

Men in Northern Ireland: Report 5a December 2007

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The Men in Northern Ireland (MINI) series is produced by ARK, a joint project between Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. Its aim is to make material on the social and political life of Northern Ireland available to the widest audience.

www.ark.ac.uk

The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre aims to increase awareness of the issues facing local men and boys and to promote their social inclusion.

www.mensproject.org

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Men and family life

Key facts

- Most men (98.5%) live in households.
- 58.1% of men live as a couple (married, re-married or co-habiting).
- In 2006, 8,259 men got married, with an average age of 33.2 years.
- In 2006, 65 men in Northern Ireland entered into civil partnerships, of which the average age was 42.7 years.
- In 2006, 2,565 men became divorced in Northern Ireland. The average duration of these marriages was 17.7 years.
- 17% of men responding to the 2006 Life and Times Survey cared for someone inside or outside their home.

Living arrangements

Data from the 2001 Census of Population indicate that out of 821,450 males, the vast majority (98.5%) lived in households. However, 11,431 males were residents in communal establishments and a further 743 males lived in communal establishments as staff or their families.

The list of communal establishments is broad, ranging from NHS-managed residential care homes (411 men or 3.6%), privately-managed residential care homes (962 men or 8.4%), children's homes (66 boys or 0.5%), prison (573 men or 5%) to religious communities (69 men or 0.6%). Approximately one in thirty male pensioners aged 65 years or over (2,929 men) live in a communal establishment. These figures include non-staff residents only.

Census data also shows that, of the 605,288 men aged 16 years or over living in households, over one half (58.1%) lived as a couple, either married or re-married (53.6%) or cohabiting (4.5%).

Table 1: Living arrangements

Males aged 16 or over living in households							
Total number	%						
	Living as a couple		Not living as a couple				
	Married or re-married	Co-habiting	Single (never married)	Married or re-married	Separated (but still legally married)	Divorced	Widowed
605,288	53.6	4.5	33.0	0.5	2.5	2.7	3.2

Source: 2001 Census of Population

Marriage

In 2006, 8,259 men got married, the majority (45.6%) of which were in the age category of between 30 and 44 years. The majority of men getting married (84.5%) had never been married before, while 14% had been divorced and 1.5% were widowers.

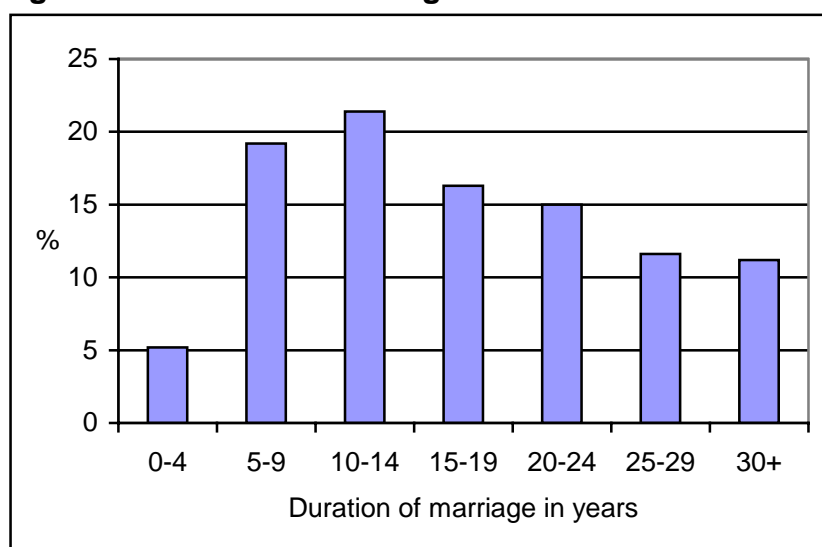
The mean age at marriage for all men in 2006 was 33.2 years. For men who had never been married before, the mean age was lower (30.7 years), while it was much higher for divorced men (45.1 years) and widowers (59.4 years). For women, the average age at marriage was lower at 30.9 years. The average age at marriage for men has increased over time – for example, in 1948 it was only 26.0 years. In 7.9% of marriages in 2006, both partners had previously been married.

There is clearly strong agreement that marriage is still an important relationship, as the 2005 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey indicates. 69% of men agreed or strongly agreed that even though it might not always work, marriage is still the best kind of relationship. 66% of women either agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. Attitudes towards marriage in relation to religion have clearly changed somewhat over the past few decades. In the 2005 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 70% of men and 75% of women surveyed stated that they would not mind if a close relative of theirs married someone of a different religion.

Divorce

In 2006, there were 2,565 divorces in Northern Ireland. Nearly three quarters of these (72.3%) were on the grounds of non-cohabitation. Of these break ups, the average duration of the marriage was 17.7 years. The figure for 2006 is the highest number of divorces in Northern Ireland ever recorded. Only 35% of these divorces were filed for by the husband. 8% of those who became divorcees in 2006 had been divorced previously. As can be seen from Figure 1, nearly one fifth of divorces (19%) occurred after 5-9 years of marriage, while 5% occurred in the first four years of marriage. 53% of divorces occurred between 10 and 25 years of marriage and 23% occurred after 25 years or more.

Figure 1: Duration of marriage before divorce



Source: Registrar General Annual Report, 2006

Civil Partnerships

In December, 2005, the Civil Partnership Act came into effect in Northern Ireland. This legislation enabled same sex couples to gain legal recognition of their relationship, provided they are over 18 years of age, or over 16 years of age with parental consent. The legislation

represents changing attitudes towards homosexual relationships, which the 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey also reflects. When asked if gay couples should have the same rights as a heterosexual married couple less than half of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Men appear less accepting of legal recognition of gay relationships with 42% of disagreement while 31% of women disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

2006 was the first full year in which the act was in place. The Northern Ireland General Register shows that, in this year, 116 civil partnerships were registered in Northern Ireland. Slightly more of these were male partnerships (56%) than female partnerships (44%). The average age of men who were registered as part of a civil partnership in 2006 was 42.7 years, slightly higher than the average age for women in the same category, which was 39.5 years. In 12% of the civil partnerships among men registered in 2006, either one or both of the partners were married previously.

Fatherhood

The results of the 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey revealed that 48% of men agree, or strongly agree that earning money should be a priority for men, rather than bringing up children. But 37% of men did either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. In line with this, the same survey shows that most respondents agree that men can care for children just as well as women can. 67% of men and 76% of women agree or strongly agree with this statement.

The results of the 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey indicate that 71% of men and 55% of women believe that family law upholds the rights of women more than men.

Paternity leave

In April 2003, the Employment (NI) Order 2002 included Paternity and Adoption Leave Regulations. New fathers are now allowed two weeks' paid paternity leave, provided they have been working for their employer for 41 weeks before the date the baby is due. This leave also applies to fathers who are adopting a child whether they are in a heterosexual or a same sex relationship. Mothers can take maternity leave of up to 52 weeks.

This legislation reflects overall attitudes to the rights of new fathers which are reflected in the 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey. It indicates that 89% of men, and 95% of women agreed that it was very important or fairly important that men be entitled to two weeks paid paternity leave.

Lone fathers

In the 2001 Census of Population, there were 58,782 lone parents aged 16-74 years with dependent children. (A dependent child is either aged 0-15 years or a young person aged 16-18 years in full time study, living as part of a family.) Of these, 4,566 (7.8%) consisted of lone father families. Nearly half (45.5%) of these fathers were working full-time and 6.9% worked part-time. One in ten (10.6%) were unemployed and over one third (37%) were economically inactive, for example, retired, full-time student, permanently sick or disabled, or looking after the home or family.

The 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey asked respondents what they believed should happen to the children when couples separate. 79% of respondents agreed that it should be assumed that both parents will share equally in the parenting unless there is a very good reason not to, but 20% of respondents felt that it should be assumed that the mother will do most of the parenting unless there is a very good reason not to.

Family roles

Figures from the 2004 Labour Force Survey indicate that the average actual weekly hours of work for men working full-time in their main job is 40.2, compared with 32.8 for women. The 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey showed strong feeling that many fathers choose to work such long hours that it damages family life as 72% of men and 73% of women agreed with this statement. But the survey also suggests that fathers who work long hours do not always do so entirely of their own choosing but also due to workplace pressure. 69% of men and 73% of women, who completed the 2004 survey, either agreed or strongly agreed that most workplaces expect so much of their employees that men can't get enough time to spend with their families.

When asked if they agreed with the statement that, when the woman has a full time job, family life suffers, respondents to the 2002 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey produced mixed results. 37% of men agreed or strongly agreed, as did 37% of women. However 44% of men and 45% of women disagreed or strongly disagreed that family life suffers when the woman works full time.

Carers

The 2006 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey contained a set of questions relating to caring and carers. The key results relating to men and caring include:

- 9% of men cared for someone within the same household and 12% of women did so.
- 17% of men cared for someone either within the same household or outside the home.
- Of the male carers surveyed, 32% care for other men and 68% take care of women.
- 20% of male carers care for their wife or partner.
- Just over one third of male carers (37%) care for a parent.
- Over one half of male carers cared for someone seven days a week.
- While 15% of male carers provided care for less than two hours per day, 16% provided care for 60 hours per day or more.

Carers' Allowance is a benefit for people aged 16 and over who spend at least 35 hours a week caring for a disabled person. In May 2006, there were 15,480 male claimants with entitlement to this benefit.

Useful sources of information

www.nisra.gov.uk The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). This website contains a range of official Northern Ireland statistics and survey information.

<http://www.groni.gov.uk/index.htm> The General Register Office of Northern Ireland. This website which contains accurate information and statistics relating to births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and divorces.

www.nisra.gov.uk/census/start.html Background information, as well as data, are available online for the 2001 Census of Population.

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt The 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey contained a range of questions on men's issues, while the 2002 survey included questions on family and gender roles. Questions on carers were asked in 2006.