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<b>Authors(s)</b>	Walsh, Brendan M.
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## TRENDS IN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN POSTWAR IRELAND

**Brendan M. Walsh**

The Economic and Social Research Institute, 4 Burlington Road, Dublin 4, Ireland

*Abstract*—Age at marriage in the Republic of Ireland has declined substantially from the very high level that prevailed in 1946. Between 1946 and 1969 the median age of grooms fell from 32 to 26 and of brides from 27 to 24. To some extent this is a reflection of the declining importance of the rural population but to a much greater extent it is due to the falling age at marriage among all sections of the population. Simultaneous with the decline in age at marriage, the frequency distributions of brides' and grooms' ages have become both more skewed and more peaked. Thus earlier marriage has also meant greater uniformity in age at marriage, but the phenomenon of first marriage at a fairly advanced age persists. There has been a marked trend towards greater equality between husbands' and wives' ages over the postwar period: the proportion of marriages in which there was less than five years' gap between the ages of the bride and groom rose from 49 percent in 1946 to 71 percent in 1969. The percentage of marriages in which the groom was ten or more years older than the bride has fallen from 22 to seven percent. The evidence suggests that the "marriage market" became less favourable to males (especially older males) over the period and that part of the narrowing in the gap in relative age of brides and grooms has been due to the greater willingness of younger males to marry. It also seems that changes in the age structure of the unmarried population has had an impact on the age distribution of grooms.

Ireland's low marriage rate and late age at marriage are widely referred to as an extreme example of the "European marriage pattern" described by Hajnal (1965). Nuptiality reached its lowest level in the early decades of the twentieth century, and by the 1940's an upward trend may be discerned. (Thus, the Commission on Emigration [1954] described in detail the situation as it was near the nadir of Irish nuptiality.) Since the second world war, an accelerating rate of change in Irish marriage patterns may be documented, a reflection of the fact that the country not only participated in the European marriage boom of the immediate postwar years but also began to

close the gap between itself and the rest of Europe. The prospect now is that Ireland will before long cease to be remarkable by European standards in regard to nuptiality. Change in the postwar period has been very rapid in regard to age at marriage and relative age of brides and grooms at marriage. This article is concerned with the description and interpretation of these aspects of recent Irish demographic history.

### THE DATA

Prior to 1957 our only source of information on age at marriage in Ireland was the special inquiry into marriages of under one year's duration included in

the 1946 Census of Population (Ireland, Central Statistics Office, 1953). The returns of this inquiry provided details of the age of brides and grooms who were enumerated together on the census forms. First marriages were not distinguished from remarriages. Tabulations were published by area of residence (using a simple rural/urban classification) and by social group of the groom (as decided by his occupation). Since 1957, due to the enlargement of the marriage certificate in that year, details of brides' and grooms' ages at first marriage (as well as at remarriage) have been published, the latest year available being 1969 (Ireland, Central Statistics Office, 1960-1971). Tables for all marriages including remarriages are published by social group of groom (but not by urban/rural residence). The occupational details collected on the marriage certificate are not extensive, and the social groupings are therefore not very reliable. The marriage data are also classified by social group of bride, as determined by her occupation (if she is in the labour force), but the concentration of young working women in clerical occupations greatly reduces the utility of these data. Much of the present study is based on the annual tables (since 1957) giving grooms' age at first marriage classified by brides' age (single years of age), and grooms' age (all marriages) classified by social group (five-year age intervals). The brief time span for which these data are available renders it impossible to present the generational indexes recently calculated for a number of European countries by Festy (1971). In all cases the analysis is restricted to those marriages in which the relevant age or occupational data were recorded: the exclusions never reach one percent of the total, except in the special case of the 1946 census returns (see note to Table 1). For calculations requiring the population by age and marital status, the relevant data from the 1946,

1961, and 1966 Census of Population were employed.

#### AGE AT MARRIAGE

Table 1 displays the median ages of brides and grooms since 1946. The fall in the median for both sexes has been considerable, exceeding that for any other country for which comparable data are available (Bogue, 1969, Table 11.1). This holds true even if allowance is made for the fact that the 1946 data include remarriages: in 1957 median age at marriage (including remarriages) was only 0.4 years higher for grooms, and 0.2 for brides, than the corresponding figures for first marriages. Two features of Table 1 are noteworthy. First, the reduction in age at marriage has been more rapid since 1957 (0.28 years per year for

TABLE 1.—Median Age of Brides and Grooms at First Marriage, Ireland, 1946, 1957-1969, by Area of Residence in 1946

Year and area of residence	Brides	Grooms
1946 <sup>a</sup>		
Urban	25.8	29.2
Rural	28.0	33.6
Total	27.0	31.8
1957	25.9	29.4
1958	25.7	29.2
1959	25.4	28.9
1960	25.3	28.6
1961	25.1	28.3
1962	24.9	27.9
1963	24.6	27.7
1964	24.5	27.4
1965	24.2	27.0
1966	24.0	26.9
1967	24.0	26.6
1968	23.9	26.3
1969	23.8	26.0

a—All marriages, including remarriages. Based on the 14,338 usable returns from the 1946 Census. The total number of marriages in the preceding twelve months was 17,859.

grooms) compared with the 1946-57 period (0.24 years per year, including the overstatement due to the switch to first marriages in 1957). This contrast between the two periods corresponds broadly to a contrast in economic growth: real income per person grew by 30 percent between 1946 and 1957, but by 46 percent between 1957 and 1968. Secondly, the gap between the median age of brides and grooms narrowed from 4.8 to 2.2 years between 1946 and 1969, due to the greater reduction in grooms' median age.

As is evident from Table 1, rural and urban marriages differed considerably in 1946 in regard to age at marriage, with rural marriages characterized both by an

older median age of brides and grooms, and by a larger gap between the median ages of brides and grooms. A more detailed examination of the data, classified by social group of groom (Table 2), reveals considerable intergroup variations in age at marriage (including remarriages), some of which parallel those found in Britain (Grebenik and Rowntree, 1964). Part of the reduction in age at marriage for the country as a whole between 1946 and 1969 is due to the changing social background of grooms over this period, since the decline in the rural population would be expected to have lowered the overall median if no intra-group change occurred. By standardizing the 1969 data on the 1946 social

TABLE 2.—Median Age at Marriage of Grooms, 1946, 1957, and 1969, and Percentage of Adult Males Unmarried, 1966, by Social Group

Social group of groom	Median age of grooms <sup>a</sup>			Single as per- cent of all males aged 14 and over	Percentage distribution of grooms	
	1946	1957	1969	1966 <sup>b</sup>	1946	1969
Farmers . . . . .	36.1	35.9	31.7	50.8	29.5	13.4
Farm labourers. . .	30.7	30.2	27.4	60.4	12.0	2.2
Higher professional	31.0	29.6	27.3	27.8 <sup>d</sup>	1.8	5.2
Lower professional.	31.7	29.0	27.0	37.0	1.8	5.5
Shopkeepers, mgrs.	32.8	31.5	27.6	16.1	10.4	3.4
Salaried employees <sup>c</sup>	29.5	29.5	27.3	25.3	12.8	3.0
Clerks, etc. . . . )		28.4	26.5	46.3	)	16.5
) 30.2					)	6.7
Other non-manual )					)	
wage earners . . . )		28.5	25.5	35.9	)	8.9
Skilled manual wkrs.	28.8	27.7	24.9	42.9	12.8	26.9
Semiskilled manual						
workers. . . . .	30.1	28.5	)	48.2	5.7	)
) 24.5					)	14.8
Unskilled manual )					)	
workers. . . . .	27.8	28.1	)	43.4	6.5	)
Total . . . . .	31.8	30.0	26.5	45.7	100.0	100.0

a—Based on data for all marriages, classified in five-year age groups.

b—Gainfully occupied males only.

c—It is apparent from the data that the distinctions between "salaried employees," "clerks, etc.," and "other non-manual" are not clear-cut and it is probably more reliable to group all these categories together.

d—Excluding religious professions (priests, brothers).

distribution of grooms it has been calculated that the overall median would have fallen from 31.8 to 27.9 in the absence of any change in the social background of grooms; the remainder of the observed reduction (from 27.9 to 26.5) was therefore due to the changed social grouping of grooms in 1969. Thus, the fall in age at marriage has been mainly due to declining age at marriage in the individual social groups.

While it is clear that the farmer and professional and managerial groups have a very much older median age at marriage than (urban) manual workers, it is important to stress that those groups where late marriage is the norm are not necessarily the same as those with the highest proportions remaining in life-long celibacy. Despite their early age at

marriage the urban manual working groups have much lower proportions married than the professional and managerial classes, for example. The farmers, on the other hand, are remarkable both for a late median age at marriage and for a high proportion remaining unmarried (Table 2, column 4).

The median age at marriage is probably the most useful summary statistic for the frequency distribution of age at marriage, but for a complete picture of the distribution measures of skewness and peakedness must be considered. In Table 3 the values of  $\beta_1$  (a measure of skewness based on the third moment about the mean) and  $\beta_2$  (a measure of peakedness or kurtosis based on the fourth moment) are presented. The values of  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  in a normal distribution

TABLE 3.—Age Distribution of Brides and Grooms, 1946, 1957-1969, First Marriages: Mean and Measures of Skewness and Peakedness

Area of residence and year of marriage	Brides			Grooms		
	Mean	Skewness ( $\beta_1$ ) <sup>a</sup>	Peakedness ( $\beta_2$ ) <sup>b</sup>	Mean	Skewness ( $\beta_1$ )	Peakedness ( $\beta_2$ )
1946 Urban	27.15	2.22	7.05	30.91	2.34	6.65
1946 Rural	28.70	0.95	5.14	34.73	0.83	4.37
1946 Total	28.05	1.36	5.72	33.14	1.19	4.83
1957	27.11	1.45	5.28	31.09	1.14	4.33
1958	26.96	1.42	5.13	30.96	1.16	4.23
1959	26.70	1.71	5.66	30.64	1.37	4.59
1960	26.60	1.73	5.71	30.33	1.53	4.92
1961	26.35	1.86	5.84	30.08	1.59	5.02
1962	26.23	2.13	6.31	29.84	1.81	5.27
1963	26.00	2.24	6.46	29.60	1.73	5.11
1964	25.83	2.60	7.34	29.27	2.02	5.66
1965	25.55	2.72	7.43	28.86	1.95	5.36
1966	25.44	2.94	7.59	28.66	2.33	6.08
1967	25.47	3.37	8.11	28.50	2.64	6.52
1968	25.15	3.22	8.05	28.01	2.75	6.71
1969	25.03	3.61	8.63	27.78	3.34	7.81

a- $\beta_1$  is the third moment squared divided by the second moment cubed (value in a normal distribution = 0.0).

b- $\beta_2$  is the fourth moment divided by the second moment squared (value in a normal distribution = 3.0).

are 0.0 and 3.0 respectively. All the values recorded in Table 3 indicate highly significant departures from normality due to (positive) skewness and peakedness (leptokurtosis). (For significance tests, see Pearson, 1931.) Brides' age tends to be both more skewed and more peaked than is the case for grooms. For brides and grooms the urban distribution in 1946 was far more skewed and peaked than the rural, and the trend since 1946 has been towards higher values of  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  in the total distributions. It is not unexpected that the falling mean age at marriage would be accompanied by increasing skewness since the minimum legal age is now only 11 years below the mean for brides. The increased peakedness is an indication that as the typical age at marriage has fallen the concentration of marriages around this age has risen. Thus although there has been a persistence of a relatively minor number of first marriages at an advanced age (which is increasingly distant from the typical age), the trend towards earlier

marriage has been accompanied by a growing conformity in age at marriage. Whereas in 1946, 20.5 percent of all brides were within one year of the modal age (25 years), in 1969, 33.7 percent of brides were within one year of the mode, which had fallen to 22 years.

From a statistical viewpoint it is interesting to ask whether the age at marriage variable is log normally distributed. To test this the values of  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  have been calculated for the distribution of log age at marriage. In all cases the resulting statistics were considerably closer to their values in a normal distribution than was the case with the distribution of the original variables. However, all the statistics for the log distribution also departed significantly, and in the same direction as the original statistics, from normality.

The impact of changes in the social groupings of grooms on the skewness and peakedness of the distribution may be judged from Table 4, where a farm/non-farm dichotomy is used. Although the

TABLE 4.—Age Distribution of Grooms by Social Groups, 1946, 1957–1969<sup>a</sup>

Year of marriage	Social group					
	Farmers and farmers' relatives			All others		
	Mean	Skewness	Peakedness	Mean	Skewness	Peakedness
1946	36.95	0.58	3.97	31.56	1.49	5.26
1957	36.68	0.53	3.86	30.39	2.10	5.97
1958	36.59	0.55	3.84	30.11	2.52	6.49
1959	36.30	0.43	3.53	29.81	2.65	6.68
1960	35.98	0.60	3.99	29.68	2.95	6.98
1961	35.70	0.63	3.94	29.54	2.88	6.96
1962	35.70	0.55	3.73	29.15	3.22	7.37
1963	35.43	0.58	3.74	29.03	3.27	7.48
1964	35.13	0.60	3.94	28.67	3.74	8.20
1965	34.91	0.78	3.99	28.28	3.72	8.46
1966	34.47	0.68	3.92	27.98	4.12	9.00
1967	34.24	0.66	3.73	27.92	4.41	9.18
1968	33.96	0.84	3.91	27.56	5.07	10.34
1969	33.16	1.18	4.53	27.33	4.96	10.27

a—Based on data for marriages (including remarriages), classified into five-year age groups.

values of  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  for farmers are all highly significant statistically as evidence of non-normality, they are very much closer to the normal values than is the case for the non-farm grooms. (In all but two years the value of  $\beta_2$  for the log distribution of farmers was significantly below 3.0, indicating flatness or platykurtosis.) On the other hand, the frequency distributions of non-farmers' age at marriage are extremely skewed and peaked, and both these features have become more pronounced with the passage of time. The declining importance of farmers in the total of marriage has, of course, contributed to the changes that have occurred in the combined distribution shown in Table 3, but undoubtedly the major influence at work has been the change that has taken place within each group in regard to the distribution of age at marriage.

#### BRIDES' AND GROOMS' RELATIVE AGES

We have seen that the median age of grooms fell by more than that of brides in the postwar period. A simple comparison of brides' and grooms' median ages

does not, however, reveal very much about the relative ages of individual marriage partners. The data summarised in Table 5 are more helpful in this context. Over the years since 1946 there has been a strong tendency for women to marry men closer to themselves in age: in 1946 only 49 percent of all brides and grooms were less than five years apart in age, compared with 71 percent in 1969. The sharp fall in the proportion of marriages in which the bride is 10 or more years younger than the groom is especially noticeable. Since inequality in relative age was greater in rural than in urban marriages in 1946, it is likely that some of the overall reduction in inequality since then may be attributed to the declining proportion of rural marriages; but the national picture in 1957 was close to the urban picture in 1946, hence there must also have been substantial reductions in inequality in each part of the country since 1946. (The data on relative age at marriage are not tabulated by social class [but see Hutchinson, 1971, Table 13].)

An indirect check on the influence of

TABLE 5.—Percentage Distribution of Age Difference between Brides and Grooms, Ireland, 1946, 1957, and 1969, First Marriages by Area of Residence in 1946

Age difference between brides and grooms	Urban	1946 Rural	Total	1957	1969
Number of years husband is younger than wife:					
10 years or more	0.6	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.4
5 to 9 years	2.9	3.4	3.2	3.4	2.4
1 to 4 years	14.8	10.8	12.5	13.6	15.7
Same age as wife	8.6	5.6	6.9	8.2	11.2
Number of years husband is older than wife:					
1 to 4 years	36.4	24.8	29.6	34.0	44.4
5 to 9 years	23.3	26.9	25.4	24.0	18.7
10 to 14 years	9.0	16.4	13.3	10.4	5.3
15 to 19 years	2.8	6.7	5.1	3.7	1.4
20 years or more	1.6	4.4	3.2	1.9	0.6
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

social group on relative age at marriage at a later date than 1946 may be made by comparing the median ages at marriage of brides and grooms by county of residence before marriage: the gap between these medians is a rough indication of the inequality in relative age at marriage in that county. In 1968 this gap varied from 1.61 years in Dublin (an almost entirely urban county) to 4.64 in Longford (a predominantly rural area). The coefficient of linear correlation between the gap in median ages and the percentage of the male labour force in agricultural occupations (1966) was +0.88, significant at the  $P < 0.01$  level. Thus it seems that the pattern of greater inequality between brides and grooms in rural or agricultural areas that prevailed in 1946 persists today.

It is important to stress that in Ireland the gap in age at marriage has, on average, narrowed over a period in which the median age of brides and grooms was falling. Bogue points out that, on an international basis, "the older the median age of bride at marriage, the smaller the discrepancy [between bride's and groom's age] tends to be" (Bogue, 1969, p. 329). If we consider the relative ages of brides and grooms classified by age of bride (Table 6 and Figure 1) it is clear that in Ireland, as well as internationally, inequality in age at marriage is least when the bride is in her mid-twenties. Teenage brides tend to marry men considerably older than themselves, and brides aged 30 or over show a preference for grooms that are younger or older (but especially older) than themselves. These patterns are consistently present in all three years for which the calculations have been performed. As median bridal age has fallen, inequality at each age has also diminished, especially among brides aged under 30. For brides aged 21 to 25 years the reduction in inequality manifests itself primarily as a strong growth in the proportion of marriages with partners of equal age, whereas for other

bridal ages the most striking change has been the fall in the proportion of marriages in which the bride was five or more years younger than the groom and the corresponding rise in the proportion in which the bride was one to five years younger. A minor but fascinating aspect of the data is the rise in the proportion of brides aged 25 and over who marry grooms younger than themselves. (This trend is not evident from the aggregate data due to the falling proportion of all marriages with brides in this age group.)

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS

The changes outlined in the preceding sections of this study may have a major impact on the quality of Irish married life. Their implications for variables such as age at maternity and duration of widowhood are obvious. If marriage fertility remained constant, the falling age of brides would also imply an increase in average family size. However, the trend towards earlier marriage is part of a wider movement towards higher nuptiality combined with lower fertility that has become very noticeable with the growth in the use of the pill in Ireland since 1960. (Recent developments in Irish fertility, as well as some broader socioeconomic aspects of the situation, are discussed in Walsh, 1972.) The historic role of postponed marriage in curbing the Irish birth rate finds an interesting parallel in current Chinese experience (Tien, 1970). The following brief commentary on the findings of the present paper is restricted to the immediate demographic background of the subject.

The postwar period in Ireland was one of rapidly rising marriage rates as well as falling age at marriage, as is evident from Table 7 and Figure 2 (a and b). The rate of change in marriage rates was more rapid after 1961 than in the period 1946-61. This parallels the timing of the fall in age at marriage. A striking feature of Table 7 and Figure 2 is that while the marriage rate rose substan-



TABLE 6.—Age Difference between Irish Brides and Grooms, 1946, 1957, and 1969, First Marriages, by Age of Bride and by Area of Residence in 1946

Age of husband & age difference bet. brides and grooms	1946 <sup>a</sup>			1957	1969	1946			1957	1969
	Urban	Rural	Total			Urban	Rural	Total		
	17 years and under <sup>b</sup>					18 years				
Median age of husband	22.9	26.4	24.6	22.7	21.1	22.8	26.4	24.0	23.9	21.6
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-4 years	2.0	1.7	1.8	0	0.7	0	0	0	1.8	3.3
Same age	0	1.7	0.9	2.0	4.8	2.1	1.6	1.9	1.8	6.8
Older by										
1-4 years	27.3	15.8	21.0	33.0	54.5	51.8	23.3	38.1	36.3	57.2
5 years +	70.7	80.8	76.3	65.0	40.0	46.1	75.2	60.0	60.1	32.7
	19 years					20 years				
Median age of husband	23.6	27.7	25.5	24.1	22.4	24.5	27.9	26.0	24.6	23.2
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-4 years	2.7	1.3	2.0	1.0	4.2	4.2	2.9	3.5	3.7	5.3
Same age	4.6	1.3	2.8	6.9	8.3	9.3	4.4	6.7	7.3	9.2
Older by										
1-4 years	47.9	21.4	34.1	41.5	59.5	41.2	23.5	31.9	44.4	58.8
5 years +	44.7	76.1	61.1	50.6	28.1	45.3	69.2	57.8	44.7	26.8
	21 years					22 years				
Median age of husband	24.8	28.9	26.3	25.1	23.9	25.9	29.6	27.3	26.0	23.7
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.5	0	0.2	0	0.1
1-4 years	7.9	3.8	5.8	5.3	7.2	10.2	5.8	8.0	8.3	10.0
Same age	8.4	4.3	6.3	6.9	12.5	8.1	3.5	5.7	8.5	12.6
Older by										
1-4 years	47.8	24.5	36.1	46.1	54.3	44.3	25.2	34.7	41.5	52.0
5 years +	35.9	67.4	51.7	41.7	25.9	37.0	65.5	51.4	41.6	24.4

TABLE 6.—Age Difference between Irish Brides and Grooms, 1946, 1957, and 1969, First Marriages, by Age of Bride and by Area of Residence in 1946 (Continued)

Age of husband & age difference bet. brides and grooms	1946			1957	1969	1946			1957	1969
	Urban	Rural	Total			Urban	Rural	Total		
	<u>23 years</u>					<u>24 years</u>				
Median age of husband	26.7	29.7	28.1	26.5	25.5	27.3	30.7	28.7	27.7	26.1
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4
1-4 years	10.1	5.6	7.8	12.5	14.3	16.0	9.8	13.0	11.7	19.3
Same age	8.6	6.2	7.4	8.1	15.0	9.6	4.0	6.9	10.3	14.1
Older by										
1-4 years	41.8	25.4	33.4	42.6	47.7	38.9	23.6	31.6	38.4	43.9
5 years +	39.2	62.6	51.1	36.5	22.9	34.8	62.2	48.0	39.2	22.4
	<u>25 years</u>					<u>26 years</u>				
Median age of husband	28.0	31.3	29.4	28.2	26.9	28.8	32.5	30.5	29.0	27.9
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	1.6	1.8	1.7	0.7	0.8	1.4	3.0	2.2	1.3	2.0
1-4 years	15.8	9.2	12.4	14.6	23.3	19.8	8.0	13.6	18.3	26.1
Same age	11.6	6.5	8.9	10.0	13.5	12.0	5.9	8.8	12.1	11.9
Older by										
1-4 years	36.7	26.4	31.3	38.4	39.1	33.3	24.3	28.6	32.3	37.0
5 years +	34.3	56.1	45.7	36.3	23.2	33.6	58.9	46.8	36.1	22.9
	<u>27 years</u>					<u>28 years</u>				
Median age of husband	30.2	32.7	31.6	29.7	28.7	30.9	33.2	32.2	31.2	29.7
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	2.3	2.2	2.2	3.9	4.3	1.8	2.7	2.4	4.1	7.8
1-4 years	18.8	11.0	14.1	19.5	28.1	19.0	10.2	13.5	18.6	27.2
Same age	9.3	7.0	7.9	12.0	10.3	8.5	6.7	7.3	8.6	7.8
Older by										
1-4 years	34.5	25.6	29.0	31.0	33.3	36.6	29.2	31.9	30.6	30.7
5 years +	35.1	54.2	46.8	33.6	24.0	34.2	51.2	44.9	38.2	26.6

TABLE 6.—Age Difference between Irish Brides and Grooms, 1946, 1957, and 1969, First Marriages, by Age of Bride and by Area of Residence in 1946 (Continued)

Age of husband & age difference bet. brides and grooms	1946			1957	1969	1946			1957	1969
	Urban	Rural	Total			Urban	Rural	Total		
	<u>29 years</u>					<u>30 years</u>				
Median age of husband	31.7	34.5	33.4	32.2	30.7	32.4	34.7	33.8	33.1	31.8
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	3.9	3.4	3.5	4.8	7.5	6.8	3.6	4.7	6.1	10.7
1-4 years	19.1	13.2	15.4	22.1	24.9	21.8	13.1	16.0	23.4	27.3
Same age	11.0	6.3	8.0	6.1	11.4	7.3	6.9	7.0	6.5	7.3
Older by										
1-4 years	35.0	23.6	27.8	28.7	26.8	35.0	28.5	30.7	24.3	25.0
5 years +	31.1	53.4	45.3	38.2	29.3	29.1	48.0	41.7	39.7	29.8
	<u>31 years</u>					<u>32 years</u>				
Median age of husband	33.1	35.2	34.5	33.5	32.6	34.3	36.3	35.2	35.1	34.2
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	9.4	5.2	6.7	8.5	13.2	9.9	5.7	7.1	11.3	9.3
1-4 years	20.1	13.4	15.6	21.7	24.3	23.3	18.8	20.3	18.6	27.2
Same age	8.9	7.3	7.8	8.5	7.9	9.9	6.6	7.6	5.5	6.1
Older by										
1-4 years	27.3	30.2	29.6	27.2	26.0	28.5	21.7	23.9	27.9	26.8
5 years +	34.4	43.5	40.3	34.1	28.6	28.5	47.3	41.1	34.7	30.4
	<u>33 years</u>					<u>34 years</u>				
Median age of husband	35.6	36.6	36.2	36.7	35.4	36.7	37.9	37.5	36.7	34.9
Percent of husbands:										
Younger by										
5 years +	9.8	7.4	8.2	11.4	10.4	18.5	7.6	10.4	10.6	19.5
1-4 years	18.0	15.7	16.5	16.2	22.8	15.7	17.1	16.7	17.9	23.1
Same age	9.8	7.7	8.4	5.4	9.7	7.4	6.0	6.4	7.3	8.7
Older by										
1-4 years	33.3	28.0	29.8	27.0	25.5	24.1	24.4	24.3	26.9	19.0
5 years +	29.0	41.2	37.1	40.0	31.7	34.3	44.9	42.2	37.2	29.7

TABLE 6.—Age Difference between Irish Brides and Grooms, 1946, 1957, and 1969, First Marriages, by Age of Bride and by Area of Residence in 1946 (Continued)

Age of husband & age difference bet. brides and grooms	1946 <sup>a</sup>			1957	1969	1946			1957	1969	
	Urban	Rural	Total			Urban	Rural	Total			
							35 years and over <sup>b</sup>				All ages
Median age of husband	42.2	42.2	42.1	41.3	41.7	29.2	33.6	31.8	29.4	26.0	
Percent of husbands:											
Younger by											
5 years +	11.4	14.5	13.5	14.4	16.5	3.5	4.4	4.0	4.1	2.8	
1-4 years	20.9	17.4	18.6	18.8	21.0	14.8	10.8	12.5	13.6	15.7	
Same age	7.7	5.8	6.5	7.8	6.6	8.6	5.6	6.9	8.2	11.2	
Older by											
1-4 years	23.8	22.0	22.5	27.1	26.7	36.4	24.8	29.6	34.0	44.4	
5 years +	36.1	40.2	39.0	32.0	29.3	36.7	54.4	47.0	40.0	25.9	

a-Includes remarriages.

b-Age of bride.

tially for all ages up to 34 years, it fell (very markedly in the case of males) at most ages 35 years and over. To some extent, then, the rise in marriage rates in the younger age groups reflected the fall in age at marriage rather than an increase in the proportion that would eventually marry: men and women who in earlier times would have waited until they had reached or passed 30 now tend to decide on marriage in their mid-twenties. The fact that the fall in marriage rates in the older age groups has been far more pronounced among unmarried males than unmarried females suggests that the older bachelors' marriage prospects deteriorated over the period because women were able to find younger grooms with greater ease than had traditionally been the case. This in turn was a reflection of the increasing willingness of younger males to enter the married state.

A similar interpretation may be placed

on the data on remarriages available since 1957 (Table 8). Remarriages have declined in proportion to all marriages since 1957, and this contraction has been due primarily to the fall in the number of marriages between spinsters and widowers (by 50 percent over the eleven-year period). On the assumption that a spinster prefers marriage to a bachelor to marriage to a widower, other things equal, this trend could be taken as further evidence of the greater readiness of bachelors to marry in 1969 than in 1957. Both this interpretation and that of the preceding paragraph emphasize the willingness of the male to marry as the effective constraint on the number of marriages that occur.

Relative age at marriage has been studied with the help of a theoretical model of nuptiality by Henry in France and on an international basis by Cox (Henry, 1969; Cox, 1970). Underlying both these studies is the notion that the

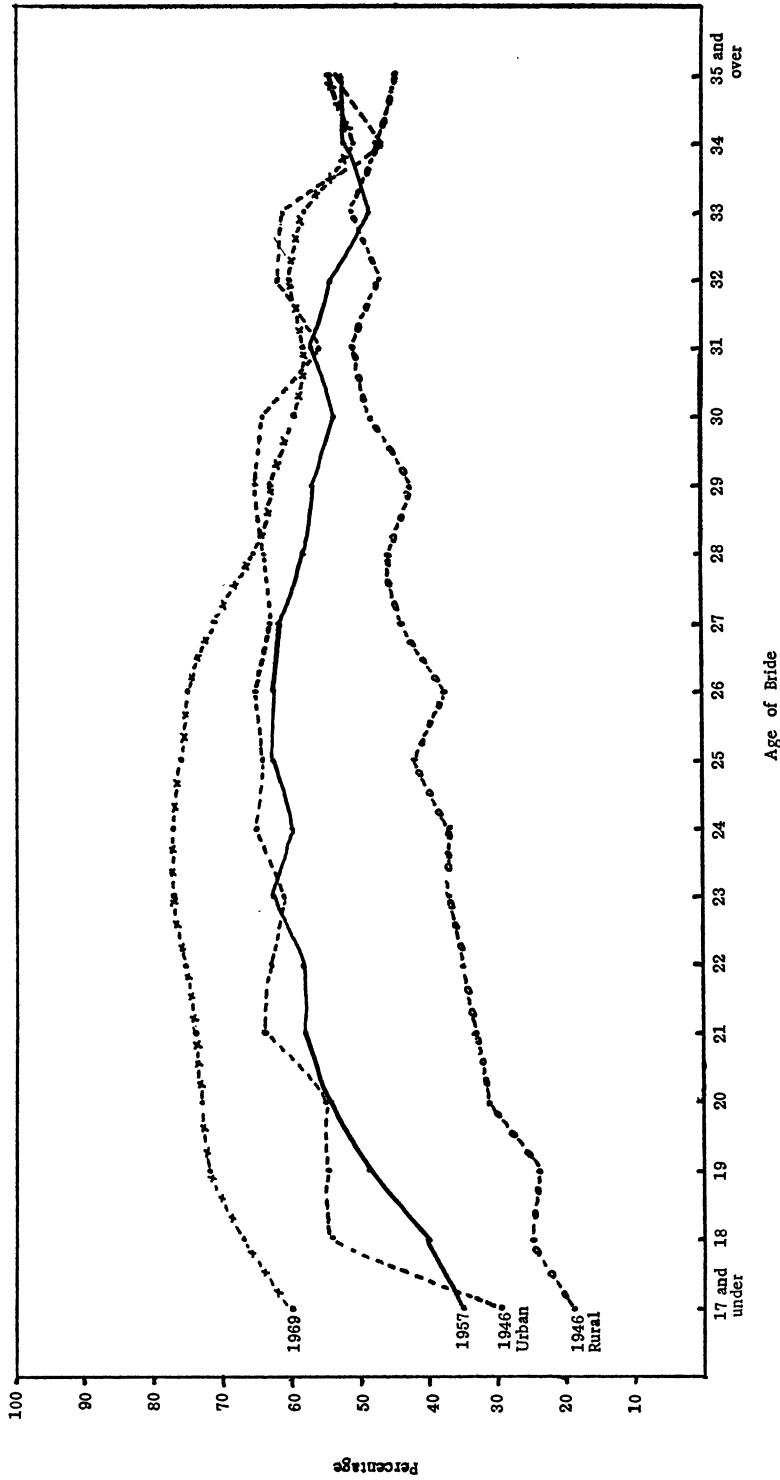


Figure 1.—Percentage of Irish Marriages with Less than Five Years Age Difference between Bride and Groom, Classified by Age of Bride, 1946, 1957, and 1969

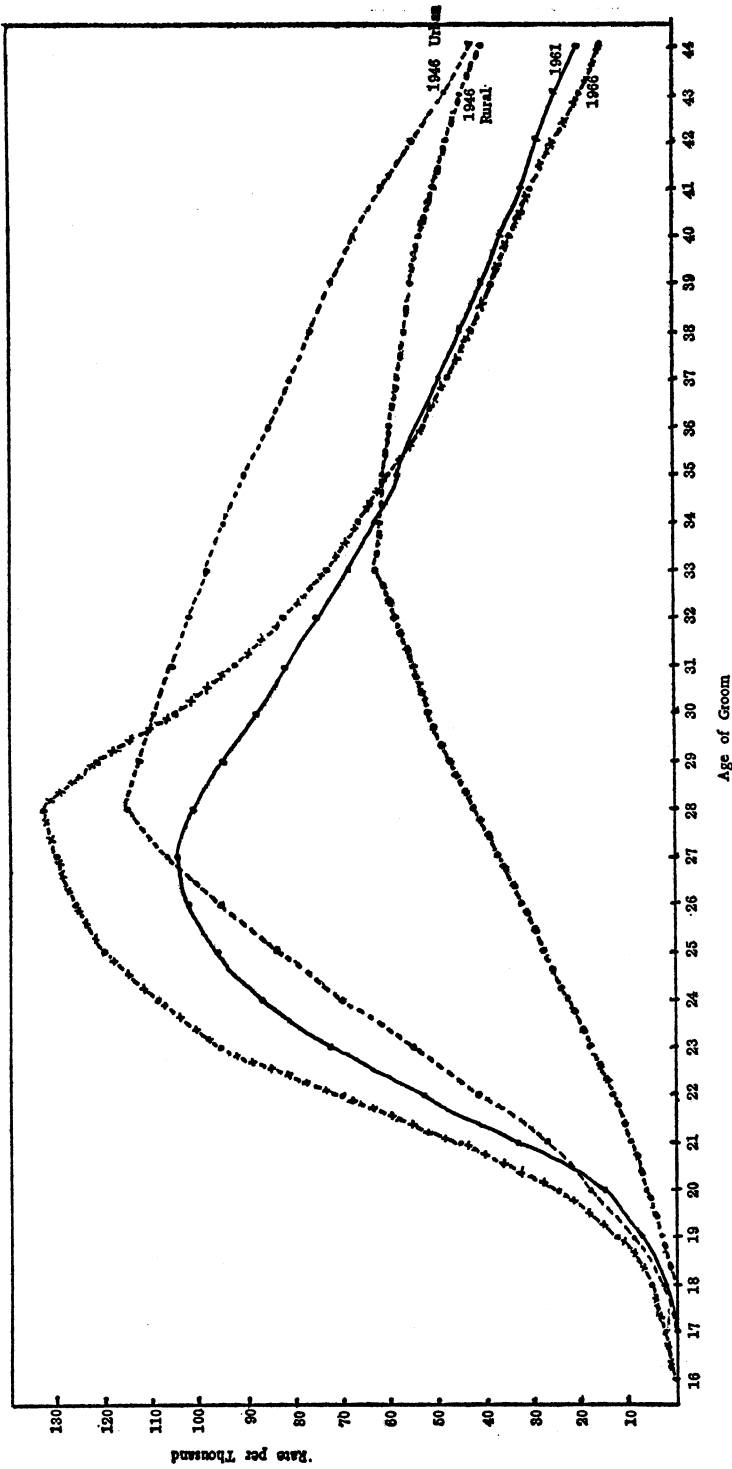


FIGURE 2a.—First Marriage Rate per Thousand Single Males, by Age of Groom, 1946, 1961, and 1966, Ireland

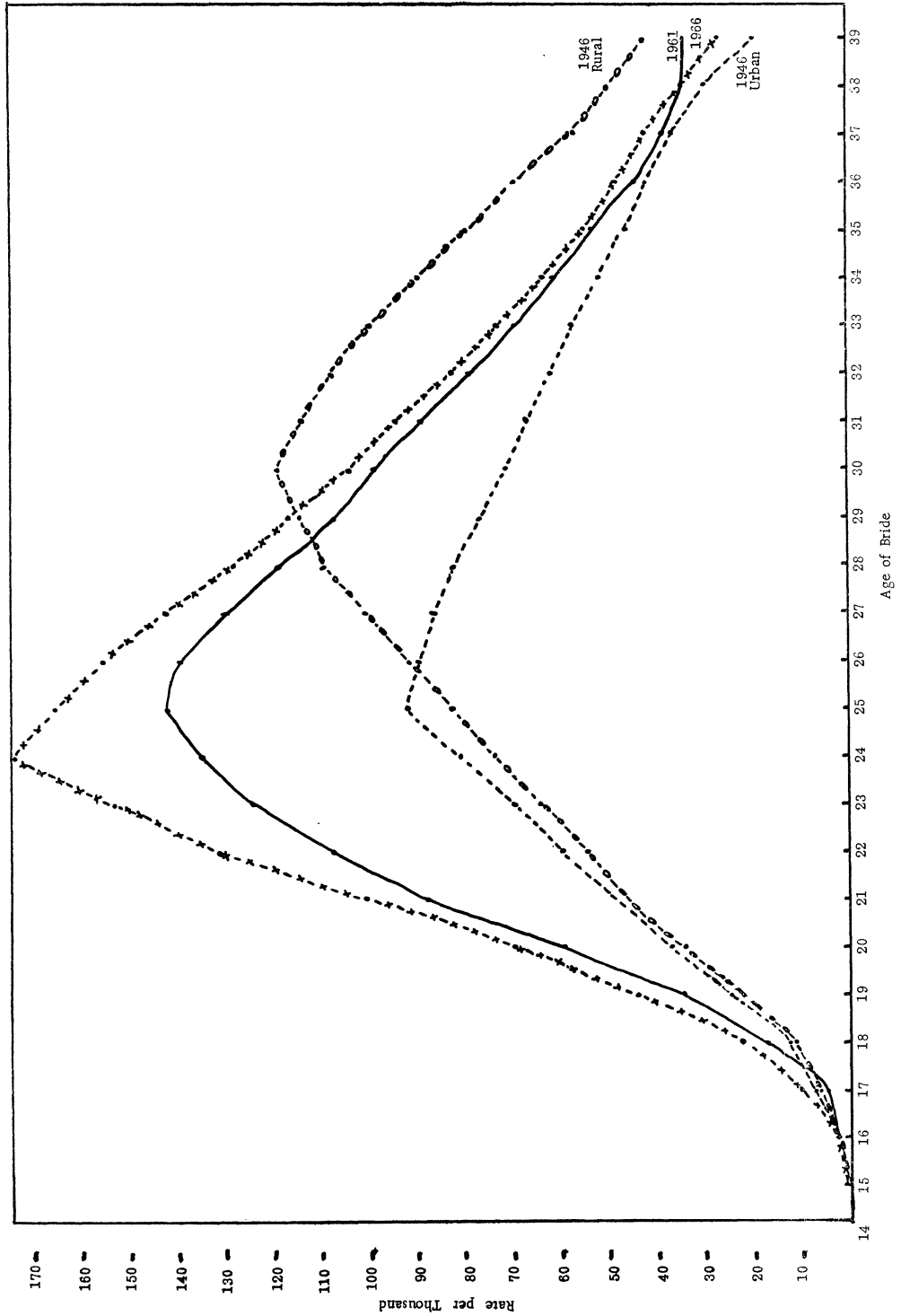


FIGURE 2b.—First Marriage Rate per Thousand Single Women, by Age of Bride, 1946, 1961, and 1966, Ireland

TABLE 7.—Marriage Rate per 1,000 Unmarried Population, Ireland, 1946, 1961, and 1966, by Sex

Age	Males			Females		
	1946 <sup>a</sup>	1961	1966	1946 <sup>a</sup>	1961	1966
15 - 19	1.4	2.2	3.5	9.7	10.4	14.2
20 - 24	22.8	49.1	63.7	56.5	100.7	116.8
25 - 29	55.4	100.6	123.6	92.4	130.0	145.1
30 - 34	67.9	76.0	87.4	88.1	81.9	86.4
35 - 39	64.2	51.1	48.2	45.4	41.8	41.2
40 - 44	47.6	29.7	27.1	19.3	16.6	19.8
45 - 49	28.1	18.4	13.6	5.9	8.0	6.1
15 - 49	34.3	39.6	44.0	43.6	50.4	55.9
15 and over	26.2	30.1	33.4	29.5	30.6	33.8

a—The number of marriages recorded in the Census has been multiplied by 1.246 in each age group to correct for the fact that the census returns refer only to 14,338 out of the 17,859 marriages that occurred in the year preceding the census. This total includes remarriages.

age structure of the unmarried population has an important influence on the age distribution of the grooms married by brides of various ages. Similarly, a study of Irish county marriage rates has shown that the sex ratio of the unmarried population in certain age groups exercises a major influence on the county's marriage rate (Walsh, 1970). It is therefore natural to inquire whether the changes that have occurred in the relative ages of Irish brides and grooms can be related to the changing age structure of the unmarried Irish population. Table 9 presents data relevant to this topic. It is clear that over the 1946-66 period the relative abundance of single males aged 20-24 rose substantially, and the relative abundance of those aged 30-34 fell. These changes in the "supply" of single males by age group correspond to some extent with the changes that have occurred in the proportions of brides marrying men in these ages. In particular, the rising relative abundance of unmarried males aged 20-24 coincides with a rising proportion of brides of all ages marrying grooms in this age group. Similarly the fall in the proportion of unmarried males aged 30-34 may have

occasioned the reduction in the proportion of brides at all ages under 30 marrying grooms in this age group. However, the changes that occurred in the proportion of grooms aged 25-29 to all grooms do not seem to have been closely connected with the changed age structure of the unmarried male population. "Supply" effects—as far as these have been measured in Table 9—may have accounted for some features of the change in rela-

TABLE 8.—Remarriages as Percentage of All Marriages, and Composition of Remarriages, 1957 and 1969

Composition of remarriages <sup>a</sup>	1957	1969
Total number . . .	517	306
Widows & bachelors .	24.6	29.1
Spinsters & widowers	62.3	46.1
Widows & widowers. .	13.1	24.8
Total percent. . .	100.0	100.0
Remarriages as percentage of all marriages . . . . .	3.5	1.5

a—Note that there is no legal divorce in the Republic of Ireland.



TABLE 9.—Proportion of Single Males in Certain Age Groups, and of Brides Marrying Grooms in These Age Groups, 1946 and 1966

Age of grooms (X) and year of marriage	Single males aged (X) as percentage of all single males aged 20-44	Brides aged (Y) marrying grooms aged (X) as percentage of all brides aged (Y)			
		Y: Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34
20-24					
1946	33.3	43.4	28.3	8.0	2.1
1966	40.1	59.5	46.9	13.8	3.5
25-29					
1946	24.6	28.1	36.3	32.2	13.3
1966	20.8	15.7	36.5	46.1	19.8
30-34					
1946	18.8	12.4	19.5	30.7	33.0
1966	14.3	4.2	10.6	25.5	33.6

tive age at marriage in postwar Ireland, but changes in "tastes", and in particular the apparently growing reluctance of women to marry men too far removed from them in age, seems to have been a dominant force in accounting for the decline in inequality in brides' and grooms' ages.

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