

THE LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN IRELAND

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Abstract: The concept and term ‘social capital’ has enjoyed widespread currency in recent years not least in Ireland where it has emerged prominently in public policy debates (NESF, 2003). Claims have frequently been advanced that social capital is declining as people have less time to volunteer and be engaged in their local communities (Bohan, 2002). However, there is very limited evidence to support or reject these claims in the case of Ireland given the paucity of data, over time, on key aspects of social capital.

Keywords: Social capital, distribution

JEL Classifications: H10, H40

1. INTRODUCTION

To assess the potential significance of social capital now and in the future it is helpful to first:

- define the term;
- measure some dimensions of social capital to the extent possible; and
- provide an analysis of how social capital is distributed among different groups in the population.

1.1 What is Social Capital?

Social capital has been defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2001: 41) as: “*networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.*”

Central to a consideration of social capital is the extent to which people engage in voluntary relationships of trust, support or joint social activity with others. This has, potentially, personal, collective and economic value alongside other forms of ‘capital’. Three names have been primarily associated with the literature on social capital: James Coleman (1988), Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Robert Putnam (2000). It is not proposed to investigate the various meanings and applications of social capital in this paper. Two core concepts emerge from the literature:

* This paper is written in a personal capacity and any views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Education and Science.

- social networks; and
- associated norms of reciprocity.

Neither of these two concepts is new to social research. There is, already, an extensive literature on social networks in areas as diverse as public health to business innovation. However, what is novel in the application of 'social capital' as a term is the way in which social connections are viewed as a form of economic and social capital which has an impact in diverse areas and the way in which social networks and associated norms of reciprocity have been brought together under one umbrella concept and term, viz., social capital.

1.2 Measuring social capital

Although there has been a rapid development in conceptual discussion of social capital in the last 15 years, demand for relevant empirical measures has continued to outstrip supply¹. Less attention has been paid to how empirical measures of social capital connect to theoretical definitions. Rather, 'ready-to-measure' indicators have been used, frequently based on single-item measures (for example questions on the extent to which people trust others in general), or non-specific measures linked to formal membership of associations or participation in voluntary community activities.

Various writers on social capital have aspired to the establishment of a conceptually sound and theoretically informed measurement framework for empirical investigation of social capital (e.g. Stone and Hughes 2002). However, it is not clear that these efforts have been successful. A major theoretical constraint is that, typically, the survey unit of response is an individual reporting behaviour and attitudes at the individual level. Hence, characteristics of a community, neighbourhood or society in which the individual respondent lives is reported as the individual perceives them. While the phenomena being measured or signified are *collective* and systemic, the signifier or units of reporting are *individuals*.

Three broad dimensions are important in attempting to measure social capital in social networks. These may be described as:

- informal social ties (and norms) of obligation and trust;
- community (including voluntary) involvement; and
- social contact and communication with others.

Informal social ties including availability of help in the form of advice, service or voluntary time are difficult to measure – especially those that are not counted as part of formal membership of some association. Also of relevance is the extent of informal social contact including frequency of visiting others at home or in other places. Social ties among *family members* are even more difficult to measure in general household surveys and are frequently omitted from community-based surveys of social capital (including the NESF Survey cited in this paper).

Community participation refers to formal networks in the community – typically in a broad "civil society" context (membership of residents' associations, sporting, cultural, and religious or special

¹ For a review of some recent work on the measurement of social capital at international level refer to Healy (2002) as well as the work of the British Office of National Statistics
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/>

interest groups). Some typical dimensions of community participation include frequency of involvement, time taken, number of groups involved and nature of involvement. Volunteering and other types of altruistic behaviour ranging from behaviour such as donating blood, sports coaching to charitable giving may or may not be linked to formal associational membership. Political participation encompasses aspects of active civic engagement and interaction (e.g. lobbying politicians for improvements in the local neighbourhood). Engagement may also be linked to prevalence of trust in political structures and institutions.

In the context of measuring family-based social capital relevant to learning or schooling outcomes, some researchers have used questions from large-scale surveys (typically not designed as surveys to measure social capital) on family structure, the nature of inter-generational discussions within families as well as the extent of inter-generational closure with respect to acquaintance, shared norms (e.g. expectation of academic achievement or general behaviour) and mutual involvement.

The data source used to analyse social capital in Ireland in this paper was the Survey of Social Capital undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute for the National Economic and Social Forum in August 2002.² The questionnaire module, which is included in Appendix 1 to this paper, was designed to cover key elements of community engagement, social support and inter-personal trust in the space of approximately 11 minutes of interview time in a telephone-based survey. A random sample of household telephone numbers was generated within each primary electoral area sampling cluster. A quota sampling control based on gender, age and broad socio-economic composition was used to select respondents within households when the initial call was made. The data were re-weighted on age, gender, household size and county of residence to ensure compatibility with the household population.

Although fragmentary evidence was available on the measurement of some aspects of social capital in various surveys over recent decades, the NESF Survey represented the second focussed attempt to measure ‘social capital’ in Ireland. The first was the survey of social capital and health undertaken by the All-Ireland Institute of Public Health in Ireland in 2001 to test the relationship between health and social capital (Balanda and Wilde, 2003).

The work associated in undertaking the NESF Survey provided a useful discipline in (a) clarifying which were the key features to be measured, (b) linking these to given policy concerns and (c) conducting such a survey against a tight constraint in terms of survey time and feasibility. Two further issues, which arose as ancillary objectives were:

- the identification of key background and demographic characteristics of individuals and their relationship to social capital; and
- measures of outcomes such as life satisfaction, employment and access to public services in relation to social capital.

A number of background variables were included either in the ‘social capital’ module or the background/context portion of the main survey on which the module was loaded. An overview of the variables used is shown in Table 1.

² The Economic and Social Research Institute was commissioned to undertake the Survey as module of ‘social capital’ questions in its monthly EU Consumer Survey. Data findings from the Survey are reported in Section V of Report No. 28 of the National Economic and Social Forum at http://www.nesf.ie/publications/n esf_28.pdf

Table 1 Overview of Variables Used for the Analysis of Social Capital (NESF Survey)

Indicator Heading	Survey question items
A Engagement – volunteering	A ‘Do you take part in any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside your own home or workplace on a REGULAR basis?’
B Engagement – active membership of a community organisation	B ‘In the last 12 months have you been actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group such as a sports, residents or professional association, parish group, political party, trade union etc.’
C Civic Engagement	C ‘During the last 12 months have you: (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group of any kind; (C3) contacted an appropriate organisation to deal with a particular problem; (C4) contacted a T.D. etc; (C5) undertaken unpaid voluntary work in a political party; (C6) written to a newspaper; (C7) contacted or appeared on TV/Radio?’
D Charity-giving	D ‘During the last 12 months have you: ...made a voluntary donation of money e.g. to charities, school, church’
E Voting	E ‘Did you vote in the general election in May 2002?’
F1 Social Support (with bringing up children)	F1 ‘In the past 12 months have you received any regular, practical help in bringing up children under 18 years from any of the following people.....the help I’m referring to would include childcare, transport with children or help with domestic tasks?’ (for households with children<18 years only)
F2 Social Support (number of close friends)	F2 ‘When I talk about, ‘close friends’ I mean people whom you feel at ease with, whom you can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence with, seek advice from or call upon for practical help. So how many close friends would you say you have among your: neighbours, work associates, relatives who don’t live with you and others?’
G1 Informal sociability (visited someone)	G1 ‘In the past 4 weeks have you visited anyone in their home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide them with some form of voluntary help or assistance in their home?’
G2 Informal sociability (received a visit)	G2 ‘In the past 4 weeks has anyone visited you in your home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide you with some form of voluntary help or assistance in your home?’
H Absence of feelings of social isolation	H1 ‘Have there been times in the last year when you have felt cut off or isolated from people in general or felt that you couldn’t socialise or meet people as much as you would like due to, lets say, work commitments, family responsibilities or caring for children or other persons, transport problems etc.?’
H1 Absence of social isolation	H2 ‘Do you meet up with your family or friends as much as you would like?’
H2 Meets up with family and friends as much as liked	I ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people or it depends on the people in question?’
I Trust	

The representativeness of the NESF Survey sample in terms of known Census of Population distributions is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Representativeness of the NESF Survey Sample
(adults aged 18 or higher - living in private households, 2002)**

	Total No. in sample (reweighted)	Percentage breakdown by category for each variable	
		NESF Survey (August 2002)	Census of Population (April 2002)
Demographic			
Gender			
Male	582	49.1	49.1
Female	603	50.9	50.9
Age category			
18-29yrs	330	27.8	26.5
30-39yrs	187	15.8	20.5
40-49yrs	217	18.3	18.0
50-64yrs	268	22.6	20.1
65+yrs	183	15.4	15.0
Marital status			
Married/living with partner	585	49.6	52.4
Widowed	131	11.1	6.7
Never married	407	34.5	36.1
Separated/divorced	56	4.7	4.8
Socio-economic & human capital			
Educational completion			
Primary level	279	23.5	20.6
Junior Certificate (or equivalent)	339	28.6	21.9
Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)	329	27.8	28.5
Other second level	81	6.8	2.5
Third level (including IOTs)	157	13.3	26.6
Occupier status			
Owns home	1,028	87.1	75.5
Privately rented	54	4.6	11.8
Local Authority rented	82	6.9	9.9
Other	16	1.4	2.8
Employment status			
Paid employment	668	56.6	57.3
Retired	141	11.9	11.0
Full-time student	101	8.6	6.5
Domestic duties	216	18.3	15.4
Unemployed/sick/disability	55	4.7	9.9

The sample was broadly representative in terms of gender, age, educational attainment and employment and marital status. However, third level graduates and persons aged in their thirties were under-represented in the NESF sample while home owners were over-represented. The main drawback with the NESF Survey was that it was a one-off survey lacking any comparison over time for the same individuals or for group-aggregates based on common questions. The aim of the Survey was to measure the extent of some aspects of social capital in Ireland in a 'civil society' context and draw comparisons, where possible, with other countries. Specifically, the presence of social capital within families was not covered. Hence, all questions about volunteering, contact with others and trust related, specifically, to non-family or non-household members. The carrier survey for the NESF Social Capital module contained a sufficient number of important contextual variables such as income, educational level, occupation, etc. to make possible a statistically controlled analysis of social capital.

1.3 Levels of social capital

In Table 3 partial cross-bivariate coefficients are shown for 9 measures of social capital:

- Volunteering (indicator A)
- Active involvement in the community (B)
- Civic engagement of at least one type (C)
- Giving to Charity (D)
- Voted in the general election of 2002 (E)
- Eight or more close friends (F2)
- Visited or was visited in last 4 weeks (G)
- Felt socially isolated in previous 12 months (H1)
- Trusted other people in general (I)

When controlling for gender, age, marital status and educational attainment, clear patterns of statistically significant correlation emerged for groups of indicators. Volunteering, civic engagement and community involvement were statistically associated with each other ($p < .01$). The positive association between volunteering and active community involvement was particularly strong with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.6047. Surprisingly, the act of giving to charity was negatively associated with volunteering and active community involvement as was voting in the 2002 general election. Measures of informal social support (F2 and G) did not show any significant inter-correlation. Feelings of social isolation were significantly negatively correlated with volunteering and civic engagement (i.e. persons who did not feel socially isolated were more inclined to volunteer or engage in their local community). Visiting or being visited was negatively associated with civic engagement and volunteering. The most interesting result in this Table is that the correlation coefficient of trust with any of the other eight measures of social capital was *not* statistically significant. Hence, a typical proxy measure of social capital – trust – used in the research literature has no correlation with any other proxy measure. Whatever the definition of social capital used, and based on the data in this analysis, ‘trust’ does not appear to be a candidate for single-proxy status. In other words, a simple question on ‘trust’ in this or any other Survey does not capture social capital.

As an approximation of social capital by broad domains – A through I, it appears that active community involvement, civic engagement and volunteering are likely to pick up most of the variation among the social capital groups of indicators. None of the informal social support indicators or trust displayed a systematic correlation across other indicators of social capital.

**Table 3 Partial Correlation Coefficients for Selected Indicators of Social Capital
(controlling for gender, age, marital status and educational attainment)**

	VOLUNT A	ACTIVE B	CIVIC C	CHARITY D	VOTED E	FRIENDS F2	VISIT G	ISOLATE H1*	TRUST I
VOLUNT	1	.6047**	.2595* *	-.1057**	-.0808* *	.0447	-.0760*	-.0822**	-.0109
ACTIVE	.6047**	1	.3409* *	-.1774**	.1015* *	.0219	-.0477	-.0046	.014
CIVIC	.2595**	.3409**	1	-.2323**	.1496* *	-.0167	.0899* *	-.1845**	-.0183
CHARITY	-.1057**	-.1774**	.2323* *	1	.1608* *	-.0017	.1329* *	.0359	-.0282
VOTED	-.0808**	-.1015**	.1496* *	.1608**	1	-.0178	-.0177	-.0087	.035
FRIENDS	.0447	.021s9	-.0167	-.0017	-.0178	1	-.0104	-.0411	-.0606
VISIT	-.0760*	-.0477	.0899* *	.1329**	-.0177	-.0104	1	.042	-.0478
ISOLATE	-.0822**	-.0046	.1845* *	.0359	-.0087	-.0411	.042	1	.0681*
TRUST	-.0109	.014	-.0183	-.0282	.035	-.0606	-.0478	.0681*	1

Source: Authors own calculation

In Appendix 2 cross-tabulations of social capital indicators are shown for key demographic and socio-economic variables. In a positive sense it is possible to report that as many as 17 percent of adults undertake some type of unpaid voluntary activity on a regular basis and 22 percent are actively involved in some type of voluntary or community group. Put negatively it is possible to report that in 2002 (refer to Table 7 in Appendix 2):

- almost four in five adults were not involved in any type of active community or voluntary activity;
- over two in three adults had not undertaken any type of civic engagement in the previous 12 months (attended a meeting or joined an action group or wrote to a newspaper or contacted a public representative/organisation or undertook voluntary work for a political party or contacted/appeared on radio/TV).

This leaves room for improvement. In terms of ‘informal’ social capital, more than half of households with children reported ‘no help with bringing up children’. Roughly a half of all respondents were not visited by someone in their own home in the four weeks prior to being interviewed. Behind the averages, there is considerable variation in reported social engagement. Persons over 65 years of age are much less inclined to be actively engaged in their local community or in various types of civic activity (Table 7). Physical health issues aside, so much for active ageing! Patterns of social engagement by socio-economic status (Table 8) suggest higher levels of involvement for those in work or unemployed. The retired, those in domestic duties or students are less inclined to volunteer or be involved in community or civic activity. However, those with higher levels of education (especially Leaving Certificate and above) are much more inclined to be active. In relation to ‘informal’ social capital, no strong patterns seemed to emerge in terms of gender, age and education. However, simple cross-tabulations such as those presented in Appendix 2 hide or exaggerate correlations between important variables when colinearity among ‘predictor’ variables is not factored in.

In tables 4 through 6, I seek to identify which are the key ‘predictor’ variables associated (positively) with measures of social capital. It is possible to distinguish between mainly ‘formal’ measures of social capital based on membership of community organisations, organised volunteering, voting and other types of civic engagement on the one hand, and ‘informal’ measures such as number of close friends and lack of feeling of social isolation. Indicators of ‘**formal**’ social capital indicate a strong predictive role for:

- level of completed formal **education** (for volunteering, community engagement, civic participation and voting);
- number of **children** in the household (for volunteering, community engagement, and voting but *not* for civic participation);
- being **married** (for community engagement, civic participation and voting but *not* statistically significant for volunteering);
- **length of residence** at current address (for volunteering, community engagement and voting but *not* for civic participation); and
- the least amount of time spent **watching TV** (for volunteering, community engagement and civic participation but *not* for voting).

Demographic factors (age, gender, marital status and size of location) were found to have a stronger relationship with social capital measures than socio-economic measures based on income, occupation, employment status or level of educational attainment.

Table 4
Logistic Regression of Volunteering on Different Background Variables

	Bivariate odds ratios	Multivariate odds ratios	
		Active in the labour market only (n=494)	All respondents (with reduced set of explanatory variables) n = 1,069
	1	2	3
Gender [ref: male]	.753	.682	.661*
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]			
AGE1 (30-39 years)	1.109	.340**	.938
AGE2 (40-49 years)	1.372	.830	.974
AGE3 (50-64 years)	1.066	.499	.833
AGE4 (65+ years)	.311**	^	.608
Marital status [ref: not married]	1.506**	2.282	1.370
Home occupier status [ref: does not own]	1.532	.680	.954
With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref: not active in labour market]	1.906**	1.943*	1.579*
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]	1.711**	-	.977
Employment status [ref: employee]			
EMP1 (self-employed)	1.036	2.282	-
EMP2 (retired)	.486	^	-
EMP3 (unemployed/sick/disability)	1.400	-	-
EMP4 (full-time student)	.9810	^	-
EMP5 (domestic duties)	.465**	-	-
Average daily travel time home-work [ref: less than 45 mins]			
TRAVEL1 (45-90 mins)	.802	.875	-
TRAVEL2 (90 mins+)	.767	.679	-
Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: less than 1 hour]			
TV1 (1-2 hours)	.813	.853	.898
TV2 (2 hours+)	.422**	.864	.588*
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at current residence]			
RES1 (13-25 years)	1.450	1.726	1.848**
RES1 (25 years+)	1.458	6.386**	3.005**
Hours of work [ref: <= 30 hours per week]			
HOURS1 (31-39 hours)	1.685*	1.443	-

Table 4 continued
Logistic Regression of Volunteering on Different Background Variables

HOURS2 (40 hours+)	1.230	.947	-
Educational attainment [ref: primary level only]			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)	2.701**	13.182	2.969**
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)	3.959**	26.197**	4.772**
EDUC3 (further education)	4.630**	12.158*	5.774**
EDUC4 (tertiary level)	5.875**	33.807**	7.161**
Net weekly income	[ref: First income quartile]	[ref: Fourth income quartile]	
INC1 (First income quartile)	-	.210**	-
INC1 (Second income quartile)	1.145	7.319	-
INC2 (Third income quartile)	2.039*	7.539	-
INC3 (Fourth income quartile)	3.038**	-	-
Size of location/settlement [ref: open area]			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	1.100	3.640	1.109
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	1.160	1.266	1.586
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	.673	1.630	.922
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	.760	.725	1.056
Occupation [ref: self-employed]			
OCC1 (if farmer)	.305**	^	-
OCC2 (if professional)	.978	1.826	-
OCC3 (if other non-manual)	.554	1.205	-
OCC4 (if skilled manual)	.371	.788	-
OCC5 (if unskilled manual)	.310*	.524	-
OCC6 (if never worked)	.096**	-	-
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a week]	1.518*	1.510	1.496
Nagelkerke R Square	-	0.330	0.152

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

Note: An Odds Ratio of 1.0 indicates that there is equal probability of volunteering or not volunteering.

In Table 4, the results of a logistic regression of volunteering on bivariate and multivariate odds ratios are shown. Education emerges a strong correlate of social capital – at least ‘formal’. Higher education graduates, other things equal, were 7 times more likely to volunteer in the community than those whose education was completed before Intermediate or Junior Certificate level. These results appear to be similar to those found by Schuller et al. (2001) in the United Kingdom. They report that higher education graduates were three times more likely to be a current or active member of a voluntary organisation than those without upper secondary completion (below A-Levels) and about twice as likely as upper secondary completers.

It is not surprising that the level of completed education is one of the most important predictors of many forms of political and social engagement in Table 4 and Table 5. From analysis of European data in the 1950s, Almond and Verba (1963: 276) reported a strong link between various types of political engagement (discussion of politics, voting, sense of competence to influence government) and level of completed (formal) education. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) found that education, other things constant, increased political participation. Moreover, literacy skills among adults have shown a positive relationship with participation in voluntary community activities for several OECD countries (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000).

Schuller et al. (2001), using UK data, report higher levels of ‘social skills’ for higher levels of education. These cover organising, advising and counselling skills – all of which have the

potential to enhance the quality of civic engagement. They also report higher tolerance of diversity, commitment to equality of opportunities and resistance to political alienation. Data analysis from the UK *National Child Development Study* (NCDS) reveals a strong positive correlation between levels of education and membership of political organisations, environment or women's groups and charity, residents and parent-teacher associations, (Schuller et al., 2001).

The above findings need to be treated with caution, though. An apparent link between length or level of formal education and social capital may arise from other influences that are not measured here. The content and process of learning inside and outside formal schooling is likely to be critical to long-term patterns of behaviour and civic attitude.

It is possible that the positive association between the number of children in the household (under the age of 18) and volunteering is linked to volunteering for educational, sporting and youth-related activities at local level. Other data sources – notably the *European Values Survey* – indicate higher than average rates of participation and active membership coupled with volunteering in sporting organisations in this country compared with other European countries (NESF, 2003). Age was not related to indicators of 'formal' social capital (except for voting where the older age-groups are much more likely to vote). Women were less likely than men to volunteer, engage in the community or undertake civic activities – when other demographic and social variables were controlled for).

Home ownership made no statistical difference to measures of 'formal' social capital except in the case of civic activity where, interestingly, respondents who did not own their home were more likely to be involved in civic activity. Participation in the (paid) labour force is regarded as an important area for analysis in relation to social capital. The evidence in Tables 4 and 5 suggest that it is neutral with respect to 'formal' social capital (at least volunteering, civic engagement and voting). However, labour force participation is positively associated with community engagement when other variables are controlled for (Table 5).

Active engagement in the labour market was *positively* associated with volunteering (although the relationship was not statistically significant). Female participation in the labour market does not seem to be generally associated with lower levels of community engagement and volunteering. However, active labour market engagement is statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level) as a predictor of community involvement – other things equal. Hours of work has a weak (and not statistically significant) negative impact on volunteering, however (refer to column 2 where a range of labour market variables are added to the explanatory model). These results bear some similarity to those found by Putnam (2000) who showed that the impact of increased working time and female labour force participation in the United States has not been associated with a fall in social capital as measured by community engagement or volunteering. However, Putnam found evidence that part-time employees, other things equal, are more likely to engage in communities or volunteer.

A hypothesis that length of residence is positively correlated with community engagement and volunteering, other things equal, is confirmed. It would appear that people who have put down roots in a place or community are more likely to get involved locally. They may also be more likely to 'get to know' others locally and establish relationships of mutual help and trust. However, as the analysis in Table 5 shows, length of residence is not significantly correlated with measures of civic participation. Hence, caution is needed in concluding that there is a positive impact of length of residence on social capital generally. Size of location seems to be invariant with respect to 'formal' social capital – once other factors are statistically controlled for. In the case of 'religiosity' (as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services in Church), the statistically significant and positive association of volunteering with religiosity in the univariate column (1) of Table 4 turns to being not statistically significant in column 3, once other variables are entered into the multivariate analysis. Presumably, the impact of age and its correlation with religiosity dominates this relationship.

Table 5
Multivariate Logistic Regression (Odds Ratios) of Various Other Measures of ‘Formal’ Social Capital on Different Background Variables

	Active in community in last 12 months (n=1,076)	Index of Civic Engagement (n=1,076)	Voted in 2002 general election (n=1,068)
	1	2	3
Gender [ref: male]	.684*	.729*	1.030
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]			
AGE1 (30-39yrs)	.576*	1.120	2.175**
AGE2 (40-49yrs)	.623	.903	3.603**
AGE3 (50-64yrs)	.831	1.345	4.164**
AGE4 (65+yrs)	.573	.597	6.524**
Marital status [ref: not married]	2.046**	1.658**	2.930**
Home occupier status [ref: does not own]	.768	.442**	.637
With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref: no children]	1.476*	.903	.640*
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]	1.553*	1.176	1.215
Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: one hour or less]			
TV1 (1-2 hours)	.622*	.703**	.831
TV2 (2 hours+)	.518**	.660**	.860
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at current address]			
RES1 (13-25 years)	1.706*	.883	.843
RES1 (25 years+)	2.610**	1.211	2.154**
Educational attainment [ref: primary level]			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)	1.584	1.335	1.421
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)	2.839**	1.726*	1.365
EDUC3 (further education)	3.582**	1.933*	4.116**
EDUC4 (tertiary level)	5.599**	3.114**	2.772**
Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	1.496	1.068	1.194
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	.913	.754	1.750
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	.658	.708	.844
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	1.089	1.100	1.418
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	1.307	1.213	2.302**
Nagelkerke R Square	0.193	0.120	0.330

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$.

Column 1 Active in community in the last 12 months (indicator B per Table 1).

Column 2 Index of Civic Engagement has a value of 1 for each respondent if he/she has responded positively to any one of 7 possible civic activities referred to over the previous 12 months (indicator C1 thru C7 in Table 1).

Column 3 Voted in May 2002 General Election (indicator D in Table 1).

Turning to Table 5, neither community engagement nor civic participation were statistically significantly related to religiosity (although the odds ratio is greater than one). However, even controlling for age, religiosity is still statistically significant for the turnout in the 2002 general election. If this latter finding represents a more general pattern, then 'religious' citizens are more likely to turn up to vote at elections and referenda – with possible implications for the outcome depending on which issues are to the fore. However, this is not to suggest that religiously active persons vote mainly because of specifically religious-based concerns. They simply turn out in greater numbers – even after age and other considerations are taken into consideration.

Two further issues are worth exploring in relation to 'formal social' capital – the amount of time devoted to watching television and the daily amount of time spent commuting between home and work. Both of these factors, especially the former, are thought to be important for long-term trends in social capital (Putnam, 2000). The amount of time spent watching TV was, indeed, negatively related to volunteering, community engagement and civic participation. The length of time spent travelling to, and from, work was entered as an explanatory variable in the regression on volunteering. Not surprisingly, respondents were less likely to volunteer, other things equal, the longer they spent travelling to, and from, work. However, this relationship was not statistically significant.

Next, I turn to a consideration of 'informal' social capital (Table 6). Unlike the case of 'formal' social capital, a very different picture emerged in the analysis of 'informal social' capital. There is evidence that those living in urban areas (especially Dublin), home-owners and those living the longest at their current address, were *less* likely to report 'feeling socially isolated'. At the same time, Dubliners were more likely (other things equal) to have less 'close friends' and to receive or pay a social visit at home than their country cousins.

Surprisingly, perhaps, young people under the age of 30 reported having fewer 'close friends' than other (older) age-groups. Active labour market participation was associated with a greater number of 'close friends' – substantiating the hypothesis that paid employment increases the number of social contact points and potential network supports. However, feelings of social isolation (and the extent of social visiting) were not statistically related to labour market participation. Hence, there is no evidence that being at (paid) work reduces time spent visiting others or being visited in the home.

An interesting finding in Table 6 is that the presence of children in the household is *negatively* correlated with the number of 'close friends' reported by the respondent. Being cut off from social networks such as the labour market and without social support in rearing and minding children is likely to be a feature of many communities. However, a word of caution is needed in relation to the measure of 'close friends'. According to Table 6 women and men had about the same probability of having 'close friends' to call upon for help and advice. It is possible, but not certain, that men over-report their number of close friends. Moreover, the quality, durability and intimacy of that support may vary between men and women. Such differences are not reflected in this data source.

Whereas the data do not indicate any significant gender difference in relation to 'informal' social capital, they do suggest differences in respect of 'formal' social capital (volunteering, community and civic participation). These results echo findings in Pevalin and Rose (2003) based on UK data, which found that men were more likely than women to report higher levels of social participation but lower levels of social contact. However, it is possible that, in common with many other surveys of social capital, the NESF Survey did not adequately capture the extent and nature of voluntary, caring and community-building activity undertaken by women. For example, Nancy Folbre (1994: 97) has commented:

"Kin/community networks that are maintained by visiting, gift-giving, and meal-sharing often prove crucial for family welfare. Women devote more time to informal care outside, as well as

inside, the home”. A more detailed analysis of time-use would help to identify differences in the amount of such activity by gender. Unfortunately, data on time-use are generally not available in Ireland. The NESF, in its report on a *Framework for Equality* (NESF, 2002: 55) pointed out that:

....”there are no sophisticated measures developed in our own society for assessing levels of belonging, loving, solidarity in persons’ lives, although some work has been done in this area in Northern Europe”

Table 6
Multivariate Logistic Regression (Odds Ratios) of Measures of ‘Informal’ Social Capital on Different Background Variables

	More than 8 ‘close friends’ (n=1,076)	Did not feel socially isolated (n=1,074)	Received or paid a home social visit (n=1,076)
	1	2	3
<i>Gender [ref: male]</i>	1.080	.772	1.325
<i>Age category [ref: 18-29 years]</i>			
AGE1 (30-39yrs)	2.279**	.892	1.237
AGE2 (40-49yrs)	1.400	1.280	1.161
AGE3 (50-64yrs)	1.167	1.222	1.169
AGE4 (65+yrs)	1.103	.934	2.018*
<i>Marital status [ref: not married]</i>	.878	.771	1.202
<i>Home occupier status [ref: does not own]</i>	.748	2.016**	.986
<i>With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref: no children]</i>	.616**	1.042	1.057
<i>Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]</i>	1.757**	1.053	1.230
<i>Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: one hour or less]</i>			
TV1 (1-2 hours)	1.078	.882	1.346
TV2 (2 hours+)	.916	1.012	.867
<i>Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at current address]</i>			
RES1 (13-25 years)	.967	1.470	1.258
RES1 (25 years+)	.753	2.101**	1.354
<i>Educational attainment [ref: primary level only]</i>			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)	.700	1.055	.831
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)	.754	.938	.959
EDUC3 (further education)	.914	1.287	.822
EDUC4 (tertiary level)	.644	.974	1.531
<i>Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]</i>			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	.725	.661	1.345
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	.737	1.435	.640
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	1.559*	1.660*	1.526*
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	.660*	3.028**	.553**
<i>Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]</i>	.945	1.226	1.437*
Nagelkerke R Square	0.094	0.092	0.11

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

Column 1 Respondents with 8 ‘close friends’ or more (indicator F2 in Table 1).

Column 2 Did not feel socially isolated or cut off (Indicator H1 in Table 1).

Column 3 Received a social visit in one’s home or paid such a visit to another in their home in previous 4 weeks (Indicator G in Table 1).

The level of *formal education* had no significant impact on ‘informal social capital’ (Table 6) even though it was strongly associated with measures such as volunteering, community engagement and civic participation (Table 4 and 5). Hence, the supposed positive relationship between social and human capital is likely to be specific to which dimension of each is being measured as well as the population group under consideration (in this case the adult population). It is also possible that those aspects of social capital that are most conducive to learning – particular social norms and inter-personal ties are poorly reflected in many of the indicators of social capital used in this Study and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the data analysis in this paper does support the view that *formal education* probably constitutes one of the strongest ‘policy’ correlates of social capital – typically observed as ‘positive’ civic behaviour. The direction, local specifics and size of ‘causality’ remain elusive, however.

The results of the NESF survey indicate widespread differences in levels of community engagement and inter-personal trust as well as access to social networks. The Survey indicates that active community engagement or volunteering is lower, particularly amongst the poorly educated or those living in large cities. Surprisingly, perhaps, active engagement among the unemployed is higher than for other groups in the labour force. These Survey results confirm the findings of the Central Statistics Office (2003) which indicate lower voter turnout among the young and the unemployed. Groups which seem to be at greatest risk of social isolation and disengagement are the elderly, the unemployed and those who are ill or disabled.

Issues for further analyses

A key point that emerged from the analysis is that there is likely to be no single measure of social capital. As observed by Furstenburg and Hughes (1995: 589) in their empirical analysis of transition to early adulthood among youth at risk:

...“these varied components of social capital may be differently linked to particular outcomes. Thus it may not be useful to search for a common link between a unitary measure of social capital and a unitary measure of success in early adulthood.”

As emphasised in this paper, there are a number of significant drawbacks and omissions with respect to statistical measures social capital. In addition, the analysis presented in this paper is constrained by the omission of measures of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital defined, respectively, as social ties among those who are alike (by virtue of social, family, ethnic or other badges of identity) and those who are not. It is extremely difficult to measure these dimensions in the space of a short module on social capital in a survey of the sort used by NESF. Other difficulties arise in relation to the direction and causal nature of associations between variables. A correlation may represent the impact of other variables omitted from the model, or may arise from the existence of (unmeasured) collinearity among explanatory variables.

In interpreting the impact of social capital at the individual level, an important omission in the analysis has been the absence of ‘meso-level’ variables relating to neighbourhood, organisation or other bounded communities. The NESF survey questions, on which the analysis was based, were addressed to individuals. Questions were about their perceptions or behaviour without specifying a well-defined ‘community’ to which they belong. However, social capital at the local community level may represent an important conditioning mechanism. Clusters of socio-economic disadvantage or specific geographical characteristics may moderate the impact of generalised social capital measures such as trust, volunteering, community engagement or the extent of social support.

Notwithstanding the sudden rise in public, political and media discourse about ‘social capital’ in Ireland in recent years we have very little data to track or analyse different dimensions of social

capital. A start needs to be made in terms of building a data and research infrastructure. Some of the key statistical elements need to include:

- Time Use Surveys;
- Longitudinal surveys such as the National Longitudinal Children's Study;
- International surveys such as the European Social Survey;
- The Quarterly National Household Survey module on social capital and sport in the Third Quarter of 2006.

As part of a suggested European Household Survey a General Social Survey, here, would be extremely valuable.

CONCLUSIONS

Ireland would appear to be rich in some measurable dimensions of social capital. However, the distribution of social capital varies according to social group with considerable variations by age, marital status and level of education.

Although there has been a huge growth in the use of 'social capital' variables in the research literature in such diverse areas as public health, economic growth and crime, the jury is still out on how social capital will be mainstreamed in the way that 'human capital' was in the decades following the pioneering work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. James Coleman (1990: 305-306) wrote:

Whether social capital will come to be a useful quantitative concept in social science as are the concepts of financial capital, physical capital, and human capital remains to be seen; its current value lies primarily in its usefulness for qualitative analysis of social systems and for those quantitative analyses that employ qualitative indicators.

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APPENDIX 1

National Economic and Social Forum Questionnaire for the Survey of Social Capital in Ireland (2002) (undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute as a supplement to the EU Consumer Survey, August 2002)

Now, I would like to ask you a few questions on the amount of time you spend on various activities.

S1 *First, could you tell me how much time you spend travelling between home and work on an average day?*

- (a) Home to work ____ hrs ____ mins
(b) Work to home ____ hrs ____ mins
(c) Not applicable / No paid work... ☐

S2 *How much time would you spend watching TV on an average weekday?*
hours ____ minutes

S3a *Do you take part in any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside your own home or workplace on a REGULAR basis? Examples of such voluntary activity would include helping with fund-raising; visiting the elderly; St. Vincent de Paul or other charity work; coaching in a sports club etc.*

Yes.....☐1 → S3b How regularly? _____
No.....☐2

S4 *In the last 12 months have you been actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group such as a sports, residents or professional association, parish group, political party, trade union etc. By active involvement I mean attending meetings, being a committee member or taking responsibility for some activity? [Int. Please note that attendance at mass or church service is not included].*

Yes, actively involved... ☐
No, not actively involved☐

S5 *Please name up to three of the most important voluntary or community organisations in which you were actively involved.*

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

[Int. If church is mentioned make sure this is not attendance at mass or service only. Amend S4 if necessary].

S6 During the last 12 months have you: [Int. Tick Yes or No for each]

	Yes	No
Attended a public meeting.....	☐	☐
Joined an action group of any kind	☐	☐
Contacted an appropriate organisation to deal with a particular problem (e.g. a local county council or residents association)	☐	☐
Contacted a T.D, public official or local representative.....	☐	☐
Undertaken unpaid voluntary work in a political party.....	☐	☐
Made a voluntary donation of money e.g. to charities, school, church.....	☐	☐
Written to a newspaper.....	☐	☐
Contacted or appeared on radio/TV	☐	☐

S7 Did you vote in the general election in May 2002?

Yes ☐ No ☐

S8a In the past 4 weeks have you visited anyone in their home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide them with some form of voluntary help or assistance in their home?

Yes..... ☐ No ☐

S8b In the past 4 weeks has anyone visited you in your home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide you with some form of voluntary help or assistance in your home?

Yes..... ☐ No ☐

S9 When I talk about, "close friends" I mean people whom you feel at ease with, whom you can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence with, seek advice from or call upon for practical help. So how many close friends would you say you have among your:
Neighbours _____ Work Associates _____
Relatives who don't live with you _____ Others _____

S10 [Int. check answer to Q 18 (Consumer Survey) above. If there are no children under 18 years in the household go to S11. If there are children under 18 years of age in the household continue].

In the past 12 months have you received any regular, practical help in bringing up children under 18 years from any of the following people. The help I'm referring to would include childcare, transport with children or help with domestic tasks. [Int. Tick Yes, No or NA for each]

	Yes	No	Not applicable
1 Friends	☐	☐	☐
2 Neighbours	☐	☐	☐
3 One of your own parents ..	☐	☐	☐
4 The parent(s) of your spouse/partner	☐	☐	☐
5 Ex-spouse/partner not in household	☐	☐	☐

S11a *Have there been times in the last year when you have felt cut off or isolated from people in general or felt that you couldn't socialise or meet people as much as you would like due to, lets say, work commitments, family responsibilities or caring for children or other persons, transport problems etc.*

Yes ☐

No ☐ Go to S12

S11b *Would you say you felt isolated or unable to meet other people as much as you would like because of:*

Yes No NA

1. Work commitments ☐1 ☐2 ☐3

2. Childcare responsibilities ☐1 ☐2 ☐3

3. Other caring responsibilities ☐1 ☐2 ☐3

[Int. Tick Yes, No or NA for each]

Yes No

4. Lack of own transport

5. Irregular/expensive public transport ☐1 ☐2

6. Problems with physical access ☐1 ☐2

7. Lack of places to meet others outside the home ☐1 ☐2

[Int. Tick Yes or No for each]

S12 *Do you meet up with your family or friends as much as you would like?*

Yes ☐ if yes —————> Go to S14

No ☐

S13 *Do the following factors prevent you from meeting up with family or friends more often?*

Yes No NA

1. Lack of time due to paid work..... ☐ ☐ ☐

2. Lack of time due to childcare responsibilities ☐ ☐ ☐

3. Lack of time due to other caring responsibilities .. ☐ ☐ ☐

4. Can't go out because of other caring responsibilities ☐ ☐ ☐

5. No vehicle ☐ ☐ ☐

6. Poor public transport ☐ ☐ ☐

7. Problems with physical access ☐ ☐ ☐

8. Too ill, sick or disabled ☐ ☐ ☐

S14 *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people or it depends on the people in question?*

Most people can be trusted ☐1

You can't be too careful ☐2

Depends on the people in question ☐3

Don't know ☐4

S15 *Thinking of your workplace. Would you agree that most people in your workplace can be trusted?*

Strongly Agree ☐1

Agree ☐2

Disagree ☐3

Strongly Disagree ☐4

Not Applic/Don't know ☐5

S16 All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days. Where would you place yourself in terms of overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' means you are "very dissatisfied" to '10' which means you are "very satisfied"
[Interviewer circle one number 0 to 10 to indicate level of satisfaction].

Very Dissatisfied **Satisfied**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

S17 Thinking about your current address, when did you start living there?
_____ month _____ year

S18 Is your accommodation:

- Owned outright (no mortgage) ☐1
 Rented from a Private Landlord..... ☐3
 Owned with an outstanding mortgage ☐2
 Rented from a Local Authority..... ☐4
 Other (specify) ☐5

S19 Which of the following would you say best describes how often would you generally attend religious services?

- More than once per week..... ☐1
 Once per week ☐2
 Once per month ☐3
 Several times per year..... ☐4
 Once a year ☐5
 Less often..... ☐6
 Never ☐7
 Refused ☐8

S20 Which of the following would you say best describes the size of the location where you live?

- Open Country ☐1
 Village of less than 1,500 people..... ☐2
 Town of 1,500 – less 5,000 people..... ☐3
 Town of 5,000 – less than 10,000 people ☐4
 Town or city, 10,000 or more ☐5
 Dublin City – Urban area..... ☐6
 Dublin City – Rural areas ☐7

APPENDIX 2

Table 7 Measures of Volunteering and Community Engagement by Demographic Characteristics of Individuals

Percentage of adults who: (A) undertook any type of *unpaid voluntary activity* or service outside the home or workplace; (B) were *actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group* in the last 12 months; (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group; (C3) contacted an organisation; (C4) contacted a public representative; (C5) undertook voluntary work for a political party; (C6) wrote to a newspaper, (C7) contacted/appeared on radio/TV; (D) donated money to charity & other causes.

	Volunteered	Comm. member	Civic engagement (reference: last 12 months) data in column C denote occurrence of at least one type of civic engagement among respondents (C1, C2 thru C7)								Charity
	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Male	19.4	25.8	34.5	22.1	6.6	11.1	15.7	3.5	4.5	5.7	60.1
Female	15.3	18.4	27.2	13.4	4.4	10.3	13.1	2.7	2.5	3.2	66.5
Age: 18-29yrs	17.6	25.5	29.4	16.1	7.8	9.3	12.1	0.9	3.4	4.0	50.6
30-39yrs	19.3	20.7	35.8	20.2	3.8	13.5	16.8	3.3	3.2	4.8	68.8
40-49yrs	22.7	25.5	33.2	23.0	6.9	10.2	17.1	4.6	4.6	6.5	67.7
50-64yrs	18.7	25.7	37.8	21.1	4.2	15.2	18.0	5.8	4.6	5.4	72.2
65+yrs	6.0	7.2	14.8	6.6	3.3	3.9	6.7	1.1	1.1	1.1	62.6
Married /cohabiting	20.3	26.4	36.0	22.5	6.9	14.0	16.3	4.4	3.8	4.2	70.6
Widowed	9.1	8.4	17.6	15.7	5.9	7.8	17.3	3.8	3.8	5.9	63.5
Never married	16.8	20.8	28.6	3.8	1.6	4.7	9.6	2.4	1.6	0	53.5
Separated/divorced	12.3	19.6	19.6	15.6	4.2	8.4	12.1	1.7	4.0	5.7	56.9

Table 8 Measures of Volunteering and Community Engagement by Socio-economic Characteristics of Individuals

Percentage of adults who: (A) undertake any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside the home or workplace; (B) were actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group in the last 12 months; (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group; (C3) contacted an organisation; (C4) contacted a public representative; (C5) voluntary work for a political party; (C6) written to a newspaper, (C7) contacted/appeared on radio/TV; (D) donated money to charity & other causes.

	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Employment status: At work	20.0	27.3	35.8	22.6	7.5	13.4	15.5	3.8	4.0	5.8	66.2
Retired	10.6	10.1	18.6	8.6	2.1	7.1	10.7	0.7	2.2	1.4	65.7
Full-time in education	19.8	24.8	23.8	13.0	3.0	7.1	8.0	1.0	6.0	2.0	38.0
Unemployed/sick/disability	26.4	25.5	34.5	20.0	1.9	7.4	22.2	7.1	0	7.3	37.5
Domestic duties	10.3	11.2	24.1	10.2	2.8	6.6	14.4	2.9	2.8	2.4	71.2
Income: First income quartile	8.7	8.7	18.4	1.9	1.0	2.9	12.0	1.0	0	1.0	61.0
Second income quartile	13.7	15.3	22.5	13.9	1.2	7.1	11.8	3.0	1.8	2.9	58.8
Third income quartile	19.5	21.6	33.5	23.8	5.0	12.9	15.4	4.5	2.5	5.0	64.2
Fourth income quartile	24.6	31.7	35.8	18.7	8.2	13.5	15.1	2.4	5.4	4.7	69.6
Missing	7.5	13.8	30.1	20.2	5.8	9.3	14.2	4.0	3.1	6.2	54.2

Table 8 continued

	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Occupation: Self-employed	31.4	25.5	39.2	17.6	7.8	27.5	21.6	3.9	7.8	5.9	66.7
Farmer	11.5	18.7	29.2	24.8	6.8	12.4	15.5	2.9	4.8	5.8	59.0
Professional /Managerial	30.1	35.3	40.1	24.3	5.9	12.9	15.1	1.6	3.7	4.8	71.0
Other non-manual	19.6	22.8	35.7	19.2	5.6	11.6	17.3	3.5	4.3	7.1	68.8
Skilled manual	14.1	22.6	28.6	15.9	7.5	7.9	11.7	5.6	1.9	3.3	57.9
Unskilled manual	11.9	11.5	21.1	12.4	2.6	9.0	13.3	1.1	1.6	1.6	65.1
Never worked	4.1	11.3	21.2	8.2	4.2	6.3	8.5	1.1	3.1	1.0	52.6
Occupier status: Owns home	18.0	22.9	29.8	17.7	5.0	10.8	13.7	3.1	3.8	4.0	63.7
Privately rented	18.9	22.2	55.6	27.8	22.2	13.0	16.7	3.7	3.7	18.5	68.5
Local Authority rented	7.3	13.6	25.9	13.4	0	4.9	21.0	2.4	0	2.4	58.0
Education: Primary level	6.3	11.0	21.9	13.0	3.3	5.1	8.2	3.0	2.2	2.2	64.8
Junior Certificate	15.5	16.4	27.5	14.5	6.8	10.9	14.8	4.1	1.8	4.4	55.9
Leaving Certificate	21.3	25.8	31.0	17.0	4.0	11.5	14.3	2.5	4.4	5.3	62.6
Post Leaving Certificate	24.1	29.5	37.0	21.3	6.3	13.6	21.0	2.6	6.3	1.3	68.8
Third level	27.0	39.7	49.4	32.3	8.4	17.3	20.0	3.2	7.1	8.4	76.0

Table 9 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Demographic Characteristics of Individuals

	<u>Voting</u>	<u>Informal Social Support</u>		<u>Informal Sociability</u>			<u>Feelings of Social Isolation</u>		<u>Trust</u>
	E	F		G	G1	G2	H1	H2	I
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Was visited by someone at one’s own home – last 4 weeks	Did not feel cut off or isolated – last 12 months	Meet up with family/friends as much likes	Agrees that ‘most people can be trusted’
All respondents	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Male	75.9	45.5	57.8	58.6	48.3	50.0	85.7	83.6	25.9
Female	76.0	49.8	55.0	67.9	52.2	53.8	83.7	84.3	23.3
Age: 18-29yrs	48.8	43.6	55.7	53.9	49.4	47.6	83.0	81.5	23.9
30-39yrs	77.4	65.1	68.4	61.0	55.1	50.8	78.0	83.4	23.5
40-49yrs	86.2	47.1	55.1	59.6	50.2	48.6	86.6	80.6	20.3
50-64yrs	90.3	24.0	51.9	62.7	52.4	53.6	88.0	84.6	27.2
65+yrs	^	16.7	52.9	68.3	44.3	62.6	87.4	92.3	27.9
Married /cohabiting	86.3	54.7	55.7	62.1	52.1	53.8	83.6	79.5	21.7
Widowed	85.8	^	49.1	68.7	45.8	63.4	85.6	90.2	29.0
Never married	57.3	^	60.5	55.4	48.8	46.6	85.0	87.5	27.3
Separated/divorced	76.8	38.5	52.2	57.1	53.6	43.9	91.2	92.9	23.2

Note F1* denotes that data in this column refer only to households with children under the age of 18. The data are based on a sample of 500 respondents for most variables (e.g. 504 for gender and 501 for the age-breakdown). F2 denotes percentage of respondents in each category that reported eight ‘close friends’ or more from among neighbours, relatives (not living at home), work associates and others. ^ denotes a total sample size of less than 30 in the total number of respondents across all response categories. The data are, accordingly, suppressed.

Table 10 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Socio-Economic Characteristics of Individuals

	<u>Voting</u>	<u>Informal Social Support</u>		<u>Informal Sociability</u>			<u>Feelings of Social Isolation</u>		<u>Trust</u>
	E	F		G	G1	G2	H1	H2	I
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Was visited by someone at one’s own home – last 4 weeks	Did not feel cut off or isolated – last 12 months	Meet up with family/friends as much likes	Agrees that ‘most people can be trusted’
<i>All respondents</i>	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Employment: Work	78.7	54.6	61.0	59.9	52.8	51.4	84.4	81.1	22.8
Retired	94.2	^	52.0	65.2	49.6	56.7	87.9	90.8	29.8
Full-time education	24.8	17.4	51.6	61.4	54.5	47.5	87.1	88.0	41.0
Unempl./sick/disabil.	61.8	^	50.0	30.9	25.5	18.2	80.0	85.5	14.5
Domestic duties	83.6	48.2	48.4	65.7	47.7	61.6	83.3	87.0	22.2
Income: First quartile	77.2	^	42.7	69.9	45.2	62.5	76.9	84.6	26.2
Second quartile	89.7	52.1	52.9	59.3	44.6	53.4	89.3	89.8	26.6
Third income quartile	82.0	54.1	63.2	61.7	51.9	49.5	81.1	84.0	18.9
Fourth quartile	74.1	45.8	56.7	57.1	51.1	48.9	83.5	80.1	25.9
Missing	62.6	44.1	58.8	62.0	53.9	54.4	90.4	86.8	24.9

Table 11 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Other Characteristics of Individuals

	<u>Voting</u>	<u>Informal Social Support</u>		<u>Informal Sociability</u>			<u>Feelings of Social Isolation</u>		<u>Trust</u>
	E	F		G	G1	G2	H1	H2	I
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Was visited by someone at one’s own home – last 4 weeks	Did not feel cut off or isolated – last 12 months	Meet up with family/friends as much likes	Agrees that ‘most people can be trusted’
All respondents	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Church: Once a month +	85.1	46.9	55.7	64.8	53.4	56.1	85.5	83.8	24.1
Less than once a month	59.7	49.3	57.5	51.3	43.6	43.9	82.7	84.2	25.4
TV: 0-60 minutes	78.8	45.2	58.2	61.1	50.1	52.5	83.4	78.0	23.8
61-120 minutes	74.9	57.4	58.9	65.0	56.7	56.2	83.5	84.6	26.7
121 minutes +	73.9	40.6	52.0	54.4	43.3	46.7	86.4	88.4	22.4
Education: Primary level	85.7	21.6	58.0	65.2	47.0	59.5	86.0	90.7	24.7
Junior Certificate	74.8	51.4	52.7	56.0	47.6	47.3	86.1	87.0	20.9
Leaving Certificate	63.7	48.0	57.1	57.3	50.2	47.9	82.3	79.6	24.6
Post Leaving Certificate	86.3	48.6	61.3	58.0	51.9	48.1	86.4	77.5	26.3
Third level	80.9	56.3	57.2	68.2	61.4	59.0	82.9	78.5	31.3

**FIRST VOTE OF THANKS PROPOSED BY DR. TONY FAHEY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
INSTITUTE**

The recent upsurge of interest in 'social capital' is due in large measure to the persuasiveness of its chief proponent, Robert Putnam, a political scientist from Harvard University. His best-known book on the subject, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) is a bravura performance. It amasses an extraordinary array of data on civic and community life in the United States and on that basis argues in an entertaining and light-handed way that civic and community life in America is disintegrating. The consequences, he says, are serious, since a society of disconnected citizens is unhappier, less economically productive, less interested in education, unhealthier and more prone to crime than one in which social capital is strong. Tom Healy's paper is pitched at a more modest level than Putnam's work. It says nothing about trends in social capital, what might cause rises or declines in this area, or what the consequences might be. Rather it asks what social capital is, how much of it there is in Ireland at present and what social groups might have more or less of it than others. Yet, modest though these questions may be, they take us to the heart of the matter, for much of the credibility of research on social capital turns on questions of definition and measurement. Can we say clearly what social capital is, and if so, can we measure it?

To show some of the ambiguities that surround these questions, let me go back to Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. The small change in social behaviour in the US that Putnam uses to symbolise the malaise of civic and community life is the decline in league bowling, the most popular mass-participation competitive sport in America. In the early 1960s, according to the data presented by Putnam, men's participation in ten-pin bowling leagues peaked at over 80 league members per 1,000 men aged 20 and over; by 2000, that figure had fallen to 20 members per 1,000, with most of the decline having occurred since 1980 (women's participation peaked in the late 1970s but subsequently fell at the same rate as men's) (Putnam, 2002: 112). The picture of dramatic decline, however, is by no means straightforward, as Putnam (to his credit) points out: although *league* bowling plummeted, overall bowling increased, so that by the late 1990s 'more Americans were bowling than ever before' and when population increase is taken into account, the rate of participation in bowling has at least held steady, if not increased (p. 112). He also accepts that 'only poetic license authorises my description of non-league bowling as "bowling alone"' since informal groups dominate in bowling alleys. As Putnam therefore points out, 'the fact that participation in bowling has held more or less steady in recent years actually represents an exception to the general diminishment of informal ties' (p. 113). It is somewhat disconcerting to find that the image of the lone bowler evoked by the title of Putnam's study is, by the author's own admission, a poetic license that is at some remove from the facts. A further ambiguity arises from Putnam's account of other aspects of the role of sport in American life. He trawls through quite a lot of data to assess whether popular participation in sport has gone up or down since the 1960s and concludes that, on balance, taking the sports that have increased with those that have declined, the overall movement is probably slightly downward, a trend he interprets as another indication of decline in collective social life (pp.109-11). However, there is no doubt about the trend in *attendance* at sports events. Here the trend is sharply and unambiguously upwards. Even after adjusting for population growth, attendance at major league sports events in baseball, football, basketball, hockey and NASCAR auto racing almost doubled between 1960s and the late 1990s: attendances numbered about 380 per 1,000 of US population in 1960, compared to about 720 per 1,000 in the late 1990s (p. 114). Putnam, however, regards this trend as having little significance, since he interprets attendance at sports event as 'passive spectatorship' that has little social value compared to the 'active participation' represented by playing a sport. To put it mildly, this is an interpretation many would disagree with. What concerns us here is not how Putnam glosses over trends in American life that are at odds with his 'declining social capital' thesis, but

rather the difficulties of conceptualisation and measurement of social capital of that arise from looking at even one area of life, such as sport, in any detail. These difficulties have a bearing on Tom Healy's approach in today's paper, since the definition of social capital that he sets out extends to neither playing of sport nor attendance at sports events (though volunteering for sport is in). It might be pushing things too far to suggest that sport is the new civic religion in the modern world, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the focus of much leisure-time social interaction, especially among men. However one argues this question, the very fact that some definitions of social capital can include both playing and attending sport (as Putnam's does) while others omit both (as Tom Healy's does) indicates how difficult it is to come up with an agreed and empirically meaningful concept. Other activities that are important in Irish social life but that are never thought of in connection with social capital could also have a claim to be included. Visiting the pub is an example. This is a behaviour that the tourist trade (perhaps with some justification) likes to project as the epitome of Irish gregariousness even though researchers concerned with 'community' rarely give it attention. Pubs are often associated with drunkenness, which most would agree is a bad thing, but their link with sociability would make it hard to ignore them in a comprehensive concept of social capital. Today's paper also points to methodological problems associated with units of analysis: many of the instruments designed to measure social capital (such as sample surveys) focus on individuals while social capital is usually conceptualised as a property of groups. The solution to this problem lies not in the abandonment of surveys but in the use of additional methods and units of analysis. Again, in the Irish case, it is worth turning to the world of sport to illustrate this point. Social science in Ireland, even those branches that have been interested in social capital, have never taken *sports organisations* seriously and for that reason, one might argue, have missed out on some intriguing developments in the organisational expression of community life. The GAA is an obvious case in point: though 'traditional' and rural in its historical base, it is booming as never before in Ireland today, and is doing so without having lost its core, community-based, voluntaristic character. Given how much opprobrium is heaped on television as the destroyer of traditional community practices and values, it is also worth noting how the GAA's vibrancy today has been nurtured in no small measure by its marriage with television. In the 1960s and 1970s, the GAA was fearful of television and was worried about the survival of Gaelic games in the emerging television age. During the 1980s and 1990s, it learned how to embrace and benefit from the medium. Now the oxygen of TV publicity and the infusions of TV-related sponsorship money have rejuvenated the organisation from Croke Park down to club level. Here we have an instance of a community-based organisation that used the great anti-social ogre that television is often portrayed to be and turned it to the advantage of social capital at national and local level. To explore the nature and dynamics of social capital we need to examine institutional-organisation developments such as these, as well as the behaviour of individuals. This is a challenge that research on social capital has scarcely begun to address. Tom Healy is to be thanked for his work in opening up the field of research on social capital in Ireland and for providing extensive baseline data. He has done more in this field than anyone else, and his paper today is but a small part of a larger body of writing. As he himself points out, however, the field is yet to be mastered, so we can only urge him to continue with this work and respond to the challenges that his own industry and insights have revealed.

Second Vote of thanks Proposed by Morgan Kelly, UCD

Since probably the beginning of urban civilization, and certainly since Roman times, social conservatives have contrasted the former abundance of some virtue with its rarity in current society in general and among the lower orders in particular. The identity of this virtue has changed through time virtues in Rome, filial piety in China, more recently godliness or knowing the value of hard work; but what has remained constant is the certainty that its decline explains the intractable ills of the present. The latest candidate for universal solvent, from Robert Putnam, is

social capital, the idea that the success and happiness of individuals and societies is determined by their cohesiveness. The paper under discussion attempts to measure the extent and determinants of social capital using a variety of measures of social participation as proxies for social capital. It finds, like other studies, that better educated individuals tend to have more social capital. Implicit in this exercise is the assumption is that social capital, like human and physical capital, is a good thing whose accumulation should be encouraged. I am not convinced of this. Outside natural and human disasters, we are accustomed to capital rising through time. What is puzzling about social capital is that, as Putnam argues, its quantity has declined through time. Social capital has fallen while education levels have risen. If more educated people in cross section 1 have higher levels of social capital, why has social capital not risen through time with average education levels? Given the assumed benefits of social capital to individual's greater happiness, health, labour market contacts this decline in social capital becomes even harder to understand. It is as if people suddenly decided to stop brushing their teeth. In fact the basic finding of the happiness research literature, that happiness has not changed much through time, indicates that the decline in social capital does not matter. This decline in social capital suggests that there is more to the concept than the inane, unfocused sociability that Putnam lauds. To see this it is worth looking at contemporary analyses of Putnam's golden age, the Eisenhower era of 1950s America. The definitive study is William Whyte's "The Organization Man." What is immediately striking is how closely Whyte's description matches Putnam's. The main motives of corporations were belongingness and togetherness; suburban life consisted of other-directed people whose main desire in life was to seem helpful and outgoing. While the descriptions are identical the reactions are completely opposite. What for Putnam was a heaven of social capital was for Whyte a "benign tyranny" of social conformity. Once we follow Whyte in recognising social capital as social conformity its decline can be understood and, to a large degree, welcomed. What induces individuals to engage in a collective activity is a combination of a personal preference for the activity and an assessment of how useful the activity will be for their personal advancement. If social activities contribute little to private advancement, only those who enjoy them will participate while if they contribute greatly, many of the participants will dislike the activity but will nevertheless engage in it. This process can be seen in the decline of our former national pastime of politics. What caused participation in political activity to decline was not a sudden distaste for ringing doorbells, intimidating rivals, or personating the deceased; but a fall in the value of political patronage. A generation ago a job in the post office for your son was a rare prize in return for which politicians could extract any amount of footwork. Now with jobs plentiful people are free to express their private feelings towards the political class and engage their preferred activities of shopping or watching television. Similarly, throughout the industrialized world the changing pattern of corporate promotion has lessened the value of seeming like a regular guy. Instead of lengthy tenures with one employer with internal promotion based on signalling one's commitment to the organization, individuals frequently change job, relying on specific skills rather than general affability for promotion. As the returns to conformity have fallen, so has investment in conformity or social capital. It would be a useful exercise if the type of survey here were to be repeated to include some questions from some standard psychological conformity scale to measure how much participation in group activities correlates with individual conformity. What then is to be done about social capital? If the findings here are correct, the best measure is to eliminate the poor and uneducated. Flippancy aside, aspects of social capital such as trust reflect how benevolently people believe society operates based on their personal experience. Those for whom society operates benevolently, the affluent who enjoy good schools, healthcare and police protection, believe that it operates benevolently whereas the poor whose experience is the opposite believe otherwise. To improve people's perception of society and encourage their participation in it, it is necessary to improve their experience of it by offering better public services, not by encouraging them to engage in the collective idiocy of bowling.