

SEE HOW THEY GROW

An analysis of the Growing Up in Ireland 9-month old
infant cohort data

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Solo and unmarried-cohabitant parenthood and crisis pregnancy in Ireland

Key Findings

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crisispregnancyprogramme





The National Federation of Services for
Unmarried Parents and their Children

Founded in 1976, Treoir is a membership organisation that promotes the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children.

Treoir

1. operates the free, confidential **National Specialist Information and Referral Service** on all aspects of unmarried parenthood for
 - unmarried expectant parents
 - unmarried parents living apart
 - unmarried parents living together
 - teen parents
 - opposite and same sex parents
 - grandparents and other relatives
 - those working with unmarried parents and their families.
2. advocates on behalf of unmarried parents and their children.
3. co-ordinates the 11 local **Teen Parent Support Programmes** at national level.

Treoir: Principles

- *Treoir recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland*
- *Treoir recognises that all families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support, protection and recognition*
- *Treoir supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*
- *Treoir believes that all children have a right to know, be loved and cared for by both parents.*

Introduction

Since its inception in 1976 Treoir campaigned for the initiation of a national longitudinal study of children in Ireland in order to ascertain the outcomes for the children of unmarried parents and finally succeeded some 30 years later, when the Growing Up in Ireland Study was initiated and funded by the Irish government.

For the first time in Ireland data was collected on a large cohort of infants (11,134), who were nine months old when the data was collected in 2008/9, and their parents. Details of the sampling procedure and design methodology of the GUI can be found in the supporting documentation to the study.

Treoir commissioned an analysis of the data relating to unmarried parents. The data was examined in relation not only to solo unmarried parents but also unmarried parents living together who are also the client group of Treoir. Outcomes for these groups were compared to those for married families who are the 'reference category' in the study. Data on crisis pregnancy was also analysed.

We are particularly grateful to the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme for funding this initial study and for agreeing to fund the follow-up, which is due to be completed at the end of 2013. Special thanks are due to Dr. Owen Corrigan, who undertook the work. He brought his considerable expertise on working with large data sets to bear on the project. Anthony McCashin, of Trinity College Dublin, provided an enormous amount of support to Treoir and to Dr. Corrigan during this project.

The full report is available on www.treoir.ie/policy.



Crisis Pregnancy

In the GUI study questions were asked about whether the pregnancy was intended, at that time or a later time, and whether women experienced any stress during the pregnancy, either directly due to the pregnancy itself or for other reasons. These questions allowed for an identification of women experiencing crisis pregnancy and for an exploration of the effects of crisis pregnancy on their and their child's outcomes.

- 16.4% of women experienced an 'unintended' pregnancy, where they had either no intention of becoming pregnant or had intended to become pregnant much later in their lives.
- Just under 16% of women experienced a 'stressful' pregnancy, where they reported feeling some or a great deal of stress during their pregnancy, where this stress was only or solely due to the pregnancy itself.
- Those women whose pregnancies were both unintended and stressful *at the same time* and where their stress was due *only* to the pregnancy itself are labeled as experiencing a 'Pregnancy Crisis'. This group comprised 3.4% of women in the sample.
- Those women whose pregnancies were both unintended and stressful at the same time, but where the stressor was any one of a number of (unspecified) factors, comprised 9.2% of women in the sample. This situation is labeled a 'Generalised Crisis'.
- Women experiencing Pregnancy Crisis are a sub-group of those experiencing Generalised Crisis.



Marital status is significantly associated with crisis pregnancy, with Unmarried-cohabitant parents 3 times more likely than Married parents to experience crisis pregnancy and Solo parents 4-5 times more likely.

As women get **older** they are generally less likely to experience crisis pregnancy.

The **number of children** in household and **poor health of the mother** are factors significantly associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing crisis pregnancy.

Crisis pregnancy is seen to be significantly and positively correlated with higher scores on the index of **depression** available in the dataset.

Crisis pregnancy is not significantly associated with the **affection** felt towards one's child, nor is it associated with the child's weight at birth.

Crisis pregnancy is seen to be a significant predictor of undesirable **health** outcomes for infants and of a reduced likelihood for parents having had their child **vaccinated**.

Crisis pregnancy is significantly associated with reduced likelihood of **contact** with the child's father after birth and reduced likelihood of receiving **financial support** from the father.

As the data was collected only from women whose pregnancy resulted in a live birth, the results are not representative of the entire population of all of those experiencing crisis pregnancy.

Descriptive statistics

Chart 1 - Education level by marital status

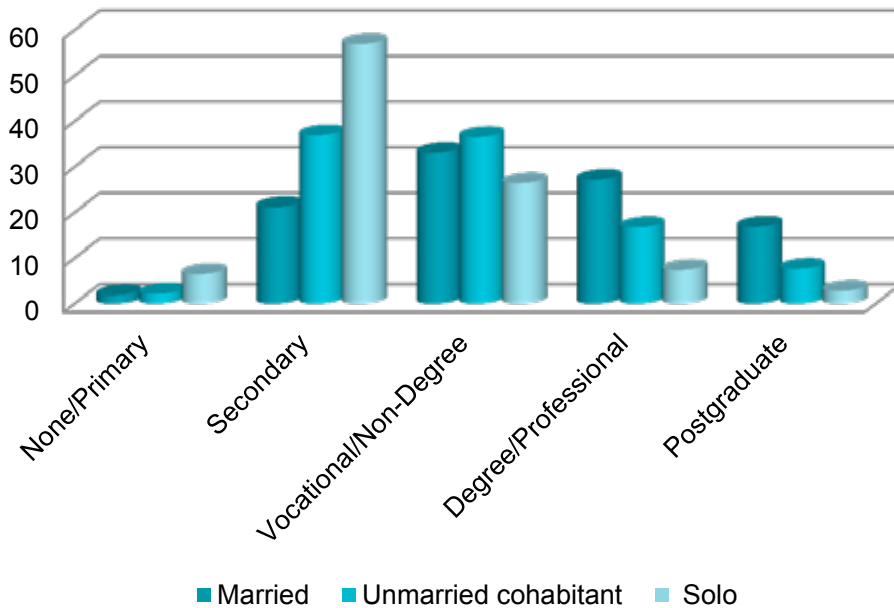
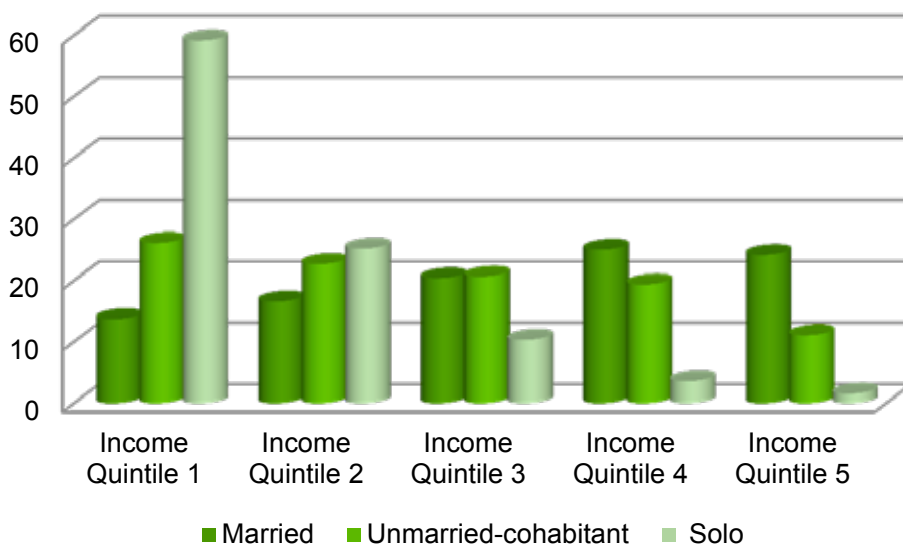


Chart 2 - Income quintile by marital status



This study confirms much of what we know about Solo parents – that they had low levels of education, were poor, were 10 times more likely than Married parents to be welfare dependent, were less likely to be working and fared worst of all on all deprivation measures as compared to other family types.

In addition, the average age for Solo parents was 10 years less than the average age for Married parents.

Chart 1 illustrates that Solo parents, and to a lesser degree Unmarried-cohabitant parents, have achieved lower levels of education as compared to Married parents.

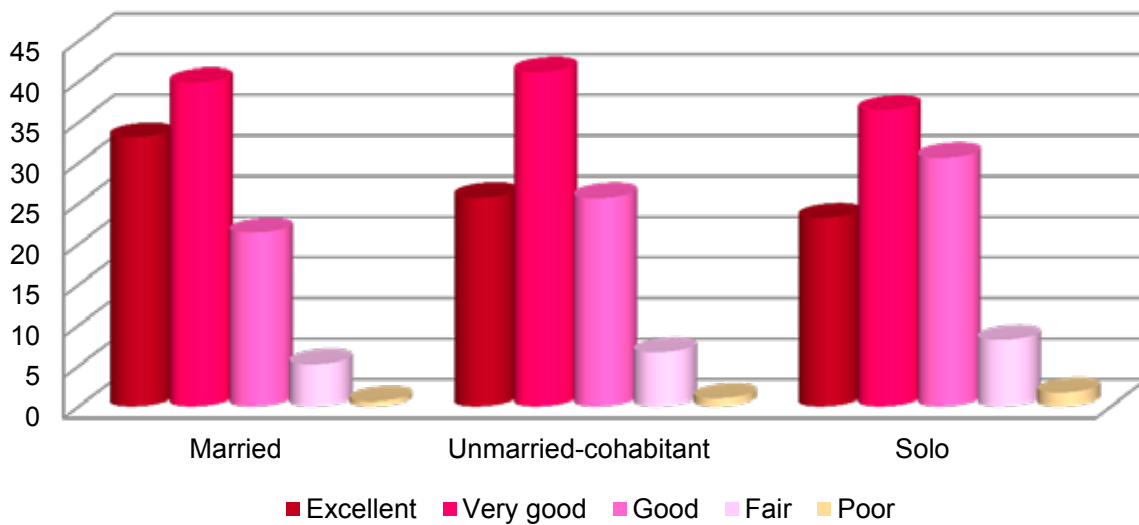
Chart 2 indicates the significant economic disadvantage of Solo parents.

For the first time in Ireland we have data on **Unmarried-cohabitant parents** - who generally fared worse than Married parents on most measures, but generally did better than Solo parents. For example, in comparison with Married parents they were less well educated, were poorer, 2.3 times more likely to have been welfare dependent and fared worse on deprivation indicators.

Health

Married **parents** were significantly more likely to report very good health outcomes, with progressively worse outcomes more likely to be reported as one moves from marriage through unmarried cohabitation to solo parenthood. The chart below shows frequencies of reported health by marital status.

Table 3 - Current health by Marital status



Solo parents were 3.3 times more likely to report **baby** as being 'almost always unwell', controlling for a likely set of determinants of baby's health, namely household income, mother's education level, whether the mother smoked or drank alcohol during pregnancy, and whether there were complications during the pregnancy.

However, this difference by marital status disappeared once the effect of crisis pregnancy was known. Those women who experienced a **Generalised Crisis** were 6.5 times more likely to report their baby as being currently 'almost always unwell'.

Those who **smoked** while pregnant were almost 3.5 times more likely to report that their baby's current health was 'almost always unwell'.

Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parents were less likely to have had their child's later stages (4 or 6 months) **vaccines** administered, but there were no differences for early vaccinations (at 2 months).

Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parents were more likely than Married parents to wait longer before their first **antenatal** appointment and were less likely to be **breastfeeding** their children at 9 months.

Crisis pregnancy was seen to be a significant predictor of undesirable health outcomes for infants and lower odds of parents having had their child vaccinated.

Welfare

Unmarried-cohabitants

- were almost twice as likely as Marrieds to live in a household where anyone was receiving any form of social welfare payment (not counting universal entitlements) controlling for education.
- were more likely to be on Jobseeker's payments and on Rent Supplement than Married parents; were more likely to be welfare dependent.
- were significantly less likely than Married parents to:
 - have friends around to their home
 - be able to keep their home adequately warm
 - possess a warm coat
 - have a roast joint or equivalent at least once a week.



Solo parents

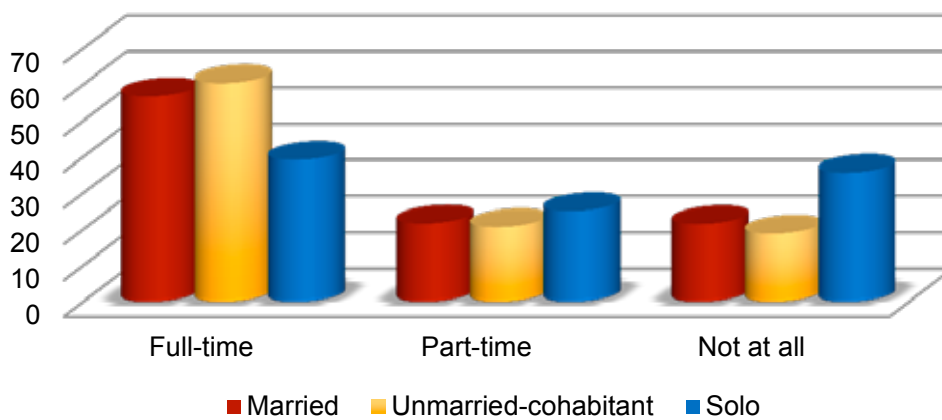
- were two and a half times more likely than Marrieds to live in a household where anyone was receiving any form of social welfare payment (not counting universal entitlements), controlling for education. Yet just under 60% of Solo parents reported that their household did not receive any social welfare payment whatsoever, with the exception of universal payments. Almost three out of every ten Solo parents (27.7%) were claiming One-parent Family Payment.
- were 10 times more likely to be welfare dependent, 9 times more likely to be on Rent Supplement and half as likely as Married parents to have been on Jobseeker's Benefit.
- fared worse on every measure of deprivation, being at least half as likely as Married parents to
 - have friends around to their home
 - keep their home adequately warm
 - possess a warm coat
 - have a roast joint or equivalent at least once a week.

Solo parents were also deprived on other indicators including eating nutritious meals at least every second day, being able to buy new as opposed to second-hand clothes, being able to replace worn-out furniture and being able to buy presents for family members at least once a year.

Work

Seventy seven per cent of all mothers were engaged in work either full-time or part-time when they became pregnant. A greater proportion of Unmarried-cohabitant parents worked full-time compared to Marrieds while only 39% of Solo parents were working full-time when they became pregnant. Nearly 36% of Solo parents were not working at all before the birth.

Chart 4 - Pre-birth working practices by Marital status



- At time of interview, when baby was 9 months old, the majority of women, 58%, had returned to work outside the home either full- or part-time; 42% had not returned to work.
- Of those not yet back at work, 71% of those responding indicated an intention to return to work either full-time or part-time.
- The main reason for women returning to work was overwhelmingly financial and this varied significantly by marital status; this was cited as the main reason for returning to work by a greater proportion of Unmarried-cohabitants than Marrieds, and for a greater proportion of Solo parents than either of the other two groups.
- Solo parents were more likely than other marital status groups to cite their inability to pay for childcare as the most important reason for not working outside the home.
- Of those who worked, Solo parents worked significantly fewer hours than Married parents, while there was no difference between Married and Unmarried-cohabitants.
- Unmarried-cohabitant parents earned less than Married parents and Solo parents earned much less.

Childcare

Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parents were more reliant on their relatives for help with childcare (Fig. 1). Controlling for no other factors, Solo parents were about half as likely as Married parents to use a **childcare centre such as a crèche**. However, when controlling for the effects of income Solo parents were actually significantly *more* likely than Marrieds to use centre-based childcare. This highlights the **importance of financial constraint for Solo parents** in making childcare arrangements.

This finding is borne out in figure 2 which shows a larger proportion of Solo parents choosing their main form of childcare on the basis that it was the only one they could afford. They also register a slightly larger proportion comparatively reporting that it was the only one available to them. Both Solo and Unmarried-cohabitant parents were significantly more likely to have their childcare arrangements determined by financial constraint than Married parents.

Fig. 1

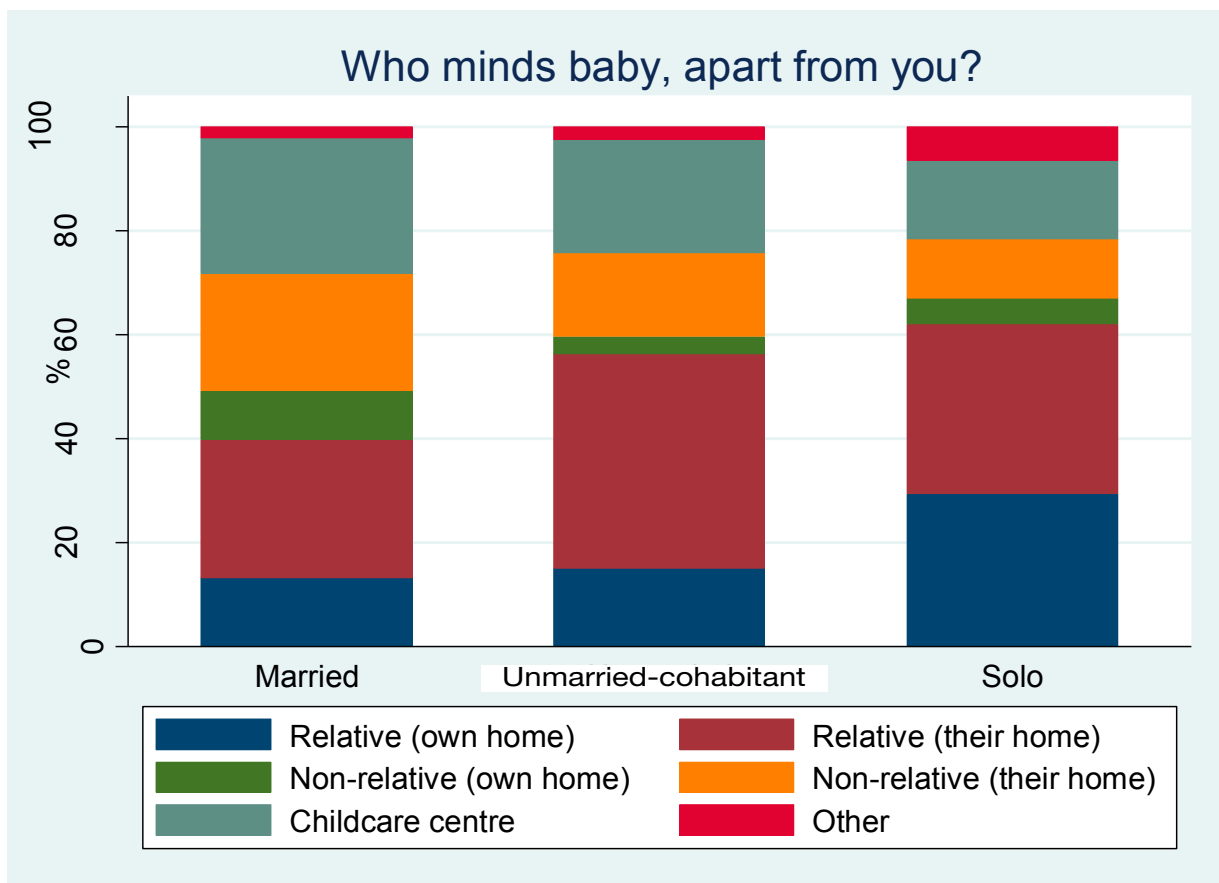
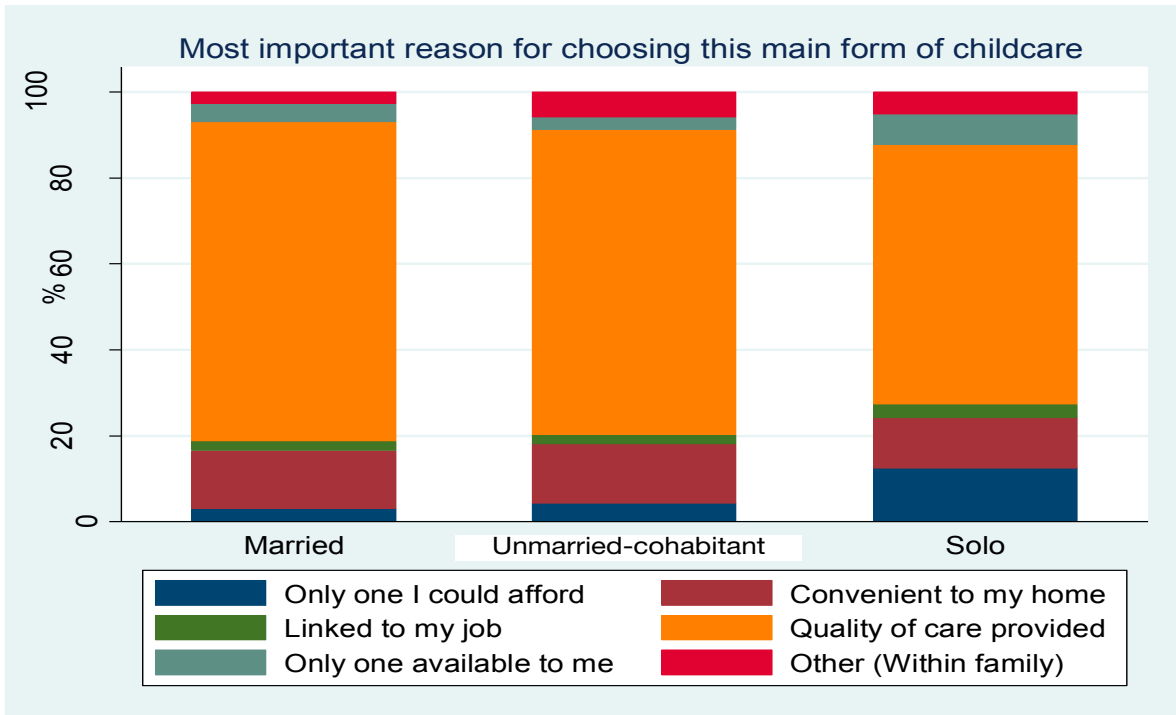
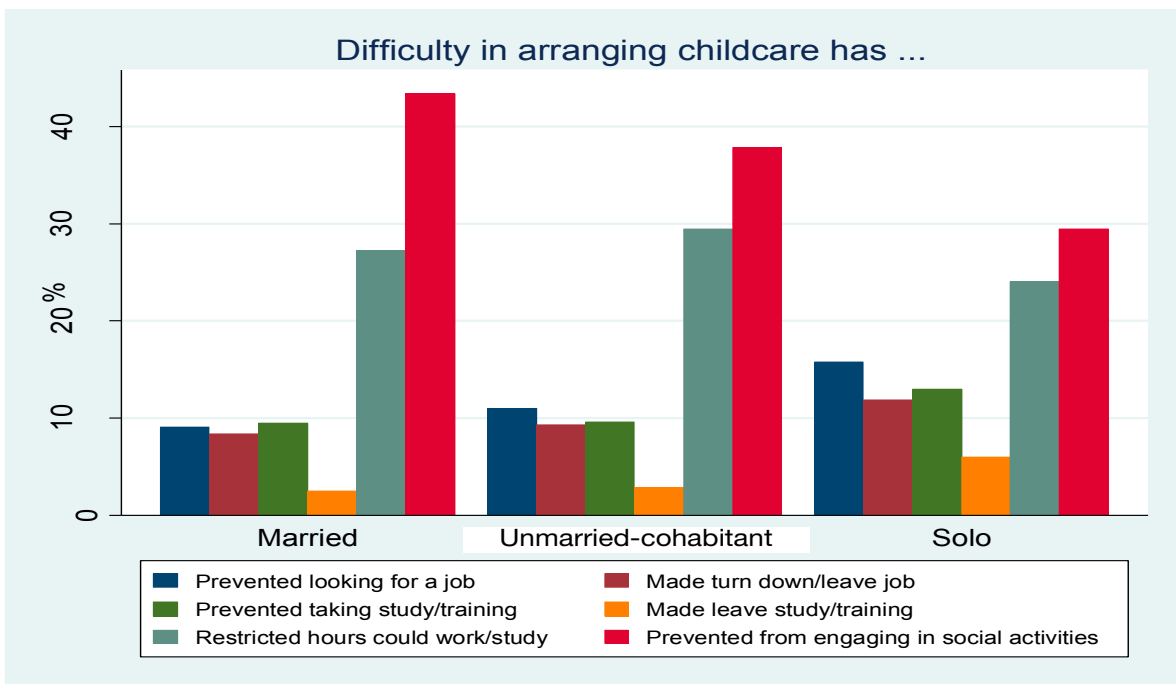


Fig. 2



Childcare difficulties made it significantly more difficult for Solo parents to look for work or engage in study in comparison to Married parents, and also made it more likely that Solo parents had to leave study/training they were already engaged in. It should be noted that no difficulties due to childcare were reported by 55% of Married parents, by 52% of Unmarried-cohabitants and by 44% of Solo parents.

Fig. 3



It is also worth noting that:

- Solo parents were more reliant on grandparents for babysitting, and helping round the house.
- Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parents were more likely to receive financial help from grandparents with higher frequency than Married parents.
- Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parents were more likely to report that they got enough external help.
- Those who experienced crisis pregnancy were less likely to report that they received enough external help and support.

Fathers' involvement

- Fathers in Unmarried-cohabiting families were significantly more likely to share parenting duties and engage with their child across a range of indicators of parental involvement than were Married fathers.
- Among Solo parents, one quarter had no contact whatsoever with the father of their child.
- Among Solo parents, 50% of fathers made no financial contribution to the maintenance of their children.
- Less than one in five Solo parents cohabited with the father of their child before birth.
- Crisis pregnancies were significantly associated with reduced likelihood of contact with the child's father after birth and reduced likelihood of receiving financial support from the father.
- Absence of parental contact or financial contribution were not associated with a range of health outcomes, though lack of financial support did predict lower birth weight.



Conclusion

This study very clearly reveals that Married parents and their children have the best outcomes on almost all indicators, followed by Unmarried-cohabitants, with Solo parents seriously disadvantaged across almost all indicators except in terms of receiving financial help from grandparents and in terms of being more likely to report that they got enough external help.

The fact that crisis pregnancy is associated with adverse outcomes for both mothers and children is a cause for concern. There is a case to be made for targeting advice and/or support services towards those women who are relatively quite young, towards women with known health problems and unmarried women. The finding that crisis pregnancy is associated with experience of depression points to the importance of ensuring that adequate post-pregnancy mental health advice and support services are in place for women who have experienced a crisis pregnancy.

Findings regarding poor **health** behaviours among Solo and Unmarried-cohabitant parents during and after pregnancy point to an important and on-going role for targeted information and awareness-raising efforts, e.g. regarding vaccination schedules and the dangers of smoking while pregnant.

Financial constraint is directly implicated in choice of **childcare** arrangements, especially for Solo parents, and this impacts directly on their ability to engage in paid employment or to improve their skill levels through education. These findings suggest that securing full or extensive labour market participation among groups such as Solo parents must require adequate provision of childcare and practical advice and support on securing this.

The findings around Solo parents' **work** habits, their usage of the welfare system and their much higher incidence of welfare dependency and material deprivation indicate that assistance with entering the labour market would indeed be highly beneficial for this group.

For the first time in Ireland national data is available on Unmarried-cohabitant parents. The research shows that they are quite disadvantaged as compared to Married parents. However, the analysis also reveals that Unmarried-cohabiting fathers are significantly more likely to share parenting duties and engage with their children.

It will be possible, following the analysis of the data collected when the children were three years old, to ascertain if the significant disadvantages associated with Solo parenting and Unmarried-cohabitant parenting continues, as well as the movement in and out of different family types. It is over time that evidence of the impact on children of growing up in different family types will become apparent.

The full report

See How They Grow

is available on

www.treoir.ie/policy