

Niamh at 9 months



Niamh at 3 years



Niamh at 5 years



# Ireland's New Family Inequalities

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# Why important?

- Differences in family patterns by socio-economic status an important context for children's lives
  - SES → differences in family patterns → differences in children's outcomes
- Family processes may *amplify* (not merely reproduce) SES inequalities
  - Differences in family behaviour by SES add to social polarisation of children?
  - Contribute to rising inequalities over time?



# Two major phases in 'social polarisation' thesis

- Early 20<sup>th</sup> century: fertility behaviour/family size the main focus:
  - SES differences in fertility: 'the rich get richer and the poor get children'.
  - Esp. during fertility transition (middle & upper classes first to adopt two-child family model)
  - Poor family = large family
  - Effects on population composition as well as at individual level (eugenics: the poor reproduce too much, 'degrade' population quality)
- Since 1960s: partnership behaviour (family instability, lone parenthood) the main focus
  - Absent fathers v engaged fathers: Higher SES → more fathering
  - Joint parenting amplifies advantages of parents as individuals
  - Poor family = lone parent/unstable family
  - McLanahan: 'children's diverging destinies' – serial lone parenthood among US poor
  - Esping-Andersen: 'Incomplete revolution' – women's movement more effective among higher SES couples → increases father's involvement with children → raises total parental investment per child



# Situation in Ireland today?

- Examine fertility and partnership dimensions together
- Keep population effects in mind: which SES groups reproduce the most?
  - Historic pattern of unequal access to family formation?
- Three topics:
  - Union formation (marriage & cohabitation)
  - Fertility (number of children, childlessness)
  - Union instability (solo child-bearing, marital breakdown, [second unions])



# Measuring SES

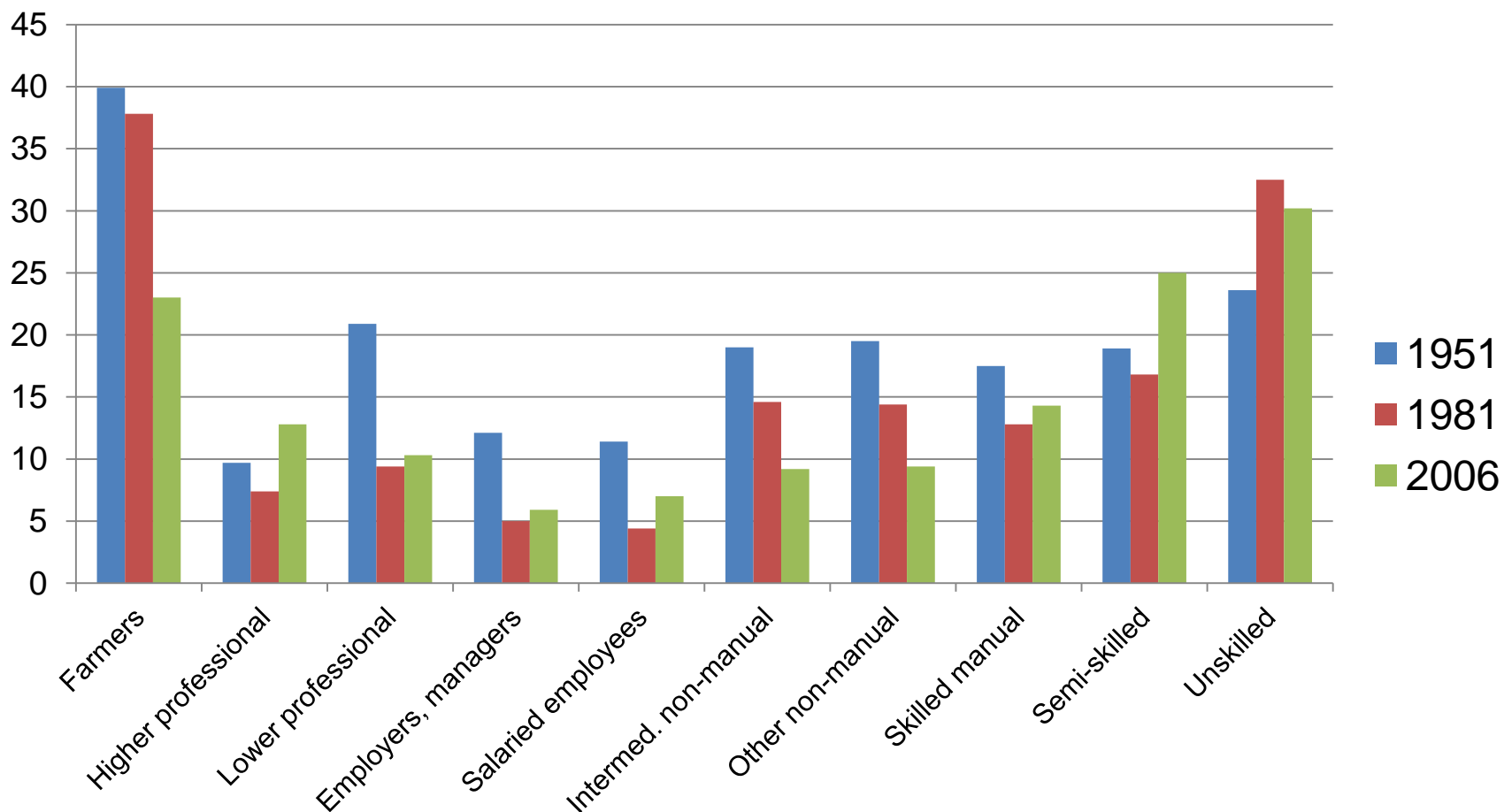
- **Social class (based on occupation):**
  - Central concept in sociology
  - But data often missing, esp. for women (home duties & never employed)
  - Can be endogenous to family dynamics (esp. for women – family status limits job options)
- **Education:**
  - Easier to measure, fewer missing cases
  - Less endogenous: usually completed prior to family formation?
- **Income level:**
  - Conceptually & practically difficult
  - Limited as indicator of current resources (worse as indicator of long-term resources)



# I. FAMILY FORMATION



# Males aged 45-54: % single

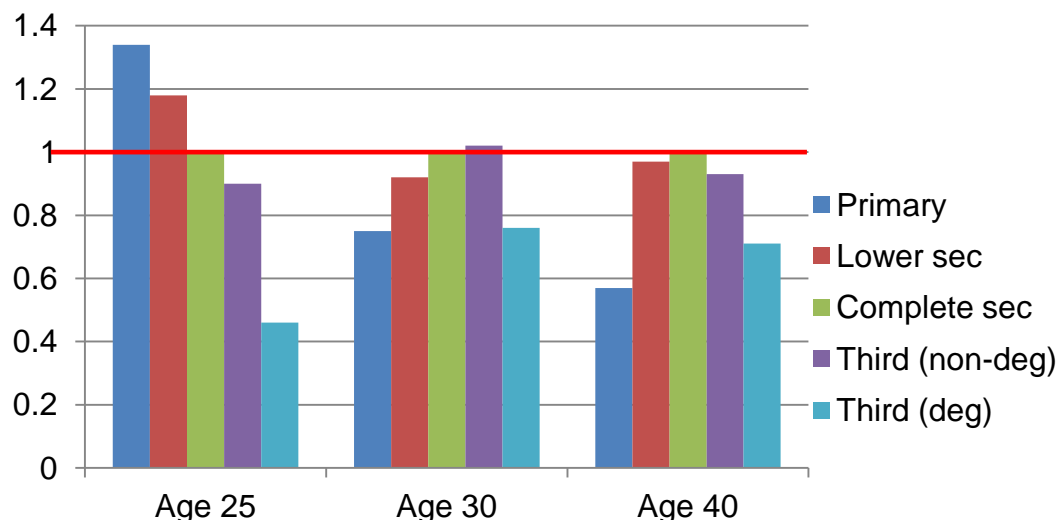


Source: Censuses of Population

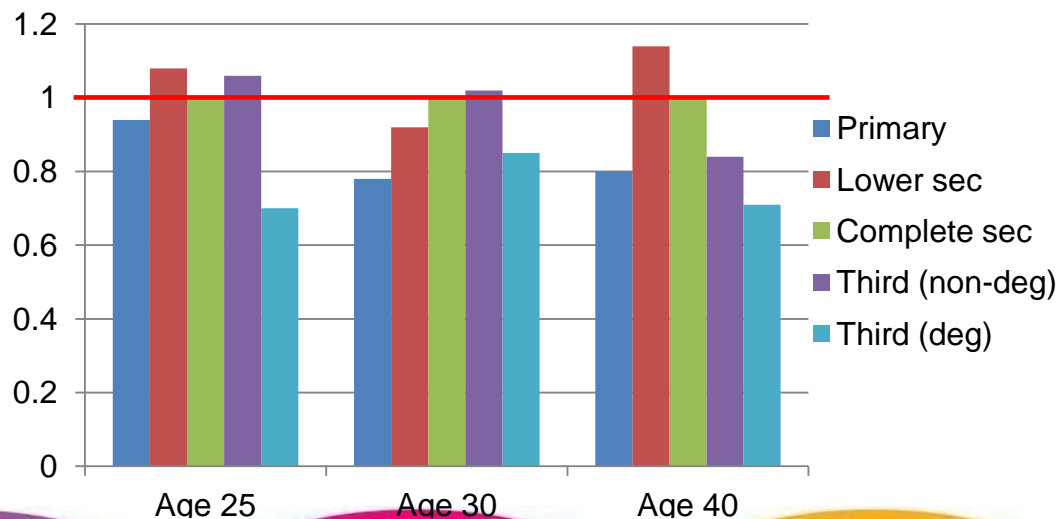


# Marriage & cohabitation by educational level (Census 2006)

Marriage: odds ratios\*  
(ref: complete secondary education = 1)



Cohabitation: odds ratios\*  
(ref: complete secondary education = 1)



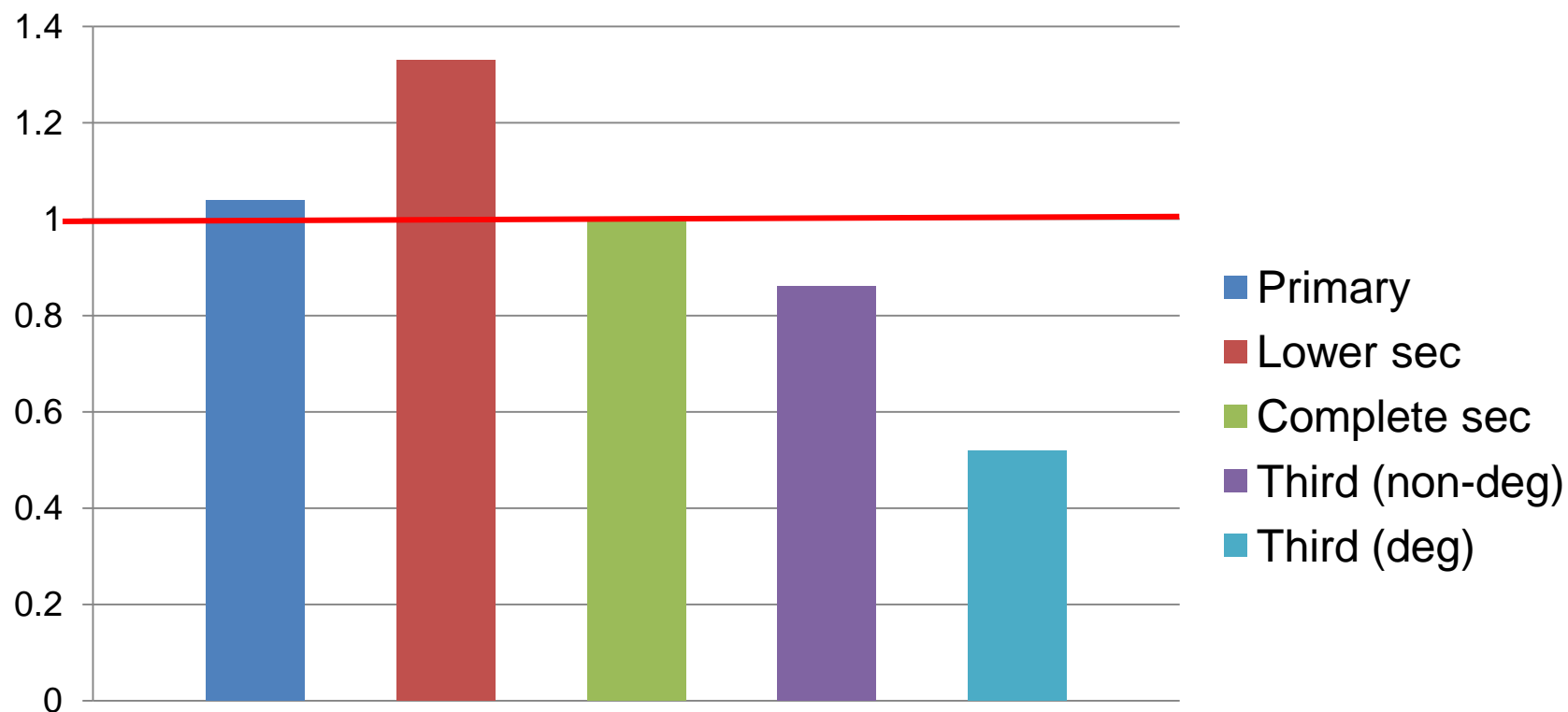
\* Controlling for gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, occupational class, & region.

Source: P. Lunn et al. (2009), p. 107. Based on Census 2006 microdata





# Odds ratios of having at least one child by age 40 (Census 2006)



\* Controlling for gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, occupational class, & region.  
Source: P. Lunn et al. (2009), p. 107. Based on Census 2006 microdata



# Conclusions: Family formation

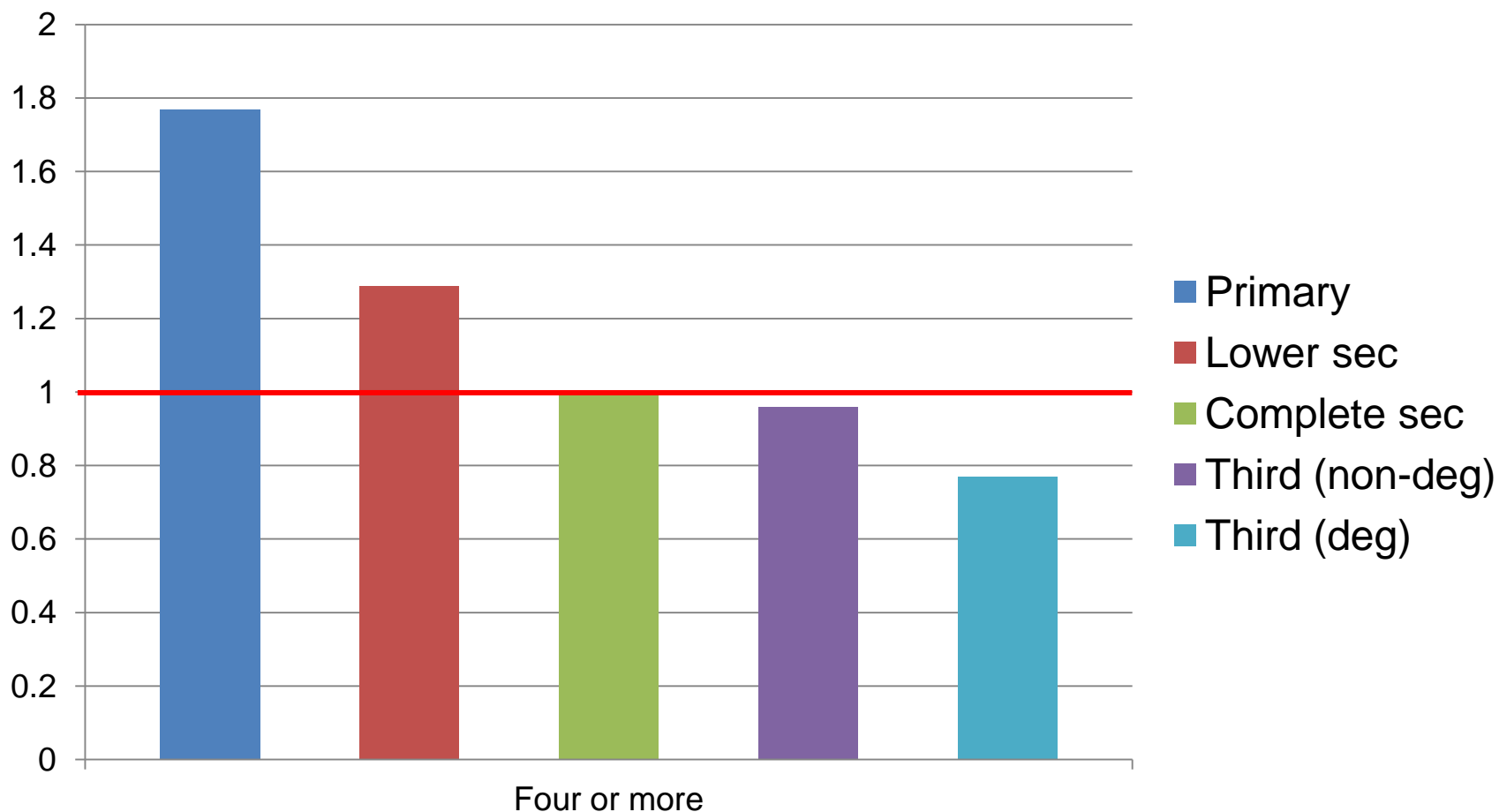
- Persistence of traditional lowest rates of partnership among lowest SES groups?
- But, because of solo parenthood, may not translate into lowest rates of family formation?
- Lower partnership rates among highest SES groups (esp. third level educated)?



## II. FERTILITY



# Odds ratios of having four+ children by age 40\* (Census 2006)

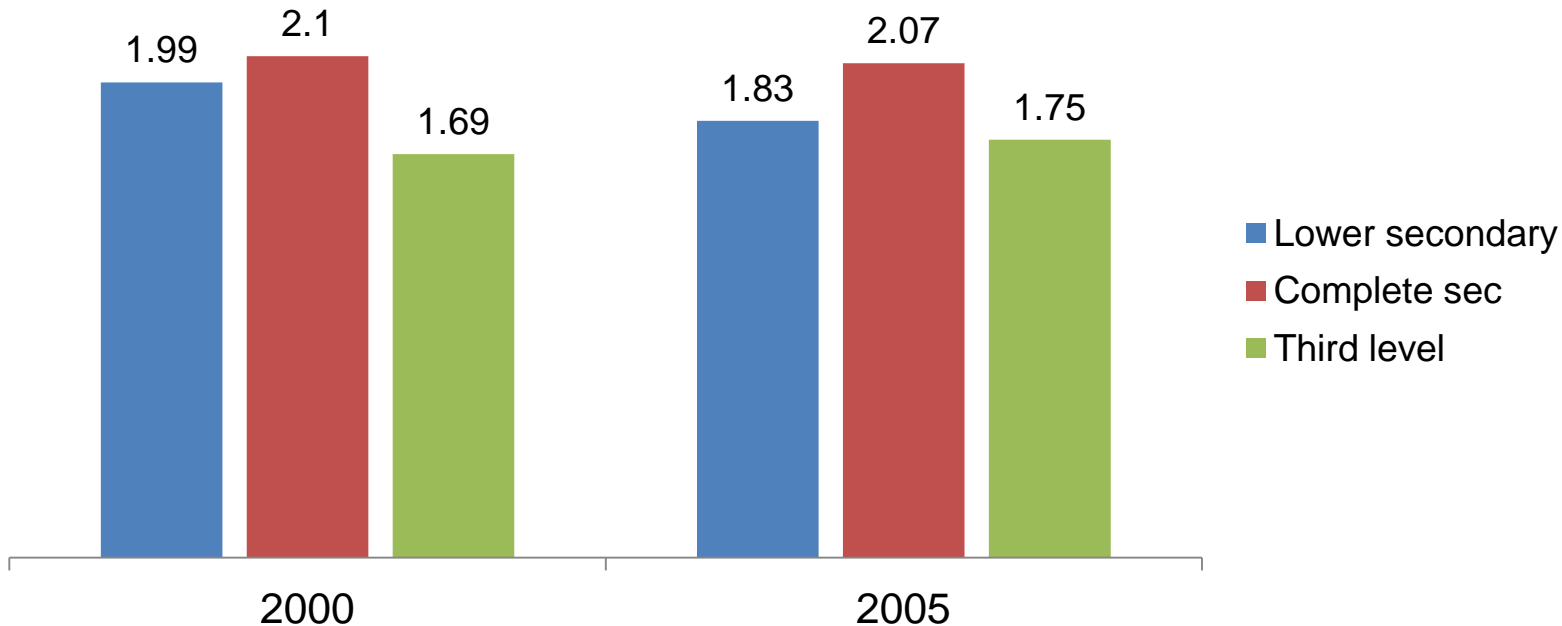


\* Controlling for gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, occupational class, & region.  
Source: P. Lunn et al. (2009), p. 107. Based on Census 2006 microdata



# Recent fertility differences by educational level of mother

Derived estimates of fertility rates by educational level of mother\*



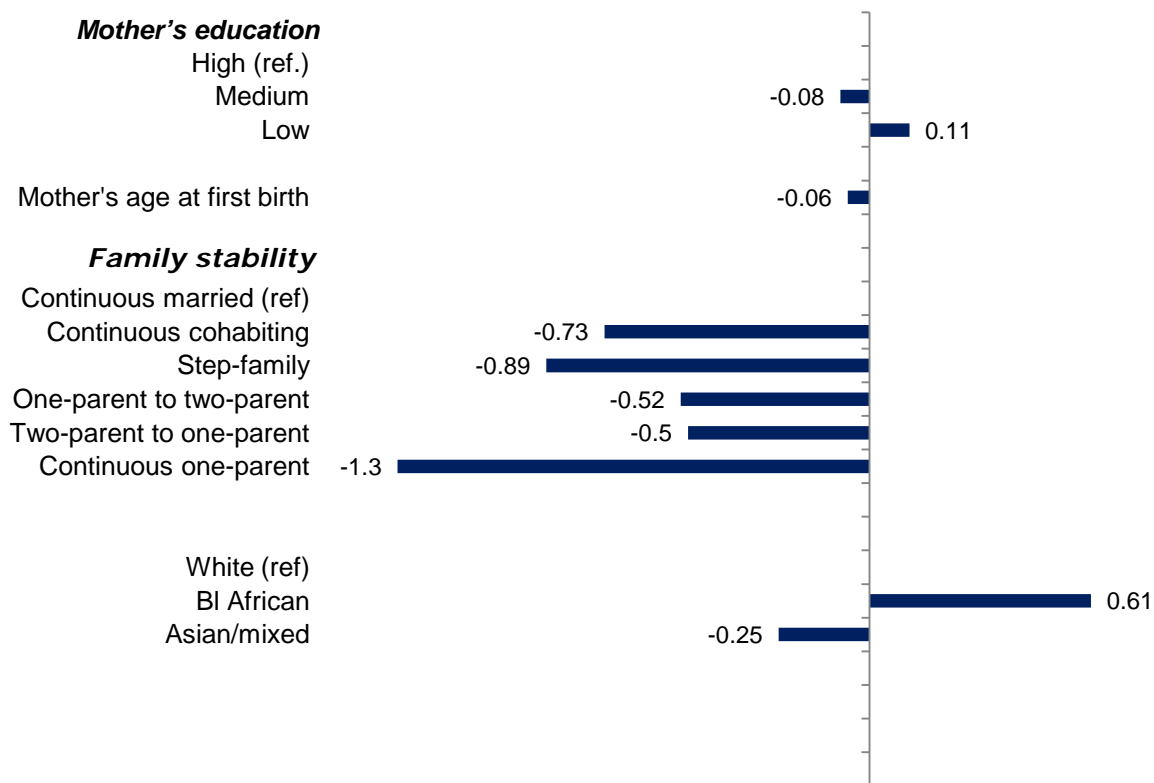
\* Based on counts of mothers with children born in 2000 and 2005 in Census 2006  
Source: P. Lunn & T. Fahey (2011), p. 86.



# Predictors of family size (GUI child cohort at 9 years)

## A. All Families

Unstandardised OLS coefficients

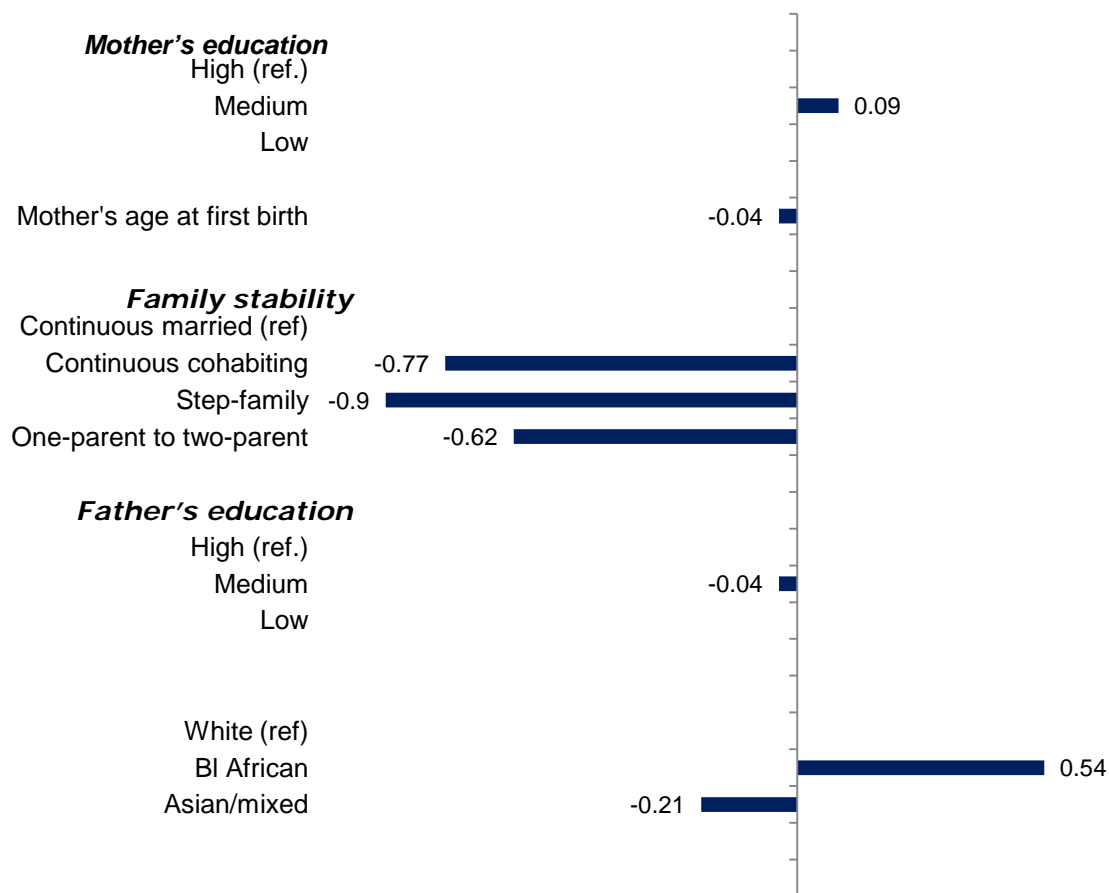




# Predictors of family size (GUI child cohort at 9 years)

## B. Two parent families

Unstandardised OLS coefficients

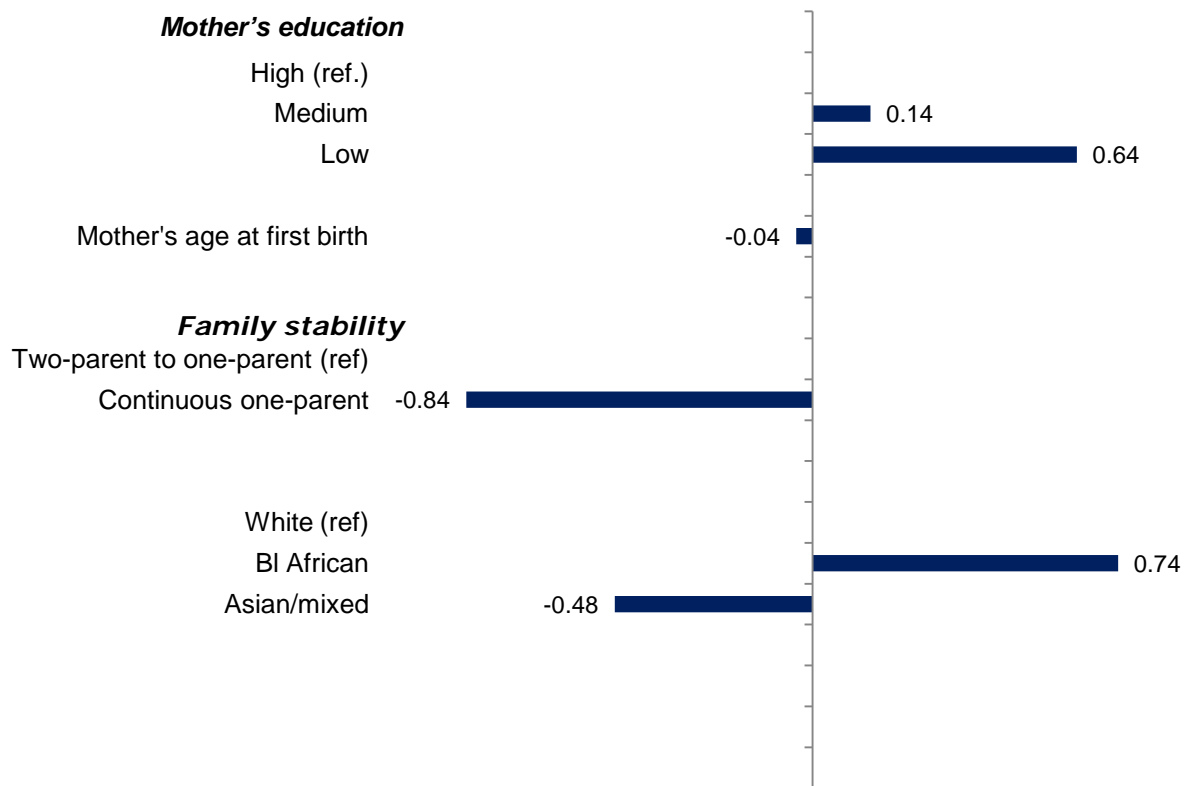




# Predictors of family size (GUI child cohort at 9 years)

## C. One Parent Families

Unstandardised OLS coefficients







# Conclusions: Fertility

- SES differences in fertility persist ...
- But may be narrowing?
- Timing of family formation (first births) still an influence
- Family instability also an influence:
  - unstable unions → smaller families

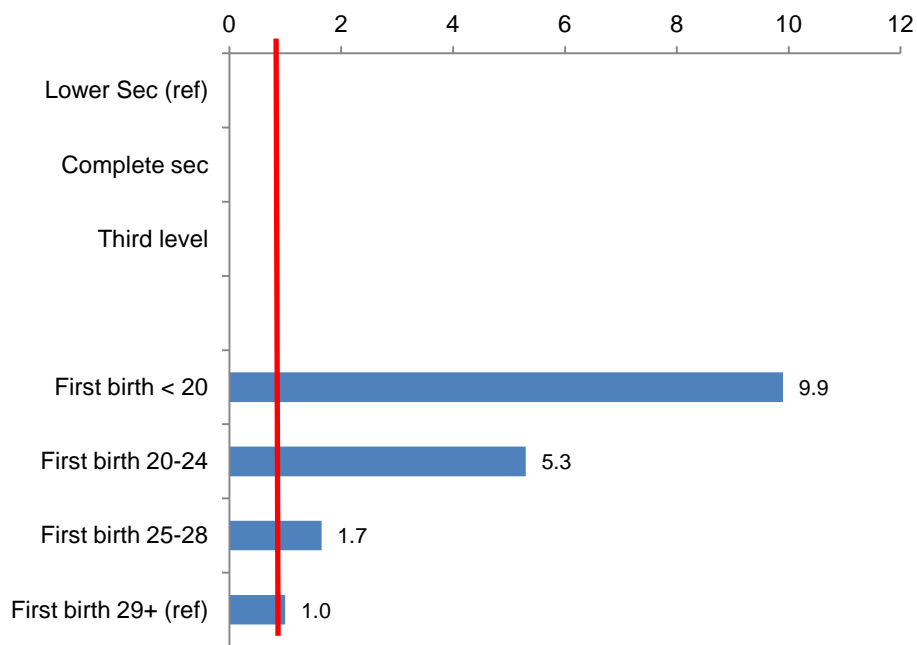


## II. FAMILY INSTABILITY

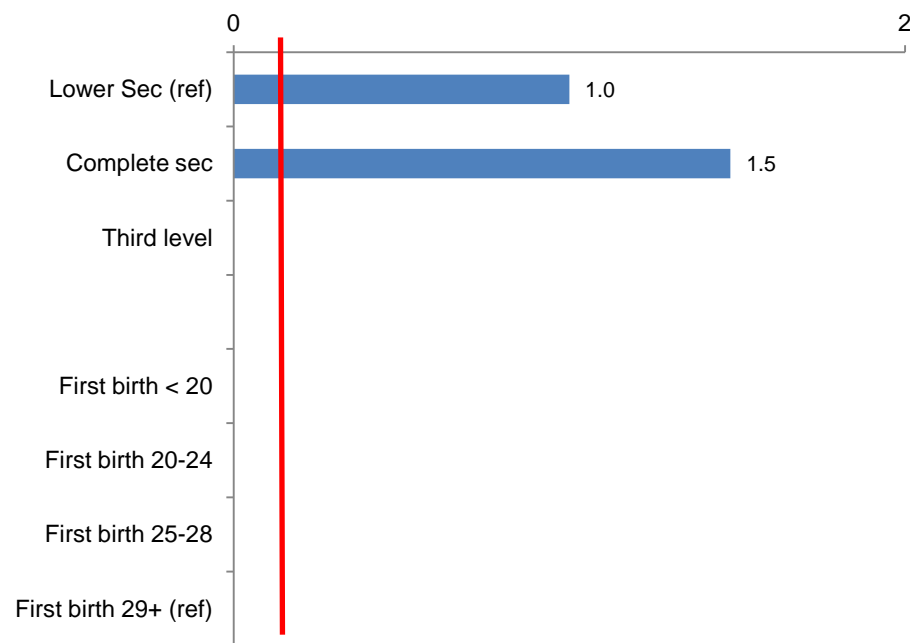


# Odds ratios for family instability: mother's education & age at first birth (GUI child cohort)

Odds ratios for never-married lone parenthood

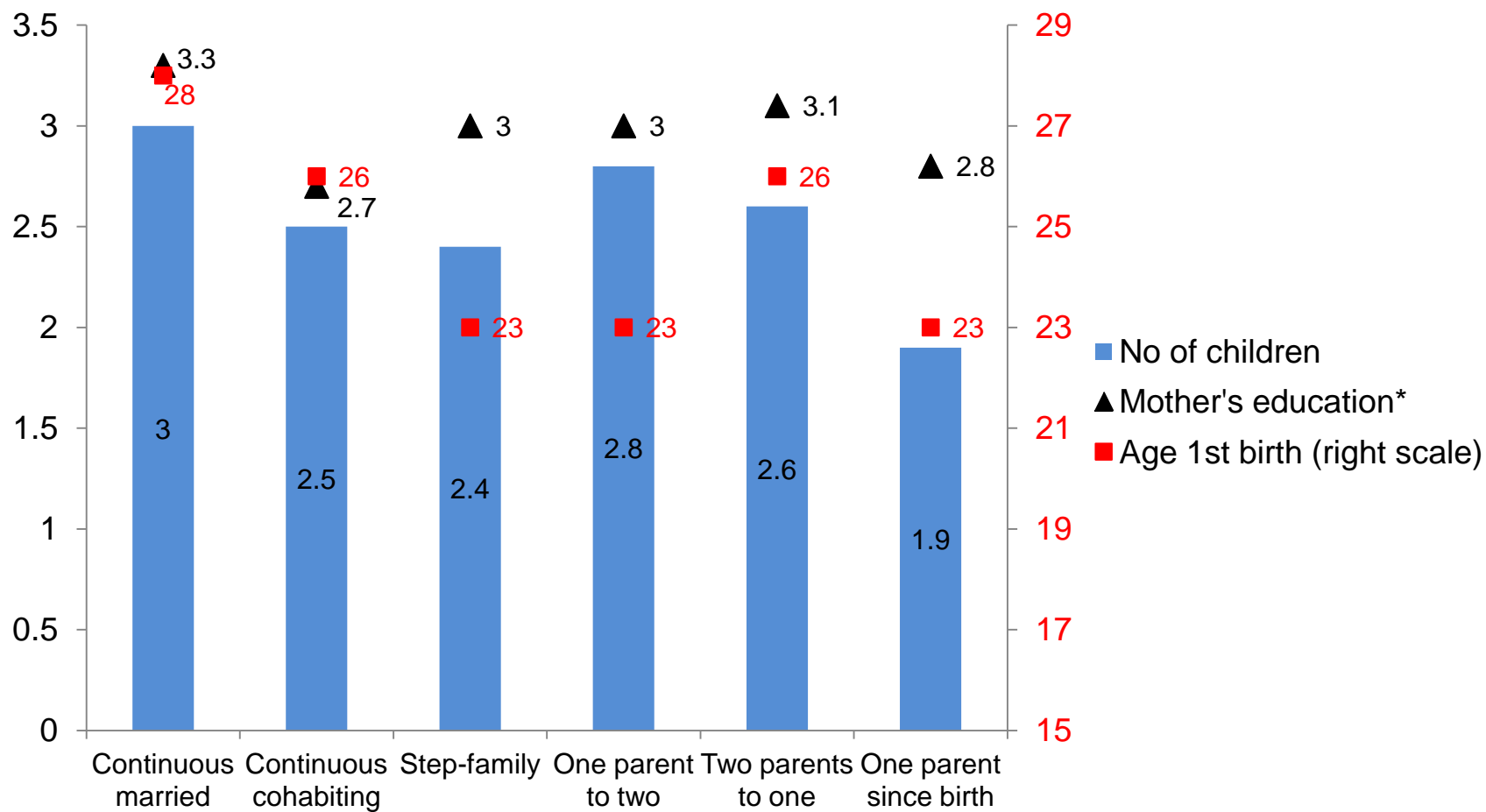


Odds ratios for sep/divorced lone parenthood





# Interaction of family instability and fertility (GUI child cohort)

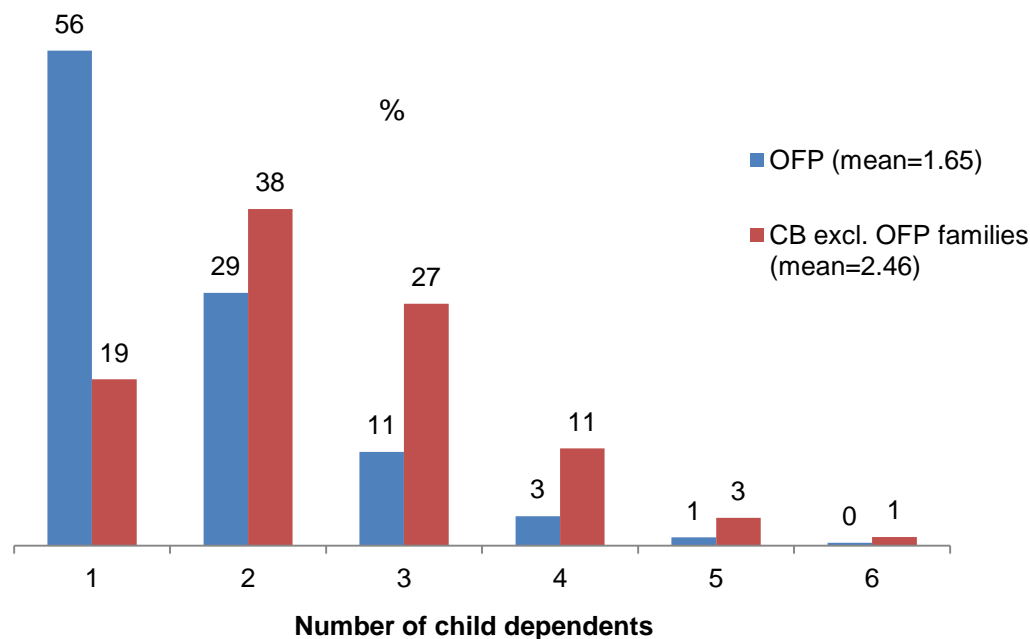


\* Based on ISCED scale : 1= none or primary, 2= lower secondary, 3= higher secondary, 4= non degree, 5= degree, 6= post-grad.  
 Source: GUI Child Cohort data (9 years)



# One-Parent Families, Small Families?

**Number of child dependents:  
Families receiving One-Parent Family Payment compared  
to families receiving Child Benefit (2011)**



Source: Computed from Annual Social Welfare Statistics 2011



# Overall conclusions

- SES gaps in family patterns not uniform: differ across different family processes
  - Union formation
  - Fertility
  - Union instability
- No evidence of *overall* trend towards social polarisation
- Narrowing fertility differentials: a counter-polarising trend?
- Union instability: new SES differences (esp. re never-partnered lone parenthood)
- ... but polarisation counter-balanced by fertility-limiting effects of union instability: unstable families → small families



# References

P. Lunn, T. Fahey & C. Hannan (2009) *Family Figures Family Dynamics and Family Types in Ireland, 1986-2006*. Dublin: ESRI/Family Support Agency

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