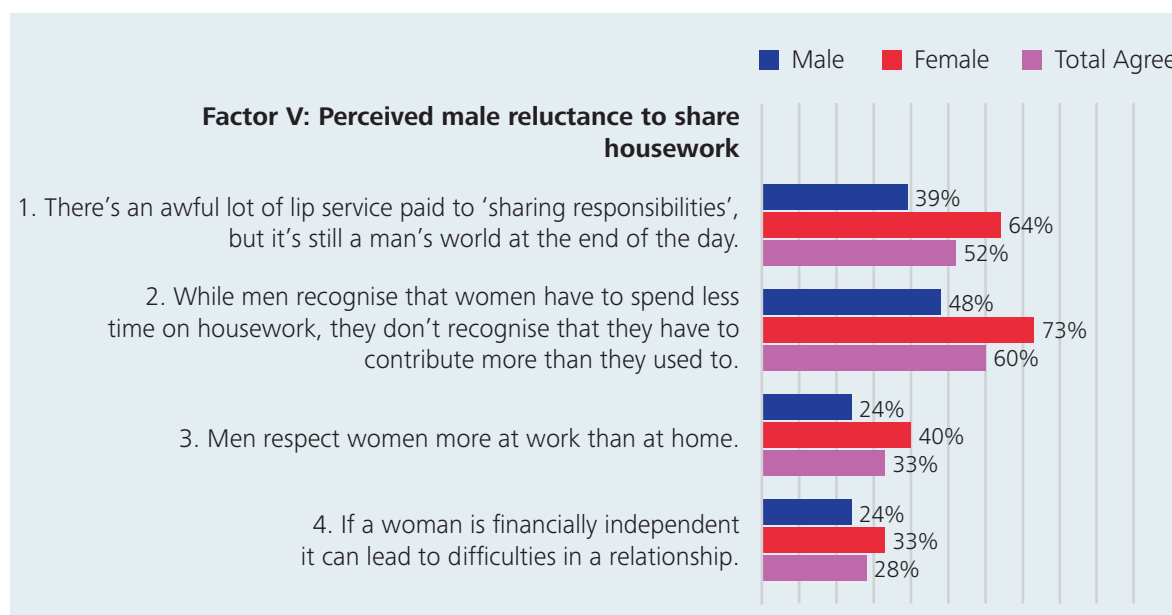
**Factor V, Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework**, is a new factor which taps into attitudes towards sharing domestic work. There is majority agreement (60%) that “while men recognise that women have to spend less time on housework, they don’t recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to,” (see Fig 5.5). This item elicited major gender differences, as shown in Fig 5.5a. While just 48% of men agreed with the item, fully 73% of women did, indicating that the majority of women feel that men are not pulling their weight in this department. This is supported by responses to the item, “there’s an awful lot of lip service paid to ‘sharing responsibilities,’ but it’s still a man’s world at the end of the day,” to which 52% agreed. Again there was a large discrepancy in male and female responses: while 64% of women agreed with the statement, only 39% of men did. This indicates that men think they are contributing more than women think they are – a finding which was observed cross-culturally in a previous study (Fine-Davis et al., 2004). Recent research by McGinnity and Russell (2007) shows that men carry out significantly less domestic work and childcare than women do. The issue of housework is linked in people’s minds with men’s respect for women, suggesting that lack of helping may be related to a lack of respect. While most people (55%) disagreed that “men respect women more at work than at home,” 33% supported this view. Women were more likely to think that men respected women more at work than at home; 40% of women felt this way, while only 24% of men did so.

**Figure 5.5: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor V, Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework (N=1,404)**



The fact that the vast majority of the sample favours women’s economic independence is supported by the responses to the item: “If a woman is financially independent it can lead to difficulties in a relationship.” The vast majority of the sample (64%) disagreed that this was the case, while only 28% agreed. However, the fact that this item loads in the same direction as the other items indicates that those who tend to agree that if a woman is financially independent it may lead to difficulties in a relationship also tend to agree that men still do not contribute sufficiently to housework. It may be that the difficulties in a relationship arising from women’s financial independence often relate to housework.

**Figure 5.5a: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses by Gender to Items on Factor V, Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework (N=1,404)**

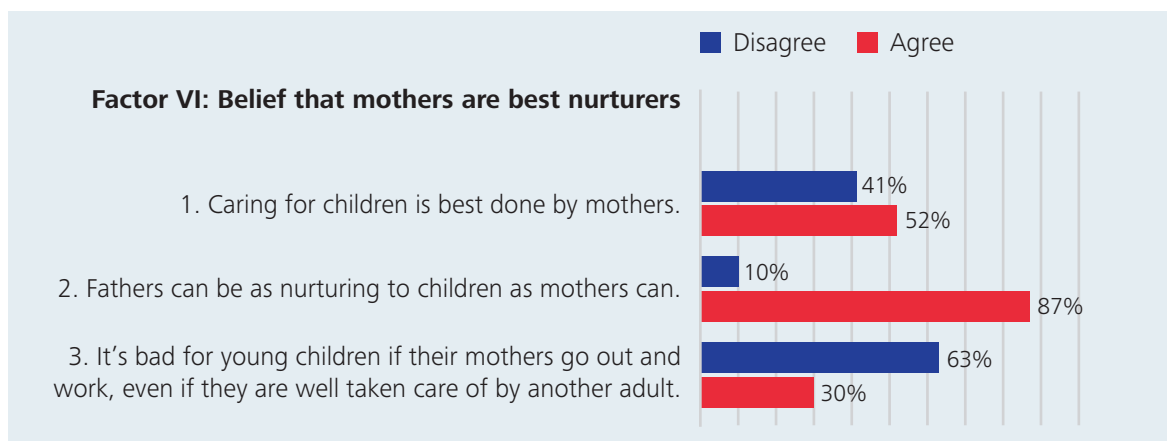


**Factor VI, Belief that Mothers are Best Nurturers**, shows that the vast majority of the sample (87%) thinks that “fathers can be as nurturing to children as mothers can, “ yet approximately half (52%) of the sample thinks that “caring for children is best done by mothers.” While this shows an increasing support for male caring, it still reflects an underlying ambivalence and vestiges of traditional views of caring. In the qualitative study some men expressed reservations. These were frequently framed in terms of a concern for the well-being of children and also the belief that women were more suited to taking care of children.

*“I understand the idea behind women working — it’s that they can do anything men can do and of course they can, but . . . I think women are better equipped to be mothers than men . . . It’s much the same for a man to stay home as for a woman to stay home but it’s clear women are better equipped to deal with emotional issues and relationship issues and I think that stands them to dealing with children.”*

(Male, 33, cohabiting, software engineer, Galway)

**Figure 5.6: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor VI, Belief that Mothers are Best Nurturers (N=1,404)**



However, the item on the effects of maternal employment on children (“it’s bad for young children if their mothers go out and work, even if they are well taken care of by another adult”) elicited little support (30%) and majority disagreement (63%) which shows that attitudes in this area have clearly changed in recent years.

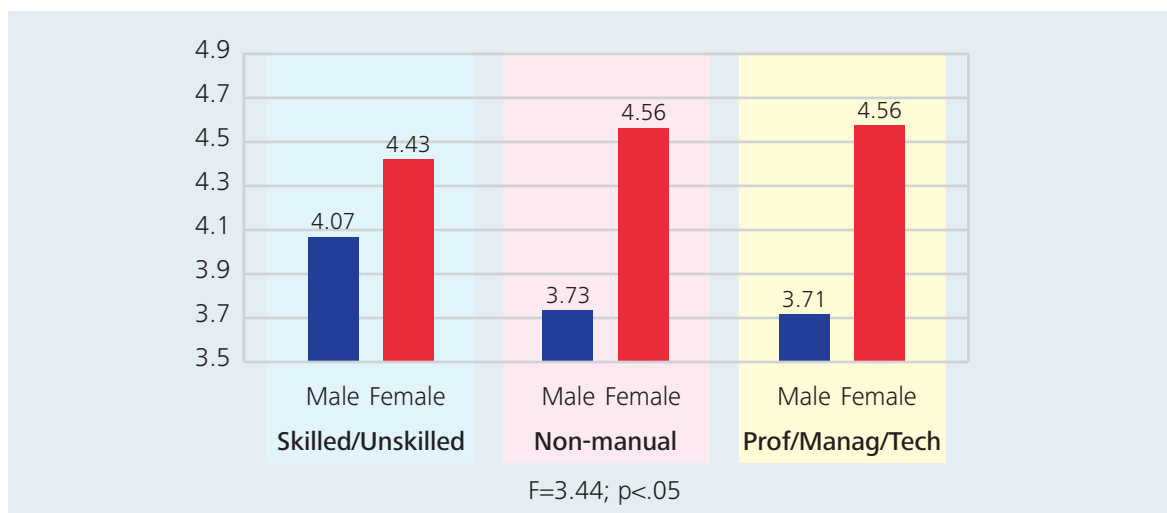
### 5.3 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Attitudes to Gender Roles

Table 5.1 presents results of an analysis of variance, which looks at the simultaneous effects of sex, age, family status, having or not having a child and socio-economic status on the six factors measuring attitudes to gender roles. These factors are based on composite scores for the items on each factor. This analysis also tells us if there are any significant interaction effects between two or more of the demographic characteristics on the dependent variables, i.e. the measures of gender role attitudes. The most important of these will be highlighted below. In this section one of the main things we are interested in is differences between single, cohabiting and married people, as we want to see if differences in attitudes to gender roles are related to family status. We are of course also interested in gender differences. We include the other independent variables as controls so that we can see the “pure” effects of family status and gender, but also any interaction effects which might be occurring with these other key demographic variables.

On **Factor I, Perceived Threat of Women’s Career Advancement**, there is a strong effect of gender ( $F=86.89$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Contrary to what might have been expected, and as we saw in the percentage results, women are significantly more likely to think that men are threatened by their advancement in the workplace than men actually are. The fact that men’s scores on this factor are lower than women’s (mean for men = 3.84; mean for women = 4.51) indicates that women may be overestimating the extent to which men are threatened by their career advancement. There is a significant interaction effect between gender and social class indicating that working class men are more likely to perceive the threat of women’s career advancement than men in the middle and higher SES groups, as illustrated in Figure 5.7.



**Figure 5.7: Perceived Threat of Women’s Career Advancement: Means for Significant Interaction Effect of Gender and Socio-Economic Status**



This interaction effect also shows that there is a greater gap between men and women in the middle and higher SES groups than in the lowest SES group, indicating that women in the two higher groups have significantly more anxiety about the perceived threat of their career advancement relative to the men in their own social class and less reason to do so, whereas women in the lowest social class, while having a comparable level of anxiety, are more realistic in that the men in their social class are in fact threatened by their advances in the workplace.

**Table 5.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Five Demographic Characteristics on Six Factors Measuring Attitudes to Gender Roles (N= 1,404)**

FACTORS MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER ROLES	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	S	M	C	With-out Child	With Child	Skilled /Un-skilled	Non-man-ual	Prof./ Manager/ Technical
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)
I. Perceived Threat of Women’s Career Advancement	F =86.89***		F =9.95**		F =3.94*			F =3.27		F =2.90		
	3.84	4.51	4.13	4.22	4.28	4.10	4.15	4.17	4.18	4.25	4.14	4.13
II. Male Role Ambiguity	F =2.50		F =10.46***		F =4.78**			F =5.26*		F =5.02**		
	3.75	3.85	3.74	3.86	3.96	3.73	3.72	3.74	3.86	3.94	3.75	3.71
III. Support for Female Financial Independence	F =0.26		F =1.64		F =3.03*			F =12.79***		F =4.37*		
	5.53	5.53	5.53	5.53	5.59	5.47	5.53	5.61	5.45	5.40	5.60	5.59
IV. Belief in Traditional Male Support and Protection	F =2.54		F =12.06***		F =10.04***			F =4.38*		F =4.92**		
	4.83	4.73	4.90	4.66	4.56	4.98	4.78	4.70	4.85	4.85	4.80	4.68
V. Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework	F =103.94***		F =19.51***		F =19.92***			F =16.48***		F =3.82*		
	3.46	4.17	3.73	3.90	4.08	3.55	3.81	3.71	3.92	3.86	3.84	3.73
VI. Belief that Mothers are Best Nurturers	F =0.21		F =10.65***		F =1.22			F =0.52		F =5.31**		
	3.26	3.23	3.17	3.32	3.28	3.27	3.18	3.22	3.27	3.33	3.31	3.09

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001



There is also a slight tendency for older people to be more likely to think that men are threatened by women's career advancement and younger people to be less so ( $p < .05$ ). An effect for family status indicates that single people are somewhat more likely than married and cohabiting people to think men are threatened by women's career advancement ( $p < .05$ ). Taking the main effects together, this would indicate that single women in the age group 35-49 are the most likely to think that men are threatened by women's career advancement. Married and cohabiting women are less likely to think so, perhaps because they are more secure in their relationship and do not fear that their own career advancement would threaten their relationship. Single women, on the other hand - particularly older ones who may be having difficulty forming a permanent relationship - may be more fearful that men will be threatened if they are too successful in the workplace.

The second factor, **Male Role Ambiguity**, does not show a significant gender effect, as might have been expected, meaning that men and women both have similar views on this. Older people are somewhat more likely to think that men's roles are more ambiguous than they used to be ( $F = 10.46$ ;  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that younger men and women (aged 20-34) are more comfortable with changing gender roles, whereas older people (35-49) feel these changes are leading to greater role ambiguity. There are also significant effects showing that single people are somewhat more likely to perceive male role ambiguity than married or cohabiting people; people with children are more likely to perceive male role ambiguity than those without children; and finally manual workers (unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled) are more likely to perceive male role ambiguity than professional/managerial and technical workers or non-manual workers.

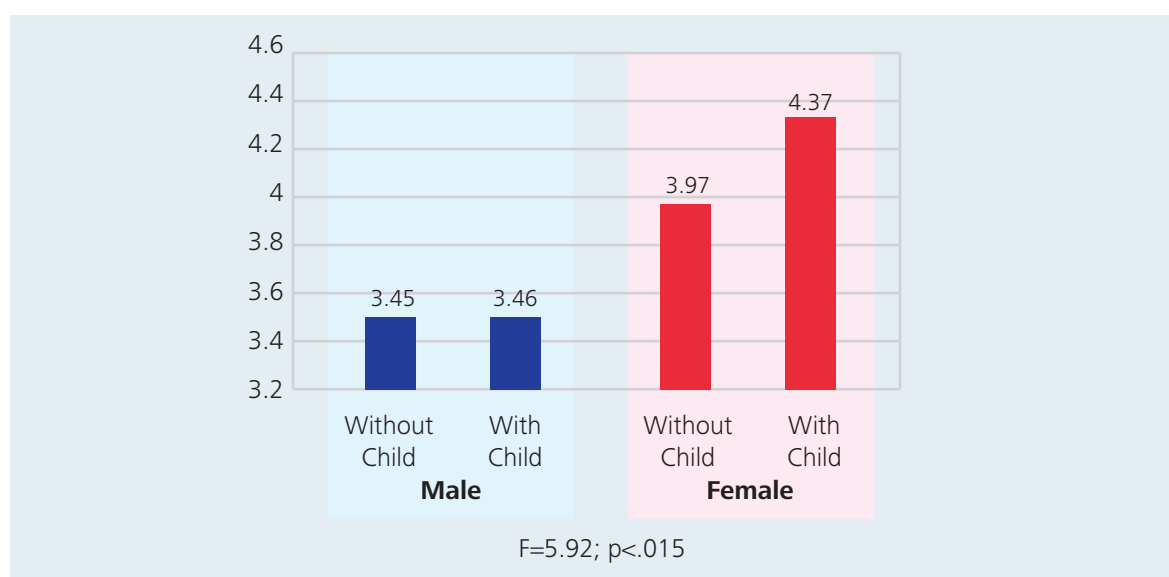
Men and women both expressed mild to moderate **Support for Female Financial Independence**. Men and women without children were more likely than those with children to support female financial independence ( $F = 12.79$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The other two significant main effects were less strong, showing that single and cohabiting people were somewhat more supportive of female financial independence than were married people and those in working class occupations were less supportive, while those in the middle and higher occupational groups were more supportive. These findings mirror those found for the second factor, Male Role Ambiguity. These findings taken together indicate that married people, those with children and those in the lower socio-economic group have more traditional views about gender roles and as a result are finding changes in gender roles, such as greater female economic independence, are leading to greater male role ambiguity.

**Factor IV, Belief in Traditional Support and Protection**, again shows strongest agreement among married people, the least among single people and cohabiting people are in between ( $F = 10.04$ ;  $p < .001$ ). There is also a significant effect of age in the counter-intuitive direction of younger people being more likely to believe in male protection and support ( $F = 12.06$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Those with children and those in the lowest and middle SES groups are also more likely to espouse traditional beliefs concerning male protection and support ( $p < .05$  in both cases).

**Factor V, Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework**. There is a very strong effect of gender on this factor ( $F = 103.94$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The male mean is 3.46, while the female mean is 4.17. This indicates that women are significantly more likely to perceive a male reluctance to share housework. There is also a significant effect of family status, indicating that single people are most likely to perceive male reluctance to do housework, followed by cohabiting people. Married people were least likely to be high on this factor. This is somewhat surprising since housework is often an area of dissension in among men and women, especially if both partners are working. We have seen in previous factors that married people have more traditional attitudes towards gender roles and this

may explain their views on this factor. In spite of this, the extremely strong effect of gender would of course pertain to married people as well and would indicate that married women would still be more likely to perceive male reluctance to share housework than would married men. There was also a significant effect for children ( $F=16.48$ ;  $p<.001$ ) indicating that those with children were significantly more likely to perceive male reluctance to share housework (Table 5.1). When there are children in the household there is more work to do so that the issue of sharing of domestic responsibilities would clearly be more salient. A significant interaction effect between gender and presence of children shows that it is women with children who are the most likely to perceive a male reluctance to do housework (Figure 5.8). These results confirm those of McGinnity and Russell (2007) to the effect that women with children carry out significantly more domestic work and childcare than men.

**Figure 5.8: Perceived Male Reluctance to Share Housework: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender and Presence of Children**



**Factor VI, Belief that Mothers are Best Nurturers**, has two main effects. There is an effect of age in the direction of younger people being less likely to think mothers are the best nurturers, suggesting that attitudes are changing and among younger people men and women are both likely to be seen as equally good nurturers. There is also an effect for social class, indicating that those in the lower two SES groups are somewhat more likely to think that mothers are the best nurturers for children, whereas those in the highest SES group are least likely to perceive gender differences in the case of nurturing.

## 5.4 Summary of Key Findings

One of the prime questions which the present study addressed was whether or not changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour were affecting family formation. A set of six measures was developed which captures how people view gender roles and gender relations today. The study found strong support among both men and women for women's financial independence. Associated with this were also strongly positive attitudes to maternal employment, suggesting that there is now joined up thinking about the relationship between women's fulfilment, the welfare of children and the economic well-being of the family unit. In spite of the widespread support for women's economic independence, their progress in the workplace was perceived as posing a threat to some men. This included

perceptions that women's advances could be a threat, some men might feel that women are taking their jobs and that men could find it difficult being supervised by a woman. Attitudes to women in the workplace may spill over into the personal sphere and the findings suggested that women's success in the workplace may come with a personal price. However, it was found that women were more likely to think men were threatened by their advances in the workplace than men actually were. Working class men were more likely to perceive a threat of women's career advancement than men in the middle and higher socio-economic groups. Women in the higher socio-economic groups had more anxiety about the perceived threat of women's career advancement and less reason to do so. There was also evidence of male role ambiguity as a result of changing gender role attitudes and behaviour. Changing attitudes towards male nurturing were evident from the results; however, while there was increasing support for male caring, there was still an underlying ambivalence and vestiges of traditional views of caring. This also extended to the area of housework. A majority agreed that "while men recognise that women have to spend less time on housework, they don't recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to." There was a very strong effect of gender, with women much more likely than men to perceive a male reluctance to share housework. Women with children were the most likely to feel this way. The issue of housework was found to be linked with perceptions concerning men's respect for women.



# Chapter 6

## Attitudes to Family Formation



## CHAPTER 6 Attitudes to Family Formation

The Census data from 2006 indicates that the fastest growing category is families consisting of couples (whether married or not) without children. Their number increased 130% in the 20 years from 1986 – 2006. Many of these couples are cohabiting. Punch (2007) observed that those who are cohabiting tend to be young: 41 % of the males and 53 % of cohabiting females were less than 30 years of age. However, he pointed out that it was not clear to what extent cohabitation was a precursor to marriage or whether it was a more permanent form of relationship replacing marriage.

One of the clear findings of the qualitative study was that cohabitation was seen as very acceptable and a positive thing. Respondents frequently said they did not see a difference between cohabiting and marriage. Several said things like, “*you don’t need a ring to show that you love somebody*”. People said that there was less pressure to marry from parents and society in general. They felt that the religious reasons for getting married were now less important. People saw cohabitation as offering the opportunity to get to know someone better to see if you were really suited to each other. It was seen as a step in a progression towards marriage:

*Two people can meet and decide to cohabit and no real fuss is made about it, so there’s kind of an entry way into forming a stable relationship with somebody that has no big fanfare about it, as opposed to previously having to get married and have a big celebration.*

(Male, 37, single, computer technician, Dublin)

People were aware of marriages that had broken down and they wanted to avoid this in their own lives. They saw cohabitation as offering the possibility of trying out a relationship before committing to it through marriage. They used phrases like “*testing the waters*” and “*come know me, come live with me.*”

### 6.1 Dimensions of Attitudes

In the main quantitative study a set of 35 items was presented to respondents to elicit their attitudes to family formation and in particular, their attitudes to forming relationships, including their attitudes to being single, to marriage and to cohabitation. As in the case of attitudes to gender roles, factor analysis was carried out to identify underlying dimensions or clusters of attitudes. This analysis identified seven psychologically interpretable dimensions:

#### **Factor I: Belief in Marriage**

“Belief in Marriage,” was the strongest and most robust factor of the seven factors. The item which most strongly expresses this factor is: “Marriage shows more commitment to the relationship than cohabiting.” The factor indicates that those who are positive to marriage are not opposed to cohabitation, since they tend to agree that “cohabiting is fine, but marriage seals the deal”, yet they see the two statuses as different. Those favouring marriage feel that it provides “security and stability for children” and think “those who want children should get married.” Those who are positive to marriage believe that marriage means “just as much to men as it does to women,” that married people are “generally happier than unmarried,” and that marriage is still a “crucial part of society.”

#### **Factor II: Belief in Cohabitation**

The second factor, “Belief in Cohabitation,” includes six statements. The highest loading item - which

is most representative of the factor as a whole - expresses the view that “it’s better to live with someone before you marry them.” Those who are supportive of cohabitation see it as “a natural progression towards marriage.” While they acknowledge that marriage provides “a solid family basis,” they think “cohabiting does too.” Individuals who have positive attitudes to cohabitation tend to think that “deciding to have a child together” is a “far greater commitment than getting married.” They believe that the religious reasons for getting married have become less important. They do not feel that cohabiting in any way diminishes the value of marriage. However, the converse of this is that those who do not support cohabitation do feel that it diminishes the value of marriage.

### **Factor III: Perceived Negative Aspects of Marriage/Positive Aspects of Cohabitation**

Factor III includes a combination of statements including negative perceptions of marriage and positive perceptions of cohabitation. Those high on this factor tend to think that “when a woman gets married she loses part of her identity.”

*The advantage for me is that I’m not a ‘Mrs’. I don’t want to be a ‘Mrs’. I want to be ‘Ciara’.*

(Female, 43, cohabiting, teacher, Dublin)

They also think that men also lose part of their identity when they marry. While they acknowledge that marriage “gives people security,” they also tend to think that it also “traps them into a situation.” Those who are high on this factor tend to think that “cohabiting people are happier than married people” and that one of the advantages of cohabitation is that “you can walk away from it.” This view is exemplified by the thoughts of this Dublin woman:

*Probably couples were coming together and having a go to see how they got on. They’re testing the ground somewhat. Maybe there are phases. Marriage is looked upon as being trapped, probably by men more than women. And therefore living together is a way of getting out easier and financially it’s easier.*

(Female, 49, single mother, company owner, Dublin)

### **Factor IV: Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single**

Factor IV, “Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single,” is comprised of four items. Two of the items express the view that it is easier for a man to be single than it is for a woman, e.g., “It’s more acceptable for a man in his late 30s to be single and on his own than it is for a woman of the same age.” Those high on this factor also agree that it is “easy for a single man to walk into a pub on his own, but much more difficult for a woman.” The factor includes the perception that “there is a lot more pressure on women to get married than on men,” and that “women worry more than men about finding someone to marry.” The factor thus consists of a cluster of attitudes which express the feeling that while women feel more pressure to marry and as a result worry about it more, they have less access to meeting people. The pressure women feel to get married would seem to be based in part on the attitude that it is less acceptable for a woman in her late 30s to be single, as this is also a key component of this factor. These ideas are well expressed by a single man in his thirties:

*I know it’s a strange thing to say, but there’s an air of desperation on the dating scene and being single. . . . I have noticed dating women in their 30’s — not all of them, I can’t generalise — that there is a sense that they want to meet someone soon, quickly, and get it nailed down. People are meeting and getting married very quickly. I shouldn’t have said that just women that are desperate, and panicky. I think there is a bit of both. I think that maybe*

*men don't feel as much pressure because there is no biological clock ticking as they say and also men in their 30's seem to have, myself included, the ability to date women in their 20's no problem but sometimes that situation isn't always the same the other way around.*

(Male, 36, single, production manager, Dublin)

#### **Factor V: Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner**

Factor V, "Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner," concerns the perceived ease vs difficulty in meeting someone. Those high on this factor think it is "difficult to find a partner at my age." They also tend to disagree that "It's very easy to meet/date people in my community/area." Finally, they tend to feel that "there's a stigma attached to being single and on your own." Conversely, those low on this factor tend to think it is easy to meet people and find a partner and tend not to think that being single and on one's own is stigmatised.

#### **Factor VI: Ambivalence towards being Single**

The sixth factor, "Ambivalence towards being Single", contains apparently contradictory attitudes. On the one hand, those high on this factor say "people just don't accept the fact that you can be single, on your own and happy." On the other hand, they also say "I don't think anybody chooses to be single and on their own, if they are really honest." Together with these two statements is the view that "one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together." The factor thus includes two statements which show an acceptance of being single, even a single parent, while at the same time expressing the view that nobody really chooses to be single.

#### **Factor VII: Perceived Acceptability of Being Single**

The seventh factor measures "Perceived Acceptability of being Single." It reflects the view that it is "more acceptable to be single and on your own now than it used to be." Those holding this view also tend to think that people are staying single longer because they are more "choosy" about relationships. This view was reflected by many respondents in the qualitative study:

*We are a more selfish culture/society, but we still want the same things. We still want happiness and family and children but we're not doing it under old traditional, old fashioned values, so we're giving ourselves more time, maybe in some instances too much time trying to decide who is the right person, do I want a family with them and having those children, so you then get into territory where people are waiting too long to make that decision. People are waiting well into their 30's, sometimes 40's to try and find someone and maybe there's a little bit of a panic as well. I'm starting to experience that and people are just getting together because, you know, they have waited too long and they had too many failed relationships and there is that inkling to have a family.*

(Male, 36, single, production manager, Dublin)

Many women in the qualitative study, especially those in their mid-thirties or older, were less likely to think that people were choosing to stay single:

*No. My best friend is single – it's not a choice. She's 35. The whole thing with children . . . She wants children. I wanted children. I started to feel lonely when I was single. Who would I go on a holiday with unless I had a partner?*

(Female, 36, cohabiting, 1 newborn baby, architect, Dublin)

Some thought that well educated and accomplished women in particular were finding it difficult to find the right partner:



*People are not choosing to be single. Men find single women threatening. My sister's friends are lawyers, accountants, actresses, pharmacists, academics. They've been single for a long time. They are beautiful, own their own homes, they're smart, working towards PhD's and they're not dating. They can't seem to find their male counterparts. They say men like to be seen as providers – they like the 'fluff secretary.'*

(Female, 43, cohabiting, teacher, Dublin)

A young male from the West of Ireland echoed what was said by many of the women from Dublin, namely that people had high expectations of relationships:

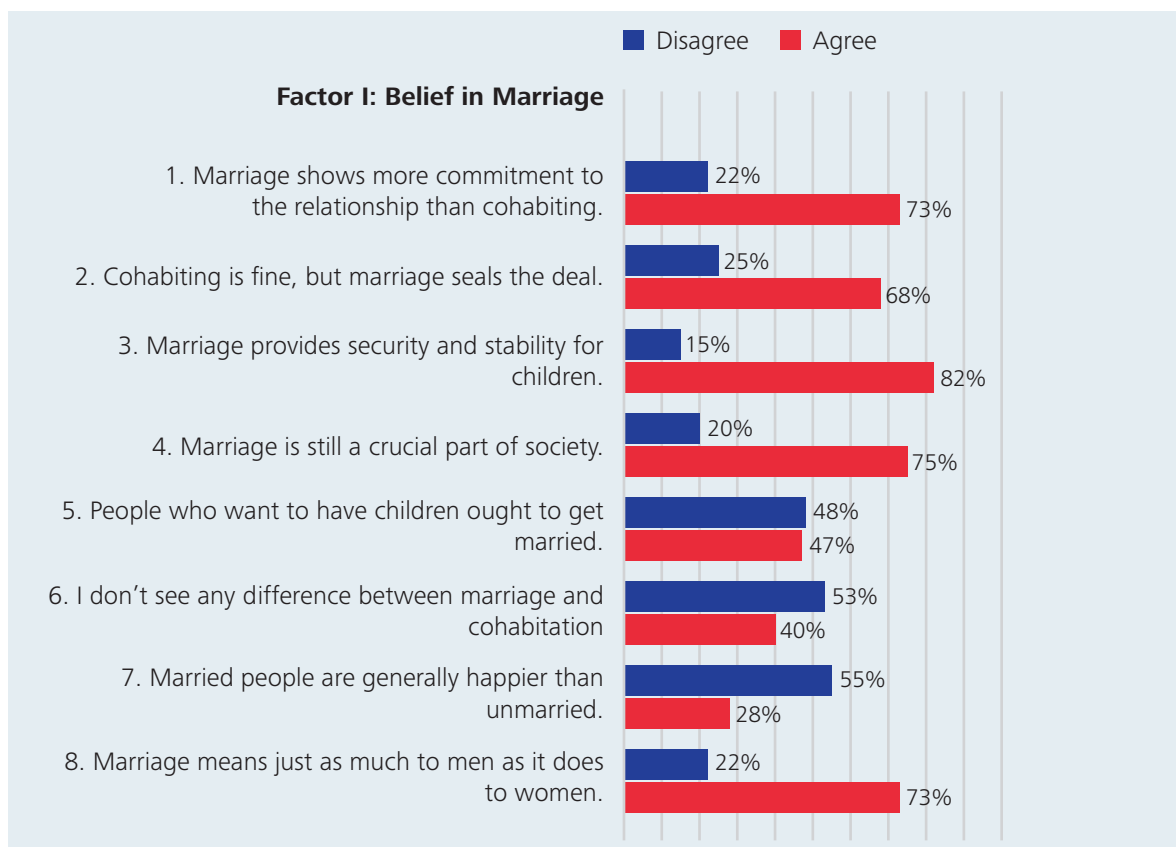
*I don't think people are choosing to be single. I think people are expecting more from relationships.*

(Male, 29, single, apprentice cabinet maker, Co. Clare)

## 6.2 Prevalence of Attitudes to Family Formation

The attitudes of the sample towards family formation are presented in Figure 6.1. Beginning with Factor I, “Belief in Marriage,” it is clear that a large majority (75%) believe that “marriage is still a crucial part of society”. However, there is variation in the strength of this belief, with only 26% strongly agreeing, 25% moderately agreeing and 24% slightly agreeing. A large majority (73%) also agrees that “marriage shows more commitment to the relationship than cohabiting,” of whom 32% expressed strong agreement. There is general consensus that “marriage provides security and stability for children” – 82% of the sample agree with this, of which 40% strongly agree. However, only 47% agreed that “people who want to have children ought to get married;” 48% disagreed with this.

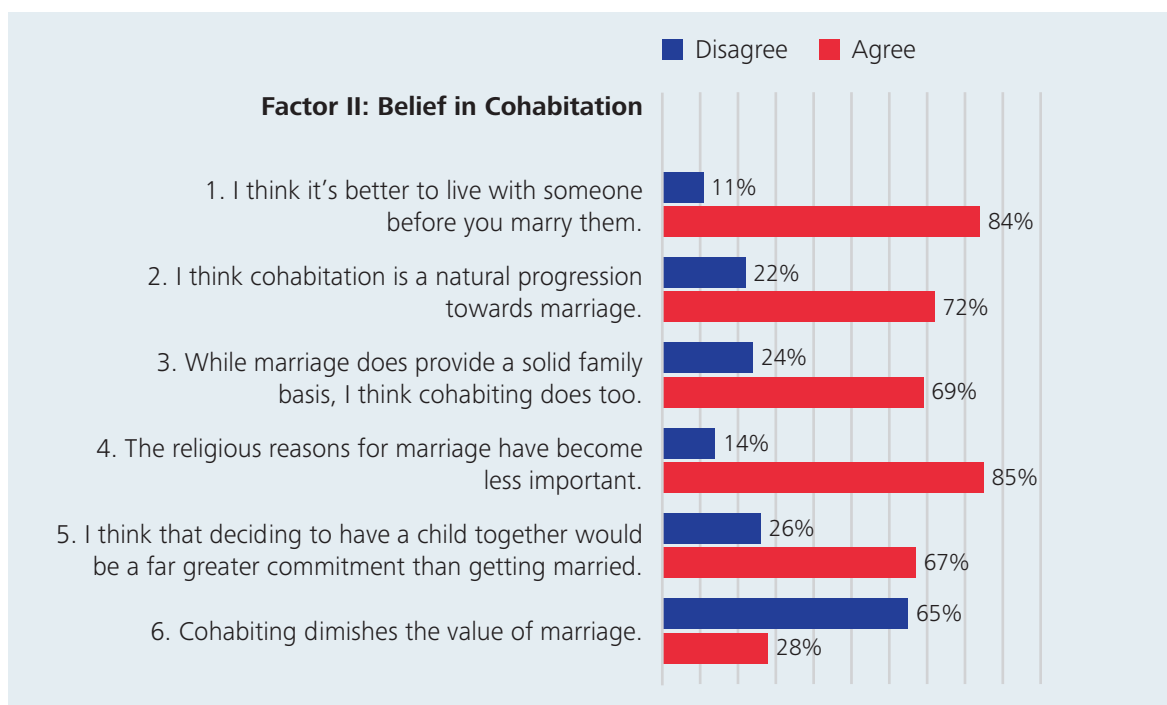
**Figure 6.1: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor I: Belief in Marriage (N=1,404)**



While 68% think cohabiting is fine, they think that “marriage seals the deal.” Most people see a clear difference between marriage and cohabitation, as only 40% agreed with the statement, “I don’t see any difference between marriage and cohabitation,” whereas 53% disagreed with it. There was general consensus that “marriage means just as much to men as it does to women,” with 73% agreeing that this was so. In spite of the fact that a large majority sees marriage as providing security and stability for children and as a crucial part of society, only a small proportion (28%) thought that “married people are generally happier than unmarried”; 55% disagreed with this and 17% were unsure.

In contrast to Factor I, which measures Belief in Marriage, Factor II measures Belief in Cohabitation. There was strong support for cohabitation, as evidenced by the very high agreement (84%) with the statement: “I think it’s better to live with someone before you marry them.” Almost half of the sample (49%) expressed strong agreement. A large proportion (72%) saw cohabitation as “a natural progression towards marriage,” although there was wide variation in the strength with which this view was held. Only 22% strongly agreed, while 24% moderately agreed and 26% only slightly agreed.

**Figure 6.2: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor II: Belief in Cohabitation (N=1,404)**



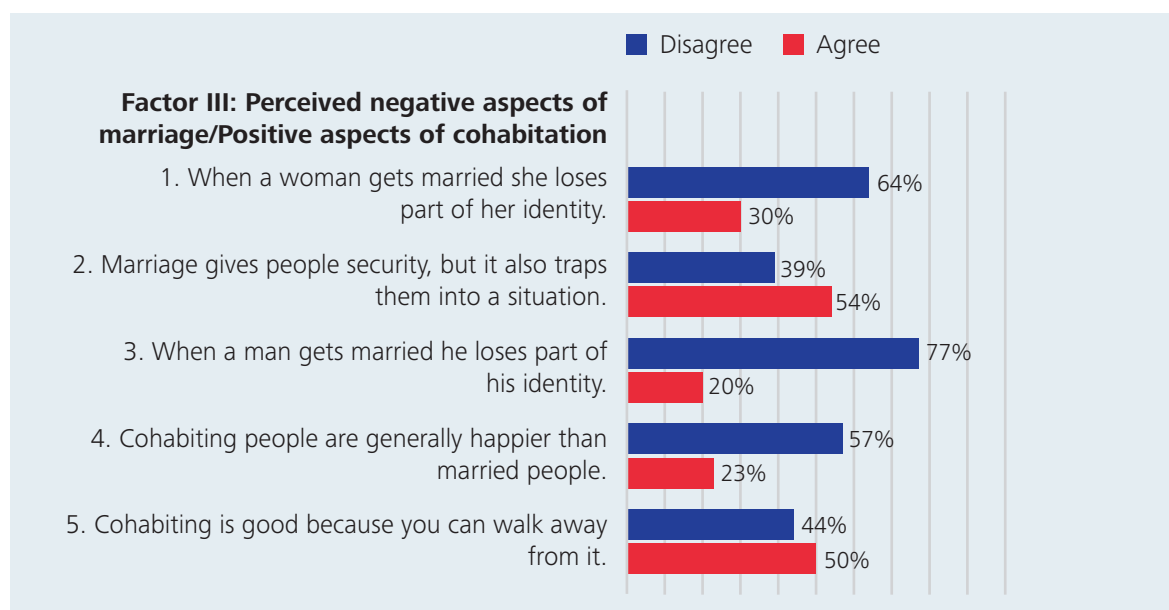
The notion of cohabitation as a progression towards marriage is consistent with the view that cohabitation does not diminish the value of marriage. Only 28% thought it did, whereas a clear majority (65%) did not think so. The high levels of support for cohabitation may in part be explained by the fact that a very large majority (85%) feel that “The religious reasons for marriage have become less important.” Of these, 38% strongly agreed that this was the case. It is interesting that this item loaded on the Cohabitation factor, rather than the Marriage factor, suggesting that the weakening of religious reasons for marriage have made it more acceptable for people to cohabit.

Over two-thirds (69%) agreed with the statement “While marriage does provide a solid family basis, I think cohabiting does too.” However, the fact that only 17% strongly agreed with this, whereas larger proportions only slightly (26%) or moderately (26%) agreed, suggests that people are not that

sure that cohabiting is the best for children. This is in contrast to the statement on Factor I, “marriage provides security and stability for children” to which 82% agreed and to which 40% strongly agreed. However, the complexity of people’s attitudes in this area is further revealed by their responses to the item, “I think that deciding to have a child together would be a far greater commitment than getting married.” Quite a high proportion of the population (69%) agreed with this, indicating that people are putting a high value on the decision to have a child together and a lesser value on marriage *per se* as an indicator of commitment.

Factor III, provides further insight into how people view the advantages and disadvantages of marriage and cohabitation. A majority (54%) expressed the belief that “marriage gives people security, but it also traps them into a situation.” On the other hand, cohabitation is seen as advantageous by half of the sample “because you can walk away from it,” though 44% did not feel this way. In the qualitative study some respondents expressed the view that “when a woman gets married she loses part of her identity.” Only a minority (30%) agreed with this view in the main study. Even fewer (20%) thought that a man loses part of his identity upon marriage. However, for those who do feel this way, cohabitation may be seen a way to retain one’s own identity. While there was widespread belief that it was better to live with someone before you married them, people did not think that cohabitation led to greater happiness than marriage. Only 23% thought cohabiting people were happier than married people; 57% did not think so and 21% were unsure.

**Figure 6.3: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor III: Perceived Negative Aspects of Marriage/Positive Aspects of Cohabitation (N=1,404)**



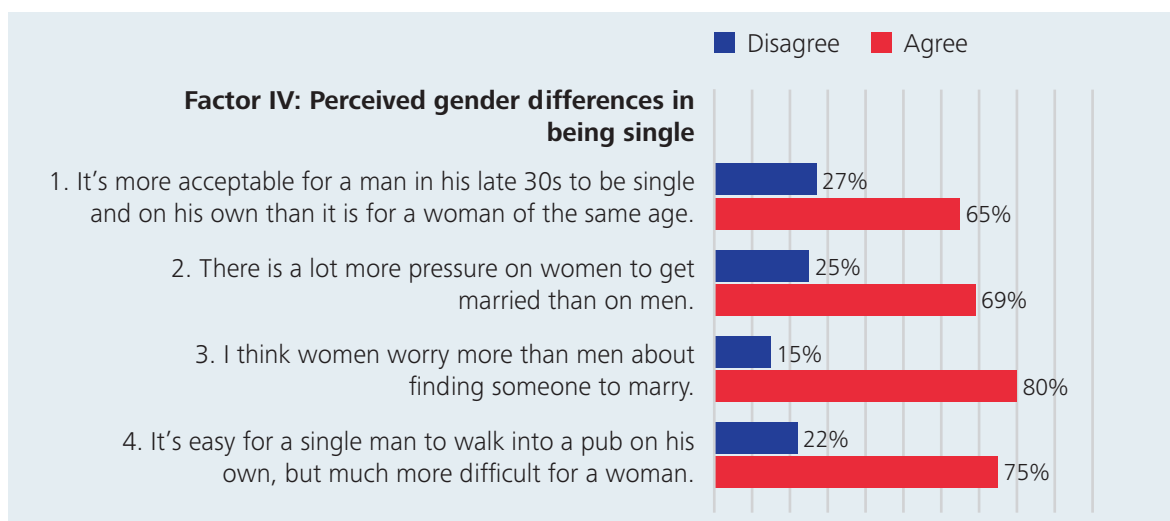
Factor IV concerns “Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single.” There was widespread agreement (69%) that there is “a lot more pressure on women to get married than on men.” Consistent with this, 80% thought that “women worry more than men about finding someone to marry.” In general most people (65%) thought that it is “more acceptable for a man in his late 30s to be single and on his own than it is for a woman of the same age.” In spite of the pressure on women to get married, they are not seen as having as much access as men to one of the main ways of meeting people in this country – namely the pub. A large majority agreed that “it’s easy for a single man to walk into a pub on his own, but much more difficult for a woman.”

*A man being single walking into a bar/pub – it’s easy for him to do that. It’s very easy for him to interject into a social situation, but much more difficult for a woman. A woman walking into a bar by herself and sitting up is definitely not the given and it’s not as natural looking. It looks lonely – as if there’s something not right. In a bar situation a man can be on his own. Men have the upper hand — the power — in picking up the women or chatting up the women. You will never see a woman chatting up a man, really, unless it’s a group of women and that’s when the power shifts . . . It’s more acceptable if you’re with another woman.*

(Female, 49, single, company owner, Dublin)

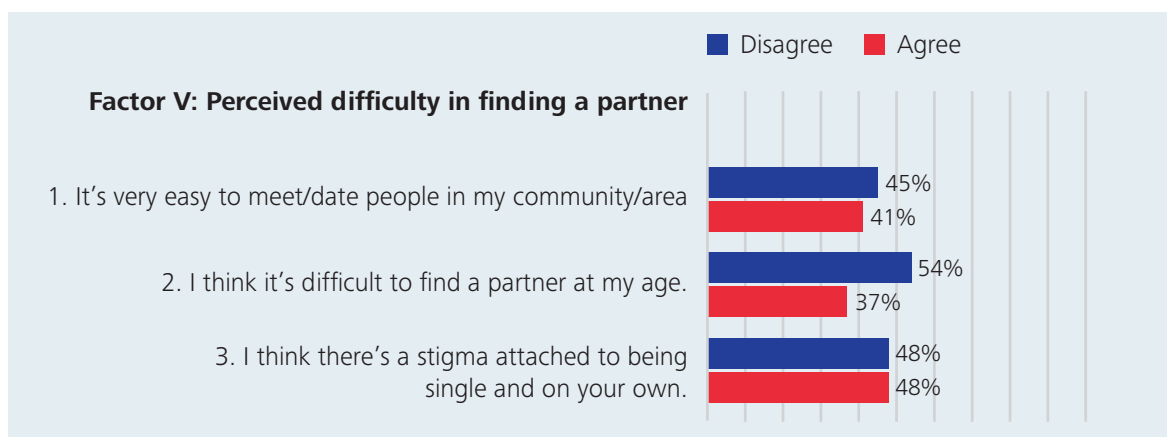
The perception that a man can go into a pub on his own and be comfortable, whereas a woman cannot do the same and to do so would be socially unacceptable and make her feel uncomfortable, is a perception that co-exists with women’s equality in the labour market. It seems that women are not actively challenging these social norms. Their way of dealing with it is to go out with another woman. They acquiesce to social expectations, since going out with one or more other women is acceptable. Men do not have this constraint. Clearly this constraint in itself must contribute to social isolation and to the difficulty single people – especially those in the older age groups – experience in seeking partners.

**Figure 6.4: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor IV: Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single (N=1,404)**



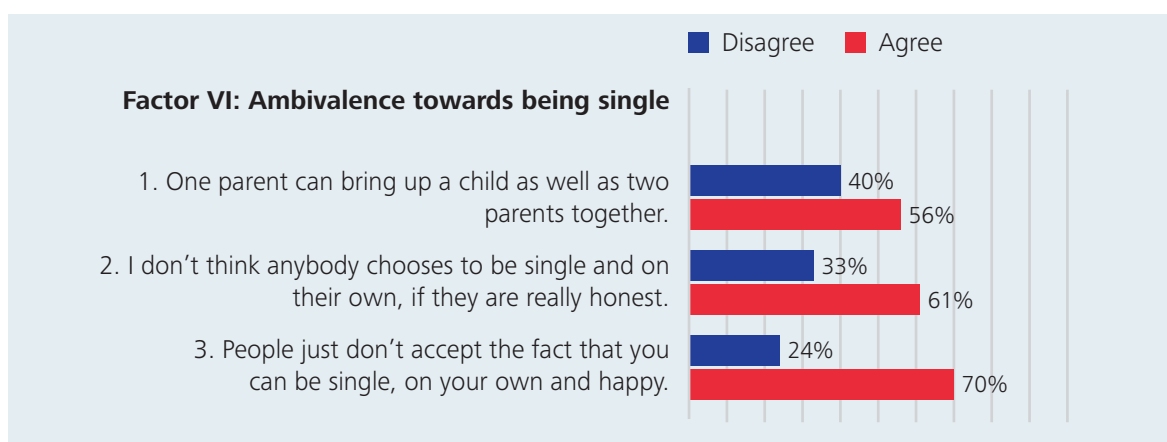
Factor V concerned people’s perceptions of how easy or difficult it was to find a partner. While there were divergent views on this, 54% did not think it was difficult, although a sizeable minority (37%) felt it was. This divergence of views tallies with the split on the item “It’s easy to meet/date people in my community/area.” While 41% thought it was easy, 45% did not think so. Also on this factor was the statement, “I think there’s a stigma attached to being single and on your own.” The sample was completely split down the middle on this, with 48% disagreeing and 48% agreeing.

**Figure 6.5: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor V: Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner (N=1,404)**



Factor VI concerns “Ambivalence towards being Single.” The items on this factor have some apparent contradictions which suggest that people have ambivalent feelings about the single status. For example, 70% agreed with the statement “People just don’t accept the fact that you can be single, on your own and happy.” Yet at the same time 61% say: “I don’t think anybody chooses to be single and on their own if they are really honest.” Perhaps what these data are saying is that while people may not choose to be on their own, if they are they can still be happy.

**Figure 6.6: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor VI: Ambivalence towards being Single (N=1,404)**



There is embedded in these items a feeling that others somehow do not accept if people are single as they get older, suggesting social pressure towards being in couples. It is apparent from some of the other items that this pressure particularly impinges on women, especially those in their late 30s and older in a way that is different for them than for men in the same age group.

*I think there's still kind a stigma attached to it. 'Poor Claire hasn't met someone yet.' 'Will Claire ever meet anyone?' People just don't accept the fact that you can be single and happy. It's the children thing.*

(Female, 36, cohabiting, 1 newborn baby, architect, Dublin)

*You're looked at as if, 'what's wrong with you?' and 'why are you still single?' There is more of a stigma with that than being a single mother. I have friends who are in relationships and*

*they shouldn't be, but they are terrified of being on their own.*

(Female, 42, single, one child, art therapist/part-time, Co. Tipperary)

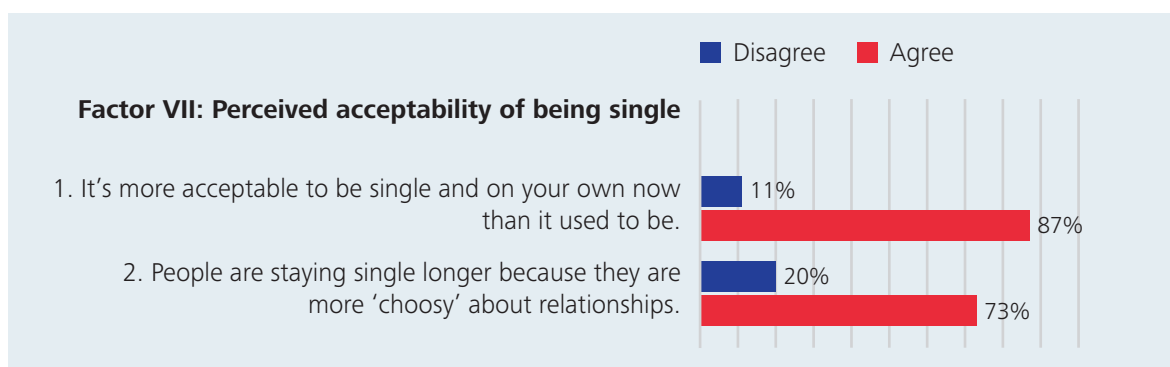
However, men can also be subject to this kind of social pressure:

*I do find that many people don't believe me when I tell them I'm single. They say 'what, you've never married?' It's almost like you've reached my age and there's the expectation you should have been married and had kids. It's like what happened?*

(Male, 48, single, public servant, Co. Clare)

Factor VII concerns the Perceived Acceptability of being Single. This factor contains other elements to those in Factor VI and is complementary to it. A large majority (87%) agreed that “it’s more acceptable to be single and on your own now than it used to be.” The second item on the factor offers an explanation for the later age at marriage evident in the latest Census results, namely “people are staying single longer because they are ‘more choosy’ about relationships.” This is a view which was notable in the qualitative study.

**Figure 6.7: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor VII: Perceived Acceptability of Being Single (N=1,404)**



There would seem to be some contradictions between the findings in Factor VI and Factor VII. While responses to the items in Factor VII suggest that there is widespread acceptance of being single and that more people are staying single longer because they are being ‘more choosy’ about finding the right partner, Factor VI suggests that there is also ambivalence towards the state of being single. As some of the other findings have shown, there is more pressure on women to get married and more difficulty for them to access certain social situations.

### 6.3 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Attitudes to Family Formation

We have examined the prevalence of attitudes to family formation in the sample as a whole. We shall now see if there are differences among various groups to these issues. Table 6.1 looks at the effects of gender, age, family status, having or not having a child, and socio-economic status on each of the factors measuring attitudes to family formation.

There were significant effects of all five demographic characteristics on the first factor, Belief in Marriage. The strongest effect was for family status, with married people holding the most positive attitudes to marriage ( $F=102.33$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Single people had the next most positive attitudes to marriage and the least positive attitudes were held by cohabiting people. The means ranged from



4.01 – 5.08 out of a maximum of 7. The next strongest effect was for presence or absence of children: those without children held more positive attitudes toward marriage than those with children ( $F=41.37$ ;  $p<.001$ ), which may sound counter-intuitive. It may indicate that people without children may idealise marriage, a phenomenon which has been observed previously in the literature (Bailyn, 1964). There were also significant effects of the other three demographic variables, though these were not as strong. Gender was significant, in the direction of men holding somewhat more positive attitudes towards marriage than women ( $F=12.00$ ;  $p<.01$ ). This is somewhat surprising given the greater pressure on women to marry and their greater tendency to worry about getting married, as shown earlier. There was also an effect for socio-economic status showing that the most positive attitudes towards marriage were held by those in professional, managerial and technical occupations as well as those in non-manual occupations, whereas those in unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled occupations held somewhat less positive views toward marriage ( $F=7.01$ ;  $p<.01$ ). There was also a small but significant effect of age, with younger people holding more positive attitudes than older people ( $F=4.31$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

In relation to Factor II, Belief in Cohabitation, the strongest effect was for family status ( $F=37.08$ ;  $p<.001$ ), with cohabiting people the most likely to believe in cohabitation (mean = 5.56 out of a maximum of 7). This was followed by single people (mean = 5.17); married people were least likely to believe in cohabitation (mean = 5.01). However, in the case of all groups, the mean was above 5, which is on the positive side of the continuum. Younger people were also slightly more likely to believe in cohabitation, than were older people ( $F=6.11$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

Factor III measures “Perceived Negative Aspects of Marriage/Positive Aspects of Cohabitation. There was a significant effect of family status on this variable, with single people being most likely to see disadvantages in marriage and advantages in cohabitation and married people least likely to do so ( $F=31.47$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Cohabiting people were in between, but their views were closer to those of single people. There was a significant effect of age indicating that younger people were more likely to see advantages to cohabitation and disadvantages to marriage.

Factor IV, Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single, did not elicit any major group differences. There was a slightly greater tendency for older people to perceive greater gender differences in being single, and also for those in the middle SES group to do so.

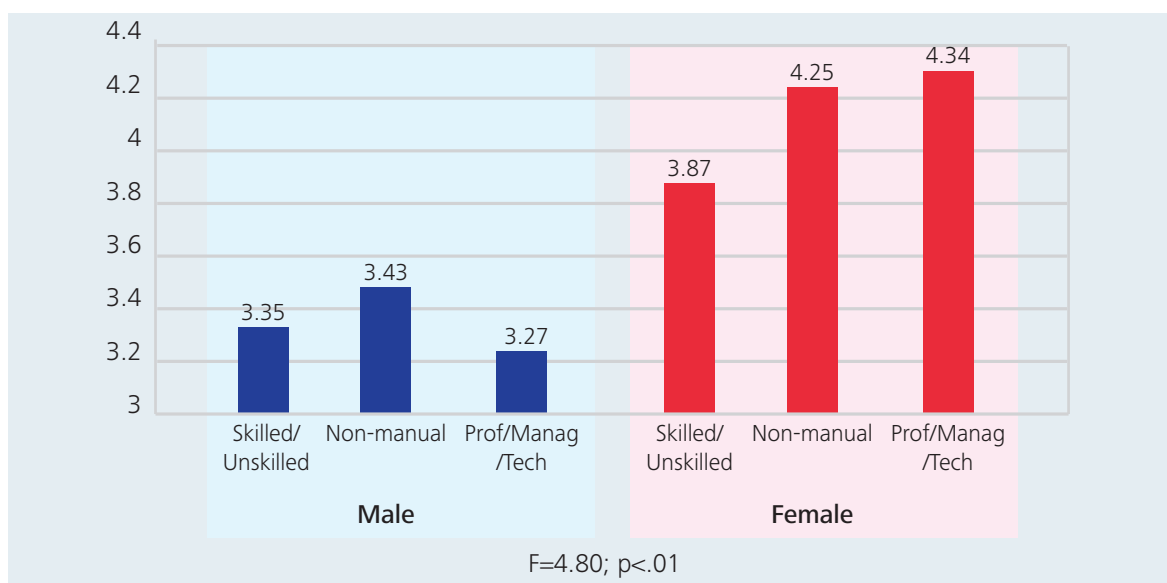
Factor V, Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner, elicited two strong main effects for gender and age and a small effect for SES. The greatest difference was between young and older people, with older people (35-49) being significantly more likely to say it was difficult to find a partner and younger people (20-34) more likely to say it was easier ( $F=117.38$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Women were also significantly more likely to say it was difficult to find a partner than men were ( $F=98.20$ ;  $p<.001$ ). There was a tendency for those in the lowest occupational status to say that it was easier to find a partner than it was for those in the middle and highest SES groups ( $F=3.15$ ;  $p<.05$ ), as illustrated by this quote from a young woman in the qualitative study:

*I would go out nearly every weekend. When you're single if you go out with a group of girls, especially if you have a regular place where you are known, it's easy to meet people.*

(Female, 20, single, hairdresser trainee, Dublin)

However, a significant interaction effect showed that the social class difference held mainly for women ( $F=4.8$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (see Fig. 6.8 below). There were few differences among men of all social classes in terms of perceived ease or difficulty in finding a partner, whereas among women, those in the middle and highest social class groups found it significantly more difficult to do so.

**Figure 6.8: Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender and Socio-Economic Status**



**Table 6.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Five Demographic Characteristics on Seven Factors Measuring Attitudes to Family Formation (N= 1,404)**

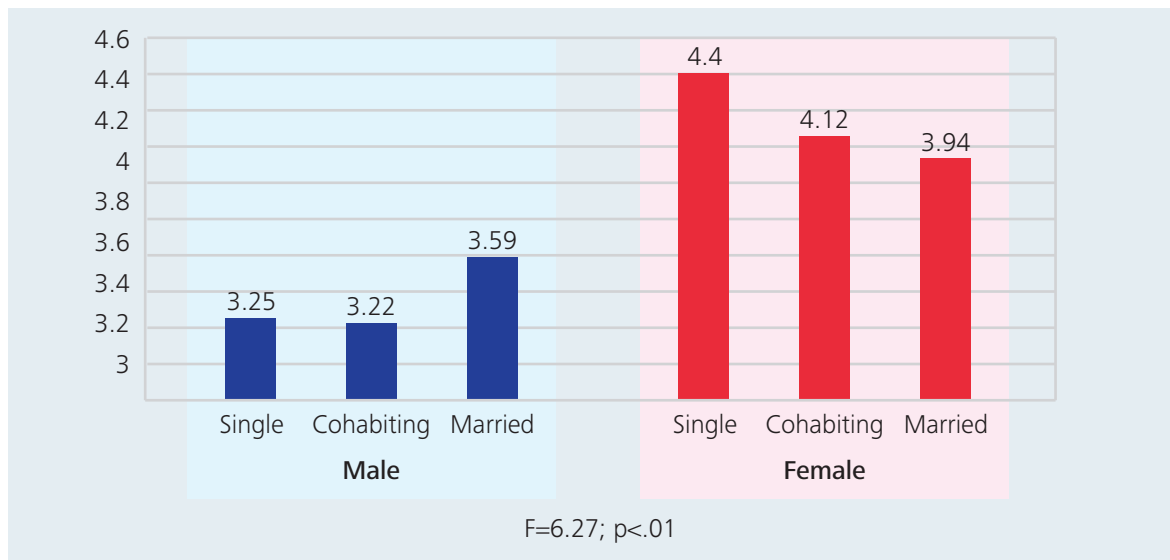
7 FACTORS MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD RELATIONSHIPS	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	S	M	C	Without Child	With Child	Skilled/Unskilled	Non-manual	Prof./Manager/Technical
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)
1. Belief in Marriage	F =12.00***		F =4.31*		F =102.33***			F =41.37***		F =7.01***		
	4.57	4.34	4.55	4.36	4.28	5.08	4.01	4.68	4.23	4.26	4.56	4.54
2. Belief in Cohabitation	F =0.27		F =6.11*		F =37.08***			F =1.98		F =1.33		
	5.22	5.27	5.32	5.17	5.17	5.02	5.56	5.21	5.28	5.20	5.17	5.37
3. Perceived Negative Aspects of Marriage/ Positive Aspects of Cohabitation	F =3.80		F =15.85***		F =31.47***			F =1.11		F =4.01*		
	3.49	3.34	3.32	3.51	3.63	3.13	3.49	3.39	3.44	3.54	3.36	3.35
4. Perceived Gender Differences in Being Single	F =0.84		F =3.85*		F =1.16			F =0.98		F =4.18*		
	5.01	5.06	4.97	5.10	5.00	5.11	4.99	5.04	5.03	4.88	5.13	5.09
5. Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner	F =98.20***		F =117.38***		F =1.65			F =0.19		F =3.15*		
	3.35	4.15	3.44	4.06	3.82	3.77	3.67	3.85	3.66	3.61	3.84	3.81
6. Ambivalence towards being Single	F =38.33***		F =2.00		F =25.25***			F =4.96*		F =1.58		
	4.45	4.81	4.58	4.67	4.87	4.28	4.73	4.53	4.73	4.64	4.71	4.53
7. Perceived Acceptability of being Single	F =12.46***		F =10.68***		F =3.30*			F =0.86		F =0.76		
	5.13	5.32	5.12	5.34	5.33	5.14	5.22	5.17	5.28	5.15	5.34	5.20

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001



It may also be seen in Figure 6.9 below that while family status did not differentiate among men to any great degree, it did so for women: single women were the most likely to say it was difficult to find a partner.

**Figure 6.9: Perceived Difficulty in Finding a Partner: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender and Family Status**



Factor VI measured Ambivalence toward being Single. The results showed that women were significantly more ambivalent about single status than men ( $F=38.33$ ;  $p<.001$ ). There was also a significant effect of family status showing that single people were the most ambivalent about being single, followed by cohabiting people ( $F=25.25$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Taking the two main effects of gender and family status together, it is evident that single women are the most ambivalent about the single status.

Factor VII, Perceived Acceptability of Being Single, showed three significant effects. The strongest was for gender, with women being more likely to think being single was acceptable ( $F=12.46$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Older people were also more likely to think that being single was more acceptable these days ( $F=10.68$ ;  $p<.01$ ), as were single people ( $F=3.30$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The effect for gender, taken together with that for the previous factor, Ambivalence toward being Single, suggests that while women find it more acceptable to be single nowadays, they also hold some ambivalent feelings about it because of social pressures. Women were somewhat more likely than men, for example to strongly agree with the statement in this factor “People are staying single longer because they are more ‘choosy’ about relationships.” Twenty-five per cent of women strongly agreed with this compared with 20% of men.

## 6.4 Perceived Facilitators and Constraints to Cohabitation and Marriage

In the preceding sections of this chapter we examined attitudes to relationships and family formation, including attitudes to being single as well as attitudes to cohabitation and to marriage. However, this does not tell us what leads people to cohabit and what leads them to marry and are there differences between the two. In the next section we look at the “prerequisites” to cohabitation and marriage. We were interested in exploring what factors people felt were necessary before they were ready to cohabit and marry and to see if different factors were seen as pre-requisites to cohabitation and others pre-requisites to marriage.

#### **6.4.1 Factors Contributing to the Decision to Cohabit**

In order to identify the facilitators to cohabitation a set of 13 brief statements was presented to people who were currently cohabiting. These included, for example, “it made sense financially,” “we were ready to buy/rent apartment/house together,” etc. In addition to these concrete reasons, the list also contained items concerning the wish for “more security,” “more commitment,” etc. Other emotional reasons were also included, such as “I loved my partner and wanted to live with them,” and “I wanted to spend more time with my partner.” Some of these items replicated items used in previous research (Rhoades et al, 2009). Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent, if at all, each contributed to their decision to live with their current partner.

The factor which was seen to contribute the most to the decision to cohabit was the psychological factor, “I loved my partner and wanted to live with them.” Sixty-five per cent of cohabiting people said that this reason contributed “a great deal” (see Appendix Table A2). The next strongest factor was also psychological in nature, namely “I wanted to spend more time with my partner.” A similar proportion (64%) said that this contributed “a great deal” to their decision. The third most significant factor was more concrete, namely the fact that couples “were ready to buy/rent an apartment/house together.” However, only 25% said this contributed “a great deal” to their decision, while 30% said it contributed “a fair amount.” There were two equally strong fourth factors. The first was “I saw this as a step to marrying my partner in the future” to which 24% said it contributed “a great deal” and 22% said it contributed “a fair amount.” This was followed by the reason “I wanted more commitment” to which 18% said it contributed “a great deal” and 30% said it contributed “a fair amount.” Relatively few said that their decision to cohabit was determined by financial reasons. Only 13% said that this was a very important desideratum. Similarly, wanting to test the relationship or wanting to have children were also relatively low down on people’s lists of what determined their decision to cohabit. However, when gender differences were examined, it was found that women were more likely to say that their decision to cohabit was motivated by the desire to have children; 19% said that this contributed “a great deal” to their decision, whereas only 12% of men said this was so. Those who already had children were also more likely to say that the decision to cohabit was motivated by the desire to have children; 25% of cohabitees with children said that wanting to have children contributed a great deal to their decision to cohabit, whereas among those cohabitees with no children, only 10% said that this reason contributed a great deal. Those with lower levels of education were more likely to say that the wish to have children motivated their cohabitation: 19% of those with lower second level, 21% of those with upper second level and only 9% of those with third level said that this was a strong motivator.

In summary, the most significant determinants of cohabitation were loving one’s partner and wanting to live with them and spend more time with them. This was followed in importance by being ready to buy or rent a house or an apartment with one’s partner. A wish for greater commitment was also evident and many saw cohabitation as a step towards marriage.

#### **6.4.2 Perceived Facilitators and Constraints to Marriage**

##### ***6.4.2.1 Attitudes of cohabiting people to the decision to get married***

Cohabiting people were asked about their intentions to marry in the future. When asked if they would like to get married one day, in general – not necessarily to their current partner, 46% said that they definitely would (see Table 6.2 below). A further 30% said that they probably would, 14% were not sure, 6% said they probably would not and 5% said that they definitely would not like to marry in the future. While there were virtually no gender differences, there were large age differences. Younger cohabitees (20-34) were much more likely to say that they would like to marry in the future; 52% of younger people said they definitely would like to marry in the future, compared with only 29% of older

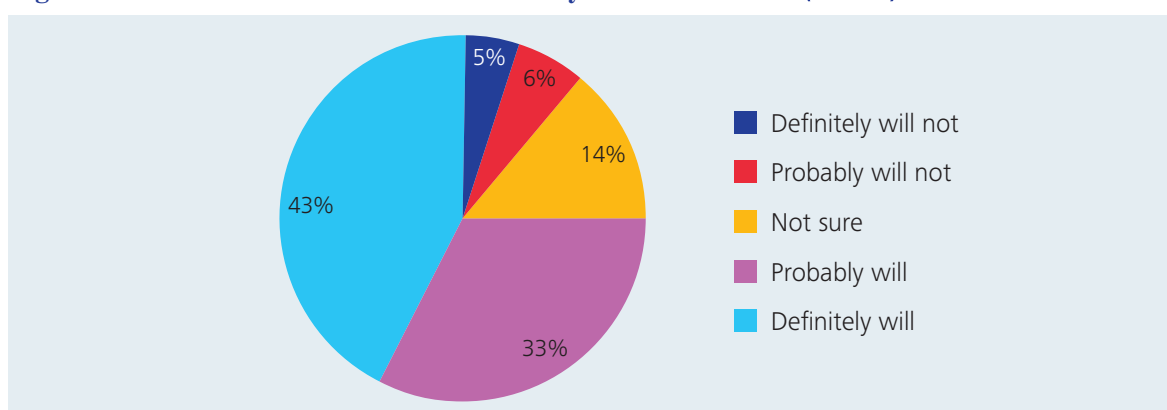
cohabitees (aged 35-49). Cohabitees without children were also more likely to say they hoped to marry in the future; 52% said they definitely would, compared with only 35% of cohabitees with children. This suggests that perhaps once cohabiting people have children they do not feel as much pressure to marry. Again there is evidence of socio-economic differences, as there is a stronger wish to marry among cohabitees with third level education (57% said they definitely would like to), compared with just 38-39% of those with lower educational qualifications who said they definitely would like to marry in the future.

**Table 6.2: Intention of Cohabitees to Marry in the Future by Gender, Age, Presence of Children and Education (N=160)**

	Total	Gender		Age		Children		Education		
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Without Child	With Child	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
Total	160	80	80	119	41	99	61	42	55	63
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	304	153	151	172	132	152	152	70	117	117
Definitely would not	5%	4%	7%	3%	10%	3%	8%	6%	6%	4%
Probably would not	6%	6%	6%	2%	16%	3%	10%	9%	3%	6%
Not sure	14%	13%	14%	10%	24%	10%	20%	14%	18%	10%
Probably would	30%	31%	29%	33%	21%	31%	27%	32%	35%	24%
Definitely would	46%	47%	45%	52%	29%	52%	35%	39%	38%	57%
Mean	4.06	4.12	4.00	4.28	3.41	4.27	3.71	3.90	3.95	4.25

When asked if they intended to marry their current partner, 43% of cohabiting people said that they definitely would. A further 33% said they probably would, 14% were not sure, 6% said they probably would not and 5% said they definitely would not (Fig. 6.10). Cohabiting men were more likely to intend to marry their current partner than were cohabiting women. While 48% of cohabiting men said they definitely would marry their current partner, only 38% of the women felt this way (Table 6.3 below). In view of the greater pressure on women to marry, these findings are somewhat surprising and indicate that cohabiting women are somewhat more reticent about marriage than cohabiting men.

**Figure 6.10: Intention of Cohabitees to Marry Current Partner (N=160)**



Younger cohabitees were more likely than older ones to think that their current cohabitation would lead to marriage. While 48% of cohabitees aged 20-34 thought they definitely would marry their current partner, only 30% of those aged 35-49 thought they definitely would. While 21% of older cohabitees said they probably or definitely *would not* marry their current partner, only 6% of younger cohabitees felt this way. This suggests a greater romanticisation of marriage among younger cohabitees and perhaps less of a need to conform among older cohabitees.

**Table 6.3: Intention of Cohabiting People to Marry Current Partner, by Gender, Age, Presence of Children and Education (N=160)**

	Total	Gender		Age		Children		Education		
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Without Child	With Child	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
Total	160	80	80	119	41	99	61	42	55	63
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	304	153	151	172	132	152	152	70	117	117
Definitely will not	5%	4%	5%	3%	8%	4%	6%	8%	5%	2%
Probably will not	6%	4%	7%	3%	13%	3%	9%	7%	2%	8%
Not sure	14%	13%	15%	11%	22%	12%	17%	13%	16%	13%
Probably will	33%	31%	35%	35%	26%	33%	32%	32%	42%	25%
Definitely will	43%	48%	38%	48%	30%	48%	35%	40%	35%	52%
Mean	4.04	4.15	3.93	4.20	3.56	4.18	3.81	3.89	3.99	4.19

A greater intention to marry one's current partner was more evident among those with third level education, of whom 52% said they definitely intended to marry their current partner, whereas only 40% of those with lower second level and 35% of those with upper second level did so. As we have seen before, there was a stronger intention to marry one's current partner among those without children (48% said they definitely would), compared with those with children, of whom only 35% definitely intended to marry their current partner.

We examined previously the factors which contributed to people's decision to cohabit. We were also interested in finding out why these people were cohabiting rather than getting married. We asked the cohabitees to review 10 different factors and indicate to what extent each would be a "relevant consideration" in their decision to get married in general. Their responses are presented in Appendix Table A3. The factor which had the greatest influence on cohabitees' intention to get married was the cost of the wedding. It was a relevant consideration for 80% of the sample. The next most important consideration was the wish to have a secure job/income first. A quarter said this would be important for them "a great deal" and a further quarter said "a fair amount." This was followed by the high cost of housing: 40% said this would influence them a great deal or a fair amount. Completing one's education or training was only important for 21% of the sample. For the majority (67%) it was not important at all.

The cost of the wedding was particularly salient for those of lower educational background, 54% of whom said this would affect them "a great deal." This compared to only 28% of those with third level.

Younger people were also more concerned with the cost of the wedding – 64% said it would matter either a fair amount or a great deal. The cost of the wedding as a barrier to getting married was also emphasised in the qualitative study:

*It's tough, people being unemployed. It's tough on the relationship, trying to keep up with what we have. Marriage would be great, but at the moment we can't afford it. We would love to get married, but unfortunately it costs a lot and there are more important things to pay for, such as (daughter) and we have to put her first, not ourselves.*

(Female, 25, cohabiting, 1 child, administrator/part-time, Co. Cork)

*You can't afford to get married now anyway — the cost of a wedding — €25,000. Invite 200 people, hotels, the dress is €3,000. If I get married it'll just be a registry office with 50 people max.*

(Female, 36, cohabiting, 1 newborn baby, architect, Dublin)

It was reported recently that traditional weddings cost between €15,000 – 20,000, which is a reduction over the cost during the Celtic Tiger days of €30,000 (Madden, 2011). Thus, it is evident why the cost of weddings is a major barrier to getting married.

Having a secure job or income before getting married was more important for men: 58% said it would be important a fair amount or a great deal, whereas only 40% of women said this was true for them. Men were also somewhat more influenced by the high cost of housing, as were younger people. This issue was also more salient for urban dwellers, of whom 27% said it would influence them “a great deal” compared to just 17% of rural dwellers.

Completing one's education or training was more salient for women than men. While it was not a major factor, in the sense that overall 67% said it was not at all important, it is interesting that 16% of cohabiting women said it would be relevant “a great deal” and 10% said “a fair amount.” Among men, only 5% said completing their education would be important “a great deal” and 11% said “a fair amount.” Completing one's education was more important for younger cohabitees and those without children, as well as for those in professional and managerial occupations.

While some of the reasons were not as important overall, there were nevertheless notable group differences. For example, it was interesting to observe that 14% of cohabitees with children said that not believing in marriage was relevant “a great deal”. This compared with just 5% of those without children holding this view. Older cohabitees were also more likely to say they did not believe in marriage. Approximately a quarter (24%) of older cohabitees said not believing in marriage was a relevant consideration “a great deal,” or “a fair amount,” whereas among younger cohabitees this was true of just 12%. This suggests that younger cohabitees are more likely to marry in the future than older cohabitees.

Feeling that one's partner did not want to get married was more likely to be expressed by those in the older age group; 22% of those 35-49 said this was a consideration either a fair amount or a great deal, whereas only 9% of younger cohabitees said this. There was also a somewhat greater tendency for older cohabitees to be more likely to say that they did not want to marry their current partner. While 73% of younger people said this was not at all important, only 58% of older people said so. This indicates that for many people – including older ones - cohabitation is a step towards finding the ideal partner to marry. The idealism and optimism of younger people and perhaps the greater realism of older people, which have been evident in other aspects of the results, are also apparent here.

#### **6.4.2.2 Attitudes of married people toward the decision to get married**

Married respondents were also asked their views about the important factors leading to marriage. In this case, as the respondents were married, they were asked to indicate to what extent each factor contributed to their decision to get married to their current husband/wife. Many of the 13 items presented to married people were the same as those presented to cohabiting people to ascertain what led to their cohabiting with their current partner.

The most important facilitator to marriage was loving the partner and wanting to live with them. Over three quarters (76%) said that this influenced them “a great deal.” This is a slightly higher percentage than that given by cohabiters for the reasons leading them to cohabit, of whom 65% said that loving their partner and wanting to live with them was the prime motivator. The second strongest reason for getting married was the wish to have children; 52% of married people said that this influenced them “a great deal” and a further 20% said that it influenced them “a fair amount.” The third strongest reason was the wish for “more commitment.” Thirty percent said that this influenced them “a great deal” and a further 30% said it did so “a fair amount.” The cost of the wedding was also a relevant consideration. It will be recalled that one of the barriers to marriage for cohabiting people was the cost of the wedding. Thirty-nine per cent of cohabiters had said that this would influence them a great deal and a further 21% “a fair amount.” It is interesting then to compare the attitudes of married people on this factor. It will be seen in Appendix Table A4 that the fact that they could “afford the wedding” was a major consideration for 27% of married people and for a further 30% it was a fairly important. The fifth most important factor influencing people to get married was “wanting to make the relationship legal.” Thirty-three per cent said this was a major consideration and a further 21% said it was to a fair degree. This was followed by wanting more security, to which 25% said “a great deal” and 27% said “a fair amount.” The seventh most important reason was being ready to buy/rent an apartment/house together. Approximately half said this influenced their decision a great deal (27%) or a fair amount (24%). Only 14% said the fact that marriage “made sense financially” was a crucial factor. Already having children was also not a strong driver to getting married – only 15% said this influenced them “a great deal.” Completing one’s education first was also not a strong driver.

There were certain commonalities in the drivers for cohabitation and marriage, primary of which was the love for one’s partner and the wish to live with them. Some of the barriers to marriage perceived by cohabiting people included financial factors, such as the high cost of housing, the high cost of weddings and the wish to have a secure job/income first. It is clear that some of these barriers were overcome for the married people. A fair proportion of them were able to afford the wedding (57%) and the housing (51%) and one or both had a secure job/income (45%). Yet the strongest motivators towards marriage were emotional, i.e. loving one’s partner and wanting to live with them (93%) and wanting to have children (72%). It is clear that while economic factors play a role in terms of housing and being able to afford a wedding, they are much less important than the emotional factors.

An examination of group differences showed that women were somewhat more likely to say that having children was an important factor leading them to marry (56% of women said “a great deal” compared with 47% of men); however the means for the two groups were almost identical, as men were more likely than women to say “a fair amount” (27% vs 14%). Those with children said that having children was a strong motivator to getting married: 55% said that wanting to have children was a prime motivator for them, whereas this was only true of 37% of married people without children. Rural dwellers were also more likely to say that wanting children was prime motivator for marriage: 54% of rurals said “a great deal” compared with 46% of urbans.



## 6.5 Summary of Key Findings

Cohabitation is seen as an important step in the progression towards marriage and 84% believe that it is better to live with someone before you marry them. A large majority (85%) believes that “the religious reasons for marriage have become less important” and this view may help to explain why cohabitation has become more acceptable. In spite of the positive attitudes to cohabitation, there is still strong support for marriage and it is a state that most people aspire to. While there is general consensus that “marriage provides security and stability for children,” only 47% think that “people who want to have children ought to get married.” This reflects the growing acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative household arrangement, even where there are children. Over two thirds of the sample believed that “deciding to have a child together would be a far greater commitment than getting married.” This suggests that people are putting a higher value on the decision to have a child together and a lesser value on marriage *per se* as an indicator of commitment.

The strongest reasons for deciding to cohabit were “loving one’s partner and wanting to live with them” as well as wanting to “spend more time with them.” These were followed by “being ready to buy or rent a house or an apartment together.” These were also the main drivers for getting married. The major reasons why cohabiting people are not getting married for the moment are largely economic. These include the high cost of weddings, wanting to have a secure income first, and the high cost of housing.

The study found that it is more acceptable to be single and on your own now than it used to be. There was a general perception that “people are staying single longer because they are ‘more choosy’ about relationships.” This may help to explain the later age at marriage evident in the latest Census results. This sense of “choosiness” may relate to greater freedoms and options that people have nowadays, including greater educational opportunities, greater sexual freedom, weakened religious proscriptions, and also the acceptability of cohabitation.

While there was widespread acceptance of being single there was also some ambivalence about it. For example, 61% said “I don’t think anybody chooses to be single and on their own if they are really honest.” Imbedded in overall positive attitudes to being single was a social pressure towards being in couple, a pressure which was found to impinge disproportionately on women, especially those in their late 30s. In spite of the pressure on women to get married, it is more difficult for them to find a partner. This was also true of older people (35-49).

There was a tendency for those in the lowest occupational status to say that it was easier to find a partner than it was for those in the middle and highest SES groups. While there were few differences among men of all social classes in terms of their ease in finding a partner, among women, those in the middle and highest social class groups found it significantly more difficult to do so.





# Chapter 7

## Attitudes to Having Children and Childlessness



## CHAPTER 7 Attitudes to Having Children and Childlessness

While the current birth rate is still high by European standards, at approximately two children per woman, the total fertility rate has nevertheless fallen 50% over the last four decades from approximately four children per woman in 1970 to two children today. It has been predicted by the Central Statistics Office that this will further decrease (CSO, 1999, 2007) and that Ireland's birth rate is likely to continue to fall in line with European norms (approximately 1.5) unless policies intervene to change this trend. Lunn et al. (2010) concur with this prediction, in spite of current small rises in the birthrate. Part of this trend is based on the fact that women are having children later. The average age for women in Ireland to have their first child is 31 (CSO, 2007; Punch, 2007). This was aptly illustrated in the qualitative study:

*“My friends – who are 34 to 38 – are just thinking about having their first child.”*

*(Female, 36, cohabiting, one newborn baby, architect, Dublin)*

This issue is of importance from many points of view. These include the effect of women's increasing participation in the labour force and the effect this may have on childbearing. It also interacts with various social policies, such as the provision of child care and the availability of flexible working arrangements. While Ireland currently has a young population relative to many other developed countries, this may change if the birth rate decreases. Our population is currently ageing and a decrease in the birth rate would accentuate this.

The issue of children is also important from the point of view of changes in family formation and the increasing prevalence of cohabitation and the later age at marriage and the birth of the first child (Punch, 2007; Lunn et al., 2010). It is also relevant from a psychological point of view in terms of the increasing rate of single child families and of childlessness in Ireland and in Europe as a whole and the effects this has on children, families, and older people without children (Kreager and Schroder-Butterfill, 2004). For all of these reasons it is important to examine current attitudes to having children.

### 7.1 Dimensions of Attitudes

The study first sought to identify attitudes to having children. The qualitative study was the initial source of material for the development of items to measure attitudes in the main study. Factor analysis was used to identify various dimensions of attitudes to children. Three clear factors emerged, as well as one “isolate,” an item which did not load together with other items, but which emerged as a factor in its own right.

#### **Factor I: Belief in Necessity of having Children for Fulfilment**

The first factor concerns the view that having children is fundamentally important for fulfilment, as exemplified by the highest loading item, “A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled.” The factor also contains an identical item for men, i.e. “A man has to have children in order to be fulfilled.” The third item expresses the view that “people who do not have children lead empty lives.” The factor also includes the belief that “women who do not want at least one child are selfish.” Those who are high on the factor tend to think having children is necessary for fulfilment and they also tend to hold negative attitudes towards those who do not have children. Those low on the factor are less likely to think that having children is necessary for fulfilment and they are not proscriptive about those who do not have children.

## **Factor II: Perceived Economic Constraints to having Children**

In the qualitative study economic factors – particularly in the current climate - were highlighted in relation to the trend of having fewer children:

*In our society the reasons why people end up cohabiting and having fewer children is because they're under economic pressure. You're having smaller families because both parents have to work, they don't have as much time, they don't have the money to pay for childcare and education and even the basics — clothing and food for their kids.*

(Male, 37, single, computer technician/currently unemployed, Dublin)

Factor II contains two statements concerning economic constraints to having children: “the cost of living is restricting the number of children I will have/did have,” and the related item, “these days most couples simply cannot afford to have more than two children.” The factor also contains two items concerning other influences on having children, i.e., “men don't feel as much pressure to have a child because there is no biological clock ticking” and “there's less stigma than there used to be about not having a child.” The clustering together of these items suggests that a combination of factors are influencing the number of children people have. These include economic factors, the fact that men are holding off because of no biological clock and the fact that there is less stigma nowadays to not having a child.

## **Factor III, Belief in Value of Smaller Families**

In the qualitative study many of the respondents talked about the value of smaller families. For example, one middle aged man from the West of Ireland said:

*Traditionally Irish families have been pretty large and for me it goes back to the capacity of a couple to give equal attention to 2 or 3 kids. How can you do that with 6-7 kids?*

(Male, 48, single, public servant, Co. Clare)

These views were echoed by a woman from Dublin:

*Traditionally in Ireland people just had children endlessly. The attitude was – the husband was in charge and he could take what he wanted from this wife, if you like. That was very strongly supported by the Catholic Church and we had no contraception until the mid '70s. The fact that we are having fewer children in some ways is better because they are being had by choice. Sometimes an accident can be a happy accident – that's the other side of it. But fewer children also puts less of a strain on the family in terms of financial resources. Women are having more of a voice or a say in how many children they are having. We are now prioritising quality of life over just getting on with it. We are choosing to live better and to give children a better education.*

(Female, 45, single, interior designer, Dublin)

Factor III, “Belief in Value of Smaller Families,” comprises three statements which endorse reasons why smaller families are a good thing. The first indicates that “it's better to have fewer children because you can give more to each child.” The second suggests that “having fewer children is better since they are being had by choice.” Those who agree with these statements also tend to think that “an only child can be just as happy as a child with brothers and sisters.” Those who tend to disagree with this point of view are more likely to say “I like the idea of a big family.” Thus, respondents high on the factor tend to perceive positive aspects to having smaller families while those low on the factor do not hold this view and instead would prefer larger families.

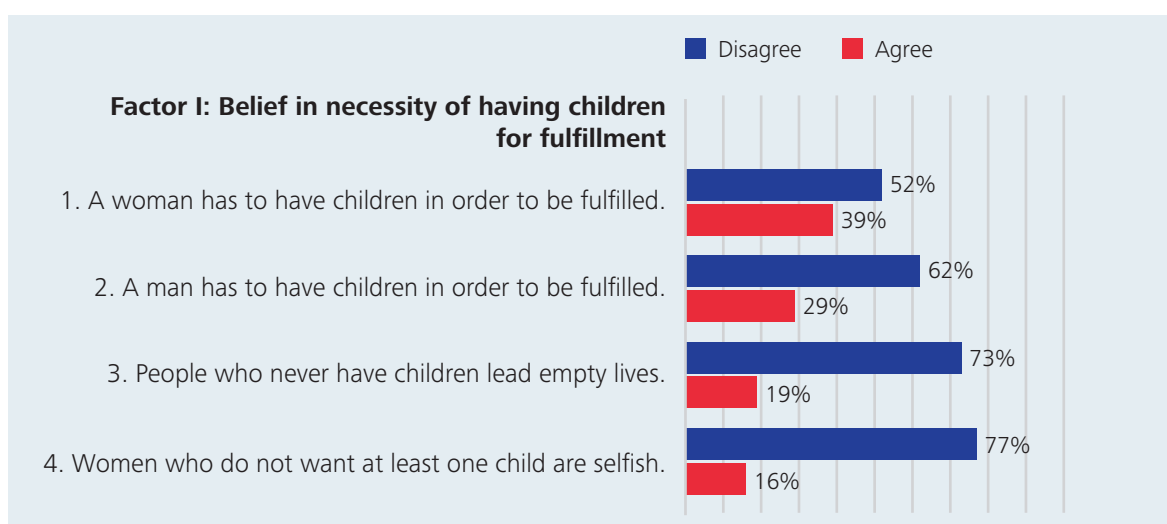
#### Factor IV, Belief that Men want Children as much as Women do

The fourth factor, “Belief that Men want Children as much as Women do,” was an isolate, meaning that there was only one item loading on the factor. Because of the interest of this item it will be discussed along with the other factors.

## 7.2 Prevalence of Attitudes to Having Children

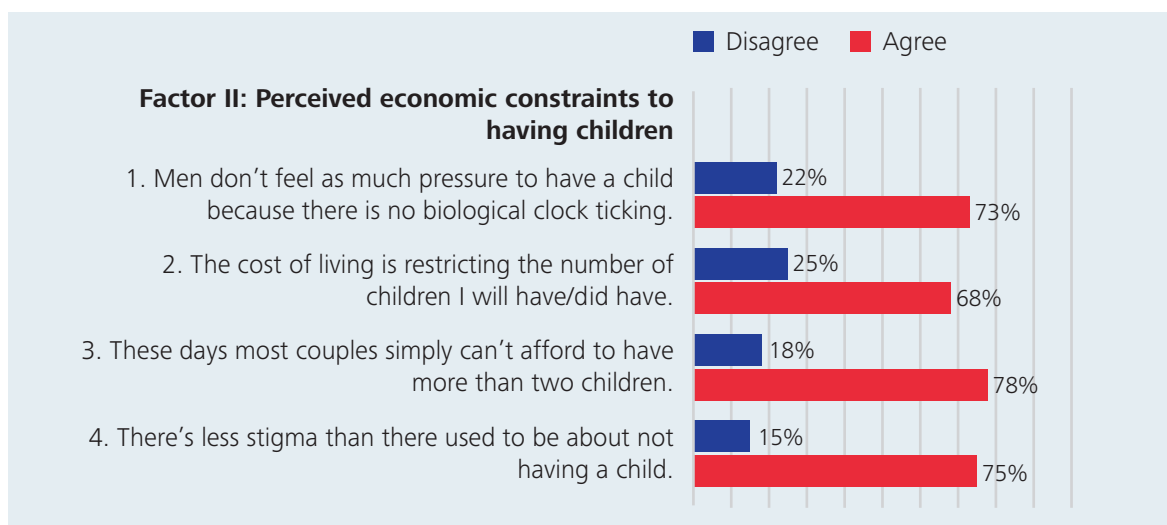
The extent to which people hold these various attitudes is illustrated in the figures below. It is evident from the responses to the items in Factor I that most people do not think that it is necessary to have a child in order to be fulfilled (Fig. 7.1). Only 39% think that “a woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled.” Even fewer (29%) think that “a man has to have children in order to be fulfilled.” Attitudes to childlessness are also quite accepting, as indicated by the fact that only 19% feel that “people who never have children lead empty lives.” Similarly, only 16% feel that “women who do not want at least one child are selfish.” This contrasts with attitudes expressed in a study carried out in 1986 in which 47.5% agreed with this statement (Fine-Davis, 1988a), indicating that attitudes to childlessness have changed considerably over the last 25 years.

**Figure 7.1: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor I: Belief in Necessity of having Children for Fulfilment (N=1,404)**



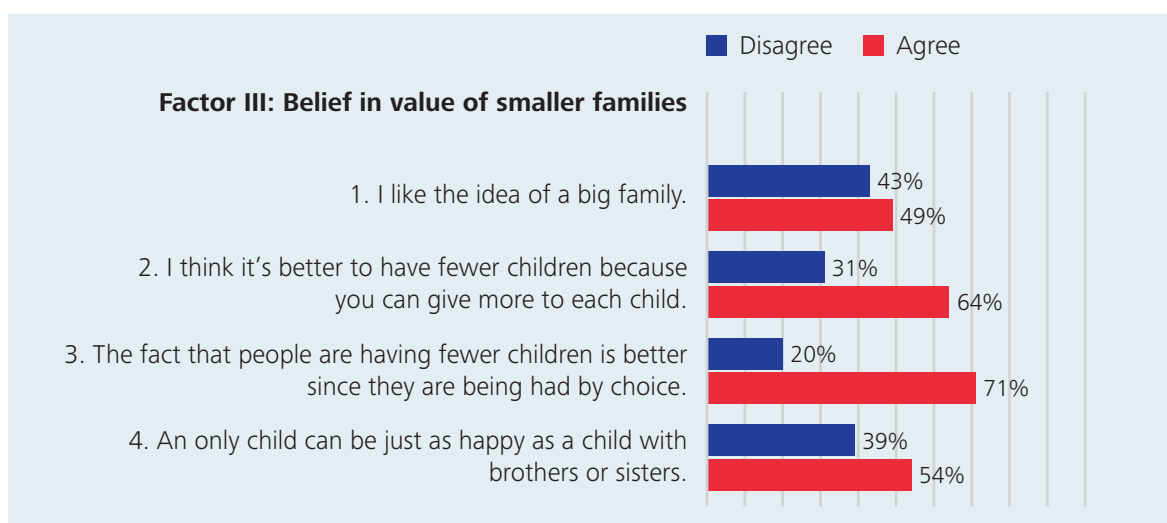
Responses to the items on Factor II, Perceived Economic Constraints to having Children, strongly suggest that economic factors are having a major influence on people’s attitudes to having children and their behavioural intentions in this regard (see Fig. 7.2). For example, 78% believe that “these days most couples simply cannot afford to have more than two children.” More than two-thirds (68%) of the sample said that “the cost of living is restricting the number of children I will have/did have.” Other factors were also found to be related people’s attitudes to having children. The fact that 75% feel that there is less “stigma than there used to be about not having a child,” suggests that this too may contribute to people’s childbearing intentions. Finally, there was widespread agreement (73%) that “men don’t feel as much pressure to have a child because there is no biological clock ticking.” This too undoubtedly influences the timing of men’s decisions to have children and also helps to explain male and female differences in this area.

**Figure 7.2: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor II: Perceived Economic Constraints to having Children (N=1,404)**



Given the economic constraints which people feel, it is not surprising that their attitudes concerning smaller families are reflecting this economic necessity. Thus, on Factor III, 71% agree that “the fact that people are having fewer children is better since they are being had by choice” (Fig. 7.3). Almost two-thirds (64%) also agree that “it’s better to have fewer children because you can give more to each child.” It would thus seem that attitudes towards family size are changing in Ireland. On the basis of people’s attitudes on Factor II, this relates in large part to economic exigencies and the cost of having children. However, the belief in the value of smaller families may also reflect a change in more basic attitudes, as reflected in people’s views that it is better to have fewer children by choice and be able to give more to each child. The fact that attitudes on Factor I indicated that there is no longer a stigma to not having children and that the majority do not see having children as being essential for fulfilment undoubtedly also contributes to an attitude syndrome which favours smaller families.

**Figure 7.3: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor III: Belief in Value of Smaller Families (N=1,404)**

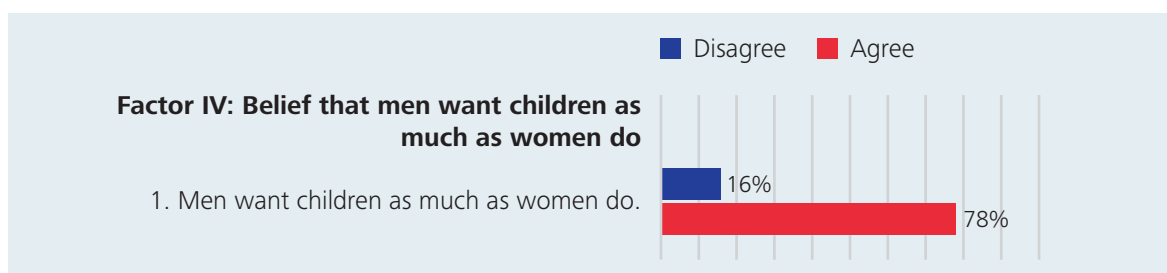


However, attitudes to other items suggest that some of this attitude change may be somewhat reluctant. While people’s attitudes seem to justify having smaller families, half of the sample (49%) still “likes

the idea of a big family” and while 54% feel that “an only child can be just as happy as a child with brothers and sisters,” 39% disagree.

Factor IV, contains the sole item, “men want children as much as women do.” The vast majority (78%) agreed with this and only 16% disagreed, with 6% being unsure. Thus, while 73% expressed the view that “men don’t feel as much pressure to have a child because there is no biological clock ticking,” most people think that men do want children as much as women do. The differences related to biological clock may impinge in terms of different timing of men and women to have children, but not in any difference in ultimate aspirations.

**Figure 7.4: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor IV: Belief that Men want Children as much as Women do (N=1,404)**



### 7.3 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Attitudes to Having Children

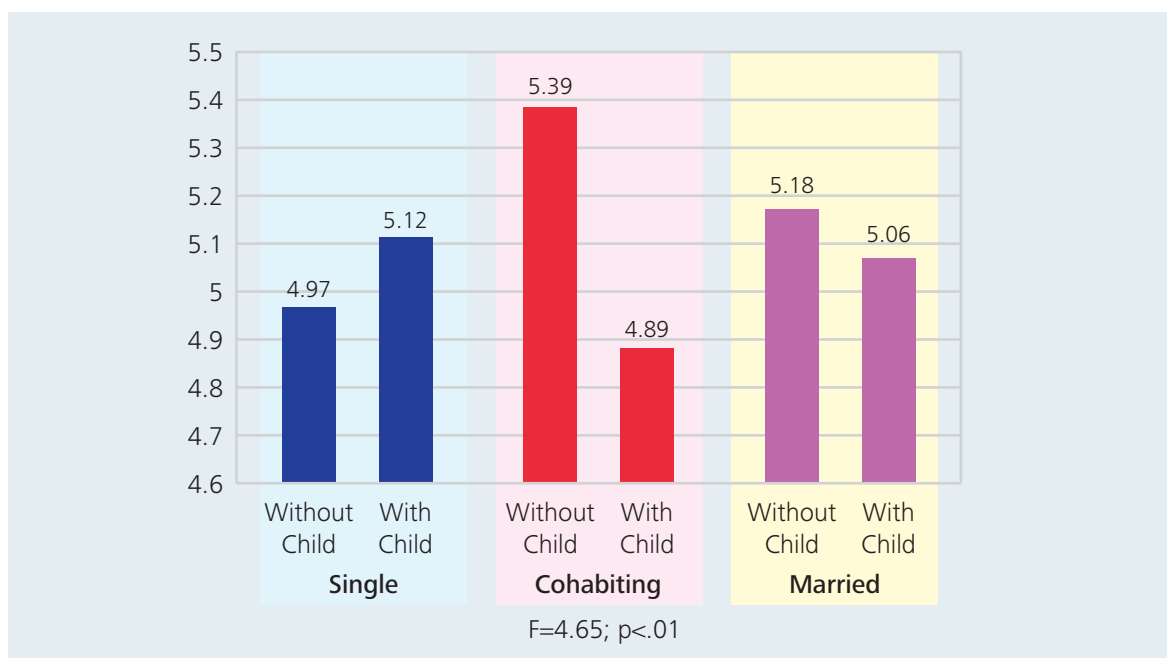
The effects of various demographic characteristics of respondents on their attitudes to having children were examined in this section. Factor I, Belief in Necessity of Having Children for Fulfilment, manifests four significant main effects (see Table 7.1 below). The strongest is for gender in the direction of men being more likely to think that it is necessary to have children in order to be fulfilled ( $F=38.15$ ;  $p<.001$ ). This is a somewhat surprising finding, given that there is more pressure on women to have children. The second strongest effect is for presence of children. Those who already have children are more likely to think that having children is necessary for fulfilment than are those without children ( $F=23.76$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Somewhat unexpectedly, younger people are more likely to think that having children is necessary for fulfilment ( $F=8.89$ ;  $p<.01$ ) than are older people. This may reflect hope and expectation on the part of younger people and acceptance of childlessness on the part of some of the older people. There is also an effect for social class, though this is of lesser magnitude than the previous effects, indicating that people in unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled occupations are more likely than those in non-manual or professional/managerial/technical occupations to think having children is crucial for fulfilment.

There were no significant main effects for Factor II, Perceived Economic Constraints to Having Children, however there were significant interaction effects. The first of these indicated that among single people those with children felt greater economic constraints to having children than did single people without children (see Figure 7.5 below).

The reality of being a single parent often brings with it economic hardship and this explains this finding. Interestingly, among cohabiting people, those without children were more likely to perceive economic constraints to having children. This may be a factor preventing them from having children.

Married people without children were similarly slightly more likely to perceive economic constraints to having children. Cohabiting and married people with children were less likely to perceive economic constraints. It may be that once you have children you adjust to the economic reality, but before you have children you may be reticent to make the economic sacrifices.

**Figure 7.5: Perceived Economic Constraints to Having Children: Means for Significant Interaction Effect of Family Status and Presence of Children**



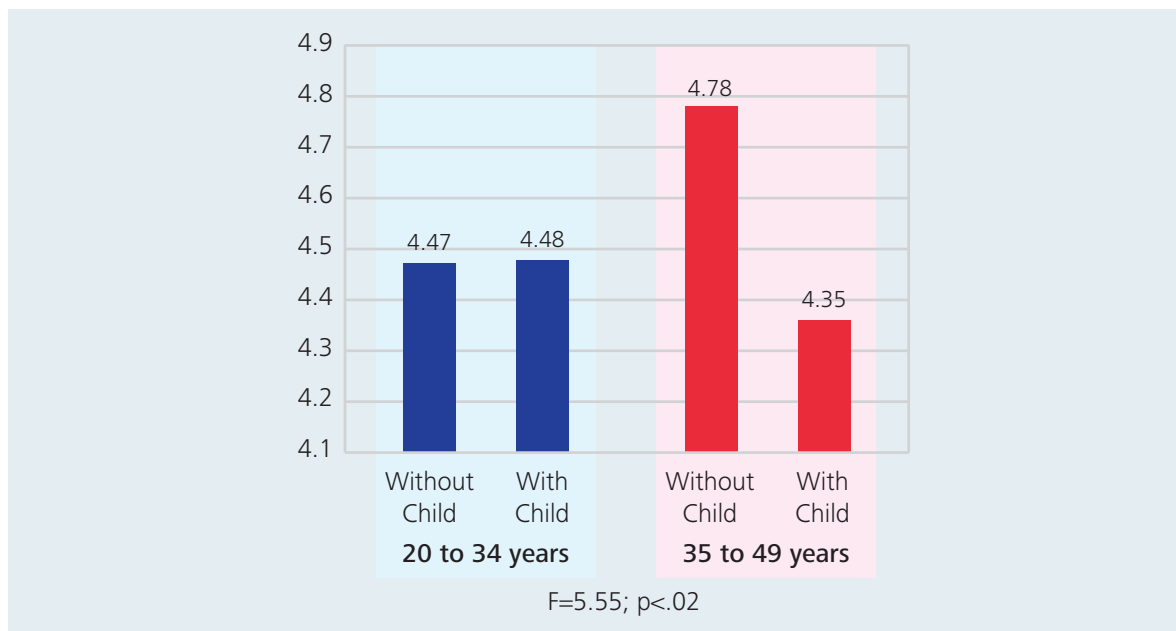
**Table 7.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Five Demographic Characteristics on Four Factors Measuring Attitudes to Having Children (N=1,404)**

4 FACTORS MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD HAVING CHILDREN	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	S	M	C	With-out Child	With Child	Skilled/ Un-skilled	Non-manual	Prof./ Manager/ Technical
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)
1. Belief in Necessity of Having Children for Fulfilment	F =38.15***		F =8.89**		F =0.22			F =23.76***		F =4.18*		
	3.12	2.64	3.01	2.75	2.84	2.96	2.84	2.67	3.09	3.02	2.82	2.80
2. Perceived Economic Constraints to having Children	F =1.69		F =1.76		F =2.51			F =1.93		F =1.86		
	5.12	5.09	5.18	5.02	5.05	5.12	5.14	5.18	5.02	5.06	5.14	5.11
3. Belief in Value of Smaller Families	F =1.01		F =13.31***		F =3.33*			F =7.16**		F =0.27		
	4.53	4.51	4.48	4.57	4.64	4.43	4.49	4.63	4.41	4.50	4.48	4.58
4. Belief that Men want Children as much as Women Do	F =3.83		F =3.61		F =12.98***			F =0.39		F =2.74		
	5.41	5.26	5.37	5.29	5.07	5.63	5.30	5.34	5.32	5.22	5.38	5.40

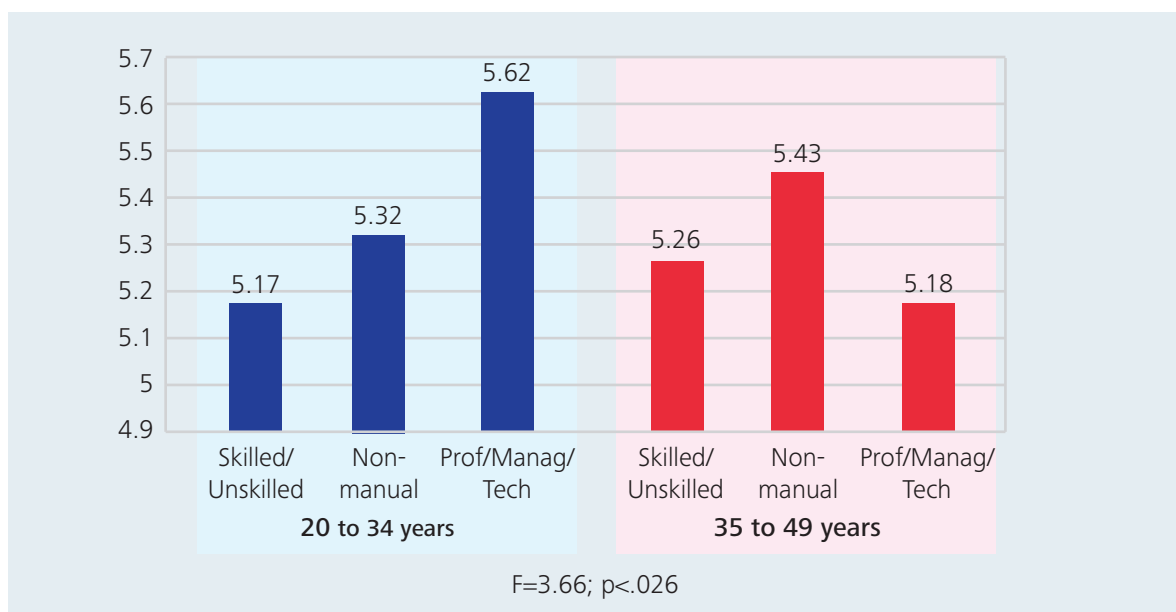
\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

Factor III concerned the Belief in the Value of Smaller Families. The results showed that older people (aged 35-49) were more likely to favour smaller families, as were single people and those without children. A significant interaction effect shed further light on the main effects by revealing that among younger people those with and without children had similar views, whereas it was among the older people (35-49) that those without children were more likely to favour smaller families (see Figure 7.6 below).

**Figure 7.6: Belief in Value of Smaller Families: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Age and Presence of Children**



**Figure 7.7: Belief that Men want Children as much as Women Do: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Age and Social Class (N=1404)**



Factor IV, Belief that Men want Children as much as Women do, showed two main effects (Table 7.1). An effect for gender was small (F=3.83; p<.051), yet it is worth noting since it indicates that men are somewhat more likely to endorse this. A much stronger main effect for family status (F=12.98;



$p < .001$ ) showed that married people were the most likely to think men wanted children as much as women, followed by cohabiting people. Single people were least likely to think so. There was also a significant interaction between age and social class showing large differences among younger men by social class. What is particularly interesting about this interaction effect is the high mean score (5.62) among high SES younger people (Fig. 7.7). This indicates that an attitude shift may be taking place in this group which goes together with other findings we have seen concerning a growing belief in the equality of male nurturing, a breakdown in traditional gender roles and a move toward more equality in parenting.

## 7.4 Ideal, Expected and Actual Family Size

All respondents were asked about their attitudes and intentions in relation to having children. This section began with asking respondents if they thought they would have children one day. Overall, 63% said they “definitely will”, 23% said they “probably will,” 7% were “not sure,” 3% said “probably not,” and 4% said “definitely not.” Percentage responses are shown for different groups in Table 7.2. When asked how many children they thought they would have in their lifetime, the mean for the total sample was 2.41 children (see Table 7.3). The commonest response was two children (40%), followed by three children (31%). Ten per cent of the sample expected to have four children and a further 5% expected to have more than that. Nine per cent of the sample expected to have just one child and 7% expected to have no children. When asked how many children they would like to “ideally” have, regardless of their present circumstances, the average number was 2.73, which is higher than people’s expected number of 2.41.

**Table 7.2: Likelihood of Having Children One Day (N=1,404)**

	Total	Gender		Age		Family Status			Children		Education		
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Single	Married	Cohabit	With-out Child	With Child	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
Total	1,404	706	698	759	645	625	619	160	753	651	379	477	548
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	1,404	691	713	780	624	590	510	304	735	669	295	533	576
Definitely will not	4%	3%	5%	2%	6%	6%	2%	4%	7%	-	5%	3%	4%
Probably will not	3%	4%	3%	2%	5%	5%	1%	3%	6%	-	3%	3%	3%
Not sure	7%	10%	5%	7%	7%	13%	2%	4%	13%	-	7%	8%	6%
Probably will	23%	27%	18%	37%	6%	38%	6%	26%	42%	-	13%	23%	29%
Definitely will	63%	57%	70%	52%	76%	38%	89%	63%	32%	100%	73%	62%	58%
Mean	4.39	4.31	4.47	4.36	4.43	3.98	4.79	4.43	3.86	5.00	4.47	4.39	4.33

**Table 7.3: Expected Number of Children (N=1,404)**

	Gender			Age		Family Status			Children		Education		
	Total	Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Single	Married	Cohabit	With-out Child	With Child	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
Total	1,404	706	698	759	645	625	619	160	753	651	379	477	548
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	1,404	691	713	780	624	590	510	304	735	669	295	533	576
0	7%	6%	7%	4%	10%	10%	3%	7%	13%	-	8%	5%	7%
1	9%	8%	9%	6%	11%	11%	7%	6%	9%	8%	9%	10%	7%
2	40%	42%	38%	42%	38%	39%	40%	43%	41%	39%	34%	45%	40%
3	31%	33%	29%	37%	24%	31%	31%	33%	30%	32%	33%	26%	34%
4	10%	7%	13%	9%	11%	9%	12%	9%	7%	14%	8%	11%	11%
5+	5%	3%	4%	1%	7%	1%	7%	4%	1%	7%	9%	2%	2%
Mean	2.41	2.35	2.48	2.45	2.37	2.21	2.62	2.40	2.12	2.75	2.51	2.35	2.40

An analysis of variance was carried out on actual, expected and ideal family size (see Table 7.4 below). Beginning with actual family size, we see that there are strong main effects for all of the demographic variables examined. The strongest effect is for family status: married people currently have more children than single or cohabiting people. The average number of children that married people have is 1.57. Cohabiting people, on average have 1.04 children and single people have .70 children. The reason that the average number is smaller than the current total fertility rate for Ireland, which is approximately 2, is that many people in the sample have not yet completed their families and this number is likely to increase by the time they have completed their childbearing. It must be remembered that the sample includes people in the childbearing age range, 20-49, so that many of those in their 20s and 30s will still go on to bear more children.

In addition to family status, there is a strong effect for age in the direction of older people having had more children, as per the point made above. Those aged 20-34 had on average .85 children, while those aged 35-49 had on average 1.35 children. Gender was also significant; women were more likely to report more children than men. Women reported giving birth to or adopting on average 1.30 children, whereas men only reported having fathered or adopted .94 children. This discrepancy in male and female reporting is something that has been observed in the Census (Lunn et al., 2010).

This is the first time that we have data concerning the children of single fathers, since the Census only asks women about the number of children they have given birth to. It does not ask men about their children.

The results also show that the more education a person has the fewer children they have. Those with lower second level have, on average, 1.51 children, those with upper second have 1.02 children and those with third level have .78 children.

Expected family size averaged 2.28, with men and women holding similar views (the slight divergence from the expected family size in the cross tabulation means is due to the fact that the analysis of

variance tables are based on the unweighted data). It is interesting to observe that younger people (20-34) had a significantly higher expected family size than older people (35-49). While younger people expected to have on average 2.53 children, older people expected just 2.02. The lower figure of the older people reflects the fact that the sample includes some older people who do not expect to have children and some married and cohabiting people who have not completed their families.

**Table 7.4: Analysis of Variance: Main Effects of Four Demographic Variables on Actual, Expected and Ideal Family Size (N=1,404)**

ACTUAL, EXPECTED AND IDEAL FAMILY SIZE	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Education		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	S	M	C	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=379)	(n=477)	(n=548)
1. ACTUAL FAMILY SIZE: What is the total number of children (including deceased) that you have given birth to, fathered or adopted?	F=31.13***		F=74.86***		F=77.06***			F=31.73***		
	0.94	1.30	0.85	1.35	0.70	1.57	1.04	1.51	1.02	0.78
2. EXPECTED FAMILY SIZE: How many children do you think you will have in your lifetime?	F=0.04		F=58.43***		F=15.34***			F=1.43		
	2.27	2.29	2.53	2.023	2.05	2.52	2.27	2.42	2.22	2.20
3. IDEAL FAMILY SIZE: Thinking in general and regardless of your present circumstances, how many children would you ideally like to have?	F=3.88*		F=13.92***		F=15.56***			F=1.61		
	2.60	2.76	2.82	2.54	2.40	2.88	2.76	2.83	2.55	2.66

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

Not surprisingly, married people are significantly more likely to expect to have more children (2.53), whereas currently cohabiting people expect on average to have 2.27 and single people expect on average to have 2.05.

The ideal number of children is 2.60 for men and 2.76 for women. This difference is small, but significant (F=3.88; p<.05). Again we see that younger people also have high expectations for the number of children they would like to have – 2.82 on average, whereas older people think 2.54 is ideal (F=13.92; p<.001). Married people have the highest ideal family size – 2.88, while cohabiting people think 2.76 would be ideal and single people think 2.40 would be ideal (F=15.56; p<.001). Interestingly, there was no significant effect for education, indicating that all educational groups have similar views on expected and ideal family size. The fact that those with the lowest educational qualifications had significantly more children than those with third level ( F=31.73; p<.001) in spite of the fact that there were no significant differences due to education in relation to expected and ideal number of children is noteworthy. It suggests that those with lower education may be having more children than they would ideally wish to over time and those with more education may be having fewer.

## 7.5 Perceived Facilitators and Constraints to Childbearing

In the previous sections of this chapter we examined attitudes to having children as well attitudes to expected and ideal family size. We were also interested in identifying the factors which contribute to people having children as well as those factors which constrain them. The following section presents respondents' views on the factors which they believe would facilitate or have facilitated their having a child, either their first child or another child.

All respondents were shown a list of 18 potential factors that might impinge on childbearing decisions. These included a wide range of factors including perceived prerequisites (e.g., "having a suitable partner," "quality of relationship with my partner," "wanting to complete my education/training first," "having a job,"), potential barriers (e.g., "high cost of childcare," "lack of availability of childcare," "I can't afford it,") and physical factors (e.g., "my age/biological clock," "my partner's age/biological clock," "my/my partner's fertility/infertility"). Responses to each of the 18 factors are presented in Appendix Table A5.

The most important considerations in the decision to have a child were found to be:

- Having a suitable partner
- The quality of the relationship with one's partner
- Having a job
- One's housing situation
- The cost of childcare
- Being able to afford it.

Thus, as we have seen before in relation to the decision to cohabit and the decision to marry, psychological factors take precedence in the decision to have a child: having a suitable partner and the quality of that relationship are seen as a *sine qua non* to having children. After that, economic exigencies play a key role, beginning with having a job and appropriate housing. The high cost of childcare also plays a role as well as one's overall ability to afford having a child.

## 7.6 Summary of Key Findings

Changes in norms about gender roles are evident in people's attitudes to having children. Most people do not think that it is necessary to have a child in order to be fulfilled. Attitudes to childlessness are also quite accepting and the results reflect the fact that attitudes to having children have changed considerably over the last 25 years.

The study showed discrepancies between people's ideal, expected and actual number of children. When asked how many children they would "ideally" like to have, the average number was 2.73. However, when they were asked how many children they expected to have in their lifetime, the mean was 2.41 children. Thus, people expect to have fewer children than they would ideally like to have. The actual number of children that each woman has when she completes her childbearing (total fertility rate) is currently approximately 2.

The study found that there are new attitudes which favour having smaller families:

- 71% agree that “the fact that people are having fewer children is better since they are being had by choice.”
- 64% agree that “it’s better to have fewer children because you can give more to each child.”

However, the results also revealed that economic factors are having a major influence on people’s attitudes to having children and their intentions in this regard. More than three quarters agreed that “these days most couples simply cannot afford to have more than two children.” More than two-thirds (68%) of the sample said that “the cost of living is restricting the number of children I will have/did have.”

There was general consensus (73%) that men don’t feel as much pressure to have a child because there is no biological clock ticking. This undoubtedly influences the timing of men’s intentions concerning having children and it is clear that differences in men and women’s biological clocks, coupled with other factors, is a key contributor to the delay in coupling and decreasing birth rate.

One of the stark findings concerning childbearing was the fact that those of lower socio-economic status, who reported the greatest difficulty in making ends meet and the lowest perceived standard of living, had significantly more children than those of higher socio-economic status, though not having a larger ideal family size.



# Chapter 8

## People's Priorities and Values



## CHAPTER 8 People's Priorities and Values

In order to understand the determinants of family formation, it is important to examine people's values and priorities as these undoubtedly contribute to people's life choices. While we have done this to some extent in the previous chapters by looking at people's attitudes to gender roles, family formation and having children, we have not examined the relative importance they place on these and other areas of their lives. In this chapter we look at people's priorities in several areas of life. We asked respondents to indicate how important various areas of life were to their happiness and well-being. These areas included:

- A job/career
- Being in a relationship
- Having a child/children
- Your freedom/independence

We also examined two other characteristics of people which we hypothesised might be related to family status, namely their need for autonomy and the importance of religion in their lives.

### 8.1 Relative Importance of Different Areas of Life

Looking at the Importance of a Job/Career, we find a significant effect of gender indicating that a job/career is significantly more important to men's well-being than to women's. We also see that it is more important to those in the highest socio-economic group and to those without children (see Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Five Demographic Characteristics on People's Priorities (N=1,404)**

	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	Single	Married	Cohabit	Without Child	With Child	Skilled / Un-skilled	Non-manual	Prof./ Manager/ Technical
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)
1. Importance of 'A Job/Career'	F=16.73***		F=3.01		F=2.79			F=7.15**		F=8.42***		
	5.64	5.24	5.55	5.33	5.53	5.30	5.49	5.58	5.30	5.23	5.49	5.60
2. Importance of 'Being in a Relationship'	F=3.27		F=15.96***		F=108.33***			F=.27		F=1.98		
	5.50	5.24	5.50	5.25	4.60	5.89	5.63	5.37	5.37	5.29	5.39	5.44
3. Importance of 'Having a Child/Children'	F=0.62		F=39.31***		F=9.45***			F=288.12***		F=1.11		
	5.20	5.19	5.47	4.92	4.99	5.44	5.16	4.44	5.95	5.21	5.17	5.21
4. Importance of 'Your Freedom/Independence'	F=4.19*		F=0.18		F=10.68***			F=0.01		F=0.20		
	5.30	5.39	5.36	5.33	5.55	5.14	5.35	5.33	5.36	5.34	5.41	5.28
5. Autonomy	F=11.84***		F=23.07***		F=8.18***			F=6.23*		F=0.89		
	5.72	5.93	5.73	5.92	5.98	5.79	5.70	5.91	5.74	5.80	5.79	5.89

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001



When we look at the ‘Importance of being in a Relationship,’ we see an overwhelming effect of family status, with married people being most likely to put a priority on being in a relationship. They were followed by cohabiting people. Single people were least likely to say that being in a relationship was important to their happiness or well-being. There was also a significant effect of age in the direction of younger people putting a higher priority on being in a relationship than older people and seeing it as more important to their well-being.

Having a child or children was a very high priority for those who already had a child and significantly less so for those without children. The second strongest predictor was age, with younger people putting a higher priority on having a child than older people. Finally, married people put the highest priority on having children, followed by cohabiting people. Single people put a significantly lower priority on having children than these other two groups.

Having freedom and independence was a high priority for single people, followed by cohabiting people. Married people were the least likely to put a high priority on their freedom and independence and they were less likely to see it as contributing to their well-being. There was also a significant effect of gender showing that women put a somewhat higher priority on their freedom and independence than men did.

## 8.2 Autonomy

Our interest in people’s priorities included the construct of Autonomy. We wanted to test the hypothesis that people who are not in a cohabiting or marital relationship may have a higher need for Autonomy. To some extent this hypothesis has already been supported by the finding on the significantly greater importance placed on “freedom and independence” by single people. However individual items are less reliable than composite scores measuring a particular dimension. For this reason three statements were included which were related to people’s need for autonomy. These were developed on the basis of the qualitative study. The need for autonomy was expressed in ways such as this:

*For me being single, it gives me time and space to do what I want to do. Maybe I’m ridiculously selfish, I don’t know, but I definitely have things that I want to do and things that I want to see and I want to spend my time the way I want to spend my time, so if somebody invades that space I get quite precious about it. Well for me it gives me independence and freedom to do what I want to do the way that I want to do it without compromise.*

(Female, 33, single, mortgage broker/administration, Dublin)

*I will say that having been in four to five long term relationships each in an excess of three years where every decision you make involves two people in equal amounts . . . when I built my house I discovered things about myself that I didn’t know anything about . . . I decided to do it on a hugely selfish basis. I just said ‘I’m going to do this for me’. And the more I was doing it the more I was enjoying it. I thought, I don’t want two opinions on what kind of mirror should be on that wall or what kind of TV I should have in that room . . . Most of my friends who built houses — women have picked the carpet on the floor, the type of the floor, the tiles in the bathroom, the colours on the wall, the fixtures and fittings, the little odds and ends and all that. I have loved every minute of doing that on my own and not having to think about “what do you think about us buying this?”*

(Male, 48, single, public servant, Co. Clare)

The measure of Autonomy included the following three items to which respondents agreed or disagreed slightly, moderately or strongly:

- “I like having time on my own”
- “I like having my own space”
- “As I’ve gotten older I’ve become more particular about the things I like”

These three items were then averaged for each respondent into a single measure (Cronbach alpha = .64).

An analysis of differences among groups showed that the strongest effect was for age, with older people (35-49) placing a greater value on autonomy than those 20-34. This was followed by gender, in the direction of women placing a greater value on autonomy than men. This corroborates the finding which showed that women placed a higher value on their freedom and independence than men. There was also a significant effect of family status showing that single people have a higher need for autonomy than either married or cohabiting people. This may help to explain why they are not in a relationship. Finally, those without children have a higher need for autonomy than those with children, which may also help to explain why some people do not have children. One could posit alternative interpretations, e.g., that people who are not in a cohabiting or marital relationship and people without children have adjusted to their solo situation by holding positive attitudes to their relatively high level of autonomy whereas those living with others and having children have had to adjust to the needs and wishes of others.

### **8.3 Religious Behaviour**

It was also found that the degree of religious observance, as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services, was related to family status. Married people were the most likely to attend services once a week or more (26%), followed by single people (15%), while cohabiting people were least likely to attend services this often. Just 7% attended once a week or more. Cohabitees were more likely to say they attended rarely or never (38%), while only 20% of married people said they attended rarely or never. Church attendance was also more common among those with children and rural dwellers (see Table 8.2).

### **8.4 Summary of Key Findings**

It was found that men put a higher priority on having a job/career than women did and saw this as contributing most to their happiness and well-being. This was followed by being in a relationship. While men and women did not differ in terms of the importance of being in a relationship or having children, women put a slightly higher priority on their freedom and independence.

Married people put the highest priority on having a relationship and this was central to their well-being. Cohabiting people also saw relationships as very important to their well-being. Single people were least likely to feel this way. Having children was also most important to married people, followed by cohabiting people and least so to single people. People who already had children were significantly more likely to say that having children was important to their well-being, in contrast to those without children. Single people were the group most likely to place a high value freedom and independence, with married people least likely to feel this way.

Those who put a high priority on having autonomy were women, older people, single people and those without children.

Attendance at religious services was used as a measure of the importance of religion to people. Married people, those with children and people living in rural areas were more likely to attend services more often.

**Table 8.2: Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services: Cross-Tabulations by Six Demographic Characteristics**

	Total	Gender		Age		Family Status			Children		Education			Area	
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Single	Married	Cohabit	Without Child	With Child	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level	Urban	Rural
Total	1,404	706	698	759	645	625	619	160	753	651	379	477	548	556	848
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Daily	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	-	1%	0%	-	1%	1%	1%	0%
More than once a week	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Once a week	17%	16%	19%	14%	22%	13%	25%	7%	14%	21%	14%	17%	20%	9%	23%
Two or three times a month	11%	11%	10%	11%	10%	10%	12%	7%	11%	10%	9%	11%	11%	10%	11%
Once a month	10%	9%	10%	9%	10%	9%	10%	12%	10%	10%	9%	11%	10%	7%	11%
A few times a year	34%	32%	35%	34%	33%	35%	32%	35%	33%	34%	34%	36%	31%	39%	30%
Rarely or never	27%	31%	24%	31%	23%	32%	20%	38%	31%	23%	33%	24%	26%	32%	24%



# Chapter 9

## Predictors of Family Status



## Chapter 9 Predictors of Family Status

Throughout the study we have compared single people with cohabiting and married people and have seen that they differ on a range of variables from gender roles to family formation, to social policy. However, we don't know which variables are the most important in determining if someone is single or is in a cohabiting or marital relationship. In order to tease this out we examined a range of variables together to see which ones best predict family status.

### 9.1 Predictors of Being Single vs Cohabiting or Married: Comparative Analyses for Men and Women

We entered 28 potential predictor variables into stepwise multiple regression analyses for men and women separately, on the basis of the hypothesis that different things may be important for men and women in determining their family status. The 28 predictor variables included demographic characteristics of age, education, occupational status and attitudes to family formation; composite scores on six factors measuring attitudes to gender roles; composite scores on seven factors measuring attitudes to family formation; composite scores on four factors measuring attitudes to having children; the item “the cost of weddings is putting people off getting married”; the importance of four separate areas of life to one's well-being (job/career, being in a relationship, having a child, freedom and independence); the composite score on autonomy; and frequency of church attendance. The dependent variable examined was dichotomous, with a value of 0 given to single and 1 given to married or cohabiting. Stepwise multiple regression identifies which predictor variable explains the most variance in the dependent variable, in this case being single vs being married or cohabiting. It then identifies the variable which explains the next greatest amount of variance and so on. The analysis keeps going until it finds that the increase in Multiple R and R square is no longer significant.

The two separate multiple regressions run for men and women are presented in Table 9.1. Seven variables were found to predict family status for men. This equation had a Multiple R of .514 and an R square of .264. An equation of 12 predictors emerged in the female sample, with a Multiple R of .577 and an R square of .333.

**Table 9.1: Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression of Predictors of Being Single vs Cohabiting or Being Married for Males and Females**

Model Summary					
Gender	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Males	7	.514(g)	.264	.256	.42863
Females	12	.577(q)	.333	.321	.40362

ANOVA							
Gender	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Males	7	Regression	45.008	7	6.430	34.997	.000(g)
		Residual	125.484	683	.184		
		Total	170.492	690			
Females	12	Regression	56.842	12	4.737	29.076	.000(q)
		Residual	114.036	700	.163		
		Total	170.878	712			

Predictor Variables							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	
Male	(Constant)	.592	.170			3.482	.001
	1. Importance of Being in a relationship	.131	.012	.380		11.012	.000
	2. Age	.017	.002	.273		8.243	.000
	3. Importance of Your freedom/independence	-.057	.013	-.158		-4.539	.000
	4. Factor 6 - Ambivalence towards being single	-.038	.014	-.092		-2.711	.007
	5. Factor 2 - Belief in cohabitation	.051	.017	.103		2.995	.003
	6. Autonomy	-.043	.018	-.086		-2.446	.015
	7. Factor 4 - Belief in Traditional Male Support and Protection	.032	.015	.072		2.103	.036
Female	(Constant)	1.185	.163			7.262	.000
	1. Importance of Being in a relationship	.106	.010	.353		10.391	.000
	2. Age	.020	.002	.324		9.721	.000
	3. Importance of Your freedom/independence	-.042	.012	-.126		-3.656	.000
	4. Factor 6 - Ambivalence towards being single	-.052	.014	-.127		-3.832	.000
	5. Factor 2 - Belief in cohabitation	.044	.016	.091		2.722	.007
	6. Factor 4 - Belief in Traditional Male Support and Protection	.035	.014	.084		2.484	.013
	7. Importance of A job/career	-.034	.011	-.118		-3.197	.001
	8. Factor 3 - Perceived negative aspects of marriage/positive aspects of cohabitation	-.040	.015	-.093		-2.725	.007
	9. Factor 5 - Perceived difficulty in finding a partner	-.029	.012	-.082		-2.493	.013
	10. Ideal Family Size	.028	.012	.075		2.339	.020
	11. Factor 6 - Belief that Mothers are Best Nurturers	-.040	.013	-.103		-2.989	.003
12. Factor 3 - Support for Female Financial Independence	-.044	.018	-.083		-2.417	.016	

A comparison of the significant predictors of family status for men and women shows a great deal of commonality for the first five variables and then there is divergence. For both men and women the

strongest predictor of being in a cohabiting or marital relationship (as opposed to being single) is the Importance of Being in a Relationship to one's well-being. Those who rate it as very important to their well-being are more likely to be cohabiting or married and those who rate it as less important are more likely to be single. The second strongest predictor for both men and women is age, with older people being more likely to be cohabiting and married and younger people being more likely to be single. The third strongest predictor for both men and women was the importance of freedom and independence to their well-being. Those putting a high priority on this were more likely to be single and those putting a lower priority tended to be cohabiting or married. The fourth strongest predictor for both men and women was Ambivalence toward being single. Those high on this factor were more likely to be single and those low on this factor more likely to be cohabiting or married. Ambivalence toward being single included the item "people just don't accept the fact that you can be single, on your own and happy" and the item "I don't think anybody chooses to be single and on their own, if they are really honest." The fifth strongest predictor for men and women was Belief in Cohabitation. Those with a strong belief in cohabitation were more likely to be married or cohabiting than single.

At the sixth predictor men and women began to diverge. The sixth significant predictor for men was Autonomy. Those men high on need for Autonomy (liking one's own space, own time and being particular about the things one likes) were more likely to be single than cohabiting and married. This indicates that the wish to have time on one's own and liking to have one's own space, which are both indicative of the kind individualistic culture which is emerging, are key determinants of whether a man will form a cohabiting or marital relationship. It is notable that this variable did not emerge at all for women. However, in spite of it not being significant for women, one cannot say that these issues are unimportant for women, since the related variable of placing a high value on "freedom and independence" for one's well-being was the third most significant predictor for women. It may mean, however, that autonomy, freedom and independence are even more significant for men.

Belief in the Traditional Support and Protection of Men was the seventh and final predictor for men and the sixth significant predictor for women. In both cases the results showed that those who held strong beliefs in this regard were more likely to be cohabiting and married, rather than single. It also may indicate that those with these beliefs seek out the kind of relationship in which they will give and receive this kind of support.

The seventh significant predictor of family status for women was the Importance of a Job or Career. Those who rated this as important to their well-being were significantly more likely to be single and those who rated it as less important were more likely to be cohabiting or married. The fact that the importance of one's work is a key determinant of women's family status shows how women's increasing participation in the workplace is influencing their personal lives and personal choices. It is most interesting that there is a gender difference on this item. It reveals that for men job or career does not impinge on one's choice of relationship status, while it does for women. This very well may relate to the fact that women usually have to balance dual roles and hence if a job or career is very important to their well-being they may be less able to manage both a job and a cohabiting or marital relationship, while men have traditionally been able to manage both since they usually have been able to count on their partner/spouse to take major responsibility for domestic work and child care. The remaining predictors for women were: Perceived negative consequences of marriage/positive aspects of cohabitation, Perceived difficulty in finding a partner, ideal family size, Belief that mothers are best nurturers and Support for female financial independence. Single women were more likely to perceive negative consequences of marriage and positive aspects of cohabitation and they were more likely to perceive difficulty in finding a partner than cohabitating or married women. It is



interesting that finding it difficult to find a partner was a significant predictor for women, but not for men. This indicates that women have a more difficult time than men in finding a partner and this is one of the main reasons why they are not cohabiting or married. As discussed before having a larger ideal family size is a determinant of being married or cohabiting, whereas having a smaller ideal family size is associated with being single. One of the more interesting findings in the women's data is that support for female financial independence is associated with being single. This further demonstrates the importance to women of their increased labour force participation and economic independence. The price many are paying for this is that they are remaining single, sometimes against their own wishes.

## **9.2 Predictors of Being Single vs Married, Single vs Cohabiting and Cohabiting vs Married: Comparative Analyses for Men and Women**

In the analyses described above we examined single vs cohabiting and being married together since this comparison tells us first of all what are the determinants of being in a relationship involving living together vs remaining single. This comparison also acknowledges the fact that cohabitation is increasingly common in this society and shares some similarities with marriage. While marriage and cohabitation differ, they nevertheless are qualitatively different from being single.

We subsequently compared being single with being married, being single with cohabiting and cohabiting with being married. We found that in all cases there were great similarities and that the analyses presented above in relation to single vs cohabiting and married include many of the findings in the subsequent analyses. However, some different findings emerged in these more specific analyses. Among these was the fact that when cohabiters were compared with married people Belief in Cohabitation was an important determinant of cohabiting and Belief in Marriage was a strong determinant of being married. This shows that the attitudinal measures developed to tap attitudes to family formation are predictive of behaviour. We also found that frequency of religious attendance was a determinant of marriage rather than cohabitation in the direction of greater religious attendance being associated with marriage. This was particularly so in predicting marriage among men. The importance of having a child was also an important predictor of being married among men. Autonomy was also found to be important and while it was not significant for women in the comparison of single vs cohabiting and married women, it was so in the comparison of single vs cohabiting women, with single women expressing a greater need for Autonomy. When cohabiting women were compared with married women, the cohabiting women were more likely to support female financial independence than were married women. They were also more likely to perceive difficulty in finding a partner. Married women were more likely to say having a child was important to them.

## **9.3 Summary of Key Findings**

This chapter examined the determinants of family status for men and women. By examining a wide range of demographic and attitudinal variables, it was possible to see which factors most strongly predicted whether a man or a woman would be single, cohabiting or married. It was found that the five most important factors which determined whether a person was single or in a cohabiting or marital relationship were the same for men and women. The most significant predictor was the importance of being in a relationship to one's well-being. Those who placed a high importance on being in a relationship were more likely to be cohabiting or married. The second strongest predictor of family

status was age, with younger people being more likely to be single and older people being more likely to be cohabiting or married. The third strongest influence on family status was the importance of freedom and independence to a person's well-being. Those putting a high priority on this were more likely to be single and those putting a lower priority were more likely to be cohabiting or married. The fourth strongest factor was Ambivalence toward being single, with those high on this factor more likely to be single and those low on this factor more likely to be cohabiting or married. The fifth strongest predictor was Belief in Cohabitation. Those with a strong belief in cohabitation were more likely to be married or cohabiting than single. For men, the sixth most significant predictor was Autonomy. Those men high on need for Autonomy (liking one's own space, own time and being particular about the things one likes) were more likely to be single than cohabiting and married. Belief in the Traditional Support and Protection of Men was the seventh and final predictor for men and the sixth significant predictor for women. Those who favoured male support and protection of women were more likely to be cohabiting and married, rather than single. For women, other significant factors included the importance attached to having a job or career. Those who rated this as important to their well-being were significantly more likely to be single and those who rated it as less important were more likely to be cohabiting or married. This finding reveals how women's increasing participation in the workplace is influencing their personal lives and personal choices. Single women were also more likely to perceive negative consequences of marriage and positive aspects of cohabitation and were more likely to perceive difficulty in finding a partner than cohabiting or married women. One of the more interesting findings is that support for female financial independence is associated with being single for women. This further demonstrates the importance to women of their increased labour force participation and economic independence.

When cohabitees were compared with married people belief in cohabitation was an important determinant of cohabiting and belief in marriage was a strong determinant of being married. More frequent attendance at religious services was a determinant of marriage, rather than cohabitation. The importance of having a child was also an important predictor of being married among men. In a comparison of single versus cohabiting women, Autonomy was found to differentiate between the two, with single women expressing a greater need for autonomy. When cohabiting women were compared with married women, the cohabiting women were more likely to support female financial independence, while the married women were more likely to say having a child was important to them.

# Chapter 10

## Attitudes towards Social Policies Relevant to Family Formation



## CHAPTER 10 Attitudes towards Social Policies relevant to Family Formation

In this chapter we look at attitudes to social policies relevant to family formation. As noted above in the discussion of previous research, child care and work life balance policies have been found to be the most relevant to family formation. We shall examine in detail people's attitudes to these. In this chapter we shall also look at attitudes to other social policy issues relevant to family formation, notably people's attitudes to the recently passed Civil Partnership Act (2010).

### 10.1 Dimensions of Attitudes to Work-life Balance and Related Social Policies

Thirteen Likert items were included in the study which particularly focused on issues related to work life balance and child care. These items were factor analysed to identify the dimensions of people's attitudes. The resulting three factors are discussed below.

#### **Factor I: Support for Universal Provision of Childcare**

Factor I, entitled "Support for Universal Provision of Childcare," contains five items, of which four refer to childcare. The two highest loading items concern provision of childcare at a national level. The first expresses the view that "there should be a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school aged children," while the second states that "free preschool education should be available to all children in the same way that primary education is." The third item expresses the belief that "there should be tax concessions for child care." The fourth item - "if people have to spend a lot on childcare they are more likely to have fewer children" - shows a connection in people's minds between affordability of childcare and childbearing decisions. The last item concerns work-life balance and specifically refers to men: "work-life balance is as important to men as it is to women." The fact that this item loaded on this factor suggests that work-life balance for men and women is associated with provision of childcare. Respondents high on this factor tend to favour a national programme of childcare facilities for preschool children and feel that it should be available for free to all children in the same way that primary education is. They also favour tax relief for child care costs. They tend to believe that people will have fewer children if they have to spend a lot on childcare. They also tend to believe that work-life balance is as important to men as it is to women. Those who are low on this factor do not favour government provision of childcare or tax concessions for childcare costs, nor do they see a relationship between childcare costs and childbearing decisions and they do not think work-life balance is as important to men as to women.

#### **Factor II: Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working**

Factor II, entitled "Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working," contains three items replicating items from an earlier cross-cultural study of work-life balance of working parents (Fine-Davis et al., 2004) which were also subsequently used in a more recent Irish nationwide study of work-life balance (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). The highest loading item expresses the view that "if men work part-time or job share, they are seen as less serious about their careers." A related view is also expressed, namely that "you put your career on hold when you work part-time." Those high on the factor see disadvantages to part-time working, particularly for men. A related attitude in this cluster concerns the belief that "to get ahead, employees have to work over and above the normal hours." Thus, not only is part-time working or job sharing seen as detrimental to one's career, especially for men, but additional hours over and above the norm are seen as necessary for career advancement, confirming

the existence of a “long hours culture.” Those who are high on this factor tend to hold these attitudes, whereas those low on the factor do not.

### **Factor III: Support for Work-Life Policies to Support Co-Parenting**

The qualitative study revealed that many people in the childbearing age group wished to share parenting with their partner. Recent research has also found that co-parenting is becoming more common after a separation (Mahon and Moore, 2011). Hence, it is interesting to see that a factor concerning co-parenting emerged in the main study. Factor III, entitled, “Support for Work-Life Policies to Support Co-Parenting,” contains four statements reflecting different aspects of this issue.

The highest loading item expresses the view that “ideally . . . men and women should both work part-time and co-parent.” Those in favour of co-parenting also think that “maternity leave should be changed into leave for one or other parent” and that “fathers should have a right to take paid paternity leave on the birth or adoption of a new baby.” Those who hold these views believe that “if people had flexible working conditions, this would make it more likely that they would have children.” Thus, we see in this factor a confluence of several policies, together with the view that the availability of these work-life balance policies would make it more likely that people would have more children.

## **10.2 Prevalence of Attitudes to Work-life Balance and Childcare**

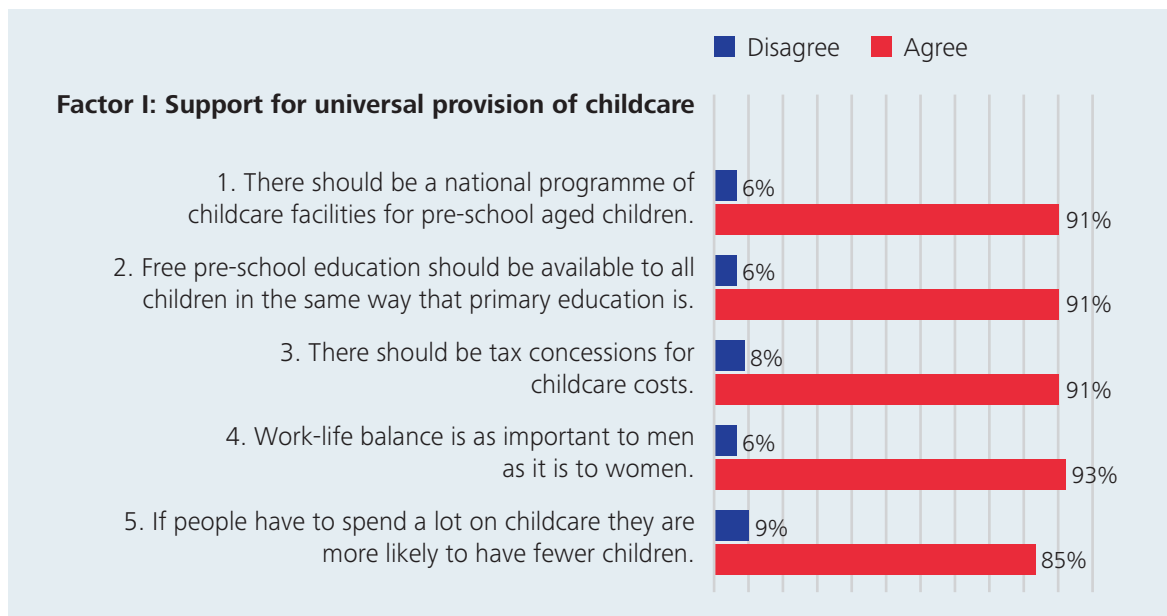
To what extent do the people in the sample endorse the attitudes described above? The figures below present percentage distributions for each of the items comprising each of the factors above. There is almost unanimous support for the universal provision of childcare, as illustrated in Factor I. Ninety-one per cent (91%) believe that “there should be a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school aged children.” There is also very strong agreement (91%) that free preschool education should be available to all children in the same way that primary education is.” Recognising that such facilities do not exist at present and that many parents have to pay for child care, there is strong agreement (91%) that “there should be tax concessions for child care costs.” The overwhelming majority of people in the childbearing age group (93%) believe that “work-life balance is as important to men as it is to women” and, as this loaded on the childcare factor, it may be assumed that there is a strong connection in people’s minds between attaining work-life balance for mothers and fathers and the provision of free childcare by the state. Another key component of this factor is the view that “if people have to spend a lot on childcare they are more likely to have fewer children,” to which 85% agreed. The clustering of this item with the others suggests that choices regarding family size are being influenced by child care costs and that if free childcare were provided by the state in the same way as primary school – or at least if there were tax concessions for child care costs – that people would be more inclined to have larger families.

While the levels of support for child care may seem very high, they are not out of line with previous surveys in this area. In a 1981 study for the Working Party on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents over 90% of mothers expressed support for a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school children (Fine-Davis, 1983c). A comparable level of support was expressed by married women in a 1986 survey (Fine-Davis, 1988b). Ninety per cent of employed and 88% of non-employed married women said they would favour such a policy and over 40% saw it as applicable to them. Married men were also quite supportive: 81% favoured such a policy and 50% said it applied to them.

A more recent nationwide survey conducted in 2005 found that 92% of adults believed that there should be a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school children (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). In both the 1981 and 1986 surveys (Fine-Davis, 1983b, 1988b) 88% of married women

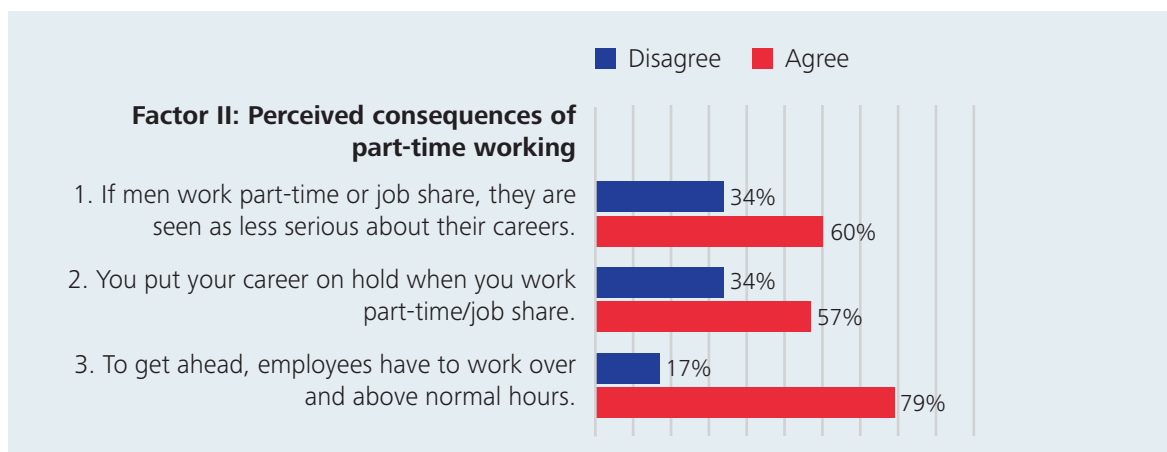
favoured tax concessions for child care costs. These data, which stretch back 25 – 30 years, show the consistency of attitudes in this sphere and the broad based support in the population for public child care.

**Figure 10.1: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor I: Support for Universal Provision of Childcare (N=1404)**



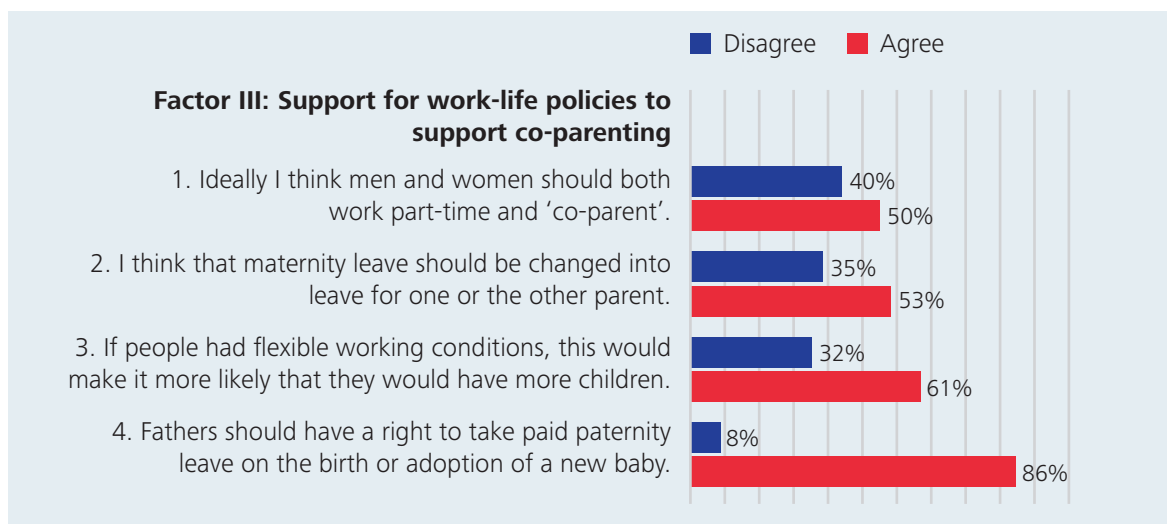
Factor II, Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working, presents people’s attitudes to working time and working arrangements. The vast majority of the sample (79%) believes that “to get ahead, employees have to work over and above normal hours.” There is also a general belief on the part of more than half of the sample (57%) that “you put your career on hold when you work part-time/job share.” A slightly higher proportion feels that this applies to men more than women, as 60% believe that “if men work part-time or job share, they are seen as less serious about their careers.” These attitudes suggest that many people will be disinclined to engage in part-time working or job sharing since they will see it as leading to being seen as less serious about their careers, particularly if they are men, and will feel that such work will impede career advancement. In fact, working longer hours is what is seen as required to get ahead.

**Figure 10.2: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor II: Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working (N=1404)**



Factor III, Support for Policies to Support Co-Parenting, presents attitudes to policies which would support work-life balance and co-parenting. In general the sample was supportive of such policies. There was strong support (86%) for fathers to “have a right to take paid paternity leave on the birth or adoption of a new baby.” There was also support (53%) for maternity leave to be “changed into leave for one or other parent,” although this received less support than paternity leave. Half of the sample (50%) felt that “ideally . . . men and women should both work part-time and ‘co-parent’,” while 40% disagreed with this.

**Figure 10.3: Summary Agree and Disagree Responses to Items on Factor III: Support for Policies to Support Co-Parenting (N=1404)**



While only 50% supported co-parenting, a larger proportion (61%) felt that “if people had flexible working conditions, this would make it more likely that they would have more children.” In the qualitative study many respondents, both male and female, said that having flexible hours would definitely have an influence on the number of children they would have. One young man said:

*If I had flexible working conditions there would be more chance of my having two children rather than one.*

*(Male, 23, single, unemployed university graduate)*

Thus, there is strong support for flexible working arrangements and strong support for the introduction of paternity leave. The notion of part-time working for both parents in order to facilitate co-parenting and making maternity leave available to either parent are more controversial, but they have surprisingly high support and suggest that changes are underway which signal a readiness for greater sharing of childcare between men and women. The extent to which there are gender differences in these attitudes will be explored in the next section.

Looking at all of the attitudes expressed in this section, it will be noted that while there is a wish for greater ‘co-parenting’ among a sizeable proportion of the sample, part-time working and job sharing are seen as leading to career disadvantages, particularly for men and people feel that they must work long hours to get ahead in their careers. Thus, while many might wish to work part-time or job share in order to be able to better share childcare, this is not an appealing option from a career point of view. In light of high child care costs it is likely that it is also problematic from an economic point of view. It is evident that people feel financial pressure to pay for childcare costs and that this is preventing



them from having as many children as they might like. The high support for state provision of child care would seem to be the policy which people of childbearing age most strongly support in order for them to have the number of children they would like and in order to achieve work-life balance.

### 10.3 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies

An examination of group differences shows that married people were the most supportive of universal childcare, followed by cohabiting people. Those with children were also more in favour than those without children (see Table 10.1 below).

**Table 10.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Five Demographic Characteristics on Three Factors Measuring Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies (N=1,404)**

3 FACTORS MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL POLICIES AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status		
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	Single	Married	Cohabit	Without Child	With Child	Skilled/ Un-skilled	Non-manual	Prof./ Manager/ Technical
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)
1. Support for Universal Provision of Childcare	F =0.06		F =0.00		F =6.13**			F =8.23**		F =1.86		
	6.06	6.07	6.08	6.05	5.96	6.17	6.07	5.99	6.14	6.01	6.06	6.13
2. Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working	F =0.76		F =0.01		F =1.49			F =3.05		F =4.42*		
	4.67	4.68	4.66	4.69	4.63	4.76	4.63	4.67	4.68	4.56	4.70	4.77
3. Support for Work-life Policies to Support Co-Parenting	F =5.12*		F =1.09		F =3.18*			F =2.60		F =1.32		
	4.72	4.88	4.84	4.76	4.69	4.90	4.82	4.76	4.84	4.74	4.76	4.91

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

In relation to Factor II, Perceived Consequences of Part-time Working, those in professional, managerial and technical occupations were significantly more likely to perceive negative consequences of part-time working than those in manual occupations. This suggests that it may be harder to encourage work-life balance policies which entail part-time working for people in professional/managerial/technical occupations because there may be greater pressure in these occupations to work full-time in order to get ahead. However, it may be more possible to facilitate work-life balance through part-time working in manual occupations because negative consequences of this are not perceived as acutely.

Support for Work-life Policies to Support Co-Parenting (Factor III) was somewhat more likely to be favoured by women rather than men and more likely to be favoured by married and cohabiting people than single people, however the differences were not great.



## 10.4 Relationships between Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies and Attitudes to Having Children

We examined the relationships between attitudes to the various social policies discussed above and people’s attitudes to having children to see if childbearing intentions were related to people’s attitudes to social policies.

As shown in Table 10.2 there is a very significant correlation between Support for Universal Provision of Childcare and Perceived Economic Constraints to having Children ( $r = .357$ ;  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that those who feel economic constraints to having children are more likely to support a national programme of free childcare facilities for preschool children. They are also more likely to support tax relief for child care expenses. This suggests that if childcare were provided at national level and were universally available many people who are currently feeling economic constraints to having children would be more likely to have them. This is not to suggest that support for universal childcare provision is associated with a wish for big families; on the contrary those who support it are more likely to believe in the value of smaller families ( $r = .202$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

There is also a significant correlation between the perceived consequences of part-time working and perceived economic constraints to having children ( $r = .164$ ;  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that people who think that part-time working and job sharing will lead to negative career outcomes and who feel that they must work long hours to get ahead are also more likely to feel economic constraints to having children. Those who feel economic constraints to having children are also somewhat more likely to support other work-life balance policies to support co-parenting.

**Table 10.2: Correlations between Attitudes to Having Children and Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies (N=1,404)**

Attitudes to Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies	Attitudes to Having Children			
	Factor 1 Belief in necessity of having children for fulfilment	Factor 2 Perceived economic constraints to having children	Factor 3 Belief in value of smaller families	Factor 4 Belief that men want children as much as women do
Factor 1 – Universal Provision of Child Care	.000	.357***	.202***	.227***
Factor 2 – Perceived consequences of part-time working	.079**	.164***	.042	.031

\*  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed). \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (2-tailed)

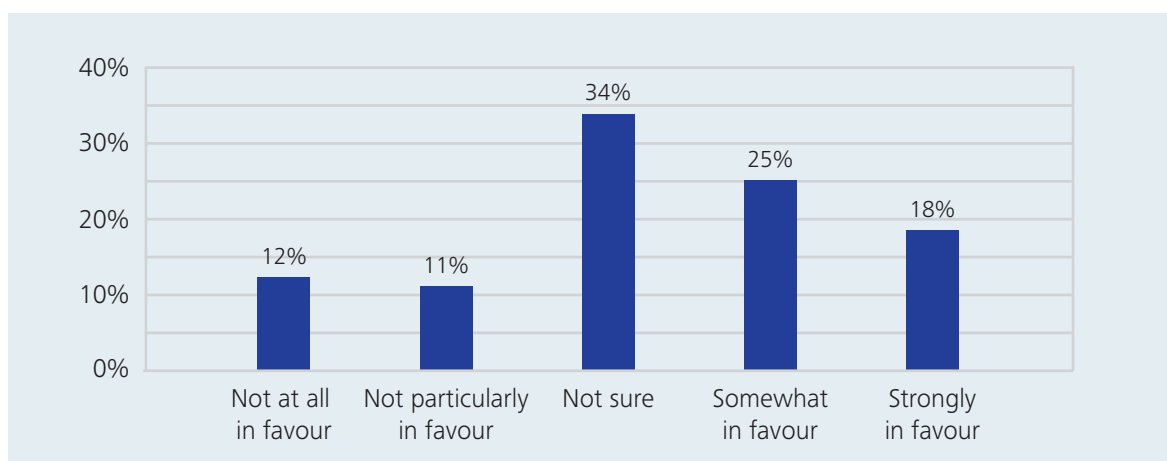
## 10.5 Attitudes to the Civil Partnership Act and related Issues

In this chapter we also examine attitudes to other social policies relevant to family formation. The Civil Partnership Act 2010 recently passed by the Oireachtas provides for civil partnerships for same sex couples and also provides for a redress system for financially dependent cohabiting partners in both same sex and heterosexual relationships who are not married or in a civil partnership. Cohabiting partners are defined in the Act as two same-sex or opposite sex adults who have lived together in an intimate relationship for five years or two years where there is a child or children of the relationship. The Act makes it possible for a partner to claim part of one’s assets unless both opt out of the provisions of the Act.

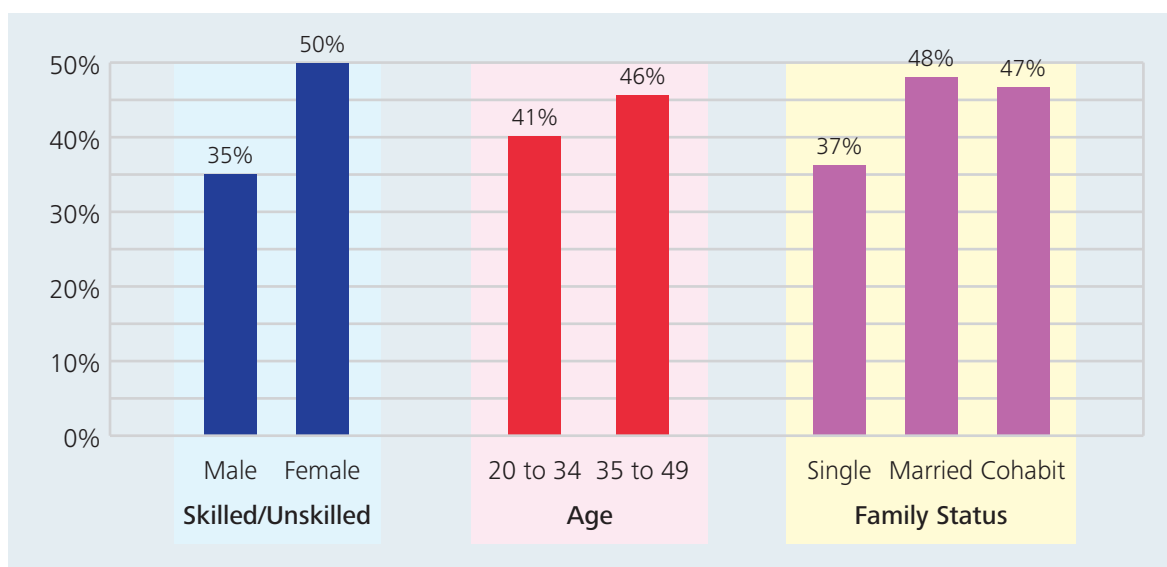
In the context of the present study we ascertained respondents' views of this new legislation. The question was introduced as follows: "The Government has introduced new laws for cohabiting relationships which break down after 5 years (or after 2 years where there is a child of the relationship). Under the new law a financially dependent ex-partner can apply to the court for maintenance, property and pension entitlements. What is your opinion of the new law?"

The results show that people are divided on this legislation: 25% are somewhat in favour and 18% are strongly in favour for an overall total of 43% in favour (see Figure 10.4). Eleven per cent are not particularly in favour and 12% are not at all in favour, for a total of 23% not in favour. Quite a high proportion is not sure how they feel about this legislation (34%). A comparison of different groups shows that women are somewhat more in favour than men, with 50% of women favouring the legislation compared with 43% of men. Older people are also somewhat more in favour than young (46% vs 41%). Married and cohabiting people have similar views on it, with 48% of married people and 47% of cohabiting people in favour. Single people tended to be less supportive, with just 37% in favour (see Figure 10.5). Those with children were more in favour (47%) than those without children (38%). Those in the highest socio-economic group were most in favour (49%) and those in the lowest group least in favour (37%) – see Figure 10.6.

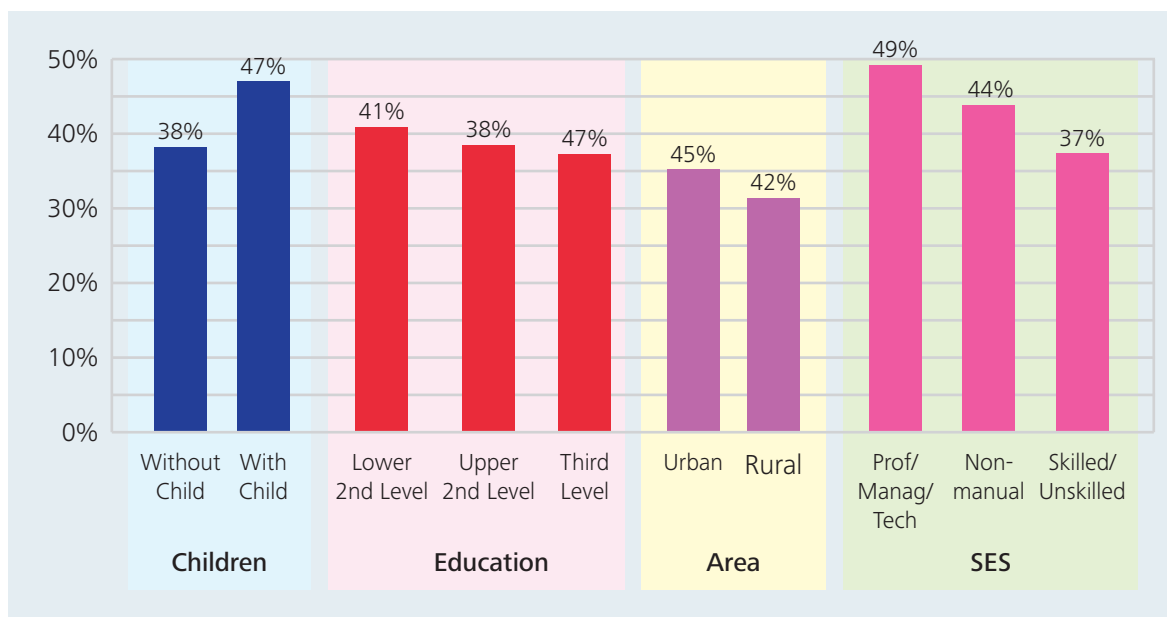
**Figure 10.4: Attitudes to New Law on Cohabiting Relationships (N=1,404)**



**Figure 10.5: Attitudes to New Law on Cohabiting Relationships: Percentage in Favour by Gender, Age and Family Status (N=1,404)**

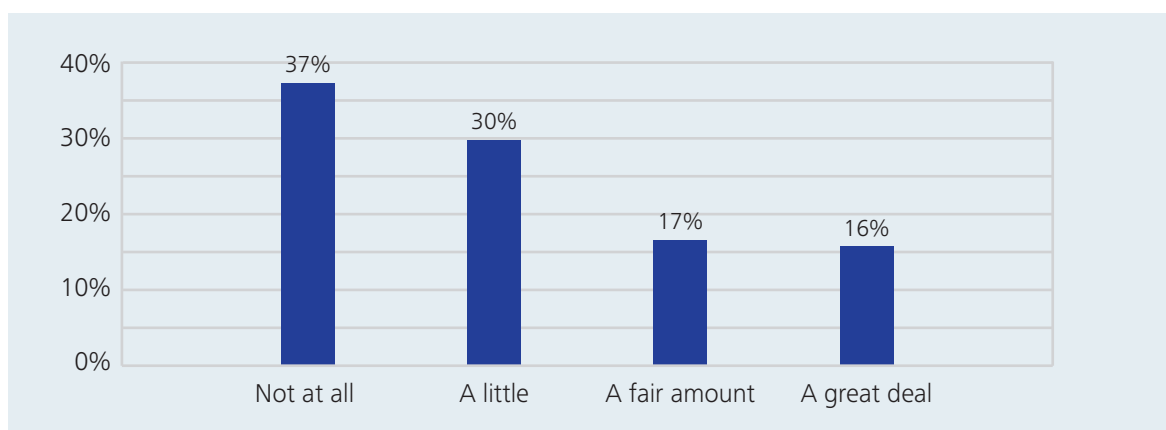


**Figure 10.6: Attitudes to New Law on Cohabiting Relationships: Percentage in Favour by Presence of Children, Education and Socio-Economic Status (N=1,404)**

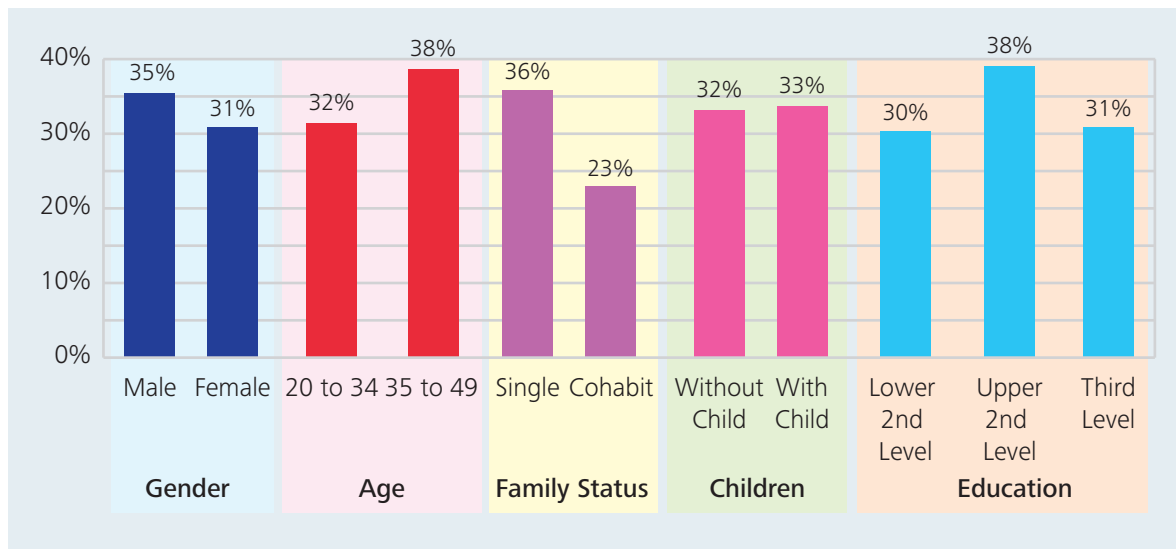


Cohabiting and single people were asked if they would be worried about the possibility of their partner or a future partner gaining legal rights to apply to court for a share of their assets. Overall, 37% of single and cohabiting people said that they would not be worried at all, 30% said they would be worried a little, 17% would be worried a fair amount and 16% would be worried a great deal (Figure 10.7). Men were slightly more worried than women, with 35% saying they would be worried a fair amount or a great deal, compared with 31% of women. Older people were slightly more worried than younger people, with 38% saying they would be worried a fair amount or a great deal, compared with 32% of younger people. Interestingly, cohabiting people were less likely to be worried than single people. Only 23% of cohabiting people said they would be worried a fair amount or a great deal, compared with 36% of single people (see Figure 10.8). This suggests that most cohabiting people are secure in their relationship and do not feel adversarial with their partner. In contrast, given the somewhat greater worry on the part of single people, it is possible that some may be deterred from cohabiting given the new legislation.

**Figure 10.7: Extent of Worry about the Possibility of Your Partner/a Future Partner Gaining Legal Rights to Apply to Court for a Share of Your Assets (N=785)**

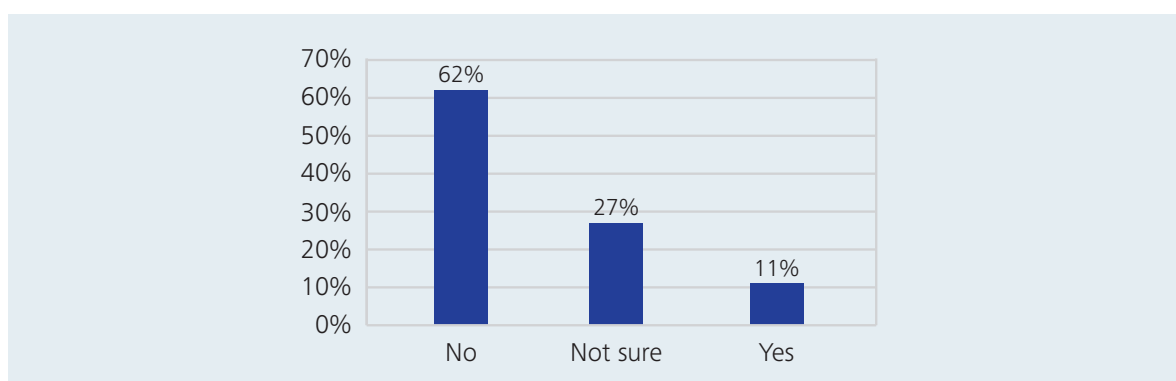


**Figure 10.8: Extent of Worry (A Fair Amount or A Great Deal) about the Possibility of Your Partner/a Future Partner Gaining Legal Rights to Apply to Court for a Share of Your Assets, Cross-tabulated by Gender, Age, Marital Status, Presence of Children and Education (N=785)**

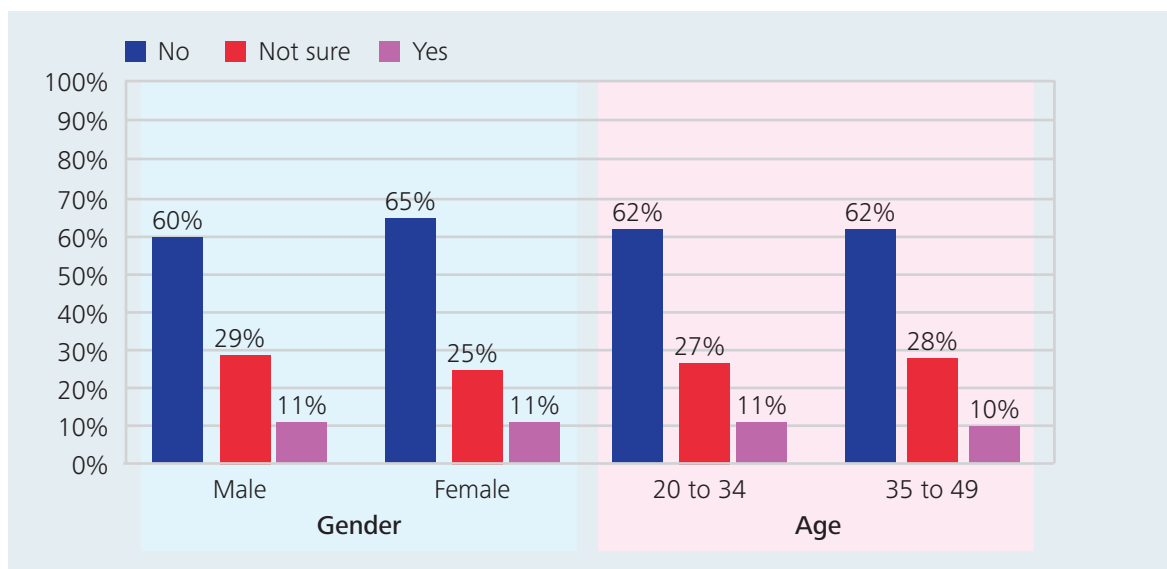


Cohabiting people were asked “If you were living together for less than five years, would this law discourage you from living together for more than five years?” Figure 10.9 presents the responses to this question. Overall, 62% of cohabittees said no, the new law would not discourage them from living together for more than five years, 27% said they were not sure and 11% said it would discourage them. Men were somewhat less likely to say no (60% did so) and more likely to say they were not sure (29%), whereas 65% of women said they would not be discouraged and only 25% were not sure (Figure 10.10). People with children were somewhat more likely to say they were unsure (37%) than people without children (21%). People without children were more likely to say no they would not be discouraged (67%) compared to those with children (55%) – Figure 10.11.

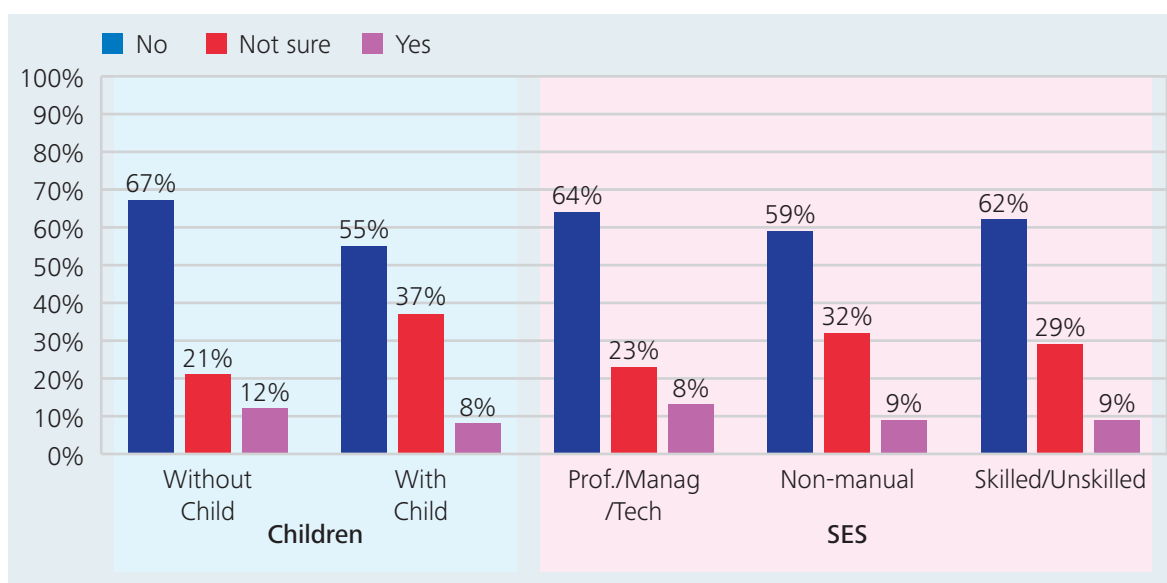
**Figure 10.9: Cohabitees’ View on “If You were Living Together for Less Than Five Years, Would this Law Discourage You from Living Together for More Than Five Years?”**



**Figure 10.10: Cohabitees’ View on “If You were Living Together for Less Than Five Years, Would this Law Discourage You from Living Together for More Than Five Years?” Cross-Tabulated by Gender and Age**



**Figure 10.11: Cohabitees’ View on “If You were Living Together for Less Than Five Years, Would this Law Discourage You from Living Together for More Than Five Years?” Cross-Tabulated by Presence of Children and Socio-Economic Status**

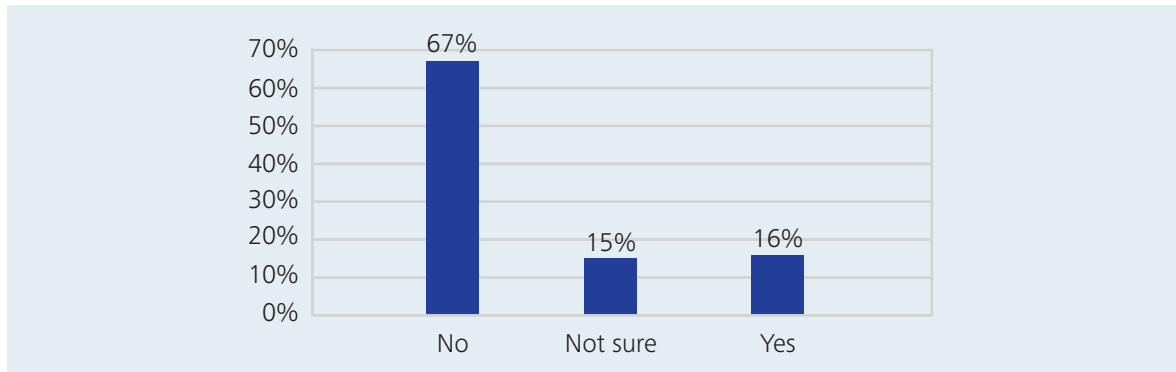


## 10.6 Influence of Social Welfare payments on Cohabitation

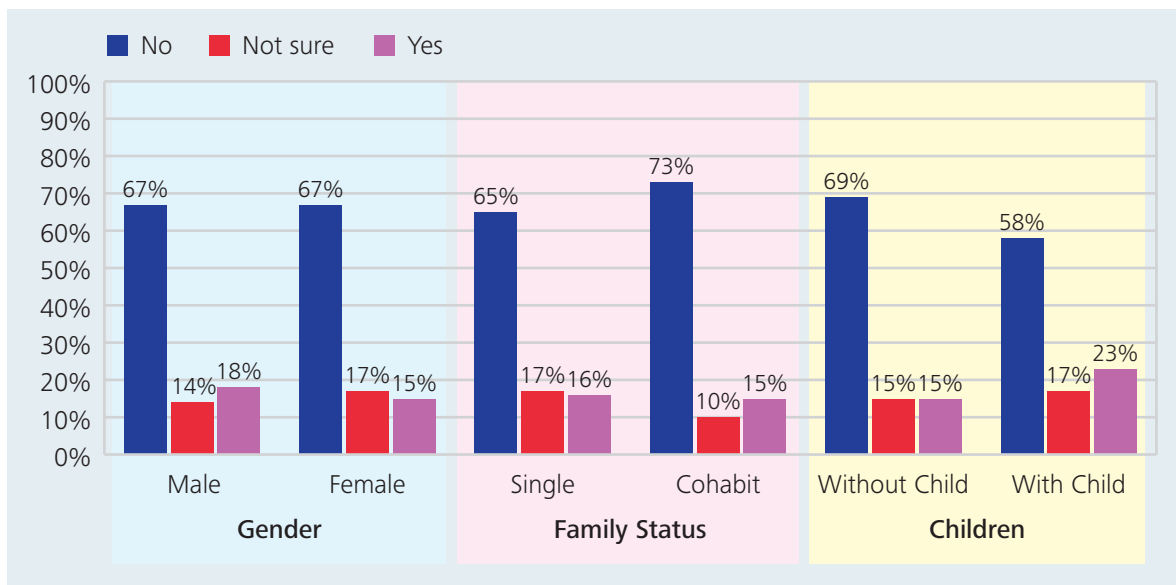
A related question concerned the influence of Social Welfare payments on cohabitation. The question was posed: “Would the possible loss or reduction of Social Welfare payments influence your decision to live with someone?” Overall, 67% said that it would not, 15% were not sure and 16% said yes (see Figure 10.12 below). Those currently cohabiting were more likely to say it would not (73%), compared with just 65% of single people. Single people were more likely to be unsure (17% vs. 10%) – Figure 10.13. This suggests that most cohabiting people, who are in a relationship with a partner, would not contemplate breaking up this relationship as a result of loss or reduction of social

welfare payments. However, those in lower SES occupations were more likely to say yes (22%) than those in the highest (9%) or middle SES group (18%), since they are more likely to be dependent on social welfare payments (see Figure 10.14). Those with children were also more likely to say that a reduction or loss in social welfare payment might influence their decision to live with someone (23% of those with children said yes it would). This compared with just 15% of those without children who said yes (Figure 10.13). Again, some respondents with children may be more dependent on social welfare benefits than those without children, such as single mothers. People living in rural areas were more likely to say that it would influence them (21% rural saying yes, vs 10% of urban).

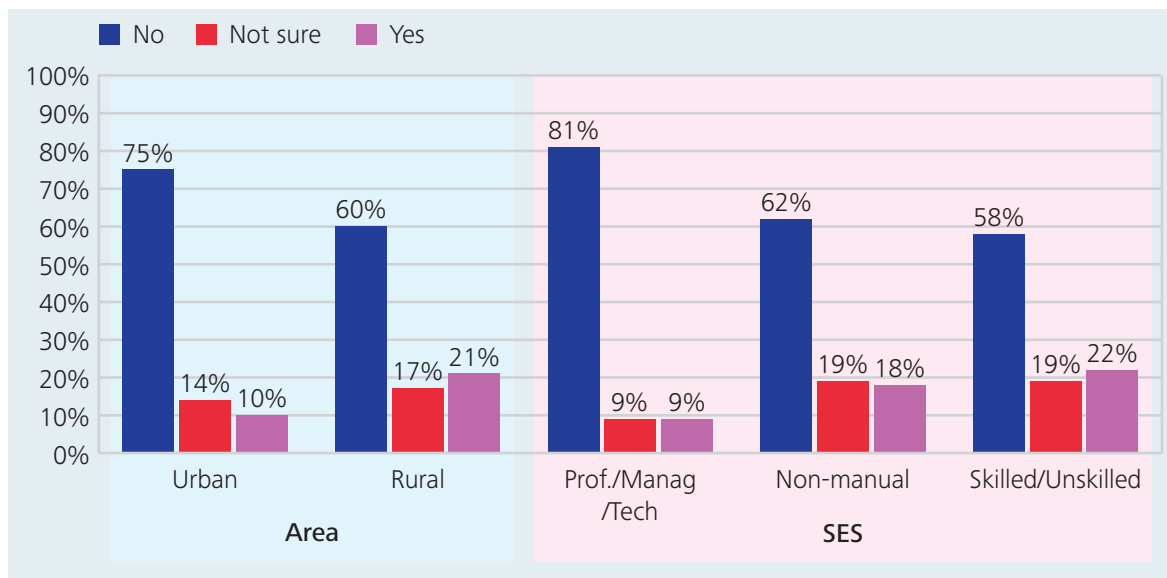
**Figure 10.12: Single and Cohabitees Response to: “Would the Possible Loss or Reduction of Social Welfare Payments Influence Your Decision to Live with Someone?” (N=785)**



**Figure 10.13: Single and Cohabitees Response to: “Would the Possible Loss or Reduction of Social Welfare Payments Influence Your Decision to Live with Someone?”, By Gender, Family Status and Presence of Children (N=785)**



**Figure 10.14: Single and Cohabitees Response to : “Would the Possible Loss or Reduction of Social Welfare Payments Influence Your Decision to Live with Someone?”, By Urban/Rural Location and Socio-Economic Status (N=785)**



## 10.7 Summary of Key Findings

Choices regarding the number of children people will have are being influenced by the high cost of childcare as well as the availability of flexible working policies in the workplace. The study found that people are likely to have fewer children if they have to spend a great deal on childcare. Flexible working policies were also seen as crucial to attaining work-life balance for both men and women and highly relevant to childbearing decisions.

There was virtually unanimous support for the universal provision of childcare, with the majority of the sample endorsing the view that “there should be a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school aged children,” together with the belief that free preschool education should be available to all children in the same way that primary education is. In light of the fact that most parents currently have to pay large sums for child care, there was also strong support for tax concessions for child care costs.

In terms of new social policies, there was strong support (86%) for fathers to have a right to take paid paternity leave on the birth or adoption of a new baby. There was also moderately high support (53%) for maternity leave to be “changed into leave for one or other parent.” The results also showed a surprisingly high support for ‘co-parenting.’ Half of the sample felt that ideally men and women should both work part-time and co-parent. While this was the wish of many, part-time working and job sharing were seen by some as leading to career disadvantages, particularly for men. Nevertheless, these attitudes suggest that changes are underway which signal a readiness for greater sharing of childcare between men and women.

The findings underscore the need for social policy which addresses the dilemmas faced by young people who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development. Provision of necessary social supports such as child care and greater availability of flexible ways of working that are compatible with parenthood are essential if men and women are to

be able to function as workers and parents. Unless society facilitates childrearing by fathers as well as mothers women will continue to face dilemmas which prevent them from forming stable family relationships and having the number of children that they ideally wish to have.

Among the attitudes to social policies examined, the study ascertained attitudes to the Civil Partnership Act 2010. This provides protection for cohabiting relationships which break down after five years or after two years where there is a child of the relationship. Under the new law a financially dependent ex-partner can apply to the court for maintenance, property and pension entitlements. The results show that people are divided on this legislation: 43% are in favour, 23% are not in favour and 34% are unsure. Given that the legislation is intended to provide protection to cohabiting people, the relatively low level of support indicates that some do not see it as providing protection. The high proportion unsure suggests that people do not have enough information about this legislation and one of the policy implications of these findings is that more public awareness is needed.



# Chapter 11

## Well-Being and Social Integration



## Chapter 11 Well-Being and Social Integration

### 11.1 Measures of Well-being and Social Integration

A major focus of the study was the effect of family status, i.e., being single, married or cohabiting, and having children on people's well-being. The study included a wide range of measures of well-being, many from previous research. These include measures of social integration vs. social isolation from the UN Generations and Gender Study, measures of positive life experiences from the Second European Quality of Life Survey (Anderson et al., 2009), and a measure of the extent to which the respondent's life is how they would like it to be (NESC, 2009). The study also included measures of self-assessed physical health and mental health, life satisfaction and perceived standard of living.

Social integration measures the extent to which people feel part of the community and connectedness to other people, whereas social isolation measures loneliness and a lack of connection to people. This measure contains six items, three phrased in a positive direction ("there are plenty of people that I can lean on in case of trouble," "there are many people that I can count on completely," and "there are enough people that I feel close to") and three in a negative direction ("I experience a general sense of emptiness," "often, I feel rejected," and "I have felt lonely"). Respondents were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with each statement slightly, moderately or strongly in relation to how they have felt recently.

In order to have a range of measures of well-being, tapping different components, we also included a set of items which was used in the Second European Quality of Life Survey (Anderson et al., 2009). This includes five statements which are all about positive feelings about life ("I have felt cheerful and good spirits," "I have felt calm and relaxed," "I have felt active and vigorous," "I woke up feeling fresh and rested," and "My daily life has been filled with things that interest me"). People were asked to indicate how they have been feeling over the last two weeks. The possible responses ranged from 1 = at no time to 6 = all of the time.

Physical health is also a key indicator of well-being. We asked respondents to rate their current state of physical health on a six point scale ranging from very poor (1) to excellent (6). A similar measure was also included concerning self-assessed mental health.

Life satisfaction is perhaps the most widely used measure of psychological well-being. The question asked was "taking all things together, how satisfied are you with your life these days?" This was rated on a six point scale ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 6 = very satisfied.

The NESC (2009) in its study of well-being in Ireland found that one of the best indicators was the measure "On the whole, my life is close to how I would like to be." Respondents in our study were asked to agree or disagree with this statement on a seven point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

The final measure of well-being concerned perceived standard of living. In the current economic climate, when many are suffering economic hardship, this is a key measure of well-being. The question posed was: "Is your household income sufficient for you to afford a satisfactory standard of living?" The response continuum ranged from 1 = "it is impossible to manage" to 5 = "I/we can very easily manage".

## 11.2 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Well-being and Social Integration

An analysis was carried out to see if people with different characteristics had different levels of well-being. We were primarily interested in family status (single, married and cohabiting) as well as in the effect of having a child on well-being. In addition we were interested in the effects of gender, age, socio-economic status, education and living in an urban or a rural area. The same technique used previously (analysis of variance) was used which analysed the simultaneous effects of six demographic characteristics on each of the eight measures of well-being. The means for the main effects with their significance are presented in Table 11.1.

**Table 11.1: Analysis of Variance: Effects of Six Demographic Characteristics on Eight Measures of Well-Being (N=1,404)**

MEASURES OF WELL-BEING	Sex		Age (Years)		Family Status			Child Status		Socio-economic Status			Location	
	Male	Female	20-34	35-49	Single	Married	Cohabit	Without Child	With Child	Skilled /Un-skilled	Non-manual	Prof./ Manager/ Technical	Urban	Rural
	(n=706)	(n=698)	(n=759)	(n=645)	(n=625)	(n=619)	(n=160)	(n=753)	(n=651)	(n=578)	(n=303)	(n=523)	(n=556)	(n=848)
1. Social Integration vs Social Isolation	F=0.67		F=12.44***		F=21.48***			F=2.90		F=3.24*			F=11.00***	
	5.47	5.47	5.57	5.38	5.22	5.71	5.49	5.51	5.43	5.42	5.42	5.57	5.33	5.60
2. "I have felt lonely."	F=14.04***		F=11.60***		F=30.13***			F=0.03		F=0.22			F=21.54***	
	3.31	3.76	3.38	3.70	4.07	3.09	3.44	3.57	3.51	3.49	3.66	3.47	3.80	3.29
3. Positive Life Experiences	F=0.87		F=3.63		F=3.48*			F=6.48*		F=1.59			F=17.78***	
	4.28	4.14	4.26	4.16	4.14	4.31	4.18	4.29	4.13	4.19	4.17	4.27	4.10	4.33
4. Self-Assessed Physical Health	F=5.26*		F=23.28***		F=2.87			F=4.37*		F=3.80*			F=5.36*	
	4.61	4.53	4.72	4.42	4.55	4.65	4.50	4.65	4.48	4.52	4.54	4.64	4.51	4.62
5. Self-Assessed Mental Health	F=0.00		F=8.20**		F=1.82			F=0.66		F=5.69**			F=2.78	
	4.73	4.78	4.85	4.66	4.70	4.84	4.73	4.80	4.71	4.68	4.71	4.88	4.70	4.81
6. Life Satisfaction	F=2.48		F=3.40		F=24.89***			F=2.58		F=10.48***			F=3.01	
	4.84	4.87	4.88	4.83	4.61	5.11	4.86	4.93	4.78	4.73	4.85	5.00	4.81	4.91
7. "On the whole, my life is close to how I would like it to be."	F=8.25**		F=0.34		F=32.82***			F=1.06		F=8.38***			F=2.01	
	5.20	5.36	5.31	5.25	4.85	5.64	5.36	5.33	5.23	5.15	5.18	5.51	5.23	5.33
8. Perceived Standard of Living	F=0.38		F=0.09		F=8.78***			F=65.10***		F=24.14***			F=0.15	
	3.25	3.13	3.21	3.17	3.09	3.33	3.16	3.41	2.97	2.99	3.14	3.44	3.18	3.20

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

### 11.2.1 Social Integration vs. Social Isolation

The six items measuring Social Integration vs Social Isolation were averaged for each respondent and a composite score computed. A higher score indicates greater social integration and a lower score

greater social isolation. The analysis showed that while there were no differences based on gender or presence of children, there were highly significant differences for family status, age and rural/urban location as well as a moderately significant effect for socio-economic status. The strongest effect was for family status which showed that married people had the highest level of social integration, single people the lowest and cohabiting people in between ( $F=21.48$ ;  $p<.001$ ). The next strongest effect was for age, with younger people being more likely to feel socially integrated and older people being more to feel socially isolated ( $F=12.44$ ;  $p<.001$ ). A significant effect for rural/urban location showed that rural dwellers were also more likely to feel socially integrated, whereas urbans were more likely to feel socially isolated ( $F=11.00$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Finally, an effect for socio-economic status indicated that those in the highest socio-economic group felt more socially integrated and less isolated than those in the lower and middle groups ( $F=3.24$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

Of all of the six items, loneliness differentiated most strongly among the groups. A separate analysis carried out just on this item corroborated the overall findings for Social Integration to the effect that married people were least likely to feel lonely, followed by cohabiting people, whilst single people experienced a much higher degree of loneliness ( $F=30.13$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Rural people were also less likely to report feeling lonely and urban dwellers more so. Given that those in rural areas live with more space between them and urban dwellers live more closely together, this is an interesting finding. It suggests that there may be more interaction, support and feeling of belonging in rural areas, even though people may live more geographically isolated from one another, whereas in urban areas there may actually be more isolation. There was also an effect for gender, which did not manifest itself in the global score of Social Integration, showing that females are significantly lonelier than males ( $F=14.04$ ;  $p<.001$ ). This was illustrated by the following quote from the qualitative study:

*I suppose there is a certain amount of – there are moments of loneliness, there’s no doubt about that. I’m in my apartment and I want to share a bottle of wine or I want to watch a movie or I want to watch a TV programme and there’s nobody there . . .*

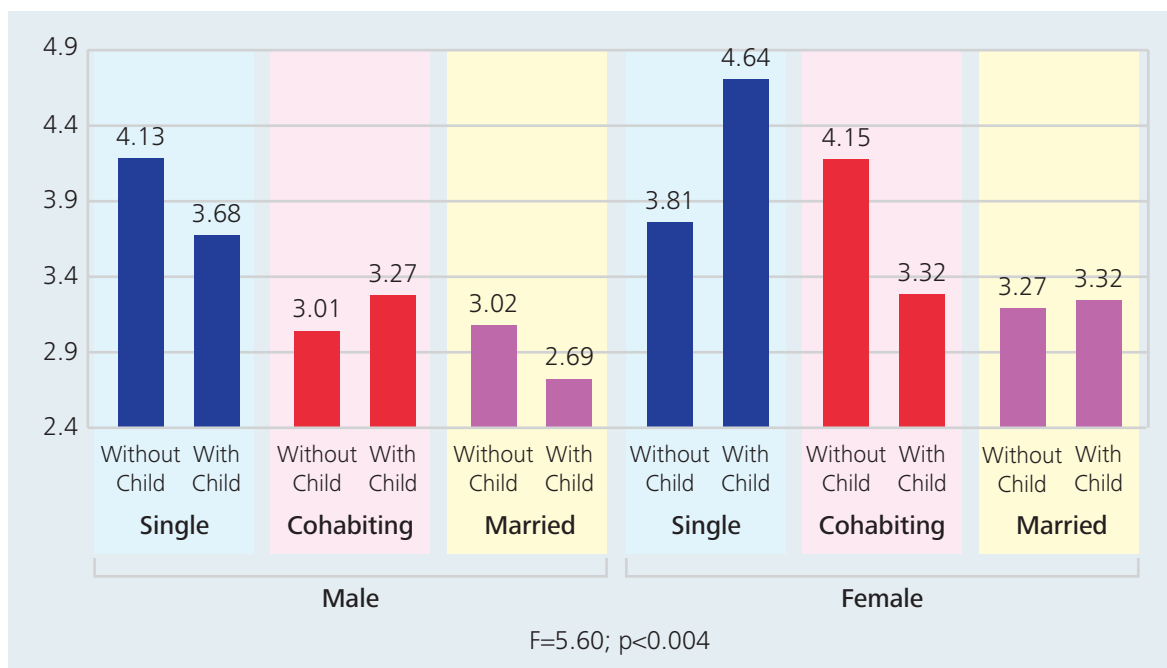
*(Female, 33, single, mortgage broker/administration, Dublin)*

A significant interaction effect between gender, family status and presence of children, illustrated in Figure 11.1, reveals that single mothers are the loneliest of all groups in the study. They are lonelier than single women without children and lonelier than single fathers. This may mean that the single fathers are more likely to have other social contacts than single mothers. It is surprising that single fathers – most of whom do not live with their children - are also less lonely than single men without children. This suggests that their relationships with their children may contribute to their well-being. Single mothers, on the other hand, are a socially isolated group, even though they live with their children. Their loneliness would appear to stem from a lack of contact with other adults.

### **11.2.2 Positive Life Experiences**

Rural/urban location showed a very strong effect on the summated measure, “Positive Life Experiences,” which included such items as “I have felt cheerful and in good spirits,” “I have felt calm and relaxed,” “I have felt active and vigorous,” “I woke up feeling fresh and rested,” and “My daily life has been filled with things that interest me” ( $F=17.78$ ;  $p<.001$ ). This suggests that the rural environment, with fresh air and living close to nature, apparently has many health effects, which seem to be both physical and mental. Other demographic variables did not have such a strong effect as rural/urban location. However, in line with other results, married people had somewhat more positive life experiences than cohabiting or single people. Again singles were the least well off in this regard. This measure also showed that those with children were less likely to report the various positive life experiences and those without children were more likely to.

**Figure 11.1: Loneliness: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender, Family Status and Presence of Children (N=1,404)**



### 11.2.3 Physical Health

Older people (aged 35-49) reported significantly poorer health and younger people (aged 20-34) better health ( $F=23.28$ ;  $p<.001$ ). While it is well known that older people have poorer health, the fact that this difference manifests itself in this relatively young group of people of childbearing age is somewhat surprising. There were also effects for gender, presence of children, rural/urban location and socio-economic status, though these were much less strong. Men reported better physical health than women. People with children reported worse physical health than those with no children. Those living in rural areas reported better health than those living in urban areas. Finally those in the highest socio-economic group reported better health than those in the lower two groups.

### 11.2.4 Mental Health

Younger people not only reported better physical health, they also reported better mental health ( $F=8.20$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Socio-economic status was also significant for mental health as it was for physical health, with the highest group showing the best mental health and the lowest group the worst ( $F=5.69$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

### 11.2.5 Life Satisfaction

Life Satisfaction is a widely used global measure of well-being. Family status had a strong effect on Life Satisfaction, with married people having the highest life satisfaction, followed by cohabiting people ( $F=24.89$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Single people had the lowest level of life satisfaction. Confirming other related results, socio-economic status was also significantly related to life satisfaction ( $F=10.48$ ;  $p<.001$ ). It was a linear relationship in which those in the lowest SES group manifested the lowest life satisfaction, followed by those in the middle SES group, while those in the highest SES group had the greatest life satisfaction.

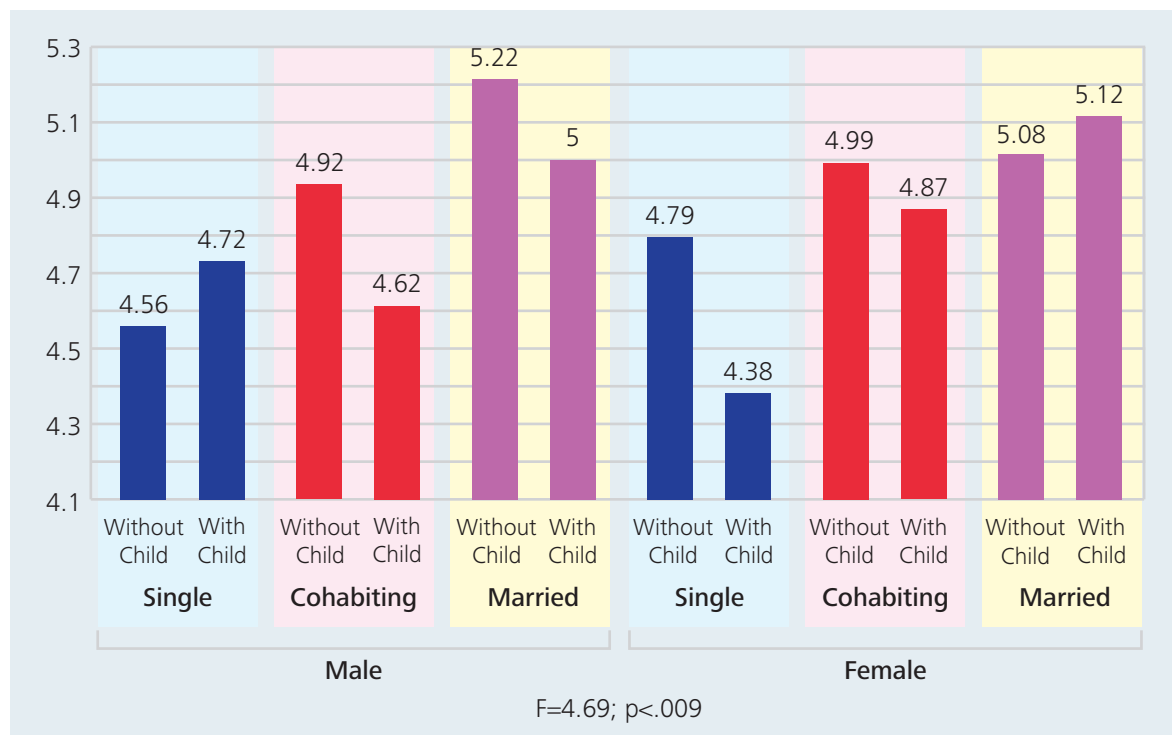
A significant interaction effect between gender, family status and children indicates that single fathers have higher life satisfaction than single men without children. This contrasts with the life satisfaction of cohabiting men; in this case those without children have higher life satisfaction. Among married

men those without children also have somewhat higher life satisfaction. Among married women, those with children have very slightly higher life satisfaction, but the difference between them and married women without children is almost negligible. Among cohabiting women those without children have somewhat higher life satisfaction. Among single women, those with children have lower life satisfaction than those without children by quite a margin and indeed the single mothers have the lowest life satisfaction of all groups (see Figure 11.2). The fact that single fathers have higher life satisfaction relative to single men without children whereas single mothers have lower life satisfaction than single women without children may have to do with the fact that single fathers generally do not have to care for their children the way that single mothers do, so they can benefit from having children without the burdens of care. Of the 73 single fathers interviewed in the study, 12 had a child living with them. This constituted 16% of all single fathers. This compares with 97% of single mothers who had a child living with them. These findings also suggest that having a child, even if the child does not live with one, contributes to single fathers' well-being.

### 11.2.6 Extent to Which Respondent's Life is Close to How They Would Like it to Be.

The global item, "My life is close to how I would like it to be," manifested several significant effects. Family status was the strongest, with married people significantly more likely than others to say this was true ( $F=32.82$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Cohabiting people were next most likely and single people were the least likely to say it. The gap between married and single people was particularly great (4.85 for singles vs. 5.64 for married people out of a maximum of 7). There was also an effect for socio-economic status showing that those in the highest SES group were more likely to agree with this statement, whereas those in the lower two groups were significantly less likely to do so ( $F=8.38$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Finally, there was an effect for gender in the direction of women being somewhat more likely than men to say that their lives were close to how they would like them to be ( $F=8.25$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

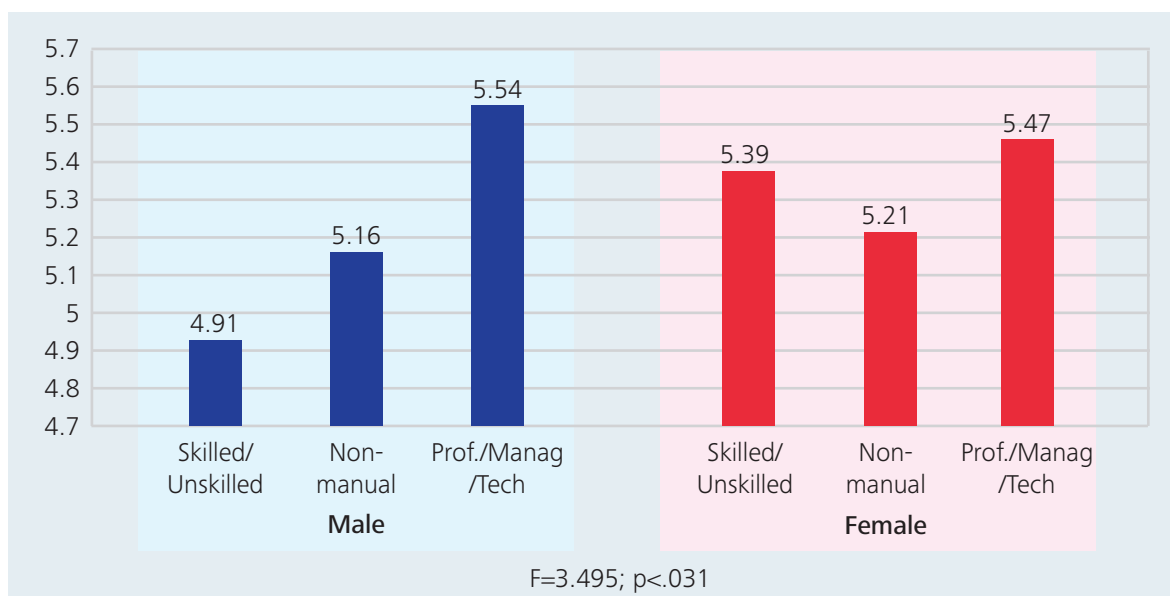
**Figure 11.2: Life Satisfaction: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender, Family Status and Presence of Children**



A significant interaction effect illustrated in Figure 11.3 shows that there is a linear effect of socio-economic status for men, such that those in the lowest group are least likely to say that their life is close to how they would like it to be. Those in the middle group are more likely to say so and those in the highest group are most likely to say so. However, for women socio-economic status is not such a clear determinant of happiness with one's life. While the highest SES group of women have the highest score, it is not that different from that of low SES women (5.47 vs. 5.39).

In fact it is women in the middle group (non-manual) who have the lowest score of all of the women (5.21). The overall means show that high SES men are most likely to say that their life is close to how they would like it to be (5.54), followed by high SES women (5.47). The group who is most disenchanted with their lives are low SES males. There is quite a discrepancy between low SES men and women (4.91 for men and 5.39 for women), indicating that low SES men are more dissatisfied with their lives than are low SES women.

**Figure 11.3: “My Life is How I Would Like it to Be”: Means for Significant Interaction Effect between Gender and Socio-Economic Status**



This is undoubtedly related to the fact that lower SES men are more likely to be unemployed. Of those not employed in the sample, 59% of men were unemployed compared to 18% of women. Skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers were the most likely to be unemployed (48% of those not employed, compared with 21.5% of those in the higher SES groups).

### 11.2.7 Perceived Standard of Living

The final measure of well-being was Perceived Standard of Living. The strongest difference on this measure was between those with and without children. Those with children had a significantly lower perceived standard of living than those without children (F=65.10; p<.001). Not surprisingly, socio-economic status was also a strong predictor of standard of living in a linear direction (F=24.14; p<.001), however this effect was not as strong as the independent effect for having children. Family status was also associated with perceived standard of living; married people had a higher standard of living than cohabiting people and single people had a slightly lower standard than cohabiting people (F=8.28; p<.001).



### 11.3 Summary of Key Findings

While much research has documented the major demographic changes which have been taking place in our society and in societies around us, little research has examined the effects of these changes on people's well-being. The present study compared single, cohabiting and married people on a range of measures of well-being. Married people were found to have the greatest well-being on most measures, including social integration, life satisfaction, positive life experiences, etc. They were followed by cohabiting people. Single people had the lowest level of well-being and were found to be more socially isolated. Single mothers had the lowest life satisfaction and were the loneliest of all groups. They had lower life satisfaction than single women without children and lower life satisfaction than single fathers. These findings underpin the value of relationships to well-being and in particular the value of marriage to people's well-being.

Married people were most likely to say "My life is close to how I would like it to be." Cohabiting people were next most likely and single people were the least likely to say so. The gap between married and single people was particularly great. Socio-economic status (SES) was also a significant predictor. High SES men were most likely to say that their life was close to how they would like it to be, followed by high SES women. The group most disenchanted with their lives on this dimension was low SES men. There was a significant discrepancy between low SES men and women indicating that low SES men were much more dissatisfied with their lives than were low SES women. The higher unemployment rate of lower SES men is undoubtedly a significant contributor to this finding. The differing psychological well-being of the various groups in society, as reflected in these findings, is clearly an important area to be addressed by social policy.

Given that we are witnessing an increase in the proportion of single people in the population, including an increase in single mothers, and an increase in divorced and separated people, it is likely that a greater proportion of our society will become vulnerable to poorer psychological well-being. Our society is changing from one which was previously richer in social networks and is now characterised by greater social isolation particularly in urban areas. Relative psychological well-being is a key issue that should be of increasing concern to social policy makers in the coming years.



# Chapter 12

## Discussion and Conclusions



## CHAPTER 12 Discussion and Conclusions

### 12.1 Background and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine people's attitudes to family formation in the context of changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour and the profound demographic changes taking place in Ireland. In addition the study sought to explore the effects of family status on well-being.

Recent demographic changes have included a dramatic increase in cohabitation, a later age at marriage and at the birth of the first child. They have also included a 50% drop in the birth rate over the last 30 years and a consequently smaller family size. In addition the proportion of single people in the population has been increasing and there has been an increase in childlessness. While we know these things from analyses of Census data (Punch, 2007; Lunn et al., 2010), little or no research has examined the social psychological factors which have contributed to these major demographic changes. Such social psychological factors constitute an important set of potential predictors which have not been adequately examined in the literature to date, particularly in Ireland. The present study was designed to explore people's attitudes towards these issues to understand the reasons behind these social and demographic changes, i.e. why are people making the decisions which are leading to these changes and are these changes leading to greater well-being?

The present report contains the results of the nationwide quantitative study carried out in 2010 on a sample of 1,404 people in the childbearing age group (aged 20-49). The study examined attitudes and behaviour concerning relationship and family formation in the context of changing gender role attitudes and behaviour. It also examined attitudes to having children and attitudes to social policies related to families and work-life balance. Finally the study examined the comparative well-being of people in different family statuses (single, married, cohabiting), both with and without children.

### 12.2 Attitudes to Gender Roles

The changing role of women has meant that women are more highly educated and are playing an increasingly active part in the labour market. Gender role attitudes and behaviour in Ireland have been changing significantly over the last 35 years (Fine-Davis, 1988a; 2011; Whelan and Fahey, 1994; Fahey et al., 2005) and it would not be surprising if these changes were playing a role in the changing demographic patterns in family formation.

One of the main attitudinal factors which emerged concerned the response to women's career advancement. Many people feel that men are not entirely comfortable with women's progress in the workplace and for some it poses a distinct threat. Women's success in the workplace may also come with a personal price and the findings suggested that women fear there will be a personal backlash to their success. However, this was mitigated by other findings suggesting that this fear may be not entirely justified and women may be overestimating the extent to which men are actually threatened. While working class men were more likely to perceive a threat of women's career advancement, men in the middle and higher socio-economic groups were much less likely to do so. The results also showed that women in the higher socio-economic groups had more anxiety about the perceived threat of their career advancement and less reason to do so.

There was also evidence of male role ambiguity as a result of changing gender role attitudes and behaviour. Forty-two per cent of the sample agreed that “with all the changes in gender roles, it’s hard to know who’s supposed to do what.” A similar proportion agreed that “a lot of men are confused about their roles because they are less defined than they used to be.” The results also identified a feeling of “redundancy” on the part of men, i.e., that changes in the workplace have left men feeling “a little redundant because there is so much competition from women”, and the feeling that “women can be so independent sometimes that it makes men feel like they’re not needed anymore.” This would seem to be an important psychological dynamic in male role ambiguity.

In spite of these attitudes, there was strong support among men and women for women’s financial independence. The overwhelming majority of the sample endorsed the view that it was good for a woman to be financially independent in a relationship, and believed that men and women should both contribute to the household income. Yet, there was also recognition that female economic independence is having an effect on some men’s sense of security in the workplace and may be generating a degree of male role ambiguity.

A majority endorsed the view that “a woman who has a job she enjoys is likely to be a better wife and mother because she has an interest and some fulfilment outside the home.” This finding indicates for the first time the emergence of more integrated thinking about maternal employment which is now seen to include women’s own fulfilment and the economic well-being of the family as well and not just in terms of its effect on children.

Men’s participation in the domestic sphere was also a key component of current attitudes to gender roles. The majority of the sample felt that “men recognise that women have to spend less time on housework” yet, “they don’t recognise that they have to contribute more than they used to.” Not surprisingly, women were more likely than men to perceive a male reluctance to share housework and women with children were most likely to feel this way. Research on time use in Ireland has found that women, and particularly those with children, spend significantly more time on housework and childcare than men do and in fact Irish men carry out less of this work than their European counterparts (McGinnity and Russell, 2007). These authors suggest that this indicates a “traditional gender division of labour in Ireland relative to other countries” (*Ibid.*, p. 337). This is in spite of the fact that 56% of women are in the labour force and that dual earner couples are increasingly the norm. The results show that men are only reluctantly beginning to share this burden and it is clear that conflicts in relationships often revolve around this issue. The issue of housework was found to be linked with perceptions concerning men’s respect for women, suggesting that lack of helping in the home may be related to a lack of respect. While most people disagreed, a third of the sample expressed the view that men respect women more at work than at home.

Changing attitudes towards male nurturing were evident from the strong support for the view that fathers can be as nurturing to children as mothers can. In spite of this, approximately half of the sample still thinks that caring for children is best done by mothers. While the results reveal increased support for male caring, they also reflect an underlying ambivalence and vestiges of traditional views of caring. Thus, while women may be overestimating men’s negative reaction to their increasing success in the labour market, there is nevertheless some feeling of threat about women’s increasing power in the world of work, as well as a sense of ambiguity about men’s roles. These factors may be playing a role in the development of male and female relationships in the personal sphere. Nevertheless there are positive signs in the sphere of gender relations evident in the widespread acceptance of

women's economic independence, a belief that both men and women should contribute financially to the household income and also an increasing acknowledgement of the value of male nurturance of children.

### **12.3 Attitudes to Marriage and Cohabitation**

In spite of the increase in cohabitation, there is still strong support for marriage as an institution and it is a state that most people aspire to. While people see marriage as involving more commitment, cohabitation is widely accepted and seen as a step in a progression towards marriage. There is general consensus that marriage provides security and stability for children, however only 47% agree that people who want to have children ought to get married. This reflects the growing acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative household arrangement, even where there are children. The fact that a very large majority (85%) felt that "The religious reasons for marriage have become less important" helps to explain why cohabitation has become more acceptable. The complexity of people's attitudes to marriage and children is revealed by their general belief that deciding to have a child together would be a far greater commitment than getting married.

Those with a strong belief in marriage were significantly more likely to believe in the fundamental value of having children for fulfilment. In contrast, those who were supportive of cohabitation were less likely to think that having children was fundamental to fulfilment. A strong belief in marriage was also strongly correlated with a belief in traditional male support and protection and a belief that mothers are the best nurturers of children. The data on church attendance bolstered these findings, showing that married people were more likely to attend religious services more often than single or cohabiting people. These findings support those found in the U.S. to the effect that less traditional attitudes are associated with a greater likelihood to cohabit rather than marry (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg and Waite, 1995; Kaufman, 2000).

### **12.4 Reasons for Cohabiting and Cohabiting Behaviour**

As noted above one of the reasons for cohabiting was the belief that it was better to live together before marrying. This, together with the weakening influence of religion, has meant that it is now more socially acceptable to live with one's partner without marriage. The study also explored other drivers of cohabitation. It was found that the strongest reasons for deciding to cohabit were "loving one's partner and wanting to live with them" as well as wanting to "spend more time with them." These were followed by "being ready to buy or rent a house or an apartment together." A wish for greater commitment was also evident. These findings corroborate those of Rhoades et al. (2009) in the U.S. to the effect that loving one's partner and related psychological reasons were the strongest motivations for cohabiting.

Almost half (49%) of the total sample had cohabited at some point in time. Most people (79%) who had cohabited had done so only once. Sixteen per cent (16%) of women and 17% of men who had cohabited had done so twice. The average length of all cohabitations was just under four years and the length of cohabitation varied considerably. More recent cohabitations were likely to have lasted longer than previous cohabitations, indicating that the more experience people have cohabiting the more likely they are to form longer lasting relationships. This was corroborated by the fact that people had a higher degree of certainty that their current cohabiting relationship would lead to marriage than they did in relation to previous cohabitations.

## 12.5 Facilitators and Constraints to Marriage

The major reasons why cohabiting people are not getting married for the moment are largely economic. These include the high cost of weddings, wanting to have a secure income first, and the high cost of housing. The study found that there are many commonalities in the drivers for cohabitation and marriage, the primary of which are psychological factors, i.e., loving one's partner and wishing to live with them. The main barriers to marriage perceived by cohabiting people were financial, including the high cost of housing, high cost of weddings and the wish to have a secure job/income first. The results showed that some of these issues were overcome for the married people. A fair proportion of them could afford the wedding and the housing and one or both had a secure job/income. Yet the strongest reasons given for marrying were emotional, i.e. loving one's partner and wanting to live with them and wanting to have children.

## 12.6 Attitudes to Being Single

A large majority believe that it is more acceptable to be single and on your own now than it used to be. They feel that people are staying single longer because they are 'more choosy' about relationships. This finding supports a widespread view expressed in the qualitative study and may help to explain the later age at marriage evident in the latest Census results. This greater selectivity in partner choice may relate to greater freedoms and options that people have nowadays, including greater educational opportunities, greater sexual freedom, weakened religious proscriptions, and also the acceptability of cohabitation.

While there is widespread acceptance of being single there is also some ambivalence about it. Imbedded in these attitudes is the notion that others do not accept singleness, at least not indefinitely, indicating that there is still strong social pressure towards being in couples. This pressure impinges particularly on women, especially those in their late 30s in a way that is different for them than it is for men in the same age group. The majority feel that there is more pressure on women to marry and hence there is a widespread view that women worry more than men about finding someone to marry. In spite of the pressure on women to get married, they do not have equal access to one of the main routes to meeting people. The perception that a man can go into a pub on his own and be comfortable, whereas a woman cannot do the same is a perception that co-exists with women's equality in the labour market. Clearly this constraint in itself must contribute to social isolation and to the difficulty of single people – especially those in the older age groups – to find partners. It would appear from these views that in spite of women's role in the labour force and their increased economic independence, they do not feel ready and able to challenge one of the last barriers to their equality.

In light of women's greater educational attainment, particularly their greater likelihood of completing third level education, they were more likely than men to be in professional, managerial and technical occupations. Given these disparities, it is perhaps not surprising that women were likely to fear that men were threatened by their career advancement. However, while a certain proportion of men did feel threatened by women's progress in the labour market – particularly men of lower socio-economic status – in general men did not feel nearly as threatened as women thought they were. Nevertheless, the results clearly showed that better educated women, particularly those over 35, are finding it more difficult to find a partner. This fact is undoubtedly one of the contributors to the later age at marriage, later age of the first child and the increasing proportion of single people in the population, as well as the decreasing number of children per family and decreasing birth rate overall.

## 12.7 Attitudes to Having Children

Changes in norms about gender roles are evident in people's attitudes to having children. Most people do not think that it is necessary to have a child in order to be fulfilled. Attitudes to childlessness are also quite accepting. This contrasts with findings of earlier research which found much stronger social pressure to have a child (Fine-Davis, 1988a).

The study revealed discrepancies between people's ideal, expected and actual number of children. The ideal number of children is 2.73, while the number people expect to have is 2.41 and the actual number people have is more like two. A widening gap between desired and observed fertility is a phenomenon that has been observed cross-culturally in the World Values Survey. D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2000) conclude that this discrepancy reflects the existence of constraints which prevent women from achieving their preferred family size. These constraints were found in the present study to include a lack of affordable childcare and flexible working, as well as economic constraints and a fear that men would not be likely to share childrearing and housework with them and that they would have to choose between their career and being a mother.

The fact that attitudes to having children have changed is evident from a comparison of the data from the present study with that from a study carried out in 1975. The earlier study found that the modal response concerning ideal number of children was four. The expected family size of employed married women was 3.2, whereas the expected family size of non-employed married women was 3.8 (Fine-Davis, 1976, 1979). Thus, a lower expected vs. ideal family size is a trend which has persisted. However, the decrease in ideal family size from four to two is noteworthy and corresponds to the decrease in fertility which we have seen over the last 40 years. While the sample for the earlier study is not directly comparable, the comparison of the results of the two studies is indicative of the major attitudinal and related behavioural changes which have taken place in this sphere over the last 35 years.

The present study revealed a strong feeling that economic factors are having a major influence on people's attitudes to having children and their intentions in this regard. More than three quarters of the sample felt that "these days most couples simply cannot afford to have more than two children." More than two-thirds said that the cost of living was restricting the number of children they would have. Given the economic constraints which people feel, it is not surprising that their attitudes concerning smaller families are reflecting this reality. Other attitudes to family size reflect newer values or perhaps an accommodation to economic exigencies, since people actually would like to have more children than they are having. These newer attitudes include the belief that having fewer children is better since they are being had by choice and that one can give more to each child when there are fewer children in a family. These newer attitudes to family size undoubtedly reflect a combination of factors, including economic pressures, increased labour force participation of women and the availability of contraception, together with more basic changes in attitudes and values.

There was general consensus that men don't feel as much pressure to have a child because there is no biological clock ticking. This undoubtedly influences the timing of men's intentions concerning having children and helps to explain male and female differences in this area. This reality was underscored in the qualitative study and it is clear that differences in men and women's biological clocks, coupled with other factors, are a key contributor to the delay in coupling and the decreased birth rate. The increased prevalence of cohabitation means that people are taking more time to try out relationships and hence they are older when they finally choose a marriage partner. This delay has



little effect on men, but disproportionately affects women and may help to explain their greater anxiety to find a partner when they are in their mid thirties or older.

One of the stark findings concerning childbearing was the fact that those of lower socio-economic status, who reported the greatest difficulty in making ends meet and the lowest perceived standard of living, had significantly more children than those of higher socio-economic status, while not having a larger ideal family size. These findings underscore the need for continued family planning efforts to be directed to this group, such as those which have been carried out by the HSE's Crisis Pregnancy Programme, i.e., their Positive Options programme. On the other hand, those in the higher socio-economic groups are having fewer children than they would ideally like. This is related to the delay in partnership formation, discussed below.

## **12.8 Partnership Formation and Impacts on Fertility**

It is apparent that relationship formation is being hindered for various reasons, including people's increasing tendency to postpone coupling in order to find an ideal mate and to some extent a desire for freedom, independence and autonomy. This pattern is reinforced by women's increasing education, participation in the labour force and economic independence. Their labour force participation also makes it more difficult to have children, with the lack of public childcare and the high cost of private sector childcare. Women are thus postponing childbearing and reducing the number of children they have. The differences in men and women's biological clocks means that women have a smaller window of opportunity to have a child, given that they are postponing childbearing. The relaxation of sexual mores and the increasing pattern of sexual behaviour outside of marriage, as well as the increasing prevalence of cohabitation and the possibility of sequential cohabitations, are also contributing to a delay in finalising partnerships. The fact that men are more likely to have more sexual partners than women in the childbearing age group (Layte et al., 2006) may indicate that they are not as ready to settle on one partner at the time that women are. All of these factors combined are contributing to delayed marriage and a decreasing fertility rate.

While the issue of the birth rate may not seem important in today's economic climate in which there are not enough jobs for all and in which we have witnessed a slight peak in the birth rate, it is something which is likely to be of great importance in future years and is an issue currently being faced by most developed societies. While there are now four workers to support every pensioner, in 2050 there will only be two (European Commission, 2006). This phenomenon will be further exacerbated by increasing life expectancy and hence increasing numbers of older people. The fact that the trend in births over the last 40 years in Ireland – as in Europe – has been steadily downwards, suggests that this is the trend which is likely to predominate (CSO, 1999, 2007; Walsh, 2009; Lunn et al., 2010) in coming years and therefore it is important to consider the factors which are impinging on relationship formation and childbearing decisions.

## **12.9 Attitudes to Childcare, Work-Life Balance and Related Social Policies**

The study showed that there is virtually unanimous support for the universal provision of childcare. Ninety-one per cent believe that “there should be a national programme of childcare facilities for pre-school aged children.” There was also very strong support for free preschool education to be available

to all children in the same way that primary education is. Recognising that such facilities do not exist at present and that most parents have to pay large sums for child care, there was strong agreement that there should be tax concessions for child care costs.

It is noteworthy that attitudes towards child care were correlated with attitudes to work-life balance for men as well as women and the vast majority of the sample believed that work-life balance is as important to men as it is to women. This indicates there is a connection in people's minds between attaining work-life balance for fathers and mothers and the provision of universal childcare by the state. Another aspect of this is the widespread belief that if people have to spend a lot on childcare they are more likely to have fewer children. It is clear that choices regarding family size are being influenced by child care costs and the data suggest that if free childcare were provided by the state or at very least if there were tax concessions for child care costs – that people would be inclined to have more children than they are presently having.

Another important factor which impinges on fertility decisions is that the workplace as currently constructed is not viewed as optimally conducive to work-life balance. The vast majority believe that “to get ahead, employees have to work over and above normal hours.” While work-life balance policies are favoured, there is nevertheless a belief that “you put your career on hold when you work part-time/job share.” This is seen as applying more to men than women, as most held the view that if men work part-time or job share, they are seen as less serious about their careers. This suggests that many people will be disinclined to engage in part-time working/job sharing since they will see it as potentially impeding their career advancement. Other forms of flexible working may be what are required to facilitate work-life balance. Previous studies have shown that flexible working hours are particularly favoured by both men and women and tele-working (working from home) is one of the few forms of flexible working that men take up if available (Drew et al., 2003; Fine-Davis et al., 2005). “Flexible hours” are often not as flexible as they might be and “personalised hours” may be an even better way to facilitate workers to have greater work-life balance.

In terms of new social policies, there was strong support for fathers to have a right to take paid paternity leave on the birth or adoption of a new baby. There was also support for maternity leave to be changed into leave for one or other parent, although this received less support than the introduction of paternity leave. Half of the sample felt that, ideally, men and women should both work part-time and ‘co-parent’. A large proportion also believed that if people had flexible working conditions, this would make it more likely that they would have more children. While part-time working is seen as having some disadvantages, the notion of part-time working for both parents in order to facilitate co-parenting does have moderate support, as does the idea for maternity leave to be available for either or both parents. These attitudes signal a readiness for greater sharing of childcare between men and women. However, given people's financial exigencies, it is unlikely that part-time working on the part of both partners in order to share childcare will provide adequate income to most couples – even though many would favour this.

Taking into account all of the results concerning people's attitudes to social policies related to work-life balance, it is apparent that state provision of child care is the policy which people of childbearing age most strongly support in order to enable them to have the number of children they would like and in order to achieve work-life balance. This view is well supported by the international literature. In an analysis of the effects of family policies for the OECD, Fagnani (2008) observed that “a dearth of formal childcare provision (of both good quality and affordable) and lack of state support will likely push women to reduce the number of children they have in order to stay in employment” (p. 10).



D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2005) pointed out that fertility rates below replacement level are likely to be a persistent feature for most OECD countries in the coming years. Yet they found that childcare provision was a significant predictor of fertility and concluded that “childcare arrangements, transfers to families that reduce the direct cost of children, as well as provisions that allow mothers to better cope with their family and career responsibilities all can help in removing obstacles to childbearing decisions” (p. 69). This view is shared by the United Nations (2008) who state that: “family-friendly policies aiming at the reconciliation of work with family life can both counteract a decrease in the birth rate to very low levels and augment the employment rate” (p. 3).

These findings underscore need for social policy to address the dilemmas faced by young people who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development. Provision of necessary social supports such as child care and greater availability of flexible ways of working that are compatible with parenthood are essential if men and women are to be able to perform the dual roles of worker and parent. Unless society makes sharing by both parents of childrearing possible, women will continue to face dilemmas which prevent them from forming family relationships and having the number of children that they wish to have and society as a whole will suffer the consequences.

## **12.10 Family Status and Well-being**

While much research has documented the major demographic changes which have been taking place in our society and in societies around us, little research has examined the effects of these changes on people's well-being. The present study compared single, cohabiting and married people on a range of measures of well-being. Married people were found to have the highest level of well-being on most measures, including social integration, life satisfaction, positive life experiences, etc. They were followed by cohabiting people. Single people had the lowest level of well-being and were found to be more socially isolated. These findings highlight the value of relationships to well-being and in particular the value of marriage to people's well-being.

Married people were most likely to say “My life is close to how I would like it to be.” Cohabiting people were next most likely and single people were the least likely to say so. The gap between married and single people was particularly great. Socio-economic status (SES) was also a significant predictor of this measure of well-being. High SES men were most likely to say that their life was close to how they would like it to be, followed by high SES women. The group most disenchanted with their lives was low SES men. There was a significant discrepancy between low SES men and women indicating that low SES men were much more dissatisfied with their lives than were low SES women. The higher unemployment rate of lower SES men is undoubtedly a significant contributor to this finding. The differing psychological well-being of the various groups in society, as reflected in these findings, is clearly an important area to be addressed by social policy.

These findings support those of Stack and Eshleman (1998) who reviewed data from 17 countries, collected in the context of the World Values Study. Their review supported previous research linking marital status and happiness. These authors found that while “cohabitants, who also have a live-in partner to enhance social integration, were happier than other categories of single persons . . . marriage increases happiness substantially more than cohabitation” (Ibid., p. 534). Our findings also supported those of McKeown et al. (2003) to the effect that single mothers had the lowest psychological well-being on several measures. The poverty of single mothers has been highlighted by the OECD (2003)

and the NESF (2001) and the present results underscore that their disadvantaged status also extends to their psychological well-being relative to all other groups, including that of single fathers.

Given that we are witnessing an increase in the proportion of single people in the population, including an increase in single mothers, and an increase in divorced and separated people, it is likely that a greater proportion of our society will become vulnerable to poorer psychological well-being. Our society is changing from one which was previously richer in social networks and is now characterised by greater social isolation and individualisation (e.g. Giddens, 1994; Putnam, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001), particularly in urban areas – an irony given that people live more closely together. Relative psychological well-being is a key issue that should be of increasing concern to social policy makers in the coming years.

## 12.11 Suggestions for Future Research

The results of the present study suggest several lines of further research, some of which can be carried out on this data set, which will be archived, and some of which will require new data. The current dataset on adults of childbearing age is a rich and extensive one and there is much more that can be learned from it. Firstly, there are data on specific sub-groups which would be interesting to explore further. These include non-nationals, who make up 11% of the sample. A comparison of their attitudes with those of Irish nationals would identify similarities and/or differences in attitudes to family formation. In addition, the sample includes single mothers and fathers. Further research could explore their living arrangements, number and ages of children, level of contact between the non-cohabiting partner and their children and other variables, including differences in attitudes and behaviour among single parents in different socio-economic groups and of different ages. The current data set also includes potential material to discover more about the attitudes and behaviour of “blended families,” that is families which include some children from previous relationships. As this is an increasingly common type of new family, it would be useful to learn more about the nature of these families.

There is an increasing prevalence of same sex couples and their attitudes and behaviour in relation to family formation would also be an important area of new research. While the present study included gay people the numbers were too small to allow for comparative analyses.

The group of older single women, particularly those in the higher socio-economic group, who found difficulty finding partners and who exhibited poorer psychological well-being, would also be an important group to study further. While the qualitative study included interviews with this group, it would be fruitful to carry out further research to better understand their attitudes. In particular, discrepancies were found between men and women’s attitudes concerning the perceived threat of women’s role in the workplace and the study also found women had a higher need for autonomy, freedom and independence than men. Future research might explore to what extent single women are choosing their current lifestyles and to what extent external factors may be contributing to barriers to partner formation and the lesser well-being of this group.

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# Appendix



**Table A1: Cross-tabulation of those Completing Third Level Education by Gender, Age, Family Status, Presence of Children, Area and Socio-Economic Status (N=1,404)**

	Total	Gender		Age		Family Status			Children		Area		SES		
		Male	Female	20 to 34	35 to 49	Single	Married	Cohabit	With-out Child	With Child	Urban	Rural	Prof./ Mngr/ Tech	Non-manual	Skilled/ Un-skilled
Total	1,404	706	698	759	645	625	619	160	753	651	556	848	523	303	578
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Lower Second	27%	31%	23%	19%	36%	24%	30%	26%	20%	35%	23%	30%	4%	26%	48%
Upper Second	34%	35%	33%	34%	33%	33%	35%	34%	33%	35%	35%	34%	22%	45%	39%
Third Level	39%	34%	44%	47%	30%	43%	35%	39%	46%	31%	43%	37%	74%	28%	13%

**Table A2: Perceived Facilitators to Current Cohabitation: Percentage Responses of Cohabiting People (N=304 unweighted; 160 weighted)**

	Total	Please indicate for each item whether it didn't contribute at all, contributed a little, contributed a fair amount, or contributed a great deal.													
		It made sense financially.	We were ready to buy /rent apartment/ house together.	I wanted to test the relationship.	I wanted to spend more time with my partner.	We just fell into it.	I felt it was time because of my age.	I wanted more security.	I wanted more commitment.	I loved my partner and wanted to live with them.	I wanted to cook meals/ provide a home for my partner.	I wanted to have a child/ ren.	I/we already had a child/ ren.	I saw this as a step to marrying my partner in the future.	
Total	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
UNWTD	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	
Not at all	35%	32%	29%	43%	3%	40%	56%	45%	28%	1%	30%	47%	77%	31%	
A little	19%	30%	15%	19%	9%	25%	19%	23%	25%	7%	28%	21%	5%	24%	
A fair amount	23%	25%	30%	24%	24%	23%	19%	24%	30%	27%	25%	16%	6%	22%	
A great deal	23%	13%	25%	15%	64%	12%	6%	9%	18%	65%	17%	16%	13%	24%	
Mean	2.33	2.19	2.52	2.10	3.50	2.08	1.75	1.96	2.38	3.55	2.29	2.01	1.53	2.38	

**Table A3: Factors Perceived by Cohabitees as Relevant to Getting Married**

	How much of a consideration would the following be ...									
	I feel it would be too much of a commitment.	I would want to complete my education /training first.	I would want to have a secure job/ income first.	High cost of buying apartment/ house	Concern it would restrict my freedom	Not sure I want to marry my current partner	My partner does not want to get married	Being married would conflict with my work/ career	Cost of wedding	Don't believe in marriage
Total	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304	304
Not at all	60%	67%	31%	42%	68%	69%	71%	88%	20%	66%
A little	18%	11%	20%	18%	21%	18%	17%	7%	20%	19%
A fair amount	15%	10%	25%	19%	6%	9%	7%	4%	21%	6%
A great deal	7%	11%	24%	21%	5%	4%	6%	1%	39%	9%
Mean	1.68	1.64	2.42	2.20	1.47	1.48	1.48	1.19	2.79	1.57

**Table A4: Married People's Perceived Facilitators to Current Marriage**

	How much of a consideration were the following...												
	It made sense financially.	We were ready to buy/ rent apartment/ house together.	I wanted more security.	I wanted more commitment.	To make the relationship legal	I loved them and wanted to live with them.	I wanted to cook meals/ provide a home for my partner.	I wanted to have a child/ ren.	I/we already had a child/ ren.	I had completed my education/ training.	I/my partner had a secure job.	We were able to afford the wedding.	I felt it was time because of my age.
Total	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619	619
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
UNWTD	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510	510
Not at all	56%	34%	28%	20%	27%	3%	32%	13%	72%	56%	40%	24%	46%
A little	19%	14%	20%	20%	19%	5%	24%	15%	6%	12%	14%	19%	22%
A fair amount	11%	24%	27%	30%	21%	17%	22%	20%	6%	16%	20%	30%	18%
A great deal	14%	27%	25%	30%	33%	76%	22%	52%	15%	16%	25%	27%	14%
Mean	1.83	2.45	2.50	2.70	2.60	3.66	2.34	3.11	1.64	1.91	2.30	2.61	2.00

Table A5: Perceived Facilitators and Constraints to Childbearing

		How much of a consideration would the following be...																	
	Having a suitable partner	To help improve my relationship with my partner	My age/ I'm not ready yet	My biological clock	My age/biological clock	My partner's biological clock	Wanting to complete my education/training first	I can't afford it.	Having a job	My housing situation	Would restrict my freedom	My/my partner's fertility/infertility	Concern about my ability to cope with my work and a child/another child	Lack of availability of childcare	High cost of childcare	Availability of Child Benefit	I've completed my family	Quality of relationship with my partner	I am gay
Total	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404	1,404
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Not at all	3%	50%	44%	47%	20%	43%	54%	36%	20%	22%	48%	42%	47%	32%	48%	53%	10%	39%	
A little	3%	15%	17%	16%	14%	19%	15%	25%	14%	12%	28%	24%	24%	20%	23%	13%	6%	1%	
A fair amount	11%	16%	18%	17%	24%	23%	12%	16%	24%	26%	14%	21%	16%	21%	14%	11%	14%	1%	
A great deal	83%	19%	20%	20%	41%	15%	19%	23%	41%	39%	9%	13%	13%	27%	15%	23%	58%	1%	
Not Applicable	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13%	59%
Mean	3.74	2.03	2.14	2.10	2.86	2.10	1.97	2.25	2.86	2.82	1.85	2.04	1.96	2.42	1.95	2.05	3.36	1.11	







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