

1

Changing gender roles and family formation: overview of key issues and previous research

Rationale for study

The past several decades have witnessed major changes in gender roles and family patterns as well as a falling birth rate in Ireland and the rest of Europe. While the traditional nuclear family is now being replaced in many cases by new family forms, we do not fully understand the reasons people are making the choices they are and whether or not these choices are leading to greater well-being. Demographic research has attempted to explain the new trends in family formation, yet there has been little research on people's attitudes to family formation and having children (Hakim 2003). Moreover, the relationship between changing gender role attitudes and behaviour and the new trends in family formation and fertility has not been adequately addressed. We shall address these questions primarily from the point of view of Ireland. However, we shall do so in the context of the international literature and trends.

Comparisons of Irish Census data from 1986 to 2006 have revealed major demographic changes which have affected the nature of the family. These include an increase in cohabitation, postponement of marriage, an increased likelihood of remaining single and delayed fertility (Lunn et al. 2009). Yet Lunn et al. point out that 'despite the centrality of family life to people's well-being, there has been relatively little quantitative research into the dynamics of union formation in Ireland, or into the underlying causes of changes in fertility' (2009: 2). While census data can illustrate trends in demographic behaviour, because it does not include information on psychological states other than mental health, 'it is not possible to relate family structures to well-being, attitudes or other psychological indicators that may be important determinants of family life' (Lunn et al. 2009: 7). Moreover, while demographic research identifies trends, it does not identify people's motivations for behaving the way they do or the psychological effects of their choices. Thus, while demographic analyses have contributed much to our understanding of the transitions we are undergoing in family formation and fertility, they are insufficient on their own to understand

the determinants and effects of the changes in family formation which we have been witnessing in Ireland (Fahey and Russell 2001; Cousins 2006; Lunn et al. 2009) and internationally (Belka 2008). We need other kinds of data to augment the analyses of demographic data to more fully understand the phenomena we are seeing. As Belka (2008), Under-Secretary-General, and Executive Secretary, United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Europe, stated in a paper to the UN Conference on 'How Generations and Gender Shape Demographic Change', 'It is not sufficient to chart demographic changes. It is important to understand the causes of these changes.'

Background and context of present study

Since the 1960s, there have been vast social changes which have led to changing gender role attitudes and behaviour and changes in the family in Western developed societies (Inglehart and Norris 2003). These include the increasing wealth of countries and the increasing educational attainment of populations, especially of women (Esping-Andersen 2009). The 1960s saw the widespread availability of contraception through the development of the contraceptive pill, which made it possible to control fertility in many countries (though not in Ireland until the late 1970s). This, in turn, gave women more choices, including the choice to remain in education and to enter and remain in the labour force. Towards the end of the decade of the 1960s the women's movement began, which reinforced these trends.

This period of economic and social change was accompanied by changes in the nature of the family and decreasing fertility. As a result, the traditional nuclear family is now being replaced in many cases by new family forms, including a greater prevalence of cohabitation and an increase in single-headed households. While these trends have been prevalent in some societies longer than others, notably the Scandinavian countries (Wiik et al. 2010), they are now becoming normative even in previously traditional societies such as Ireland (Drew 1998; Family Support Agency 2005; Central Statistics Office 2007; Punch 2007; Fahey and Field 2008; Lunn et al. 2009).

A review of the literature in this area reveals a set of interrelated phenomena which have been studied by demographers, sociologists and psychologists. These issues can be broadly characterised as falling under several themes or areas; however, there is often overlap and interplay between them:

- changing gender role attitudes;
- changing gender role behaviour, e.g., women's increasing labour force participation;
- the relationship between women's labour force participation and fertility;
- demographic changes and the emergence of new family forms;

- the effects of family policies on women's labour force participation and fertility;
- the economic and social effects of these changes on society; and
- the psychological effects of the changing nature of the family on individuals and on society.

We shall address each of these areas in turn as they all have relevance for the issues addressed in the book.

Changing gender role attitudes: the international context

Before we can address changes in family formation, it is necessary to look at the significant changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour that have been taking place, since these form the backdrop to the demographic changes we are seeing.

Changing gender roles constitute a major trend in our societies with vast social, political and economic implications and consequences. Inglehart and Norris have observed that 'glacial shifts are taking place that move systematically away from traditional values and toward more egalitarian sex roles' (2003: 9). These shifts in gender roles have far-reaching implications. Esping-Andersen goes further, asserting that 'women constitute the revolutionary force behind contemporary social and economic transformation. It is in large part the changing role of women that explains the new household structure, our altered demographic behaviour . . . and, as a consequence, the new dilemmas that the advanced societies face' (2004: v). While these changes came somewhat later to Ireland, the process of change has been very rapid.

The heightened international awareness of the role and status of women, beginning in the late 1960s and coinciding with the beginning of the women's movement, led to a marked increase in research devoted to studying changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour. Social scientists attempted to capture these shifts, along with related shifts in values, through attitudinal studies carried out over time. One of the earliest studies of attitude change was carried out in Finland (Haavio-Mannila 1972), though the vast majority of the research in the early period was carried out in the United States. These earlier studies captured the initial effects of the women's movement (e.g., Mason et al. 1976; Thornton and Freedman 1979). This train of research continued in the US through the 1980s and beyond and has continued to the present day (e.g., Thornton et al. 1983; Mason and Lu 1988; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Cotter et al. 2011).

This train of research has also taken place in several European countries, including the Netherlands (e.g., van der Wal and Oudijk 1985), the UK (e.g., Hinds and Jarvis 2000; Scott 2006, 2008), and Ireland (Fine-Davis 1983a, 1988a; Fine-Davis et al. 2005; Fine-Davis 2015) as well as in Australia (van Egmond et al. 2010). Measures of gender role attitudes have been included in several

cross-national surveys, including the Eurobarometre, European Values and World Values surveys and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), and trends in Ireland have been discussed by several authors (Wilcox 1991; Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Whelan and Fahey 1994; Hayes et al. 2000; Treas and Widmer 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2003; O'Sullivan 2007, 2012).

The vast majority of the research cited above has found that gender role attitudes have become significantly less traditional over time, and most studies have found that attitudes to maternal employment have become more accepting (e.g., Mason and Lu 1988; Fine-Davis 1988a, 2015; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; O'Sullivan 2007, 2012). Yet several of the studies have shown that men continue to hold more traditional attitudes than women (e.g., Fine-Davis 1988a, 2015; Fine-Davis et al. 2005; Treas and Widmer 2000), and opposition to maternal employment tends to be expressed through concern about its effects on children (e.g., Mason and Lu 1988; Treas and Widmer 2000; Fine-Davis 2015). Mason and Lu (1988: 46) concluded that 'for many men, support for equal family roles is highly qualified'.

Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) and Cotter et al. (2011) both conclude that attitudes to gender roles in the US may have plateaued up to the mid-1990s – a trend also found in Australia. Van Egmond et al. (2010) found that gender role attitudes in Australia became more egalitarian up to the 1990s but then flattened and in some cases reversed after that period. These authors asked if it was 'a stalled revolution?' (van Egmond et al. 2010). Cotter et al. (2011) explored reasons for the slowing down of change in gender role attitudes in the US, including the possibility of a 'backlash effect', a concept introduced earlier by Faludi (1991). Braun and Scott (2009) attempted to answer this question by examining cross-cultural data and also explored whether or not the trend reversal was real, pointing to possible measurement issues in comparative research. They concluded that observed changes in gender role attitudes over time did not in fact support an interpretation of 'revolutionary change and backlash', but rather one of 'egalitarianism reaching a peak and retreat' (Braun and Scott 2009: 365–6). While this may have been true in the countries examined, it did not hold true for Ireland. Gender role attitudes in Ireland continued to change in a more egalitarian direction beyond the 1990s and into the early 2000s, particularly concerning the issue of maternal employment (Fine-Davis 2015).

Socio-cultural context in Ireland

Thus, while many countries experienced significant changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour from the 1960s onwards, for a number of unique reasons, Ireland's transformation began somewhat later, and, in many ways, Ireland had much farther to go in order to catch up with developments in the status of women in most other developed Western societies. Part of the lag in Ireland's transition

may have been due to its island status and consequent geographic isolation from the rest of Europe. It had also been primarily an agrarian society, and its economic and industrial development did not gain momentum until the early 1960s. The agrarian nature of the culture had a historical impact on the nature of gender roles in the society by virtue of economic considerations (Lee 1978). A further important factor influencing the role and status of women in this country has been the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church, to which 95 per cent of the population belonged in the 1970s; this figure has slightly reduced over the past three decades.

Ireland is unique among developed Western societies in relation to the constraints on women's roles which continued well into the 1970s and 1980s (Commission on the Status of Women 1972; Beale 1986; Galligan 1998; O'Connor 1998; Kennedy 2001) and which still remain concerning the issue of abortion (Smyth 1992; Kingston et al. 1997; Fine-Davis 2015). This was due in large part to the strong influence of the Catholic Church in promulgating and supporting a traditional role for women and in shaping attitudes to gender roles (Flanagan 1975; Robinson 1978; Inglis 1998; Ferriter 2009), as well as in contributing to the social conditions and legal framework in the country. While the influence of religion on the development of gender role attitudes and behaviour has been well documented (e.g., Reuther 1974; Daly 1975; Farley 1976), the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland was particularly strong (Garvin 2004), surpassing that in other Catholic countries (Chubb 1971), particularly concerning women's roles (Flanagan 1975; Robinson 1978) and issues related to sexuality and relationships, such as contraception, divorce and abortion. The influence of church teachings on the norms and values of the society have been complemented by laws of the State and underpinned by passages in the Irish Constitution concerning the role of women (Constitution of Ireland, 1937, Article 41.2):

- 2.1 In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
- 2.2 The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers should not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to neglect of their duties in the home.

(Article 41.2, Constitution of Ireland, 1937)

Attitudes towards the role of women in Ireland are part of a larger belief system in which religiosity is a central component (Fine-Davis 1979a, 1989) and which also has elements reminiscent of the authoritarian personality syndrome (Fine-Davis 1989; Adorno et al. 1950), a feature noted earlier by both Chubb (1971) and Whyte (1971).

In spite of the fact that Ireland was a more traditional society relative to many other Western countries, the process of change from the mid-1970s was very rapid.

The influence of various factors, including Ireland's economic development, the women's movement – both internationally and in Ireland itself – and the impact of Ireland's membership of the European Community from 1973 onwards, served as catalytic forces to affect gender role attitudes and to remove barriers to their full and equal participation in the labour force. These were reinforced by a series of administrative and legislative changes which had major implications for the role and status of women. These included the removal of the marriage bar (1973), which had prevented married women from being employed in the public service, followed in rapid succession by legislation for equal pay (passed in 1974, implemented in 1975), employment equality (1977), contraception (1979) and taxation of married women (1980). All of these issues had constituted deterrents to married women's employment, and, as a result, women's increasing role in the labour force is one of the more dramatic social shifts of this period.

Legislation concerning equal pay and equal employment were direct results of EU membership, as it followed EU directives. There was extensive public debate on contraception in the early 1970s, and the 1973 McGee case, in which the Supreme Court ruled that contraceptives could be imported for personal use, helped to precipitate legislation in 1979 in this area. Further significant changes followed, including a High Court ruling that declared the then current system of taxation, in which a wife's earnings were treated as part of her husband's, to be unconstitutional (Scannell 2000), thus leading to changes in the tax code.

Divorce was legalised in 1996, following two national referenda in 1986 and 1995, the latter successful by a very small margin (O'Connor 1998). While in general the attitudinal shifts and legislative developments have been in a liberal direction, an outstanding unresolved issue is that of abortion, which remains an area of controversy (Smyth 1992; Kingston et al. 1997; O'Connor 1998; Fahey et al. 2005; Fine-Davis 2015). In 1983, a national referendum was held which resulted in the addition of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution which recognises the equal right to life of the unborn child with that of its mother. Several cases have been brought to challenge this restrictive legislative situation. In December 2013, legislation was passed which provides for abortion when a woman's life is in danger, which gave legislative effect to the Supreme Court X Case of 1992. However, public opinion polls and attitudinal studies indicate that a majority of the population is now supportive of abortion on a wider number of grounds (McBride et al. 2012; Ipsos/MRBI 2013; Millward Brown 2013; Fine-Davis 2015), though it would be necessary to repeal the Eighth Amendment in order to allow this to happen.

Concomitant with these significant legislative and administrative changes came major shifts in attitudes to gender roles (Fine-Davis 1988a; Whelan and Fahey 1994), which have continued up to the present time (Fine-Davis et al. 2005; O'Sullivan 2007, 2012; Fine-Davis 2015; see also Craven 2006, 2010, for comparisons of Catholic and Protestant women's attitudes). Fine-Davis (1988a)

found that attitudes to gender roles had become significantly less traditional from 1975 to 1986 among all groups – male and female, rural and urban. This included a greater acceptance of women's role outside the home, including a greater acceptance of maternal employment. It also included attitude change concerning gender equality in areas such as equal pay, equal taxation and so on. While most of the attitude change took place in the earlier period, attitude change continued into the latter period from 1986 to 2005, particularly in relation to greater support for maternal employment (Fine-Davis 2015).

The influence of the Catholic Church on gender role behaviour also began to diminish during this time, as women were now able to control their fertility and increasingly move out of the private sphere into the public sphere (Inglis 1987, 1998; O'Connor 1998; Kennedy 2001; Ferriter 2009).

Irish women's increasing participation in the labour force

The increasing secularisation of Irish society, together with the social policy and attitudinal changes referred to above, were accompanied by a major increase in women's labour force participation, particularly among married women.

Married women's labour force participation was almost negligible in the 1960s, with only 5.2 per cent employed as of the 1961 Census figures. By 1977, this figure had almost trebled to 14.4 per cent. In the 20 years from 1989 to 2009, a period of economic growth, the figure increased from 23.7 per cent to 54 per cent. In the early period, the increase was due to the spate of administrative and legal changes in the area of gender equality (the removal of the marriage bar, the enactment of equal pay and equal opportunity legislation, changes in the tax code) and the removal of other deterrents to married women working (e.g., legalisation of contraception). In the later period, the increase in women's participation was associated with economic growth and, indeed, was seen to contribute to the Celtic Tiger (Fahey and FitzGerald 1997). At all points, from the 1970s onwards, the participation of women in the prime childbearing age group (25–34) increased at an even more rapid rate than that of other groups of married women. As illustrated in Table 1.1, by 2009, 72.6 per cent of married

Table 1.1 Married women's labour force participation in Ireland, 1961–2009 (%).

	1961	1971	1977	1981	1989	1994	1997	2001	2004	2009
All ages	5.2	7.5	14.4	16.7	23.7	32.4	37.3	46.4	49.4	54.0
Age 25–34	4.8	8.8	16.7	21.6	39.0	54.5	58.2	64.7	65.5	72.6

Sources: CSO: *Labour Force Surveys* (1971–97); CSO: *Quarterly National Household Surveys* (1999–2009); Callan and Farrell (1991).

women in the childbearing age group were employed, as compared with only 54 per cent of married women overall (Central Statistics Office 2009a).

The labour force participation rate for all women (married, single, etc.) was also 54 per cent at this time, and, again, the participation rate of those in the childbearing age group was much higher at 77.9 per cent (Central Statistics Office 2009a). Given the increasing patterns of cohabitation and single motherhood, it is apparent that many young mothers of varying family statuses fall into this category. Russell et al. (2009) confirm that this is the case in their examination of labour force participation of parents. These authors found that 60.2 per cent of women with children under 5 years of age were employed, as were 65 per cent of women with children in the age group 5–15 (Russell et al. 2009: 18, Table 2.2a).

It is thus clear that both gender role behaviour and attitudes to gender roles have changed fundamentally in Ireland since the 1970s. The attitudinal changes have been associated with social change in women's roles, notably their increased labour force participation, which reflects significant changes in attitudes towards maternal employment. They have also been associated with changes in legislation in the area of gender equality. What is not clear, however, is to what extent and in what ways changing gender role attitudes and behaviour are associated with the newly emerging changes in family formation.

Demographic changes and the emergence of new family forms

Over the past three to four decades there have also been many changes in demographic patterns and in the nature of the family. A primary one has been a change in marriage patterns. Punch points out that the 1970s were 'a period in which a high proportion of men and women in their twenties were marrying, such that by the mid to late 1980s only one in six males and one in nine females aged 35–44 years were (never married)' (2007: 4). However, since then there has been a decline in the marriage rate, together with a postponement of marriage. This has resulted in higher proportions of those in the 35–44-year age bracket being single as of the 2006 Census (27.7 per cent of males and 22.3 per cent of females). The average age at which women marry has increased from 24.7 years in 1980 to 31 years in 2005. This has affected the average age at which women have their first child in marriage. While this was 25 years of age in 1980, it rose to 31 in 2005 (Punch 2007), a phenomenal leap of 6 years in just a 25-year period. It is likely that attitudes towards marriage, expectations and social norms regarding the 'right' or ideal age to get married and have children have changed. Demographic data suggest that women and men's lifestyles and expectations regarding family formation and children have shifted. Marriage no longer takes place when a woman is in her mid-twenties but rather in her late twenties or early thirties. Another major reason why the age at marriage

and at first birth is rising for women is that they are staying in education longer. This is equipping them to participate at a higher level in the labour market.

The lesser prevalence of marriage has been accompanied by a greater variety of living arrangements (Punch 2007; Lunn and Fahey 2011). The traditional nuclear family is now being replaced in many cases by 'new family forms' (Drew 1998; Family Support Agency 2005; Fahey and Field 2008; Lunn et al. 2009; Lunn and Fahey 2011). While having children used to take place primarily in the context of marriage, it is now becoming more common for childbirth and parenting to take place also outside of marriage – either in a situation of cohabitation or single parenthood. Punch (2007) points out that

the strong link which formerly existed between marriage and fertility has weakened in the last few decades. Up to 1980 births outside marriage accounted for less than 5 per cent of all births. However, during the 1980s and 1990s the percentage increased rapidly reaching a figure of 31.1 per cent by 1999. The figure has since stabilised at around 31 to 32 per cent. (Punch 2007: 7)

However, Lunn and Fahey (2011) note that among first births the proportion outside of marriage is 44 per cent, suggesting that births outside of marriage are on the increase.

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

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

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

Another significant demographic change is an increase in the proportion of childless women, which now stands at 17.5 per cent (Central Statistics Office 2007). Among women born in the 1960s, who may be assumed to have completed their fertility, approximately 20 per cent did not have children as of the 2006 Census (Punch 2007). This trend is also apparent in other countries.

Hakim (2003) observes that following the contraceptive revolution childlessness is now approximately 20 per cent in most modern societies. In Germany, fully one-third of the cohort of women born in 1965 is childless (Kohler et al. 2002). Factors such as attitudes towards marriage and children, family policies and employment patterns are seen by some authors as contributing to the trend of increasing childlessness. However, Hakim (2003) argues that the contraceptive revolution was in large part responsible for the drop in fertility that we have seen and particularly for voluntary childlessness. As will be discussed further below, the drop in fertility seen in Ireland from the early 1980s onwards, following the legalisation of contraception in 1979, would tend to support this view.

A further demographic trend and change in the nature of the family includes an increase in the proportion of divorced and separated people. An analysis of Census data from 1996, 2002 and 2006 showed that not only are divorce and separation increasing but that more women are divorced or separated than men (Punch 2007). In the age group 35–44, 8.5 per cent of males were divorced or separated in 2006, whereas this was true of 11.9 per cent of women. In the age group 45–54, 11.3 per cent of men were divorced or separated, whereas this was true of 14 per cent of women (Punch 2007). The greater likelihood of women being separated or divorced indicates that men in the age group 35–54 are more likely to remarry, although Lunn et al. (2009) suggest that men may be more likely to say they are single rather than divorced and therefore the Census results are not entirely reliable in this respect.

The relationship between women's labour force participation and fertility

Along with the demographic changes cited above – particularly women's increasing labour force participation – together with the changes in attitudes to gender roles, has come a steep fall in the birth rate in many EU and OECD countries, including Ireland. In most European countries the trend has been for decreasing fertility as female labour force participation has increased (Villa 2002). The decrease in fertility in selected EU countries from 1960 to 2007 is illustrated in Table 1.2. While most countries have shown a decrease in fertility over this period, some countries have managed to maintain a comparatively high level (e.g., Ireland, France and Denmark). Other countries have shown a decrease to 'low fertility', considered to be a total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.5, or 'lowest low', a TFR of 1.3 (Kohler et al. 2002). It may be seen that Poland has entered the lowest low group, as have many other Central and Eastern European countries and some Mediterranean countries, including Spain and Greece. Italy reached lowest low in 2000, and, while it has slightly increased its fertility since then, it still remains quite low at 1.34. Germany's fertility has also dropped over this period and its TFR has remained in the low to lowest low range of 1.34–1.39 over most of the past decade.

Table 1.2 Total fertility rate, 1960–2007, for selected high- and low-fertility EU countries.

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2004	2006	2007
High								
Ireland	3.76	3.93	3.25	2.11	1.90	1.99	1.90	2.03
France	2.73	2.47	1.95	1.78	1.88	1.90	2.01	1.98
Denmark	2.57	1.95	1.55	1.67	1.77	1.78	1.85	1.85
Low								
Poland	2.98	2.20	2.28	2.04	1.34	1.23	1.27	1.31
Hungary	2.02	1.98	1.92	1.87	1.32	1.28	1.35	1.32
Italy	2.41	2.42	1.64	1.33	1.24	1.33	1.35	1.34
Germany	2.37	2.03	1.56	1.45	1.38	1.36	1.34	1.39
EU-15	2.59	2.38	1.82	1.57	1.50	1.54	–	–
EU-25	2.59	2.34	1.88	1.64	1.48	1.49	–	–
EU-27	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.53	1.53

Sources: Eurostat 2006: 76, Table D-4; 2008: 6, Table 4; CSO 2009b: 58, Table 7.9; Lunn et al. 2009: 61, Figure 5.1.

Although there is a general trend of decreasing fertility with increasing labour force participation, there are some exceptions to this trend. The first includes countries that manifest both high female labour force participation and high fertility (e.g., France and Denmark) and the second includes countries with low female labour force participation and low fertility (e.g., Italy, Spain and Greece). These cases, which go against the general trend, have been referred to as the ‘participation fertility puzzle’ (e.g., Villa 2002) or, as Castles (2003) puts it, ‘the world turned upside down.’ Those countries with the highest female labour force participation (e.g., France and Denmark) also happen to have the highest fertility (Villa 2002; Fagnani 2000, 2002, 2007). The total fertility rate in Denmark is among the highest in the EU (1.85), and its female participation rate is also among the highest (71.6 per cent). This trend is apparent in other Scandinavian countries as well. France has an even higher total fertility rate than Denmark (1.98 vs. 1.85) together with high labour force participation of women with young children. Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) point to a shift from a negative correlation between labour force participation and fertility to a positive correlation over the years 1970 to 1996 in twenty-one OECD countries, although they agree that this shift is mainly due to changes in the two groups of countries cited above; most countries have maintained the negative correlation.

The continuing downward trend in fertility in European countries was reversed in France and Denmark in the 1990s (see Table 1.2), due to the introduction of family policies to support both women’s labour force participation and their fertility (Fagnani 2008). Villa (2002: 16) points out that ‘Among other

factors, the increasing burden on women, having to continue paid work with family responsibilities, has played a major role in lowering fertility.' Yet,

those countries which have been able to develop the supply of social services (all personal services, in particular childcare services) and to move towards a more equal sharing of family responsibilities (between men and women) have not only successfully expanded female employment, but they also managed to halt the declining trend in fertility. (Villa 2002: 16–17)

Castles (2003) concurs with Villa (2002) that in those countries with good social supports, such as childcare and family policies (e.g., France and Denmark) as well as flexible working arrangements, women can have children and still work. Those countries that manifest both low female labour force participation and low fertility (e.g., Italy, Spain and Greece) in the region of 1.2 to 1.3 children per woman, are countries with poor supports for families and where women have a lot of caring responsibilities for children and the elderly (Delgado Perez and Livi-Bacci 1992; Villa 2002; Symeonidou 2002, 2004). Several of the new members of the European community, e.g., Hungary and Poland, have very low fertility rates because of economic transformations following the collapse of state socialism in 1989. Poland's fertility fell from 2.04 in 1990 to 1.34 in 2000 and has remained at approximately that level; Hungary displays a similar pattern (Table 1.2). The policies which had supported women's entry into paid employment began to be rapidly dismantled. These included, in particular, maternity leave and subsidies for childcare (Mishtal 2009). In Poland, discriminatory practices by employers against pregnant women and women with small children were also found to be decisive in women's decisions to postpone or forgo childbearing (Mishtal 2009).

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

The decrease in fertility in Ireland over the past three decades mirrors the increasing labour force participation of married women during the same period; this negative relationship over time is vividly illustrated in Table 1.3.

While Ireland currently has one of the highest total fertility rates in Europe, this still reflects a significant decrease of roughly 50 per cent over the past three decades. It has been predicted by the Central Statistics Office (1999, 2007) that this will further decrease and that Ireland's birth rate is likely to continue to fall in line with European norms (approximately 1.5) unless policies intervene to change this trend.

Table 1.3 Relationship between married women's labour force participation and total fertility rate in Ireland 1960–2009.

	1960/61	1970/71	1980/81	1989/90	2000/01	2004	2009
Employment rate (all ages)	5.2%	7.5%	16.7%	23.7%	46.4%	49.4%	54%
Employment rate (ages 25–34)	4.8%	8.8%	21.6%	39.0%	64.7%	65.5%	72.6%
Total fertility rate	3.76	3.93	3.25	2.11	1.90	1.99	2.10%

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

While the CSO (1999, 2007) predicted a falling birth rate over the next 20 years, more recent figures have shown that the birth rate actually increased slightly from 1.90 in 2006 to 2.03 in 2007 and 2.1 in 2008 (CSO 2009c). Lunn et al. (2009: 86) observed that this may have reflected 'the tail end of a positive impact of the economic boom'. Conceptions for births in 2007 took place in 2006, which was an economic boom time in Ireland. Data on birth rates during recessionary periods indicate that they tend to fall (Walsh 2009) as people are less likely to be able to afford to have children (Lunn et al. 2009).

The effects of family policies on women's labour force participation and fertility

Much has been written concerning the effects of family policies on women's labour force participation and fertility. A good deal of this research has been carried out in a cross-cultural framework (e.g., Sleebos 2003; D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005; Gauthier 2007; Fagnani 2008), often under the aegis of international organisations such as the OECD and/or using data from OECD countries. The family policies which have been examined are extensive and vary from country to country. As Brewster and Rindfuss (2000: 283) point out, 'there are nearly as many ways of classifying family policies as there are authors'. They include cash transfers to families with young children and leave entitlements, such as maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. They also include childcare facilities of varying kinds and quality and the availability of various kinds of work–life balance policies. The latter can include flexible working, part-time working, job-sharing, term-time working, tele-working, personal hours and so on. While cross-cultural research has attempted to study the effects of family policies on women's employment and fertility, it is clear that it is impossible to have strict comparisons, since the policies vary so much from country to country. As Fagnani (2008) points out, referring to Gauthier's (2007) reference to the limitations of data in this area:

It makes little sense to conduct cross-national comparisons on a scheme by scheme basis or to assess the impact of parental leave schemes in isolation. It is more relevant to look at the overall organisation and then place it in its respective institutional, historical and cultural context . . . Indeed, what accounts for the variations between countries are the whole range of measures and services provided to parents and the cultural environment (that interacts with family policy) in which these take place. (Fagnani 2008: 10)

She further points out that ‘it is important to see whether the premises of the family policy are actually in tune with the normative attitudes of women and men towards maternal employment and childcare arrangements outside of the home’ (Fagnani 2008). Bearing in mind these caveats, we shall review some of the discussion in the literature about the effects of family policies on fertility and consider this in relation to Ireland.

D’Addio and Mira d’Ercole (2005) examined changes in fertility across OECD countries and tried to explain cross-country variation in fertility in terms of labour markets, social and fiscal policies and individual characteristics, and finally explored which policies had the largest effects on fertility rates. They concluded that fertility rates below replacement level are likely to be a persistent feature for most OECD countries in the coming years. They attribute this to women’s higher educational attainment and their increasing labour force participation as well as to changes in their values, which include increased financial autonomy and a less traditional attitude toward family roles. However, they do not see the low fertility rates as inevitable. They point to the US, France and the Nordic countries as exceptions to this trend, all of which have fertility rates close to replacement. They say that the factors which contribute to ‘success’ in these countries include policies that contribute to the lower cost of having children, namely direct transfers and tax advantages but, more importantly,

investment in education and childcare facilities, access to a variety of caring arrangement, affordable housing, leave provisions and features of their labour market that do not penalise women for their decision to have children and that facilitate the sharing of family chores and the reconciliation of work and family life for young couples. (d’Addio and Mira d’Ercole 2005: 70)

Ireland seems to represent an anomaly if d’Addio and Mira d’Ercole’s analysis is used. In Ireland, family policy has concentrated on cash transfers, such as child benefit and the childcare supplement, the latter of which has recently been phased out. There is relatively low investment in pre-school education compared to other countries with comparatively high fertility rates, which will be discussed below in connection with childcare later in this section. Leave provisions, e.g., for maternity leave and parental leave, have improved considerably

in recent years but do not reach the levels in some other countries which have maintained women's employment and fertility (i.e. the Nordic countries and France). Work-life balance policies, while supported by the social partners, are not equally available to all employees (Drew et al. 2003; Fine-Davis et al. 2005).

Fahey and Field (2008), in discussing the findings of d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2005), conclude that the effects of family policy measures are weak compared to effects of labour demand changes (see their Table 3.3, 2005: 41). However, the family-friendly policies to which they refer included only:

1. length of parental leave;
2. percentage of wage replaced during maternity leave;
3. net transfers to families with children.

The analysis by d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole to which Fahey and Field refer was a time series analysis of panel data which did not include work-life balance policies or childcare provision, since comparable cross-cultural data for these were not available. In an analysis of cross-sectional data for one point in time, in which data on childcare provision were available cross-culturally, d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2005) found that childcare provision was a significant predictor of fertility. Indeed, they conclude that 'childcare arrangements, transfers to families that reduce the direct cost of children, as well as provisions that allow mothers to better cope with their family and career responsibilities all can help in removing obstacles to childbearing decisions' (d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005: 69).

Further discussing the d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole results, Fahey and Field refer to the fact that countries with a high female employment rate show higher fertility (2008: Table 3.3). Many of the countries for which this is so are those which have state-supported childcare and work-life balance policies (e.g., France and the Nordic countries). These authors also note that an increase in women working part-time leads to some increase in fertility. This illustrates the fact that this form of flexible working is compatible with motherhood and balancing work and family life. Sometimes this is a positive choice, but other times it is the only work that women can undertake if adequate childcare facilities are not available. D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2005) emphasise that this part-time work needs to provide the same protection as full-time employment if it is to support childbearing. If it involves lower hourly wages and a lack of pension or health coverage, it is less likely to do so (d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005: 66). The fact that an increase in gender earnings equality is associated with a decrease in fertility may in part reflect the fact that women in senior positions frequently do not have access to flexible working arrangements, such as part-time work and job-sharing, due to prevailing attitudes concerning how such work must be carried out, e.g., the view that 'management jobs must be full-time' (e.g.,

Fine-Davis et al. 2005), and hence women in such positions often have to make a trade-off of career against motherhood.

In her analysis of the effects of family policies for the OECD, Fagnani (2008: 10) observed that 'a dearth of formal childcare provision (of both good quality and affordable) and lack of state support will likely push women to reduce the number of children they have in order to stay in employment'. She states that this will be particularly so if the childrearing norms encourage women with young children to stay at home to care for them, as in the case of Germany, which has a low level of fertility and in which a high proportion of women are remaining childless (Kohler et al. 2002). Fagnani (2008) attributes this to the cultural norms in Germany which discourage women to combine motherhood with a career. She contrasts the German experience with that of the French in which combined motherhood with a career is 'valorised'. Brewster and Rindfuss point out that German family policies are designed to support the breadwinner-homemaker family and 'do not accommodate women who wish to both pursue a career and raise children' (2000: 285). As a result, it is clear that many German women have chosen to pursue a career at the expense of having children, hence the high rate of childlessness in Germany (Kohler et al. 2002).

As previously suggested, it would appear that at the current time Ireland presents a different pattern using Fagnani's analysis, as in Ireland the lack of formal and affordable state childcare does not appear to have lowered the fertility level to what one might have expected. However, Ireland's fertility trajectory is still on a basically downward course, having decreased 50 per cent over the past 40 years so that it is likely that it will decrease further unless social policies, such as increasing state support for childcare, intervene.

Fagnani observes that family policies themselves are the 'expression of the dominant value systems, as well as a reflection of the cultural context that plays a role in creating a more or less guilt-inducing environment for mothers who wish to work' (2008: 11). Hoem (2005) concurs that it is the whole political culture of Sweden, as opposed to specific policies, that makes the country more family, child and woman-friendly, which may have an impact on fertility (see also Gauthier 2007). Haas (2014) supports this view, pointing out how the provision of generous paternity leave in Sweden is reflected in men's greater participation in childcare and domestic activities even after the paternity leave is over. It may be that the 'dominant value system' in Ireland still implicitly supports women's role in the home as a carer of children. This view is supported to some extent by some continuing ambivalence towards maternal employment and the belief that mothers are the best nurturers of children (Fine-Davis 2015). It is also reflected in the generous child benefit payments, traditionally paid to the mother, and in the disparity in leave entitlements between women and men, whereby women are entitled to extensive maternity leave benefits while men are not entitled to any paid paternity leave. Parental leave may be shared between

both parents, yet this leave is unpaid, and there is extremely low take up by men. Moreover, because it is unpaid, women of lower socio-economic background are also less able to avail of it. The pre-school provision in Ireland in the 'infant classes' (for 4- and 5-year-olds) is only available for part of the day, and this dictates that alternative childcare must be found for children of mothers who wish to work more than part-time. All of these policies reflect ambivalence to maternal employment, which is inconsistent with expressed government aspirations in terms of gender equality.

Work-life balance policies and childcare are two of the most important family policies that affect women's labour force participation and fertility (Castles 2003). The importance of these two forms of support has been identified extensively in the Irish context. We shall discuss each of them in turn.

The impact of childcare on women's labour force participation and fertility in Ireland

The primary driver for childcare facilities has been the dramatically increased participation of women in the workforce over the past 30 years, and particularly in the past 10 years, fuelling Ireland's economic boom that began in the 1990s (Fahey and FitzGerald 1997). It was predicted as early as 1998 that the demand for childcare would be likely to increase by 25 to 50 per cent over the period 1998 to 2011 (Goodbody Economic Consultants 1998). This has come to pass, and childcare has become an increasingly important social and political issue during this time (Fine-Davis 2004, 2007). While the trend in most European countries, notably the Nordic countries and France, has been toward greater state provision of pre-school facilities, Ireland is one of the countries with the lowest level of provision, and its expenditure on pre-primary education (for children age 3 and older) is the lowest of all of the EU countries compared by the OECD (2004).

The OECD points out that 'childcare costs can be a barrier to work in Ireland' (2004). This has particular implications for women, as the National Women's Council of Ireland (2001) points out, citing the Expert Working Group on Childcare (1999): 'The availability and cost of childcare and the difficulties around reconciling employment and family lives are the most significant barriers to women accessing and participating in the labour force.'

Childcare costs are a particular barrier to single mothers. For a lone parent with average earnings living in Dublin, 'the cost of childcare for one child is equivalent to 30% of after-tax net income, and it would be another 30% for a second child' (OECD 2003: 148). A recent study found that the most important barrier to single mothers entering employment was childcare arrangements (Fine-Davis et al. 2007). This was reiterated in a recent publication by the OECD (2009).

The OECD had several years earlier concluded that 'While the Irish tax/benefit system largely supports the work/care choice, this is countered by expensive childcare for those without access to other arrangements, to the extent that

it may not be financially worthwhile for second earners to work' (2003: 200). This will act as a deterrent to further maternal employment, as informal modes of childcare become less and less available. Thus, women with young children, both lone parents and those in relationships, are vulnerable to social exclusion from the labour market because of the lack of affordable childcare.

In spite of the arguments put forward in numerous government working party reports for a coherent, high-quality childcare programme (see Fine-Davis 2004, for a discussion of these), the main thrust of recent childcare strategy in Ireland has been to subsidise existing childcare services in the community and to only directly provide services to the disadvantaged. Increases in child benefit have been a part of this policy. Recently, the Government provided a free year of pre-school for children aged 3 for part of the day. This marks a departure from previous policy and may indicate the beginning of a shift in policy towards greater direct provision. However, this policy, as well as the infant classes provided for 4 and 5-year-olds in the national schools, which are also on a part-time basis only, do not provide the kind of comprehensive childcare that many working parents require. For parents working full-time, this needs to be augmented by other forms of childcare. For other parents, the availability of part-time childcare means that they are only able to work part-time, often in inferior kinds of employment.

The availability of childcare facilities not only impinges on working parents' ability to reconcile work and family life but also has significant implications for the nation's birth rate and hence future population. Working is frequently related to economic exigencies. If parents cannot afford to pay for childcare, they may have no choice but to delay childbearing or limit the number of children they have. For many people, work is also related to a desire for personal fulfilment and a wish to use one's education and training. In this case also, if women must choose between working and having children, many may choose to work and not have children at all or choose to have only one child or perhaps two. The former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and economist Garret FitzGerald emphasised the connection between childcare, women's employment and fertility, pointing out that the current situation was:

sub-optimal . . . and public policy should . . . be directed towards easing the tensions that women experience so often having to choose between work and child-bearing, for example, by facilitating childcare for working mothers – the inadequate provision of which is clearly one of the causes of late marriages and late childbirths. (FitzGerald 2007: 16)

It is clear that attitudes towards maternal employment and the impact of childcare costs and financial supports for children will need to be addressed in any exercise aiming to understand family formation and fertility in Ireland.

Work–life balance policies: effects on women’s labour force participation and pregnancy decisions

The availability of flexible working arrangements and supportive workplace culture are critical to combining work and family life among working parents of young children (e.g., Humphreys et al. 2000; Fine-Davis et al. 2004). Research has consistently shown that men do not contribute to domestic and childcare tasks as much as women do, and, consequently, women are responsible for the majority of domestic work and childcare in addition to their work in the paid labour force (Eurostat 2001; Villa 2002; Fine-Davis et al. 2004, McGinnity and Russell 2007, 2008; United Nations 2008). While 82 per cent of Irish fathers of young children would like to spend more time with their families, they are less likely to avail of many work–life balance policies due to a workplace culture in which such behaviour on the part of men is perceived as indicative of their being ‘less serious about their career’ (Fine-Davis et al. 2004, 2005). Moreover, Irish workplace culture also values working long hours ‘in order to get ahead’ (Fine-Davis et al. 2004, 2005).

Research in Ireland has shown that women are more likely to take flexible working options such as job-sharing and part-time work, which has the indirect effect of negatively impacting on their career progression, whereas men are more likely to avail of options such as flexible hours and tele-working, which have no negative impact on career progression or on salary (Drew et al. 2003; Fine-Davis et al. 2005). This has resulted in a twin-track system in which women continue to remain in the lower levels. As O’Callaghan (2002) has pointed out, ‘It would indeed be a travesty if the very arrangements that are intended to allow staff to combine work and family responsibilities were to inhibit the career progression of those availing of these arrangements’ (O’Callaghan 2002: 83).

While Fahey and Field (2008) conclude that the availability of part-time employment keeps women in the labour force, it is clear that it frequently does so at the price of their career progression. Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) point out that this varies by country. In the US, women who return to work on a part-time basis often lose pay, seniority, benefits and job security, whereas in Sweden and Norway part-time workers share the same employment rights and benefits as full-time workers, and part-time jobs are also available to those in higher-level professional positions. These authors argue that ‘the negative association between fertility and labour force participation can be expected to diminish as the conflict between work and family responsibilities is reduced – whether by a change in the nature of work life, shifts in the social organization of childcare, or a combination of the two’ (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996: 262). This view is shared by the United Nations, which states that: ‘family-friendly policies aiming at the reconciliation of work with family life can both counteract a decrease in the birth rate to very low levels and augment the employment rate’ (2008: 3). It would thus appear that unless work–life balance policies are made more widely available, young people

approaching decisions about family formation and childbearing may postpone childbearing or limit the number of children they have.

The effect of work–life balance and childcare policies on pregnancy decisions and well-being

Recent research has examined the attitudes of young women and men concerning pregnancy and childbirth and specifically the extent to which the lack of flexible working and lack of childcare facilities influence their pregnancy and childbirth decisions. Redmond et al., in a literature review of issues related to work–life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues, conclude that ‘many working parents are experiencing increasing levels of stress due to two main factors: the lack of work–life balance arrangements in the workplace and the lack of affordable childcare’ (2006: 11). They refer in particular to research by Murphy-Lawless et al. on sexually active women and their attitudes to fertility, sex and motherhood. This research found that the young women in the study who were not currently planning on having children had ‘serious doubts about their ability to cope with the demands of motherhood and the labour market’ (Redmond et al., 2006, p.10). These findings further underscore the fact that inadequate childcare provision and work–life balance policies are already affecting the decisions of young Irish women to have children.

The increasing stress of working people has been highlighted by Fagnani (2008), who notes that the pressure of increased demands on time, which she links to the rise in the culture of long working hours, has led to a deterioration in the quality of life. She argues that in light of these tensions and pressures, young couples might reduce their number of offspring. The issue of time pressure in various spheres – commuting time, working time, difficulties in synchronising work with childcare arrangements – were all found to be significant predictors of working parents’ ability to combine work and family life in a comparative study of working parents with young children carried out in Ireland, France, Denmark and Italy (Fine-Davis et al. 2004). It is possible that these stresses in balancing work and family life could impact on childbearing decisions, including the number of children a couple might feel they could cope with.

A lack of supportive policies means that women often have to choose between work and having children or else they try to do both, and this results in stress. The stress experienced by the woman herself will also have an impact on her partner and her children. Research carried out in Ireland (Fine-Davis et al. 2005) and cross-culturally (Fine-Davis et al. 2004) showed that when inadequate childcare and work–life balance policies were in place respondents experienced lesser well-being in a wide variety of life domains, including satisfaction with health, work, family, partner and life in general. Conversely, when respondents had access to good childcare and work–life balance policies, this was related to greater well-being.

If women limit their participation in the labour force due to inadequate family support policies, this has the effect on society of depriving the economy of their talents. The EU has recently pointed out that the adequacy of provision of childcare facilities impinges particularly on women,

who faced with inadequate childcare options, are more likely than men to have to give up work or to choose working arrangements which prevent them from fully exploiting their talents . . . the European economy is thus deprived of their productive potential, at a time when it is having to contend with economic and demographic challenges. (Commission of the European Communities 2008: 2)

If women decide to participate actively in the workforce, they may feel unable to manage having children as well if supports are inadequate, or they may feel unable to have as many children as they would ideally like to have. If a woman or a couple limits the number of children they have, this impacts not only on the woman or the couple, but also on society as a whole.

Attitudes to family formation: an important component

In view of the vast changes in family structure and fertility patterns we are seeing, it is critical to understand the attitudes underpinning them. Castles believes that 'what we are witnessing . . . is a long-term change in preferences concerning family size' (2003: 211). Caldwell and Schindlmayr ask whether the current emphasis on type of welfare state or kind of family structure are adequate as explanations or whether perhaps we should be looking instead at 'lifestyles' and how family building has changed in current times (2003: 242). While it is known that falling birth rates are in part due to economic conditions, availability and affordability of childcare and availability of flexible working, little or no research has examined the social psychological factors that contribute to people living in various types of family units and having fewer children or no children. Such social psychological factors – in particular, attitudes – constitute a set of variables which Hakim (2003) has referred to as 'preferences' – an important set of potential predictors which she believes has been overlooked. The notion of preference or choice is a theme echoed by van de Kaa (2002a) who argues that individuals have greater choice in post-modern societies, and this may be affecting their fertility decisions. Sleebos (2003) also points out that with the emergence of post-materialist values, self-realisation and quality-of-life issues may take precedence over wishes to bear children, a view also expounded by van de Kaa in his theory of the Second Demographic Transition (van de Kaa 2002b). Individual preferences may also influence the form of relationships people seek, and this may impinge on fertility. It was the main goal of the study to be reported here to examine precisely these issues, namely people's attitudes,

preferences and choices and how they relate to their decisions regarding family formation and fertility.

Other authors have also pointed out that research on the relationship between fertility and employment leaves out important data on attitudes to childcare and attitudes to the 'impact of childcare constraints' on fertility and labour force participation rates (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000: 289). D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole compared men and women's attitudes towards family and gender roles from the World Values Survey (2000) and found that men have more traditional attitudes than women about family and gender roles in most OECD countries, though these gender gaps have narrowed over time. However, these authors also found a widening gap between desired and observed fertility to the effect that people are having fewer children than they would ideally like to have. They concluded that 'This divergence between desired and observed fertility rates suggests the presence of constraints that prevent women to achieve their expectations about children' (d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005: 44), a view supported by Esping-Andersen (2009) among others. D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole (2005) postulated that a mismatch in gender attitudes of young men and women might lead to lower rates of partnership formation and lower fertility rates. When they included this variable in an equation with other variables the relationship was in the predicted direction but the coefficient was not significant. However, the authors point out that the results did not allow for country specific effects or for interaction effects with various policies (d'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005: 60–1).

These findings further underscore the need to take into account attitudes, preferences, lifestyle choices and perceived constraints in trying to understand family formation and fertility behaviour. The importance of studying attitudes to family formation is central to the design of the Generations and Gender Programme, launched in 2000 by the Population Activities Unit of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (United Nations 2000). The aim of this research programme is to 'improve understanding of demographic and social development and of the factors that influence these developments' (Vikat et al. 2007). This research programme was preceded by an earlier one: the Fertility and Family Survey, which sought to determine the causes of decreasing fertility (Klijzing and Corijn 2002; Macura and Beets 2002a). In summarising the results of this coordinated research, Macura and Beets (2002b) and Klijzing and Corijn (2002) conclude that the inclusion of only a limited set of determinants of fertility have contributed to a lack of progress in this area. The extensive use of event-history methods has led to a lack of explanatory power. There is a felt need for more research aimed at 'explaining behaviour, not just describing it' (Klijzing and Corijn 2002: 10), a view strongly supported by Hakim (2003).

The influence of attitudes on behaviour has been well established in the social sciences. Their importance in understanding partnership and fertility

decisions has recently been highlighted by a number of researchers. Writing on the UN's Family and Fertility project, Cliquet concluded that 'Despite the number and diversity of the comparative projects tackled so far, there are still some important issues that are under-researched and deserve further attention . . . In particular, these include . . . The influence of values and beliefs on partnership and reproductive behaviour' (2002: 24). This set of variables is seen as potentially offering greater explanatory power. More recently, Thornton et al. in the US stated that 'Attitudes, values and beliefs are central factors in theoretical models of family formation behaviour and key elements in understanding changing patterns of family formation' (2007: 225).

Given the vast social changes witnessed in Ireland, particularly in relation to the decreasing influence of the Catholic Church on people's family formation and fertility decisions, it is increasingly important to understand attitudes and intentions and the factors that influence these. Indeed, it has been argued that 'As societal tolerance increases and as social control decreases in US society, individual attitudes are likely to become even more important determinants of individual behavior' (Barber 2001: 124; see also Thornton et al. 2007). While this was said about family formation in the US, the premise is equally likely to be true for Ireland.

Research has shown that gender role attitudes can significantly impact on people's attitudes towards family formation, both in terms of the type of unions they form and their fertility level. Research in the US has found that less traditional attitudes are associated with a greater likelihood to cohabit rather than marry (Clarkberg et al. 1995; Kaufman 2000). Clarkberg et al. (1995) found that more egalitarian or liberal sex role attitudes were differentially associated with cohabitation and marriage for men and women. They concluded that

cohabitation is attractive as an alternative to marriage not only because it is a tentative, nonlegal form of a coresidential union but, more broadly, because it accommodates a very different style of life . . . cohabitation as an institution allows for flexibility and freedom from traditional gender-specific marital roles, at least temporarily. (Clarkberg et al. 1995: 623)

This view is also shared by Musick and Bumpass (2012).

Regarding the relationship between gender role behaviour and fertility, research in West Germany found that couples with a traditional division of household labour had higher birth rates than couples with either a semi-equal division of labour or where men did more of the housework (Henz 2008). Other research has looked at the relationship between gender role *attitudes* and fertility. For example, Kaufman (2000) found a significant difference between men and women in relation to their gender role attitudes and their fertility intentions. While egalitarian women were *less* likely to intend to have a child than

traditionally oriented women, egalitarian men were *more* likely to intend to have a child than traditionally oriented men. While the majority of respondents still intended to have a child, the difference between egalitarian women and men's fertility intentions was statistically significant. Similar findings concerning males were obtained in a cross-cultural study in eight European countries by Puur et al. (2008) who found that men with egalitarian attitudes seem to have higher fertility aspirations than their traditional counterparts. However, Westoff and Higgins' (2009) non-replication of the findings suggests that this area still requires more research before any firm conclusions can be reached. Nevertheless, these findings from attitudinal studies suggest that changing gender role attitudes of men and women may significantly impact on fertility behaviour.

It is also important to consider the interaction between gender role attitudes, the type of family a person desires and other goals or lifestyle preferences which may compete with either or both of these. For example, Barber and Axinn found that 'Gender role attitudes have a strong impact on rates of marriage in early adulthood, but this impact is in opposite directions depending on individuals' commitments to the pursuit of higher education' (1998: 28). Those who believe that a wife should stay home, yet at the same time are committed to higher education, are more likely to delay marriage. Yet corroborating previous research, these researchers also found that 'young people become less likely to agree with the idea that wives should be homemakers as they complete more education' (Barber and Axinn 1998: 28). In addition to attitudes towards education, attitudes towards careers and spending also influence cohabitation, marriage and first birth (Barber 2001; Thornton et al. 2007).

Theoretical models and previous research have shown that attitudes influence family forms (e.g., Rhoades et al. 2009; Wiik et al. 2010), which, in turn, have their own characteristics. (For summaries on differences between cohabitation and marriage, see Clarkberg et al. 1995; Barber and Axinn 1998.)

The economic and social effects of decreasing fertility on society

The social changes that we are witnessing in terms of the changing nature of the family and a decreasing birth rate will in turn have other effects on society. One of these effects is referred to as the 'demographic time bomb' (European Commission 2006), i.e. the long-term effects on society of a lower birth rate. A low birth rate means that there will be fewer young people to enter the labour force, with the result of a smaller base of workers to support the increasing numbers of older people in the population. There are currently four people of working age for every person over 65. Falling birth rates, rising life expectancy and the retirement of the baby boom

generation mean that, by 2050, this ratio will have dropped to two workers supporting one pensioner (European Commission 2006). Vladimír Špidla, then EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, said that ‘concerns over the demographic time bomb must translate into action and reform now’ (European Commission 2006). This issue is one faced by many developed societies. If a falling birth rate leads to a higher dependency ratio, it creates the necessity to increase taxes or cut spending or both in order to support pension funds and health care needs of the older population. This not only puts additional strain on disposable income but can contribute to a decrease in economic growth and quality of life – phenomena which people in Ireland and in several other European countries have experienced in recent times. Such negative outcomes could be exacerbated further unless we maintain a reasonable level of fertility to replenish the stock of workers and maintain healthy dependency ratios.

Demographic changes and the changing nature of the family: psychological implications for individuals and society

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

Effect of relationship or family status on well-being

While the attitudinal determinants of demographic changes in family formation are less studied, the effect of type of relationship on well-being has been the subject of more research. There has been extensive international research examining the effect of marital status on psychological and physical well-being. Much of the early work was conducted in the US (e.g., Gove 1973; Verbrugge 1979; Gove et al. 1983). These studies found that marriage was related to greater well-being than being single, divorced or widowed. This research also demonstrated that marriage had more of a protective effect on men than on women. In a review of over 130 empirical studies, Coombs concluded that ‘the evidence is consistent with the protection/support hypothesis’ (1991: 97). Stack and Eshleman’s review of data from seventeen countries, collected in the context of the World Values Study, also supported previous research linking marital status and happiness: ‘In 16 out of 17 analyses of the individual nations, marital status was significantly related to happiness . . . The results offer perhaps the most sweeping and strongest evidence to date in support of the relationship between marital status and happiness’ (1998: 534).

Given the increasing rates of cohabitation, research has begun to examine its characteristics and similarities and dissimilarities to marriage. Stack and Eshleman found that while 'cohabitants, who also have a live-in partner to enhance social integration, were happier than other categories of single persons . . . marriage increases happiness substantially more than cohabitation' (1998: 534). McKeown et al. (2003), who examined well-being among parents in Ireland, found that the quality of the relationship did not differ significantly between married and cohabiting mothers and fathers. These authors initially found that women's well-being was significantly related to family form, whereas the differences in men's well-being did not significantly differ by family type. They found that married mothers had 'the highest level of psychological well-being, followed by cohabiting mothers, separated mothers and, finally, single mothers, who have the lowest level of psychological well-being' (McKeown et al. 2003: 33). However, upon further analysis, they found that the relationship between women's well-being and family form 'practically disappears' when other factors were included, such as personality traits, feeling financially secure and the quality of their relationship with their child. In fact, the significance only remained for single mothers.

In a longitudinal study in the US, Musick and Bumpass (2006) concluded that the differences between cohabitation and marriage tend to decrease over time and are not as important as the similarities. Corroborating these findings, Hansen et al. (2007), in a Norwegian study, also found no significant differences between marriage and cohabitation on measures of happiness or life satisfaction and very small differences in well-being. More recently, Musick and Bumpass (2012) found that any union confers well-being outcomes, although some kinds of unions are more likely to add certain outcomes and others other outcomes.

Effects of demographic changes and changes in the family on social integration

Several social theorists have written about the increasing individualisation in society, which is in part an outgrowth of post-materialist values that focus more on self and self-actualisation and quality of life (e.g., van de Kaa 2002a, 2002b; Bauman 2003). This trend may also be one of the forces contributing to changes in the family, as people pursue their own needs to develop and self-actualise. These motives may contribute to an extension of the period of singleness and postponement of partnership formation, marriage and childbearing. As a result, we see an increase in smaller households, a decrease in the number of children per family and the greater prevalence of single-person households.

The potential social psychological effects of these changes in terms of social integration vs. social isolation and well-being vs. ill-being are an understudied phenomenon. We do know, however, from earlier research on the effects of marital status on well-being, that being married is associated with greater

well-being than being single, widowed or divorced. There is also literature to indicate that older single people, and women in particular, suffer from some stigmatisation (Byrne and Carr 2005; Lahad and Hazan 2014). Recent research suggests that there are no significant differences in well-being of married and cohabiting people, although this research is still in its early stages (e.g., Musick and Bumpass 2012), as cohabitation has not been prevalent in many countries for that long except in the Scandinavian countries (Wiik et al. 2010). Some research also indicates that single mothers have significantly poorer well-being (McKeown et al. 2003). Given that we are witnessing an increase in the proportion of single people in the population, together with an increase in single mothers, divorced and separated people, it is likely on the basis of the previous research that we do have that a greater proportion of our society will become vulnerable to poorer psychological well-being. Our society is changing from one which was previously richer in social networks and is now characterised by greater social isolation (e.g., Giddens 1994; Putnam 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Bauman 2003). These are issues which have not been studied to any great extent in the context of the recent demographic changes and are explored in the present study in the context of the changing nature of the family.

Purpose and aims of the study

The main purpose of the study was to examine people's attitudes to family formation and having children in the context of changing gender role attitudes and behaviour and the profound demographic changes that are taking place in Ireland. These include an increase in cohabitation, a later age at marriage and at the birth of the first child. They also include a 50% drop in the birth rate over the past thirty years and a consequently smaller family size. The primary aim of the study was thus to better understand the reasons behind the recent social and demographic changes, i.e. why are people making the decisions which are leading to these changes? While demographic data tells us about these trends, little or no research has examined the social psychological factors that contribute to people living in various types of family units and having fewer children or no children. Such social psychological factors – in particular, attitudes, but also choices and preferences – constitute a critical set of potential predictors which have not been examined in the Irish literature to date nor featured to any appreciable extent in the international literature.

The second main aim of the research was to explore whether or not recent trends in family formation are leading to greater well-being. The study examined the well-being of people in different family situations (single, married and cohabiting), both with and without children, in order to better

understand the psychological effects of the changing nature of the family on people undergoing these transitions. The study also explored attitudes to related social policies, such as childcare and flexible working, to ascertain the extent to which the availability or lack of availability of such policies may be affecting people's attitudes and decisions in relation to family formation and childbearing.