Unmarried cohabitation and its fertility in Ireland: Towards post-Catholic family dynamics?

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Abstract [250 words]

Ireland was known for being conservative in family matters. The 2015 referendum that allowed same-sex marriage and the 2018 that allowed abortion showed this is no longer true. This article aims at better understanding recent family change in Ireland by looking at changes in values on topics related with family behaviour and change in behaviour related with family formation — the rise of unmarried cohabitation, and childbearing within unmarried cohabitation—, with a focus on the Catholic dogma and its role in the Irish society. We use data from the 2008 European Value Survey and from the five censuses conducted between 1991 and 2011. We find that the young have been moving away from the teachings of the Church on unmarried cohabitation, but that a few years before the 2018 referendum, they were still close to it on abortion. Cohabitation and having children while cohabiting are related to education in a qualified way. Cohabitation and having children while cohabiting became more common among all educational groups over time. However, the less educated tend to marry earlier than the highly educated who seem to use unmarried cohabitation as a means of postponing marriage. There is no clear negative relationship between cohabitation or fertility within cohabitation and education, but the use of cohabitation seems to vary according to education. The most enduring legacy of the Church doctrine seems to be the late development of family policies that make motherhood hard to reconcile with work and might explain why cohabiting women have few children.

Keywords [4 to 6 keywords]

Unmarried cohabitation; Marriage; Fertility; Childbearing; Education; Ireland (Republic of).

Abstract [200 words]

Ireland was known for being conservative in family matters. The 2015 referendum that allowed same-sex marriage and the 2018 that allowed abortion showed this is no longer true. This article aims at better understanding recent family change in Ireland by looking at changes in values on topics related with family behaviour and change in behaviour related with family formation — the rise of unmarried cohabitation, and childbearing within unmarried cohabitation—, with a focus on the Catholic dogma and its role in the Irish society. We use data from the 2008 European Value Survey and from the five censuses conducted between 1991 and 2011. We find that the young have been moving away from the teachings of the Church on unmarried cohabitation, but that a few years before the 2018 referendum, they were still close to it on abortion. There is no clear negative relationship between cohabitation or fertility within cohabitation and education, but the use of cohabitation seems to vary according to education. The most enduring legacy of the Church doctrine seems to be the late development of family policies that make motherhood hard to reconcile with work and might explain why cohabiting women have few children.

Introduction

Irish society had until recently a reputation of being rather conservative in family matters, regarding attitudes, laws and behaviour. The result of the referendum held on 22 May 2015 that amended the Constitution of Ireland to legalise same-sex marriage came as a surprise, probably not for the people of Ireland, but certainly to most of the rest of Europe and other Western countries. It certainly intrigued foreign researchers involved in the study of family change. By then, since the ground-breaking decision by the Netherlands in 2001, only fourteen countries had followed suit, and none through a referendum. In many cases, same-sex marriage was introduced as a consequence of courts' decisions in which restraining marriage to couples formed by a man and a woman was ruled as being a form of unacceptable discrimination, and thus through a channel typically used to protect minorities against the will, or the tyranny, of the majority. Denmark, which in 1989 had been the first country to introduce registered partnership as a substitute for marriage intended for same-sex couples, did not allow same-sex marriage until 2012. In France, the United Kingdom and the USA, the introduction of same-sex marriage came only after large-scale debates and strong demonstrations by opponents. It is still not introduced in Northern Ireland, where the Catholics are a minority. The fact that same-sex marriage had been introduced in a country deemed still close to the teachings of the Catholic Church and through a national referendum, with the explicit approval of over 60% of the votes, was truly astonishing (Elkink et al., 2017). The referendum held almost exactly three years later on 25 May 2018 by which the constitution was amended again to allow abortion confirmed that indeed, on family matters, Ireland was changing deeply.

Such events foster questioning whether the Irish people are still as conservative in other family matters as they were long assumed to be. It is pretty difficult to imagine that a society may

have demanded changes of such magnitude without going first through more modest transformations in family values and behaviour. In this article, we focus on the diffusion of unmarried cohabitation and of childbearing within unmarried cohabitation. Allowing same-sex couples to get married is a strong departure from the traditional conception of marriage, actually more radical than the acceptance of unmarried cohabitation between a man and a woman. Logically, diffusion and acceptance of unmarried cohabitation as a family form should have preceded the introduction of same-sex marriage.

Most research on the rise of unmarried cohabitation as a family form in Western countries emphasises either cultural change or economic constraints as the main drivers of this phenomenon. For the first perspective, closely related to the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 2010), the spread of unmarried cohabitation is seen as one element of an overarching change in norms, values and attitudes, in particular the increasing need for individual autonomy and the growing rejection of traditional institutions like marriage. For the second perspective, exemplified by the work of Valerie Oppenheimer (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn and Lim, 1997; Oppenheimer, 2003), it is largely a consequence of the deterioration of men's economic status over the last decades, especially the employment and income conditions of young men. Kennedy's (2001) views of the sources of changes in the Irish family would suggest that, in Ireland, the second perspective would provide a better explanation. However, Fahey's (2014) finding that unmarried cohabitation and even having a child while cohabiting is not restricted to the less well-off suggests otherwise.

The diffusion of cohabitation is also intimately linked to the changes in reproductive behaviour and to the normalisation of childbearing outside marriage. Researchers have classified cohabitation in different types according to the motivations of the cohabiters, the meaning they

attach to the relationship and most importantly their fertility intentions (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004). The ideal types range from young cohabiters who understand cohabitation as a trial period before marriage and exclude childbearing from their partnership project to older cohabiters who clearly understand their partnership as a stable and committed relationship and whose fertility intentions do not differ significantly from that of married spouses (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Hiekel and Castro-Martín 2014). Thus, the variation of the share of nonmarital births in each country is related to the level and types of cohabitation.

The pace of incorporation of unmarried cohabitation to the family life course has not been uniform across European countries (Kiernan 2001; Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004). Together with other countries of Catholic majority, such as Italy (Gabrielli and Vignoli, 2013), Spain (Dominguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin, 2013) or Poland (Matysiak, 2009), Ireland has been a laggard country in the spread of nonmarital cohabitation. In the early 1990s, the prevalence of cohabitation remained low —under 2% of Irish women were cohabiting in 1994 (Halpin and O'Donoghue, 2004)—, but the recent evolution of nonmarital births, which have reached 36.6% in 2016, suggests that in the past two decades there has been an important shift away from marriage and that unmarried cohabitation has become an integral part of the family formation process. Therefore, Ireland has gotten closer to the levels in the UK, where the increase of nonmarital births started already in the 1990s and reached 47.6% in 2016 (Perelli-Harris et al 2010).

In this article we aim at contributing to a better understanding of family change in Ireland by looking at change in values related to family issues and change in behaviour related to family formation. We examine the rise of unmarried cohabitation and of childbearing within unmarried cohabitation, by focusing on some aspects of the process, especially its relation with age and with

educational level as a proxy for social class, using a series of “snapshots”. Specifically, we look at the growth, between 1991 and 2011, in the proportion of women who live in an unmarried cohabiting relationship. We are especially interested in the differential growth across age groups and educational strata. We are also interested in the evolution of childbearing within unmarried cohabitation by age group and education. We begin by providing an overview of family change in Ireland, and of the changes in values on topics related to family behaviour.

Overview of Family Change in Ireland

The Republic of Ireland came to existence in a context in which religious difference, namely the opposition between Catholics and Protestants, structured the political fight that led to the independence of the Southern portion of the island. Not surprisingly given the context, the 1937 Constitution included several important elements of the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church, such as the indissolubility of marriage —shared with the Church of Ireland, i.e. the Anglican Church in Ireland—, and of the social doctrine expressed in the *Rerum novarum* encyclical, such as the family as the foundation of society and the role of women as mothers. The enshrinement of elements of the doctrine of the Catholic Church in the Constitution has been typically viewed as one main reason why Irish governments have been slow at recognising family diversity and developing active policies towards families (Canavan, 2012). However, things started to change in the mid-1990s, and the transformation of the relation between the State and the family occurred outside the domain of family policies as such. The most important change of that period was the introduction of divorce through a constitutional amendment adopted by referendum. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act in 2010, the 2015 referendum on same-sex marriage, and the 2018 referendum on abortion followed.

In this changing legal context, contemporary family patterns in Ireland have also undergone important changes. Many of the recent published studies are only available in books or as reports from government agencies or not-for-profit organisations. Connolly (2015) gathers a collection of recent studies on the Irish family that provide valuable insights on different aspects of family change in Ireland. However, Kennedy (2001) remains a highly comprehensive reference on family change in Ireland and recent research still bears the mark of its influence. The author contrasts the conception of the family enshrined in the Constitution of Ireland, in which "the State recognises that by her life within the home, a woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and "the State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home", with the deep transformations in women's roles that occurred particularly over the last two decades of the 20th century. Since the beginning of the new millennium, the proportion of married women engaged in the labour force in Ireland has been similar to the average proportion in Europe. The rapid decline of fertility and the introduction of divorce in 1996 represent other examples of how Ireland has lost some features of its exceptionalism in Europe. As one reviewer of her book summarises it, "Kennedy's thesis is that economic influences were more important in the long term than the social and moral teaching of the Catholic Church" and that "the ideal constitutional notion of the family […] could not remain above and beyond economic realities" (Ferriter, 2002). Economic realities may have played a larger role in the transformation of the family in Ireland than in other countries, or the stark opposition between the constitutional ideal based on Catholic teachings and the economic realities may have been more obvious in Ireland than in most other countries. However, as S. Coontz (2005: 262) puts it, "the erosion of the male breadwinner family is a classic example of what some historians call an overdetermined event" —meaning it had many causes and not just

one— and one cannot refrain from thinking that the increase in Irish women's labour force participation over the 20th century is also likely an overdetermined phenomenon that cannot be reduced either to changes in values or to economic pressure.

Whatever the causes of the deep changes that occurred in family dynamics in Ireland over the 20th century, the diversification of family configurations is noticeable in multiple demographic data sources. The general findings of a study based on the 2006 Census provide a picture in which alternative family structures —dominated by never married cohabiting couples and lone mothers— represent around a third of all families (Lunn and Fahey, 2011).

Fahey (2015) provides a telling analysis of family change in Ireland. He focuses on three elements of the SDT: rising out-of-marriage births, declining fertility and growing union instability. He looks at the rise of nonmarital births from a perspective in which he defines the family as the mother and the child with or without a co-residential father, contrasting the contentious political battles on contraception, divorce and abortion with other "seismic shifts", such as the new social acceptance extended to unmarried mothers and their children, which happened quietly. He finds that nonmarital children are mostly born to parents who live together at the time of birth and that those parents who are not married at the time of birth eventually marry. He also finds that better-off young adults start their family later than the less well-off, more of them do it once married, but eventually, most if not all get married.

It is important to note that the attitudinal change towards unmarried mothers and their children might have a distinct meaning in Ireland. Although illegitimacy existed historically in all European countries, most of them abolished the legal discrimination against nonmarital children in the 1970s. In the case of Ireland, it was not until 1988 that the country ratified the *European Convention on the Legal Status of Children Born out of Wedlock*. According to recent historical

research, the social stigma attached to illegitimate children was particularly strong, their level of institutionalisation was high, and their treatment seems to have been especially harsh even in the mid-20th century (Maguire, 2009). The discovery of mass graves containing the bodies of hundreds of illegitimate children who died while under the care of a Catholic religious order of nuns, some of them as late as 1961 (Grierson, 2017) illustrates the extent of the social rejection of illegitimate children in Ireland and helps to understand why the new social acceptance of children born to unmarried mothers or to unmarried couples is considered a "seismic shift".

Although we are interested solely in Ireland, looking at family change in Northern Ireland may provide some additional insights, especially on the role of religion in the transformation of family dynamics and in the change in values. We found little recent research on the topic. McGregor and McKee (2016: 618) use panel data to show the decreasing role of religion in determining fertility behaviour and the reaction of both Catholics and Protestants "to external developments in a similar way but still maintaining distinctive demographic profiles". Looking at Ireland in the European context also provides useful insights. In his study on the SDT in Europe, Sobotka (2008) emphasises the diversity between countries in the general process of change in family-related values, the differences being shaped by culture, history, family policies and the secularisation process. According to him, the relation between change in values and change in family behaviour is strongly supported by empirical evidence. He uses two complementary indices —one for family behaviour and one for family values— to evaluate the advance of the SDT in European countries. Ireland gets a score of 5 on a 10 scale on both indices, ranking in the middle of the distribution, closely located to Spain and Italy, two other Catholic countries.

Until recently, the "Irish exceptionalism" in matters related to the family was mainly characterised by a strong opposition to abortion. Abortion has been a matter of debate in many

Western societies since the 1960s and, in most of them, the law has been modified to allow abortion, in many cases after heated debates and usually in a gradual way. Ireland stands out. The Irish constitution was amended in 1983 to include a new subsection that added the protection of the life of the unborn to the list of personal fundamental rights. The amendment was adopted through a referendum with 67% of the votes in favour of the proposal (DECLG, 2016). The Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013 allowed abortion if the mother was at risk of death from physical illness or suicide and included strict provisions to ensure that such circumstances were recognised by experts. Thirty-five years later, the amendment that allows abortion won 66% of the vote, almost exactly the proportion that had voted for the amendment forbidding abortion in 1983.

Previous Research on Change in Values in Ireland

We found little published research on the evolution of values and attitudes towards unmarried cohabitation and related matters in Ireland. Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott (2005) used survey data covering the period from the 1970s to 2003 and the European Values Study (EVS) fielded in the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland in 1999–2000 to examine the differences in values and attitudes between Catholics and Protestants on a variety of topics. They found that, although religion remained a deep source of division with regard to identity and constitutional preferences, Catholics and Protestants "were closer to each other in their thinking on many issues than either is to any other population in Europe, including that of Britain". This was also true on questions of family and sexual morality on which religion traditionally had a large influence. They also found that "on a number of issues the split is between the religiously committed and those whose faith has weakened or disappeared. Secularisation has replaced denomination as the

main axis of differentiation in regard to certain values and attitudes." Although focused on values rather than on behaviour, their conclusions are parallel to those of McGregor and McKee (2016).

Previous Research on Unmarried Cohabitation and Its Fertility in Ireland

Data from the 2001 Census of Ireland allow comparing Ireland to other European countries at the beginning of the millennium. At that time, 31.0% of women aged between 20 and 34 who lived in a conjugal union were not married. For men, this proportion was 34.8%. In the European context, this was a relatively high level, above the proportions observed in Southern European countries, but below those of Scandinavian countries (see Sobotka and Toulemon, 2008). However, the proportion of unmarried people aged between 20 and 44 and living with children drops dramatically to 6.8% for women and 8.9% for men. This difference is specific to Ireland, suggesting that unmarried cohabitation was expanding but was not yet considered as a proper setting for having and rearing children.

Halpin and O'Donoghue (2004) used data from the Labour Force Survey and from the Living in Ireland Survey, the Irish component of the European Community Household Panel, to examine the diffusion of unmarried cohabitation in Ireland between 1994 and 2002. They found that unmarried cohabitation had become more common in Ireland over that period, the proportion of women living in an unmarried cohabiting relationship increasing from about 2% to 6%. Unmarried cohabitation was associated with being young, urban and in the labour market. Most cohabiting relationships were short: only about 20% lasted at least seven years. A high proportion of them ended in marriage. More interestingly, they found that over 40% of new marriages were preceded by cohabitation, "making it close to a majority practice rather than the deviant behaviour it would have been a generation ago". Because of the generalisation of unmarried

cohabitation as a prelude to marriage, they conclude that unmarried cohabitation "seems to be developing as an adaptation of marriage rather than an alternative to it".

Another study on family patterns based on data from the 2006 Census estimated "that cohabiting couples accounted for 11 per cent of all couples, and that 33 per cent of these cohabiting couples had children" (Fahey and Field, 2008). If the estimates of the two studies are accurate, the proportion of couples living together without being married grew from 2% in 1994 to 6% in 2002 and to 11% in 2006. More recently, the Irish Central Statistics Office's report of the 2016 Census noted that 15.2% of all couples were cohabiting and that half of them had children. Such an increase is impressive. Fahey and Field are of the same opinion as Halpin and O'Donoghue: they believe that unmarried cohabitation is not replacing marriage. Given that, according to their estimates, a large proportion of cohabiting couples had children and that the data did not allow them to examine the evolution of the duration of cohabiting relationships, other researchers might have been more cautious in their conclusions.

Data and methods

We are interested in change in values on topics related to family behaviour and change in behaviour related to family formation.

We envision attitude and opinions on family related matters from the perspective of the Catholic doctrine. From this perspective, not rejecting unmarried cohabitation, same-sex families or abortion signals having moved away from the traditional norms of the Irish society. That said, not rejecting unmarried cohabitation is a smaller move away from the doctrine of the Church than either not rejecting same-sex families or abortion, as the former is a sin that does not, by itself, reject the teachings of the Church or its moral authority, whereas the two other opinions are

strong doctrinal departures that amount contesting the moral authority of the Church. Change in opinions and attitudes towards unmarried cohabitation should have accompanied the rise in unmarried cohabitation and fertility within cohabitation. Opinions and values on matters more at odds with the Catholic doctrine, such as same-sex families and abortion, should have been slower to change, but should display some evolution in the years before the referendums. We study these changes using data from a sample of the Irish population, focusing on the relation between opinions and attitudes with age as a proxy for generation.

As we state in the introduction, we examine the rise of unmarried cohabitation, and childbearing within unmarried cohabitation and their relation with age and with the level of education as a proxy for social class, using a series of "snapshots". We look at the growth, between 1991 and 2011, in the proportion of women who live in an unmarried cohabiting relationship and at the growth of the portion of fertility that is attributable to unmarried cohabiting women.

All our data are cross-sectional. Furthermore, we have only one sample, thus only one "snapshot", of the opinions and attitudes. Thus our analysis of change in attitudes and opinions relies heavily on the interpretation of age as a proxy of generation. However, using data from several censuses to trace the evolution of cohabitation allows us to disentangle somewhat the effect of time by considering period as well as age. In all cases, our data limits us to estimate prevalence rather than incidence.

Values

The fifth wave of the European Values Study (EVS) has been initiated in 2017, but Ireland has not initiated yet the fieldwork. Therefore, we use data from the 4th wave, the most recent completed wave, fielded in Ireland in 2008 (EVS 2010). The questionnaire of this survey

included two questions especially relevant to our study that were not asked in previous waves, at least not in Ireland. In these questions, respondents were asked to state their degree of agreement with the two following statements: “It is alright for two people to live together without getting married” and “Homosexual couples should be able to adopt children”. Given that the questions were asked only in 2008, there is no way to examine the evolution of the answers over time. An approximation is to examine the relation of the answers given in 2008 with the age of the respondent. We use ordinal logistic regression to estimate the relation between the answer given to these questions and the age of the respondent, and graph predicted probabilities. This smooths the relation between age and values despite the relatively small size of the sample, and makes comparisons straightforward despite the use of different scales across questions.

The questionnaire of the 4th wave of the EVS included seven questions on abortion. One of them is synthetic and provides a convenient way to gauge the opinion on abortion in Ireland a few years before the 2015 referendum on same-sex marriage and the 2018 referendum on abortion. The question reads as follows: “Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card” and one of the several items is simply “Abortion”. Respondents were asked to answer by choosing a number ranging from 1 to 10, 1 meaning “Never” and 10, “Always”. Forty-five percent answered “Never”, 17% answered “5” and 3%, “Always”, the remaining answers being spread almost equally over the remaining categories. We grouped the answers in four categories — “Never”, “2 or 3” “4 to 6” and “7 to 10” and used the same approach as we did earlier to estimate the probability of answering each of the four levels of agreement according to age.

Behaviour

We use data from the IPUMS collection of harmonised census microdata files from the five most recent censuses of Ireland for which data are available, i.e. 1991, 1996, 2002, 2006 and 2011 (Minnesota Population Center, 2015).

We compute the proportion of women aged between 20 and 44 who are married, live in an unmarried cohabiting relationship or do not live in a any form of conjugal union. Given that in Ireland IPUMS data, age is grouped in five-year categories, we compute these proportions in five-year age groups.

We estimate childbearing within marriage, unmarried cohabitation and outside any form of conjugal union using an approach based on the own-children method. The own-children method was designed to study fertility using census data so that fertility could be related to characteristics collected by the census, but not recorded in vital statistics (Cho, Rutherford and Choe, 1986). Using the own-children method allows detecting recent births in unmarried cohabiting couples and in married couples. The original form of the method uses the distribution of the number of children less than five years old in the household conditional on the age of mothers aged between 15 and 49, grouped into five-year classes. Given that in Ireland IPUMS data, age is grouped in five-year categories, we estimate rates within five-year age groups, but using births which occurred in the year preceding the census.

First, we compare the fertility of married women with that of women living in an unmarried cohabiting union, estimating age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) and the total fertility rate (TFR) by union type. The TFR by union type is an extension of the traditional distinction between the marital TFR and the nonmarital TFR to a third case, fertility within unmarried cohabitation. The marital TFR is a measure of the number of children a woman would have had if she had been

continuously married between ages 20 and 44 and subjected to the synthetic cohort's age-specific fertility rates of married women throughout this period. The unmarried cohabitation TFR should be interpreted in the same way, *mutatis mutandis*. These rates indicate implausible high levels of fertility in marriage and cohabitation, which is a consequence of union type being a time-varying characteristic (Hoem and Mureşan, 2011a, 2011b). We do not interpret this TFR as an approximation of completed fertility, but as a measure of the overall intensity of fertility within each union type. We use this measure to compare the overall intensity of fertility within each of the two forms of conjugal union. We estimate ASFRs and TFR using an approach that combines the own-children method and Poisson regression, which allows computing standard errors and thus test whether observed differences between marriage and consensual union are statistically significant.

Second, we use two measures introduced in Laplante and Fostik (2015): the contribution of each conjugal status to age-specific fertility rates (CASFR) and the contribution of each conjugal status to cumulative fertility (CCF). The first measure, the contribution of a given conjugal status to an age-specific fertility rate (CASFR) is computed as the product of the within conjugal status age-specific rate and the proportion of women of the corresponding age who are in that conjugal status. The sum of the contributions of each conjugal status to a given age-specific fertility rate is that age-specific rate. The second measure, the contribution of each conjugal status to cumulative fertility (CCF), is the sum over age of the contributions of each conjugal status to age-specific fertility rates. The sum of the contributions of each conjugal status to cumulative fertility is the cumulative fertility. The sum of the contributions of all conjugal statuses to overall fertility is the total fertility rate. The value of the contribution of each conjugal status to cumulative fertility at age 49 is the contribution of the conjugal status to the TFR.

Substantively, the contributions to age-specific fertility rates provide a description of the fertility, over her life course, of a “synthetic woman” who would have spent her reproductive years unpartnered, cohabiting, and being married as the average woman of the synthetic cohort. The contributions to the TFR provide a decomposition of the cumulative fertility of this “synthetic woman”. Over her life course, she would have had exactly the same number of children as the period TFR, but using the contributions of each conjugal status allows us to detail the proportion of these children she would have had while having no co-residential partner, while cohabiting, and while being married.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Results

Values

Overall, 78% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with people living together without being married. The first pane of Figure 1 reports the predicted probability of answering each of the five levels of agreement according to age as predicted from an ordinal logistic regression in which the relation between age and the dependent variable is specified as quadratic. Approval of unmarried cohabitation is related with age, but in a qualified way. The probability of answering “Agree strongly” decreases almost in a linear fashion as age increases, whereas the probability of answering “Agree” is constant up to age 60 before starting to decrease. On the contrary, the probability of answering “Neither”, “Disagree” or “Disagree strongly” increases with age, the slope increasing with age as well. Overall, the opinions are moderate, except among people over

60 who tend to disagree strongly. The second pane of Figure 1 reports the predicted probability of agreeing with marriage being an outdated institution from a logistic regression in which the relation between age and the dependent variable is again specified as quadratic. Few agree with this idea and although agreement decreases somewhat with age, the difference between the young and the old is less than ten percent.

As the first pane of Figure 1, the first pane of Figure 2 reports the predicted probability of answering each of the five levels of agreement according to age as predicted from an ordinal logistic regression in which the relation between age and the dependent variable is specified as quadratic. Approval of homosexual couples having children is a more delicate matter than approval of unmarried cohabitation. The predicted probabilities of the two approval categories are not as high as those of the question on unmarried cohabitation, while the predicted probabilities of the two disapproval categories are higher. The relation with age is clear: approval decreases as age increases.

The second pane of Figure 2 reports the probability of belonging to each of the four categories in which we grouped the ten original categories of the question we use as a synthetic measurement of the opinion of the respondent on abortion as predicted from an ordinal logistic regression in which the relation between age and the dependent variable is specified as quadratic. The probability of rejecting abortion absolutely increases with age, whereas the probability of showing a qualified approval — “4 to 6” or “7 to 10” — decreases with age and the probability of being close to rejecting abortion completely — “2 or 3”— shows little relation with age.

In 2008, seven years before the referendum on same-sex marriage and two years before the passing of the act that extended the notion of family to unmarried cohabitants and same-sex couples, approval for this extension to unmarried cohabitants would seem quite generalised, but

the opposition to its extension to same-sex couples seemed quite strong, even among the young. Thus, in 2008, unmarried cohabitation was becoming acceptable to the Irish society, while the idea of a family headed by a same-sex couple was not. Obviously, this should have changed by 2015.

There is some evidence that the young are less opposed to abortion than the elders, but the overall public opinion seems to be firmly opposed to abortion. On this topic, in 2008, Ireland as a whole seemed to remain firmly attached to the Church's teaching. Ten years later, another seismic change had happened.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Behaviour

Figure 3 presents the distribution of conjugal status of women aged between 20 and 49 by five-year age groups for all five censuses. Not surprisingly, the overall proportion of women living in an unmarried cohabiting relationship increases from the oldest to the most recent census. The proportions increase steadily from 1991 to 2006, but more slowly between 2006 and 2011. As one could expect, unmarried cohabitation is more common among young adults. In 2011, 76% of women aged 20–24 and 53% of women aged 25–29 who are in a conjugal union are not married. The growth in the proportion of women in a cohabiting relationship is associated with a decrease in the proportion of women married, but not with a decrease in the proportion of women living outside any form of conjugal union. In fact, the proportion of women over age 30 who do not coreside with a partner remains relatively high in all censuses.

One additional result is worth noting. Divorce was not available in Ireland until the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1995 removed the constitutional prohibition of divorce and the divorce bill was signed into law in 1996. In Chile, another Catholic country late to introduce divorce, the ban on divorce had fostered the spread of unmarried cohabitation among separated but still married persons who lived with new partners (Cox 2011). One could have expected to see something similar in Ireland; that is, a non-trivial proportion of women in their late 30s or 40s living as cohabiters at the time of the 1991 Census and either the decrease or the stabilisation of this proportion afterwards. Our results show the opposite: these proportions are very small in 1991 and increase afterwards. Thus, before they could divorce, Irish people in their late 30s or 40s could have used unmarried cohabitation for their second and subsequent unions, but this use was either very limited or undisclosed before the introduction of divorce.

Figure 4 reports the proportion of women aged between 20 and 49 who are cohabiting among those who live in a conjugal union by five-year age classes and level of education for all five censuses. The relationship between education and living in a cohabiting union varies according to age, and the relationship between these three variables varies across censuses.

Among women younger than 30, we find a positive association between educational level and being in a cohabiting relationship in all censuses except the 1991 census. However, there is no relationship between the level of education and cohabitation among women aged between 30 and 34, although the proportion increases from one census to the next. In all groups of women aged at least 35, there is a slight negative association between education and living in an unmarried cohabiting relationship, but the levels are relatively low in all censuses and decrease with age.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 5 reports the age-specific fertility rates for five-year age classes by conjugal status for the five censuses. The most striking change is the decrease in the fertility of young married women from the oldest census to the 2006 Census. Another striking feature is the relatively high fertility rates among unmarried cohabiting women over 35 in all censuses, even in 1991, when unmarried cohabitation was uncommon. In fact, the rates are similar among married and cohabiting women among this older age group. With regard to younger women, fertility rates are always lower among cohabiting women than among their married counterparts.

The first pane of Figure 6 reports the total fertility rate for marriage and unmarried cohabitation for women aged between 20 and 49 with 95% confidence intervals derived from estimating the age-specific rates using Poisson regression. There is some fluctuation across censuses in the overall intensity of fertility within both forms of conjugal union, but the overall intensity is always higher within marriage than within consensual union.

The second pane of Figure 6 reports the total fertility rate for marriage and unmarried cohabitation by level of education for women aged between 20 and 44, again with 95% confidence intervals. There are differences by education levels in all censuses, but the results from the 2011 Census are the most telling. The intensity of fertility is the same within marriage and within unmarried cohabitation for women having the two lowest levels of education. The intensity is higher within marriage than within unmarried cohabitation for women having upper secondary education and from that level up, the difference between marriage and unmarried cohabitation keeps increasing.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

The first pane of Figure 7 reports the contributions to age-specific fertility rates by conjugal status for women aged between 20 and 44 across censuses. The contribution of unmarried

cohabitation increased from the oldest to the most recent census, but even in the most recent, it is barely higher than that of women not living in a conjugal union.

The second pane of Figure 7 reports the contributions to the total fertility rate by conjugal status for women aged between 15 and 44 by census. The contribution of unmarried cohabitation increases from the oldest to the most recent census and, again, is slightly higher than that of living outside any conjugal union in the most recent census. However, as the contribution of marriage decreases because of lower fertility within marriage, the relative contribution of unmarried cohabitation increases more rapidly than its absolute contribution. Over her life course, the average woman of the 2011 synthetic cohort would have had 0.25 of a child while not living in a conjugal union, another 0.25 child while living in an unmarried cohabiting relationship, and 1.25 children while being married. In 2011, unmarried cohabitation accounted for about 12.5% of Irish fertility as measured by the TFR.

Discussion

In 2008, unmarried cohabitation was becoming acceptable to the Irish society, while the idea of a family headed by a same-sex couple was not and there was a strong resistance to abortion. For the two referendums to allow both of these, opinion has had to change profoundly in about ten years. That said, as we suspected, the opinion became more tolerant of unmarried cohabitation before accepting same-sex couples being a family or abortion.

Unmarried cohabitation is more common among young adults, but there is no real way to disentangle to what extent this association is due to the growing acceptance of unmarried cohabitation as a initial stage of the family formation process and a prelude to marriage or to new cohorts with more progressive views on family issues replacing older ones and possibly

maintaining this new form of partnership as they grow older. Both are possible and the two are not mutually exclusive.

There is a positive relationship between education and unmarried cohabitation among the young, none among those aged 30 to 34, and a slight negative association at older ages. Unmarried cohabitation has become widespread among young adults and the positive association between education and living together without being married suggests that there might be a growing gap between the less educated and the well-educated in the age at first marriage, possibly because the latter leave school and start working later. The well-educated marry later and are apparently choosing to live together without being married until older ages than the less educated. Another interpretation of the positive educational gradient of unmarried cohabitation among the young is that individuals with greater material, social and cultural resources are in a better position to make non-traditional choices regarding lifestyles and act as forerunners in behaviours that will later be adopted by the rest of the population.

Among women aged at least 35, marriage remains by far the most common form of conjugal relationship and there is a slight negative association between education and unmarried cohabitation. The proportion of women living in an unmarried relationship increases slightly from one census to the next, but it remains low. Things are a bit different among women aged 30 to 34. In this group, there is no association between education and cohabitation and the proportion of those who live in an unmarried cohabiting relationship increases steadily from one census to the next. This could be the harbinger of a coming change in which the proportion of unmarried cohabiting women would increase in older cohorts in future censuses.

Living in an unmarried cohabiting relationship does not prevent women of any level of education from having a child, and this seems to have been true as early as 1991, when unmarried cohabitation was something rare. Whatever norms may have discouraged a couple to have a child

without being married, they seem to have weakened fast. However, having children within an unmarried partnership is associated with education in a peculiar way: there is no difference between marriage and unmarried cohabitation among women who are less educated, but there is a difference within the three highest levels of education, and this difference becomes steeper the higher the level of education. As we pointed out, unmarried cohabitation among the well-educated seems to be a way of postponing marriage. The low fertility among the well-educated who are cohabiting could be a consequence of some class-related norms: having children while not being married would not be appropriate in the upper classes. Perhaps more convincingly, it could be that cohabitation is preferred by women who do not yet want to be a mother in a society in which career and motherhood may still be difficult to reconcile, especially for highly educated women.

The relative increase of the contribution of unmarried cohabitation to overall fertility is largely due to the decrease of the contribution of marriage. In 2011, the contribution of unmarried cohabitation to overall fertility was on par with that of being unpartnered. Nevertheless, the fact childbearing within cohabitation is not marginal brings into question the prevailing assumption that cohabitation functions only as a childless stage leading to marriage.

It is important to acknowledge a number of limitations of the present study. First, we relied on cross-sectional data for a single year to portray family-related values. Hence, our description of attitudinal change relies heavily on the interpretation of age as a proxy of generation. Second, our analyses on the prevalence of cohabitation and fertility within cohabitation also rely on cross-sectional data, although in this case the examination of five successive censuses allows us to disentangle somewhat the effect of time by considering period as well as age. Nevertheless, we cannot estimate the overall incidence of cohabitation (i.e. who has ever cohabited), its duration pattern, its rate of disruption or its rate of conversion into marriage before and after childbearing,

indicators that could provide a more detailed picture of the meaning of cohabitation and its role in the family formation process (Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2014), because this would require longitudinal data on family transitions over the life course.

Conclusion

The overall picture that emerges from our results is that, in the Irish society, values have been moving away from the teachings of the Catholic Church: unmarried cohabitation has become socially acceptable, as well as having children while living together without being married. That said, marriage and unmarried cohabitation are probably attached different meanings by different social classes. A considerable proportion of the population enters an unmarried cohabitation when they are young, but the less educated marry early and the well-educated later. Having children within an unmarried partnership is no longer stigmatised, but more educated women are less prone to do so. This might be a matter of respectability or of marriage being a marker of social class, some kind of instrument of distinction in the sense of Bourdieu. Alternatively, and more prosaically, it might be that among well-educated women, living together without being married and not having children is a way to give more importance to a professional career than to motherhood in a context where there is little public provision of support for working mothers. Those who choose to have children might prefer to rely on the relative certainty of the implementation of spousal support and asset sharing that remains associated with marriage even in common law jurisdictions, such as Ireland, that have attempted to equate unmarried cohabitation with marriage for such purposes (Leckey, 2017).

Such developments would have been impossible if the social rejection of illegitimate children had remained as it had been until at least the early 1960s. The diffusion of cohabitation occurred hand in hand with the social acceptance of children born to unwed mothers. The scope

and the meaning of this attitudinal change among the Irish society might explain why it seemed so natural to extend the rights and obligations of marriage to unmarried couples. In other countries, for instance in Sweden and in France, living together without being married emerged as a choice by which some couples rejected the intervention of the State in their intimate life and the gendered ideology on which Western marriage has been built (Sandström 2018; Rault 2009). In Ireland, unmarried cohabitation seems to have been embraced by society and integrated into the law as nothing more than a modified version of marriage. That said, both same-sex couples and unmarried cohabitation have become legal institutions by means of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010. Both the differential use of unmarried cohabitation by different social classes and the passing of this act point to change in values as the main driver of recent family change in Ireland.

Ironically, the most enduring legacy of the Catholic Church once-prominent role as provider or moral guidelines for sex and family matters, apart from late legalisation of abortion, might be the late development of family policies. As we write above, according to Canavan (2012), the notion that the family based on marriage is the foundation of society would have been the main deterrent that has long refrained the Irish government from developing active policies towards families. A family structured along traditional gendered roles of men and women was pivotal in the social doctrine that the Catholic Church developed in the late 19th century for the new industrialised society, where most families were not living anymore in rural areas, but in cities where the separation between home and work became standard. The Church actively endorsed and fostered the assignment of women to household work and men to wage-earning employment. The lasting influence that the Catholic Church social teachings had on the slow pace of development of family policies is still perceptible in the paucity of public support for working women.

As pointed out by other scholars (Seward et al., 2005), Irish family patterns are less exceptional than earlier portrayals insinuated. As women's economic independence and secularism have gained ground, the Catholic Church has lost much of its influence in politics, law-making and daily life. Although many of the characteristic features of the Second Demographic Transition emerged later than in other European countries, the recent trends in the prevalence of unmarried cohabitation and childbearing within cohabitation here examined indicate that a convergence process with other European societies is well under way.

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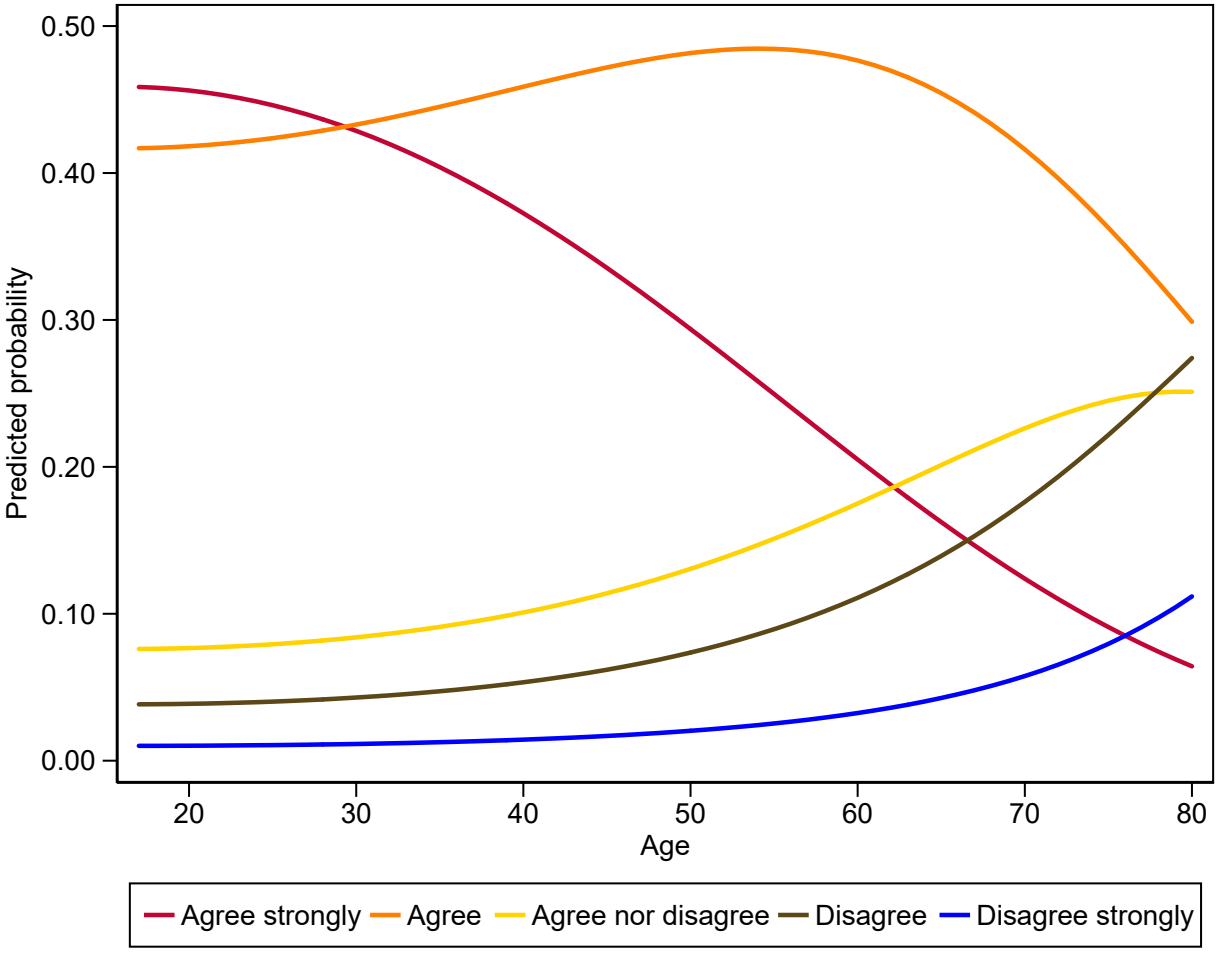
Figure 1

Values as a function of age. Predicted probabilities. "It is alright for two people to live together without getting married" (1). "Marriage is an outdated institution" (2). European Values Study, Ireland, 2008.


0.50
0.40
0.30
0.20
0.10
0.00
Predicted probability
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
Age
Agree strongly
Agree
Agree nor disagree
Disagree
Disagree strongly

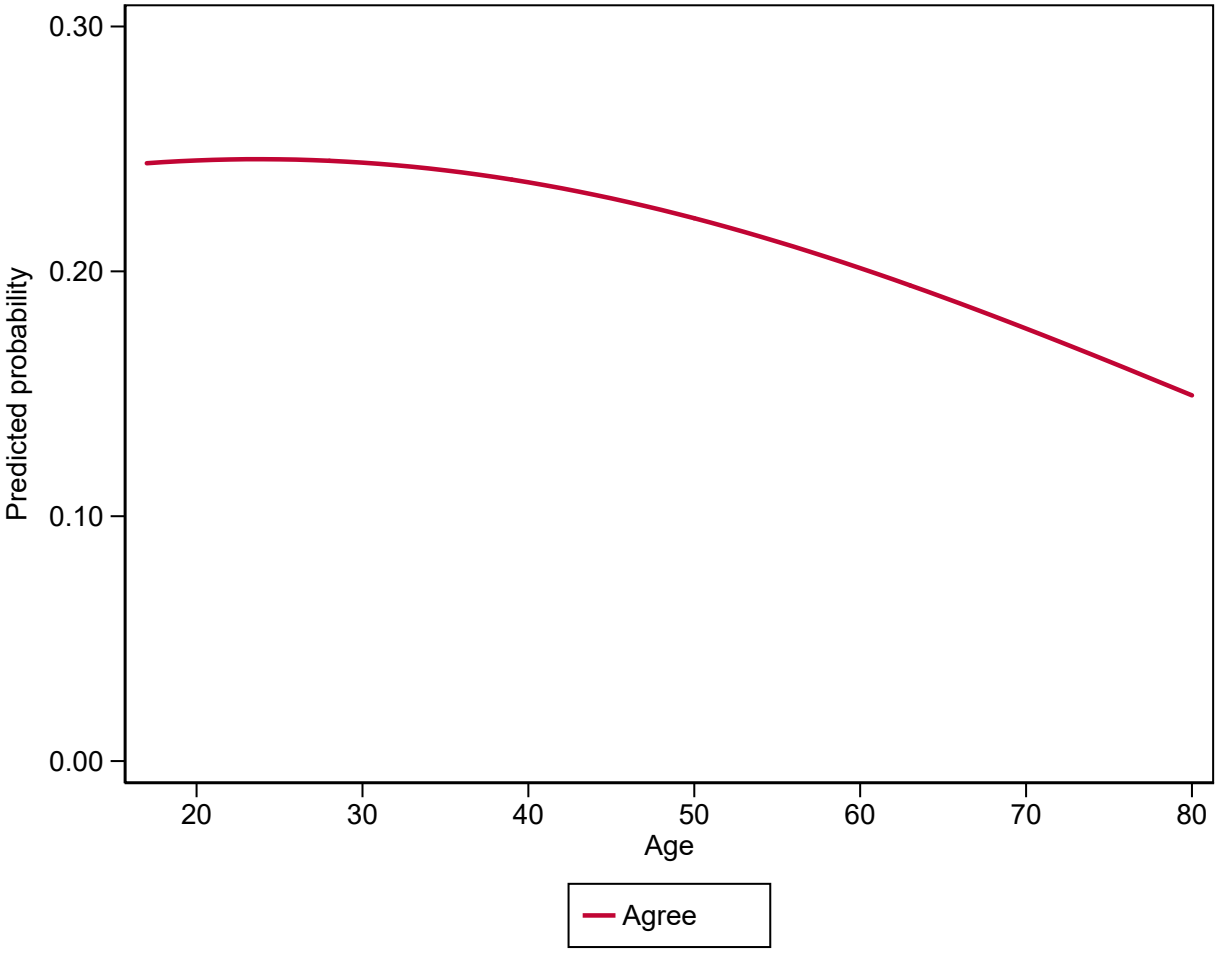
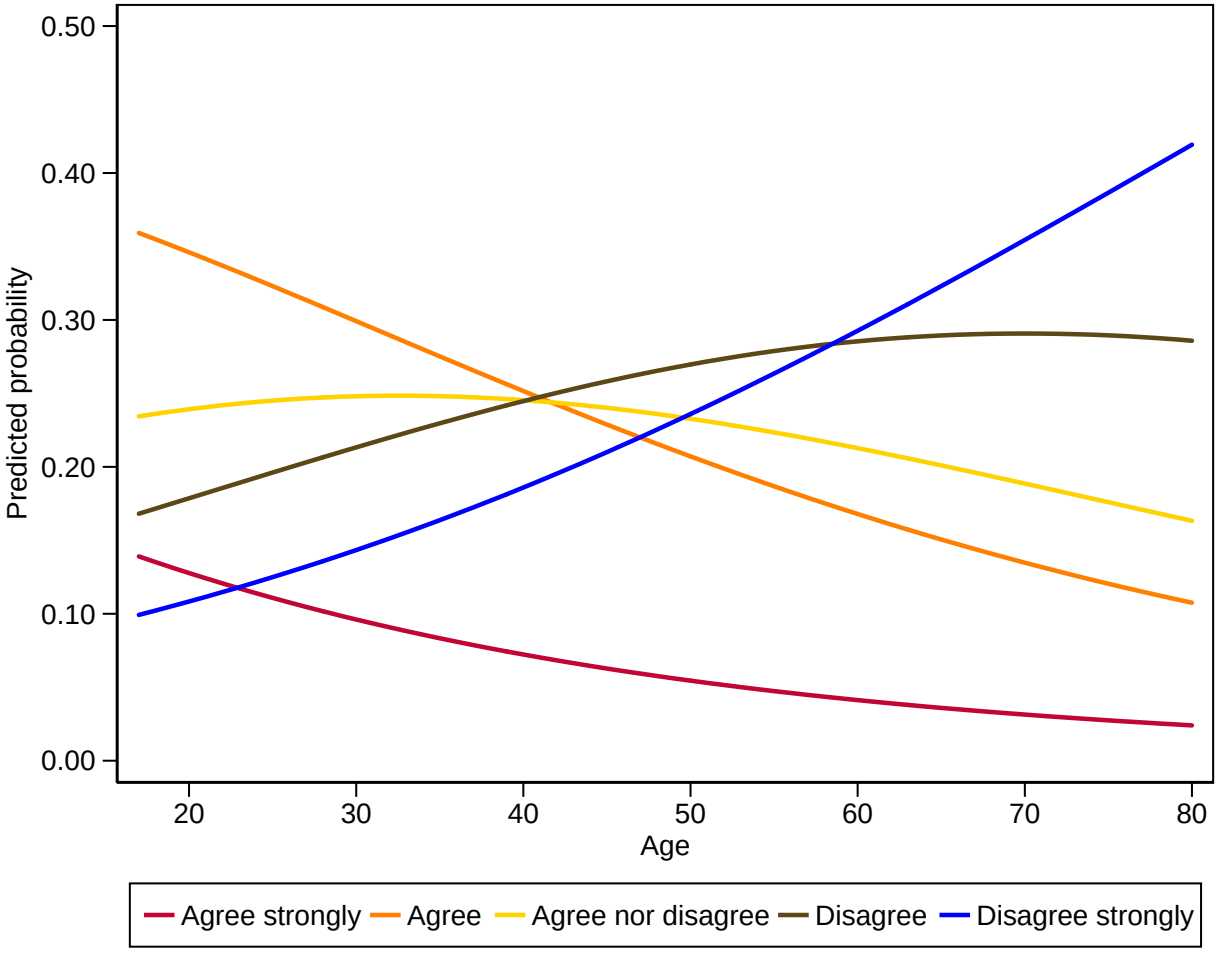

0.30
0.20
0.10
0.00
Predicted probability
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
Age
Agree

Figure 2

Values as a function of age. Predicted probabilities. “Homosexual couples should be able to adopt children” (1) “Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card: Abortion” (2). European Values Study, Ireland, 2008.


0.50
0.40
0.30
0.20
0.10
0.00
Predicted probability
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
Age
Agree strongly
Agree
Agree nor disagree
Disagree
Disagree strongly

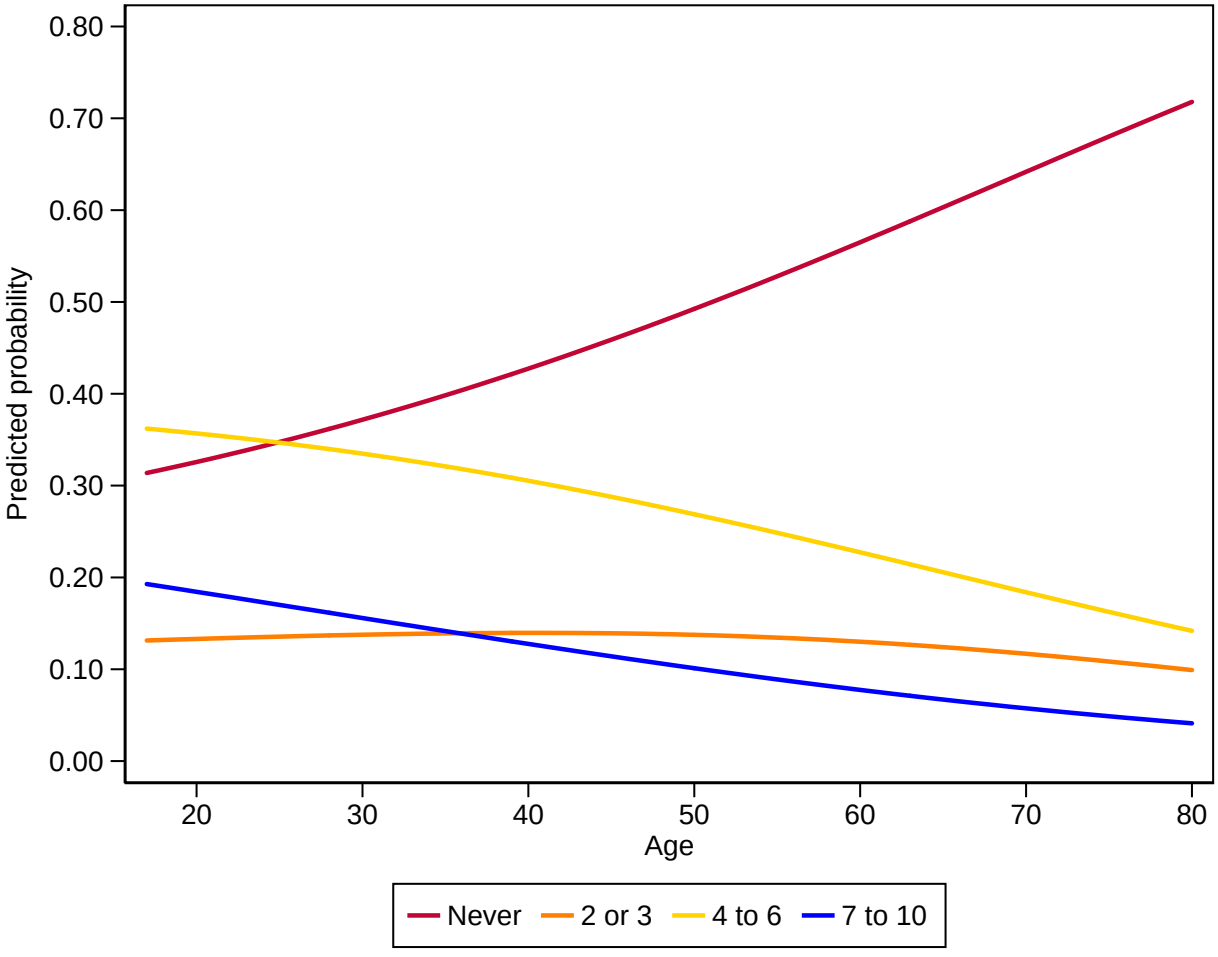

0.80
0.70
0.60
0.50
0.40
0.30
0.20
0.10
0.00
Predicted probability
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
Age
Never
2 or 3
4 to 6
7 to 10

Figure 3

Conjugal status of women aged 20–44 by five-year age classes. Ireland. Census data. IPUMS.

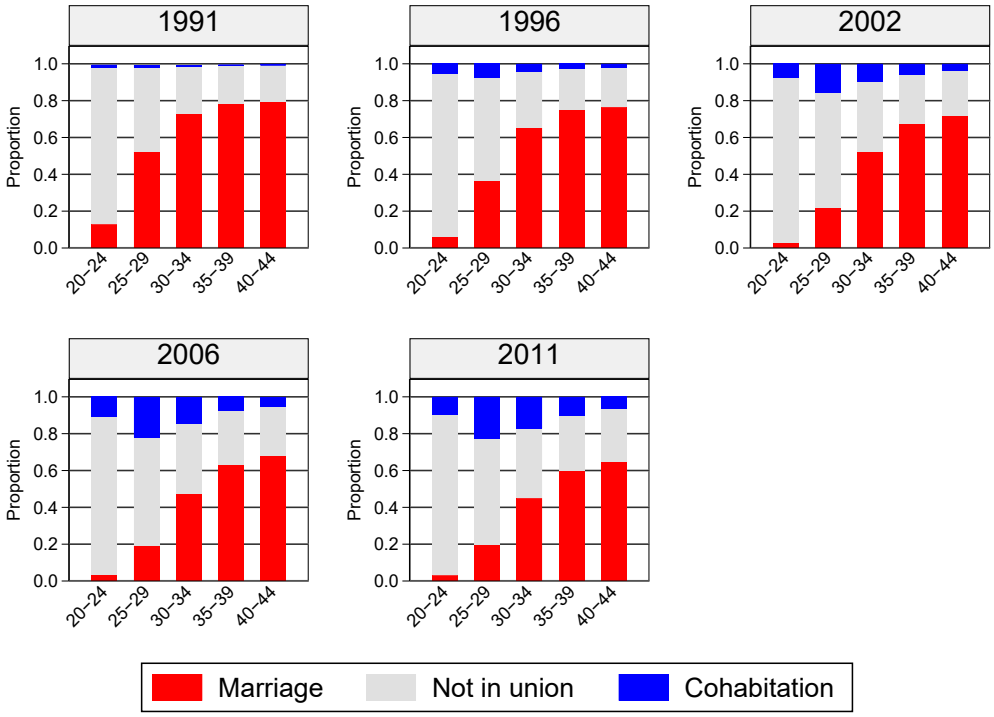

1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
Proportion
0.0
0.2
0.4
0.6
0.8
1.0
20–24
25–29
30–34
35–39
40–44
Marriage
Not in union
Cohabitation

Figure 4

Proportion of women aged 20–44 cohabiting among those who live in a conjugal union by five-year age classes and level of education. Ireland. Census data. IPUMS.

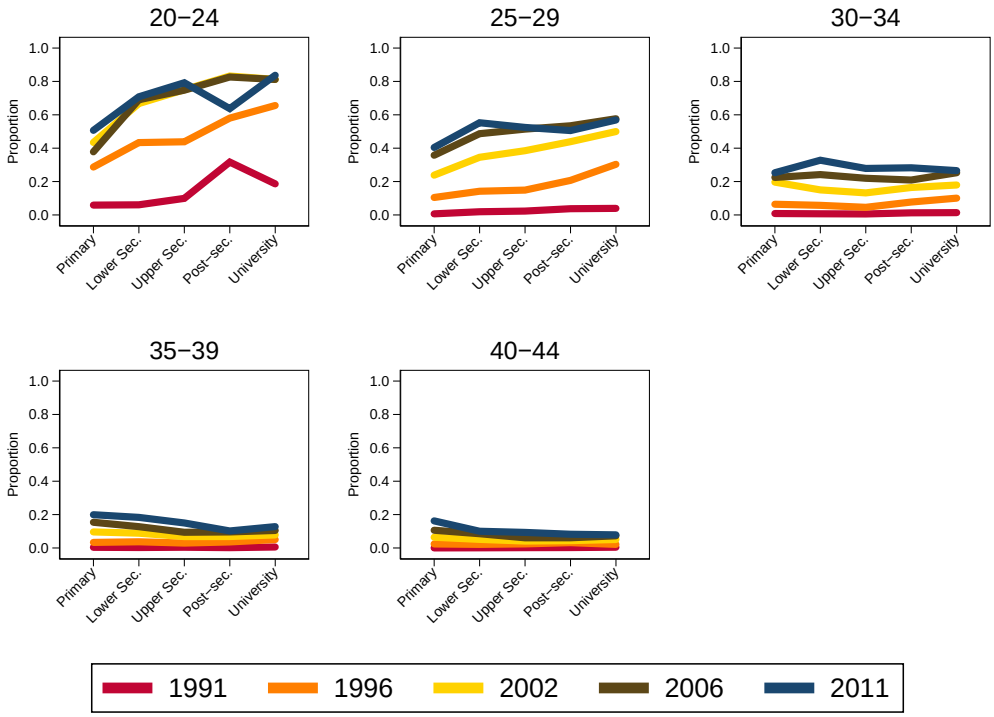

20−24
25−29
30−34
35−39
40−44
Proportion
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
Primary
Lower Sec.
Upper Sec.
Post−sec.
University
1991
1996
2002
2006
2011

Figure 5

Age-specific fertility rates for five-year age classes by conjugal status. Ireland. Women aged 20–44. Census data. IPUMS.

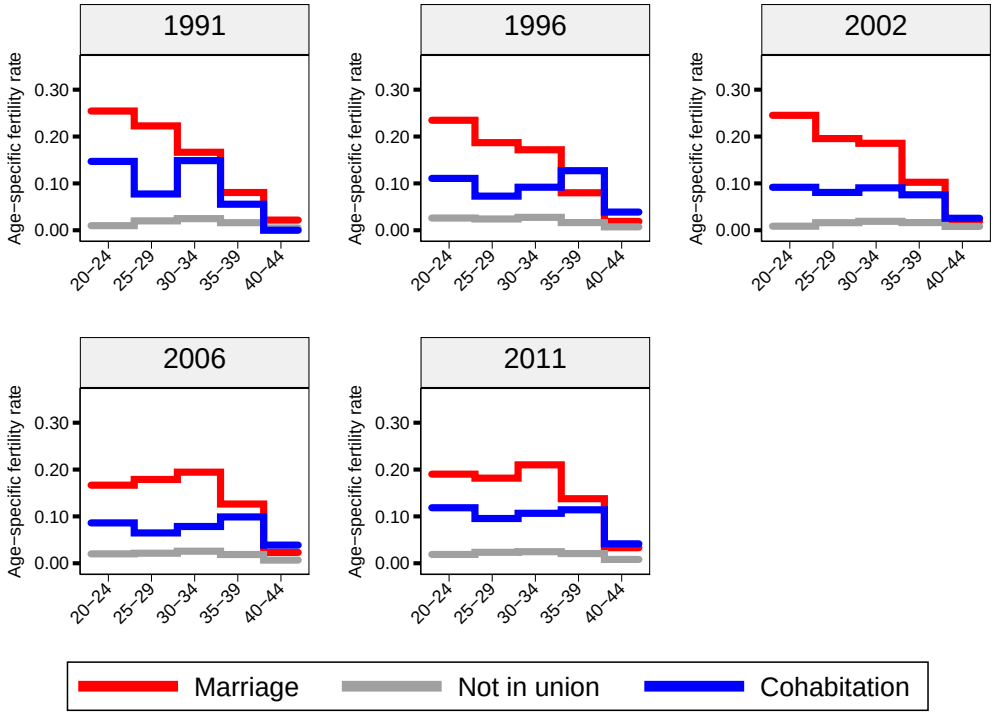
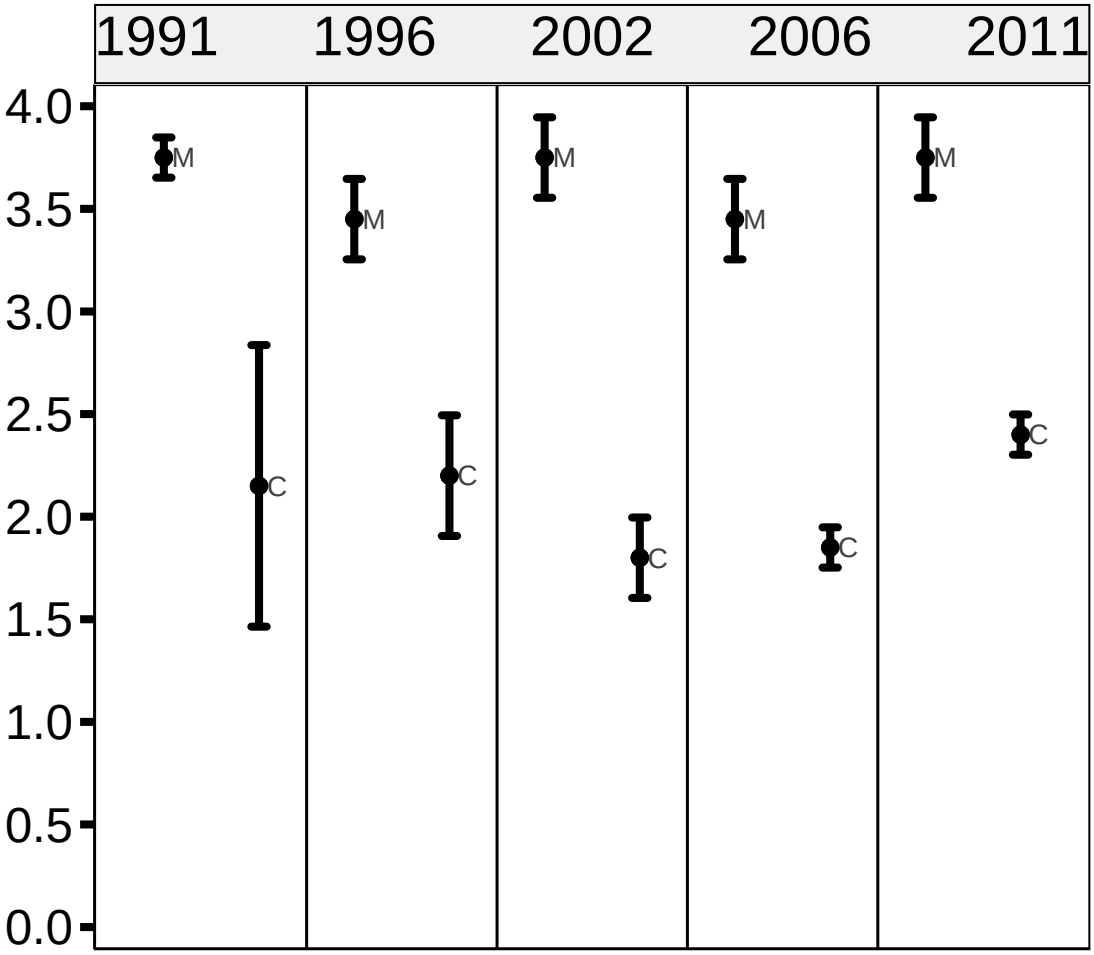

1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
Age−specific fertility rate
0.00
0.10
0.20
0.30
20−24
25−29
30−34
35−39
40−44
Marriage
Not in union
Cohabitation

Figure 6

Total fertility rate for marriage and cohabitation (1) and Total fertility rate for marriage and cohabitation by level of education (2) or women aged 20–44 with 95% confidence intervals. Ireland. Census data. Poisson regression. IPUMS


1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
4.0
3.5
3.0
2.5
2.0
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
M
C

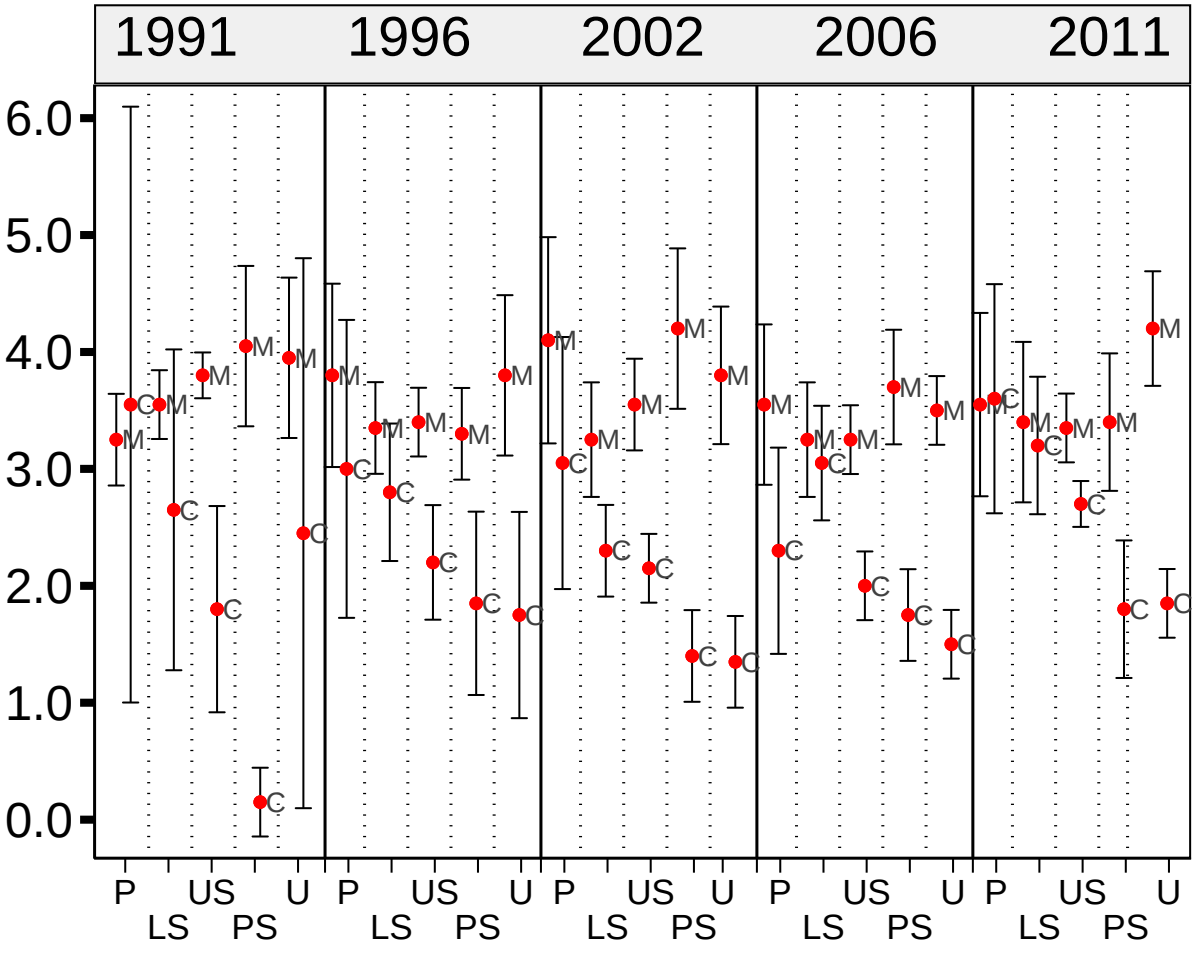
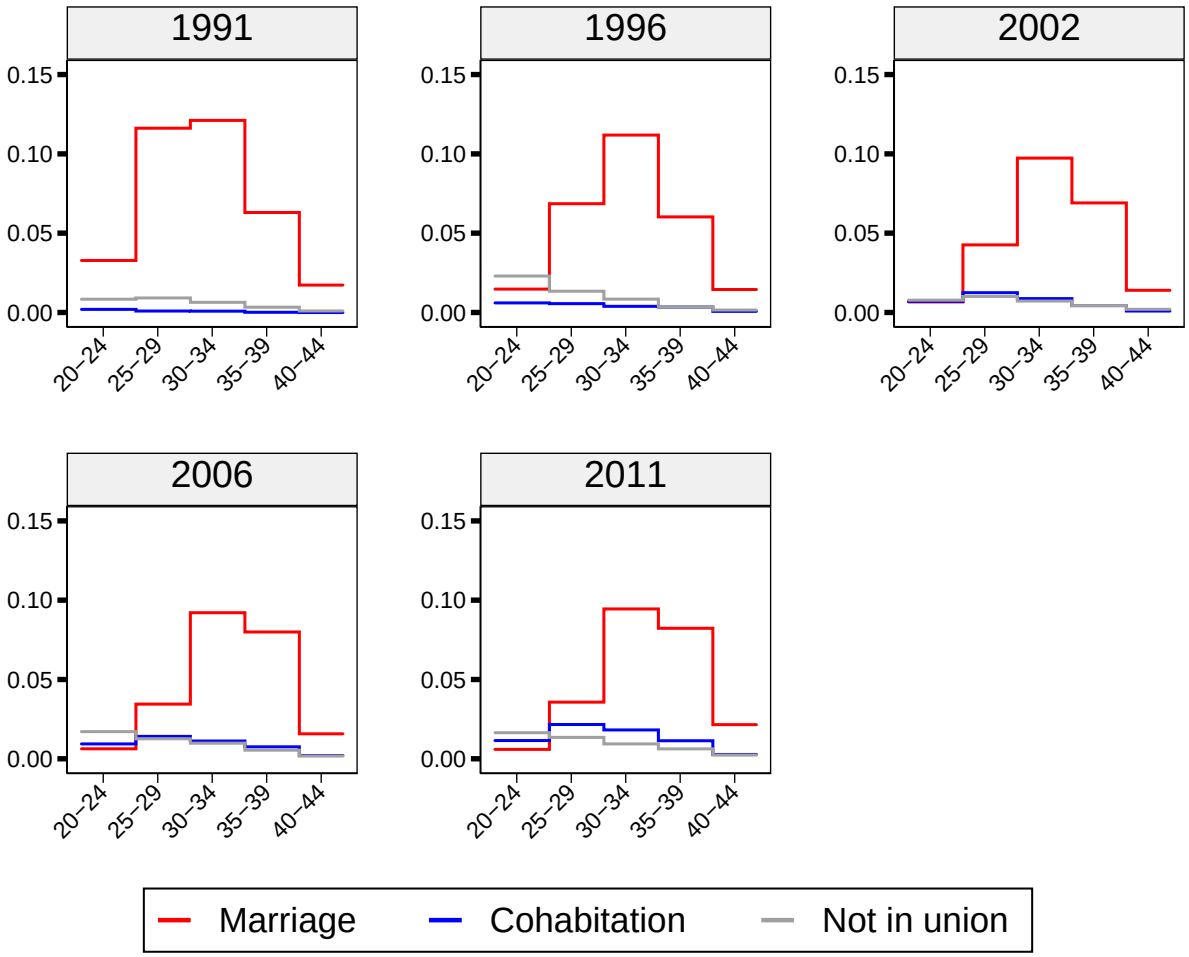
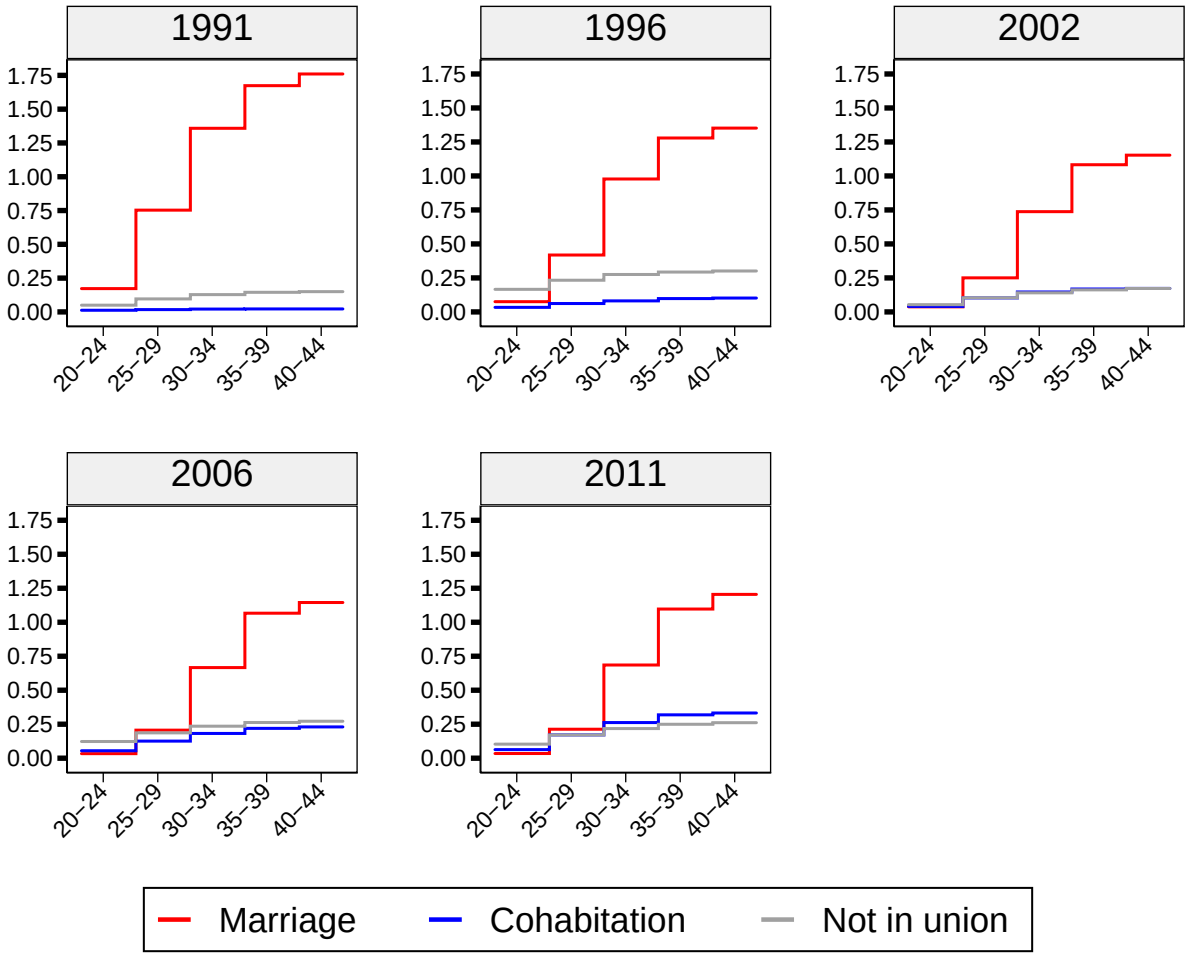

1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
6.0
5.0
4.0
3.0
2.0
1.0
0.0
M
C
P
US
U
LS
PS

Figure 7

Contributions to age-specific fertility rates by conjugal status (1) and Contributions to the total fertility rate by conjugal status (2). Ireland. Women aged 20–44. Ireland. Census data. IPUMS.


1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
0.15
0.10
0.05
0.00
20–24
25–29
30–34
35–39
40–44
Marriage
Cohabitation
Not in union


1991
1996
2002
2006
2011
1.75
1.50
1.25
1.00
0.75
0.50
0.25
0.00
20–24
25–29
30–34
35–39
40–44
Marriage
Cohabitation
Not in union