

**MARRIAGE, FERTILITY AND THE FAMILY IN IRELAND – A STATISTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract:** The paper looks at the changes which have been occurring in trends relating to marriage, fertility, and the family in Ireland. Cohabitation is increasing with one in four couples without children now falling into this category. On the other hand, marriage is occurring at older ages although there is evidence of a stabilisation of the decline in the probability of females marrying for the first time. The increase in the average age at which females are having their first child is consistent with later marriages while the narrowing of the differential between the average ages for different birth orders suggests that the spacing of children is now concentrated over a shorter period of time than heretofore. While the predominant family type still consists of husbands and wives and their children, the growth in the number of couples without children clearly reflects a lifestyle choice on the part of certain couples. The increase in the number of usual residents of this country who were born abroad has begun to impact on the make up of the family in Ireland. One of the fastest growing categories has been children born in this country to parents, both of whom were born outside Ireland and the UK. It is clear from the information presented in the paper that Ireland is experiencing major demographic change at present.

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*Keywords:* Marriage, Fertility, Family

*JEL Classifications:* J12, J13

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The paper examines the changes that have occurred in trends relating to marriage, fertility, and the family in Ireland. The main data sources used are the annual vital statistics on marriages and births and the five yearly Censuses of Population. Most of the interest will focus on more recent periods. However, in order to place the data for these recent periods in perspective, a longer time horizon will be chosen where appropriate.

The paper is in five sections. The first section looks at marriage trends with particular emphasis on the extent to which the average age at marriage for both brides and grooms has been increasing in recent years. Marriage dissolution is approximated using Census data on persons who classify themselves as separated or divorced. The next section of the paper examines changing fertility trends including the changes that have occurred in age specific and total fertility rates – the so-called time-period measures. The total fertility rate is decomposed into a tempo and quantum effect to remove the effect of changes in the timing of births. Recent census data on the number of

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children born to women are highlighted and comparisons drawn with corresponding 1971 and 1981 data. A measure of the number of childless women is also derived from these sources.

The third section covers the changing face of the family in Ireland. The advent of cohabiting couples is commented on while results from the most recent census give a preliminary indication of the extent of reconstituted families. Recent immigration trends are also looked at to determine what effect they may have had on the make-up of the family in Ireland. The fourth section puts the changes occurring in Ireland in a European context. Census data for years around 2000 are used for this purpose. The final section of the paper attempts to draw some tentative conclusions.

## 2. MARRIAGES

The most remarkable feature of the recently published statistical release on marriages (CSO, 2007a) is the extent to which couples are marrying at older ages than heretofore. In the ten years to 2005, the average age of grooms increased from 30 to 33.1 years while over the same period the average age of brides increased from 28.1 to 31 years.

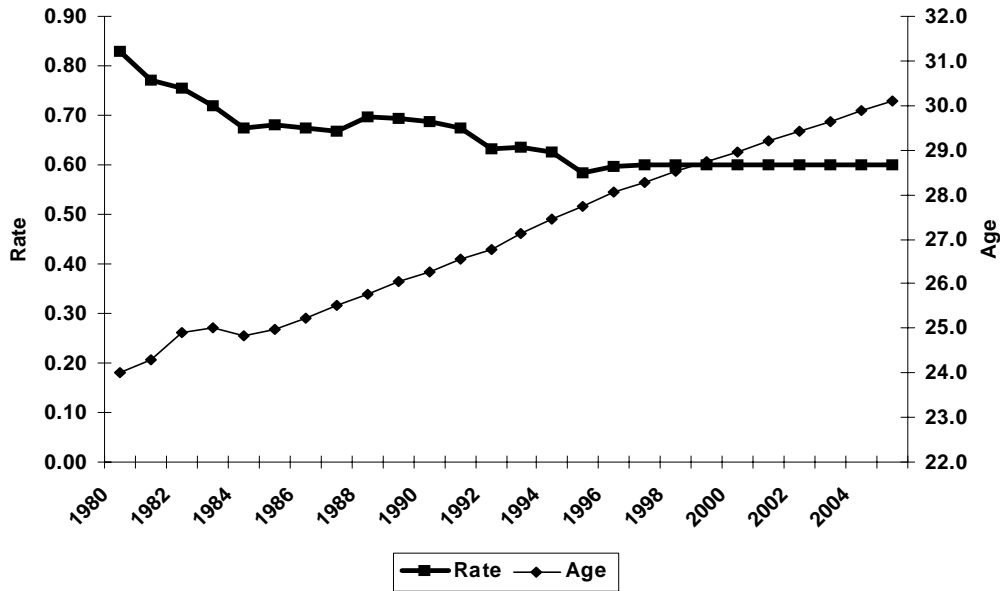
While there was an increase of 5,751 (36.9%) in the annual number of marriages over the period 1995-2005, this has to be viewed in the light of changes in the underlying population and the effect which the availability of divorce since 1997 has had on the figures, especially those for recent years. Firstly, population: the number of males aged 25-34 increased by 37.3 per cent between 1996 and 2006 compared with a rise of 30.1 per cent for females in the same age groups. Of the total of 21,355 marriages registered in 2005, 67.3 per cent of the grooms and 71.2 per cent of the brides were aged 25 to 34 years. So, the increase in the number of marriages registered between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s was of the same order of magnitude as the increase in the underlying population. Regarding the impact of divorce on the marriage numbers, approximately 5.6 per cent of brides and 6.5 per cent of grooms in 2005 were remarrying following divorce. Therefore, when allowance is made for the underlying population change and the effects of remarriage following divorce the increase in marriages is not as pronounced as it appears at first sight.

A more refined measure of the evolution of marriages can be got by focusing on first marriages while taking account of changes in the relevant underlying population of males and females. In particular for females, the female first marriage rate is obtained by summing the age-specific first marriage rates for women aged 15 to 49 years. A twenty five-year perspective is taken in Figure 1, which also shows the average age of the bride at first marriage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The figures for 1997 to 2001 are not yet available due to difficulties in extracting the relevant marriage registration documentation, while work on the marriage data for 2003 and 2004 is ongoing. The data on average age and female first marriage rate for the missing years have been linearly interpolated.

**Figure 1: Female first marriage rate and average age of bride at first marriage, 1980-2005 (Table A)**

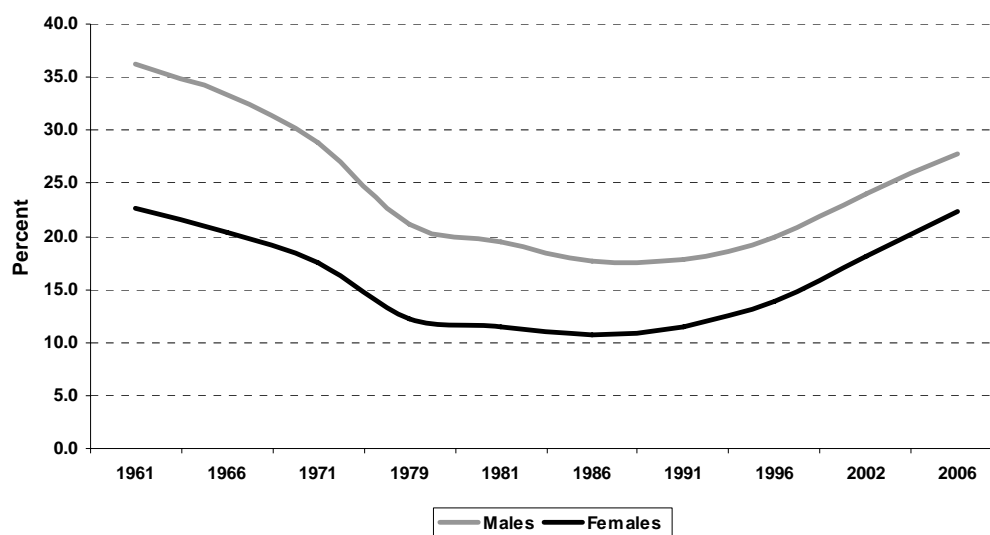


The graph shows that apart from the earlier period the average age of brides at first marriage has increased steadily from 24 years in 1980 to 30.1 years in 2005. Over the same period, the probability of a female marrying, as measured by the female first marriage rate, has declined from 83 per cent to 60 per cent. Given that the required breakdown of the marriage registration data is not yet available for 1997 to 2004 inclusive, the shape of the graph for those intervening years may differ from that illustrated which is based on linear interpolation for the missing years.

Based on the evidence of the steady increase in the average age of bride and groom at marriage (and first marriage) the true shape of the graph between 1996 and 2005 is not likely to be radically different from that illustrated. However, it is not possible to be as confident about the composite measure, which is first marriage rate. For instance, is it possible that the graph decreased following 1996 and experienced a turn around thereafter? To throw some light on this it is worth examining the percentage of 35 to 44 year olds who were single (having never married) as derived from the various census reports. This is given in Figure 2.

The age group 35 to 44 has been chosen because of the reduced probability of marrying for the first time beyond these ages. To that extent therefore it provides a good proxy indicator of the extent to which first marriage rates are increasing or decreasing.

**Figure 2: Proportion of males and females aged 35-44 years who were single (never married) at various censuses**



The evidence points to the fact that the 1970s was 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 single (never-married). The decline since that period in the marriage rate along with a postponement of marriages to older ages for both brides and grooms have resulted in higher proportions of 35 to 44 year olds being recorded as single (never-married) in the 2006 census – 27.7 per cent of males and 22.3 per cent of females. Therefore, allowing for age structure effects the clear evidence is that marriage is not as prevalent as it once was and that other forms of living arrangements are being preferred. This will be explored further in the section dealing with families and households.

Before concluding this section on marriages we examine the available census data on the extent to which marriage breakdown is occurring. The measure used is got by summing the number of separated or divorced persons and expressing the total as a percentage of persons who ever married. The results for the three most recent censuses are given in the following table distinguishing males and females.

**Table 1: Separated and divorced as a percentage of ever-married males and females, 1996, 2002 and 2006**

Age group	Males			Females		
	1996	2002	2006	1996	2002	2006
15-24	5.4	5.2	5.4	6.5	5.6	6.1
25-34	3.9	4.6	4.8	6.6	6.9	6.5
35-44	5.8	8.1	8.5	8.7	11.2	11.9
45-54	6.2	9.6	11.3	7.8	11.6	14.0
55-64	4.6	7.3	9.4	4.5	7.5	9.8
65 and over	2.2	3.1	4.2	1.5	2.0	2.8
15 and over	4.8	7.0	8.1	5.9	8.0	9.2

The marital status question is asked of all persons aged 15 years and over with a similar format used in the censuses of 1996, 2002 and 2006. At the overall level, marriage breakdown, as measured by the proportions of ever-married persons who were either separated or divorced, has been on the increase for both males and females. By 2006, 8.1 per cent of ever-married males were either separated or divorced compared with 9.2 per cent for females. The 45-54 year age group had the highest proportion of separated or divorced males and females in all three censuses. For the most recent census this age group corresponds to those who were in their mid-twenties in 1980, of whom 90 per cent were marrying for the first time at that stage. It remains to be seen whether the decline in the first marriage rate noted earlier and the rise in cohabitation, which we will comment on later in the paper, will have the effect of slowing down the increase in marriage dissolution.

### 3. FERTILITY

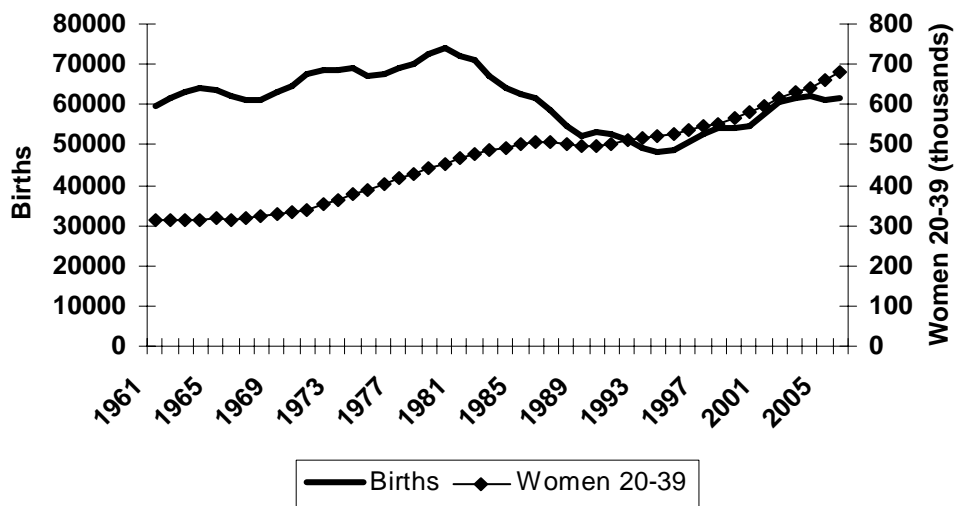
#### 3.1 Total births

The number of births in a particular year is the most easily understood measure of fertility. However, changes over time in the number of births are sometimes mistakenly referred to as changes in the fertility rate without any account being taken of the number of women of child-bearing age (15-49 years).

While a lot of interest focuses on children born to teenagers on the one hand and to women in their forties on the other, both groups combined have accounted for fewer than 10 per cent of total births over the course of the past forty years. In the remainder of this section, therefore, the primary focus will be on women aged 20-39 years.

The following graph shows the annual number of births in the period 1961 to 2006 along with the number of women aged 20-39 years as compiled by the censuses taken during this period.

**Figure 3: Births and women aged 20-39 years, 1961 to 2006 (Table B)**



Births have followed an upward path from about 60,000 in the beginning of the period to the peak value of 74,200 in 1980, subsequently falling to 48,300 in 1994 and since recovering to just over 61,000. Over the same period the number of women in the prime child-bearing age groups 20-39

has more than doubled from 313,400 in 1961 to 683,700 in 2006. So while the annual number of births in 2006 is roughly equivalent to what it was in 1961 it has to be borne in mind that there are more than twice as many women in the prime child-bearing age groups in 2006 compared with 1961. Put in simple terms, the number of children per woman has halved over the period in question.

### *3.2 Fertility rates*

A measure which relates the number of births to the number of women in the relevant age group is the age-specific fertility rate (ASFR). The ASFR for a given year is the number of children born to women of a particular age group per 1,000 women in that age group for the year in question. The total fertility rate (TFR) is compiled by summing the age-specific rates for women aged 15-49 years. The TFR is a synthetic measure representing the average number of children a woman would have if she were to experience the age-specific fertility rates of the year in question over the course of her child-bearing ages. Table C in the Appendix provides the relevant data for the period 1955 to 2005.

For most of this period, women aged 25-29 represented the principal child-bearing age group. However, the fertility rate of these women has declined from 244 per thousand in 1971 to 79 in 2005. Women aged 30-34 also featured strongly and since 1993 they have overtaken the 25-29 year olds as the principal child-bearing age group in proportionate terms. In line with the trend for 25-29 year olds, the fertility rate of younger women aged 20-24 is now less than a third of its value in the early 1970s. The only age group to show a pick-up in recent years is the 35-39 year age group where the fertility rate has increased from 59 per thousand in 1993 to 87 in 2005. The total fertility rate which summarises the various age specific rates fell from a maximum value of 4.06 in 1964 to its present level of 1.88. The first year in which the TFR fell below the so-called replacement level of 2.1 children per woman was 1991 and while the TFR has oscillated somewhat since then it has not exceeded the replacement level since 1991.

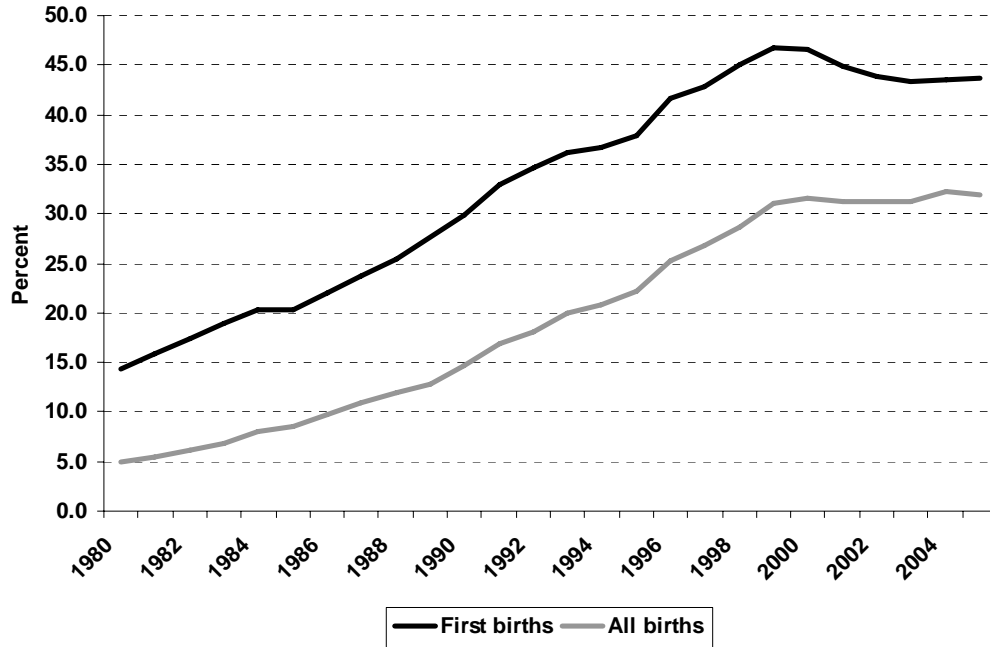
Cohort fertility sums the age-specific rates for a given birth cohort of women over a 35 year span. The resulting measure gives an indication of completed fertility for the women involved. However, this measure is not considered further in this paper as the results of the fertility question on the census form are considered to give a more accurate picture of completed fertility.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of period versus cohort fertility measures see the paper by Máire Ní Bhrolcháin to this Society.

**Figure 4: Percentage of births outside marriage for first births and all births, 1980 to 2005 (Table D)**

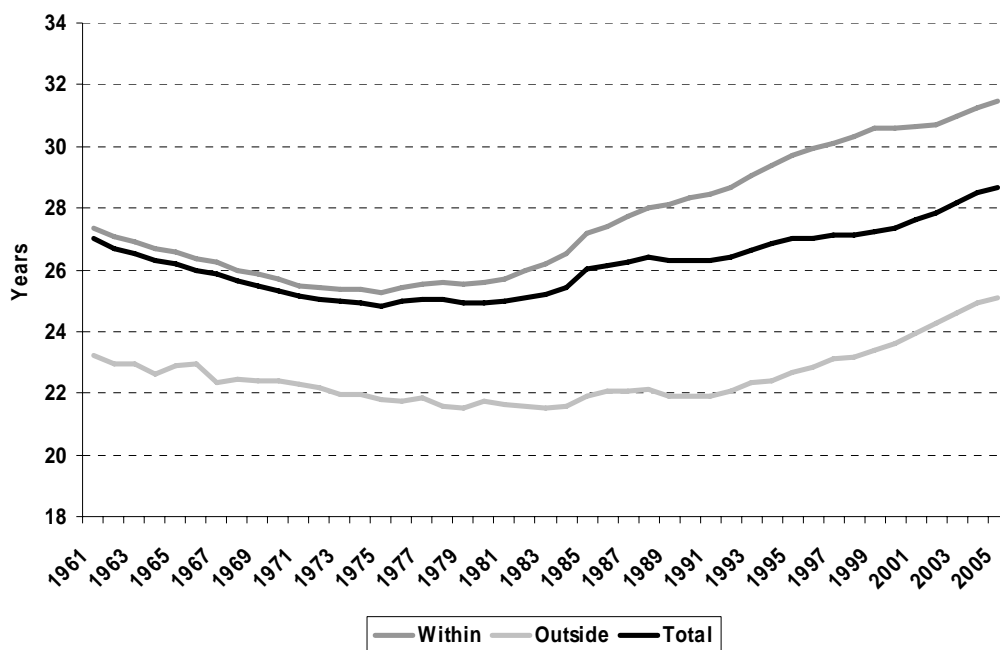


With the decline in fertility levels, first births as a percentage of total births have increased from 20 per cent in the early 1960s to 40 per cent since the late 1990s. The proportion of these first births which were outside marriage increased from around 15 per cent in 1980 to a peak level of 47 per cent in 1999/2000 before settling at about 44 per cent in the last four years. The decision to have a first child is a major factor in explaining fertility trends. It is therefore of interest to look at the ages of the women giving birth for the first time distinguishing births within marriage, outside marriage and total first births.

### 3.3 Average age at maternity

The average age of the mother at the birth of her first child, which was around 27 years at the beginning of the 1960s, steadily decreased to 24.8 by 1975. The average age remained close to 25 years until the mid 1980s after which it began to increase to reach its present level of 28.7 years. Because of the low percentage of births outside marriage during the 1960s and early 1970s, the average age at maternity for first births within marriage was closely aligned with, although higher than, the same measure for all first births. The age gap between mothers who were having their first children within and outside marriage was in the range 3 to 4 years up until 1980 after which the two began to diverge. The gap widened to 7.2 years during 1998/1999 but has since fallen back somewhat to 6.4 years in 2005.

**Figure 5: Average age at maternity for first births distinguishing births within and outside marriage and total births, 1961-2005 (Table E)**

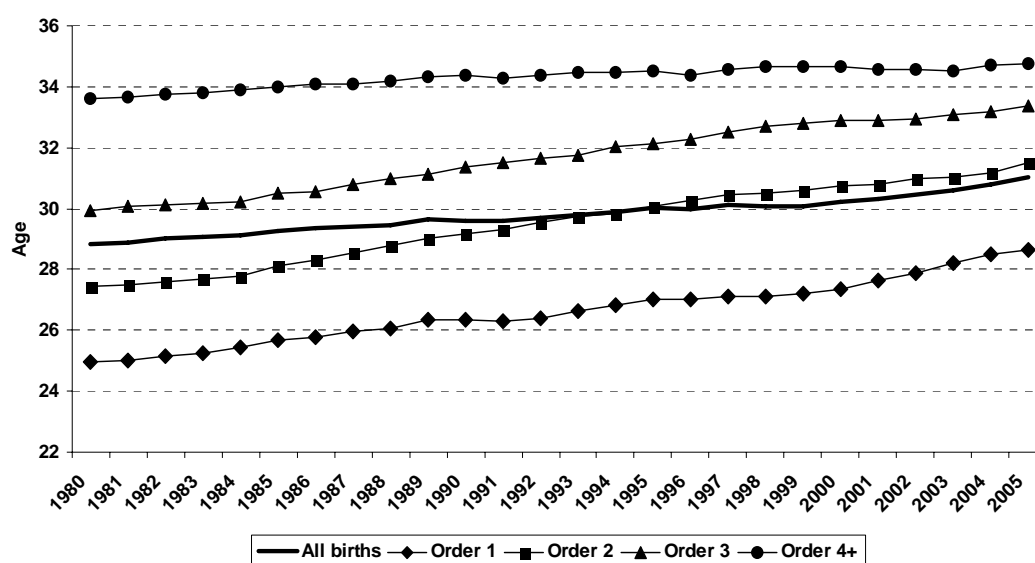


The average age of brides increased from 24.7 years in 1980 to 31 years in 2005. This has had a clear knock on effect on the average age at which women are having their first children within marriage where the average age has increased from 25.6 in 1980 to 31.4 in 2005 – an increase of 5.8 years in a twenty-five year period.

The rise in the average age at maternity for first births also affects the average age for later births. This can be seen in Figure 6. All the lines are upward sloping in the period since 1980 although the slope of the graph for fourth and higher order births is less pronounced than for the first three birth orders. The slope of the graph of average age at maternity for all births reflects the change over time in the relative weights of the different birth orders. In 1980, first order births accounted for 29.2 per cent of all births whereas by 2005 it had risen to 40.3 per cent. Hence, the line for average age at maternity for all births in the later period is closer to that for first order births. The steady decline in the difference between the average age at maternity for first and fourth and higher order births from 8.7 years for 1980/1981 to 6.1 years in 2004/2005 probably owes more to couples now completing their families more quickly rather than a catching up effect for higher order births.



Figure 6: Average age at maternity by birth order, 1980-2005 (Table F)



### 3.4 Adjusting birth rates for timing effects

The general increase in the average age at maternity for all birth orders, apart from indicating that couples are starting their families later, also has the side effect of depressing the TFR. Authors such as Bongaarts and Feeney (1998), Kohler and Ortega (2002) and Philipov and Sobotka (2006) have developed methods for decomposing changes in fertility into a quantum effect and a tempo effect. The various methods have as their objective to adjust the TFR for the tempo (or timing) effect in such a way that the true quantum (or level) of fertility is estimated. The key assumption behind these methods is that the move towards later ages at maternity depresses the TFR even if the number of children that women have during their child-bearing years does not change.

A variant of the Bongaarts and Feeney method as set out in Philipov and Sobotka (2006), when applied to Irish data, yields an adjusted TFR which is in the range 7-10 per cent higher than the measured one over the period 1980 to 2005.<sup>3</sup> However, the inexorable rise in the average age at maternity over the last twenty-five years calls into question whether there will be a recovery in births, in other words whether the true level of births is 7-10 per cent higher than that suggested by the TFR. For a further insight into past trends we turn to the census results on children born to women.

### 3.5 Completed fertility

A measure of fertility can be derived post-hoc by asking women the number of children they have had. This was done in the case of the 2006 census.<sup>4</sup> When asked previously in the 1971 and 1981 censuses it was in the context of the number of children born to the marriage. The results for the earlier censuses can still be compared with those for 2006 if we restrict the analysis for the later period to married women only. This is done in Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> The Bongaarts-Feeney method calls for TFRs to be calculated for birth orders 1, 2 and 3. An approximation can be made which uses the overall TFR and average age at maternity. This is used in the present paper.

<sup>4</sup> The following question was asked in 2006: How many children have you given birth to? *This question is for women only.* Write in the number of children born alive. The question layout provided for a two-column write in box and a tick box for "None".

**Table 2: Married women classified by age group at time of relevant census and by average number of children born alive, 1971, 1981 and 2006**

Age group	1971	1981	2006
20-24 years	1.1	1.0	0.9
25-29 years	1.9	1.7	1.1
30-34 years	3.0	2.6	1.5
35-39 years	3.8	3.4	2.2
40-44 years	4.2	3.9	2.5
45-49 years	4.3	4.2	2.7
50-54 years	4.1	4.2	3.0
55-59 years	3.9	4.2	3.3
60-64 years	3.8	4.0	3.6
65-69 years	3.8	3.8	3.8
70-74 years	3.8	3.6	4.0
75-79 years	3.9	3.5	4.1
80-84 years	3.9	3.5	4.1
85 and over	3.8	3.7	4.0

The decline in the average number of children born to married women in the prime child-bearing ages 20-39 years is evident in moving forward from 1971 to 2006. The reasons for this are the increase over time in the average age at which women married and the increase in the age at which they had their children.

Completed fertility has also fallen for women in their forties (in the case of the most recent census these women would have been born in the period 1956 to 1965) while the differences are not as marked for older age groups reflecting the fact that the major change in fertility behaviour probably occurred for the female birth cohorts of the late 1950s onwards.

It is also possible to observe the results for the same birth cohorts from census to census. However, these comparisons have to take account of how migration may have affected some of these age groups, especially during the 1940s and 1950s, and how mortality would have impacted on the older age groups. Notwithstanding these caveats, it is possible to discern the similarity of reporting for age groups from 40-44 and higher from the 1971 and 1981 censuses. The comparison between 1981 and 2006, although somewhat tenuous, is still evident for women aged 40 years and over in the earlier period.

We now turn to the question asked of all women in the 2006 census in relation to the number of children born alive. There were sensitivities involved in including this question on the census form. These mainly related to stillbirths and children given up for adoption, especially in earlier periods. Despite these concerns the level of response to the question was 97 per cent for women aged 20 years and over.<sup>5</sup>

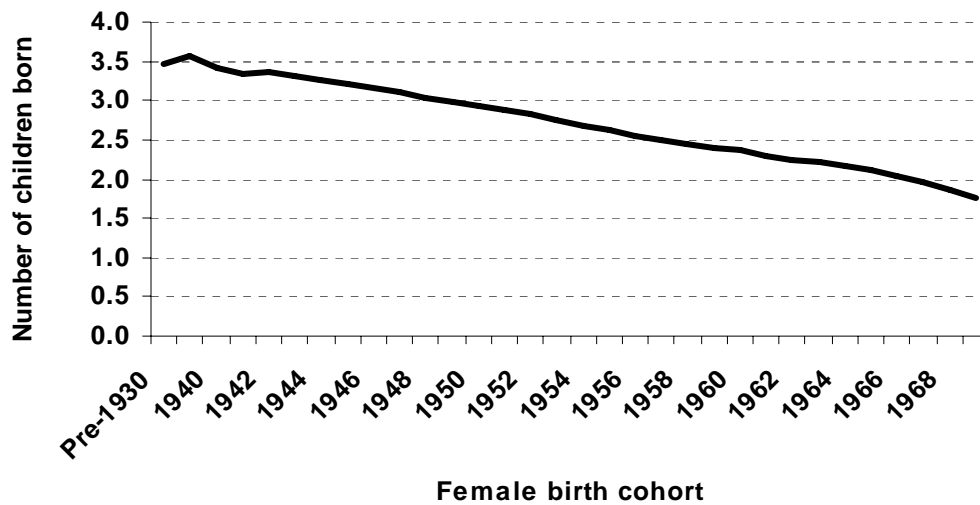
A certain amount of caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the results of the fertility question. In the case of older women, because of the effects of mortality in diminishing the relevant birth cohorts, it is questionable whether the results reported are representative of all women born around the same time. To mitigate the relatively small numbers reporting for these older age groups, the results have been aggregated for women born before 1930 and for those born during the 1930s. At the other end of the scale, the results for younger women will be affected by

<sup>5</sup> There was no age filter on the question. Understandably, there was a high level of non-response among younger females who felt the question did not apply to them.

the likelihood that they may have further children some time in the future. Women born during the 1970s (i.e. those aged approximately 26 to 35 years at the time of the census) are shown together while it would not be very meaningful to include younger women in the analysis.

Women born before 1930 on average had 3.5 children compared with 3.6 for the decade of the 1930s. Women born in the year 1930 had the distinction of having the greatest number of children – on average 3.7 per woman. Each successive birth cohort during the 1940s had fewer children so that by the end of the decade women born in 1949 had exactly three children on average.

**Figure 7: Female birth cohorts by number of children to whom they have given birth – 2006 census (Table G)**



Completed fertility continued to decline for women born throughout the 1950s. The first cohort of women with below replacement fertility was the 1966 cohort.<sup>6</sup> It should be borne in mind that at the time of the 2006 census these women were aged around 40 years leaving open the possibility that replacement fertility may yet be achieved by that cohort. It is somewhat ironic that the children born when the total fertility rate was at its peak should themselves be the ones to fail to achieve the replacement fertility threshold. Clearly, the more widespread availability of contraception as well as greater lifestyle choice played a major part in this. On the other hand, it may be that the daughters of large families may have experienced at first hand the necessary sacrifices in raising a large family!

### 3.6 Childlessness

In addition to determining the completed fertility of specific birth cohorts, the question on the number of children born alive also provides a measure of childlessness. The results are given in Table G in the appendix alongside those for the average number of children born alive.

The rate of childlessness was quite high (25.2 per cent) for women born before 1930. Again the same caveat applies to these women as mentioned in the previous section, i.e. how representative are the survivors of the totality of women born before 1930? The rate of childlessness for women born in the 1930s was 18.5 per cent. In comparing the figures for women born before 1930 with

<sup>6</sup> With remarkable prescience this was predicted in the contribution of Donal Garvey to a 1990 Council of Europe publication when he wrote “Should assumption F2 (TPFR to decline to 2.1 by 1991 and thereafter to 1.75 by 2021) closely reflect future changes in the TPFR in Ireland then the female birth cohort of 1965 or perhaps 1966 may well be the first whose completed fertility will fall below replacement.”

those born during the thirties account has to be taken of the fact that over 17 per cent of the former were never married compared with 11.9 per cent of the latter.

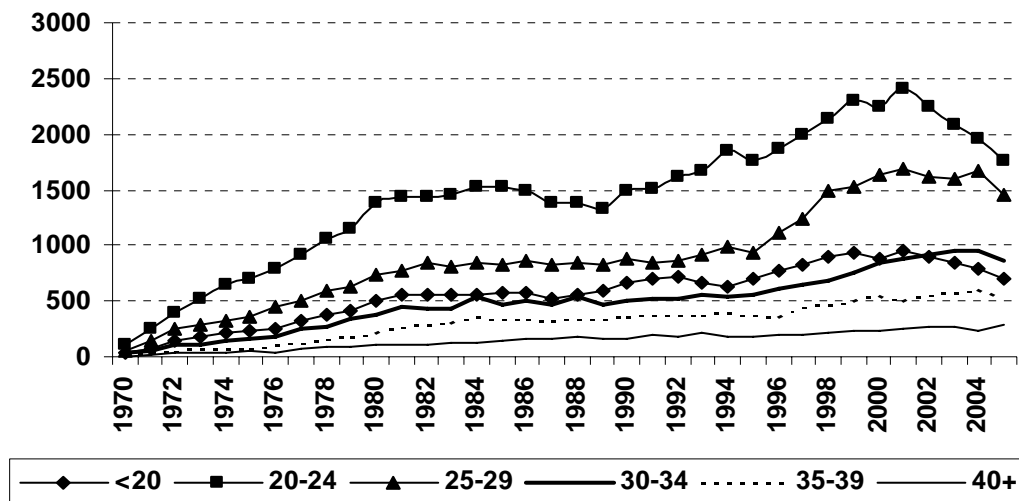
The rate of childlessness declined to 14.4 per cent for women born in the 1940s but increased again to 15.6 per cent for women born in the 1950s. Approximately one in five of the 297,000 women born in the 1960s who were included in the 2006 census did not have any children.

To put the matter in an international perspective the rate of childlessness for Irish women born in the 1950s or 1960s was 18 per cent according to the 2006 census. The corresponding figure for Austria, Germany and England and Wales was 20 per cent while in the case of Portugal it is less than 5 per cent (Hantrais, 2006).

### 3.7 Abortions

Before concluding the discussion of fertility we examine briefly the available information on abortions carried out on Irish women. The data as reported by the UK Office for National Statistics for abortions carried out in England and Wales on women with addresses in the Republic of Ireland are set out in Figure 8.

**Figure 8 Number of legal abortions carried out on Irish women in England and Wales, 1970-2005 (Table H)**



The total number of legal abortions recorded increased from a 1970 base of 261 to 3,946 in 1984. Following a decline to 3,673 in 1987 the series resumed its upward path to reach 6,673 by 2001. Since then the total number of abortions recorded has fallen back to 5,585.

Over the thirty-five year period under review, women in their twenties was the predominant category representing 60 per cent of the reported data on abortions. Teenagers accounted for 14.6 per cent of the total with those in their thirties accounting for a further 21 per cent. The evidence for recent years points to an increase in the age profile of women on whom legal abortions were performed compared with previous periods.

However, is the decline in abortions since 2001, as reported in the ONS data, indicative of an underlying trend or are there other factors at play? The Irish Family Planning Association has claimed that women are accessing cheaper services in other countries (Irish Examiner, 2005). The main countries mentioned are Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. The cost of an abortion in Britain is in the range €650-€750 while in countries such as Netherlands it can be as low as €250. Lower

airfares and access to the internet has provided greater choice for women wishing to have an abortion with the result that the ONS figures can now only be taken as a lower bound for the number of Irish women having abortions abroad.

Expressing abortions, as reported, as a percentage of births and abortions combined shows the rate increasing from 0.4 per cent in 1970 to 10.4 per cent in 1999 and 2000 and subsequently declining to 8.4 per cent in 2005. It could well be that a continuation of the increase beyond 2000 may be a more likely scenario.

## 4. FAMILIES

In the next part of the paper we examine the evolution of the family<sup>7</sup> in statistical terms over the last twenty-five years. But first we consider the definitions used.

### 4.1 Definitions

From a statistical perspective a family unit in the Irish census is defined as:

- a husband and wife or a cohabiting couple; or
- a husband and wife or a cohabiting couple together with one or more usually resident never-married children (of any age); or
- one parent together with one or more usually resident never-married children (of any age).

Family members have to be usual residents of the relevant household (see Appendix 2 of CSO, 2007b).

The definition used differs from the recent United Nations recommendations in a number of respects. In the first case, there is no requirement in the UN definition that the children should be never-married. This broader (UN) definition therefore allows for persons re-joining the original family home as “children” following marriage breakdown. The UN definition also provides for the situation where the middle generation may be missing from the household because of the need to seek employment elsewhere in the country or abroad for instance. The resulting “family” consists of grandparents and their grandchildren with the grandparents playing the role of the parents. Finally, the UN definition of the family includes same sex couples.

While the definition in use in this country is more restrictive than that recommended by the UN, it is not considered that the difference between the two concepts is in any way significant. It should be noted however that in both cases no age limit is applied in defining a child. This could imply, for instance, that a middle-aged son living with his aged mother would be considered to be a child. This is not a major obstacle however as children can be analysed by age in order to ensure some level of standardisation in spatial and temporal comparisons.

### 4.2 Overall trends since 1981

In the last twenty-five years the number of families in Ireland has grown from 707,600 in 1981 to 1,053,200 in 2006 – a compound annual growth rate of 1.6 per cent. The population increased by 0.8 per cent per annum over the same period, implying that family formation has outstripped population growth by a factor of two to one.

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<sup>7</sup> The definitive text on the family in Ireland is the excellent book by Finola Kennedy: *Cottage to Crèche*.

**Table 3: Family units in private households by type of family unit, 1981-2006**

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2002	2006	Average annual change %
Couples without children	130.0	132.1	145.4	173.5	232.9	303.6	3.5
<i>of which cohabiting couples</i>				18.6	47.9	77.8	15.4
Couples with children	481.6	502.6	499.1	504.2	537.7	560.4	0.6
<i>of which cohabiting couples</i>				12.7	29.7	44.0	13.3
Lone mother with children	76.6	85.7	94.2	108.3	130.4	162.5	3.1
Lone father with children	19.4	19.0	19.2	20.8	23.5	26.7	1.3
Total family units	707.6	739.5	757.9	806.8	924.5	1053.2	1.6

Families consisting of couples without children were the fastest growing category during the twenty-five year period with an annual growth rate of 3.5 per cent. Female-headed lone parent families also grew by an appreciable 3.1 per cent per annum while the growth in the traditional category consisting of couples with children has been a less dramatic 0.6 per cent per annum. As a result of these differential growth rates the traditional family type of mother, father and child(ren) has declined in share from 68 per cent in 1981 to 53 per cent in 2006, while couples without children have increased their share from 18 per cent to 29 per cent over the same period.

#### 4.3 Cohabiting couples

For couples without children, three-quarters of the increase over the last twenty-five years occurred in the most recent decade with 45 per cent of this growth being accounted for by cohabiting couples. In the case of couples with children, 71 per cent of the twenty-five year growth occurred between 1996 and 2006 with 40 per cent of this being due to cohabiting couples. In 1996, about one in nine couples without children were cohabiting. By 2006 this had grown to one in four, representing a quadrupling of the numbers involved. For couples with children, cohabitants represented a mere 2.5 per cent in 1996 but a more pronounced 7.9 per cent ten years later. Information on cohabitants is also coming through from the annual birth statistics where for the year 2005, of the 19,528 births outside marriage, 44 per cent were to parents who were cohabiting. These births to cohabitants represented 14 per cent of all births in 2005.

The evidence available from the 2006 census results indicates that those who are cohabiting are young as evidenced by 41 per cent of the males and 53 per cent of females being less than 30 years of age. Furthermore, 83 per cent of the males are single (never-married) compared with 86 per cent of the females. It would therefore appear that cohabitation is mainly for young singles. However, it is not entirely clear from the evidence so far to what extent cohabitation is a precursor to marriage or whether it is a more permanent form of relationship replacing marriage.

#### *4.4 Lone parent families*

Families consisting of lone mothers with children have also increased at a rapid rate – more than doubling in number between 1981 and 2006 so that they now represent over 15 per cent of all families. Male-headed lone parent families have accounted for a fairly fixed 2.5 per cent of all families over the past quarter of a century.

What are the characteristics of these lone parents? Firstly, 85 per cent of them are female. In 36 per cent of cases the lone parent is single (never married) and of these nearly a half are aged 15-29 while a further 43 per cent are aged 30-44. Widowed persons make up 29 per cent of all lone parents with 71 per cent of these widowed persons being aged over 60 years. The final major category consists of separated persons who make up 22 per cent of lone parent families with 89 per cent of them aged 30-59 years.

The category “lone parents” is therefore not a homogeneous grouping. Rather, the persons involved vary from younger unmarried mothers (and to a lesser extent, fathers), to separated persons and widowed persons, of whom the latter invariably tend to be older. Clearly, the increase in the number of lone parent families is a direct result of trends in the number of births outside marriage as well as marital breakdown.

#### *4.5 Reconstituted families*

The UN 2010 census recommendations contain the following definition of a reconstituted family:

A reconstituted family is a family consisting of a married or cohabiting couple or a marital (registered) same-sex couple, with one or more children, where at least one child is a non-common child that is the child of only one member of the couple.

The definition adopted for the purpose of the present paper excludes the marital (registered) same-sex couples but includes lone parent families where at least one of the children is the step-son or step-daughter of the lone-parent. The latter category is worthy of consideration as it probably was a re-constituted family prior to the departure, for whatever reason, of the former partner of the lone parent.

Prior to the 2006 census, the method of determining the family status of members in a household was based on responses to the question “Relationship to person 1”.<sup>8</sup> From the responses given it was not always possible to determine unambiguously whether a second family unit was present in the case of a three generation household or whether a step-son or step-daughter was in fact the son or daughter of the partner of person 1. The introduction of a matrix approach to the relationship question, whereby the relationship of every person in the household to every other person in the household was asked of all persons up to person 4, has allowed multi-family households and reconstituted families to be identified.

Following the definition set out above, the number of reconstituted families identified in 2006 was 17,403, representing 1.7 per cent of all family units. Three out of four of these reconstituted families were husbands and wives and children while a further 18 per cent were cohabiting couples and children. The remaining 1,298 cases were lone parent families of which 79 per cent were headed by females.

Not surprisingly, reconstituted families tend to contain more children than families in general (2.6 children compared with 2 for families which had at least one child). Reconstituted families containing just one child accounted for 17 per cent of the total while one in three of the identified reconstituted families contained just two children. Those with exactly three children made up 29

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<sup>8</sup> In earlier censuses the term head of household (or one of the joint heads of household) was used in place of person 1.

per cent of the total while families containing four or more children accounted for the remaining 21 per cent.

Focusing on the predominant category (husbands and wives), in 69.1 per cent of these cases both parties were in their first marriage (to each other); in 22.1 per cent of cases one of the parties was in a first marriage while the other was previously married and in the final 8.8 per cent of cases both parties were previously married.

For reconstituted families where the partners were cohabiting, in 82 per cent of the 3,219 cases either one or the other of the partners was single (never married) while in 49 per cent both were single. The age distribution of the partners in these cohabiting reconstituted families was younger than for the husbands and wives above – 64 per cent of the males and 76 per cent of the females were aged less than 40 years.

#### 4.6 *The impact of migration on the family*

The number of usual residents born outside the country has nearly trebled over the last fifteen years, from an estimated 213,700 in 1991 to 612,600 in 2006. Those born abroad now represent 14.7 per cent of the usually resident population compared with 6.1 per cent fifteen years earlier. What impact has this inward migration had on family formation in Ireland? Analysing the number of young children under 5 born in Ireland by reference to the country of birth of their parents may help to shed some light on this. The following table provides such an analysis.

**Table 4: Usually resident Irish-born children aged 0-4 years by country of birth of parent(s), 1991-2006**

Country of birth of parent(s)	1991	1996	2002	2006
Both parents born in Ireland	198,554	161,450	153,797	159,554
Lone parent born in Ireland	17,619	21,927	27,143	39,473
One parent born in Ireland - the other in UK	25,826	26,631	30,498	32,363
One parent born in Ireland - the other abroad outside UK	3,914	4,740	7,786	11,318
Both parents born in UK	2,372	2,827	4,051	4,408
Lone parent born in UK	1,918	2,398	2,916	3,035
One parent born in UK - the other abroad outside UK	507	631	1,201	1,646
Both parents born abroad outside UK	869	1,009	6,674	18,254
Lone parent born abroad outside UK	229	383	1,596	5,010
Total children aged 0-4 years	251,808	221,996	235,662	275,061

Given that the table is derived from census results rather than from the vital statistics it is first necessary to put the overall figures in context before looking at the finer details. The table refers to the usually resident population of young children at the time of the various censuses which, allowing for the effects of migration, should correspond to the births registered over the previous five years. The census stock figure varied from approximately 90 per cent of the relevant births for 1991, 1996 and 2006 to a low of 86 per cent in 2002. The main reason for the difference between the registered births figures and census count of young children is the likelihood that some of the families involved may have emigrated after the birth of their child. These could either be Irish born parents temporarily returning to have their children in Ireland or foreign born parents returning to their home countries after the birth of their child in Ireland. Certainly, in the late 1990s and early 2000s there is some evidence of foreign-born women coming to Ireland to have their children in order to establish a claim on Irish nationality for themselves.



However, a Supreme Court judgement of 23 January 2003 confirmed that the Minister for Justice was entitled to deport the non-national parents of an Irish born child. On 19 February 2003, the Minister ceased accepting new applications for leave to remain from non-national parents where such applications were based solely on the birth of Irish born children. Of the 17,917 applications on hand up to that date, 16,693 were granted. The top five nationalities of the parents whose applications were granted were: Nigerians (6,155), Romanians (1,794), Chinese (1,072), Filipinos (993) and Pakistanis (613).

Returning to Table 4 above, the share of births in which none of the parents were Irish increased from 2.3 per cent in 1991 to 11.8 per cent in 2006. The proportion of births where both parents were Irish born has declined from 79 per cent to 58 per cent in the same period. Lone parenthood has increased for all categories shown with the numbers for those in which the parent was born abroad outside UK being significant. Also of significance is the 18,254 Irish born children aged 0-4 at the time of the 2006 census where both parents were born abroad outside the UK. It is not clear to what extent the families involved have put down roots in this country or whether they will return to their country of birth at some stage in the future.

## **5. HOW DO WE FARE IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT?**

In this penultimate section we view the changes occurring in Ireland in a wider European context. The background data are given in Table I in the Appendix.

Starting with marriages, Ireland appears with the Scandinavian countries at the top end of the distribution of average age of brides at first marriage – typically in the late twenties to early thirties. The next grouping of countries with average ages at first marriage for females in the mid- to high-twenties includes Spain, Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland. At the other end of the spectrum women still tend to marry for the first time in their early twenties in the countries of Eastern Europe. In terms of the female first marriage rate (or the probability of a woman marrying for the first time), Ireland occupies a mid-range position in Europe with countries such as Estonia, Slovenia, Belgium, Hungary and Latvia being ones where marriage is far less popular.

Ireland was top of the fertility table in 1980 with a TFR of 3.25. The country with the next highest value at that stage was Cyprus at 2.46. By 2005, only one country (France at 1.94) surpassed Ireland's TFR of 1.88. In the 25 year period mentioned a number of countries experienced recoveries in their fertility levels. These include Denmark (+ 16%), Luxembourg (+ 14%), Finland (+ 10%) and Netherlands (+ 8%). All of these countries have TFRs of 1.7 or more in 2005. Slovakia (- 46%) and Poland (- 46%) both experienced drastic falls in their fertility rates which now leaves them at a precarious TFR of 1.25. While Ireland and Cyprus experienced declines of 42 per cent over the same 25-year period, in the case of Ireland the TFR is at a relatively healthy 1.88 while Cyprus (1.42) is slipping towards low fertility.

In relation to the family, the results of the various censuses held in Europe around the year 2000 provide a rich source of information on living arrangements in Europe at the beginning of the new millennium. At the most basic level persons living in private households can be classified into children, spouses, cohabitants, lone parents and persons living alone.

In the main, most countries followed the UN census recommendations in the censuses which they carried out around the year 2000, although care needs to be taken in interpreting the results relating to children as some countries used an age cut-off while others did not. By confining the analysis of children to those less than 18 years of age it is possible to compare the results from country to country. Using this standardisation Cyprus (26.1%) and Ireland (25.2%) have the highest proportion of children aged less than 18 years living in private households. This is compatible with the 1980 TFR values referred to above. At the other end of the scale is Latvia

(16.4%) along with the following Southern European countries: Italy (17.2%), Spain (17.5%) and Greece (18.3%).

The Nordic countries have the highest proportions of persons living in private households who are cohabitants. Denmark (11.1%) leads the way followed by Finland (10.3%), Norway (9.1%) and Estonia (9.0%). Cohabitation is not as prevalent in the Southern European countries with Cyprus, Greece and Italy all having less than 2.5 per cent of occupants of private households in this category. Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic also had a low prevalence of cohabiting partners while Ireland (4.1%) was in the middle of the range.

Estonia and Latvia had the highest incidences of lone parenthood (7% and 6.9% of all residents of private households, respectively). However, as pointed out previously, care needs to be taken in interpreting the data for lone parenthood as it may arise from births outside marriage, marital breakdown or widowhood. The high mortality rates in Estonia and Latvia may point to the latter category as being the likely source. The lowest incidences of lone parenthood occurred in Cyprus (2.0%), Switzerland (2.3%) and Netherlands (2.5%) while Ireland (4.1%) was again in the mid-range.

The last category distinguished is persons living alone. The Northern European countries had the highest incidence rates with Denmark comfortably heading the field (22.3%). Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland were in the range 16-17%. The more family-centred Southern European countries had the lowest percentages of persons living alone especially Cyprus (5.2%) and Portugal (6.2%). Ireland (7.3%) was in the bottom quintile of countries reported on.

In attempting to assess how Ireland compares with its European neighbours from a marriage, fertility and family perspective, it must be realised that Europe is not a homogeneous entity. It would appear that Ireland is a demographic latecomer in many of the aspects referred to in the paper. Cohabitation, although a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland, is now well established and will no doubt increase further. This will undoubtedly impact on marriage rates and the ages at which couples marry for the first time. Though high in international terms our fertility rate has been in decline but not to any serious extent. It appears quite plausible that the levels pertaining in the Scandinavian countries may be attained during the course of the next decade. Less likely, is that fertility will return to replacement levels.

The reasonably high fertility rates by comparison with our European neighbours will ensure that children will continue to feature strongly in the family statistics unlike the Southern European experience where fertility rates have fallen to what demographers call the lowest low levels.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The paper looked at the changes which have been occurring in trends relating to marriage, fertility, and the family in Ireland. The approach adopted has been to look at macro-level data derived mainly from Censuses of Population. Philipov (2006) has drawn attention to the shortcomings of using such an approach.

*“A drawback of the use of macro-level data is that they describe the net effect of all relevant demographic trends, and therefore findings should be interpreted with care.”*

However, in the absence of micro-level data capable of tracking inter-alia cohabitation, marriage, union dissolution and reconstitution, family formation and dissolution and living arrangements, we have little alternative but to have recourse to the ready available sources such as the census.

Cohabitation has been noted to be on the increase with one in four couples without children cohabiting. Marriage is occurring at older ages and the limited evidence available points to a

stabilisation of the decline in the female first marriage rate. The older age at marriage is consistent with longer periods being spent in third level education and emphasis being placed on establishing a career before entering into a commitment to marriage.

The increase in the average age at which females are having their first child is consistent with later marriages while the narrowing of the differential between the average ages for different birth orders suggests that the spacing of children is now concentrated over a shorter period of time than heretofore.

Adjusting the period measure of fertility to allow for a postponement effect does not appear to have a marked effect. More likely is that there may not be a recovery in fertility. This would tend to be borne out by the census data on the number of children born to women – with an indication that women born in Ireland in the mid-1960s may be the first women not to achieve replacement fertility. It is a matter for conjecture that the affordability of housing requiring both parties in a couple to work, the growing distance between home and work and the difficulties in finding suitable crèche facilities have all combined to put downward pressure on the fertility rate.

While the predominant family type still consists of husbands and wives and their children, the growth in the number of couples without children clearly reflects a lifestyle choice on the part of certain couples. Lone parenthood is also more prevalent with over one in three of the persons involved being single. Higher rates of marital breakdown have also contributed to the growth of this category as well as opening the way for reconstituted families, the magnitude of which was estimated as 1.7 per cent of all family units.

The increase in the number of usual residents of this country who were born abroad has begun to impact on the make up of the family in Ireland. One of the fastest growing categories has been children born in this country to parents, both of whom were born outside Ireland and the UK.

It is clear from the information presented in the paper that Ireland is experiencing major demographic change at present. Our fertility rate, although below replacement, is still high by European standards and the outlook for the foreseeable future is for the maintenance of a healthy though declining natural increase in population.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A: Female first marriage rate and average age of bride at first marriage, 1980-2005**

Year	Rate	Age	Year	Rate	Age	Year	Rate	Age
1980	0.83	24.0	1989	0.69	26.1	1998	0.60	28.5
1981	0.77	24.3	1990	0.69	26.3	1999	0.60	28.7
1982	0.76	24.9	1991	0.67	26.5	2000	0.60	29.0
1983	0.72	25.0	1992	0.63	26.8	2001	0.60	29.2
1984	0.67	24.8	1993	0.64	27.1	2002	0.60	29.4
1985	0.68	25.0	1994	0.63	27.5	2003	0.60	29.6
1986	0.67	25.2	1995	0.58	27.7	2004	0.60	29.9
1987	0.67	25.5	1996	0.60	28.1	2005	0.60	30.1
1988	0.70	25.8	1997	0.60	28.3			

**Table B: Births and women aged 20-39 years, 1961 to 2006**

Year	Births	Women 20-39 (000s)	Year	Births	Women 20-39 (000s)	Year	Births	Women 20-39 (000s)
1961	59825	313	1976	67718	403	1991	52718	500.9
1962	61782	314	1977	68892	416	1992	51089	510.2
1963	63246	315	1978	70299	428	1993	49304	516.7
1964	64072	315	1979	72539	442	1994	48255	522.1
1965	63525	316	1980	74064	453	1995	48787	528.1
1966	62215	316	1981	72158	466	1996	50655	536.6
1967	61307	320	1982	70843	476	1997	52775	545.6
1968	61004	324	1983	67117	485	1998	53969	553.9
1969	62912	328	1984	64062	493	1999	53924	565.9
1970	64382	333	1985	62388	500	2000	54789	579.8
1971	67551	339	1986	61620	506	2001	57854	595.1
1972	68527	351	1987	58433	507	2002	60503	618.3
1973	68713	363	1988	54600	503	2003	61517	630.8
1974	68907	376	1989	52018	498	2004	61972	642.7
1975	67178	390	1990	53044	497	2005	61042	659.2
						2006	61500	680.7

**Table C: Age specific and total fertility rates, 1955 to 2005**

Year	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	TFR
1955	10.3	90.2	179.3	200.8	137.8	56.5	4.0	3.39
1956	9.6	92.7	184.2	197.1	140.0	54.2	3.9	3.41
1957	9.3	94.4	188.5	204.6	145.1	57.3	4.1	3.52
1958	7.8	93.3	194.2	204.3	147.7	52.8	4.4	3.52
1959	8.2	99.1	202.1	206.0	154.8	53.1	4.4	3.64
1960	8.8	103.9	209.6	213.1	156.3	56.0	4.2	3.76
1961	9.5	108.2	216.9	209.6	152.1	57.7	4.2	3.79
1962	11.2	114.2	224.1	214.8	155.8	59.5	4.5	3.92
1963	12.2	120.1	229.2	223.0	153.9	60.1	3.5	4.01
1964	13.1	123.1	237.8	221.7	152.3	61.3	3.7	4.06
1965	14.0	125.1	236.1	218.9	150.3	57.6	4.2	4.03
1966	13.5	128.1	232.5	213.1	144.4	54.9	4.3	3.95
1967	14.5	129.7	220.0	208.3	138.6	52.9	4.4	3.84
1968	14.1	134.8	222.5	197.8	133.8	48.5	4.1	3.78
1969	15.4	139.7	228.7	199.5	133.1	48.1	4.4	3.85
1970	16.3	145.5	228.7	201.9	131.9	45.3	3.7	3.87
1971	19.1	150.3	243.5	200.5	131.7	46.6	3.3	3.98
1972	21.3	152.1	241.5	187.6	125.7	43.4	3.4	3.88
1973	22.4	149.9	235.0	181.2	115.6	41.3	2.7	3.74
1974	22.6	145.4	229.5	171.9	111.2	39.9	2.8	3.62
1975	22.8	138.5	216.0	162.2	100.2	36.8	2.6	3.40
1976	21.9	133.7	211.7	162.2	94.9	34.8	3.1	3.31
1977	21.2	130.4	205.5	166.7	93.9	33.2	3.0	3.27
1978	21.8	126.2	201.7	167.8	96.5	31.1	2.8	3.24
1979	22.7	125.9	202.5	168.4	94.1	29.9	2.3	3.23
1980	23.0	125.3	202.3	165.7	97.3	29.6	2.3	3.23
1981	22.2	117.4	190.3	161.5	93.6	26.5	2.4	3.07
1982	20.7	110.2	185.0	156.9	91.6	24.9	2.2	2.96
1983	18.7	102.6	172.3	146.9	84.6	25.0	1.7	2.76
1984	18.0	95.4	163.3	138.4	78.9	21.8	1.9	2.59
1985	16.6	87.2	158.6	138.4	75.3	21.6	1.5	2.50
1986	16.4	83.1	154.3	139.0	73.4	21.2	1.5	2.44
1987	16.1	75.4	147.9	132.3	68.6	19.8	1.3	2.31
1988	15.3	69.6	141.0	125.5	63.2	17.8	1.1	2.17
1989	14.8	64.0	134.4	122.0	62.4	17.0	1.1	2.08
1990	16.7	63.3	137.6	126.2	63.1	15.4	1.1	2.12
1991	17.1	64.0	131.8	124.4	63.4	15.2	1.0	2.09
1992	16.9	58.9	123.9	122.3	61.3	14.4	0.8	1.99
1993	16.3	53.8	116.5	121.2	58.5	14.1	0.9	1.91
1994	15.0	50.7	112.5	119.8	58.6	12.8	0.7	1.85
1995	15.1	50.3	106.7	123.5	60.3	13.1	0.8	1.85
1996	16.7	52.2	105.3	127.1	63.9	11.8	0.6	1.89
1997	17.5	50.9	106.4	131.5	66.6	13.4	0.8	1.94
1998	19.2	52.5	103.1	131.5	69.3	13.4	0.6	1.95
1999	20.2	51.0	99.4	129.5	68.5	12.9	0.6	1.91
2000	19.5	51.6	95.1	129.3	71.3	13.6	0.5	1.90
2001	19.9	53.3	95.1	134.1	75.3	13.9	0.7	1.96
2002	19.4	52.8	93.7	134.5	80.0	14.5	0.6	1.98
2003	19.0	50.3	92.6	135.0	82.3	15.7	0.5	1.98
2004	17.1	49.1	88.4	134.2	83.9	16.2	0.5	1.95
2005	16.8	45.9	78.8	130.3	87.2	16.8	0.6	1.88

**Table D: Percentage of births outside marriage for first births and all births, 1980 to 2005**

Year	All births			First births		
	Total	Outside marriage	%	Total	Outside marriage	%
1980	74064	3723	5.0	21590	3111	14.4
1981	72158	3914	5.4	20601	3254	15.8
1982	70843	4358	6.2	20145	3520	17.5
1983	67117	4552	6.8	19079	3624	19.0
1984	64062	5116	8.0	19266	3906	20.3
1985	62388	5282	8.5	19997	4065	20.3
1986	61620	5946	9.6	20285	4470	22.0
1987	58433	6347	10.9	19622	4662	23.8
1988	54600	6483	11.9	18883	4788	25.4
1989	52018	6671	12.8	16994	4697	27.6
1990	53044	7767	14.6	17738	5304	29.9
1991	52718	8912	16.9	18130	5974	33.0
1992	51089	9211	18.0	17864	6182	34.6
1993	49304	9826	19.9	17330	6265	36.2
1994	48255	10049	20.8	17009	6232	36.6
1995	48787	10862	22.3	17760	6725	37.9
1996	50655	12797	25.3	19216	7989	41.6
1997	52775	14149	26.8	20208	8654	42.8
1998	53969	15492	28.7	21249	9558	45.0
1999	53924	16790	31.1	21825	10212	46.8
2000	54789	17266	31.5	22121	10307	46.6
2001	57854	18114	31.3	23440	10522	44.9
2002	60503	18879	31.2	24199	10627	43.9
2003	61529	19210	31.2	24376	10575	43.4
2004	61684	19938	32.3	24125	10502	43.5
2005	61042	19528	32.0	24621	10736	43.6

**Table E: Average age at maternity for first births distinguishing births within and outside marriage and total births, 1961-2005**

Year	Within	Outside	Total	Year	Within	Outside	Total	Year	Within	Outside	Total
1961	27.4	23.2	27.0	1976	25.4	21.7	25.0	1991	28.4	21.9	26.3
1962	27.1	23.0	26.7	1977	25.6	21.8	25.0	1992	28.7	22.1	26.4
1963	26.9	23.0	26.5	1978	25.6	21.6	25.0	1993	29.1	22.3	26.6
1964	26.7	22.6	26.3	1979	25.6	21.5	24.9	1994	29.4	22.4	26.8
1965	26.6	22.9	26.2	1980	25.6	21.7	25.0	1995	29.7	22.7	27.0
1966	26.4	23.0	26.0	1981	25.7	21.6	25.0	1996	29.9	22.9	27.0
1967	26.3	22.3	25.8	1982	26.0	21.6	25.1	1997	30.1	23.1	27.1
1968	26.0	22.5	25.6	1983	26.2	21.5	25.2	1998	30.3	23.2	27.1
1969	25.8	22.4	25.5	1984	26.5	21.6	25.4	1999	30.6	23.4	27.2
1970	25.7	22.4	25.3	1985	27.2	21.9	26.0	2000	30.6	23.6	27.4
1971	25.5	22.3	25.2	1986	27.4	22.1	26.1	2001	30.7	23.9	27.6
1972	25.4	22.2	25.1	1987	27.7	22.1	26.3	2002	30.7	24.2	27.8
1973	25.4	21.9	25.0	1988	28.0	22.1	26.4	2003	31.0	24.6	28.2
1974	25.4	22.0	24.9	1989	28.1	21.9	26.3	2004	31.2	24.9	28.5
1975	25.3	21.8	24.8	1990	28.3	21.9	26.3	2005	31.4	25.1	28.7

**Table F: Average age at maternity by birth order, 1980-2005**

Year	All births	Order 1	Order 2	Order 3
1980	28.8	25.0	27.5	29.9
1981	28.9	25.0	27.5	30.1
1982	29.0	25.2	27.6	30.1
1983	29.1	25.3	27.7	30.2
1984	29.1	25.4	27.8	30.2
1985	29.2	25.7	28.1	30.5
1986	29.4	25.8	28.3	30.6
1987	29.4	26.0	28.5	30.8
1988	29.5	26.1	28.8	31.0
1989	29.6	26.3	29.0	31.1
1990	29.6	26.3	29.1	31.4
1991	29.6	26.3	29.3	31.5
1992	29.7	26.4	29.5	31.6
1993	29.8	26.6	29.7	31.7
1994	29.9	26.8	29.9	32.0
1995	30.0	27.0	30.1	32.1
1996	30.0	27.0	30.3	32.3
1997	30.1	27.1	30.4	32.5
1998	30.1	27.1	30.5	32.7
1999	30.1	27.2	30.6	32.8
2000	30.2	27.4	30.8	32.9
2001	30.3	27.6	30.8	32.9
2002	30.4	27.9	31.0	33.0
2003	30.6	28.2	31.0	33.1
2004	30.8	28.5	31.2	33.2
2005	31.0	28.7	31.5	33.4

**Table G: Female birth cohorts by number of children to whom they have given birth and proportion childless – 2006 census**

Year	Average number of children per woman	Percentage of childless women	Year	Average number of children per woman	Percentage of childless women	Year	Average number of children per woman	Percentage of childless women
Pre-1930	3.5	25.2%						
1930s	3.6	18.5%						
1940	3.4	15.6%	1950	2.9	14.3%	1960	2.4	17.0%
1941	3.3	15.1%	1951	2.9	14.5%	1961	2.3	17.2%
1942	3.4	14.4%	1952	2.8	14.9%	1962	2.2	17.9%
1943	3.3	13.8%	1953	2.7	15.2%	1963	2.2	18.1%
1944	3.2	14.3%	1954	2.7	15.6%	1964	2.2	18.7%
1945	3.2	14.6%	1955	2.6	15.7%	1965	2.1	19.3%
1946	3.2	14.0%	1956	2.6	16.0%	1966	2.0	20.4%
1947	3.1	13.6%	1957	2.5	16.4%	1967	2.0	21.4%
1948	3.0	14.8%	1958	2.4	16.4%	1968	1.9	23.4%
1949	3.0	14.2%	1959	2.4	16.7%	1969	1.7	25.0%



**Table H: Number of legal abortions carried out on Irish women in England and Wales, 1970 to 2005**

Year	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+	Total	20-29 as a percent of total
1970	29	116	54	36	24	3	261	64.8%
1971	69	259	146	50	40	14	578	70.0%
1972	136	387	254	111	54	32	974	65.8%
1973	179	520	280	115	66	32	1193	67.1%
1974	208	646	315	143	75	34	1421	67.6%
1975	237	695	356	162	74	48	1573	66.8%
1976	248	796	441	188	108	40	1821	67.9%
1977	320	916	499	255	126	68	2184	64.8%
1978	375	1067	602	263	158	83	2548	65.5%
1979	421	1149	631	345	173	84	2804	63.5%
1980	496	1381	736	381	224	102	3320	63.8%
1981	559	1433	778	457	273	103	3603	61.3%
1982	556	1437	837	426	296	101	3653	62.2%
1983	559	1453	804	425	305	130	3677	61.4%
1984	556	1521	843	541	351	133	3946	59.9%
1985	574	1535	828	464	340	147	3888	60.8%
1986	569	1490	866	502	337	154	3918	60.1%
1987	512	1381	824	466	320	170	3673	60.0%
1988	556	1389	843	536	338	176	3839	58.2%
1989	588	1326	825	473	348	161	3721	57.8%
1990	667	1498	880	503	358	158	4064	58.5%
1991	700	1511	845	521	385	192	4154	56.7%
1992	716	1610	855	529	372	172	4254	57.9%
1993	659	1678	924	561	372	208	4402	59.1%
1994	628	1856	987	545	387	187	4590	61.9%
1995	698	1763	943	561	382	185	4532	59.7%
1996	766	1871	1107	608	351	190	4894	60.9%
1997	822	1986	1235	645	448	204	5340	60.3%
1998	898	2137	1489	686	462	218	5891	61.6%
1999	927	2301	1519	749	502	227	6226	61.4%
2000	884	2243	1631	853	549	231	6391	60.6%
2001	944	2404	1685	875	508	257	6673	61.3%
2002	897	2241	1612	921	550	269	6490	59.4%
2003	836	2090	1597	954	579	264	6320	58.3%
2004	798	1963	1663	951	607	235	6217	58.3%
2005	694	1759	1451	860	541	280	5585	57.5%

**Table I: Data for other European countries**

Country	Average age of bride at first marriage	TFR	Total	Child (any age)	Child less than 18	Spouse	Cohabitant	Lone parent	Living alone	Other
Percentage persons in private households from Census 2000										
Austria	27.9	1.41	100.0	30.5	20.3	41.1	5.6	4.4	14.1	4.3
Belgium	27.1	1.72	100.0	30.7	20.5	43.3	4.4	4.1	13.5	4.0
Bulgaria	25.2	1.29	100.0	28.5	18.4	49.0	4.0	3.7	8.4	6.4
Cyprus	27.5	1.42	100.0	37.9	26.1	50.6	0.8	2.0	5.2	3.4
Czech Republic	26.0	1.28	100.0	32.8	20.0	43.5	2.5	5.7	12.6	3.1
Denmark	30.4	1.80	100.0	24.9	21.6	38.8	11.1	2.8	22.3	0.2
Estonia	25.7	1.50	100.0	30.3	21.8	33.0	9.0	7.0	14.4	6.2
Finland	29.0	1.80	100.0	28.3	22.0	37.4	10.3	3.7	16.9	3.4
France	28.5	1.94	100.0	31.2	23.0	49.3	0.0	3.5	12.9	3.1
Germany	28.4	1.34	100.0	25.8	18.5	47.5	5.4	2.9	16.6	1.8
Greece	27.5	1.28	100.0	32.3	18.3	48.3	1.5	3.4	7.0	7.5
Hungary	26.2	1.32	100.0	32.3	20.0	42.7	5.5	5.3	10.2	4.0
Ireland	30.1	1.88	100.0	38.8	25.2	36.6	4.1	4.1	7.3	9.2
Italy	28.0	1.34	100.0	32.9	17.2	47.8	1.8	3.7	9.6	4.2
Latvia	25.1	1.31	100.0	28.5	16.4	29.6	2.9	6.9	8.5	23.5
Liechtenstein	29.8	1.44	100.0	31.4	22.1	43.9	3.7	2.9	13.4	4.6
Lithuania	24.7	1.27	100.0	23.7	23.7	41.9	3.2	3.3	11.2	16.7
Luxembourg	28.1	1.70	100.0	31.2	21.5	47.3	0.0	3.4	11.7	6.5
Netherlands	28.7	1.73	100.0	29.0	22.1	43.7	8.5	2.5	14.6	1.6
Norway	29.1	1.83	100.0	31.7	23.5	37.2	9.1	3.8	16.5	1.7
Poland	24.9	1.24	100.0	37.7	22.8	43.5	1.0	5.4	8.7	3.6
Portugal	26.3	1.40	100.0	33.1	19.5	49.1	3.6	3.6	6.2	4.4
Romania	24.1	1.29	100.0	32.8	21.4	47.7	3.9	4.0	6.5	5.0
Slovakia	25.0	1.25	100.0	37.4	22.9	21.3	0.6	4.6	11.1	25.0
Slovenia	27.8	1.26	100.0	35.7	-	42.0	4.3	5.3	7.7	5.0
Spain	28.6	1.34	100.0	34.7	17.5	44.1	2.8	4.1	7.1	7.3
Switzerland	28.6	1.42	100.0	27.6	20.6	44.8	5.5	2.3	16.0	3.7
United Kingdom	28.1	1.80	100.0	29.9	22.6	40.3	7.6	4.7	12.8	4.7

**FIRST VOTE OF THANKS PROPOSED BY DR. FINOLA KENNEDY, INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION.**

It is a privilege to stand before you this evening to propose the Vote of Thanks to the President for his magisterial presentation. You will all agree that we have been listening to someone who is complete master of his subject and who has successfully communicated both data and analysis in a manner which is only possible when one does have such command of one's subject. Aidan Punch has spent 35 years with the Central Statistics Office, working in price statistics, national accounts and population statistics. He has been in charge of four censuses of population. He was Chair of the European Population Committee in 2002 and 2003.

The SSISI holds a unique place in Irish public discourse. Given the tradition of the Society and the calibre of many of the contributors over the years, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that this evening we stand on the shoulders of giants. There is one name in particular that I would like to mention in the context of the topic before us and that is Roy Geary, founding Director of the CSO. In the 1954/55 Session, Geary contributed a pioneering paper to the Society on 'The Family in Irish Census of Population Statistics'. I feel that were he here this evening he would be content that a great tradition lives on.

The President, in his paper, has provided a comprehensive view of marriage and fertility trends together with a depiction of the changing family, including the impact of immigration. He has placed all these changes in a European context. Among the striking features highlighted are the rise in the average age at marriage which now stands at 33 for men and 31 for women. It is necessary to go back to 1944/45 to find an average age at marriage of 33 for men. For women the average age at first marriage (30.1), is just behind Denmark (30.4), at the top of a group of almost thirty European countries. There has been a decline in the total fertility rate with a marked decline in fertility in 25-29 age group. The average age of a mother at first birth is nearly 29, one year less than the average age at first marriage, as the traditionally strong link between marriage and fertility has been broken with the increase in births outside marriage. There has been a rise in permanent childlessness and a marked rise in cohabitation.

For a few moments I would like to focus on possible explanations for some of the changes which have been presented with such a blend of science and skill. It is well known in the social sciences that key insights may be gained, and our understanding enlarged, by studying deviations from the norm. For much of the twentieth century Irish patterns of marriage, fertility and the family deviated from the norm of more developed European countries. Then in a brief period they might be said to have 'caught up', for example, Irish fertility rates have joined those in other European countries at below replacement level. The President describes Ireland as 'a demographic latecomer' in many aspects.

For decades, indeed generations, the values of the Catholic Church, the Church of the overwhelming majority of the people, were reflected in behaviour patterns and linked with Ireland's demographics. In his satirical work of genius, *The Midnight Court*, Brian Merriman mourned the *emergence* of Catholic Puritanism. I would suggest that neither the emergence of a strict moral code nor its gradual abandonment would explain the changes that have occurred without taking account of important economic changes. The struggle between economic incentives and religious beliefs may well have affected the timing of Irish adjustment to family change, but economic incentives appear to have won out as they have won out in other traditionally Catholic countries including Spain, Portugal and Italy. Poland, with a TPR of 1.24, has the lowest rate of any European country.

Contraception, abortion and a steep increase in the use of the 'morning after' pill have all contributed to fertility control. In the context of the data presented by the President on the decline in the number of women with addresses in Ireland seeking abortions in Britain in recent years, the effect of the increase in sales of the 'morning after' pill may be a factor to be considered.

I would suggest that public policies are also important in understanding the changes which have occurred because policies can influence behaviour fairly directly. The family is in part a legal-economic construct so that legislation which, for example, equates the rights of all children to inheritance, whether born within or outside marriage, or legislation which might provide equal taxation for couples whether married or

cohabiting, or a taxation policy which favours dual earner couples, may contribute in some manner to behavioural outcomes.

To understand the changes I think it is necessary to look to some combination of economic change and policy change as well as change in values. In earlier decades it could be argued that marriage was delayed or prevented due to a lack of economic opportunity. When the economy improved in the 1960s the age at marriage fell. Yet despite the buoyant economy of the nineteen nineties, marriages were postponed, some perhaps permanently. In the 1980s, a new factor entered the picture with the general availability of contraception and the decoupling of the rigid link between sexual intercourse and marriage. Values changed in line with new opportunities and cohabitation became a widespread lifestyle choice. The study by Brendan Halpin and Cathal O'Donoghue<sup>9</sup> of the University of Limerick throws some light on cohabitation. Halpin and O'Donoghue show that twenty per cent of cohabitants exit this status annually, with four out of five of those exiting via marriage. One in five terminations of cohabitation are dissolutions. They suggest that this latter figure may be an underestimate. They found that over forty per cent of new marriages come from cohabitations; a striking finding as it suggests that cohabitation is approaching the norm for those entering marriage.

The expansion in opportunity for extended education which occurred in the 1970s, together with equal access to employment for married women from the time of Irish entry into the EEC, and the growth in job opportunities, especially in services, meant that a woman was likely to spend longer in education, to remain in employment after marriage and to control her fertility. In the language of the economist the opportunity cost of child bearing and child rearing increased. A further policy stimulus to this situation was given with the individualisation of the tax system in 2000.

The long run shift from agriculture to industry and services meant a shift away from the family as a production unit. A range of services, hitherto provided within families from food production to cookery to laundry, moved to the market place. On the other hand, there is an irony in the fact that as the economy has moved more towards Boston than Berlin, certain aspects of the family have moved in the direction of Berlin as more and more of the traditional family services from child care to elder care are either being provided by the state, or their provision by the state is being sought on an expanding scale. This shift raises an important question for the economist regarding the impact on human capital formation of group care for very young children. Namely, is there a possibility that as we prioritise the economy and child care becomes subsidiary to economic development, we may, in so doing, damage the long run potential of the economy? I don't know the answer but I do know that from Marshall to Heckman, there is a tradition in economics which values early parental care as vital investment in human capital.

Another challenging issue concerns changes at the other end of the age spectrum – the marked long term increase in the expectation of life, the corresponding ageing of the population and the number of elderly living alone. The number of elderly who at present and in the future will require state-provided care is an important policy concern and one closely related to changing family patterns.

When Shane Whelan asked me to propose the Vote of Thanks, he told me that Aidan's paper would be a comprehensive scientific presentation and that I might supply a 'short colour piece'. Thus cast in the role of tabloid rather than *Times*, I thought the quickest, and completely unscientific, way to a colour piece would be to ask all present to reflect briefly on the changes they have observed in their own families. I don't think it would be too surprising if we found cohabitation, separation, perhaps divorce, possibly a gay relationship, quite likely an extra-marital birth, certainly postponement of marriage. On the other hand, one might find lurking within the family a 31 year old woman, possessed of an excellent education and a career, desperate to *become* a housewife with a rich, generous partner, and a pair of perfect children before the strike of midnight on the biological clock, or a 33 year old man worried that he had missed the boat. I have no doubt that at some future meeting of the Society further changes in families will be discussed. What is waiting in the shadows will emerge in due course. In his luminous presentation, Aidan has shone a torch on where we are today.

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<sup>9</sup> Brendan Halpin and Cathal O'Donoghue, 'Cohabitation in Ireland: evidence from survey data', WP 2004-01, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, May 2004.

## SECOND VOTE OF THANKS PROPOSED BY CORMAC Ó GRÁDA, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN.<sup>10</sup>

In 1841, Thomas Larcom transformed census-taking in Ireland from little more than a head-count to a social survey. All censuses carried out here since, apart from that of 1979, have been in the same tradition. A related tradition, carried on tonight through Aidan Punch's distinguished contribution, is for census directors to present early analyses of census results to this Society. Thus in March 1913 W.J. Thompson presented a paper on the 1911 census, 'illustrated by lantern slides', while three decades earlier, in May 1883, T.W. Grimshaw employed 'the late census' in order to compare conditions in Ireland in 1841 and 1881. The material so skilfully analysed here highlights in its own unique way the social and cultural transformations taking place in Ireland in recent decades. As more volumes of the 2006 census become available, it will be possible to analyse other social trends such as the age at which children leave home, the living conditions of the elderly, the impact of occupation and education on demographic behaviour, and so on.

Many of the measures employed in the paper – the mean age at marriage, the number of cohabiting couples, frequency of marriage dissolution, age-specific fertility, the incidence of childlessness – encapsulate a process of rapid demographic convergence to a European norm. A by-product of that convergence is that some of these measures convey less demographic information than in the past. In particular, marriage, unlike birth and death, is a social convention, and marriage data are much less useful to demographers today than a few decades ago. By way of compensation, the extra information on fertility in the 2006 census is particularly welcome.

One of the most familiar and most fundamental shifts documented here – gradual at first in the 1970s, headlong in the 1980s and 1990s – is that in the proportion of extra-marital births. Several explanations have been proposed for it. One is that secularization reduced the stigma traditionally attached to illegitimacy. A second is that the introduction of the lone parent's allowance (in 1973) and social housing provisions which encouraged single working-class women to become – in the highly-charged phraseology of Kevin Myers – 'professional unmarried mothers, living off the State until the grave takes over' (Myers 2005). A third explanation refers to the gloomy economic context of the 1980s; high youth unemployment and low educational attainment reduced the opportunity cost of having a child at an early age. At the same time, the lack of resources to set up a joint household prompted some mothers to go it alone (Hannan and Ó Riain 1993: 126-7).

Equally dramatic, and also mentioned here, has been the much slower rise in the proportion (less so in the number) of births outside marriage in the new millennium (Figure 1). This deceleration has been accompanied by a significant reduction in the share of younger women in the total (Figure 2). Teen births, mostly extra-marital, surged from 1.6 per cent in 1960 to 3.3 per cent of all births in 1980, and to 6.3 per cent in 2001, but have been falling as a proportion of all births since. They were down to 4 per cent of the total in 2005. The total number has fallen from 3,371 in 1999 to 2,469 in 2005. A decade ago, the share of out-of-marriage births accounted for by mothers aged less than 25 years was 58 per cent; today it is about 43 per cent.

Why this happened is not so clear. Perhaps the spread of information about and readier access to birth control helped, as has been claimed for the Netherlands<sup>11</sup> but a more plausible explanation is the altered economic context, notably the significant fall in the youth unemployment rate. For females aged 15-24, the unemployment rate has plummeted from well over one-fifth in the late 1980s to about 8 per cent today, while the percentage in employment rose more or less in tandem (from 36.2 per cent 1988 to 44.0 per cent in 2006).

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Tony Fahey and Brendan Walsh for comments on an earlier version.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000\\_07/uk/apprend2.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_07/uk/apprend2.htm)

The reduction in teenage births is welcome, not only for the sake of those immediately concerned but also from the standpoint of the broader community. Presumably most children born outside marriage to older women are 'planned' and associated with stable and viable family units (Fahey and Russell 2001).

Was the reduction in teenage births associated with a reduction in teenage conceptions? Here data on abortions carried out on Irish residents who travelled to Great Britain since the early 1990s, also presented in Aidan Punch's paper, offer a partial answer. Overall, since 2001 there has been a reduction in the number of abortions carried out on Irish residents in the UK, which tallies with the impression that the proportion of 'crisis' pregnancies has been declining (Figure 3). As Aidan Punch notes, there is an issue as to whether increasing recourse to abortions elsewhere may distort the impression given by Figure 3. However, recent data from Belgium and the Netherlands – the countries highlighted most in this respect by pro-choice activists – would seem to rule out any significant increase in the traffic from Ireland. In Belgium, the number of terminations on non-residents totalled 414 in 2002 and 349 in 2003, respectively, compared to 15,666 and 16,653 on residents.<sup>12</sup> Recent trends in the Netherlands, described in Figure 4, are hardly corroborative either.

There has also been a reduction in the number of teenage terminations (Figures 5 and 6). However, when linked with Irish data on births by age, a rise in the proportion of teen pregnancies that ended in terminations is indicated (Figure 7), which is again consistent with the higher opportunity cost of having a baby in fully-employed economy. For other age groups, there have been slight falls in the recent past in the proportions ending in terminations.

It is a pleasure to second the vote of thanks for such an enlightening and stimulating paper.

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<sup>12</sup> see <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/ab-belgium.html>

Figure 1: Annual Change in Illegitimacy Rate (5 Yr-MA), 1931-2004

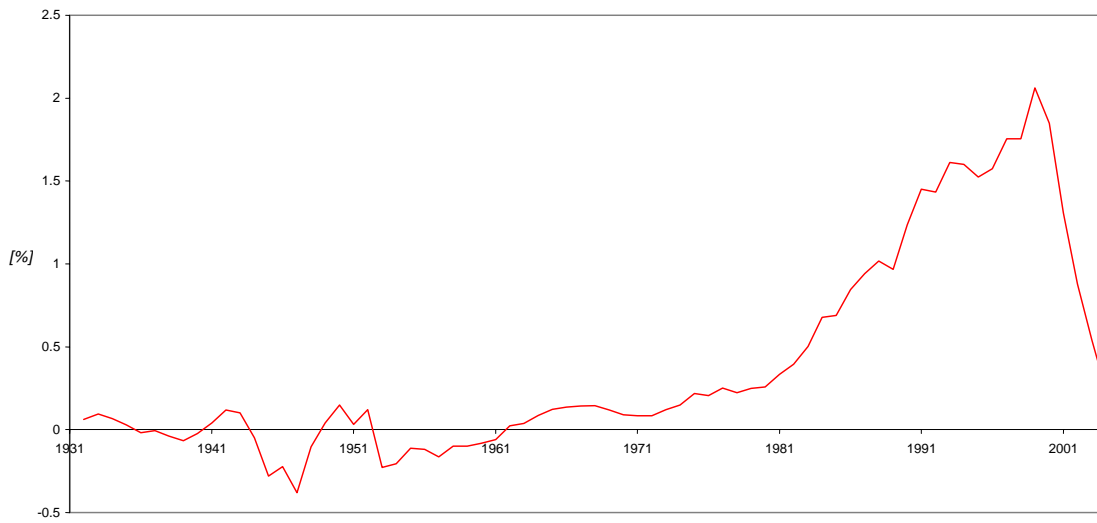


Figure 2: Births Outside Marriage, 1997-2005 (% of total)

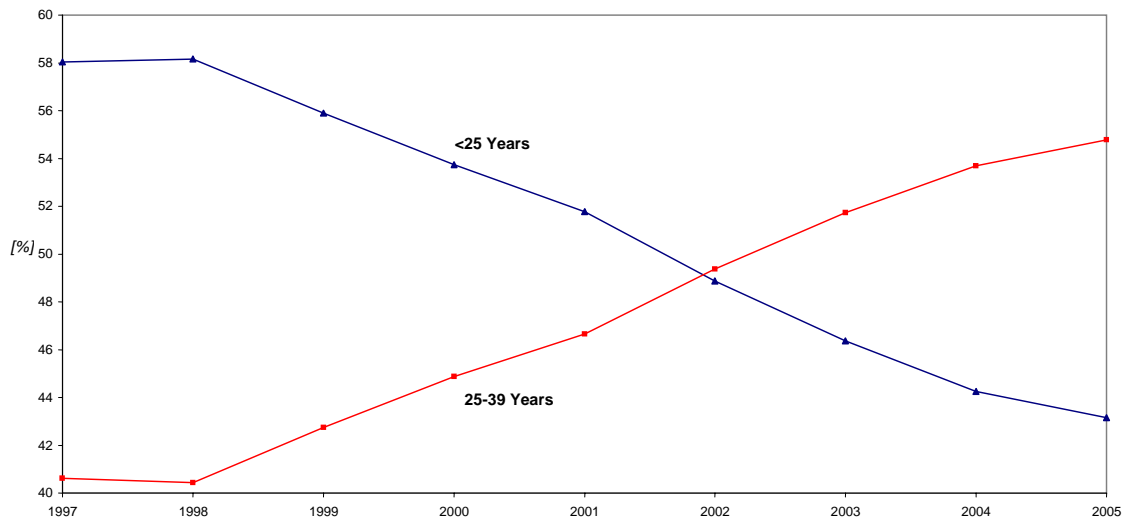


Figure 3: Induced Abortions: Irish Residents in E&W, 1991-2005

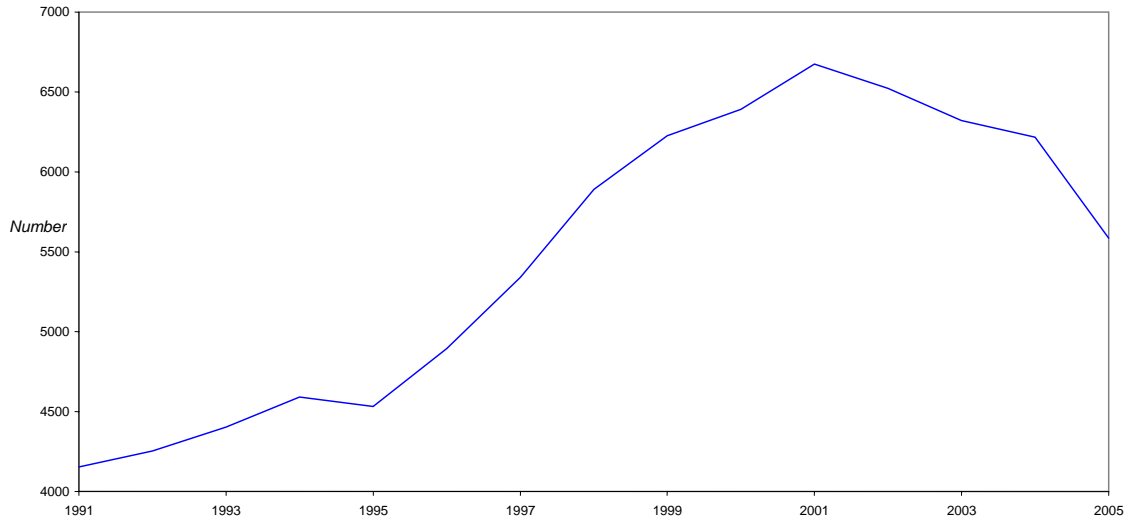


Figure 4: Abortions in The Netherlands, 1992-2005

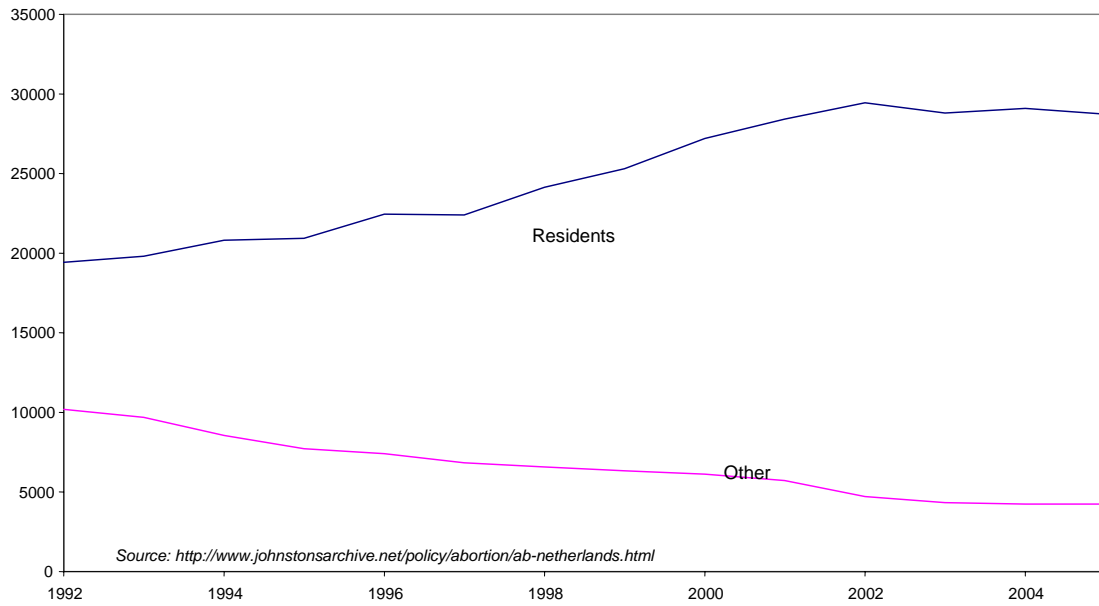




Figure 5: Induced Abortions: Percentages <25 and 25+ Years, 1991-2005

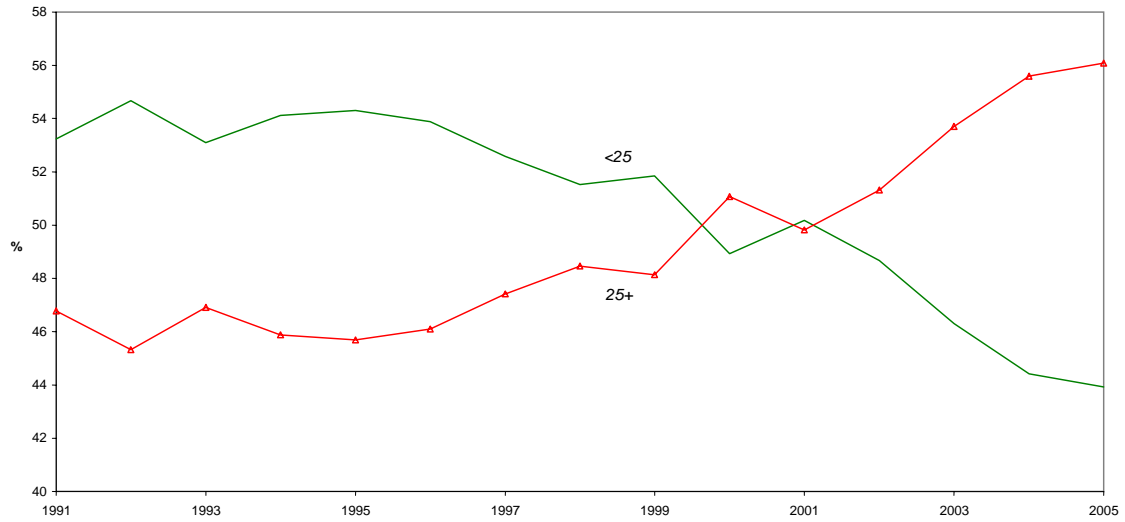


Figure 6: Annual Change in Numbers Traveling, by Age-Group, 1991/2 to 2004/5

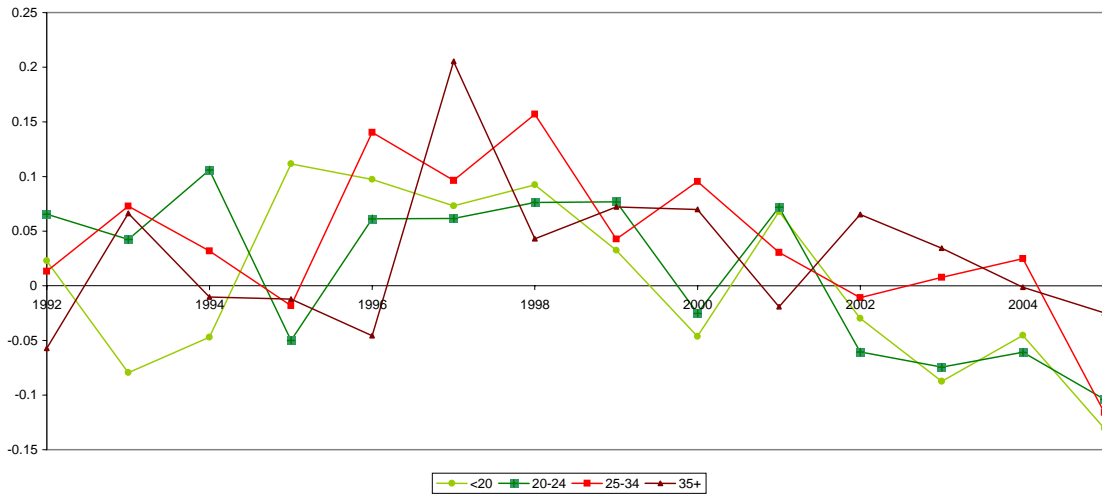
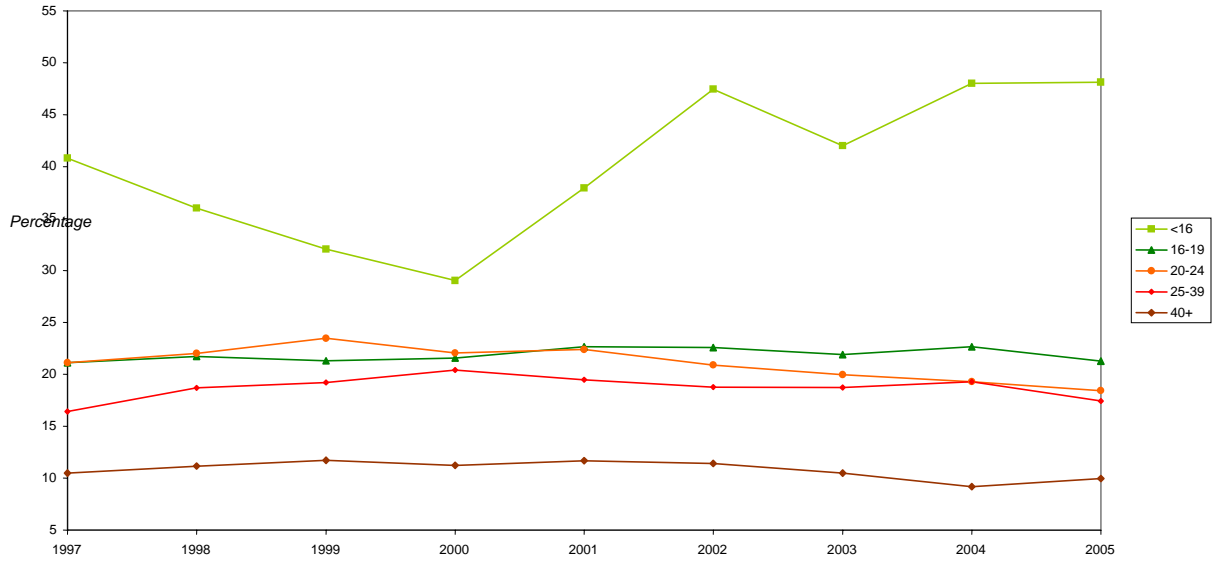


Figure 7: Percentages Terminated by Age-Group, 1997-2005



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