Partnership, Parenthood and Children in Ireland:

Contextualising the Analysis of GUI data

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UCD School of Applied Social Science

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The 'old' poverty risk family: two parents and many children …

Family size in a local authority housing estate in Limerick in 1966 (based on sample of 100 children aged 14-16 years)

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN IN RESPONDENTS' FAMILIES

| Number of Children	Percentage of Families
1– 2	5%
3– 4	9%
5– 6	29%
7– 8	23%
9–10	21%
Over 10	13%

→ 57% of families

Source: L. Ryan (1967) *Social Dynamite. A Study of Early School Leavers*. Cork: Sociology Department, University College Cork, p. 21

The 'new' poverty risk family: lone parents with 1-2 children

Household type among households with children – social housing tenants in Limerick City Council, 2005

% (households with children)

Households with & without children

With children 53%

No children 47%
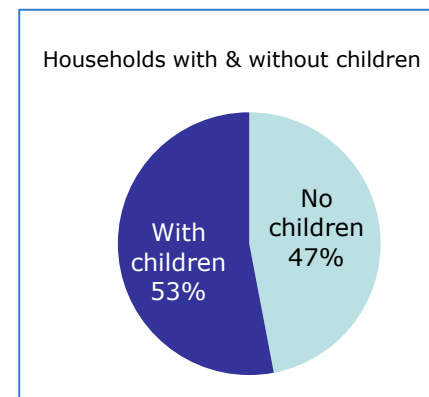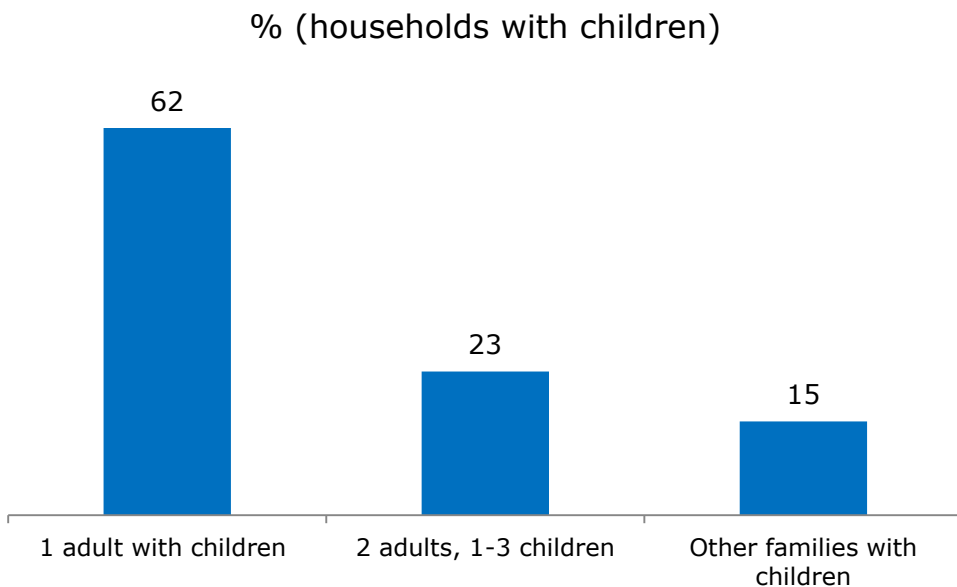
Source: D. McCaffrey & A. Canny (2005) *Public Housing in Limerick City: A Profile of Tenants and Estates*. Social Inclusion Unit, Limerick City Council

Topics

- Two contextual developments:
  - Growth of non-intact families (lone parenthood)
  - Trends in family size

- Why important?
  - Research on effects of lone parenthood & family size on child development
  - Extent of lone-parent and large families in Ireland
  - Effects: preliminary analysis from GUI 9 year-old sample

- Main features of these developments in Ireland
  - Routes into LP?
  - Who has large families?

Research context

- Many studies of effects of lone parenthood/family instability on child outcomes
  - Amato (2000) meta-analysis: 67 US studies in 1990s
  - Chapple (2009) meta-analysis: 122 non-US English-language studies in 1990s & 2000s
  - Effect sizes, net of confounding factors, nearly always negative but generally small (-0.1 → -0.23 standard deviations)
  - Higher quality studies show smaller effects (c. -0.1 std dev.)
  - Effects in US higher than in other countries (c. -0.15 → -0.25 std dev.)

- Fewer studies of effects of family size / birth order
  - > 10 major studies since 1970s?
  - But key studies find moderate effects
  - No consensus on whether family size or birth order is operative factor
  - Examples: Blake (1989), Black et al. (2005), Downey (2001)

Example: children in large families have lower verbal ability (Blake 1989)

Effect of number of children in family on verbal reasoning scores among US white children in 1960s (Hispanics & blacks excluded)

Standardised scores, controlled for mother's and father's education, family income, family intactness, and region
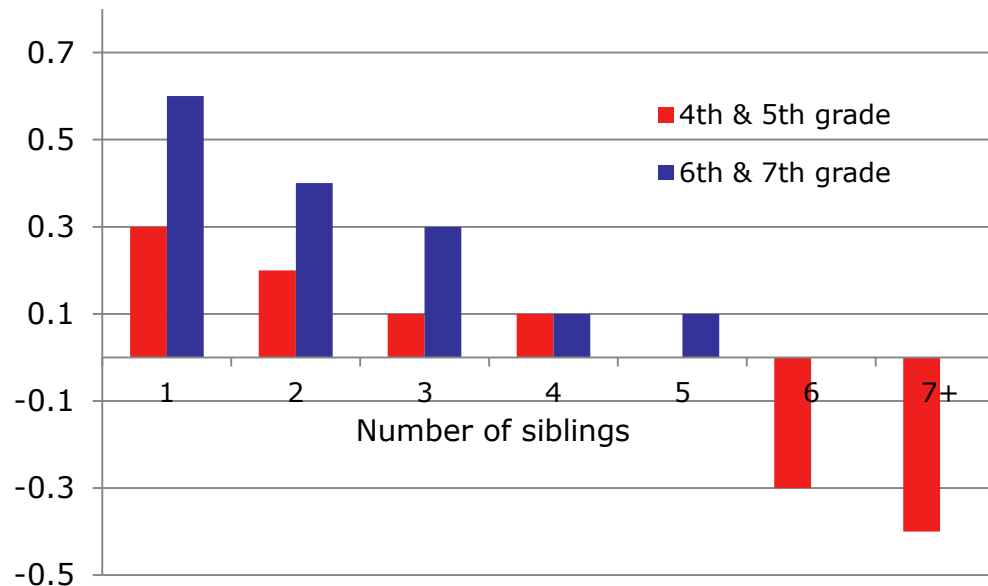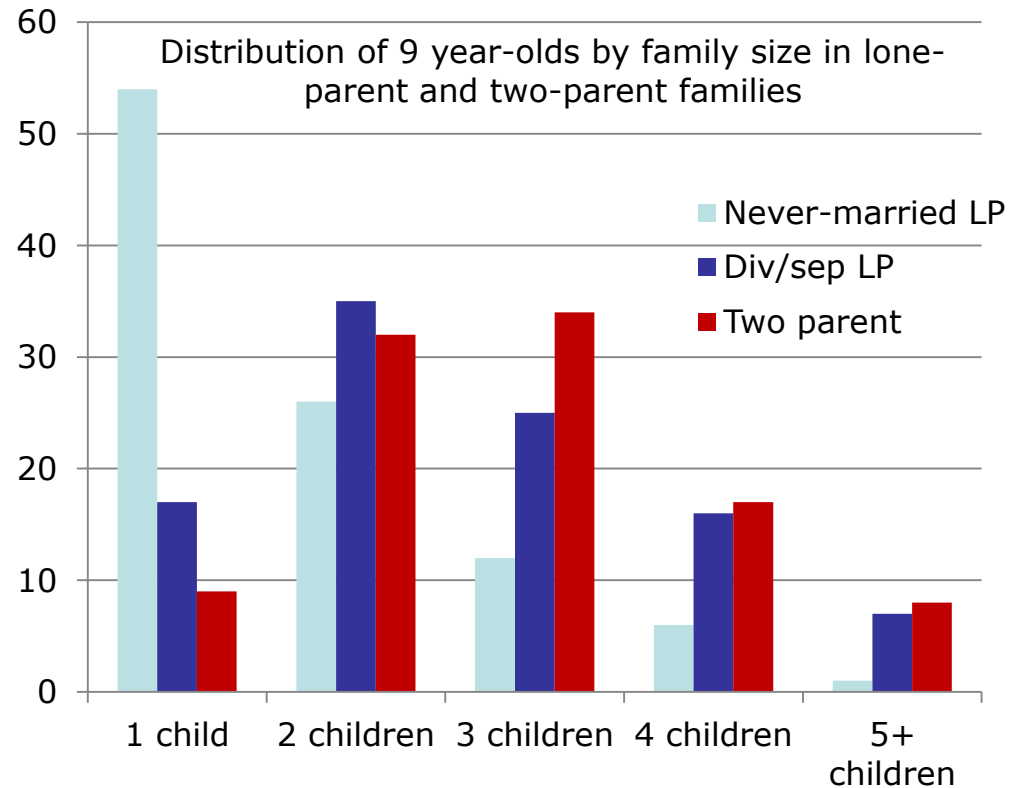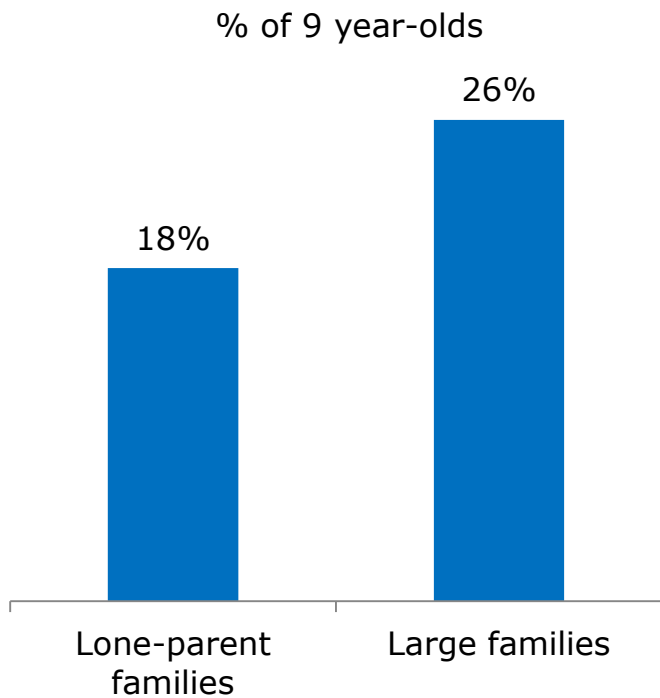

Effect sizes, 1 child v 4 child family:

4th & 5th grade: 0.3 std dev.
6th & 7th grade: 0.4 std dev.

Source: Blake (1989). Calculated from Table 4.1, p. 116. Data are from the Health Examination Surveys, 1963-65

Ireland: more 9 year-olds in large families than in lone-parent families (GUI data)

% of 9 year-olds

Lone-parent families: 18%
Large families: 26%

Distribution of 9 year-olds by family size in lone-parent and two-parent families

Legend:
- Never-married LP
- Div/sep LP
- Two parent

'Large' families (4+ children) continue to be common in Ireland

Children among women aged 40-44
(based on 'live births' data, Census 2006)

Family size

2.7

2.19

Mean no. children

Mean no. children excluding childless

Large families

36%

21%

% of mothers with 4+ children

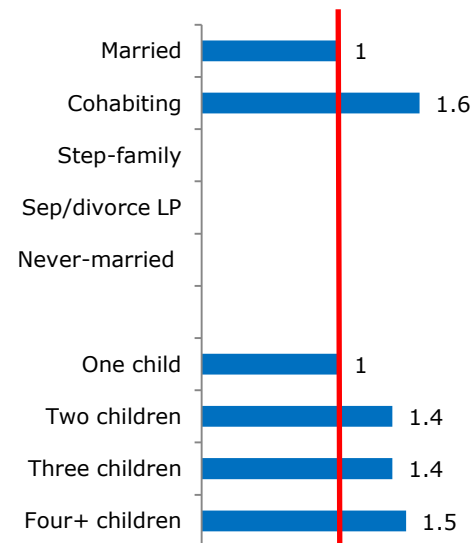% of children in families with 4+ children
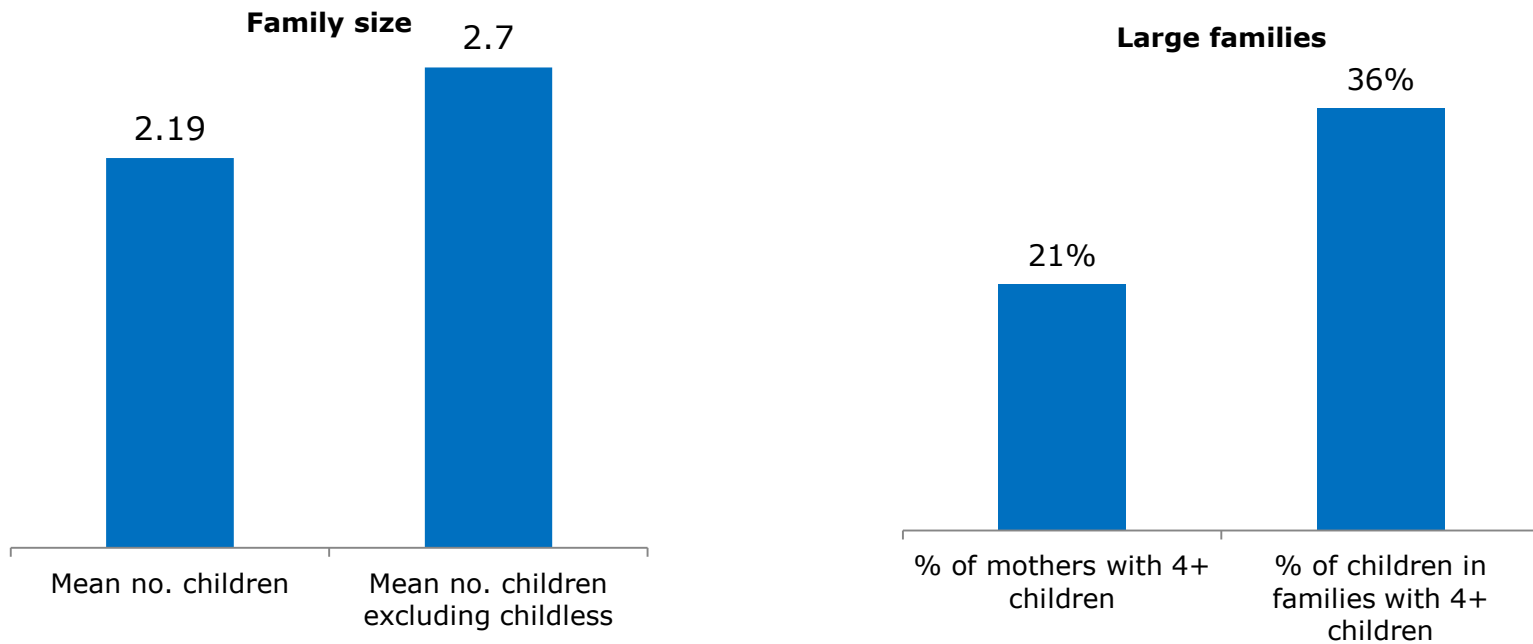
Does family size/birth order still make a difference? Does it matter as much as family type?

Odds ratios for low reading ability
(bottom quintile, Drumcondra reading test)
(9 year-olds, GUI data)
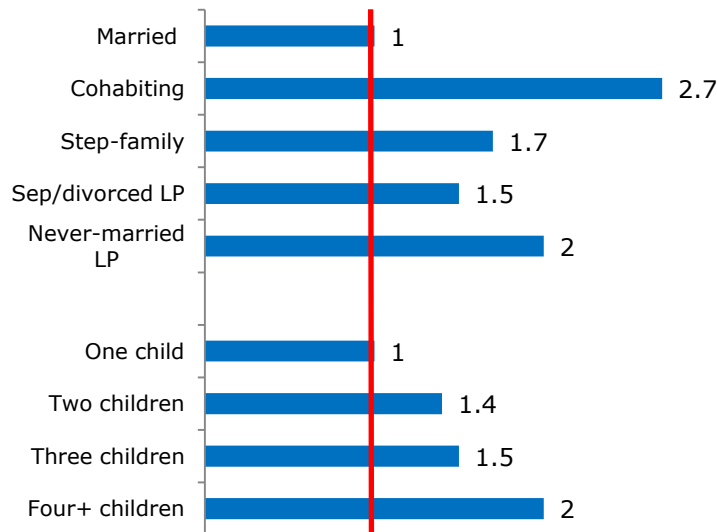
No controls,
reference categories: married =1, one child family=1

Category	Odds ratio
Married	1
Cohabiting	2.7
Step-family	1.7
Sep/divorced LP	1.5
Never-married LP	2
One child	1
Two children	1.4
Three children	1.5
Four+ children	2

With controls*,
reference categories: married =1, one child family=1

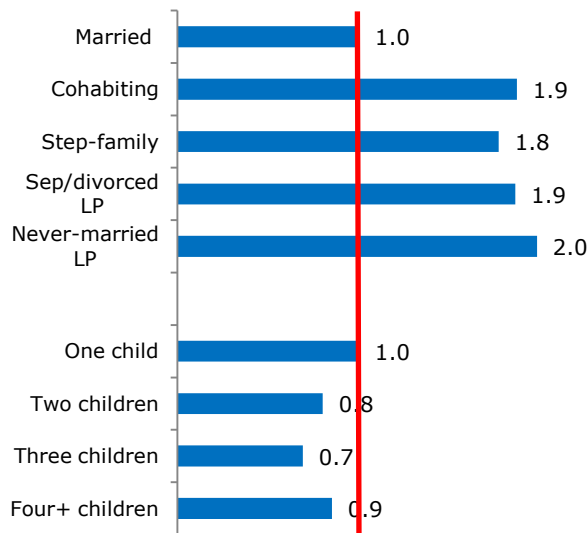| Category	Odds ratio
Married	1
Cohabiting	1.6
Step-family	
Sep/divorce LP	
Never-married	
One child	1
Two children	1.4
Three children	1.4
Four+ children	1.5

* Mother's age, mother's age at first birth, mother's education, household poverty, mother's experience of financial difficulties at age 16, living with grandparents, child's gender, language of the home, mother's ability to read to child

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Odds ratios for behavioural problems
(top quintile, SDQ)
9 year-olds, GUI data

No controls,
reference categories: married =1, one child family=1

Married	1.0
Cohabiting	1.9
Step-family	1.8
Sep/divorced LP	1.9
Never-married LP	2.0
One child	1.0
Two children	0.8
Three children	0.7
Four+ children	0.9

With controls*,
reference categories: married =1, one child family=1

Married	1.0
Cohabiting	
Step-family	1.3
Sep/divorce LP	
Never-married	
One child	1.0
Two children	0.6
Three children	0.5
Four+ children	0.6

* Mother's age, mother's age at first birth, mother's education, household poverty, mother's experience of financial difficulties at age 16, living with grandparents, child's gender, language of the home, mother's ability to read to child
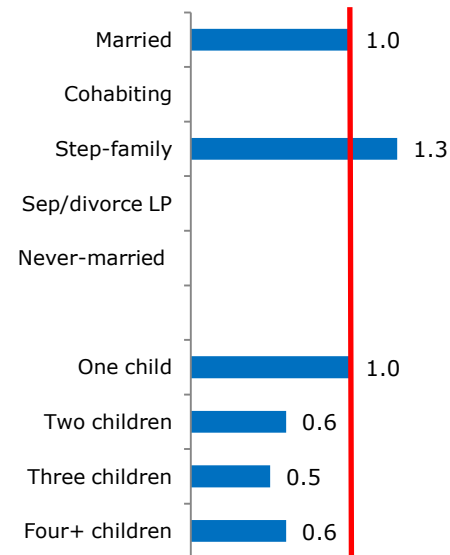
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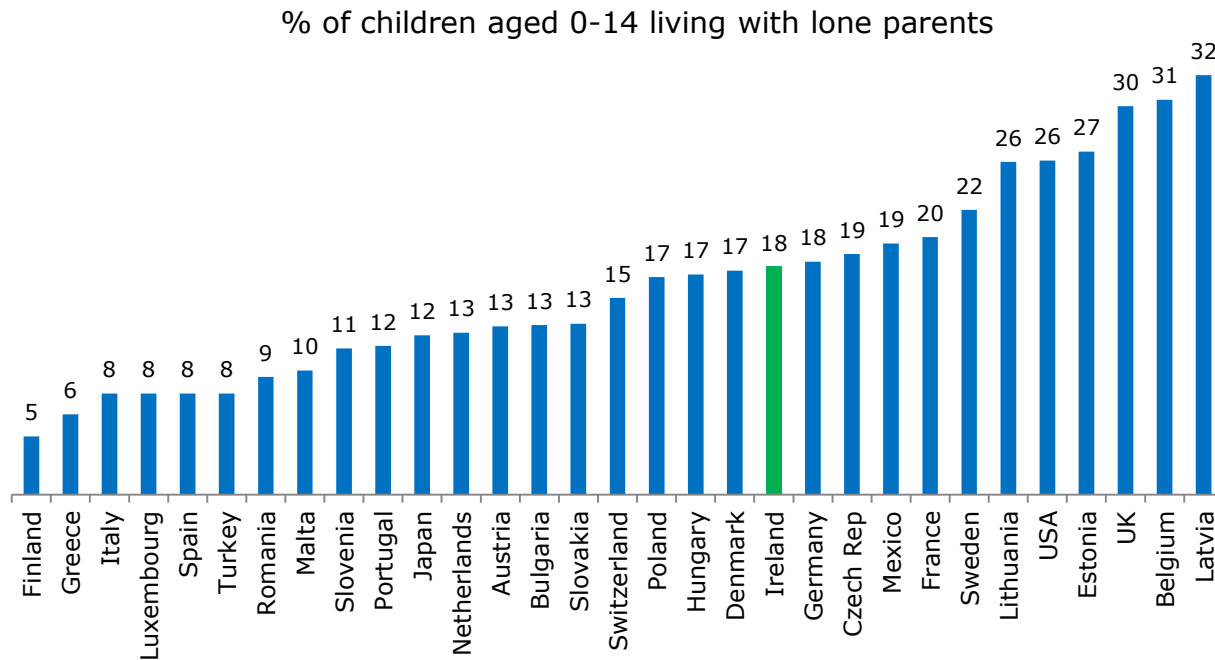
Patterns of lone parenthood in Ireland:

How many?
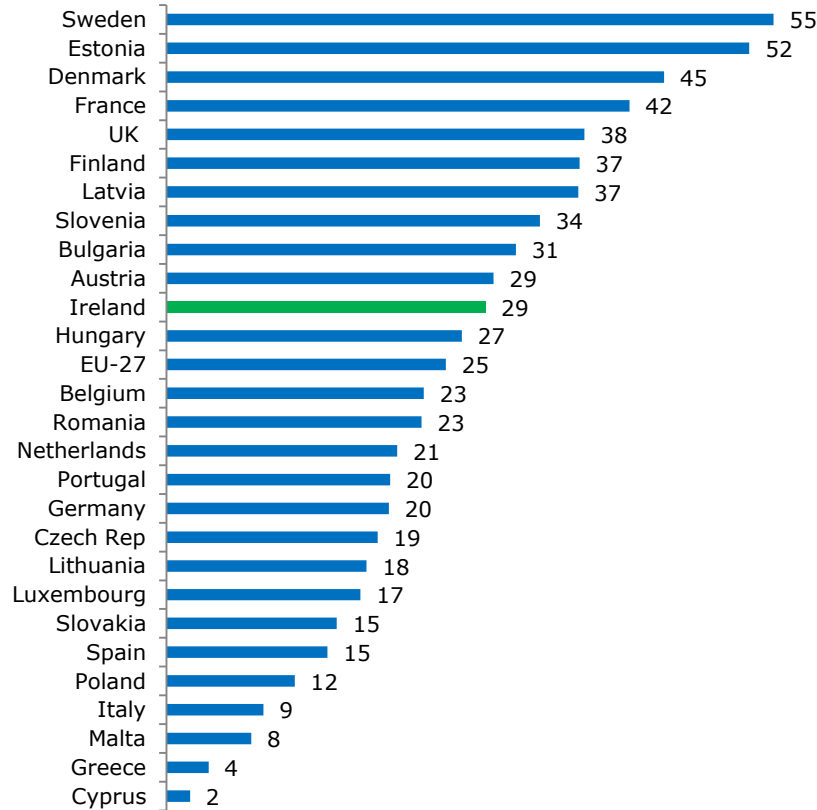
% of children aged 0-14 living with lone parents

Data relate to 2007, except Ireland (2006), Switzerland (2000), Mexico and Sweden (2005). Data for Denmark, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland relate to children aged 0-17
Sources: OECD Family Database Table SF1.3.A, except Ireland – Census 2006 (data for Ireland missing from OECD Family Database)
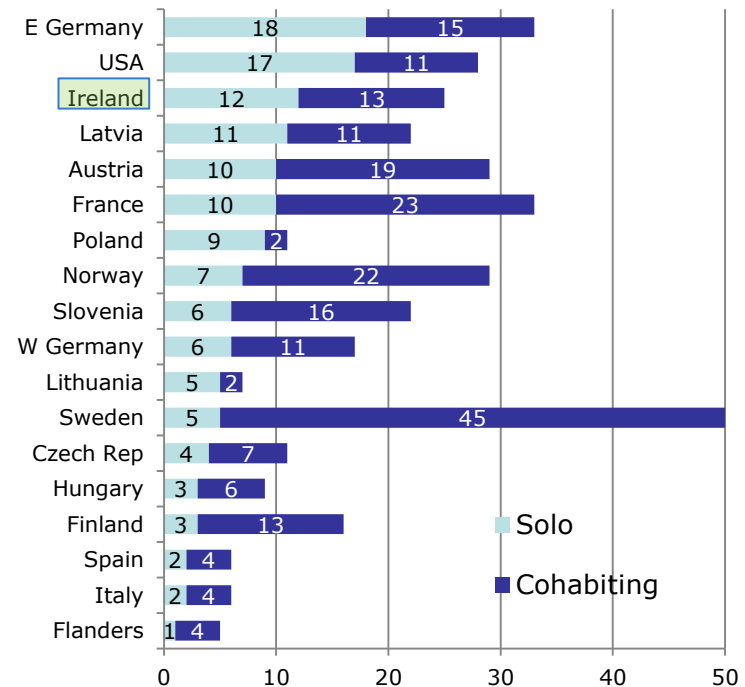
Routes into lone parenthood

- Ireland has moderate rates of *unmarried* parenthood
- But share that is *solo* (non-cohabiting) is relatively high

% births outside marriage, 1998

Country	%
Sweden	55
Estonia	52
Denmark	45
France	42
UK	38
Finland	37
Latvia	37
Slovenia	34
Bulgaria	31
Austria	29
Ireland	29
Hungary	27
EU-27	25
Belgium	23
Romania	23
Netherlands	21
Portugal	20
Germany	20
Czech Rep	19
Lithuania	18
Luxembourg	17
Slovakia	15
Spain	15
Poland	12
Italy	9
Malta	8
Greece	4
Cyprus	2

Source: Eurostat database

% of births to solo and cohabiting mothers, late 1980s to mid-1990s

| Country	Solo	Cohabiting
E Germany	18	15
USA	17	11
Ireland	12	13
Latvia	11	11
Austria	10	19
France	10	23
Poland	9	2
Norway	7	22
Slovenia	6	16
W Germany	6	11
Lithuania	5	2
Sweden	5	45
Czech Rep	4	7
Hungary	3	6
Finland	3	13
Spain	2	4
Italy	2	4
Flanders	1	4

Sources: Ireland – estimated from GUI 9 year-old sample. All others: Andersson (2002)

Low divorce rate in Ireland

Crude divorce rates in EU-15 countries, 1960-2010
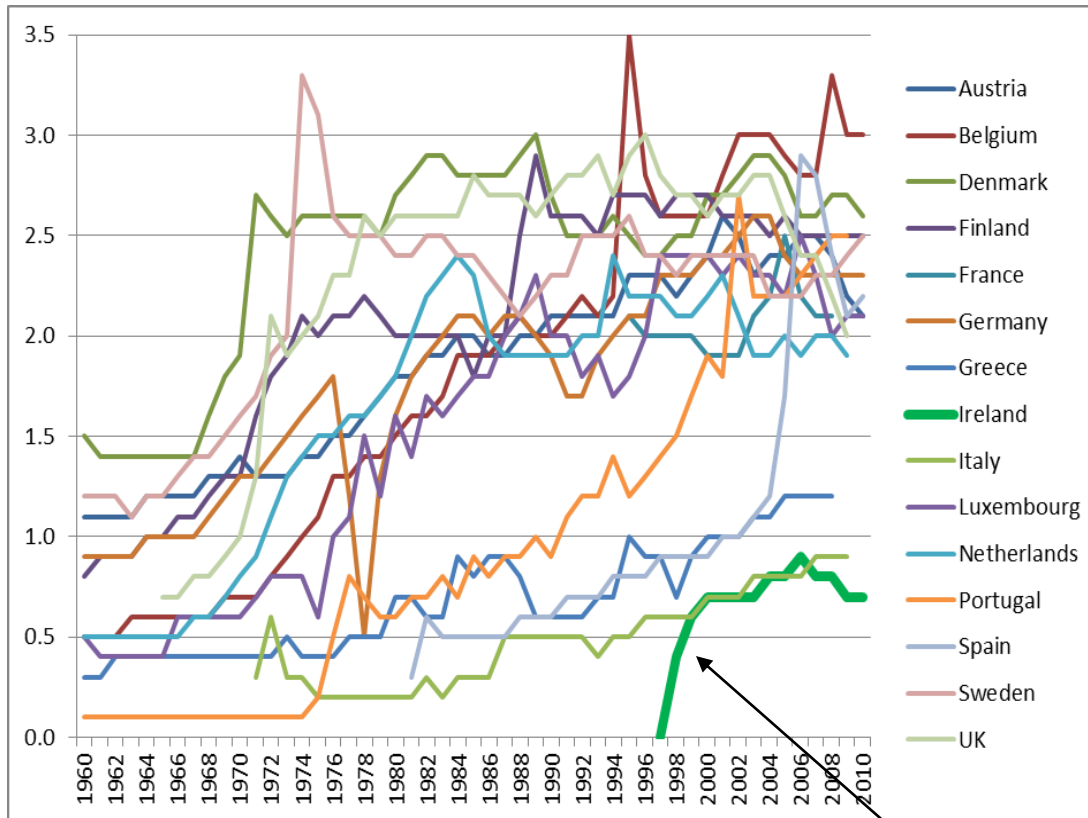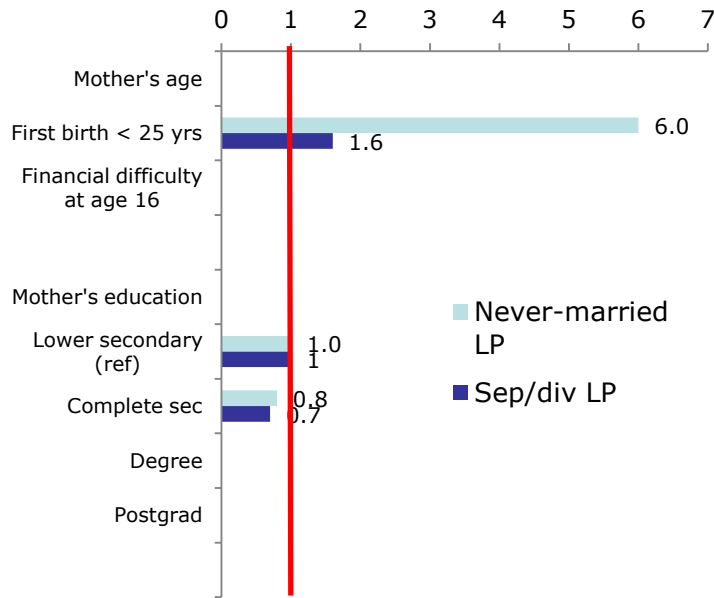
Source: Eurostat database

- If separation is included, marital breakdown rate is closer EU average (c. 1.6-2.00)
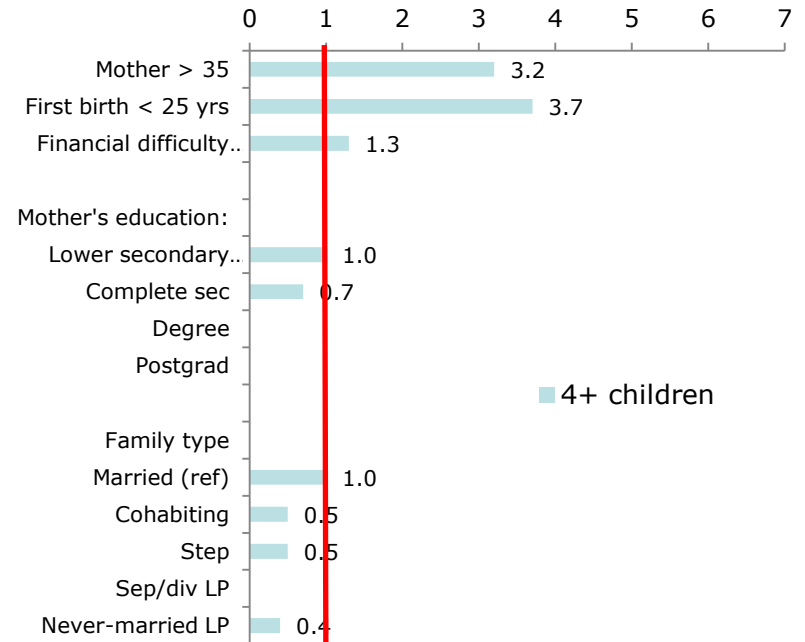- Does selection into unmarried lone parenthood reduce the incidence of marital breakdown in Ireland?

Who has lone parent & large families?
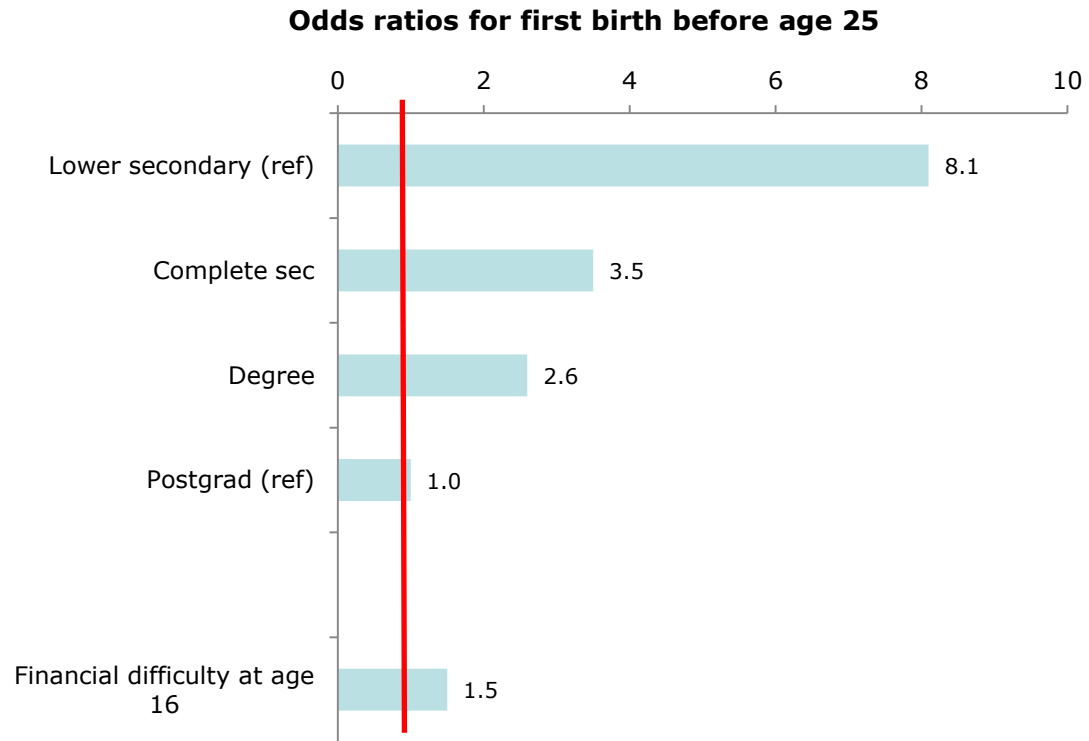## GUI data, 9 year-olds

Odds ratios for lone parenthood

Odds ratios for large family size

Who has first birth before age 25?

GUI data, 9 year-olds

Odds ratios for first birth before age 25

Conclusions

- Family intactness and family size are both important as part of children's family contexts
  - More 9 year-olds live in 4+ child families than in lone parent families
  - Over one-third of all children are in families of 4+ children
- Family intactness/stability and family size interact: intact, stable families have more children
- Relatively high incidence of 'solo' child-bearing in Ireland
  - low incidence of child-bearing within cohabiting relationships
  - a selection effect on marital stability?
- 'Early' child-bearing (before age 25) is the main factor predicting solo parenthood (no matter what the educational level of the mother)
- … but less educated are more likely to have first birth before age 25
- Within intact couples, early child-bearing also predicts large families

References

- Amato, Paul (2000a), "Children of Divorce in the 1990s: An Update of the Amato and Keith (1991) Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Family Psychology* 15: 355-370.

- Andersson, Gunnar (2002) 'Children's experience of family disruption and family formation: Evidence from 16 FFS countries' Demographic Research vol 7, art 7. DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2002.7.7

- Black, S.E, P.J. Devereaux & K.G. Salvanes (2005) 'The More the Merrier? The Effect of Birth Order and Family Size on Children's Education' *Quarterly Journal of Economics* CXX, 669–700

- Blake, Judith (1989) *Family Size and Achievement.* Berkeley: University of California Press

- Chapple, Simon (2008) *Child Well-Being and Sole Parent Family Structure in the OECD.* OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 82

- Downey, D. B. (2001) 'Number of siblings and intellectual development. The resource dilution explanation' *American Psychologist* 56, 6/7: 497-504