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PATHWAYS TO ADULTHOOD IN IRELAND

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN TRANSITIONS AMONGST IRISH YOUTH

D. F. Hannan, S. Ó Riain

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Damian Hannan is a Research Professor and Sean Ó Riain is a former Research Assistant at The Economic and Social Research Institute. This paper has been accepted for publication by the Institute, which is not responsible for either the content or the views expressed therein.

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GENERAL SUMMARY

This is a study of the main transitions to adulthood amongst a large sample of young Irish people who completed their second-level education in 1981/82. It is based on final interviews carried out with them in late 1987 about their transitions to adulthood over the preceding 5 to 6 years. It studies their achievement of a sequence of interrelated adult statuses as young people moved from dependence on their family of origin to complete economic independence and the establishment of their own households and their own new families.

The study has three main objectives: (i) to describe the main characteristics of transitions to adulthood amongst these young people – to employment, new household formation, marriage and parenthood; as well as the extent to which the attainment of these statuses conforms to some overall transition pattern; (ii) to account for "success" or "failure" in such transitions; and (iii) to analyse the main well-being and welfare effects of such successes or failures.

Strong cultural and institutional norms and values underlie such transitions, particularly the attainment of stable adult sexual and family relationships. But gaining employment and achieving a separate household status are also highly structured processes. The means by which such positions are attained, the timing and sequencing of stages, as well as the ages at which they occur, are powerfully structured by economic, social and moral influences. Whether a singular normal (in both the statistical and normative sense) pattern in the sequencing and means of attainment of such statuses still exists in Ireland is one of the main questions of this study.

Success or failure in such transitions might be thought of in at least three senses: ability or inability to get a job, for instance; premature attainment of statuses – such as teenage marriage or single parenthood; or very postponed attainments – such as inability to "escape" from home, particularly if unemployed and still dependent economically on parents.

Methods

The main data used for the study are the extensive interviews with a national sample of school leavers who were followed-up and re-interviewed in late 1987, 5 to 6 years after they had completed their second-level education. At that stage 90 per cent of the sample were between 20-23

years of age, depending on the age at which they completed their second level-education. Of the total original sample of 1,940, 85 per cent were traced and either they themselves or their parents were re-interviewed in late 1987. Details of the sample and interviews are given in earlier publications (Breen, 1991; Hannan, Shortall, 1991).

Main Results

The main results show clearly that the actual transition process is still very traditionally patterned and its outcomes strongly determined by economic and normative forces – at least up to the age 22 or so. The conventional and normatively defined stages and sequencing of transitions to fully independent adult statuses – to a job, independent residence, marriage and family formation processes, etc. – is still the dominating pattern: deviations from which tend to be both generally rare and distressing. Success in gaining employment is a prerequisite to the establishment of new households, both being a prerequisite to marriage, and marriage in general is a prerequisite to childbirth, as well as to the purchase of housing, etc. Small deviations occur from that main pattern – in terms of premarital pregnancy, early marriage and the establishment of new households while being unemployed; but these hold for less than 10 per cent of the total sample; and tend to be explainable more in terms of reactions to persistent failure to find a normatively approved pathway rather than being initially freely chosen.

The main determining factors in achieving successful transitions – both in the sense of conforming to the national norms, and in terms of young people's feelings of satisfaction or distress – is educational achievement and its highly determinative effects on employment. Failure in education almost guarantees failure in employment. And both are highly predictive of other failures: being stuck at home, unemployed, and unable to migrate successfully is more characteristic of young men; and early marriage and early single motherhood, and associated retirement from the labour market, is more characteristic of young women. All of these transition failures have serious stress-inducing effects.

Both educational and employment success are highly structured by the social and cultural backgrounds of school leavers; particularly by gender and social class of origin. The typical pattern of transition of young people from lower working class backgrounds is one of leaving school early with either junior certificate or no qualifications; of entry to lower status and unstable sectors of the labour market – mainly unskilled and semi-skilled manual and service work, with high levels of persistent or intermittent unemployment; having serious difficulties in migrating (or emigrating)

successfully, and consequently of being marooned in the parental home – particularly for young men. Young women from such backgrounds with similar low levels of education have equally poor labour market histories, and disproportionately enter into early marriage or single parenthood and subsequently withdraw from the labour force. So, for a substantial minority of lower working class youth there is a very shortened, difficult and stress-filled transition process. For a considerable proportion of working class youth, however, significant upward mobility has occurred and a much more protracted, successful and less stress-filled transition.

For those from the upper middle class the typical pattern of transition could not be more different: of late completion of education – usually to successful graduation from University; of late and successful entry into the labour market – usually into the upper non-manual and even professional levels; of late "escape" from home, particularly if went to College in their home town/city, but then easy transition to separate households and home ownership; though much later entry into marriage – usually in their late 20s or early 30s.

The large increase in unemployment over the past decade has led to a disproportionate increase in the unemployment rate for those without qualifications. These extremely damaging effects on employment chances have also reduced successful emigration chances and, as a consequence, have led to larger retention rates of the unqualified unemployed in the parental home: an increase not only in the social pressures and tensions on themselves but also on their families.

Besides social class of origin, one's father's employment status, mother's education and number of children in the parental family have substantial effects on level of education achieved, and consequently on employment chances and level of occupational attainment. The effects are equally serious for both males and females, except in the latter case it results in their much higher rates of withdrawal into home duties – usually through early marriage or single parenthood. This is, perhaps, most clearly illustrated, for instance, in the one-fourth of young women without qualifications who had retired into home duties within 5 years of leaving second-level schools, compared to less than 3 per cent of those with third-level qualifications. Both initial attainments – in educational qualifications and successful integration into the labour force – play central "gateway" roles for other transitions: leaving home and successful establishment of a separate household, and the establishment of stable sexual and marriage relationships.

Leaving home is highly determined by three factors: third-level entry – if not living near such an institution, job search strategies for those with at

least good Leaving Certificate qualifications seeking to enter white collar occupations, and size of place of origin. If from Dublin, well educated and employed young 20 year olds have the least chance of leaving the parental homes; while if well educated and from the most remote smaller communities, the rate of home leaving is very high.

Early marriage for young women is generally most characteristic of those with a Leaving Cert. qualification or less – over 20 per cent of whom were married, and least of those with third-level qualifications – less than 5 per cent. It is also much less true for men, only 7 per cent were married at the time of interview. Single motherhood, as already indicated, is most characteristic of the most poorly qualified, particularly those with very poor labour force histories and from poor and large working class and unemployed family backgrounds. Such young women, and men – though their status is not equally marked, suffer from multiple economic and social deprivations.

The Stress Effects of Transition Failures

Unemployment has very serious stress or personally disabling effects on individuals. These are much the same as in the adult population – although the level of measured stress appeared to be generally lower than in the adult population (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). There are some increasing stress effects with length of time unemployed, though they tend to decline after being a year unemployed. Such stress-causing effects are, however, modulated by the absence or presence of economic and social supports in one's social environment, as well as by the possession of certain attitudinal or self-concept characteristics, particularly the presence of high levels of employment commitment (which increases distress if unemployed, and decreases it if employed), and by the level of one's self-confidence/competency and sense of control over one's own life. The lower the level of control and the higher the level of fatalism, the higher the stress levels. So, interestingly, although the unemployed tend to "blame" external factors for their situation, this merely increases their level of fatalism and consequently their level of stress. The results here, as in Whelan, *et al.* (1991), show, however, that these distressing personal effects appear to disappear rapidly once young people become employed again.

Besides unemployment, a number of the other "failed transitions" have clear effects on such feelings of stress. Being unemployed and "stuck" at home is one of the most serious. Single mothers show some of the highest distress levels of all groups – although this appears to be mainly explainable in terms of the cluster of disadvantaging characteristics and current circumstances of those involved. Young women's marriage tends to

improve welfare levels but these disimprove again with parenthood. Returned "failed" emigrants, although showing higher levels of distress, actually tend to be in better psychological health than would be warranted by their disadvantaging backgrounds and experiences. Obviously, being unemployed at home is still better than being unemployed in (mainly) Britain.

Although we have focused above on the failures in transition, the great majority of young people interviewed had made very successful transitions; and their levels of well-being, as their levels of education, were in general significantly higher than the average of their elders (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). In addition, at least up to their early 20s, and as measured with the limited set of indicators here, their progress into adulthood appears to be as structured as their elders – although the economic circumstances they face is now much more uncertain and stressful. Failure, however, is now much more frequent and much more determined by educational level. This is something we now need to tackle with determination and effectiveness: to set a reasonable target, for instance, to reduce the "failure rate" in primary and early post-primary education by at least 50 per cent over a 5-7-year period – and not merely by reducing standards of expected achievement.

But for those already suffering from educational and employment failures, interventions should not only focus on improving people's educational/vocational qualifications and material welfare but also take care to ensure that they increase people's capacity to cope with life course difficulties, particularly through increasing people's sense of control and self-competency, and reducing feelings of fatalism. Such intervention should not focus on increasing levels of "employment commitment" unless there is a reasonable chance of subsequent employment: if not achieved such increases in "employment commitment" merely magnify levels of distress.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND

The concept of "youth" is associated in modern European societies with ideas of freedom and enjoyment of a period of self-gratification and rebellion against the moral constraints of adult society. But it is also closely linked with the more serious business of preparing to become an adult, with all the different changes of roles and lifestyles which this entails. While young people are "young, free and single" in the popular image their preparation for adulthood and its responsibilities also puts them under a lot of pressure. From a societal viewpoint the transition from youth to adulthood is the crucial stage in its social and cultural reproduction. Indeed the whole phenomenon of youth is to a large extent socially created and defined by adult members of society and is a relatively modern development (National Youth Policy Committee, 1984; Roberts, 1983; Wallace, 1987a).

This study deals mainly with "success" and "failure" in the transition to adulthood among young people in Ireland. In this chapter we outline our approach to this problem, going on to discuss the issues in more detail in Chapter 2, and presenting the results of our analysis in subsequent chapters.

The focus of our study is the causes and consequences of "success" or "failure" in the transition to adult status. Before we can analyse these, however, we need to examine what we mean by "adulthood" and by "success" or "failure" in attaining it. Adulthood is comprised of a set of statuses which provide a basis for individual independence and for full civic status. The most important transitions are those from "student" status to one in the labour market, but particularly into paid employment; the move out of dependent status within the parental home into an independent residence; and, the transition from "junior" status in the family of origin to "senior" status in the family of procreation (or, at least, in a new household). "Success" or "failure" then depends on how securely these statuses are attained. However, we can also look at the issue more broadly by comparing alternative "adult" status transitions (e.g., paid employment versus unemployment or participation in home duties) in terms of their social and psychological consequences.

The main goals of this study are to identify problems and priorities relating to success in the transition to adulthood, examining the processes which cause these problems. Therefore, our main focus is on "failure" to attain adult statuses, the personal consequences of such and the factors which influence both the causes and consequences of "failure". The actual process of transition, which has been extensively analysed within the "life course" tradition in terms of the timing and sequencing of transitions, is of less importance to us than identifying the obstacles to the attainment of satisfactory adult statuses. Furthermore, the data available to us are not fully suited to a "life course analysis" approach as we only have sufficient data on adult status attainment at one point in time, although we do have detailed information on the educational and employment histories of the young people we studied.

Although we identify employment, independent residence and family formation as crucial components of adulthood transitions it is true that one can be socially recognised as an adult and be in a quite satisfactory position without attaining all these statuses. For instance, a young man may stay at home for a long period in order to work on a farm which he will eventually inherit. Our approach does not assume such cases to be "failures", however. We emphasise those cases where aspirations have been clearly frustrated and the personal consequences are damaging. Unemployment, of course, is the most outstanding example of "failure" in the transition. Indeed, in this study we place great emphasis on the harmful effects of unemployment on young people attempting to attain adult statuses. This is due both to the substantial numbers of young people affected by it – both at present and at the time of our study in the mid-1980s – and to the extremely damaging social and personal effects of unemployment.

Although we analyse the attainment of various adult statuses separately we also test whether a singular, normatively and statistically defined, process of "adulthood" transition exists in Ireland. Such a norm – consisting of a gradual and cumulative process of attainment of the statuses mentioned above – may have broken down in other European countries but there are indications that it is still dominant here in Ireland. While there are variations in how adulthood is thought of there also seems to be a dominant pattern which is normatively approved among the majority of the population, and which appears to be the dominant expectation amongst young people. We examine this issue in some detail as it is so important in defining how success and failure in transition are defined.

Data

The data come from a national sample of school leavers interviewed over an 8 week period from mid-November 1987. This is a re-survey of the original 1981/82 sample of school leavers who were first interviewed in May 1983. The survey was carried out by the ESRI for YEA/FÁS. It is the third interview wave for this panel of school leavers. First interviewed in May 1983, one year after they had left school (Department of Labour, *School Leavers' Survey, 1983),* they were re-interviewed in November 1984 (Corcoran *et al.*, YEA, 1986), and thirdly in late 1987 and early 1988. An average of over 5.5 years had elapsed, therefore, from the point at which they had completed their post-primary education in 1981/82 to their third, 1987/88, interview. A copy of the relevant questionnaires may be obtained by writing to the authors (see also Breen, 1991; and Hannan and Shortall, 1991, for previous analyses of the database).

In addition to this 1981/82 sample a further subsample of all third-level entrants in the 1980/81 school leavers' survey was included. These were first interviewed in May 1982 after they had completed almost one year of third-level education. This provides a "double sample" of third-level entrants from 1981 and 1982. This was done so that we would have a sufficient number of third-level graduates and students, in order that their progress could be compared with that of the majority of 1981/82 school leavers who had directly entered the labour market upon leaving school. The following table briefly summarises the sample and final interview outcomes.

Table 1.1:*Details of Sample and Interview Completion Rates, November 1987 – February 1988. Re-interviews of 1981/82 School Leavers' Panel*

	Number	*Percentage*
Total Sample Selected	2,380	100
(1980/81 3rd Level)	(440)	
(1981/82 School Leavers' Total Sample	(1,940)	
Total Sample Interviewed	1,990	83.6
Total Refused	127	5.3
Total Other Unattainable (even with callbacks)	59	2.5
Total Deceased, Ill or Family Moved and Uncontactable	149	6.3
Other – Non-completions	55	2.3

The completion rate at 86 per cent was quite satisfactory. In order to avoid any sample biases, however, the sample was carefully reweighted to fully reflect the original sample characteristics first selected for the May 1983 survey: by level of education, sex, size and type of school, region, etc. In most cases in the following analysis we use either the fully reweighted 1987 sample from the 1981/82 school leavers' survey (N = 1,644)[1] or – since many respondents had migrated and could not be personally contacted – the sample of respondents who were personally interviewed (N = 1,114). There are some minor variations in the numbers reported in different analyses due to missing data – but these are generally small differences.

The Analysis

The strategy which we have adopted in our analysis is to look first at the separate dimensions of the transition to adulthood and examine how they are interrelated; secondly, to analyse social background factors and how these affect various transitions; thirdly to examine the social-psychological consequences of transition "successes" or "failures" and, finally, to explain some of the underlying processes which give rise to these consequences. The aim of the study is to give a broad picture of the experiences of Irish youth to adulthood in the mid-1980s. The comprehensive data available to us mean that for the first time we can examine in depth the whole experience of Irish youth. Extensive work has already been done on more specific aspects of young people's transition experiences using the same data set. This work has focused on emigration decisions (Sexton, Walsh, Hannan, McMahon, 1991, Chapter 6), school leavers' assessments of the quality of their education (Hannan and Shortall, 1991) and education, training and employment outcomes (Breen, 1991). Combining these in-depth, specific studies with our broader approach provides a comprehensive but detailed picture of the transition to adulthood of Irish youth in the mid-1980s.

In Chapter 2 we review the international literature on the transition from youth to adulthood, and the consequences of transition successes and failures. In Chapter 3 we start our analysis proper by analysing some of the main factors having significant influence on transitions to adulthood. Chief among these are gender and education, and we show in particular

[1] Standard errors and tests of significance are calculated on the weighted, but unchanged, sample number. The difference between the results from this procedure and using the unweighted sample are so small as to be extremely unlikely to affect the validity of statistical inferences.

how important differential access to certain labour markets is to successful transitions. In Chapter 4 we test whether an underlying unidimensional model, or a number of alternative models, of "adulthood transition" exist in Ireland. These two chapters, therefore, focus on the processes of transition themselves. However, they take different approaches – our analysis in Chapter 3 breaking down the transition into its various components and examining how they are individually related, and Chapter 4 assessing whether we can pull these elements together again into a single model of transition. In Chapter 5 we investigate the effects of social background factors on progress towards adulthood, and how they interact with educational and labour market histories in influencing the attainment of adult status. By examining how social background factors affect the transition processes we can identify how the transition process in Ireland maintains certain social inequalities and transforms others.

The remaining chapters (6-8) in our study deal with the social-psychological consequences of various patterns and dimensions of transition: particularly the well-being effects of success and failure in employment and in achieving related adult statuses. Because of the broad approach adopted we are able to avoid the tendency, present in some studies, to analyse important specified life events – like school-to-work – in isolation from related and coinciding events like leaving home, courtship and marriage.

We have been able to examine the process of attaining adult statuses in terms of differences in young people's social background and education; the various pathways by which people arrive at these statuses, as well as in terms of people's immediate social and economic circumstances. In Chapter 6 we focus on unemployment and how the experience of unemployment varies according to the social context in which young people find themselves and also according to the nature of unemployment itself (e.g., long- or short-term unemployment). Chapter 7 looks at other domestic transitions – leaving home, marriage, parenthood – and some of their social and social-psychological consequences. The subsequent Chapter (8) examines some of the factors which influence how well young people cope with unemployment – their economic situation, their immediate social environment and their beliefs about their own situation. In the final chapter we summarise our main results and point to some of the major policy implications of our findings. We identify the groups of young people most at risk of ending up in unsatisfactory statuses, as well as how they come to be in such insecure and unsatisfactory positions.

Chapter 2

THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND THE EFFECTS OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE – PARTICULARLY UNEMPLOYMENT – ON SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter 1 outlined our overall approach to this study. In this chapter we examine in detail the research literature on the main issues involved and factors influencing "success" or "failure", in transitions to adulthood.

These issues include:

(i) the various dimensions of the transition process such as getting a job, setting up an independent residence, establishing stable sexual relationships including courtship and marriage, becoming a parent; and the various interrelationships amongst these transitions;

(ii) the extent to which there is an average or "normal" process of transition; or whether there are equally acceptable pathways to transition to adulthood amongst different groups of young people;

(iii) the main factors influencing "success" or "failure" in transitions, particularly unemployment;

(iv) the main social effects of various patterns of social and cultural integration of young people into adult society;

(v) the effects of the different patterns of transition on the psycho-social well-being of individual young people.

Under each of these headings we find that young people must negotiate a number of obstacles before attaining full adult status, some of which may have important long-term consequences if not fully overcome. We examine each of these elements in turn. As readers will quickly notice we pay particular attention to unemployment because of its crucial "gatekeeping" role to other transitions.

Dimensions of the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a process consisting of "a series of interrelated events representing movement from economic dependence and participation in the family of origin to economic independence and

establishment of a family of procreation" (Marini, 1984, p. 229). These events can be thought of as organised along three main dimensions of change (Wallace, 1987a, 1987b). These are:

(i) The Labour Market: involving leaving school and entering employment with periods of training or unemployment in between.
(ii) The Family: making the transition from the family of origin to one's own family of procreation, perhaps living alone or cohabiting before establishing the second family. This will also typically involve having children and assuming parenthood roles.
(iii) The Housing Market: moving from the parental home into an independent residence which is usually either privately rented, owned or rented from the local authority.

While there is general agreement that these 3 dimensions embody the main features of the transition from youth to adulthood there is some controversy over the exact nature of the transition. The "normal" or traditional pattern of transition has been generally seen to be sequenced in terms of: (i) entrance into employment directly upon finishing education, (ii) the establishment of an independent residence; and (iii) marriage only after employment stability has been achieved; (iv) starting a family of one's own only after marriage. This is generally perceived as a "successful" transition. In countries like Ireland with a strong Christian tradition and practice such a normal model is maintained by strongly-reinforced norms and social pressures; and is accompanied by strongly held beliefs as to the appropriate age for various life events, and their appropriate sequence (Hogan and Astone, 1986; Hogan, 1978). Hogan (1978) argued that a process of transition which is significantly different from the "normative sequence" given above will harm the young person in the long term, as important social institutions may not be accommodatable towards the more unusual patterns of transition, and young persons may also be subjected to severe social sanctions if they break away from the socially accepted pattern.

Researchers using the "life course" orientation hold that such social-biographical sequences are socially or culturally constructed – not determined. Modell argues that:

> On the one hand, on-time transitions are, as a matter of course, culturally prepared, cushioned by anticipatory socialization and by supportive institutional arrangements. On the other hand, and

> correspondingly, individuals moving too slowly or too quickly through a particular transition are often admonished, where they are not restrained by administrative regulations or by positive law itself (Modell, 1989, p. 13).

"Success" in the transition to adulthood becomes a matter of following a socially approved pathway – "conformity with the social and cultural cues promoting timely moves through the life course is expected to be directly satisfactory to the actor" (Modell, 1989, p. 14).

However, as discussed in Chapter 1, we do not pursue the concerns of life course analysis in this study. This is due not only to our somewhat different focus – on transition origins and destinations rather than sequences and trajectories, and severe limitations of our data for life course analysis (in that time sequencing data are neither complete nor reliable enough). But it is also based on our belief that it is the nature of the eventual statuses attained, rather than the transition sequences leading up to their attainment, which has the most significant personal consequences. In addition, it is also questionable whether such a normative sequence of transition stages fits modern European practice (Marini, 1984). However, the notion of such a "normal" sequence is still a very useful one – particularly in Ireland when orthodox religious beliefs and associated social norms are still so strong.

The concept of a "normal transition" also implies that stages can be out of sequence, or be "premature" or "postponed" and, therefore, problematic. *Premature* transitions are those which result in the young person taking up, or being forced into, a status before being properly prepared for it. These would typically include early marriage, pregnancy at a very young age, or before marriage; but also young people leaving home unwillingly or with insufficient resources to establish a new household (Matthews, 1986). A *postponed* transition is one where the young person is "ready" – in terms of age or with sufficient resources – to enter another stage of the transition but is prevented from doing so either by a lack of opportunities or presence of constraints preventing them taking advantage of the opportunities that do exist. Such delayed transitions might include staying on longer than one wishes at school because of a lack of opportunities in the labour market (Brown, 1987), or the postponement of independent residence and family formation due to long-term unemployment or low wages (Brown, 1987; Fagin and Little, 1984).

There are some problems, however, with the application of such a universal "normal" transition model to young people of different socio-demographic and cultural backgrounds; and, of course, such "normal"

patterns may vary across cultures. Not only has the rise of mass and long-term youth unemployment undermined traditional patterns of transition, but these "traditional patterns" themselves vary by gender and social class (Wallace, 1987a). So it is important that we take an overall, population-level, perspective which can account for such variation in patterns of transition in terms of varying social contexts (Hogan and Astone, 1986).

Wallace has discussed these variations in times of relatively full employment, as regards both schooling and the labour market (Wallace, 1987a, pp. 31-33); as well as the impact of labour market variation on young people's domestic life cycles (Wallace, 1987c, pp. 112-114). While these models were developed for Britain they have been applied to many European countries and are useful in examining Irish society. These models of the transition process deal mainly with young men and centre around social class differences. Combining her discussion of the labour market and of the domestic cycle three main patterns are discernible:

(i) those from middle class (professional and managerial) homes tend to go on to higher education and professional training, and have developed a long-term career orientation. They tend to delay marriage and childbearing, mainly in their late 20s or early 30s;

(ii) children of skilled manual and clerical workers (lower middle and upper working classes) tend to do quite well out of second level education, mainly entering apprenticeships and clerical training. They have developed a "short-term career orientation", tending to marry and start a family at a younger age than the upper middle class, typically from the age of 21 onwards;

(iii) lower working class children tend to do worst at school, generally leaving at the minimum age and entering "careerless" manual or lower service occupations. They tend to marry and start a family at a relatively young age – any time from school-leaving age onwards.

These various patterns of transition to adulthood serve to reproduce the class structure. They are facilitated by an education system which provides systematically different types of education for different social groups (Brown, 1987). There is some dispute in the research literature as to whether this is due mainly to differentiation within the education system itself (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976) or to class cultural differences in the demand for education and necessary disciplines

for success in it (Willis, 1977). There are also important gender differences in schooling, labour market and family experiences. These centre on the domination of the public sphere by males and the concentration of women in the private sphere (Hannan, Breen *et al.*, 1983; Wallace, 1986).

However, even this differentiated model of ideal typical transitions for different social groups has had to be modified due to major changes in the conditions affecting youth trying to attain adult statuses over the last 10 to 15 years. The crucial factor here has been the rise of mass youth unemployment. This not only denies the young person a job, which is itself a crucial adulthood status, but also affects household and marriage patterns which are also central to the attainment of adult statuses (Wallace, 1987a; Leonard, 1980). Unemployment has become a labour market destination in itself, not just a temporary phase during adolescence; and this has, in turn, affected transitions to marriage, parenthood and independent housing.

Changes in women's participation in the labour force and in social attitudes towards marriage and sexuality have also posed a challenge to the traditional models of transitions to adulthood. The transition now appears more flexible and uncertain, especially for those social groups most affected by unemployment. Many such young people are now also experiencing longer transitions, and also coming increasingly to depend on state intervention – such as training and work-experience schemes – during this time (Wallace, 1987a, 1987b). We will in the next section, therefore, examine in detail the links between unemployment and the other dimensions of the transition process.

Despite all this, it is worth keeping the idea of the "normal" transition as a benchmark in any research for a number of reasons. Not only is this core idea central to traditional socio-demographic variations in transition patterns, but it also serves as a very real aspiration for many young people today (Wallace, 1987a, 1987c). Transitions which are "normal" in terms of timing and sequencing of stages also seem to be "successful" ones in that they tend to be correlated with favourable long-term employment, family and housing outcomes (Hogan and Astone, 1986; Hogan, 1978). If this holds for Britain it is much more likely to be so in Ireland where social norms regarding marriage and female labour force participation remain more traditional, although now changing rapidly.

This "normal" (in both its meanings of *average* and of *ideally expected)* transition process, however, depends crucially on the availability of employment. The gap between this ideal and the reality of rising unemployment has become more conspicuous throughout the 1980s, and it is to this issue of unemployment that we now turn.

The Central Role of Employment/Unemployment in the Transition to Adulthood

(a) Young People in the Labour Market

There is a very close link between success in the transition to employment and transitions to the other adulthood statuses. Youth employment is very important since it underpins the other elements of the transition to adulthood, by providing both financial independence and a respected adult status for young people. This is important for both young men and young women (Wallace, 1987d). In addition there is strong evidence that early labour market experiences, at least in Ireland, have important implications for later job prospects – and so for long-term life chances (Breen, 1985). In addition, while youth unemployment rates internationally are closely linked to the overall rates, the youth rate shows greater cyclical amplitude than the adult rate (Breen, 1985; Makeham, 1980; Casson, 1979); that is, it falls more quickly in times of economic recovery than the adult rate but it also rises faster in times of recession. This seems to be due mainly to employers ceasing to hire new employees in recessions, which particularly affects young people who dominate those seeking work; and to employers firing their most recently hired employees (again usually young people) first when under financial pressure. In addition it is also related to the concentration of young people in the more exposed employment sectors, and in the secondary labour markets (Ashton, 1988).

For Ireland it is clear that certain groups of young people are more at risk of unemployment than others. Breen (1984b) for instance found that while working class youth at all levels of education are more likely to enter the labour market early, the probability of becoming unemployed once in the labour market for young people of any class or gender is mediated almost completely by the level of education attained. The summary effect of all this for Irish youth is that "the labour market experience of the youth labour force (and particularly early labour market experience) with respect to unemployment, is closely related to educational attainment. This, in turn, is strongly related to class origins, and the consequences of this are, first, that young people of working class origins experience the greatest difficulty in getting and keeping jobs in the youth labour market and secondly, the unemployed among the youth labour force will be drawn predominantly from the working class" (Breen, 1985, pp. 176-177). Therefore, it appears very likely that it will be the transitions of working class youth which will be most affected by the rise of youth unemployment.

Those whose parents have a history of unemployment also show higher rates of personal unemployment, at least in Britain and Ireland (Payne, 1987; Breen, 1984b; 1991). This may be due to factors such as class

differences between local labour markets, concentrated residence in "problem" districts, reduced access to job-getting networks, lack of motivation to find work within "unemployed homes", and employer preference for children of employed parents whom they consider potentially more stable employees. We will attempt to examine some of these alternative explanations later.

(b) Unemployment and Family Formation

Unemployment tends to postpone family formation (Brown, 1987; Fagan and Little, 1984). It may, however, also result in a modification of relationships – as Wallace (1987a, 1987b) found that those couples in employment tended to marry while those who were unemployed tended to cohabit. This is due largely to the strong normative association of marriage with financial independence.

Marriage itself seems to have a direct relationship to employment, the relationship varying by gender. Among women, marriage has traditionally meant leaving the labour force; the pattern generally indicating working full-time while single, leaving the labour force once married to have children, and returning later to work again – usually in a part-time capacity (Leonard, 1980). Pregnancy and the birth of the first child is an especially important event in this context (Ineichen, 1977). However, women's participation in the labour force has been growing and more women are continuing to work once married and/or having started a family.

For men the processes seem quite different. Marriage is in general associated with a lower level of unemployment among men. Payne (1989) advances three possible explanations for this. There may be selection of the most able and stable men for both work and marriage; men may delay marriage until they feel their employment position is secure (as we saw above) and, finally, marriage may itself increase the probability of gaining or retaining employment. This effect may be due to heightened pressure to get or keep a job, or to more favourable employer attitudes to married men who may be seen as more responsible and stable (Payne, 1989). There may also be increased access to kinship job-getting networks which are more important for working class people in times of recession (Payne, 1987; Allatt and Yeandle, 1986). In Britain at least the direct stabilising effect of marriage on employment seems to be the most important factor.

Parenthood is perhaps a more important event for young people than marriage itself (Ineichen, 1977). Unemployment is associated with early marriage, premarital pregnancy (Ineichen, 1977) and large families (Payne, 1989). Indeed Payne suggests that a selection mechanism may be at work also in that both the propensity towards unemployment and early

marriage occurs among certain individuals. Youthful parenthood is a predominantly working class phenomenon. Ineichen (1977) has suggested, for instance, that there are a number of positive reasons for working class girls to have children. It may get them out of dead-end jobs and bestow an adult status, especially as working class values strongly endorse the raising of children as a worthwhile role. There is also a resistance to the idea of abortion (even in Britain where it is legal), and contraceptive practice is often careless amongst this social group. Having children also helps disadvantaged parents to get a Council house. Some have also suggested that parenthood provides a legitimate alternative role, for women at least (Willis, 1977); although others claim that working class girls see motherhood less as a positive alternative to be chosen than as an inevitability to be accepted (Wallace, 1986; Griffin, 1985).

Whatever explanation is given for early pregnancies it is clear that they only add, in general, to the disadvantage already typically experienced by these young parents, especially mothers. For a young couple a baby will mean having one more mouth to feed, and generally an associated loss of one income-earner in the household. It can be difficult for a young couple to overcome such early financial disadvantages, especially if there is more than one child (Payne, 1989, Ineichen, 1981). Contrary to popular belief there are few if any welfare advantages from having extra children (Payne, 1989). A baby is also a demanding responsibility, and a very young couple may be personally and socially ill-prepared to deal with these demands, quite apart from any financial considerations involved (Ineichen, 1977). However, some recent studies have suggested that such "young mothers" may overcome these difficulties (Furstenberg *et al.*, 1987; Phoenix, 1991).

Where all these trends cause most damage is in the case of teenage marriages of generally disadvantaged couples. Ineichen (1977) summarises the "vortex of disadvantage" experienced by this group, compared to the marriages of older brides, as follows:

1. Early pregnancy, often as a result of premarital conception.
2. Material disadvantage: relatively low status jobs, plus low earnings after marriage, combined with difficulties over housing; the eventual prospect of a council tenancy rather than owner-occupation.
3. An eventual higher rate of divorce (with concomitant housing problems both before and after); and possibly greater vulnerability to other forms of social pathology such as homelessness and child abuse" (Ineichen, 1977, p. 61).

Teenage marriages aside then, marriage and employment seem to sustain one another. The pronounced mutual effects persist after marriage as unemployment appears to be closely related to marital breakdown (Payne, 1989, Fagin and Little, 1984). There is a delicate balance, therefore, between these different dimensions of the transition. Unemployment may delay family formation and may damage marriages; but marriage, once early parenthood is avoided, can help sustain employment – amongst men at least.

(c) Unemployment and Living Independently

Establishing an independent residence is an important part of gaining an independent adult status. Different tenures tend also to provide very different quality residences with owner-occupation being the most desired status generally and the "private rented" sector being the least secure. Access to housing can be a difficult and a long drawn out process, as in the case of local authority housing.

Unemployment makes establishing an independent residence even more difficult as while many young unemployed couples can set up a (privately rented) household very few can become owner-occupiers (Murphy and Sullivan, 1986). Such young marriages in unsatisfactory private rented accommodation may also encourage them to have more children in order to improve their chances of local authority housing. This in turn, however, will make it more difficult to get finances to become owner-occupiers and – if unsuccessful in seeking local authority housing – may also mean that it will be difficult even to get suitable private rented accommodation (Ineichen, 1981). There is a "filtering" of people from lower social class and higher unemployment backgrounds into local authority housing, from which they find it difficult to move into other tenures (Murphy and Sullivan, 1986). As we have seen, the concentration of disadvantage is even worse for teenage couples with dependants (Ineichen, 1977).

There is a relationship between housing tenure and unemployment independent of the effects of social class. This may be due to the clustering of high risk occupations within broader social classes, to the restricted mobility of local authority tenants due to the operation of housing lists, or to employer discrimination against certain estates (Murphy and Sullivan, 1986). Local authority houses may also be concentrated in areas with relatively poor local labour markets. It is clear then that youth unemployment can result in a sequence of early marital, early child bearing and housing disadvantages which may have persistent effects over the whole life-course.

(d) Leaving the Family of Origin

While transitions from school to the labour market and from the parental home to an independent residence appear relatively clearcut, and unidirectional in formal terms, the actualities of transition from dependence on the family of origin (with one's parents) to independence in the new family of procreation are much more complex, and often maintain dependencies on the family of origin. In addition first attempts at independence may fail and young people may have to return home. While it may be difficult to establish a new fully independent family at the best of times this is particularly so when the young person is unemployed. Teenage marriages, young marriages where resources are poor – due, for instance, to unemployment, and associated prolonged material or social dependence on the family of origin – all create serious transition blockages.

While ties with the family of origin are the norm in our society it is a mistake to see such ties as always benign (Wallace, 1987b). While the origin family provides both material and social support which may be badly needed, this support may be used as a basis for control of the children even after they have established families of their own (Wallace, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1987d; Allatt and Yeandle, 1986; Binns and Mars, 1984; Leonard, 1980). Equality of ties depends on the economic independence of the newly established family, so unemployed young families may feel their dependence on families of origin keenly (Binns and Mars, 1984). So, financial independence from the family of origin is an important part of reaching independent adult status, and this in turn is based largely on gaining regular full-time employment.

The Transition to Adulthood in Ireland in the 1980s

It is useful to examine some aspects of Irish society which are likely to have a significant bearing on young people's transitions in the 1980s. These include certain characteristics of our social structure, certain changes in socio-economic conditions, as well as changing values affecting work or marriage transitions.

As the transition to adulthood is an important mechanism of social and cultural reproduction, the extent of social mobility and "fluidity" – how open Irish society is in the opportunities it offers its citizens – is a crucial one. Ireland, however, shows low levels of social mobility compared to England and Wales and other European countries (Whelan and Whelan, 1984; Breen and Whelan, 1985; Breen *et al.*, 1990). This has persisted through the 1980s (Breen and Whelan, 1992; Whelan, Breen and Whelan, 1992) and means that those from working-class backgrounds have

proportionately fewer opportunities than elsewhere in Europe – even if our unemployment rates were comparable.

Working-class young people are also highly disadvantaged as regards unemployment and this seems to be related almost totally to educational level attained (Breen *et al.*, 1990). This close link between educational qualifications and employment success actually became tighter over the 1980s. This period also saw a rise in educational participation as many young people postponed entry to a hostile labour market in order to get further qualifications, thus leading to "qualification inflation" in the education needed for certain jobs (Breen, 1984b; 1991; Hannan and Shortall, 1991). Those with no or few educational qualifications become increasingly excluded over the 1980s in Ireland.

As we have seen above, youth unemployment rates tend to rise and fall more rapidly than older (over 25) rates and the Irish experience is no exception (at least in absolute terms). As the overall unemployment rate grew from 6 per cent in 1979 to 18 per cent in 1987 the youth rate grew from 9 per cent to 26 per cent in the same period (see relevant *Labour Force Surveys).*

The rapid growth in the under 25 unemployment rate, in fact, understates the scale of the growing unemployment problem for young people entering the labour force over the 1980s. For recent school leavers first entering the labour market there was an even more rapid deterioration in their employment chances over the 1980s. The overall unemployment rate, one year out of school, grew from 10 per cent in 1980 to 34 per cent in 1987 (Department of Labour, *Economic Status of School Leavers).* The growth in unemployment has been disproportionally concentrated amongst the most poorly qualified – with the unemployment rate being three to four times greater amongst those without any qualification compared to those with the Leaving Certificate (Breen, 1991; Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Department of Labour, *Economic Status of School Leavers, 1987).*

There has also been a substantial growth in youth emigration from 1983 onwards. In fact, if one combines the percentage unemployed and the percentage emigrated of total school leavers, it has remained virtually unchanged since 1983 (Hannan and Shortall, 1991). Young people from lower working class backgrounds are far more likely to have less educational qualifications, be less upwardly mobile and have much higher rates of unemployment than other social classes. Equally, emigration has shown a significant shift in recent years from the traditional pattern where proportionately more emigrants were poorly educated and unskilled, to larger proportions of the better educated emigrating; primarily because of

changes in skill demands in the international labour market, as well as much greater relocation difficulties for those with poor educational and other social and economic resources (Sexton, Walsh, Hannan, McMahon, 1991). So, despite the fact that local unemployment rates are substantially higher amongst those with no or poor qualifications – roughly three times higher, the propensity or opportunity to emigrate successfully runs in the opposite direction. A very high proportion of the most poorly qualified are, therefore, "boxed into" unemployment and poverty in Ireland – most often in their parental home.

Besides economic forces change in values can also bring about shifts in household formation processes. A report of a national survey on social values carried out in 1981 (Fogarty, Ryan and Lee, 1984) shows that Ireland remains in many ways a solidly religious and traditional country. There is a strong work ethic among the Irish workforce and standards on religion and morality remain high. The institution of marriage, it appears, also remains strong. However, there are signs of the unemployed becoming quite alienated – "demoralised, with rather flat and featureless views on one set of issues after another, polarised between radicalism and political disinterest and for good reasons dissatisfied" (Fogarty, *et al.,* 1984, p. 91).

Young people too show a somewhat distinctive set of views, although these hardly constitute a "generation gap" of any great significance. They do appear most different in their values on religion, where their beliefs are vaguer and less approving of the Church as an institution, and on sexual morality, where they show greater permissiveness and are more tolerant towards single mothers and the idea of divorce.

It would appear, therefore, that while there may be some shifting of values related to family transitions the greatest effects on young people's transitions over the 1980s are likely to be the massive structural changes in the relationship between education, employment and emigration which we would expect to impact most strongly on those from already disadvantaged backgrounds.

Social Consequences of Differences in Transitions to Adulthood

We have now examined ways of conceptualising transitions to adulthood, various ways in which different dimensions of transition influence one another, some factors which affect "success" in the transition process and factors bringing about change in the process of achieving adult statuses in Ireland. We now turn to examine some of the main consequences of various transition outcomes for young people. We first examine some important social effects in this section, and then some psycho-social "well-being" effects, which we discuss in the next.

We have already discussed how the transition to adulthood is an important factor in the social and cultural reproduction of society, especially in regard to class and gender relations. For our purposes the outcomes of transitions to adulthood are best thought of as ranging from continued dependence to attained independence. We assume here that such independence will confer greater control over one's own life and also greater satisfaction with that life.

Continuing dependence can be material or social (Wallace, 1987b). Economic dependence due to unemployment is well-documented. It disproportionately affects those at the lower end of the educational and social class range. Different gender roles in the family can also influence dependency. For instance, young women remaining in the parental home may find their freedom curtailed by demands that they take on a good deal of housework – demands which are less likely to be made of their brothers. Of course all social processes are "gendered" to some degree and we will examine gender differences in most transitions in some detail later in the report. Two other sources of influence on youth transitions are especially important as they have greater impact on youth in times of high unemployment. These are the family of origin which, as we have seen, may be difficult to "escape" from at times – even when economically independent; and the State, which has become increasingly important in youth transitions through its welfare support and employment and training schemes. Each of these four factors – social class, gender, family, State – may include social relations of both support and control. For a young unemployed person, with few personal resources as yet accumulated, the combined influence of these variables may be very unpleasant: as for instance for a young unemployed woman from lower working class origins still dependent on the family and with low unemployment assistance payments.

The reactions of individuals to such inordinate dependence, or suffering other disadvantages, can be usefully thought of in terms of "voice", "exit" or "loyalty" (Hirschman, 1970). When a person experiences such disorder – for example, extreme dependency arising out of unsuccessful transitions to adulthood – he or she has essentially three options. The first of these is to give "voice" to their complaints by protesting and trying to change the system from within. The second is to "exit" from the system, leaving it behind them and trying to escape its influence. Finally, there is the option of "loyalty" which involves staying with the system if the cost of "voice" or "exit" is too high.

Looking at the transition to adulthood we find that the crucial "system" involved is the labour market, and unemployment is the most "disorderly"

and unwelcome situation within that system. Examining the reactions of young people to such a "disorder", the option of "loyalty" need not concern us too much as almost all individuals continue to participate in the employment system and maintain some commitment to it. Various commentators have argued that high unemployment rates would result in many people taking the "voice" option, by protesting against their plight. However, the political quiescence of the unemployed is well documented by now (Marshall *et al.*, 1988; Fraser *et al.*, 1985). While many of the young unemployed express oppositional and disaffected political views this hardly ever seems to translate into political activity (Banks and Ullah, 1988, 1987, 1986; Breakwell, 1985; McRae, 1987).

However the "exit" option is an important one among the young unemployed or those failing to make a successful transition and may potentially take a number of forms. Failure to get a job in the labour market of this State can result in a number of exit options of which two are perhaps the most important – emigration and labour market withdrawal by "discouraged workers" (Banks and Ullah, 1988, 1987).

Emigration has long been a common reaction to economic difficulties in Ireland and as we have seen it rose dramatically during the 1980s. While it is a complex phenomenon there is no doubt that labour market factors play a huge part in emigration decisions. Of course, these decisions differ for those with varying levels of educational qualifications and "saleable" skills, and for those with different socio-demographic characteristics. We do have data on emigration attitudes, intentions and decisions, however, which reveal some clear reasons for young people's emigration and how this relates to the success or otherwise of their transitions to adulthood (see Sexton *et al.*, 1991, Chapter 6).

Emigration is not the only reaction to poor labour market experiences, however. Some young people may not migrate even after continuous failures to get a satisfactory job locally, but may simply reduce their level of job-seeking or perhaps stop it altogether as their expectations of success are lowered (Banks and Ullah, 1988, 1987). The "discouraged worker" effect may take a number of forms. The anticipation of unemployment may lead to young people staying on longer at school than they would otherwise have (Raffe and Willms, 1989); and such growth in participation clearly occurred in Ireland in the 1980s. Young women are particularly susceptible to such labour market discouragement (Banks and Ullah, 1988). This may be partly reflected in increased educational participation but also partly reflected in the availability of alternative roles in marriage, or even single motherhood. However, such withdrawal into "home duties" should not be seen as an equally satisfactory solution to their problems –

young women want to work and be independent to almost the same extent as young men (Wallace, 1987d); so their "withdrawal" may be less a choice than a decision forced on them by circumstances – such as prolonged unemployment and youthful pregnancy, for instance.

Besides these immediate reactions to unemployment some researchers have argued, rather controversially, that there may arise also a "culture of poverty" or unemployment – a contra-culture which arises in networks or communities of interlinked families with very high and persistent unemployment rates, and low job-search and employment commitment levels; a culture or way of life which may be transmitted across generations where high unemployment rates persist. This goes further than the "discouraged worker" thesis in that a common identity and a common set of contra-cultural adaptive values emerge and stabilise. (See Lewis, 1959, 1961, 1966, 1968; and subsequent debates including Moynihan, 1965; Matza, 1966; Halsey, 1974; Wilson, 1987.)

Without going so far as suggesting such an inter-generational transmission of this culture Banks, Ullah and Warr (1984) suggest that there is some evidence of a "coping culture" among some young unemployed people (see also Banks and Ullah, 1987). They claim that young people out of work for long periods cope with unemployment through restricting their social networks to contacts with others in a similar position, where their meanings and feelings are less discordant than previously; forming a new shared identity and culture (beliefs, values and attitudes) with others who are in the same boat. It is hypothesised that this process results in reduced commitment to the labour market and that this in itself reduces stress and makes it easier to cope with the experience of unemployment. Binns and Mars (1984) have suggested that in such a situation there may be a legitimation of non-work-oriented relationships and activities.

However, such social group adaptations of values and lifestyles in order to cope with long-term unemployment should not be construed as providing as satisfactory a lifestyle as one provided by satisfactory employment. In fact the evidence suggests that young people from very deprived backgrounds suffer at least as much from the unemployment experience as do those from more advantaged families, and that while psychological distress may not increase any further after a certain period of unemployment or in certain contexts, it will stabilise at a level significantly higher than for those who are employed (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Warr and Jackson, 1987; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). This is reflected in the suggestion that "even close participation in a relatively closed subculture does not resolve uncertain role relations. And it leaves suspended the absence of a relationship to the world of work which traditionally provided not only male

status in the home, but also access to wider experience and knowledge than is available in the immediate community and locality" (Binns and Mars, 1984, pp. 686-687). Indeed, Payne (1987) has suggested that those unemployed youth from families with a long history of unemployment, and who have low personal expectations of gaining stable employment, may become a serious threat to social control.

To investigate these issues we need to examine:

(i) the extent of detachment from participation in the labour market, and alienation from other institutions and normal transition processes – such as family and household formation;
(ii) the extent and nature of the social networks in which young people are involved, and the incidence of unemployment among their peer groups;
(iii) the strength of individuals' commitment to the labour market, as revealed in their levels of work involvement; their job seeking behaviour, their attitudes and expectations toward work, and the extent to which they have become "discouraged workers" (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Ashton and Maguire, 1986); and
(iv) the effects of these differences at the personal level on feelings of "mastery" and "control" over one's life (conceptualised both personally and politically), and any reductions in psychological distress which might result from changed values or expectations, or other changes in social circumstances.

To the extent that such social and socio-psychological adjustment to persistent unemployment is a reality it will be important to assess to what extent this adaptation is motivated by a rational, pragmatic reaction to circumstances and, therefore, open to change as circumstances change (Roberts, 1983; Roberts, Noble and Duggan, 1984); or whether actual shifts in values and employment commitments occur – which are not equally open to change. The extent to which people from such a subculture are willing, or capable of taking up any new opportunities offered becomes a crucial issue here.

There are, therefore, a number of social and cultural strategies available to young people in situations of dependence arising from unsuccessful transitions. They may remain loyal to the system and try to operate successfully within its structures. They may protest against perceived grievances, and they may exit from the system – most importantly by emigrating or by withdrawing gradually from the labour force, perhaps into a "coping culture" of unemployment.

Unsuccessful transitions, in general, and the experience of unemployment in particular, do not only have such potential social effects, however, but they also have serious psychological and personal well-being effects. We now go on to consider these effects.

The Well-being Effects of Unemployment on Young People

We have seen that different transitions can lead to outcomes which vary widely in the degree of autonomy and satisfaction they give to the young people involved. We have also seen that satisfactory employment seems to be the key in many ways to successful transitions to adulthood. The relationship between different patterns of transition, especially differences in unemployment experiences, and the personal feelings of well-being of young people needs to be explored in detail.

Young people, however, are different from unemployed adults in a number of ways. They have, for instance, less financial strains and role pressures than the married middle-aged. However, they do face a series of very problematic role transitions, apart from the experience of unemployment itself, which could well be very stressful. In addition, employment provides a critical gateway to other transitions. To the extent that work fulfils certain intrinsic human needs and also provides access to adult roles, both adults and young people could suffer equally from unemployment. While all dimensions of the transition to adulthood are important we will concentrate here on employment – the crucial gateway to independent adulthood.

Jahoda's (1981, 1982; Jahoda *et al.*, 1933; Feather and Bond, 1983) work from the 1930s still remains one of the most important studies of the effects of unemployment. Her work emphasises that paid work has not only a number of obvious and direct effects on adult status and identity through income and earning a living, as well as through the quality and conditions of employment; but that it also has a set of indirect and, in many respects, more important personal and interpersonal effects. Paid (market) work puts not only a monetary value but also a clear and imposed time structure on daily and weekly, personal and social life. It facilitates, even enforces, regular contacts and interaction with other people, and mutually engages people in shared experiences of working and living together in, usually non-family, group contexts. It links, or groups, people together in the pursuit of common goals or purposes which, although usually in the context of an externally enforced labour contract, transcends each individual's personal preconceptions and worries. It also usually provides a valued social context within which individuals can use their individual skills and experiences in the attainment of collectively achieved goals – although

the main outcomes or fruits of that work again may well be appropriated by others outside the group. And finally, even if unwillingly engaged in, it enforces activity and requires that individuals test themselves against an externally imposed ("objective") standard of evaluation – ensuring continuous "reality testing".

Unemployment, on the other hand, leads to significant problems in the organisation and effective use of time. Both daily and weekly time use is now determined by the individual her/himself and is not structured by the external demands and rewards – except in so far as these are set by Social Welfare, or training agencies, whose enforced obligations are usually experienced as demeaning. It isolates people from each other – no occasion arises, except the weekly collection of unemployment benefits, in which people are collected together for a common purpose – at least not a socially prestigious purpose in any case. Unemployment, therefore, tends to induce a sense of purposeless and powerlessness in people; even one's income no longer depends on one's own effort. It increases uncertainty – even about one's status or standing with one's intimates and even about one's own self-definition. It removes the individual from valued, socially organised daily and weekly activity – the normal work-associated social system of socially evaluating and rewarding people in ways that transcend intrapersonal or intrafamilial preoccupations. And declining resources with prolonged unemployment cumulatively reduces social interaction with friends, as it does other social recreational activities. At the same time unemployment increases tensions and negative feedback in intrafamilial activities.

Warr (1987) has extended Jahoda's framework to various different elements of the jobless environment and analyses reactions to unemployment in terms of the presence or absence of each of the following nine opportunities or circumstances:

(i) opportunity for *control* over what happens to the individual;
(ii) opportunity for *skill use;*
(iii) opportunity to participate in socially organised activities with externally *generated goals and demands;*
(iv) opportunity to experience a *variety of lifestyles and experiences;*
(v) *environmental clarity,* i.e., information about the consequences of behaviour and about the future;
(vi) availability of *money;*
(vii) *physical security;*
(viii) opportunity for *interpersonal contact;* and
(ix) *valued social position.*

Warr's framework has the advantage of a stronger emphasis on environmental influences than Jahoda's Freudian theory of "need fulfilment" which emphasises "universal" benefits of work. However, such benefits are always mediated by the meanings attached to employment and unemployment in particular societies or in particular groups within an individual society. While psychological stress itself does seem to have a similar impact across various cultures (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Marsh and Alvaro, 1990; Whelan *et al.*, 1991) the same cannot be said of the experiences of employment and unemployment. The deprivations associated with unemployment are, at least in part, socially constructed and culturally variable; and while the distressing impact of unemployment does seem to be universal – at least in "Western" – culture this impact can be significantly affected by the prevalence of a societal work ethic (Marsh and Alvaro, 1990) among other factors.

The national analysis of the impact of unemployment in the context of diverse patterns of transition to adulthood is, therefore, essential as "the effects of unemployment do not occur in a vacuum, but within particular economic and physical environments" and, more specifically, "the way in which an individual responds to being unemployed must be assumed to be significantly affected by the level of provision which his (or her) society makes for its unemployed, and by the conditions on which that provision is available to them" (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985, p. 8).

Warr's formulation of the environment and mental health relationship is also valuable in that it can be applied to situations outside of work or unemployment and thus be used to formulate hypotheses as to the possible stress effects of other aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as the environment generated by teenage marriages or teenage pregnancies, for instance.

Given the account above of the stress environment and how it is socially mediated we can see that there are a number of ways in which different social groups can suffer to a greater or lesser extent from: *exposure* to unemployment, *vulnerability* and *economic hardship* (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). Clearly some social groups will be more at risk of unemployment than others and this will be described in our analysis of patterns of transition in Chapters 3 and 4. The vulnerability of a particular group is the way in which individuals in the group typically respond to the experience of unemployment, and how vulnerable they are to stressful reactions. These two aspects of the differential social impact of unemployment are not mutually exclusive by any means and both comprise essential elements of the explanation of the consequences of unemployment for youth. A third important aspect is the economic hardship and financial strain caused by

unemployment which has been shown to have a strong detrimental effect on psychological health both among the population as a whole (Whelan *et al.*, 1991; Whelan, forthcoming, 1994) and among young people (Ullah, 1990). However this may be less important for young people as they tend to have less financial commitments and responsibilities – especially while in their teens (O'Brien, 1986; Warr and Jackson, 1984; Warr, 1987). On the other hand, however, psychological effects may be more serious amongst young people in their developmental process of assuming adult statuses/roles. The late adolescent development stage is clearly frustrated by unemployment – particularly in achieving an independent occupation or employment status on which so much of adult identity and status is founded (Donovan, Oddy, 1982; Gurney, 1980).

Warr (1987) claims that while unemployment does damage young people's affective well-being it is the social role problems of autonomy, competence and aspirations which are, and should be, of greatest concern to the public. While the aspirations of the young unemployed appear to remain relatively stable "the harmful impact of teenage unemployment on autonomy and competence is likely to be substantial" (Warr, 1987, p. 228), as lack of money and independent accommodation decreases autonomy and competence is impaired by the lack of learning activity and challenges. We have also already seen how unemployment might be hypothesised to "desocialise" young people and create a "culture of unemployment" and alienation which could have very serious long-term consequences.

It may be that the disadvantages of the young unemployed are not due to any deterioration in their own pre-existing situation but to the denial of the benefits of satisfactory employment to them (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985, 1989a; Gurney, 1980; O'Brien, 1986). Winefield and Tiggemann (1985) claim that the effects of leaving school tended to be beneficial on a number of measures even where the alternative was unemployment. Gurney (1980), however, has observed improved psychosocial development only among the employed while finding no change among the unemployed, and he concludes that "unemployment has the effect of inhibiting development in school-leavers, rather than of inflicting trauma as is commonly supposed" (1980, p. 212). In this study we have measures both of psychological distress and of personal self-assessed autonomy and competence, so we will be able to assess the relationship between of each of these processes and various labour market situations.

Of course, conventional social categories such as social class, gender and urban/rural backgrounds are "carriers" of different experiences and resources, and these may have significant mediating effects on unemployment experience. We will review shortly what these differing

material and cultural resources and life experiences might be. For the moment, however, we can conclude that unemployment is likely to have a significant depressing effect on the well-being of youth, but that this effect will be mediated to varying degrees by socio-economic, cultural and social-psychological factors.

Explaining Unemployment and Psychological Distress

A useful starting point for building a model of the psychological effects of unemployment is to view the concept of stress itself as having three major conceptual domains (Pearlin *et al.*, 1981; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). These are the *sources* of stress, the *mediators* of stress and the *manifestations* of stress. We will comment briefly here on each of these domains before examining them in greater depth later on.

The *sources* of stress are of course extremely diverse but it is an aim of this study to assess the effects of various aspects of the transition from adolescent to adult life as sources of stress, focusing particularly on "failed" transitions – most particularly unemployment. Of course, the concept of "unemployment" itself can mask a variety of different situations. Therefore, we need to take into account various patterns of labour market participation. "Sub-employment" may be so common in certain areas that an unemployment rate of 20 per cent at any one time can actually translate into a much wider experience of periods of unemployment among the young people of that area (Roberts, Noble and Duggan, 1984). There are, therefore, important distinctions to be made between those who are so "sub-employed" and those who are long-term unemployed and almost completely detached from the labour force (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groat, 1989; Roberts, 1983).

The nature of employment may differ significantly by occupational type and status, and this may affect the psychological impact of unemployment (Roberts, 1983; Roberts, Noble and Duggan, 1984; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). Youth training schemes also, while much criticised, do appear to fulfil some of the psychological functions of employment (Breakwell, 1985; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). However, those in "home duties" – predominantly if not exclusively women – do seem to suffer relatively high levels of stress (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). High levels of domestic tension can be intensified by the challenge to traditional roles that can occur with unemployment, as well as by the economic stress associated with such unemployment (Binns and Mars, 1984; Whelan *et al.*, 1991).

Two aspects of unemployment whose psychological stress implications have been investigated are the effects of job loss, as opposed to failure to find work at all, and the effects of the duration of unemployment. As

regards the former it would appear that it is current unemployment which is crucial and not the reason for it as there would appear to be no significant differences in distress between the two groups (Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980; Winefield and Tiggemann, 1989a, 1989b).

The orthodox interpretation of the effects of the duration of unemployment since the pioneering research of Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938) has been that of the "stages theory" which claims that there are three main stages of the unemployment experience. These are:

(i) shock, followed by an active and optimistic job hunt;
(ii) pessimism, anxiety and active distress on the failure of repeated job seeking efforts; and
(iii) fatalistic adaptation to unemployment.

However, the evidence on this issue is extremely inconsistent. Recent studies suggest that there is an immediate deterioration of psychological health which tends to stabilise after 3 to 6 months, but may improve subsequently (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Fryer and Payne, 1986; Warr and Jackson, 1984; Winefield and Tiggermann, 1989b). Whelan *et al.*, (1991) in an Irish national study of the effects of unemployment find a gradual decline in psychological health for those unemployed up to 3 years, particularly severe effects on those in their fourth year of unemployment, but a subsequent decline for those unemployed for more than 4 years. There may, however, be problems with the measurement of distress after such long periods of unemployment, the "General Health Questionnaire" (GHQ) measure used is based on the individual's idea of "normality" – of departure from how one feels normally. This concept or standard of "normality" may shift significantly over a long period of unemployment. However, previous experience of unemployment did not appear to have any significant effects on current distress levels; so, it appears to be the current experience of unemployment which is particularly distressing, with minor duration effects (Whelan *et al.*, 1991).

The *mediators* of stress are also diverse and their effects on the psychological impact of unemployment can be complex. They are, however, very important as they constitute ways in which the individual can attempt to cope with the sources of stress to which he or she is subjected. Among the more important mediators are the social and material commitments of the individual concerned such as the extent of their *role commitments* and of *financial stress* and *strain;* aspects of the individual's immediate social milieu – such as the peer groups and *reference groups,* the extent of social contact and the nature and perceived availability of *social*

support from various sources; and, personal values and orientations, such as *commitment to employment,* feelings of *personal control* or powerlessness and the individual's *causal attributions* for unemployment – or the extent to which young people blame themselves or "the system" for their unemployment. We deal with each of these factors in more detail later, but it is clear from research that they have significant mediating effects on the level of distress caused to young people by unemployment, or even in some cases by other "failures" in the transition to adulthood. (See Whelan *et al.,* 1991 for more detailed discussion.)

The *manifestations* of stress are taken in this study to be "psychological distress", and we use the General Health Questionnaire to assess the levels of this distress. We will discuss this measure in a later chapter.

Our identification of the sources, mediators and manifestations of stress does not answer all the relevant questions necessary to build a model of the hypothesised relationship between unemployment and stress because – although higher levels of anxiety, distress and even depression have been isolated amongst the unemployed – the causal direction of influence is not necessarily from unemployment to declining senses of well-being. The effect may equally be the other way around, with those most subject to anxiety, distress and depression being most likely to become, or stay, unemployed. A large number of longitudinal studies, however, have shown a clear time sequence from unemployment to increased distress, as well as from unemployment associated distress to improved health and well-being upon again achieving employment. Entering unemployment clearly increases distress and anxiety symptoms; but these again decrease when people re-enter work. (See Warr *et al.,* 1988, for review; Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Banks and Ullah, 1987; Banks, Ullah and Warr, 1984; Banks and Jackson, 1982).

Unemployment, therefore, is clearly a stress inducing life event, increasing depression, anxiety and distress. It is an unwelcome, unscheduled event which decreases individuals' control over their own lives. Such social-psychological effects do not appear to necessarily increase with length of unemployment, and they appear to disappear relatively rapidly as soon as people re-enter work again.

If the research literature is clear on the direction of unemployment/ illness effects this is not the case as regards the causal direction of influence of the mediating factors. These factors generally tend to be stable, existing before the experience of unemployment, and, therefore, mediate its impact; but some may also be affected by the unemployment experience. For example, certain levels of social support are available to the individual on becoming unemployed, but the fact of being

unemployed may itself lead to a reduction in the social support available through, for instance, the increased restriction of social contacts or the declining strength of social networks.

A number of researchers have argued that some of the mediating factors discussed above operate also as predisposing factors to unemployment as well as, or even instead of, acting as mediators of unemployment; or may even be effects of unemployment. Loneliness, an external locus of control (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985), high stress, lower activity and competence (Feather and O'Brien, 1986), low need achievement ratings (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985; Feather and O'Brien, 1986) and lower employment commitment (Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980) have all been identified as predictors of unemployment among young people while they were still at school. However, this is a very controversial issue and there is much evidence to the contrary. Tiggemann and Winefield (1989) present a further analysis in which they identify socio-demographic and educational variables as important in predicting unemployment but find no significant effect beyond this for personality or attitude variables. While a longitudinal design would be necessary to settle this issue, in our study we will try to account for each of these "mediator's" simultaneous relationships with socio-demographic and labour market factors, as both possible "causes" and "effects", within the limits of our cross-sectional measurement of the attitudinal and stress-related variables.

We have now outlined the importance of the sources, mediators and manifestations of psychological distress, and discussed the direction of the causal influences between them. The role of the main socio-demographic background variables has also been emphasised. These will be essential components of our formal model of relationships. Indeed it is one of the strengths of our study that we have measured and can incorporate these various types of factors into our analysis. Before finalising our model, however, it is also necessary to examine more closely the nature of the mediating factors involved.

Factors Mediating the Effects of Unemployment on Mental and Emotional Health

As we noted above there are three major types of factors which mediate the personal well-being effects of unemployment. These are:

(i) *social and material commitments:* including role commitments and financial strain;

(ii) the *immediate social environment:* including reference group effects and the availability of social support;

(iii) *subjective orientations:* including employment commitment, causal attributions of unemployment and sense of personal control. Other attitudes such as those towards the labour market and towards emigration are also relevant but will not be discussed in detail here.

We will now deal with each of these factors in turn.

(i) Social and Material Commitments:

(a) Role Obligations

The extent of family and other role commitments and responsibilities is likely to be an important factor. Those people with more onerous role obligations to others – such as through marriage to spouses and parenthood to children – are likely to suffer much greater distress than others, particularly the young unattached still resident at home (see Carlson *et al.,* 1989).

Domestic tensions are likely to arise from the challenge to the traditional male role of breadwinner (Binns and Mars, 1984; Carlson *et al.,* 1989). However this can be experienced differently by those in different positions in the family. Whelan *et al.* (1991) show that wives tend to show distress at their husband's unemployment to a significant extent only when this has the effect of causing severe economic stress. Increasing number of dependants should also increase strain for the unemployed.

(b) Financial Strain

Economic strain rather than role commitment appear more important to most young single people, not surprisingly given their lower average level of role obligations to others. Sheehy-Skeffington (1985) reports the main complaint of the young unemployed as being a lack of money, and Whelan *et al.,* (1991) show the crucial effect of economic stress in explaining the effects of unemployment on psychological distress among adults. Among young people Ullah (1990) suggests an important detrimental effect on well-being for subjectively-experienced financial strain and claims that "low income contributes to poor psychological well-being and spurs greater effort to find employment only if it is subjectively experienced as insufficient to meet one's everyday needs and desires" (Ullah, 1990, p. 328). Severe financial hardship among the young unemployed is, therefore, likely to be most prevalent among those who are married with children.

While financial strain and role commitments may be less of a worry for the young – particularly single – unemployed than for those who are middle-

aged, it should be remembered that those young people suffering the greatest financial strain now are also likely to be those most at risk of failing to make a satisfactory transition to working life, and so be more likely to suffer from financial worries right through their adult lives (Breen, 1991; Breen and Shortall, 1992). Given this wide variation in the social situation of young unemployed people it will be important to try to dissect the various aspects of the relationship between their levels of adult role responsibility, their unemployment experience and their sense of well-being.

(ii) Local Social Environment:

(a) Reference Group

"Reference groups effects" – that is the expectations and standards of evaluative reference, arising from membership in current, or aspired to, groupings – would seem very likely to influence unemployed youth in their attitudes and evaluations. There are likely to be significant differences in attitudes, for instance, between individuals who are in high unemployment networks (of family or friends, etc.) and those who are not. Such social-psychological group effects, while a necessary condition for the emergence of any "culture of unemployment" would not of themselves, however, constitute such a contra-culture. It is, however, a distinct possibility that unemployed youth who are mainly in contact with other unemployed people would develop a common identity and common methods of dealing with the stresses of unemployment. If this were to occur the resultant social and cultural adaptations would lead us to expect lower levels of overt anxiety, distress and depression in such contexts amongst such unemployed young people (Warr, 1987).

However there are clear counterbalancing possibilities – alienation shared may well be alienation amplified. If work deprivation has such a serious effect in "normal" societal conditions – where it is a minor but a clearly unscheduled and unwelcome event – there is no reason to believe that it would not be equally as unwelcome to young people seeking jobs for the first time in family and community contexts where unemployment is the normal pattern amongst parents and older siblings. The widespread presence of unemployment in one's environment does not necessarily help one to cope with the quite dislocating and status depriving effects elucidated by Jahoda *et al.* (1932) and Jahoda (1982). Banks, Ullah and Warr (1984), while finding some evidence of the growth of a subculture of unemployment point out that the presence or absence of such "social effects" is far less distressing than the direct personal impact of unemployment on the individual. We might thus expect some, but weak,

mediating effects of the individual's own membership groups.

(b) "Social Support"

The clear perception or secure belief, and associated feelings, that one can depend on "significant others" (spouse, friends, relatives, etc.,) for social-emotional and material help when in trouble reduces psychological distress; and has been clearly shown to mediate the likely effects of unemployment on mental health (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Banks, Ullah and Warr, 1984; Ross and Mirowsky, 1989; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). So variation in such support will have a correspondingly variable influence in either reducing or inflating the effects of unemployment.

If prolonged unemployment, on the other hand, reduces such social support – and there is some clear evidence that it does – the effects of unemployment could become more psychologically damaging over time. However, variation in such social support is expected to be mainly explainable in terms of socio-cultural background, i.e., social class of origin, size of family, rural or urban origins, and extent of mobility of individuals. In this respect family and kinship supports are likely to be particularly important – rather than peer groups or neighbours. Females also are likely to have more of such support than males (Banks, Ullah, Warr, 1984), and the mother-daughter tie seems to be particularly important (Binns and Mars, 1984). So single males separated from their families of origin are likely to be most at risk.

Social support itself comprises a number of elements. We can distinguish between the *level* of contact or social isolation, and the *nature* of those contacts and of the support offered through them. While high levels of social contact increase the probability of fulfilling and supportive personal relationships they do not guarantee it (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). Indeed social isolation may not be a significant problem for the young unemployed as there is some evidence that social contacts actually increase on becoming unemployed (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Warr, 1987).

Mirowsky and Ross (1986) argue that the objective density of a person's social contacts is better thought of as social integration than as social support, because such relationships need not necessarily be supportive; nor can we assume that the optimal level of contacts is the highest one. Indeed very high levels of social contact and obligation may impose greater social strain on people (Whelan, 1992c).

The nature of the support offered can also vary. Material/instrumental or socio-emotional support appear to be the most important types. Banks and Ullah (1988) say that financial help, and having someone to suggest something interesting to do were the most valued types of support offered;

although emotional support was also important, particularly for women. Both instrumental and emotional support have clearcut positive effects on mental health among the adult unemployed in Ireland (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). However, not all social contacts are supportive and the unemployed can come under some pressure to change their situation (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Binns and Mars, 1984; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). This will tend to come mainly from family, especially it would appear on the wife's side (Binns and Mars, 1984). For the young person, however, the crucial relationship is likely to be with his/her own parents; who may, however, alternate between sympathy and irritation (Sheehy-Skeffington, 1985). That family networks are mechanisms of both support and control (Wallace, 1987a; Allatt and Yeandle, 1986; Binns and Mars, 1984) is a crucial aspect of the environment of unemployment and shows the care that must be taken in interpreting measures of social support.

While it does seem that "support" should be treated as a pre-existing variable which is expected to mediate the damaging well-being effects of unemployment (see Thoits, 1984) this effect may only operate under certain conditions. For instance Whelan *et al.* (1991) argue that the direct independent effect of social support on well-being is minimal, but that its "buffering" effects are highly significant in circumstances of high deprivation; i.e., that its effects are highly interactive.

The availability of appropriate social support has what is essentially a contingent mediating effect, therefore. This is proposed to work not only because of the external interpersonal help that actually results, but also because of individuals' confidence, or security in the belief, that such emotional and material support will be made available. This increases self-confidence and self-esteem, and security in identity, and helps to maintain a sense of mastery and control (see Pearlin *et al.*, 1981; Thoits 1984; Mirowsky and Ross, 1986).

Social support is clearly an important mediator, not only of unemployment, but of many stressful life events and situations. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the distress or otherwise caused by an unplanned pregnancy, youthful marriage or housing problems could also be mediated by the levels and types of social support available.

(iii) Subjective Orientations:

(a) "Employment Commitment" (or "Work Involvement")

This is an attitude of attachment, or commitment, to the intrinsic value and meaning of work roles in one's life. It can be distinguished from "intrinsic job motivation" which is the degree to which a person wants to work well in a specific job in order to achieve intrinsic satisfaction (Stafford,

Jackson and Banks, 1980; Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). It can also be separated to some degree from specific ideologies of work, although, of course, closely related to them at the individual level. Such ideologies can be extremely important to the experience of employment and unemployment. For instance, Marsh and Alvaro (1990) explain the greater dissatisfaction among the unemployed in Britain than in Spain in terms of a stronger societal work ethic in Britain. The extent to which ideologies of work vary by class and employment experience has been widely investigated (Blackburn, 1988), as has the varying value of manual work to working class youth (Willis, 1977).

However, our measure can best be construed in terms of a generalised commitment to the value of work in the individual's life. Thought of in these terms research has almost consistently found that those with such higher "work commitment" suffer more when they lose their jobs; the higher the commitment the greater the anxiety and depression on becoming unemployed (Banks, Ullah, Warr, 1984; Banks and Jackson 1982; Warr *et al.*, 1988; Feather, 1990; Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Marsh and Alvaro, 1990). Work, or employment commitment, therefore, acts as a modulator – which leads to greater distress when unemployed; and greater life satisfaction and less stress if employed (see Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980).

It also seems clear that employment commitment tends to stay relatively high even during long periods of unemployment (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Banks, Ullah and Warr, 1984; Furlong, 1988; Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980; Warr, 1987; Warr and Jackson, 1984); and there is some evidence that unemployed young people tend to be quite intransigent in their job expectations and aspirations (see Roberts, 1983 and O'Brien, 1986 for a conflicting view). However, job seeking does tend to decline over time and, as we have seen, some authors suggest a "discouraged worker" effect whereby repeated failures to gain employment result in an effective withdrawal of the individual from the labour market although desire for employment may remain just as strong as ever (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Banks, Ullah and Warr, 1984; Binns and Mars, 1984; Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Roberts, 1983; Noble and Duggan, 1984; Warr and Jackson, 1984).

Young people may be less committed to the intrinsic value of work, given their lack of role and financial responsibilities (Roberts, 1983; Warr and Jackson, 1984); but this is likely to change with increasing age and familial responsibilities: more a life cycle than a generational effect.

"Employment commitment" has been treated by some authors as a pre-existing social-psychological characteristic of individuals which predates unemployment – primarily explainable in terms of primary socialisation in

one's family and home community. It then obviously becomes crucial to look at the extent to which employment commitment varies along different socio-demographic dimensions – some obvious influences being social class, gender and marital status (Roberts, 1983; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). Low employment commitment in this sense has been seen as a possible predisposing factor towards unemployment (Feather, 1990; Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980). However, it is equally likely to decline as an adaptive social-psychological reaction to repeated failures to find a job. In this case, of course, over time its declining significance will lead to a consequent decline in the induced stress effects of prolonged unemployment. Furlong (1988) has argued that employment commitment is affected, not just by home and school socialisation, but also by habituation to the work role by full-time employment; and that the greatest difference in employment commitment is not between the employed and the unemployed but between those who had held a full-time job at any stage and those who had not.

Employment commitment is clearly then an important modulator of the distress effects of unemployment and will be used as an important variable in our analysis.

(b) "Causal Attributions" for Unemployment

The extent to which people believe that high unemployment, and specifically their own individual unemployment, is due to structured or cyclical economic or political factors and not to their own individual failings or incompetency, is likely to have significant effects on how they react to the experience of unemployment (see Brown, 1987, pp. 7-22). Such essentially political or ideological beliefs may be "exogenous" – pre-existing from politically or economically generated family and communal ideologies, or membership of political parties of the left. On the other hand, given their wide currency, they may also be taken on, *post hoc,* as ideological rationalisations following unemployment. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to separate out the independent ideological from the rationalisation bases of such beliefs, but their presence and strength are likely to have significant modulating consequences for the social-psychological effects of unemployment.

Unemployment is claimed by Feather and O'Brien (1986) to cause a shift towards more structural explanations of unemployment, but the literature here is somewhat inconclusive. Feather (1990) points out that causal attributions are often organised to protect the positive view of the self held by individuals in very difficult situations. Those who are employed or in full-time education seem to blame unemployment on personal and

motivational factors (thus taking the credit for their own position), and the unemployed tend to blame their plight on structural factors so "blaming" others. Breakwell (1985) reports that the young unemployed blame themselves for their own unemployment, but the state of the economy for overall levels of unemployment. Structural attributions predominated among the unemployed young people in Ireland interviewed by Sheehy-Skeffington (1985), with the educational system receiving much of the blame for not providing proper preparation for the world of work. He also reports that these young people were unable to provide themselves with an adequate analysis and definition of their own situation and were cushioned from the full impact of their disadvantaged employment situation by this ignorance of their long-term prospects.

If unemployed people's causal attributions – for example, to structural causes – are arrived at wholly rationally one would expect them to vary systematically by objective labour market position, and also to be associated with personal feelings of fatalism. However the evidence is that this is not the case (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). So it would appear that the degree of separation between attributions of overall and personal unemployment, and the ideologies associated with each, is extremely important.

While it has been argued that structural attributions of unemployment may lead to increased personal despair and distress (Banks and Ullah, 1988) it seems more probable that when individuals' beliefs about the "causes" of unemployment are basically personal – due to their own inadequacies – it is likely that the well-being effects of unemployment will be more serious; and where these beliefs refer to external and political "causes", the social-psychological effects are likely to be displaced and less severe personally.

(c) Control

Control and "powerlessness" are linked social-psychological concepts. In negative terms they refer to a sense or feeling of powerlessness, or perceived lack of control over one's own life and over what happens to one. This "learned helplessness", or inability or lack of capacity to achieve goals, and of agents and events outside one's knowledge and control determining what happens to oneself, has a long history in the sociological literature (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986; Seeman, 1959, 1975).

It has been proposed as a primary and basic social-psychological characteristic of individuals. At the negative pole it is seen as arising out of the deprived resource base in poor families and out of their limited opportunities and restricted choices. This is particularly likely to occur in families with high and persistent unemployment in lower working class families. Here, even where employed, jobs have very low autonomy, with

little control over conditions of work, and where wages are largely unresponsive to effort. Those economic and social conditions lead to a family culture of fatalism, powerlessness, and incapacity to act to address one's problems. The opposite economic and social conditions – those common amongst the upper middle class for instance – lead to high self-direction and control (see Seeman, 1959; 1975; Kohn and Schooler, 1982). In the Ross and Mirowsky (1989) review "control" is proposed as a "protean" personality variable which is mainly determined by primary (early childhood) socialisation.

However, a lack of such feelings of "control" is reinforced by the experience of unemployment through increased feelings of "helplessness" (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985). Winefield and Tiggemann (1985) also found, however, that an "external" locus of control – i.e., feelings of low personal control – was a predisposing factor towards unemployment.

The notion of "control" or, put negatively, "fatalism" as a basic personality characteristic has been challenged by other researchers as "levels of fatalism appear to be extremely responsive to current employment situations and socio-economic circumstances rather than being largely independent of such factors, as might be expected of an enduring personality disposition": not analysable as relatively fixed, independent personality variables which can be taken as exogenously given, but rather in the context of changing economic and social circumstances (Whelan *et al.*, 1991, p. 121). The notion of "fatalism" is complex, however, and it seems to be more than merely a rational response to the individual's perception of the prevailing circumstances, as it does not seem to be related to the individual's causal attributions of unemployment (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). This may be explained by Breakwell's (1985) finding that unemployed youth tended to blame structural factors for overall levels of unemployment but blamed their own inadequacies for their personal experience of unemployment, as we saw above. There may also be an intermediate category of "realists" who believe that some situations are amenable to their control while others are not (O'Brien, 1986; Feather, 1990).

The level of "control", "fatalism" or alienation felt by unemployed young people would then appear to be due to a complex combination of factors. Most important amongst these are the resources available to them from their social background (social class and gender being crucial distributive mechanisms here), their experience of unemployment and present socio-economic circumstances, and the extent to which public and personal causal attributions coincide. That unemployment itself affects the level of "control" felt by the individual is clear from research evidence that the social identity of the unemployed is learned in a labour market context of perceived

powerlessness (Breakwell, 1985), that the psycho-social development of the unemployed is impaired by feelings of inferiority towards those who are in employment (Gurney, 1980), and that unemployed young people tend to feel less positive towards themselves than their employed counterparts (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989). Winefield and Tiggemann (1985) find a significant gender difference related to schooling experience, as those females who go from school to unemployment show an increase in feelings of helplessness while their male counterparts show a decline – due to higher levels of helplessness/alienation while at school.

If "control" is taken as a pre-existing basic personality characteristic then it would appear that any association between it and unemployment is due to selection effects; i.e., those with low control tend to become unemployed more easily. However, if we accept that feelings of control are more malleable than this (and here the evidence conflicts) then we will see such feelings at least partly caused by socio-economic and employment circumstances, and as a mechanism by which unemployment can cause psychological distress. The extent to which people recover their sense of control under improved circumstances is also crucial to the arguments about the detrimental effects of a subculture of unemployment which we discussed earlier.

As a mediating variable on unemployment effects, however, people with a high sense of control, for whatever reason, are less likely to be affected by anxiety and depression; while those with a lack of confidence in their own ability to determine their own life chances will make less effective coping effort (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986). They are much less likely to engage in active problem solving – isolating reasons/causes for unemployment and devising some means to cope with or overcome difficulties. Such a growing sense of helplessness leads on to higher anxiety and depression. Whether treated endogenously or exogenously, therefore, "control" is an important mediating variable.

Summarising Models of the Social and Psychological Effects of Youth Unemployment

We have now discussed most of the relevant research literature on the social and personal well-being consequences of youth unemployment.

Earlier in this chapter we examined the factors leading to variation in the rate of "success" in transitions to employment and associated adult roles, as well as the relationships amongst various dimensions of that transition. In the latter part of the chapter we examined in detail the literature dealing with unemployment – a "failed" transition which has critical consequences for the attainment of other desirable adult statuses; and with the factors which mediate its serious health and welfare effects.

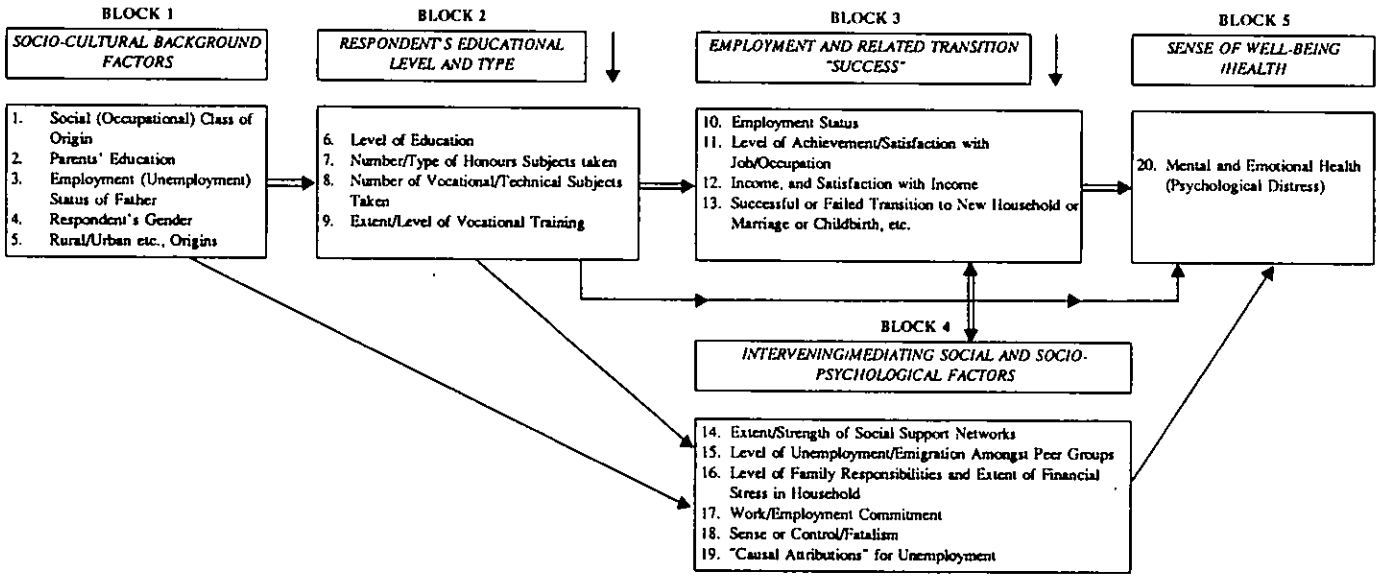
The following simplified "block model" (Figure 2.1) is proposed as showing: (a) the most important factors likely to lead to educational attainment (Block 2), as well as success or failure in the transition to employment and associated adult roles (Block 3 variables); and (b) social and socio-psychological factors which intervene to mediate the effects of unemployment (Block 4) on (c) the psycho-social health of the individual and his/her ability to function normally and effectively in the society. A "block model" such as this allows for correlations, though not direct causal relationships, amongst the variables within each block, and hypothesised causal relationships between variables in separate blocks (see Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980). In this case it is used as a clarifying conceptual tool to help draw together and clarify our thinking about the factors bringing about success and failure in transitions to employment and associated adult roles, as well as factors which might mediate, or modulate, the most serious personal consequences of failures in such transitions.

Block 1 contains social-background variables which are given, or ascribed, characteristics of individuals over which they have no control. They are highly predictive of level and type of education (Block 2) as well as of certain socio- psychological characteristics of individuals (Block 4) which are hypothesised to mediate unemployment effects. But such social background factors are also expected to have a direct effect on unemployment chances (Breen, 1984b) independent of educational achievement, etc.

Block 2 refers to educational attainment – level and type. Such educational attainment effects both translate and mediate the main effects of social background variables on employment and occupational attainment chances. Such variables are partly endogenously, and partly exogenously, determined.

Block 3 refers to transition success, mainly current employment or unemployment, but also including length and periodicity of unemployment and level of occupational (status) achievement. Patterns of family and household formation – "successful" and "unsuccessful", – are closely associated with such employment variables. Unemployment/ employment chances are hypothesised to be mainly affected by educational/training attainments but also to a limited extent by social-background factors. Such employment and other transition attainments are also influenced by the "mediating" social and social-psychological factors. These effects are reciprocal, or mutually interactive, with employment itself likely to have a significant effect on the "mediating" factors. Employment or unemployment chances are, however, likely to be also partly exogenously determined.

Figure 2.1: *Block Model of the Hypothesised Effect of Youth Unemployment on Social and Cultural Alienation*



Block 4 variables are the main "intervening" or modulating social network and social psychological variables previously discussed. They are expected to be reciprocally related to employment experience, etc., and to be partly determined by Block 1 and Block 2 variables – although mostly exogenously influenced. Their presence, strength and nature significantly modulates the effects of "failed transitions" on individual's health status, etc.

Block 5 contains the main dependent variable – the mental-emotional health status of respondents. This is hypothesised to be mainly influenced by employment/unemployment status, independent of all background and intervening variables. However, it is hypothesised that it will also vary according to "success" along other dimensions of the transition to adulthood. The severity of the effects of unemployment, and other failed transitions, however, are likely to be sensitive to certain social-psychological and social resource characteristics of individuals – mainly levels of "control", "work commitment", and "social support".

Aims of this Study

This study aims to tell the story (or stories) of young people's experiences in trying to become adults in Ireland during the 1980s – in a period of very high levels of youth unemployment. We will first examine what factors influence the success of their transitions into the labour market and independent family and household statuses. Secondly, we will examine the well-being consequences, in terms of both social and personal well-being, of success or failure in transition. The range of our data and our broad approach allows us to analyse young people's transitions in both a contextual way, paying full attention to the socio-demographic and structural context of young people's experiences, and dynamically, examining their educational and labour-market histories. It is clear from our review of the research evidence that the *most* important factor influencing successful transitions is employment or unemployment. In the following we briefly summarise the main research questions explored in this study.

Basic Research Question and Tasks of the Study

1. To describe and provide an understanding of the various patterns of integration of school leavers into the labour market, and independent household formation. Both a "1 year" and "5 year" period of post-school transition is to be studied.
2. To describe the changes in patterns of integration over the 1980s as unemployment rates grew rapidly. Our 5 year follow-up study of school leavers from 1981/82 will, therefore, be analysed in the context of rapidly declining employment opportunities over the

decade. The extent to which rising unemployment became concentrated in particular social and educational groupings will be studied in detail.

3. To describe the relationship between levels of success (or failure) in employment and occupational attainment and the mental and emotional health and well-being of school leavers. These relationships will be analysed in terms of the young person's socio-demographic background and educational history.
4. Remaining in an unemployment status is not the only response to persistent unemployment. A minority – particularly of young women – retire altogether into "home duties" or other non-paid (family) employment statuses. Others leave the labour force, "discouraged" by continual job-seeking failures. What the relationship is between unemployment and such labour force withdrawal patterns, and what the other characteristics of such "retirees" are, will be studied in some detail.
5. We will examine the extent to which individuals concentrated in certain social groups, which are particularly disadvantaged in terms of labour market position and chances of making a "successful" transition to adult working life (and may have withdrawn from the labour market) display high levels of distress and of alienation from the major societal institutions. The extent to which such groups form a "subculture" or "anti-culture" of unemployment will also be investigated.
6. Controlling for all relevant background and concurrent variables, we will isolate some of the more important social-psychological effects of unemployment – particularly feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. In addition we will isolate the extent to which certain "intervening variables" influence, or modulate, the effect of unemployment on mental and emotional health. The "block model" in Figure 2.1 above illustrates the nature of relationships analysed.
7. We will also, at every stage of the analysis, examine closely the effect of gender as a crucial discriminating factor in the nature of transition pathways chosen by, or effectively forced upon, young people.

Such an analysis should give us a relatively good picture of the main patterns of transition from school to work and adult life, the main factors determining "success" or "failure" in these transitions and their main effects on individuals' well-being.

Chapter 3

"GETTING A JOB AND MOVING OUT": DIFFERENCES IN PATTERNS OF ESTABLISHMENT OF ADULT STATUSES AMONGST SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE MID 1980s

Introduction

In this chapter we present the first part of our analysis which describes the main patterns of transition of young people from school and adolescent dependence on parents to their gradual economic and household independence as young adults. We will also attempt to provide an understanding of the nature of that transition and the reasons why, in what is always a difficult transition, young people vary so much in their transition patterns.

We will first examine the movement into jobs and the pattern of success in getting jobs. The relationship of such employment experience to gender, level of education and remoteness or rurality of place of origin, will be examined in detail. Secondly, the extent to which new households are established by young people, and the relationship of this to employment experience will be examined. About half of all school leavers were, however, still at home in 1987 – 5 years after leaving school.

In the process of establishing a new and separate adult identity many young people not only leave home but also leave their home community in order to find an acceptable and secure living in other, usually more urbanised, communities. So internal migration and emigration has also to be examined as part of a strategy used by young people to establish an independent adult identity. As we shall see it is a quite specialised option, being most characteristic of those better endowed with personal and familial resources. Whether young people have stayed or moved out from their original home depends not only on economic factors but also on gender, and whether they have had to move out from their home community to secure a suitable job; i.e., whether successful job seeking required migration. Moving to another residence within one's local community up to the age of 22-23 is not usual; even for those with well established jobs locally it appears to be greatly delayed. And for those staying locally but who are unemployed moving out is even more unusual. Marriage, however, appears to require, or justify, such local residence

movements. So, "moving out", employment search and its successful location, are closely interlinked processes; with gender and educational and occupational aspiration/attainment levels being very important in distinguishing amongst the different patterns of transition. The relationship of employment transition to new household formation, migration and emigration is the second main theme explored.

The third theme is marriage and childbirth, and their relationship to gender, education, employment and migration. Conventional marriage, however, is not the only patterned way to childbirth and childrearing roles – other living-together arrangements and single parenthood have also become more usual and although still rare appear to be quite patterned. The third, and final section of this chapter, therefore, will deal with marriage and parenthood, and analyse their relationships to employment and migration.

Employment and Unemployment

Movement from a family dependent school or pupil role to an employed and economically independent role is the most crucial development stage in most young persons' progress to independence. Success in job search, and gaining a satisfactory job and income, provides the necessary resources and security to establish other desired adult transitions: to an independent residence and household, to establishing stable adult heterosexual relationships and eventually (in most cases) to marriage and children. Failure to get a job, or a good and secure job, means that individuals cannot acquire the resources necessary to establish an adult independent status: i.e., leaving home and establishing a separate household, or establishing a stable heterosexual relationship and assuming a stable/secure parental role, etc.

Unemployment amongst young school leavers, therefore, particularly persistent unemployment, not only has serious psycho-social implications for individuals (see Chapter 2) but also brings about serious and stressful blockages toward establishing an independent adult status: i.e., economic independence, an independent residence, and a socially accepted – even prescriptive – adult heterosexual and parental role.

Since one of the main discriminators affecting ability to find employment and establish a new household is level of education (see Breen, 1984b, 1991; Hannan, and Shortall, 1991) this will be one of the main discriminating variables used to describe the "life chance" potential of young people in the following analysis.

Figure 3.1(a,b,c) summarises the main "employment status" experiences of male and female school leavers from the 1981/82 cohort for the 5 year period up to November 1987. (Appendix Tables A3.1 to A3.3 contain the

Figure 3.1a: *% of School Leavers Employed in 1983, 1984 and 1987, by Level of Education*

Figure 3.1b: *% of School Leavers Unemployed in 1983, 1984 and 1987, by Level of Education*

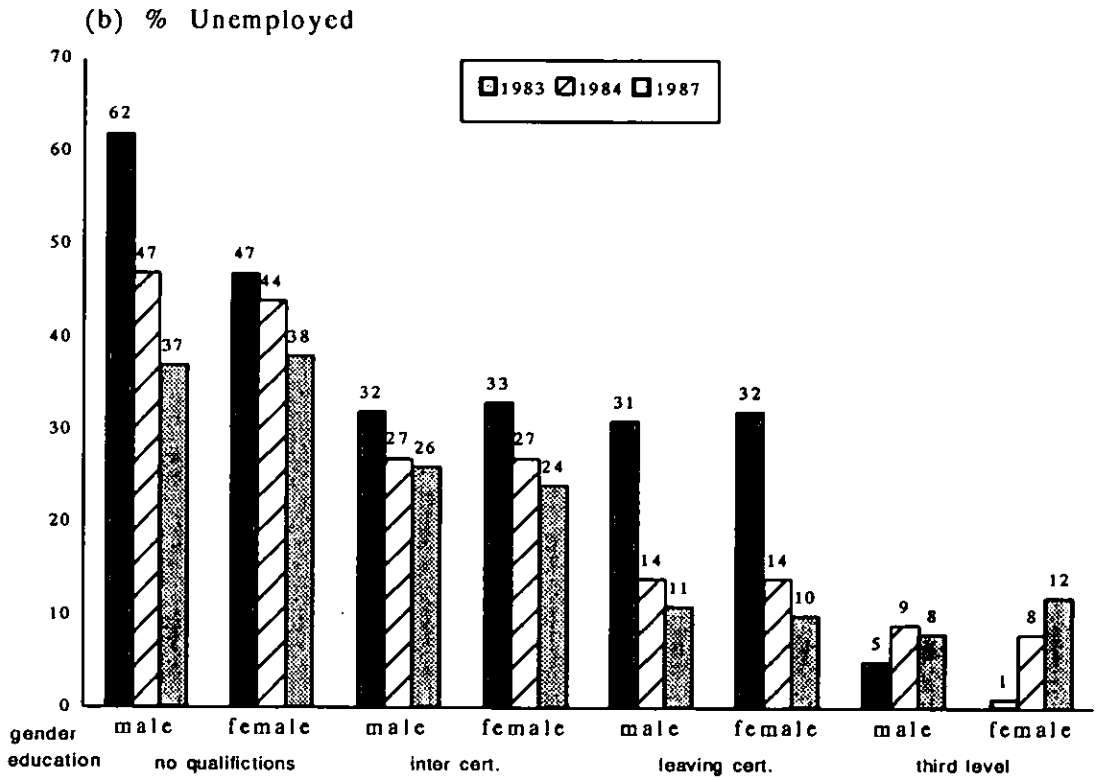
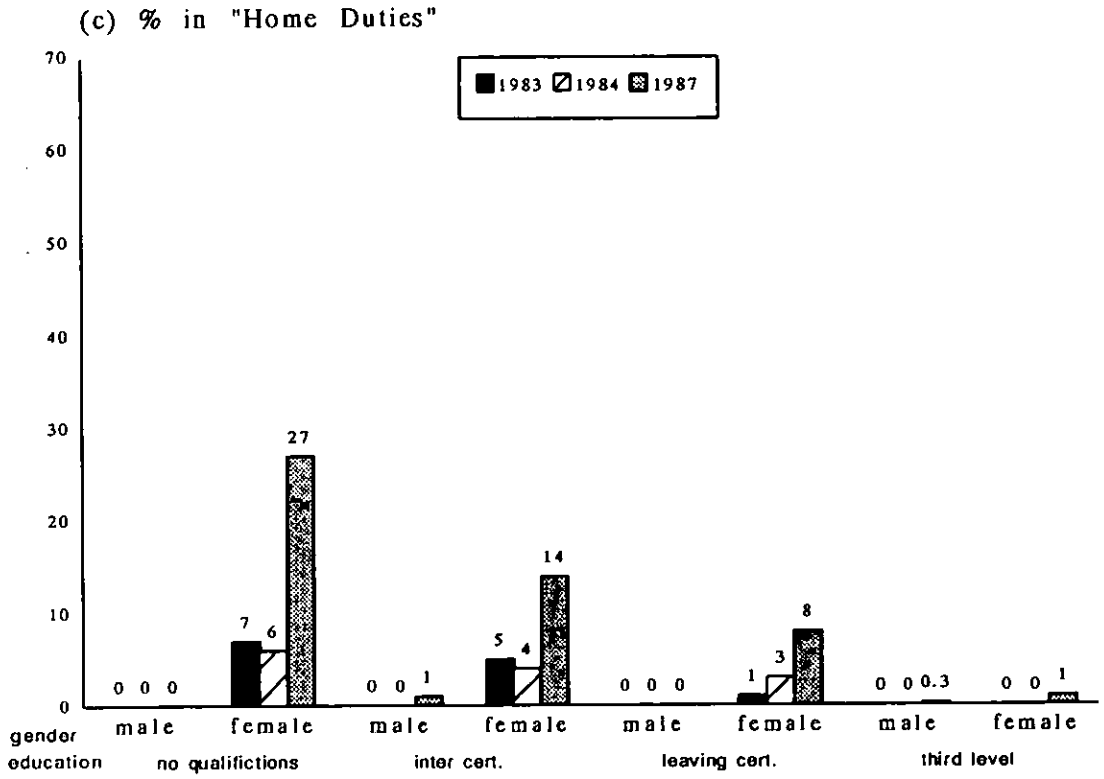


Figure 3.1c: *% of School Leavers in "Home Duties" in 1983, 1984 and 1987, by Level of Education*



detailed statistics.) Entry to the labour force was direct for almost all those not going on to third-level education in 1982/83, with third-level entrants gradually qualifying to take up jobs over the subsequent 3 to 5 years.

In the first year out of school employment chances are highly correlated with educational level. Only a third of those with "no qualifications" got a job compared to 56/57 per cent of those with a Leaving Cert., with very slight differences between males and females. Over time these employment inequalities by educational level become much more pronounced – particularly for females. In their case the percentage of those with "no quals", or poor junior cycle qualifications who are employed, actually declines over time; while the percentage employed of those with the Leaving Certificate increases significantly. Since the female unemployment level actually declines over time (See Fig. 3.1 (b)) their main status increase is in "home duties" (see Fig. 3.1(c)). A much higher proportion (27 per cent) of young unqualified women have withdrawn from the labour force within 5 years; but very few (less than 2 per cent) of those with third-level qualifications have done so. So quite obviously the "transition to adulthood" shows quite distinct gender pathways for the less qualified even in their first 5 years in the labour force.

For males, however, there is a clear pattern of increasing absorption into employment over time; with the percentage employed increasing even among the unqualified from 32 to 63 per cent, and from 57 to 88 per cent for those with a Leaving Cert. The percentage unemployed at any single date (1983, 1984 or 1987) also declines continuously, with the proportions never employed declining to 2 per cent of the total cohort by 1987 – from 23 per cent in 1983! So most of the unemployed at the later period had previously been employed for some period. For the unqualified, or the poorly qualified, however, these periods of employment had been generally shorter and of much poorer quality than the better qualified (See Breen, 1991 for details). The reverse, of course, is also true as many of those recorded as "employed" at a particular date will also have had some personal experience of unemployment at some period in their labour force history.

The "percentage unemployed", however, is not a good indicator of the actual unemployment rate since the denominator includes people not in the labour force – like "students", people who are ill or are in "home duties" etc. Table 3.1 shows the actual percentage unemployed for those actively in the labour force – the actual unemployment rate.

If we exclude third-level entrants in 1982/83 – who only seriously started to enter the labour force from 1985 onwards – there is an even clearer bias in the pattern of unemployment by educational level. The unqualified, particularly females, show very little change in their high unemployment

rates; though for poorly qualified males there is a substantial decline in unemployment. For male and female respondents, with junior cycle qualifications the unemployment rate declined by between a quarter to one-third respectively between May 1983 and late 1984, and thereafter remains rather stable. For those with a Leaving Certificate, on the other hand, the unemployment rate had declined by two-thirds by 1987 for both sexes. There is little change between 1984 and 1987 in the unemployment rate – most of the absorption adjustment had already occurred by late 1984. However, the current unemployment rate is not a good indicator of overall unemployment experience and a significant decline had occurred between late 1984 and late 1987 in the proportion of school leavers who had never been employed – particularly for the early leavers. So there had been a considerable number of movements in and out of employment in the latter period (see Breen, 1991 for details). Integration into employment was well developed among the better qualified but poorly developed and insecure among those with poor qualifications.

Table 3.1 *Unemployment Rate for Males and Females in 1983, 1984, 1987 by Level of Education and Gender (No. Unemployed / by No. Employed plus No. Unemployed)*

	Educational Level 1983						
Unemployment Rate	*1 No Quals*	*2 Group Cert*	*3 Inter Cert*	*4 Inter Cert +*	*5 Leaving Cert*	*6 Third-Level Entrants*	*Total (N)*
1983			*– Unemployment Rate (%) –*				
Male	66.0	42.5	34.1	40.9	35.5	46.9	40.6 (569)
Female	52.0	45.8	35.4	32.5	36.3	10.5	37.0 (598)
1984							
Male	49.1	33.3	28.0	27.9	14.2	30.5	25.5 (619)
Female	50.0	18.2	28.3	25.6	14.4	31.1	21.7 (641)
1987							
Male	36.8	29.9	27.3	22.4	11.3	8.1	18.5 (785)
Female	52.4	21.7	28.9	18.2	11.0	13.5	16.6 (711)

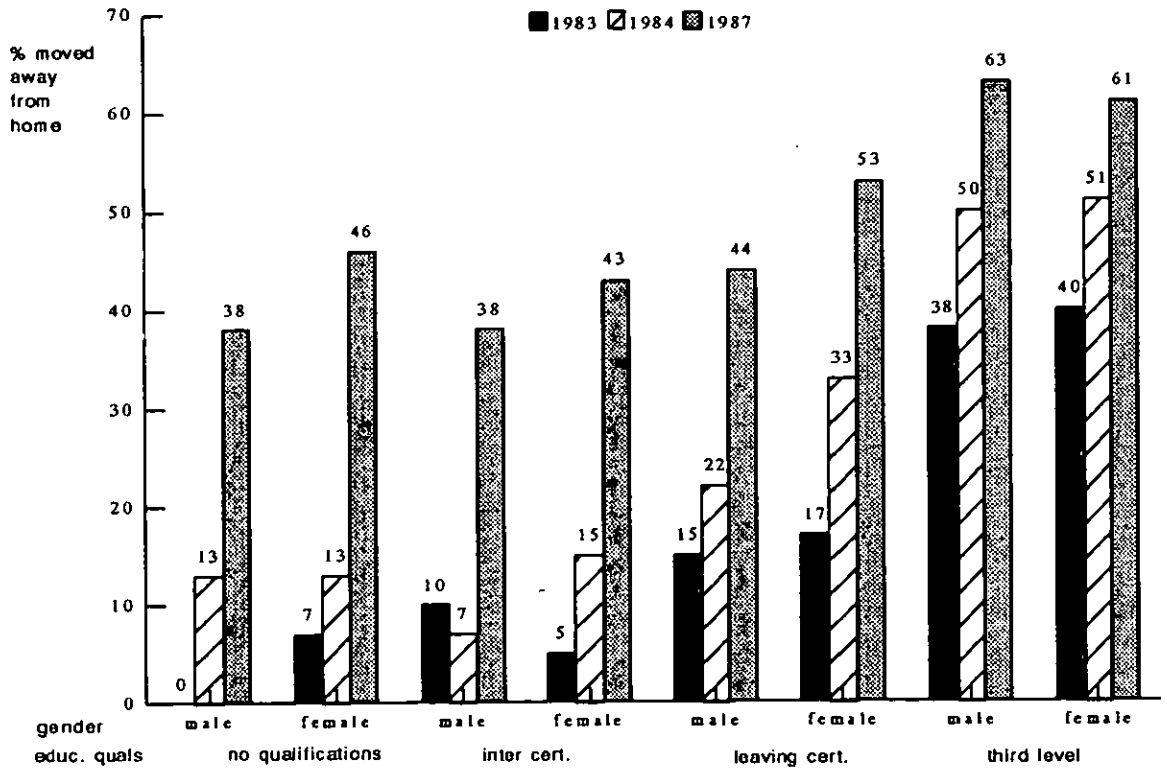
"Moving Out": New Household Formation Amongst Young Adults

Leaving, or escaping from, home to establish a separate household, often as far away as possible from one's parents, is a greatly desired objective of many young people. At the same time there has clearly been a considerable extension of parental home dwelling amongst young people – partly as third-level education has expanded, but also even amongst young working people: to the point indeed where many parents complain about the aggravating reluctance of their older well-established offspring to leave the parental nest. But moving out demands resources – mainly a good job. Getting such a good job, however, may also require one to leave one's local community – to migrate to another part of the country, for instance; or even to emigrate. The two processes of job search and residential movement are, therefore, closely interlinked, largely through the social and spatial structure of the labour market for certain types of jobs and skills. They will be examined together in this section. First the actual process of moving out is examined in detail in Appendix Table A3.4 – for three periods: May 1983, November 1984 and late 1987; and the main trend of the results is graphed below in Figure 3.2. The relationship of such a movement to educational level and gender is described.

Except for those groups going away to third-level colleges, and those with a Leaving Certificate taking up non-manual jobs away from home, there is very little movement out of the parental home in the first year out of school. For those entering third-level, around 40 per cent had left home. And for those with a post-Inter Cert qualification between 15 to 17 per cent had left home – mostly to take up jobs away from the home locality. Almost all of those with lower level qualifications had stayed at home. So, in the first year out of school – except for out-migration due to third-level entry, or post-Inter Cert leavers with non-manual jobs away from home – there is very little movement out. For those with no qualifications there is almost none. In the first year out of school, therefore, there is a very clearcut relationship of leaving home to level of education – the higher the level the greater the movement.

By 1984, however, movement away from home had considerably increased – particularly for females and especially among those with a Leaving Certificate qualification. By the end of 1984 almost a third of young women had left home, mainly to migrate, compared to 1 in 4 of young men. The underlying factor bringing this about appears to be the nature of recruitment to, and the geographical concentration of, clerical type occupations into which most of these young women with Leaving Cert qualifications were moving.

Figure 3.2: *Percentage of Male and Female Respondents Living in Separate Households, in 1983, 1984 and 1987 by Level of Education*



By 1987 – over 5 years out of school – around half of the cohort had left home. The differences by level of education are somewhat less marked than earlier. Between 35 to 45 per cent of those with junior cycle qualifications had left, up from less than 10 per cent in 1983. Between half to two-thirds of those with post-Inter and Leaving Cert qualifications had left, up from less than 20 per cent in 1983. And around two-thirds of third-level entrants had left, up from less than 40 per cent in 1983. The mobility of the less qualified, therefore, had to some extent caught up with that of their more qualified peers.

Apart from the effects of education, there is also, as one would expect, a clear relationship between employment status and leaving home, as can be seen clearly in Table 3.2 below (see also Table 3.3 and Appendix Table A3.5).

Table 3.2: *Percentage of Respondents Left Home by Employment Status and Year*

% Left Home by Year	*Employment Status*				*Total*
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Student*	*Other**	
			– % Left Home –		
1983	16.5	3.8	36.1	17.1	18.1
	(714)	(450)	(429)	(35)	(1,628)
1984	24.0	9.8	58.1	65.5	27.9
	(961)	(295)	(265)	(29)	(1,550)
1987	49.7	28.6	70	95.2	49.2
	(1,210)	(259)	(60)	(84)	(1,614)

* Other = Mostly "Home Duties".

Being a third-level "student" is strongly associated with moving out – from 36 per cent in the first year out of school to over 60 per cent in the fifth to sixth year (1987) (Table A3.4). This increase is primarily due to a more selective or elite group of third-level students who have spent at least 5 years in university and increasingly in locations which require migration.

Employment itself is closely related to "moving out" – but only after 3 to 4 years. Even then it is unusual to move out of home if employed locally: the ratio between living at home and living in a separate local household is 5 to 1 in favour of home (see Appendix Table A3.6). So it is mainly migration which accounts for such moving out – particularly as more and more of the cohort enter the labour market having completed third-level education.

However, migration itself does not account exclusively for the relationship between employment and new household formation as can be seen in Table 3.3 which shows the combined effects of gender, education and employment status on leaving home. By 1987 the relationship between employment and leaving home had become more clearcut: those with jobs were much more likely to have left, particularly those with higher levels of education. Around 40 per cent of the poorly qualified who were employed had left home compared to around two-thirds of those with third-level education (See Row 1, of Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: *The Relationship between Educational Level, Gender, Employment Status and Leaving Home, by 1987*

		Educational Level					
		No Quals	*Group Cert*	*Inter. Cert*	*Inter. Cert +*	*Leaving Cert*	*3rd Level*
(1) *Of those Employed*				%			
% Left Home:	Male	42.7	38.6	40.7	42.8	46.4	63.2
	Female	32.3	42.3	40.8	64.5	50.7	62.2
(2) *Of those Unemployed*							
% Left Home:	Male	33.3	12.5	26.4	50.0	26.9	56.3
	Female	27.3	25.0	19.2	0	39.0	31.2
(3) *Of those at Home*							
% Employed:	Male	57.8	62.3	67.4	77.0	84.6	78.3
	Female	44.1	83.4	61.5	63.7	85.9	71.4
(4) *Of those at Home*							
% Unemployed:	Male	42.2	36.5	30.9	23.0	14.6	8.4
	Female	48.4	16.7	35.6	36.3	12.7	20.6
(5) *Of those in "Home Duties"*		–	–	–	–	–	–
% Left Home:	Female	87.9	100	91.8	100	96.7	100

The unemployed were much more likely to stay at home, or to return home if they had migrated and lost their jobs; and in this case there is no clear relationship to educational level. But because there is a much higher unemployment rate amongst the poorly qualified they make up a substantially greater proportion of those who stay at home. For those without qualification who have stayed at home, for instance, around 45 per cent are unemployed; whereas from those with a Leaving Cert who have

stayed at home around 14 per cent are unemployed. So besides the individual experience of unemployment amongst the poorly qualified there is the additional disadvantage of persistent dependence, as well as the higher probability of living in households with much higher rates of unemployment.

So, underlying the movement away from home are four quite discriminatory processes. First, there is required movement to obtain third-level education, and secondly to get certain white collar jobs. This is due to centralisation of educational institutions and to geographic concentration of white collar jobs, and to the fact that a "national recruitment market" exists for these non-manual positions. This labour market sector operates to a far greater extent on universalistic achievement principles than the manual or service sectors – mainly based on examination results. In both cases such "national market" factors have their main impact within 1 to 2 years after leaving school. When third-level entrants graduate the concentration of the professional, technical and managerial occupations is even more geographically extreme; and the general labour market in which such qualifications can be exchanged for jobs is much wider than for Irish second-level qualifications.

So the higher "home leaving" tendencies of the third-level educated are primarily due to their much greater migration propensities, and impact mainly 3 to 4 years after school leaving. Differentiations in job search strategies, therefore, and in access to geographically differentiated labour markets, are very closely related to moving out of home and town.

Besides migration, however, a third more social-developmental process is at work: the tendency, or need, to establish a separate and financially independent residence as an essential part of establishing adult status and identity. This does not appear to have any great effect until young people are at least 4 to 5 years out of school.

Finally, the assumption of "Home Duties", mainly but not exclusively due to marriage or childbearing home-duties, is also very highly associated with taking up a separate residence, particularly for those who had become employed in the home locality. Over 90 per cent of those in "home duties" have left the parental home (Row 5, Table 3.3). Almost all of the married move out immediately. Indeed it is mainly the growth of marriage and "home duties" (for females) which accounts for local household movements – but this we will examine later. It appears as if local household independence is an unusual occurrence for single young people – even for those with good jobs locally.

So for those who stay in the home locality, it appears as if there are very few independent households established within the first few years of

leaving full-time education. Such an independent household is, of course, required of migrants. But if one does not migrate it appears to be justified only by marriage – at least up to the age of 21/22.

Remoteness, Employment, Further Education and Movement Away from Home

In the first year out of school migration mainly occurs in order to get a third-level education or to get a non-manual job. In these cases, as we have seen, the main reason why one has to migrate is either because there is not any third-level institution locally, or because of the small size and restricted nature of the local labour market. In both cases size of place, and distance from larger urban places – like Dublin or Cork – in which third-level institutions and large and more elaborated labour markets are located, are the main variables affecting such early migration. A "size distance" measure of place of origin of the second-level school attended was constructed with distance from Dublin or other large (25,000 +) places as the main discriminator.[2] The measure represents a close approximation of the "size-by-distance" characteristics of the local community of origin. The following tables show a very close relationship between this measure and migration.

[2] Remoteness is measured using a modified "size/distance" approach to represent both the size of place in which respondents lived while at post-primary school, and the distance of that place from larger urban or metropolitan centres: its overall centrality or remoteness.

$$R = 100 \sqrt{\frac{1}{P_1}} \times \sqrt{\frac{D_1}{P_2}} \times \textit{(Co. Remoteness Index)}$$

where P_1 = size of place in which school is situated.
D_1 = Distance to nearest town of greater than 3,000 population.
P_2 = size of nearest town.

The county remoteness index (county in which nearest town of over 3,000) is located is computed by the following formula:

$$C_R = 1 + \sqrt{\frac{D_2}{P_3}} + \sqrt{\frac{D_3}{P_4}}$$

P_3 = Population of Dublin.
P_4 = Population of nearest "regional" centre (i.e., greater than 25,000).
D_2 = Distance to Dublin.
D_3 = Distance to nearest regional centre.

Table 3.4 shows a very close correspondence between remoteness, employment, further education and movement from home. Clearly employment means leaving home for those young people from remote places with few employment opportunities. Looking at the first year out of school (1983) it is evident that almost all employed people from Dublin stayed at home whereas this was true for only 67 – 75 per cent of those from the most remote rural communities. On the other hand, almost all the unemployed were still at home – irrespective of size or remoteness of place of origin. If one could not get a job locally one either stayed at home unemployed or migrated. Upon migration one succeeded in getting a job or else returned home if one became unemployed.

Being a full-time "student" (mainly third level) means leaving home if not from those communities with third-level institutions. But these are not now as geographically concentrated as they were in the larger urban areas – viz. Tralee or Letterkenny. Nevertheless, if from Dublin, Cork or Galway all such full-time students can stay at home, and most do. But less than half such students from the remoter rural areas can do so. So, in the first year out of school two discriminating factors are at work – the need to migrate to find acceptable employment, and the need to move to attend full-time educational (primarily third level) courses. Both factors are roughly of equal significance. The unemployed either "stay put" or else return home.

By 1987, 5 years out of school, the pattern of movement out of the parental home is both clearer and yet more complex (Table 3.4). Amongst the employed there is a much clearer relationship to remoteness – as the third-level educated enter the labour force, and more and more of the previously unemployed find work. Only around 1 in 4 of the most remote employed were still resident at home, whereas almost two-thirds of those from Dublin were still at home. The main destination of movers was not local independent residence but internal migration or emigration.

In other words, successful job search locally still had not generally led to independent local residence; but where successful job search required migration "moving out" was inevitable. Successfully employed Dubliners still remain the most "stay-at-homes". So, seeking to establish a local independent residence, where it appears feasible, is clearly not a strongly motivating urge amongst these young people – at least not up to 21-23. On the other hand, it may well be that in terms of parental expectations such a locally autonomous residence is not easily socially attainable. Indeed some researchers have suggested that an important underlying reason for migration may well be the justification it gives for escaping from the parental nest. However, if that were so it is a peculiarly

distributed migration motive – it clearly does not affect Dubliners, and has an extraordinary resonance amongst the most remote localities!

Table 3.4: *The Percentage of Respondents still Resident at Home in 1983 and 1987 by their Employment Status and Level of Remoteness of Place of Origin.*

		Employment Status				
Remoteness	*Year*	*Employed*	*Unemployed*	*Student*	*Home Duties + Other*	*Total (N)*
			– *% Still at Home* –			
(1) Dublin	1983	97.4	99.2	93.4	85.7	97 (391)
	1987	63.1	77.6	73.0	5.9	62.8 (385)
(2) Other Larger Cities/Towns	1983	84.1	94.6	57.9	66.7	77.4 (350)
	1987	47.0	66.7	20.0	4.9	47.2 (344)
(3) Smaller Towns (Central)	1983	80.9	97.7	69.6	100	83.2 (327)
	1987	46.0	72.9	0	0	48.3 (321)
(4) Small Towns or more Remote Larger Towns	1983	74.7	100	54.7	80	75.3 (174)
	1987	54.2	68.2	0	0	50 (172)
(5) Small Towns (Remote)	1983	80.5	93.3	54.0	0	75.0 (129)
	1987	47.1	77.8	0	0	48.2 (126)
(6) Very Remote Small Towns in less Remote Open Country Places	1983	67.0	88.9	46.5	100	72.2 (147)
	1987	45.0	55.6	0	22.2	44.4 (143)
(7) Very Remote Small Town or Rural Areas	1983	74.8	96.2	43.9	100	70 (110)
	1987	28.3	92.9	33.3	0	34.5 (110)

Significantly fewer of these unemployed in 1987 relative to 1983 reside at home; though in all areas substantially more so than amongst the employed for all areas and all educational levels. Unemployment still has a clear immobility effect which does not vary significantly by remoteness of the locality of origin or level of education.

The proportions who had left home by 1987 – predominantly migrants – are much greater than in 1983, though only amongst those from outside Dublin and particularly those from the more remote and smaller communities is the majority living away from home: with up to two-thirds of those from the most remote rural communities having left the nest. Dubliners, in fact, are the least "liberated" in this sense, with about two-thirds still at home.

Having examined the relationships of remoteness and employment status to patterns of leaving home we now look at the effects of education. Table 3.5 shows a very clear relationship between level of education (in 1983), remoteness of origin and movement. The only consistent relationship observable between remoteness and movement out of home is that for Leaving Cert and third-level entry respondents in 1983 or 1987. Between a half to two-thirds of the most remote respondents entering third level in 1983 had left home. The relationship to "remoteness" is not linear, however; mainly because of the wide regional spread of the Regional Technical Colleges. Some larger and more central places have no such institution, however, and so have high third level out-migration rates from them.

The relationship of remoteness to leaving home for those with a Leaving Cert is not as clearcut. Nevertheless between 30 – 40 per cent of the most remote had left home by 1983 compared with around 2 per cent of those from Dublin. The main reason for the higher movement amongst the former is because of the disproportionate locational concentration of white collar jobs in Dublin or the other larger urban areas – jobs which generally require a Leaving Cert qualification (see Hannan, 1970; Sexton *et al.*, 1991).

There is no clear pattern for other educational levels – at least in the first year out of school; although in all cases the highest proportion of home birds is amongst Dubliners. They do not have to leave. However, this is only by May 1983 – for the first year out of school. The situation may be quite different by 1987; by which time "job search" is likely to have extended far outside the boundaries of one's local community.

By 1987 the relationship between educational level, remoteness and movement away from home had not become any clearer for the most poorly qualified – there being very little difference between the most and

least remote in their propensity to move. With some exceptions the more highly educated were far more likely to have left at almost all remoteness

Table 3.5: *Percentage of Respondents Still Living at Home in May 1983 and November 1987 by their Level of Education and Remoteness of Place of Residence in 1981/82.*

Remoteness of Region of Origin	*Year*	*Level of Education, 1983*						
		1 No Quals	*2 Group Cert*	*3 Inter. Cert*	*4 Post Inter Cert*	*5 Leaving Cert.*	*6 Third Level Entry*	*Total*
		– *% Still at Home* –						
1. Dublin	1983	91.2	100	98.0	100	97.9	92.2	97.0 (391)
	1987	41.8	76.2	67.3	45.0	66.6	58.6	62.9 (386)
2. Other Cities and Large Towns	1983	93.4	96.0	94.0	89.0	81.3	54.5	77.3 (350)
	1987	51.9	64.1	46.3	62.3	47.3	38.1	47.2 (344)
3. Smaller Town (Central)	1983	88.8	100	96.3	91.1	79.5	70.9	83.2 (350)
	1987	49.1	68.1	63.0	49.7	50.1	26.9	48.2 (321)
4. Small Towns or more Remote larger Towns	1983	89.9	100	83.1	91.0	80.0	48.8	75.2 (174)
	1987	83.2	85.4	35.2	78.5	53.1	25.4	49.8 (173)
5. Small Towns (Remote)	1983	100	100	78.9	74.7	75.2	55.7	75.0 (129)
	1987	59.7	60	77.9	43.1	44.9	37.4	48.2 (126)
6. Very Remote Small Towns in less Remote Open Country Places	1983	100	78.8	84.9	87.7	61.0	57.5	72.2 (147)
	1987	55.2	41.0	52.8	56.1	40.0	31.8	44.1 (144)
7. Most Remote Rural Areas	1983	100	100	100	95.8	70.9	38.6	70.0 (110)
	1987	67.3	87.8	68.7	38.8	20.8	30.4	34.5 (110)

levels. For those with a Leaving Cert and third-level qualifications the relationship to remoteness had become much more pronounced over time; with the most remote being twice to three times more likely to have left home than the least remote i.e., Dubliners. In other words for those qualified to enter lower non-manual, managerial or any professional jobs the market is geographically quite biassed – with most jobs concentrated in highly urbanised places. Over time the migration effects of this geographically concentrated pattern of non-manual jobs had become more pronounced.

So, in general, the most highly qualified and most remote respondents are not only the most likely to leave home early, but over time this biassed tendency increases markedly.

Migration, Emigration and Job Search

In the first year out of school two factors are of significance in residential movement as we have seen – migration for third-level education, or migration for white collar employment; both being due to the locational concentration of opportunities, as well as the existence of an open standardised "national market" in access to these opportunities. As a result of this "spatial mismatch" between educational qualifications and employment opportunities young people with the necessary high educational credentials for third-level entry or the many clerical and lower managerial occupational opportunities in the larger and bureaucratically organised firms (i.e., Banks, Insurance Companies, central or local authorities, etc.) are disproportionately migrant.

As we have already seen the remoteness of place of residence is also closely related to household movement – and as we can see from Table 3.6 this relationship holds for all 3 types of movement – intra-county, inter-county and emigration; although the relationship to emigration holds only for 1987.

For 1983 there is almost no household movement for Dublin respondents while at the other extreme around 30 per cent of the most remote respondents had left home. Local household movement as such – within one's home parish or town is, therefore, minimal in the first year out of school. Intra-county movement – mostly again for the same reasons – increases from only 1 for Dubliners to 6 per cent for the most remote respondents. It is internal migration mainly that accounts for extra household movement in 1983 – with emigration being only at 1.2 per cent overall, and intra-county movement limited to 3.7 per cent (Table 3.6). Such movement is almost exclusively due to, or appears justified by, the necessity to migrate and would appear to be linked to the participation of

those with Leaving Cert qualifications in third-level education and in the national white-collar jobs market. Household independence then is initially only brought about by migration as we have seen, with strong family-household attachments still holding in the first year out of school. Because this is so the tendency, or opportunity, to leave home is extremely limited for Dubliners – the only large urban area in Ireland. It is, of course, very developed and very historically rooted in the remoter rural communities – although the difference between them and the larger and less remote towns is not very great, at least in the first year out of school.

Five years out of school, however, migration out of one's home county has become a normal pattern for the most remote respondents – for 37-52 per cent of the two most remote types of communities shown in Table 3.6 (columns 6 and 7). In the case of the most remote communities – this is mainly accounted for by emigration (34 per cent). But for most others, including Dubliners, up to 21 per cent had already emigrated by 1987 – with, in fact, few differentials between places except for the most remote.

Table 3.6: *Percentage of Respondents Who Have Left Home and (i) Live in Local County, (ii) Are Inter County Migrants, and (iii) Who Are Emigrants in 1983 and 1987, by Level of Remoteness of Place of Origin*

		Remoteness of Place of Origin							
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*Total*
Migration/Movement	*Year*	*Dublin*	*Cork Limerick etc.*					*Most Remote Rural Places*	
					– *% Left Home* –				
(1) Within County of origin	1983	0.6	4.2	2.7	4.0	5.0	9.2	6.2	3.7
	1987	8.7	15.4	16.0	15.7	8.2	18.9	13.5	13.5
(2) Inter-County (Irish) migration	1983	1.8	17.6	12.9	18.1	18.4	17.9	21.5	13.3
	1987	7.3	16.2	15.3	13.8	15.9	12.2	17.9	13.2
(3) Emigration	1983	0.6	0.9	1.2	2.7	1.6	0.7	2.3	1.2
	1987	21.0	21.1	20.5	20.7	27.7	24.8	34.1	22.5
No.	1983	391	350	327	174	129	147	110	1629
	1987	386	344	321	173	126	144	110	1617

Excluding the Dublin born, internal migration – mainly to Dublin itself – holds for around 1 in 6 of all respondents from all places of origin, with few differences by remoteness. Interestingly in aggregate terms almost all internal migration had occurred in the first year out of school. But, as already indicated, a substantial proportion of that initial migration was due to third-level education. But as these completed their courses they tended to move again – internally or externally, their migrant "places" taken by the later internal migration of mainly Leaving Certificate respondents primarily seeking white collar jobs. At least for this cohort, therefore, emigration is quite a delayed option – as little change had occurred between May 1983 and Nov. 1984. Most respondents were 3-5 years out of school before they started to emigrate – though their internal migration had started almost immediately on leaving school.

The propensity to migrate and leave home varied also by educational level and career path – so both mobility variables show a clearly differentiated pattern of home leaving and migration as can be seen in Table 3.7.

First, it is obvious that there is very little migration, or home leaving, at all by May 1983 amongst those with less than a Leaving Certificate – irrespective of remoteness of place of origin. For those with a Leaving Cert there is a clear overall relationship to remoteness – with Dubliners showing little if any migration or local movement, with up to 19 per cent of those from other larger urban areas leaving – mostly as "internal migrants"; and between 30 to 38 per cent of those from the most remote smaller communities migrating – mostly but not exclusively as internal migrants. As already indicated most of this is due to job related factors. For third-level entrants between one-quarter to one-half had migrated from their home community – with local variations due mainly to the distance from third-level colleges (see Clancy, 1988 for effect of distance on third-level attendance.) Overall, however, the main relationship is to educational level not remoteness, if one excludes Dublin where there is very little migration of any kind.

By 1987, however, for each level of education migration increases consistently with remoteness – and the higher the level of education and the smaller and more remote the locality of origin the greater the rate of both internal migration and emigration. So the lowest rate of total migration is amongst the most poorly educated in Dublin or other large urban places (22-25 per cent), and the highest rate is amongst third-level graduates from the most remote smaller communities (65 per cent).

Internal migration rates to other counties remain relatively unchanged between 1983 and 1987 – indeed they decline somewhat for third-level graduates as they finished their courses and migrated elsewhere, usually emigrated.

Table 3.7: *Percentage Respondents who are Locally Mobile (in Home County), Internally Migrant (to Other Irish Counties) or Emigrant, by Educational Level and Remoteness, for 1983 and 1987*

Level of Education by Residential Movement in 1983, and 1987	*Remoteness* 1 *Dublin*		2		3		4		5		6		7 *Most Remote Rural Areas*	
	Year 1983	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*	*Year 1983*	*1987*
						%								
(1) *Pre Leaving (1983)*														
Locally Mobile	0	15.0	4.3	22.3	0.8	18.9	3.8	13.5	8.9	9.3	4.8	10.3	0	12.9
Inter County Migration	1.4	6.4	4.3	7.1	3.2	5.7	7.5	5.8	6.7	2.3	6.5	8.6	0	6.5
Emigration	0.7	17.1	0	15.2	3.2	18.9	0	17.3	0	30.2	0	27.6	0	22.6
(N)	(143)	(140)	(115)	(112)	(124)	(122)	(53)	(52)	(45)	(43)	(62)	(58)	(32)	(31)
						%								
(2) *Leaving Certificate* (1983)														
Locally Mobile	1.1	4.6	5.6	17.3	3.4	16.0	2.5	15.5	3.0	10.0	13.8	30.1	9.9	20.5
Inter County Migration	0	7.2	10.6	16.2	16.4	16.2	11.7	10.6	18.5	20.0	23.6	11.8	15.1	15.6
Emigration	0.5	21.6	2.5	19.1	0.6	17.7	5.8	20.9	3.3	25.0	1.6	18.1	4.1	43.1
(N)	(182)	(181)	(131)	(129)	(140)	(139)	(80)	(79)	(62)	(60)	(66)	(66)	(49)	(49)
						%								
(3) *Third Level Entry (1983)*														
Locally Mobile	0	6.1	3.6	5.0	5.4	9.8	7.6	19.1	0	0	7.6	5.0	6.9	4.8
Inter County Migration	7.7	8.3	41.9	26.6	23.7	33.4	43.6	31.0	44.3	33.3	34.9	25.0	54.5	33.9
Emigration	0	27.0	0	30.3	0	29.9	0	23.8	0	28.6	0	40.0	0	30.9
(N)	(65)	(65)	(104)	(102)	(62)	(60)	(42)	(42)	(21)	(21)	(20)	(20)	(30)	(30)

Emigration rates grew rapidly after 1984 for all levels of education and all remoteness origins. It is the only form of migration significant for the most poorly qualified. Internal migration – as already indicated – is not a relevant option for these. The fact that emigration is an option – mostly to England – indicates the quite underdeveloped nature of the Irish urban industrial structure compared to that of Britain. In Ireland the only extra – community (of origin) demand for labour appears to be at an intermediate non-manual (e.g., clerical) or professional-technical level, where internal migration is very relevant for those with a Leaving Certificate. Very little of this type of internal migration occurs after 1983, however, largely it would appear because successful access to such a national labour market occurs immediately after completing the Leaving Certificate. Emigration, on the other hand, increased rapidly after 1985 and is much more pronounced than internal migration by 1987. It is, as already indicated, the only form of migration relevant for Dubliners. For third-level entrants emigration increased rapidly after graduation – to the point where, by 1987, with the exception of Dubliners, their eventual employment was roughly evenly balanced between emigrants, internal migrants and home county employed. For Dubliners, on the other hand, two-thirds were still resident at home or locally by 1987. This is higher than other communities where the proportion of locally employed and resident respondents is less than one third.

It is not because of better employment opportunities locally, as already pointed out, that the most poorly qualified stay at home. Rather it appears that their poor qualifications and poor resources block successful migration. In addition if they do emigrate, poorly educated emigrants do not meet with a high demand in any country. So the greater unemployment rates of the poorly qualified are at least partly due to their lower willingness, or ability, to migrate. On the other hand if they do emigrate and become unemployed they also tend to return home. Partly as a result, those migrants who are poorly qualified have substantially lower unemployment rates, than the home residents. Unfortunately we have very limited information on such to-and-fro migration movements which can be linked directly to employment status changes. However, of currently unemployed "returned emigrants" (N = 43) 65 per cent are living at home; while of employed returned emigrants (N = 121) in the sample 44 per cent are living at home.

Part of the reason for the lower unemployment rates of the better qualified is their greater willingness or ability to migrate; and part of the reason for the higher unemployment rates of the poorly qualified is their greater difficulty in migrating successfully to other low unemployment

places; but also a greater propensity to return home if they become unemployed. In modern economies it has become increasingly necessary to migrate to get a job. The poorly qualified and poorly resourced are least able to do so successfully: and when they do emigrate but do not succeed in finding stable employment they may be left with few choices but to return home (see Sexton, *et al.*, 1991, Chapter 6).

It appears, on the other hand, that those with at least a Leaving Cert are enabled to move initially because their qualifications are much more "saleable" nationally; in effect that they are members of a national labour market in which most white collar jobs are advertised nationally, and universally applicable rules of selection are applied to choosing amongst such job applicants. As a result their lower unemployment rates appear to be partly due to their great propensity to migrate, but also to the existence of such a national labour market.

The same argument could be applied to the emigration of third-level graduates. They can participate in an international labour market where their qualifications are assessed, using universally applicable criteria, on the same basis as locals.

There may be, therefore, greater inter-county variation in unemployment rates amongst poorly qualified, manual and lower service workers than amongst the better qualified, skilled manual or white collar workers.

Clearly over time, however, as more and more of the cohort become employed – either from an unemployment status or from extended education – young people move away from the home locality. If they succeed in getting a job at home they are only slightly more likely to establish a new household locally: from about $^1/_{20}$ in 1983, to $^1/_5$ in 1987. It appears, in other words, that getting jobs frequently requires mobility out of ones locality – with almost 40 per cent of the employed having migrated out of the home locality by 1987. People mostly migrate to get their jobs: moving first to another place and getting a job subsequently – the usual position for manual jobs; or else moving having first got a job – the usual case for white collar jobs in Ireland.

On the other hand, the unemployed remain dominantly in the family home over the whole period; 96 per cent being at home in 1983, 90 per cent in 1984, and 71 per cent in 1987. In the latter case unemployment for the non-home resident had come mainly after a successful job experience for most current emigrants and internal migrants (Tables A3.5 to A3.7).

Absorption into local labour markets appears to have continued up to 1984, when the actual number employed and living in the local area had grown from 625 to 786; but their numbers had declined again by 1987 to 733.

Most intra-county migration associated with jobs increased very little after 1983 – though numbers increased from 74 in 1983 to 122 in 1984 and 152 in 1987; i.e., numbers had actually doubled – associated mainly with the gradual absorption of third-level graduates into the national labour market, mostly in Dublin and the larger urban places.

Leaving home, and where young people go when they leave home, would appear therefore to be crucially influenced by the various labour market mechanisms operating for those with different levels of education, as well as by the degree of remoteness of young people from the relevant labour market.

Marriage, Moving Out and Having Children

The later and more mature stage of transition from adolescent dependence to adult independence in marriage and parenthood is normally taken to epitomise the assumption of fully adult roles. The normally, or morally, sanctioned pattern is one which expects full economic independence to precede marriage and childbearing; but "living together" arrangements and non-marital births have become much more frequent over the 1980s, though not nearly approaching average North European levels.

Marriage had not as yet become normal for the great majority of respondents by 1987. Only 7 per cent of male respondents and 19 per cent of females had married by 1987 – at an average age of 21-22. Of course marriage is usually the end point of a long period of courtship and stable heterosexual relationships. And increasingly – as the growth in non-marital births has shown – marriage no longer as clearly indicates, or marks, initiation into stable heterosexual relationships, nor even parenthood. The 4 per cent of young women who are single mothers dramatically illustrates both the departure from normality of this traditionally non-legitimised transition to full adult sexual and parental status, but also its growing significance in Ireland over the past 2 decades.

Table 3.8 summarises the main marriage-parental transitions and the relationship of these to early retirement from the labour force by young women on their assumption of full-time "home duties".

The assumption of both marriage and parenthood statuses are correlated with educational level (since only a very small proportion of males had married by November 1987 we will confine our discussion to females). Just over a quarter of young women who had left school after the Inter Cert had married – increasing indeed to 40 per cent amongst those who had completed a full-time post-Inter clerical or vocational course. This rate is somewhat greater than those who left before the Inter Cert.. (at 20

per cent) and for those with the Leaving Cert (21 per cent). But it is considerably greater than the percentage of third-level entrants (in 1983) who had married by the end of 1987 (5 per cent).

Table 3.8: *Marriage, Home Duties, Single Motherhood and Employment as Related to Educational Level and Gender*

Marital Status, Home Duties, Single Motherhood	*Level of Education 1983*				*Total*
	1 + 2	*3 + 4*	*5*	*6*	
	No Quals + Group	*Inter Cert*	*Leaving Cert*	*Third Level*	
(1) *% Married: 1987*			%		
Male	9.3	8.5	7.1	2.7	6.8
(N)	(165)	(182)	(270)	(194)	(827)
Female	20.0	26.4	21.4	5.0	19.0
(N)	(87)	(136)	(438)	(151)	(821)
(2) *% "Home Duties": 1987*					
Male	0	0	0	0	0
Female	22.9	15.7	7.5	1.8	9.5
(3) *Of "Home Duties" % Married*					
Female	60	78	94	50	79
	(20)	(22)	(33)	(2)	
(4) *Of Married: % Home Duties*					
Female	70	47.2	33.3	14.2	39
	(17)	(36)	(93)	(7)	
(5) *Of Married: % Employed*					
Female	10.4	41.6	54.8	57.1	48
	(17)	(36)	(93)	(7)	
(6) *% "Single Mother"*					
Female	11	9	1.3	1.4	3.7
	(87)	(136)	(438)	(151)	(821)
(7) *% Married + % "Single Mother"*					
Female	31	35.3	22.8	6.6	22.5
	(87)	(136)	(438)	(151)	(818)
(8) *Of "Home Duties" % Married or "Single Mothers"*	100	100	100	100	100
(9) *Of Married or "Single Mothers" % "Home Duties"*	74	48	33	28	43
	(27)	(48)	(99)	(10)	(185)

If the marriage age and rate are affected by education – particularly the very low rate amongst third-level entrants – educational differentials in single parenthood are much more marked: from 11 per cent of those without any qualification to 1 per cent of those with a Leaving Cert or third-level education. It is primarily a phenomenon of the poorly qualified and those with poor labour market experience and prospects.

Withdrawal from the labour force to "home duties" is a related process to marriage, but not determined by it. In fact only 40 per cent of young married women in the sample had "retired" to home duties – though such a retirement was highly correlated with qualification level and job prospects. It varies from 70 per cent of those with less than Inter. Cert. qualifications to a low of 14 per cent of those with any third-level education (Row 4, Table 3.8). So the economic necessity, or the normative prescription, to retire from work at marriage is very highly correlated with qualification level. Obviously cultural, situational (like childbirth) and economic factors are at work here; but such a close correspondence between qualification level and labour force withdrawal argues for a central role for socio-economic factors in such decisions. We will explore later the role that preceding labour force experience played in such "withdrawals" from the labour force: whether, for instance, early marriage, early childbirths and retirement to "home duties" are related to poor labour market experience irrespective of qualification level. Clearly, however, the very pronounced correspondence between qualification level and marriage/single motherhood, as well as retirement to home duties, cannot all be due to normatively influenced choice and must have a strong material basis.

So retirement to "home duties" is almost exclusively a consequence of marriage and childbirth/childrearing, in that all "home duties" respondents are either married or single mothers; but marriage and even childbirth does not necessarily lead to it – in that only 43 per cent of the married/single mothers retire to "home duties". The relationship is almost determinative for the poorly qualified, however – 100 per cent of those in "home duties" are married or single mothers; and 74 per cent of those married or single mothers are in home duties. On the other hand, for those with a Leaving Cert, although all those in "home duties" are married or single mothers, only 33 per cent of the latter are in "home duties". While all those in "home duties" have spousal-parental roles, only a minority of the latter have actually retired from the labour force.

In other words, over the first 5 years out of school over a third of those young women who left school early with poor qualifications had either married or had a child as a single parent – and most of those had then retired to "home duties"; with a small minority of those with such family responsibilities actually remaining in employment. Their average age in

late 1987 was between 20-21. At the other extreme, of those who had gone on to third-level only 7 per cent had either married or were single mothers, and of these only 28 per cent had retired from the labour force. Their average age in late 1987 was 2 to 3 years older than the latter. So a very clear differentiation in marriage, childbearing and childrearing, as well as in labour force participation, had already occurred even at this early stage in post-school transition.

Marriage and Separate Households

Marriage has conventionally implied the establishment of separate households – and this remains so as can clearly be seen from the results in Table 3.9. Here 96 per cent of those married had moved out from home – almost exclusively to establish separate nuclear family households. As we have already seen, if respondents are single and employed in their local community it is rare for young people to move out of home. In fact in these circumstances only marriage appears to justify moving out – at least by ages 21 or 22. Single motherhood is not nearly as determinative as marriage of leaving home – with 1 out of 3 remaining at home.

At such an early age also the married, despite having moved out from home, are not more likely to be locally based than the single; although they are somewhat more migratory than "single mothers". The single, on the other hand, are more likely to have emigrated. So marriage and new family formation are somewhat associated with local or national residence. Single motherhood certainly is not associated with alienation from the home locality. This is partly accounted for, of course, by its association with poor qualification levels and consequent lower migration rates.

As we have already seen, therefore, "moving out" from home is directly related to educational level and gender – females and particularly the better educated females are more likely to have moved. Part of the gender difference in so moving is explained by the greater and earlier marriage propensities of young women. Marriage is almost prescriptively related to moving out and establishing a new household (in over 95 per cent of cases). So for younger and more poorly educated women it is one of the main reasons for leaving home; and the married account for up to 40 per cent of such new households for such young women. For the more highly educated – particularly the third-level educated – marriage as a reason for leaving home is not at all relevant; educational and occupational mobility reasons are the main underlying motivators.

So, with the exception of third-level educated respondents, the majority of the single are still at home in late 1987 – over 2 out of 3 of those with less than a Leaving Cert qualification (See Appendix Table A3.8).

Table 3.9: *Relationships between Marital Status, Motherhood, Household Formation and Migration for Females*

Housing and Migration Characteristics	*Marital Status*		*Single Motherhood (Female)*	*"Home Duties" (Female)*
	Single Females	*Married Females*		
		%		
(1) *% Left Home:*	43.8	96.0	66.2	95
(N)	(658)	(151)	(30)	(77)
(2) *Household Characteristics*		%		
(a) % + Parents:	56.2	4.0	33.3	5.2
(b) % + Parents in-law:	–	2.6	–	–
(c) + Spouse and +/– children	–	91.4	–	72.7
(d) Other	43.8	2.0	66.7	22.1
Total %	100	100	100	100
N	(658)	(151)	(30)	(77)
(3) *Migration Characteristics*		%		
(a) In Home Co.	65.0	62.7	70.0	63.7
(b) In other Irish Cos.	12.2	24.0	20.0	20.2
(c) Emigrant	22.7	13.3	10.0	16.1
Total%	100	100	100	100
N	(657)	(150)	(30)	(76)

Conclusions

There is obviously a range of "normal" transitions to adulthood amongst our sample of respondents. "Normal" is used here is two senses. The first is purely statistical, indicating the most frequently occurring. The second meaning refers to the "norm" expected and sanctioned by the society, and the one accepted and generally looked forward to by the majority of young people. This latter "normal" model is one which first requires getting a secure job and an independent financial status for oneself before marriage and childbirth. And, excluding particular exceptions like full-time students, the establishment of an independent residence also requires financial independence. So, moving from a position of adolescent dependence on one's family of origin to economic independence, residential independence and the eventual establishment

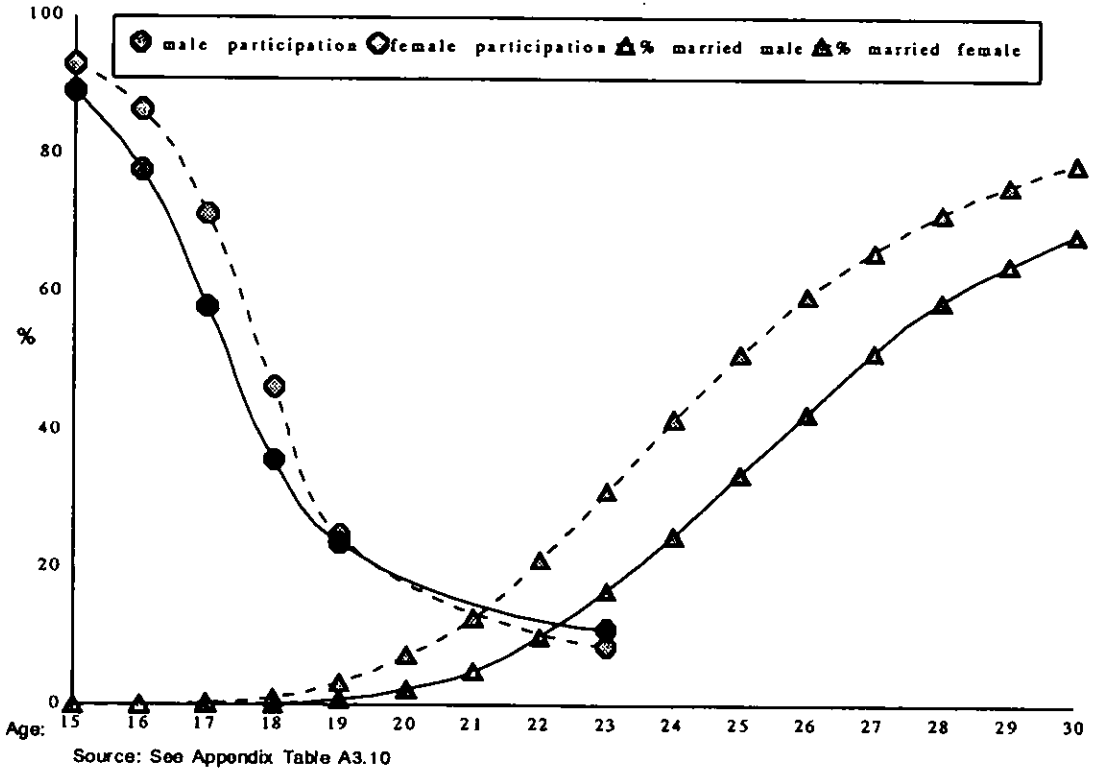
of an independent family unit has a normal range of stages and sequences (Hogan and Astone, 1986; Hogan, 1978).

This transition to adult independence, therefore, involves a "normal" career of age graded roles and statuses starting from the fully dependent adolescent schoolboy/girl roles within the family of origin to a gradual and cumulative growth of independence economically, socially (particularly in terms of autonomy), residentially, sexually and parentally. The process usually ends with the establishment, or "budding off", of a new nuclear family which is economically and socially independent and secure. This gradual assumption and accumulation of adult independent roles occurs under a highly institutionalised and normatively constrained regime – in which deviation from the "normal" pattern used to be highly sanctioned, so that initiating sexual activity before marriage, or marriage before an economically secure status and independent residence has been secured, was usually severely sanctioned. These rigid societal expectations, of course, have their roots only in late nineteenth century Ireland – with new family formation in pre-famine Ireland being much less constrained by such materialist considerations (see O'Grada, 1984; Connell, 1968; Hannan, 1979; Hannan and Hardiman, 1978).

The following figure neatly illustrates the nature of this age grading for school leaving and marriage – the main initial and end points of the transition to adulthood. The figure illustrates both the wide variance in the age of leaving school and the equally wide variance in the age of marriage; while at the same time showing the wide gap in the period of transition from school to marriage. Around two-thirds of the age group were still in school by age 17. The average age when two-thirds of the age group had married was 28; so there is roughly a gap of 11 years from where the usual status is schoolboy/girl to where it is that of married woman/man. This age gap is between 8 to 9 years for the average person – 17.5 for school leaving and 26 for marriage. And it is about 6 years for a third of the age group – from about 18 at school to 24 for marriage. So there is a late adolescent and early adult period of "freedom" of between 6 to 9 years for most young people. This "freedom gap" is much shorter (almost 3 years) for young women than men, because on average they leave school almost a year later and get married almost 2 years earlier.

These are differences between averages, however, not actual time differences for individuals. In fact, however, since those young people who leave school early are most likely to marry early and since the oldest to marry tend to be those who go on to third-level education, the usual time difference between school leaving and marriage tends to lie between 6 to 8 years.

Figure 3.3: *Percentage Participation in Full-Time Education, and Percentage Ever Married by Age and Gender, 1986*



Source: See Appendix Table A3.10

Table 3.10: *Percentage in Full-Time Education in the Labour Force and Percentage Ever-Married by Age Group and Gender 1986*

	Gender	Age Group 15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34
			%		
(1) Percentage in Full-Time Education	M	58.0	11.1	1.3	0.3
	F	65.6	8.6	0.7	0.2
				–	–
			%		
(2) Percentage in Labour Force	M	38.3	87.5	96.7	97.1
	F	30.1	76.7	59.0	37.3
			%		
(3) Percentage Unemployed (incl. those looking for first job)	M	14.8	22.6	18.9	18.3
	F	10.5	12.8	6.9	3.6
			%		
(4) Percentage Married	M	0.2	11.3	50.0	74.0
	F	0.9	22.3	64.8	83.0
		Age of Head of Household			
		15-25	25-29	30-34	35-39
			%		
(5) % of Age Group who are Heads of Household		6.3	32.1	42.9	46.6

Sources: Tuarascail Statistiuil, An Roinn Oideachais, 1985/86. Census of Population of Ireland, Vol. II, 1986. Summary Population Report – 2nd series.

The above table (Table 3.10) summarises information for the main status transitions for 4 relevant age groups: 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34. The age group 15-19 is still dominantly a school based, family dependent one. Even for those who have left school and entered the labour force around a third are unemployed. As a result only a small minority have left home. By 20-24, however, only 10 per cent or so are still at school, most of the rest being in the labour force. Of those in the labour force, the unemployment rate for 20-24 year olds is less than that for 15-19 year olds. At age 20-24 a significant proportion of young women have got married (by 24 over 20 per cent), and around half of these have retired from the labour force. By 25-29 almost all have left full-time education and entered the labour force. But a high proportion of young married women have actually

retired from the labour force into "home duties". At this stage a very high proportion of young adults have firmly established an independent status: by 30 almost 80 per cent of women are married and a high proportion of the remainder are in independent households.

In general what strikes one most about these statistical patterns is the difference between men and women – the later start for young women, their earlier marriage and their retirement from the labour force. These distinctive female patterns are, however, highly differentiated by social class of origin, educational level achieved, occupational status aimed for and achieved, as well as by the size and remoteness of the community of origin.

The modal pattern for females now is for school completion at Leaving Cert level i.e., at 17-18, a clerical or service occupation, marriage by age 25, and roughly evenly balanced between retirement from the labour force at the birth of the first child, or staying in the labour force – with a higher probability of part-time work. The probability of staying on in the labour force on marriage has increased substantially over the 1980s, but is still highly correlated with the level of education achieved.

Summarising the above survey and census evidence, there appear to be 4 main patterns of integration into adult life. For simplicity of presentation we will restrict the description to females.

1. School leaving at Leaving Cert level -> job (clerical or service) -> marriage -> with retirement from, or staying on in, the labour force being roughly evenly balanced. As to the stage, and occasion, of independent residence this appears to depend mainly on whether one can get a suitable job in the local community. If one cannot, then residence change is immediate and determined by an occupationally determined migration. If one can get a suitable job locally, then marriage appears to be the main, and delayed, occasion for an independent residence.

2. Third-level entry usually follows immediately on successfully completing the Leaving Certificate. If not available in the locality it requires migration, and residence change. This holds for over a third of those entering third-level education. Once advanced education is completed migration usually occurs again – even for those who were able to stay at home while in College. So, in general, residence change occurs at a much later stage for this group – but tends to be more radical and complete when it does. Marriage tends to be even more delayed for most of this group also – by at least 3 years.

3. There appears to be two main "deviant" patterns.

   (a) The first is the small proportion of those who left school before taking any examinations, and usually experience very poor labour market histories. A small proportion of these (up to 20 per cent) enter premature and unlegitimised parental roles – generally entering the "single mother" status in an independent residence, usually provided by the Local Authority. A few who have children at home appear to have taken a different route to coping with premature parenthood. Both have entered the parental status without ensuring greater economic security either through the labour market or marriage.

   (b) There is another very minor pattern – affecting only a few individuals – where better educated young women have developed a stable sexual relationship, usually with an equally highly educated man, and have a child without having gotten married. Such living-together arrangements without children are, however, clearly observable as a minority pattern amongst this group.

As to the success of the transition influencing mental health outcomes the following broad hypotheses are proposed: Successful transitions are those which are both economically successful and normatively sanctioned.

Unsuccessful transitions involve: (i) labour market failure (unemployment), (ii) early parenthood outside marriage – particularly when associated with economic insecurity; (iii) prolonged dependency on parents, delayed transition to adulthood, and likely conflict within the family of origin; (iv) downward mobility, or failure to achieve the type of occupational status and income level normally expected for one's achieved educational level.

Appendix Tables

Appendix Table A3.1: *Extent of Moving Back and Forth from Home to Other Residences Locally, or Emigrating by Original Residence Status in 1983*

Household Status By 1984	*Residence Status in 1983*				
	At Home	*In Local County*	*Inter Co. Migrant*	*Emigrant*	*Total*
			%		
(1) Still at Home	81.4	57.0	21.4	24.6	72.1
(2) Intra Co.	5.4	23.6	3.2	4.1	5.8
(3) Inter Co.	9.7	9.8	71.0	–	17.6
(4) Emigrant	3.6	9.5	4.4	71.3	4.6
Total %	82.2	3.7	13.0	1.1	100
N	(1224)	(57)	(202)	(16)	(1549)
Household Status 1987	*Residence Status 1983*				
	At Home	*In Local County*	*Inter Co. Migrant*	*Emigrant*	*Total*
			%		
(1) Still at home	54.7	47.5	26.7	25.0	50.4
(2) Intra Co.	13.8	29.3	8.7	3.3	13.6
(3) Inter Co.	10.7	9.7	32.0	–	13.4
(4) Emigrant	20.7	13.5	32.7	71.7	22.7
Total %	81.7	3.7	13.3	1.3	100
N	(1310)	(59)	(213)	(20)	(1602)
Household Status 1987	*Residence Status 1984*				
	At Home	*In Local County*	*Inter Co. Migrant*	*Emigrant*	*Total*
			%		
(1) At home	62.5	17.1	25.6	14.8	51.2
(2) Intra Co.	12.0	55.5	6.4	9.3	13.4
(3) Inter Co.	7.2	11.0	41.1	2.7	13.1
(4) Emigrant	18.4	16.4	26.9	73.2	22.3
Total N.	(1079)	(88)	(268)	(70)	(1505)

Appendix Table A3.2: *Employment Status of 1981/2 Male School Leavers in May 1983, Nov. 1984, and Nov 1987, by Level of Education.*

Employment History	*Level of Education 1987*							
	1 No Quals	*2 Group Cert*	*3 Inter Cert*	*4 Post Inter*	*5 Leaving Cert*	*6 Failed 3rd*	*7 Third level*	*Total*
(i) May 1983				%				
% Employed	31.8	56.6	62.1	54.0	56.8	10.0	6.9	41.5
% F.T. Educ.	–	1.4	3.2	8.1	10.5	78.0	88.1	28.9
% Unemployed or on scheme	61.6	41.3	32.4	36.7	31.2	12.0	–	28.3
(% Never Employed)	(47.3)	(34.1)	(28.5)	(23.1)	(26.8)	(8.0)	(5.0)	(23.4)
N*	(58)	(07)	(131)	(49)	(231)	(50)	(176)	(816)
(ii) Nov 1984				%				
% Employed	50.6	66.6	70.2	70.5	85.4	61.7	12.4	59.4
% F.T. Education	1.8	–	2.0	2.3	0.5	19.1	78.8	19.5
% Unemployed	46.6	33.3	27.3	27.4	14.2	15.9	8.9	20.4
(% Never Employed)	(37.5)	(15.7)	(13.2)	(9.1)	(7.3)	(12.8)	(8.9)	(12.0)
N*	(58)	(102)	(121)	(44)	(219)	(47)	(170)	(776)
(iii) Nov 1987				%				
% Employed	63.2	70.2	71.7	75.7	87.7	92.3	74.6	77.7
% F.T. Education	–	–	–	–	–	1.1	17.3	4.2
% Unemployed	36.8	29.1	26.0	24.5	11.1	3.3	7.7	17.4
(% Never Employed)	(7.5)	(4.3)	(1.2)	(2.9)	(0.4)	(1.1)	(1.2)	(1.9)
N*	(58)	(107)	(131)	(49)	(234)	(51)	(178)	(823)

* Percentages do not add to 100% as both "Illness" and "Other" have been excluded; the percentages in these categories, however, are very small.

Appendix Table A3.3: *Employment Status of 1981/2 Female School Leavers in May 1983, Nov. 1984, Nov 1987 by level of Education*

Employment Status 1983	*Level of Education*							
	1 No Quals	*2 Group Cert*	*3 Inter Cert*	*4 Post Inter*	*5 Leaving Cert*	*6 Failed 3rd*	*7 Third level*	*Total*
May 1983				%				
% Employed	42.4	55.9	60.3	60.0	55.6	24.0	7.8	46.3
% F.T. Student	1.2	–	0.9	–	9.5	76.0	91.1	23.7
% Unemployed	47.1	42.1	33.1	30.8	31.9	–	1.1	27.1
(% Never Employed)	(47.3)	(32.4)	(26.6)	(27.6)	(28.9)	–	(0.7)	(23.0)
% Home Duties	7.2	–	5.2	9.2	0.9	–	–	1.6
N	(58)	(24)	(607)	(45)	(409)	(30)	(134)	(814)
November 1984				%				
% Employed	44.4	81.8	68.3	71.8	82.6	44.4	14.8	64.4
% F.T. Student	1.9	–	–	2.9	1.0	37.0	76.6	14.7
% Unemployed	44.4	18.2	26.9	23.5	13.8	14.8	7.8	17.8
(% Never Unemployed)	(24.1)	(4.5)	(9.6)	(3.9)	(5.1)	(3.7)	(7.0)	(7.4)
% Home Duties	5.6	–	3.8	1.8	3.1	3.7	–	2.6
N	(54)	(22)	(104)	(45)	(390)	(27)	(128)	(780)
November 1987/8				%				
% Employed	35.2	78.0	60.1	61.1	81.1	76.2	72.9	72.9
% F.T. Student	–	–	–	–	1.0	8.7	14.1	3.2
% Unemployed	38.2	16.0	24.3	12.4	10.1	10.1	12.1	14.4
(% Never Employed)	(10.7)	(8.0)	(3.7)	–	(0.9)	–	(2.9)	(2.3)
% Home Duties	26.6	8.0	13.7	26.6	7.7	1.8	1.0	9.4
N	(57)	(25)	(107)	(45)	(409)	(30)	(136)	(818)

Table Appendix A3.4: *Movement away from Parents House by Gender and Level of Education*

% Moved away from Parental Home		*Level of Education 1987*							
Year	*Gender*	*No Quals*	*Group Cert*	*Inter Cert*	*Post Inter Cert*	*Leaving Cert Level*	*Failed Third*	*Third Level*	*Total*
					%				
May 1983	Male	0	4.8	10.2	17.6	15.4	15.0	37.8	18.2
	Female	6.8	1.7	5.2	22.1	16.9	36.8	40.4	19.0
Nov. 1984	Male	12.7	5.9	7.4	15.6	22.4	31.1	50.0	24.2
	Female	13.0	18.2	15.4	33.3	33.1	40.7	50.8	31.7
Nov. 1987	Male	38.3	31.1	37.9	43.9	44.4	62.6	62.5	45.5
	Female	45.5	46.7	43.3	64.5	53.2	65.5	60.7	53.3
N	Male	56	106	129	49	233	48	174	815
	Female	57	25	104	46	408	30	134	812

Appendix Table A3.5: *Residential Movement by Employment Status, in the First Year Out of School*

Residential and Migrant Status 1993	*Employment Status 1983*				
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Student*	*Other**	*Total*
		%			
(1) Still at home	83.5	96.2	63.9	82.9	81.9
(2) Moved within home county	4.0	2.2	3.7	17.1	3.7
(3) Inter-county migration	10.3	1.1	31.7	–	13.2
(4) Emigration	2.1	0.4	0.7	–	1.2
%	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	714	450	429	35	1628

* "Other" = Home Duties, Ill, etc.

Appendix Table A3.6: *Employment, Status and Movement, 1984*

Residential and and Migrant Status 1984	*Employment Status 1984*					*Total*
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Student*	*Home Duties*	*Other*	
			%			
(1) Still at home	76.1	90.2	41.9	30.0	44.4	72.1
(2) Moved within home county	5.8	3.4	3.8	65.00	11.1	5.7
(3) Inter-county migration	12.7	4.0	52.1	–	–	17.6
(4) Emigration	5.5	2.4	2.3	5.0	44.4	4.6
%	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total No.	961	295	265	20	9	1550

Appendix Table A3.7: *Employment Status and Movement 1987.*

Residential and and Migrant Status 1987	*Employment Status 1987*					*Total*
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Student*	*Home Duties*	*Other*	
			%			
(1) Still at home	50.3	71.4	30.0	5.3	50.0	50.8
(2) Moved within home county	10.3	15.8	10.0	59.2	12.5	13.5
(3) Inter-county Migration	12.6	8.1	36.7	19.7	37.5	13.3
(4) Emigration	26.7	4.6	23.3	15.8	–	22.4
%	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total No.	1210	259	60	76	8	1614

Appendix Table A3.8: *Marriage and "Moving Out" by Education and Gender by 1987: % Males and Females who have Moved Out*

		Level of Education 1983					
		No Quals	*Group Cert*	*Inter. Cert*	*Post Inter Cert*	*Leaving Cert*	*3rd Level*
					%		
(1) % who have moved out							
	Male	38.3	31.1	37.9	43.9	44	62.5
	Female	45.8	46.7	43.3	64.5	53.2	61.6
(2) % who had been married							
	Male	12	8.4	7.5	8.9	8.6	2.2
	Female	19.3	14.6	25.0	39.5	21.0	4.3
(3) % of those who have "moved out" who are married:	Male	28.4	27.0	20.8	20.2	19.6	3.6
		(N=22)	(33)	(48)	(22)	(102)	(109)
	Female	40.1	25.5	57.8	59.4	37.5	5.9
		(26)	(12)	(45)	(30)	(216)	(101)
(4) % of those who are married who have moved out:	Male	85.7	100	100	100	100	100
		(7)	(9)	(10)	(4)	(20)	(4)
	Female	95.4	81.2	100	97	94.7	85.7
		(11)	0	(26)	(18)	(85)	(7)
(5) % of those who are single who have moved out:	Male	31.2	24.8	32.9	38.4	38.7	61.7
		0	(97)	(117)	(49)	(212)	(171)
	Female	34.0	40.8	24.3	43.3	42.2	60.1
		(45)	(21)	(78)	(28)	(320)	(158)
(6) % of those "at home" who are single:	Male	98.2	100	100	100	100	100
		0	(73)	(78)	(28)	(130)	(65)
	Female	98.4	94.8	100	96.7	97.6	96.8
		(30)	(13)	(59)	0	(190)	(63)
(7) Totals (Nos)	Male	56	106	126	49	232	174
	Female	56	25	104	46	406	164

Appendix Table A3.9: *Employment and "Moving Out" by Education and Gender.*

		Level of Education 1987					
		No Quals	*Group Cert.*	*Inter. Cert.*	*Post Inter Cert.*	*Leaving Cert.*	*3rd Level Qualified*
% Employed				%			
	Male	62.1	70.0	71.4	75.5	87.7	78.4
	Female	35.5	79.2	58.9	61.1	81.1	73.0
% Unemployed							
	Male	37.9	29.2	26.2	24.5	11.1	7.2
	Female	37.7	13.5	25.0	12.4	10.0	11.7
% Student							
	Male	–	–	–	–	1.1	14.4
	Female	–	–	–	–	1.0	13.5
% "Home Duties"							
	Male	–	–	–	–	–	-
	Female	26.8	7.2	14.1	26.6	7.8	1.2
% "Other"							
	Male	–	0.8	2.4	–	–	0.9
	Female	–	–	1.3	–	1.0	0.6
Of those Employed % who left home:							
	Male	42.7	38.6	40.7	42.8	46.4	63.2 (174)
	Female	32.3	42.3	40.8	64.5	50.7	62.2 (119)
Of those Unemployed % who left home:							
	Male	33.3	12.5	26.4	50.0	26.9	56.3
	Female	27.3	25.0	19.2	0.0	39.0	31.2
Of those At Home % who are "Employed":							
	Male	57.8	62.3	67.4	77.0	84.6	78.3
	Female	44.1	83.4	61.5	63.7	85.9	71.4
Of those at Home % who are "Unemployed":							
	Male	42.2	36.5	30.9	23.0	14.6	8.4
	Female	48.4	16.7	35.6	36.3	12.7	20.6
Of those Left Home % who are Unemployed:							
	Male	31.8	13.1	18.8	27.3	6.7	6.5
	Female	23.1	9.8	11.1	0.0	7.6	5.0
Of those in "Home Duties" % left home:							
	Male	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Female	87.9	100	91.8	100	96.7	100
Nos.	Male	56	106	129	49	233	222
	Female	57	24	104	45	406	163

Appendix Table A3.10: *Percentage Married, and Percentage in Full-Time Education by Age and Gender, 1985/6*

Age	*% in Full-Time Education*		*% Ever Married*	
	Female	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
15	93.1	89.2	–	–
16	86.5	77.8	0.1	–
17	71.5	58.1	0.4	1.1
18	46.3	35.7	1.2	0.2
19	24.7	23.6	3.4	0.9
20			7.3	2.4
21			12.8	5.0
22	8.6	11.1	21.3	10.1
23			31.3	16.8
24			41.8	24.7
25			51.3	33.7
26			59.8	42.5
27			66.2	51.5
28			71.7	59.0
29			75.8	64.3
30			79.0	68.7

Sources: Statistical Report, Dept. of Education, 1985/6, Census of Population of Ireland, Vol. II, 1986.

Chapter 4

TESTING THE "NORMALITY" OF TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Up to this point we have analysed various aspects of the transition to adulthood – education, employment, leaving home and migration, etc. – on a two variable basis only: of how education is related to employment, and how employment relates to leaving home and migration and so on. However, an overall measure of how all of the various stages are related to each other – of how far the respondent has "progressed" through the transition to adulthood whatever form it takes – would be extremely useful. If such an averaged or "normal" ordered transition process exists, the use of Guttman scaling[3] procedures would isolate it. This procedure combines various items of such a transition "scale" in such a way that, where it is found to be valid and reliable, it is possible to tell from an individual's overall "score" exactly which aspects of the transition he or she has already experienced.

As we saw in Chapter 3 transitions are highly differentiated by gender, education and class background. Initially, at least, we will attempt to derive different scales for women and men. Even if we do get a highly reliable scale, it may be possible that many of the initial items used, or aspects of transition measured, do not fit such a scale; or that women's and men's patterns are different. It may be also that some people's transitions do not fit into the scale. So a number of dimensions of transition may exist or a minority set of "non-scale types" may be identifiable. If present, these will be analysed separately.

Before reporting our analysis, however, we need to make clear the main data limitations of this study. First, the data refer only to people aged 20-23 in 1987/88 – at a very early stage in the transition process; with less than 20 per cent of such young women married, for instance. The results, therefore, need not necessarily hold for people at an older age – say 28-30. Nevertheless, we would argue that the patterns identified should hold true for older age groups. Secondly, except for very detailed information on educational and employment careers – and, to a limited extent, emigration

3 The details of how the scales were constructed are presented in Appendix 4.1

and marriage – we only have information on current status in 1987/88 (at the time of interview) for some transitions. For example, we have little information on the whole process of leaving home and establishing a separate residence; only detailed information on current residence. We do not know, therefore, the extent to which respondents had experienced "reverse" movement such as leaving home on becoming employed or going on to third-level education; or completing third-level, then suffering unemployment and returning to live at home. So, this is not a study of *changes* over time in such statuses. It is rather a cross-sectional study of the relationships amongst the various "staged" statuses reached by school leavers by late 1987, 5 years subsequent to their completion of second-level education. However, even if such adult status "advances" – such as leaving home, etc. – can be reversed what Guttman scalogram analysis can test is whether stage A is a precondition for attaining stage B, and B a precondition for C: i.e., whether it appears necessary to have achieved a particular status or "stage" (such as employment, for instance) in order to achieve other statuses – such as an independent residence or marriage. In other words, most people may not be able to "go forward" – or, rather, that over 90 per cent do not in fact go forward – to "later" stages in the transition process without first achieving "earlier" stages. Of course, in this kind of analysis respondents could well achieve two statuses ("stages") simultaneously – such as marriage and moving out from the parental home; and respondents may well also have suffered "reverses" – such as unemployment or failed emigration forcing return to the parental home.

Deriving the Guttman Scale for Females

As we noted above, it was necessary to try to derive separate scales for each gender as their patterns of transition are significantly different. The scale for females used in this study is presented in Table 4.1, that for males is given later.

We were only able to examine respondents who had not emigrated, as we had insufficient data on home ownership and household structure for emigrants. Therefore, the scales we present here are only valid for transitions taking place within Ireland. These may, of course, exclude some of the more unusual transition patterns. Because we have to use the raw data when constructing a Guttman scale, we were unable to use the weighted version of the variables we tested. The female scale is based, therefore, on the unweighted sample of 702 and the male scale on an unweighted sample of 629, excluding those respondents with missing values on any of the relevant items. However, the differences between the weighted and unweighted samples appear to be minor.

Table 4.1: *Guttman Scale for Females' Stages in the Transition from Youth to Adulthood*

Scale score	*Stage of transition added at each additional, cumulative score*
0	Unmarried and unemployed and in the parental home
↓	
1	Employed, student, or single and in "home duties" and in the parental home (and not unemployed)
↓	
2	Left the parental home
↓	
3	Married
↓	
4	Spouse employed
↓	
5	Own (purchased) accommodation
	Coefficient of Reproducibility = .98

Initially 10 "combined" dichotomous items were included in the scale. These items were; (i) employed, (ii) student or in home duties, (iii) left home, (iv) married, (v) if married, spouse employed, (vi) married with children, (vii) married and employed, (viii) single mother, (ix) purchased accommodation, and (x) migrated out of home area. The matrix of responses to the scale items was then rank ordered by the total score of each *respondent* over each of the items (by row), as well as by the total score *on each item* across all respondents (by column); a sample of 100 respondents first being selected. It was clear immediately from the number and pattern of "error" responses that 4 items did not scale – single parenthood, migration, employment of self if married, marriage with children. The remaining items were obviously highly intercorrelated and after attempting various alternative "selections" they were combined to build a highly reliable 6 item Guttman scale. The coefficient of reproductibility = .98, a very reliable Guttman scale. Effectively this means that for 98 per cent of respondents if we know their scale score we also know their precise pattern of response to the 6 items involved.

Looking at Table 4.1 we can see that for each stage as the respondent "advances" through the transition process they get a higher score on the scale. Statistically, as we have seen, it is almost impossible (only 2 out of 100) to attain a higher "staged" score on "higher order" items without getting such scores also on *all* lower (ranked) level items. This means that if, for example, a respondent takes the value of 3 on the overall Guttman scale she: (i) should be married, (ii) should have left her parental home

and (iii) should be employed, be in "home duties", or be a student. If we know a respondent is married, therefore, we can confidently predict (with 98 per cent accuracy) that she will also have left the parental home and be either employed, be a student or in "home duties". Retiring from the labour force on marriage, therefore, appears to be still as "normal" for those young women as staying on at work. There is no statistically observable, or apparently normatively prescriptive, pattern identifiable in regard to marriage and employment or retirement from work. An independent residence on marriage, however, appears to be almost completely prescribed.

Some of the more important additional points to be noted from this cumulative scale are that employment of at least the spouse appears necessary in order to be in a position to purchase accommodation. Marriage itself, however, seems to be a prerequisite for purchasing accommodation. But leaving home appears to necessarily precede or immediately accompany marriage – the latter indexing a strictly final stage of adult independence. One of the most basic aspects of the transition, however, is the necessity to avoid unemployment as this seems to largely preclude leaving the parental home – or if have left home the unemployed are almost forced to return home. And it almost totally excludes marriage and home-ownership.

This significantly revised measure then scaled well. These substantial revisions and re-combinations of items might suggest maximising the biasses characteristic of small samples (c. 100). However, although initial scaling was carried out on a sample of 100, the total scale statistics were calculated on the full sample of 702. The scale, therefore, indicates that, for young women, being employed or a student (itself a transitional phase, although highly advantaged), forms the basis of a satisfactory transition to adulthood. The crucial obstacle here appears to be unemployment. A small number of young single women retire to "home duties" in the parental home – usually to look after elderly parents and usually only after poor labour market experience. A small number of unemployed young women had married and moved out of home. So, unemployment could precede marriage but not apparently accompany it to any extent. We had initially included married women's employment as a final stage in the transition; but this did not scale as, although in most cases it was highly predictive of spouse's employment and home-ownership, there were almost as equally many cases where the wife was not employed but the couple – with husband employed – still owned their own home. Indeed a small number of cases occurred where only the wife was employed but the couple also owned their house.

Single parenthood did not scale because it is highly associated with the mother being unemployed; and could not, therefore, scale with marriage or spouse's employment. It was also highly associated with independent residence – mostly in local authority housing. Single mothers, therefore, score 0, 1 or 2 on the scale. They are included in the scale – although with significant "errors" – but are not specifically identified in it.

Migration out of the home area also did not scale because, while those who did migrate fitted well with a pattern of marriage, home-ownership and employment, those who stayed were also able to attain these statuses in their home area. Indeed, larger proportions of these remaining in their county of origin seemed to be marrying, most being employed and owning their own homes. While migration is important for many young women, therefore, a faster "normal" transition appears to be characteristic of those remaining in the home area.

We also began with a measure of labour force status which simply distinguished those in employment from all others, but found that we had to include "students" and those in "home duties" as well if the item was to scale. This was largely because students particularly were very likely to have left the parental home. Many of those who were married had retired to "home duties" on marriage or very soon afterwards. In addition employment status if married, and the presence of children in married households, did not scale.

The final scale that emerged, therefore, links employment or "student" status to independence within the home first, and secondly as a requirement to leaving home; and marriage and spouse's employment to house purchase.

This scale is extremely useful, in that it gives us a summary measure of a highly typical sequence of stages of the transition to adulthood for young women. It is also highly reliable as the Coefficient of Reproducibility (which measures the relative proportion of errors in the scale) of .98 indicates. The marginal scores are rather high – with the minimal marginal reproducibility being .77 (i.e., the average of the percentages of the dichotomous item responses over all respondents, whichever of the 0 or 1 scores is greater than 50 per cent). Nevertheless, the overall "error" levels are so low that the improvement "over chance" in accurately reproducing individuals' responses from scale scores is 90 per cent. This is, therefore, an extremely reliable cumulative ordinal scale.

Table 4.2 shows the percentage of young women at each of the stages of the transition indicated in the scale – ignoring the "errors" remaining. Eighteen per cent of young women score 0 – they were still in the parental home, being in home duties or unemployed. In fact, over three-quarters of

these young women were unemployed having lost a job, and an additional 15 per cent were still looking for their first job since leaving school. Five per cent were on short-term employment schemes.

Of those who scored 1 on the Guttman scale – 44 per cent of all respondents – almost all were working for payment or profit and still living at home. Fewer of those who had left home and were still single – score 2 – were working (83 per cent), with some 5 per cent students and 12 per cent in "home duties" – mostly single mothers. These three categories (with scores 0,1,2) combined account for 80 per cent of the total number of young women interviewed. While some of these young women are, therefore, at an advanced stage in the transition to an independent adult status, the majority have only begun to establish their independence.

Almost all the spouses of those who are married (scores 3,4,5) are in employment and around half of these couples own the accommodation they are living in. There is a minority of women who have completed a full transition to a dual-earner, home-owning marriage; a destination which, of course, may be reached later, though much more slowly, by large numbers of the better educated young women in our sample.

On an initial inspection of our scale, therefore, we can see that unemployment is a very serious obstacle to leaving the parental home for most young women, although a large number of those in paid work (almost half of our respondents) have not left the parental home either: i.e., employment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for leaving home. There are some "errors" in this transition, however, as already mentioned: some unemployed young people have left home, as have some in "home duties" who are not married.

Table 4.2: *Percentage of Female Respondents at Each Stage of the Guttman Scale of Transition to Adulthood*

Score ("Stage")		*Percentage*	*Cumulative percentage*
0	(Unmarried, unemployed, in the parental home)	18	18
1	(Employed, student or in "home duties" and still at home)	44	62
2	(1+ Left the parental home)	18	80
3	(2+ Married)	6	86
4	(3+ spouse employed)	6	92
5	(4+ own accommodation)	8	100
	(No.)	(702)	(702)

However, there are some respondents who show such large "error" responses that they cannot be fitted into our scale. (They were included, of course, in estimating the total number of scale errors.) We need to look carefully at these cases in order to investigate any processes which might be cutting across the primary dimension identified in the Guttman scale. Fifteen of the total of 702 female respondents were unemployed and unmarried, for instance, but had left the parental home. Most of these had been in paid work but 7 had been unemployed for over a year. Most had remained in the home area, but 7 had migrated out of the community of origin. This pattern reflects both the many factors that push people out of the home – such as domestic problems; but it also indicates the possibility to gather enough resources to leave and stay away from home even if unemployed – especially if previously employed. Indeed most of these non-resident respondents became unemployed only after leaving the parental home.

There are also a number of respondents with unusual patterns of labour force participation. Three young women are married but both they and their spouses are unemployed. All of these have remained in their home area, married only a year of two after leaving school and have children. The women's spouses are typically long-term unemployed although the women themselves have spent less time unemployed. These couples could be seen as typical of those caught in the "vortex of disadvantage" of unemployment and early marriage and parenthood (Ineichen, 1977); and they are effectively marginalised from normal processes of transition. Four women were in paid work but married to unemployed husbands, all of whom had been in employment but were now medium to long-term unemployed. Clearly, processes of transition are not secure even if begun satisfactorily as employment can be very unstable and re-entering employment may be very difficult. There are also a number of unemployed married women whose spouses are employed but who have not taken up the traditional "home duties" role and are still seeking employment, reflecting married women's increased commitment to the labour force.

There are some other unusual patterns in the scaled responses: a small number of respondents, for instance, have not progressed as far in the transition as one might have expected. The most straightforward of these are 14 respondents who are married, both themselves and their spouses being employed but who do not own their accommodation. On further analysis it appears that most of these couples are saving for a house and some have saved between £5,000 and £10,000. Others are in low status occupations which may not be yielding enough income to be able to afford to purchase accommodation. Of course, these couples may simply prefer to

rent but only a small minority say that they are not interested in buying a house. This is, therefore, an aspect of the typical transition which has not been fully worked through but is revealed by the analysis of other available data.

Other patterns are quite clearly discrepant ("errors" or "non-scale types" in scalogram terms) however. Some couples, for instance, own their accommodation although the husband is unemployed. Where the wife is in paid work it would seem clear that this is the major source of finance for the purchase, which seems to be funded mainly from private savings or inheritance – reflecting once more the impact of increased female labour force participation. The situation is different in a small number of cases where neither partner is in employment but they still own their accommodation. About half of these couples received financial help from relatives, all live in their home area and all the women describe themselves as in "home duties" – even though their husbands are not in employment. Most of these bought the house around the time they got married, when the employment situation had been much better. While inheritance may be a factor in a number of cases we do not have sufficient information on the process of house purchase/inheritance in these clearly discrepant cases.

Apart from these patterns which show small groups of people who either have not yet fully worked through the typical transition process, or who are going through different "minority" processes of transition, there are 4 other individual cases which could not be scaled. One employed young woman owns her own home, but her parents appear to have come to live with her. Another couple are married but still live in the woman's parental home. These are "normal" deviations from the transition processes taking place, uniquely, within the familial home. Two single women, one employed and one unemployed, however, have left home and own their own accommodation; the employed woman being in a professional occupation and buying her house from personal savings and a loan, while the unemployed woman bought her accommodation with the help of relatives.

We can see, therefore, that while the great majority of our female respondents did fit the typical or "normal" pattern of transition there are a number of alternative minority transitions which can result from either unusual sequencing of "normal" transitions, from obstacles to these transitions, or from "premature" transitions. Overall, however, the Guttman scale in Table 4.1 seems to give us a powerful measure of the typical transition to adult status among young women – being employed, a student or working in "home duties"; leaving home; getting married, one's spouse being employed, and eventually coming to own one's accommodation.

Deriving the Guttman Scale for Males

Given the different transition processes for young men and women that are outlined in the literature (Wallace, 1986) and that can be seen in Chapter 3, it was decided, as we have seen, to derive separate Guttman scales of the transition to adult status for each gender. We now examine the item responses for males which, while broadly similar to those for females, do differ in important respects. The scale derived for males is shown in Table 4.3 below and is based on the unweighted sample of 629 males who have not emigrated, as was explained earlier.

Table 4.3: *Guttman Scale for Males' Stage in the Transition from Youth to Adulthood*

Scale score	*Stage of transition added at each score*
0	Unmarried, unemployed, in the parental home
↓	
1	Employed or student in the parental home
↓	
2	Have Left the parental home
↓	
3	Are Married
↓	
4	Are Married with children
	Coefficient of Reproducibility = .98

While the pattern of the transition for males is identical to that for women up until marriage – except that there are no males in "home duties" – the pattern then changes somewhat. The major difference here is that it is less determinative of other employment or housing outcomes than for young women. The continuing importance of male employment for married couples is shown in the presence of spouse's (i.e., husband's) employment in the transition scale for females while wife's employment does not seem to affect the transition processes of males significantly. Interestingly, "home ownership" does not scale for males; i.e., it does not fit, or is not sufficiently correlated with, the pattern isolated. Neither is home ownership associated with becoming a parent for males. There seems to be a number of ways in which males come to purchase accommodation, often doing so while single or – in a small number of cases – while even unemployed. The numbers involved here, however, are very small.

As already mentioned although over 95 per cent of young men do not progress to stages 2 and 3 (leave home and get married) – without achieving status 1 – mostly gaining employment – the transition to such later stages can be reversed. We do not have the necessary detailed information but it does appear as if employed, and even emigrant, young people who had moved out of home subsequently moved back home again on becoming unemployed. The scale, therefore, measures more the transition status as of late 1987 – not necessarily the status ever reached, as a small minority have clearly reversed direction though only from stage 2 "backwards".

Wife's employment did not scale largely because it was not associated with parenthood, with some of the mothers being employed while others were not. However, there were only very small numbers of these young men whose spouses were employed. Migration out of the home area was also included in the initial scale but, as on the female scale, it did not scale as almost as many of those who had become employed and married – and even had children – had been able to do so while remaining in the home area. Migration is not a prerequisite for employment or marriage – at least not for the total sample. For selected young people however, migration is important if not essential; but for others who can stay near home they can as often achieve full transitions to adulthood as those who migrate.

We had also initially included being "married with children, and employed" as a combined item in our scale. However while most of those married with children were employed one-third were not, and the item was, therefore, removed from the scale. Almost all of those not in employment but who had children were unemployed, most being long-term unemployed. Over half of this group had, however, been employed when the baby was born. So, at marriage, around 90 per cent had been employed.

Overall, therefore, the male and female scales are similar in most respects and show much the same sequence of stages. For males, however, there appears to be more diversified patterns of access to home ownership. Revealingly, acknowledged parenthood is directly linked to marriage for males, though not for females – single-parenthood is an exclusively female acknowledgement and responsibility.

We can use this scale, therefore, to measure male progression through various aspects of the transition, and Table 4.4 presents the percentage of males at each stage of the transition at the time of our survey.

The great majority of respondents (80 per cent) are still in the parental home – some 18 per cent more than of females (see Table 4.2). Of those who are neither in paid work nor are students (i.e., those with a score of

zero) 84 per cent are unemployed having lost a job, 10 per cent are still looking for their first job and 2.5 per cent are on short-term employment schemes. Of those with a score of 1 the vast majority are in paid work with the remainder being students. Of those who have left home most are in employment (92 per cent), although a small minority are students (8 per cent). Nine per cent of the total sample are married and two-thirds of these have children. It must be remembered that this is only looking at those still in Ireland, who have, however, slightly higher marriage rates than emigrants.

Table 4.4: *Percentage of Male Respondents at Each Stage of the "Transition to Adulthood" Guttman Scale*

Score		*Percentage*	*Cumulative percentage*
0	(Single, unemployed, at home)	18	18
1	(Employed or student)	62	80
2	(1+ left home)	11	91
3	(2+ married)	3	94
4	(3+ children)	6	100

From the main scale we can see that some of the most important aspects of the primary dimension of the transition to adulthood for males are the obstacles created by unemployment to leaving the parental home, and the association between employment, leaving home and marriage.

There are, of course, a number of "error responses" in our scale and it is important to look at the processes at work in these cases. Two of the respondents are married and employed, but still live in the parental home. Both are in working class occupations and lack of resources seems to be the main reason preventing independent residence, with inadequate number of "points" preventing access to local authority housing. Some other respondents have managed to reach more "advanced" stages in the transition despite being currently unemployed: but the great majority of these as we have seen were employed on marriage. Twelve unemployed respondents have left the parental home, and half of these have left the home area. Interestingly, those who have remained in the home area have spent far greater periods of time unemployed, and also have a greater history of unemployment in their family of origin; though even in this case most had held a job at some stage previously.

Some few others who are unemployed, and have left home, have got married, despite the obstacles posed by unemployment. Only 2 of these 17 respondents do not have children, but these were only just married at the time of the survey. Of those with children most had held a job at some stage since leaving school, although two-thirds had been unemployed for at least a year. Four had children prior to getting married but about half had begun their family since becoming unemployed. It is clear, however, that while unemployment may be an obstacle to marriage and parenthood it is not totally prohibitive of these statuses as this group of unemployed married males with children indicates, and as we saw in constructing our initial scale for females.

Overall, therefore, we find a pattern of transition to adult status among males which is similar to that for females in many respects – both in terms of its substance and of the apparently powerful pressures to conform to a typical one-dimensional pattern of transition. We do find, however, that marriage is less determinative of other transition processes – such as independent residences and home ownership – for men, and also that some respondents can achieve marital and parent statuses while still unemployed (even for a long period). This runs contrary to the primary dimension of the transition outlined in our scale. Overall the final Guttman scales for both sexes are highly reliable, providing a revealing and highly reliable measure of typical transition patterns for each gender, capturing the broad direction and sequencing of transition stages.

Conclusions

The analysis and results of this chapter indicate clearly that, at least for this relatively young cohort – in their early 20s – transition through their progression stages to adulthood is still very highly structured, and apparently still pretty highly constrained economically, socially and normatively. Two caveats should be entered, however. First we deal only with very young adults – 21 to 23 years old at the time of interview, so we cannot generalise these patterns to this cohort as it ages to 25 or on to 30. It may well be that as they age, these young people will not conform to socially acceptable ways of attaining some adult statuses: for example, by "living together" rather than marriage. Secondly the data – other than for employment – refer mainly to "current status" as of late 1987, early 1988. So we can only infer what the time process or order was for many of the transitions from the statistical relationships amongst respondent statuses at the time of interview. Nevertheless, the pattern and direction of relationships amongst these items (statuses) is so strong (for over 95 per cent of all responses) that it appears safe to infer a particular time order to

the transition process. So that a respondent must attain status A – for example, employment or third-level education – before she/he can attain status B – for example, an independent residence.

There are a small number of quite discrepant patterns, however, which do not fit the dominant model of transition and require explanation. Two are of particular significance. "Single motherhood" is an option adopted by around 4 per cent of young women – usually by very poorly educated respondents with poor labour market histories. In most cases this led on to separate independent housing – usually by the Local Authority. But in at least two other cases such non-marital parenthood options were also adopted by young women who, however, appeared to have established very stable living-together relationships with the fathers. In both these cases the respondents were well educated and established in high status jobs: apparently chosen alternative transition options by secure middle class respondents. As this cohort ages these alternative pathways may of course multiply. But at least up to their early 20s the orthodox traditional pattern dominates.

Although theoretically expected, some conventional stages in the transition process for many young people do not fit the model: primarily because they hold for some people but not for others. Migration is not a necessary condition for establishing a new household. When it occurs residence change occurs, but the latter can – and indeed is more likely to – occur without the former. Home ownership fits the transition model for females but not for males – although it was expected to. Age and status of male spouse appears to be the discriminating variable here. We should recall that male and female respondents are roughly of the same age and none is married to each other. Because of the normal two year age gap between wives and husbands the male spouse is, on average, over two years older amongst couples where females were the respondents; and hence such couples were generally better off on average and respondents' husbands had spent a longer time in the labour force. Partly as a result less than one-third of male married respondents owned their accommodation, while 63 per cent of married female respondents lived in accommodation which they owned, although mostly on a mortgage. The offsetting status for females was employment which, with "student" – mostly third level – as a alternative status, was a prerequisite to leaving home for males. Home duties was an alternative that had to be added for females. A small number of young women had taken a different path: to "home duties" in the parental home, usually because of onerous parental home responsibilities. And a small number of those had moved from that status to marriage and thence to an independent household status. In addition the finding that

"husband's employment" is a prerequisite to home ownership for female respondents while "wife's employment" is not for male respondents clearly illustrates the quite gender differentiated nature of the transition process.

These discrepant or "error" patterns – deviating from the 90 per cent plus "norm" – should alert us to the very young age of the cohort. Later studies should correct both deficits – by getting time series data on all relevant transitions besides employment and education, and secondly, by follow-up studies of such cohorts into their late 20s or early 30s when most initial transitions have been completed.

Appendix 4.1

CONSTRUCTING GUTTMAN SCALES

Guttman scaling (Scalogram) procedures have two desirable properties – unidimensionality and reproducibility. They test and, if present, derive undimensional scales from individual responses to a set of items. And secondly they have the desirable property of "reproducibility", i.e., one can reproduce from the scale scores the respondent's exact score on each item of the scale. People who have higher scores on the scale – say (score 3), for instance, being married and living in an independent residence – have a specific determinable order of achieved (scores) statuses (0,1,2); e.g., they have completed their education successfully, have left home, are employed and are married. If such a sequenced order of achieved statuses exists, this implies, that there is an orderly succession of stages to the transition process. The latest stages could not be reached, therefore, without going through earlier stages. For example, it might be found that it was almost impossible for males to marry without getting a secure job first; and that the purchase of a house/flat follows (or coincides with) rather than precedes, marriage or parenthood.

Although transitions to adulthood may not always be this orderly there is quite a bit of evidence, as we saw in Chapter 3, that there are strong patterns of such typical sequences to transitions to adulthood. Therefore, the Guttman scaling procedure is the most rigorous method to test the unidimensional, cumulative and progressive – or "reproducible" – nature of the transition to adulthood (See Torgerson, 1958, pp. 298-338; Openheim, 1972, pp. 143-151).

Guttman scaling tests for unidimensionality: that the phenomenon we are interested in is one-dimensional. In this case this would mean that there was one underlying basic, or dominantly "normal", process of transition to adulthood, and not a whole variety of ways of reaching adulthood. However, there may be a variety of minor discrepant patterns – such as premarital pregnancy, "living together" arrangements, leaving home before becoming employed, etc. If so the scaling method will also allow us to isolate such "discrepancies". If such discrepancies, or "errors", are large then a undimensional scale cannot be derived. Initially, however, we propose that in the Irish context such a "normal" progression process does exist. Since there is a set of measures of reliability and reproducibility for such a Guttman scale we can test that assumption.

The basic idea of Guttman scaling is, therefore, to test the hypothesis that a set of items measuring adolescent to adult transitions form a

cumulative, unidimensional scale: i.e., that there is a predictable order to the "items" (achieved statuses) of the scale, so that those who have attained the higher, or later, statuses have also attained the lower, or earlier, ones. Testing the hypothesis, therefore, is a matter of examining the actual patterns of responses to a set of such items in order to see if this cumulative, unidimensional pattern is present.

To do this we score each respondent as "positive" or "negative" on each of the relevant items – by dichotomising the scored responses. We then set up a matrix whereby the items (columns) and respondents (rows) are each ordered according to the number of positive responses for each – starting with the item with the maximum score on the extreme left, and the individual with the maximum score on the top. We can then begin to examine whether and which items fit such a scale, and also which respondents have high error levels or are "non-scale types". In Table A4.1 we present examples of valid "scale" and "error" or "non-scale" responses.

Appendix Table A4.1: *Examples of "Scale" and "Error" (or "Non-Scale") Type Responses for a Three-Item Guttman Scale*

Respondent	*Item A*	*Item B*	*Item C*	*Scale Score for Respondent*
	(e.g. Employed)	*(e.g. Left Home)*	*(e.g. Married)*	
Perfect "Scale" Types:				
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	3
2	Yes	Yes	No	2
3	Yes	No	No	1
4	No	No	No	0
Total Item Scores	3	2	1	
"Errors" or "Non-Scale" Types:				
5	No	Yes	Yes	2
6	Yes	No	Yes	2
7	No	No	Yes	1
8	No	Yes	No	1

In this hypothetical Guttman scale, if it was valid, the respondent who is positive on Item C (e.g. "married") should also be positive on Items A (e.g., employed) and B (e.g., left home); and if he or she endorses Item B, Item

A should also be positive. If all respondents had this ordered sequence of responses then we are able to deduce exactly which items are positive from the respondent's overall scale score. However, this does not hold for the second set of "error" responses, where the total scale score in fact gives a misleading indication of the pattern of responses. For example, a score of 2 – which can only come from one sequenced set of responses if the scale is reliable, but at least two non-sequenced scores can occur and the scale would be unreliable. Clearly then it is important to be able to assess how closely the actual pattern of responses fits the ideal scale pattern. We do this by counting as errors the number of responses which deviate from the ideal scale type for each respondent; for example, the "error" responses in Table A4.1. Computing the Coefficient of Reproducibility (the measure of reliability used) is got by dividing the number of "errors" by the total number of potential responses

$$(CR = 1 - \frac{\text{No. of Errors}}{(\text{No. of Items x No. of Respondents})}$$

This gives us a measure of the number of actual errors as a proportion of the total number of responses – subtracted from 1.0. Generally speaking a Coefficient of .90 or higher is acceptable: i.e., that we can reproduce individuals' responses from the overall scale scores with 90 per cent reliability. We can use this criterion in order to assess the scale as a whole, as well to assess how well individual items fit the scale (by computing the error score for each item). Items are then excluded if they have too high a proportion of errors. Clearly also, apart from the Coefficient of Reproducibility itself, we need also to examine any systematic occurrence of errors – which should, theoretically, be random; so that these particular patterns can also be isolated and perhaps analysed separately.

A high coefficient of reproducibility, however, can arise purely because the marginal scores are very high, or very low. For example, if all the "true" responses were greater than 80 or less than 20 per cent one could predict the pattern of scores with an 80 per cent "correct" score – purely from the marginal frequencies. We need a further measure, therefore, the "improvement over chance" – the relative extent to which "errors" are less than those arising from the average marginal value. This is a more meaningful measure of scale reliability, with an "improvement" of .75 or greater being regarded as the minimum required. For both scales here the measures of "improvement over chance were both over .75.

Chapter 5

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE MAKING SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Introduction

In the last two chapters we examined the transitions to adulthood, successful and unsuccessful, typical of the experience of Irish young people. We investigated how various elements in the transition were related to one another, and how young people varied from one another in the nature and "success" of their transitions. In this chapter, however, we investigate what are the characteristics of young people who make successful or unsuccessful transitions.

We first focus on educational success and failure – and attempt to provide an understanding of why some pupils fail and others succeed. Since Breen (1984a, b, 1986); Hannan (1986); Hannan and Shortall (1991); Clancy (1981, 1988); Greaney and Kelleghan (1984); Whelan and Whelan (1984, 1985) have already adequately dealt with the social background and schooling influences on levels of educational achievement, the objective of this chapter is not to repeat this work but to provide an understanding of the reasons for failure and of the background characteristics of those who have failed to gain the necessary educational qualifications for a successful transition to adulthood.

Breen (1984a, 1984b) shows the very clear influence of gender and of occupational status ("social class") of origin on level of educational attainment. Once the level of educational attainment is controlled for, neither occupational status of origin nor gender have any effect on employment chances (op. cit., 1984(b), pp. 38-40). Secondly, therefore, we examine the transition to employment and examine to what extent factors other than education and training have any impact. We will also investigate here the varying influences on the level of occupational status achieved by those young people who have had experience of the world of work. Thirdly, we examine the process of leaving home and setting up an independent residence and the characteristics of those who do leave home. Finally we examine the transition to parenthood, particularly the background characteristics of those who marry early, and their familial and

economic circumstances. We are also interested in the reasons for parenthood, particularly "premature parenthood" outside of marriage, but also among those who are married. The socio-economic background and circumstances of these households will be examined.

Educational Attainment

We first attempt to explain differential educational attainment. Although social class of origin is expected to be the main predictor variable, others are also important. We include 9 variables in our analysis: (i) father's occupational status and (ii) his employment status while the person was at school; (iii) mother's level of education – measuring the "cultural capital" of the family; (iv) number of children in the family of origin; (v) the respondent's gender; (vi) a dummy variable indicating farm origin and (vii) another indicating if the respondent is a farmer's daughter; (viii) the remoteness of the respondent's place of origin; and a final variable related to experience of schooling – (ix) attendance at a vocational school. We analyse the relative effects of each of these variables on educational attainment using multiple regression techniques. Level of education is measured on a 9-point ordinal scale with "No Quals" equal to 1 and third-level degree equal to 9.

Unfortunately we do not have any measure of respondents' early "intelligence" characteristics – as measured by individual performance potential – which has been clearly shown to be both highly correlated with social background factors such as those mentioned above, but also to have a significant independent influence on educational achievement. However, the debate on the relative importance of "intelligence" or social background effects can be found in Greaney and Kelleghan (1984) and the subsequent controversy in a special issue of *The Economic and Social Review* (1985, Vol. 16, No. 2).

The results of the multiple regression analysis of the effects of the social background factors outlined above are summarised in Table 5.1. They clearly support the previous studies in this area in showing the substantial impact of socio-economic and socio-cultural status of origin on educational achievement. The economic status of families has a clear effect on children's educational success, as shown by the highly significant effect of father's occupational status (although father's unemployment, which is closely related to occupational status, does not have a significant independent effect). There is also an independent impact of the family's socio-cultural characteristics such as parental education and values and practices about fertility – as shown in the highly significant independent effects of mother's education and number of children in the family, respectively, on educational attainment.

Table 5.1: *Multiple Regression of the Effects of Social Background Factors on Level of Educational Attainment by 1987*

Explanatory Variables	*Equation 1 (Social Background Factors)*	*Equation 2 1 + Effects (of Vocational Schools)*
Ascriptive Social Background Factors	*Beta*	*Beta*
1. Fathers' Occ. Status (Professional = 1 to Unskilled Manual = 6)	−.31**	−.28**
2. Fathers' Unemployment (Dummy, Unemployed = 1)	−.24	−.29
3. Mothers' Educ. Level (Degree = 1, to 5 = Primary level only)	−.72**	−.63**
4. No. of children in family:	−.08**	−.06**
5. Gender (Dummy, Female = 1):	.31**	.23*
6. Farm Origin (Dummy, Yes = 1)	.17	.21
7. Person is farmer's daughter (Dummy, Yes = 1):	.22	.26
8. Remoteness of community of origin:	.002**	.002**
Type of School Attended		
9. Vocational School	–	−1.07**
10. Intercept	2.46**	3.06**
R^2 =	.25	.30
F =	58.85	66.86
df =	8/1412	9/1412
p =	< .001	< .001

** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

In addition, being female (and particularly being a farmer's daughter) has a positive effect. Daughters in general, therefore, but especially those from a farming background, have a greater chance of educational success. Indeed farm background has a generally positive effect, especially for women, although neither is statistically significant. Remoteness of place of origin also has an interesting effect in that the most isolated and remote communities have higher educational participation rates. These social background factors taken together explain 25 per cent of the variation in levels of educational attainment.

However, in addition to these ascriptive social background factors, selection of, or allocation to, a vocational school has a substantial independent negative effect on educational attainment. It also explains some of the "gender effect" we noted above – but not the advantage of farmers' daughters which seems to operate through different processes. Before we can interpret the clearly negative effect of attendance at vocational school as due to the educational ineffectiveness of the schools themselves, we would need to control for the clear evidence of ability selectivity in choice/allocation to these schools (Hannan with Boyle, 1987; Hannan, Breen, *et al.*, 1983) as well as for the vocational-technical curricular/examination biases in vocational schools which appear to facilitate pupils' early leaving. This is not necessarily to students' labour market disadvantage as reflected in their own evaluation of their educational success (Hannan and Shortall, 1991), and in some of our later analysis. However, the negative effect of attendance at vocational schools is so pronounced here that it must raise some questions about their general educational effectiveness.

Another issue worthy of further investigation is that of the effect of remoteness of place of origin on educational attainment. This effect is difficult to explain but one immediate issue is the relationship between remoteness and class of origin, particularly as a number of current debates centre on the three-way relationship between socio-economic status, spatial concentration of disadvantage and its cultural effect on achievement (see, for example, Wilson, 1987, on the issue of the inner city "underclass" in the US). Table 5.2 shows us the relationship between occupational status of origin, remoteness and educational attainment among Irish young people. Looking first at the correlations between remoteness and level of education within each class category, it is immediately clear that there is an interaction between class and remoteness. Remoteness appears to be most important among the lower middle and upper working classes ($r = .10$): the more remote the higher the achievement. Urban place of origin appears to be an advantage among the upper middle classes on the other hand – but the differences are not significant. There are clear independent effects of social class (seen by comparing figures across the 3 different – class – sections of the table). Independent remoteness effects are present but not very pronounced (seen by looking at the effects of location within each section of the table). In other words, the effects of remoteness are not wholly explained by the differing distributions of social classes across the country.

The effects of remoteness differ across social class categories. A remote origin, for instance, seems to be of particular third level advantage to working class or lower middle (and small farms) class children. For the

Table 5.2: *Percentage of Respondents Achieving Different Levels of Education for each Level of Remoteness, Controlling for Social Class of Origin in 1987*

		Level of Education					
(1)	*Middle and Upper Middle Class (and large farms) by Remoteness*	*No Quals*	*Group Cert*	*Inter Cert*	*Leaving Cert*	*3rd Level*	*Total (N)*
1.	Dublin	2.2	4.3	8.6	49.2	35.6	100 (103)
2.	Larger Towns/Cities	0.0	6.3	8.6	36.1	49.0	100 (107)
3-4.	More Central Towns, and larger and more remote towns	2.8	1.9	12.2	36.4	46.6	100 (120)
5-7.	Remote small towns and open country areas	2.5	8.3	11.1	51.9	26.6	100 (58)
					r = -.05		
(2)	*Lower Middle and Upper Working Class (and average farms) Origins by Remoteness*						
	1. Dublin	4.8	15.8	25.3	40.7	13.3	100 (176)
	2	8.5	6.6	24.1	36.6	24.2	100 (144)
	3-4	6.9	8.4	20.5	42.9	21.3	100 (197)
	5-7. Remote rural places	3.1	5.9	26.2	45.5	19.3	100 (183)
					r = .10		
(3)	*Lower Working Class (and small farms) Origins by Remoteness*						
	1. Dublin	10.2	15.3	25.9	42.1	6.5	100 (84)
	2	18.9	6.7	27.9	38.7	7.9	100 (76)
	3-4	18.9	15.6	25.2	26.7	13.7	100 (137)
	5-7. Remote rural places	10.8	7.6	30.7	36.6	14.3	100 (39)
					r = .04		

middle and upper middle class the relationship seems to be slightly curvilinear with those in Dublin (row 1) doing better than those in remote areas (rows 5-7); but those in rural towns (rows 2-4) do best of all – with only around 15 per cent failing to get the Leaving Cert and almost half going on to third level. In the lower middle and upper working class there is a concentration of lower achievers – those getting only the Group Cert or less – in the larger cities and towns (21 per cent in Dublin); and a concentration of those getting the Leaving Cert or going on to third level amongst those in the more remote areas (46 per cent with the "Leaving" and 19 per cent at third level).

Looking at the lower working (and small farms) class, we find somewhat higher levels of educational failure or underachievement in Dublin and the larger cities (26 per cent with the Group Cert or less); and greater educational success in the particularly remote areas (18 per cent with the Group Cert or less). However, the greatest problems of underachievement are amongst the lower working class of smaller rural towns (row 3), with 19 per cent having no qualifications at all and another 16 per cent having only a Group Cert.

It is, therefore, clear that both class of origin and remoteness of community of origin have independent (additive and interactive) effects on educational achievement. Any targeting of educational, training or employment policy would need to take these relationships fully into account, particularly as we still lack a clear understanding of the processes at work in many of these situations.

We do not have the space here to investigate all of the important social background effects in detail but Table 5.3 illustrates some of the most significant factors at work in the process of educational attainment. Further details are also given in Appendix Table A5.1. Clearly even as single variables, factors such as father's occupational status, mother's education, number of children in the family, gender and farming background, remoteness of community of origin, and specifically educational factors such as type of school attended, have important effects on levels of educational attainment and, therefore, at the very least indirectly, on (other) various important transition processes. Their combined effects – additive and interactive – are likely to be far more significant, as we have already demonstrated in Table 5.2.

Unemployment Experiences

We have already seen that unemployment rates rose dramatically through the 1980s, particularly among young people both nationally and internationally. However, although the overall numbers experiencing

unemployment rose, the distribution of unemployment between young people of different social backgrounds may not necessarily have changed. Breen (1984a), as we have seen, finds that unemployment is largely explained by the young person's level of education, which is in turn strongly influenced by the person's class background and gender. In our far more limited analysis, therefore, we will examine if this relationship still holds through the mid-1980s. We do this through multiple regression analysis, using many of the variables discussed above but also introducing some local labour market factors and level of educational attainment itself as explanatory variables. This approach will enable us to examine the direct and indirect (i.e., through educational attainment) effects of social background characteristics on unemployment experiences. We omit students from this analysis as they have not as yet entered the labour market in any serious way.

Table 5.3: *The Impact of Social Background Characteristics on Educational Success and Failure*

Social Background Characteristics of Respondents	*% with No Qualifications*	*% with 3rd Level Qualifications*
1. *Social Class of Origin*		
Lower Working Class	17.9	4.8
Upper Middle Class	0	32.3
2. *Father's Employment Status*		
Father Unemployed	19.5	6.8
Father Employed	5.1	12.0
3. *Mother's Education*		
– Primary (only)	11.1	4.6
– Leaving Cert.	0.5	26.2
4. *No. of Children in Family*		
– Seven or more	11.4	8.9
– One to three	7.5	14.2
5. *Gender*		
Male	7.5	8.9
Female	6.3	9.5
(Farmer's Daughter)	(1.2)	(11.6)
6. *School Attended*		
– Vocational	12.4	2.4
– Private Secondary	0	28.0

The dependent variable in our analysis is based on the proportional odds of each individual in our sample being unemployed during the time they spent in the labour force. This odds is given by the proportion of time in the labour force spent unemployed and is weighted by actual time spent

unemployed. Because almost 40 per cent of our sample spent no time at all unemployed, the original (row) distribution of our dependent variable was highly skewed. Using a "log-odds" approach eliminates such skewness and an analysis using the log of the odds of being unemployed gave results very similar to those reported below. However, using the proportion of time unemployed weighted by the actual time unemployed gives greater importance to the experience of those who have spent a longer time in the labour force – those who left school early – and it is this experience we are mainly interested in.

The results summarised in Table 5.4 show a number of important social background factors to be important. Most significant are measures of socio-economic status of the family of origin: with father's unemployment status (while respondent was at school) and low occupational status, both showing marked and independent negative effects on the odds of being employed. The only other social background characteristic to be statistically significant is mother's education: the higher the level the lower the odds of being unemployed.[4] Being a woman – and particularly a farmer's daughter – also improves chances of avoiding unemployment, although these effects are not statistically significant. Local area of origin characteristics show no effect to speak of, with neither remoteness of place of origin nor county unemployment rate having any independent impact. The "local labour market" effects emphasised by British authors such as White and McRae (1989) and Ashton (1988) seem to be of little importance to the employment prospects of Irish youth – at least as measured by the county unemployment rate.

As one would expect, educational level attained has a strong positive impact on the chances of being employed. In addition, a vocational-technical emphasis in young persons' education also seems to significantly improve employment chances. This is also clearly reflected in school leavers' very positive assessments of this. However, while the impact of mother's education and being a farmer's daughter are weakened once education is controlled for, both father's unemployment and occupational status retain significant independent effects which are not mediated through their children's educational success. As the socio-cultural factors which are so important to educational success have little impact here, it might be suggested that the major effect of socio-economic status on youth unemployment is through the medium of job-seeking resources, access to employment networks and other labour market resources.

[4] Mother's education is measured using a 6-item scale which, inadvertently, has a reverse scaling logic: 1 = University Degree –> 6 = Primary Education only (Hannan and Shortall, 1991).

Table 5.4: *Multiple Regression Analysis of the Effects of Social Background, Education and Migration on the Proportion of Time in the Labour Force Spent Unemployed (Weighted by Actual Time Unemployed)*

Explanatory Variables	*Equation 1 Social Background Variables*	*Equation 2 Eqt. 1 + Educational Attainment Variables*	*Equation 3 Eqt. 2 + School Variables + Migration*
		- Beta Weights -	
1. Father's Unemployment	.18**	.17**	.17**
2. Father's Occupation	.14**	.10**	.10**
3. No. of Siblings	.01	−.01	−.01
4. Mother's Education	.07*	.03	.02
5. Gender	−.05	−.08**	−.09**
6. Farmer's Daughter	−.02	−.01	−.02
7. Remoteness	−.02	.004	.01
8. County Unemployment Rate	−.01	−.003	.002
9. Level of Education		−.18**	−.17**
10. No. of Honours Subjects Taken		−.03	−.02
11. No. of Vocational-Technical Subjects Taken		−.10**	−.11**
12. Vocational School			.001
13. Fee-paying School			.02
14. Comprehensive School			.05
15. Migration Out of Home Area			−.02
R^2	.08	.11	.11
N	1228	1228	1228

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Note: *Occupational Status* is a 6-value scale (see CSO, 1986, *Occupational Classification)* with 1 = Higher Professional to 6 = Unskilled Manual."

The positive effect of being a woman on reducing the odds of being unemployed is strengthened when educational attainment is controlled for. This would seem to be due mainly to the relative advantage to young men of vocational-technical educational specialisations being statistically controlled for. Since the effect of gender is not significant when we look only at the proportion of time spent unemployed (i.e., when it is not weighted by actual time unemployed) it would seem that the major part of the "advantage" of women is due to their much greater tendency to leave the labour force if necessary (particularly after long spells of unemployment) and take up alternative "home duties" statuses.

The type of school which the young person attended seems to be of little consequence for employment prospects, once social background and educational attainment are controlled for. Neither, it would seem, does

migration out of the home area improve labour market prospects. This is surprising, given the dominance of economic motives for emigration among young people in Ireland (Sexton, *et al.*, 1991: Ch. 6). However, our measure is not very precise as it looks only at current migration status while our dependent variable measures the full experience of unemployment over the respondents' first five years out of school. If unemployment caused a person to migrate and the migration then improved the young person's employment prospects this effect would not be fully captured by our analysis. And, in addition, if unemployed migrants disproportionately return home – which seems to be the case – this again would not be captured by our measures.

A further analysis which we carried out of the young person's chances of being unemployed at the end of their first year out of school (i.e., in 1983) sheds further light on these issues (see Appendix Table A5.2). Some of the factors which prove most important over time are also crucial to labour market success in this first year: father's occupational status remains highly significant as does educational attainment – which once again explains a great deal of the positive effect of mother's education. There are some differences, however, as it is the number of honours subjects taken in school that is most important in the first year while overall levels of educational attainment prove more important in the long run. Neither does the amount of vocational-technical subjects taken have a significant effect initially although it still improves the young person's long-term prospects. This would suggest that such vocational-technical qualifications may be of limited use initially but that they can be translated into particularly advantaged occupational niches and into further vocational skills, which can significantly improve labour market success in the long term. This would also partly explain why women have less of an advantage in the initial stage of work, counterbalanced by their "ability" to withdraw from the labour force to other roles at later stages. Of less importance in the first year also is father's unemployment. This remains a damaging influence but of greater significance in the long run.

Remoteness of place of origin does have a significant effect in the first year out of school, surprisingly reducing unemployment chances! This may be due to more readily available short-term sources of "under-employment" in farming which young rural people can avail of in order to avoid unemployment. Even from this basic analysis, therefore, we can see that young people's social backgrounds, local economic and social contexts and educational experiences equip them with a variety of resources for competing in the labour market but that these resources can be used in different ways and at different times. Thus, specific aspects of educational

attainment (honours subjects taken) appear to give way in importance over time to general levels of attainment, and vocational-technical education advantages take time to have full effect. Local factors also appear to become less important over the years. And over time, patterns of labour force participation increasingly differentiate between the sexes and the resources in the environment; as, for instance, father's unemployment having effects over the long term which are not immediately apparent.

Returning to the overall picture of young people's experience of unemployment, Table 5.5 illustrates how important the factors we have identified can be. This table gives the mean proportion of time in the labour force spent unemployed for those groups of young people who have been identified as at risk (excluding full-time students). Clearly, the personal consequences of certain social background factors can be quite severe, in terms of unemployment experience at least. The most significant finding is the effect on unemployment of socio-economic background characteristics independent of level of education attained, or even occupational status attained. This runs counter to the findings from the early 1980s which we discussed above but to fully explain them would require analysis beyond that which we can provide here. The model also explains only 11 per cent of the total variation in the chances of being unemployed (Table 5.4). There is therefore a substantial part of this particular story left untold.

Table 5.5: *The Mean Proportion of Time in the Labour Force Spent Unemployed for Young People of Different Social Backgrounds*

	Proportion of Time Spent Unemployed
	%
1. *Father's Occupational Status*	
– Upper Middle Class	13
– Lower Working Class	31
2. *Father's Employment Status*	
– Father Employed	18
– Father Unemployed	35
3. *Gender*	
– Male	21
– Female	18
– Farmer's Daughter	14
4. *Level of Education*	
– 3rd Level Degree	13
– No Qualifications	39
5. *Own Occupational Status (currently employed)*	
– Upper Middle Class	8
– Lower Working Class	25

Working in the Home

The importance to women of alternative roles to those provided by what is conventionally thought of as the labour market was clear in our analysis of young people's unemployment experiences. One of the most important aspects of this is the participation of many young women in "home duties" as their major, full-time work role. These women are engaged in unpaid work and are effectively outside the labour market. "Home duties" is an important part of many young women's lives with 10 per cent of them in our sample engaged full-time in home duties, and 39 per cent of those who are married. In later chapters, we will look at how satisfactory this status actually is for these young women, but here we examine some of the factors predicting their propensity to end up in home duties. This is done using a multiple regression analysis of the total time (in weeks) spent in full-time home duties, the results of which are presented in Table 5.6. (To simplify the discussion, such full-time duties will be referred to as "home duties" only).

Examining the results in Equation 1 (Table 5.6), we can see that very few of the social background variables have effects of any size. The only one such variable to be of much importance is the number of children in the young woman's family – with those from bigger families tending to spend more time in home duties. Educational success tends to push down the amount of time spent working in the home but the effect is relatively weak.

Equation 2 shows that while women's experiences in the labour force of employment or unemployment do affect time spent in "home duties" the effects of these experiences are not significant. In fact, it would appear that it is making the transition to employment of itself which has the greatest effect: those women who were in paid employment at some stage of their lives spend much less time in "home duties". However, these labour market history variables explain little of the variance.

It would seem from Equation 3 that it is domestic transition processes rather than social origins or employment histories which are most important in directing young women towards home. Marriage and parenthood are clearly, and not surprisingly, the major factors involved here and they explain some of the effects of coming from a large family and of low levels of educational attainments, which are both associated with early marriage. There is some evidence of a process of withdrawal from the labour force into marriage and single parenthood among women who do not succeed in the labour market (the unemployment experience coefficient being reduced when these variables are controlled for). It is clearly domestic transitions which are the most important factors here as

they explain an extra 9 per cent of the variance over the tiny 1 per cent explained by social background, educational and employment variables. However, it is the interaction between domestic and labour market transitions which explains which women work most in the home.

Table 5.6: *Multiple Regression Analysis of Effects of Social Background, Education, Marriage, Parenthood, Employment and Unemployment Experience on Total Time Spent in "Home Duties" by Women (Time in Weeks)*

Explanatory Variables	*Equation 1*	*Equation 2*	*Equation 3*
	Beta	Beta	Beta
1. Father's Unemployment	–.08	–.16	–.07
2. Father's Occupation	.23	.19	.16
3. No. of Siblings	.24**	.25**	.19
4. Mother's Education (Degree = 1)	–.10	–.17	–.24
5. Farmer's Daughter	.42	.60	.40
6. County Unemployment Rate	–.05	–.05	–.05
7. Remoteness	.01	.01	.01
8. No. of Vocational-Technical Subjects Taken	–1.26	–1.23	–.58
9. Honours Subjects Taken	–.17	–.15	–.07
10. Level of Education	–.14	–.13	–.03
11. Percentage of Time Unemployed		4.51	2.89
12. Percentage of Time Employed		2.87	1.89
13. Ever Employed (Dummy Var.)		–5.24*	–5.21*
14. Marriage			3.08***
15. Married with Children			4.95***
16. Single Motherhood			7.24***
Intercept	2.67	3.54	5.95
R^2	.007	.01	.10
N	621	621	621
p	< .01	< .01	< .01

* p < .10; ** p < .05; ***p < .01

Levels of Occupational Attainment

A related but different issue to that of unemployment is the occupational status attained by young people, as measured by their present and principal job. As we have seen, this does not include those who are presently in any situation other than some form of employment; e.g., full-time students, unemployed people, etc. However, given these restrictions,

it remains important for a number of reasons to assess the effect of social background characteristics on the level of occupational status attained. As we saw above, occupational status attained is highly correlated with the proportion of time spent unemployed. Even apart from this, however, the increased emphasis over the 1980s on getting a job at all costs does not remove the fact that some jobs are more rewarding and satisfying than others, and that working in a "good" or a "bad" job may have serious implications for job satisfaction, income and personal development, and for access to other resources which might help one to successfully attain other transition statuses.

It is also the case that intragenerational social mobility (i.e., over an individual's career) has been comparatively low in Ireland (Breen and Whelan, forthcoming; Whelan and Whelan, 1984). This means that occupational status achieved early in life is quite a good predictor of status attainment during the life-course. This is particularly so in Ireland because of the crucial role of educational certification in initial occupational attainment, and because of the restricted opportunities to improve on the stock of skills and knowledge through second-chance education or training in employment (Hannan and Shortall, 1991). This situation may, of course, change for these young people if policy were to change.

Once again, the relative effects of certain social background characteristics, "local" factors and educational factors were assessed using ordinary least squares multiple regression. Although the dependent variable is ordinal, ordinary least squares results are presented here because they are easily interpretable. An analysis using ordered probit techniques showed the same variables to have significant effects as in the analysis presented in Table 5.7 below.

This analysis shows a highly significant effect for father's occupational status, although not for father's unemployment. Those from high social class backgrounds tend to end up in high social class statuses themselves. It is also worth noting that what relative social mobility has yet to occur is likely to favour those from more advantaged backgrounds as these young people are, as we have seen, most likely to succeed in education. Therefore, once those third-level students not included in the analysis here enter the labour market, this should add further to the association between social class backgrounds and occupational status destinations.

However, the effect of socio-economic status of origin is highly correlated with the effects of other socio-cultural variables such as mother's education and number of children in the family. Both of these have significant additional effects, but also "capture" some of the impact of father's occupational status. Those who come from large families, or whose

mothers have low levels of education, have done worse in the status attainment process. Equally, being a farmer's daughter improves chances of occupational success. However, while none of these variables is affected by "local" factors, almost all are fully mediated by level of education attained, and the number of honours subjects taken in the Leaving Cert. Both of these educational variables show substantial additional independent positive effects on status attainment. Indeed, the only one of the social background characteristics to retain significance, after controlling for education, is father's occupational status. This retains a weak, but still highly significant, effect. So irrespective of educational level and grade achieved, class of origin still impacts on class of destination.

Table 5.7: *Multiple Regression of the Effects of Social Background Characteristics, Local Area Factors and Educational Factors on Level of Occupational Attainment (Upper Middle Class Occupation = 1, Lower Working Class Occupation = 6)*

Predictor Variables	*Eqt. 1*	*Eqt. 2*	*Eqt. 3*	*Eqt. 4*	*Eqt. 5*
			– *Beta Weights* –		
(A) Socio-Economic Status					
1. Father's Unemployment	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02
2. Father's Occupational Status	.28**	.19**	.19**	.19**	.09**
(B) Socio-Cultural Factors					
3. No. of Children in Family		.08**	.08**	.08**	.04
4. Mother's Education		.20**	.21**	.21**	.04
(C) Gender					
5. Gender			–.05	–.06	–.01
6. Farmer's Daughter			–.07*	–.07*	–.04
(D) "Local" Factors					
7. County Unemployment Rate				.04	.07**
8. Remoteness				–.02	.00
(E) Educational Factors					
9. Vocational School					–.01
10. Educational Level					–.30**
11. Number of Honours in Leaving Cert.					–.25**
R^2	.08	.12	.13	.13	.33
F	48.28	38.60	28.04	21.26	47.34
p	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001
N	1059	1059	1059	1059	1059

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Another interesting aspect of the analysis is that, once educational level is controlled for, the unemployment rate in the county of origin has a significant effect in that high local unemployment rates increase the chances of respondents entering a lower status occupation. This only becomes statistically significant once educational success is introduced into the analysis in Equation 5. This suggests that some of the individual social background characteristics were suppressing the local labour market effects, but that once these "confounding" factors were themselves weakened – through controlling for education – the local area effects become clear. It appears, in other words, that in high unemployment counties the better educated take poorer jobs. Why these local factors influence occupational attainment but had no significant effect on unemployment experiences – as we saw above – is difficult to assess. However, it may be that higher local unemployment rates are disproportionately prevalent amongst the most poorly qualified. The moderately qualified get (or take) jobs of lower status locally, or else they emigrate. The most poorly qualified appear to be disproportionately disadvantaged locally but also appear less able or willing to emigrate (see Sexton, *et al.*, 1991).

The overall picture we find of the process of occupational status attainment, therefore, is that the effects of social background characteristics – which explain 13 per cent of the variation in attainment – operate almost totally through educational attainment. Father's occupational status does retain a significant effect on status attainment once education attained is controlled for but the effect is minor. In addition, we find some interesting local labour market effects, with high local unemployment lowering levels of occupational attainment. Obviously "qualification inflation" is of more significance where local unemployment rates are higher. Including the effects of education we are able to explain 33 per cent of the variation in occupational success. Further details on these relationships can be found in Appendix Tables A5.3 and A5.4.

Leaving Home

We have so far examined three aspects of the transition from youth to adulthood which are closely related and essentially deal with satisfactory integration into the labour market, that is, level of educational attainment, the chances of being unemployed, levels of labour force participation and level of occupational status achieved. We now go on to investigate the process of leaving home and establishing an independent residence, and examine the factors influencing those who leave home. In the section following this we investigate the final aspect of the transition – marriage and parenthood.

Establishing an independent residence is a crucial part of the transition to adulthood. It not only weakens dependency on the family of origin, but to a varying extent also reduces interaction levels with it and is an inevitable step on the road to full independence. It appears, however, that a certain level of resources is necessary to make this move satisfactorily (Wallace, 1987c; Murphy and Sullivan, 1986). Disadvantaged groups, particularly perhaps the unemployed, may find it difficult to establish an independent residence (Wallace, 1987c; Ineichen, 1977, 1981). At the same time these are the very groups who may have the greatest motivation to leave home as their dependency on the family of origin will be greatest. On the other hand, very unfavourable home conditions – such as overcrowding or high levels of deprivation – may lead to some young persons being pushed out.

Again, we use a variant of multiple regression analysis to examine the various influences on the decision to leave home, which we treat simply as the decision to leave or stay and do not examine in any greater detail as to the destination or type of residence which is being taken up. This means that the dependent variable in our analysis is a dummy variable, coded 0 for those who have stayed at home and 1 for those who have left. This has implications for the type of statistical techniques we use in our analysis. Unfortunately, ordinary least squares regression gives us biased and inconsistent estimates when used with such dichotomous dependent variables. We, therefore, use logit regression, which is based on the log of the odds of each respondent taking one or other of the values of the dependent variable, and estimated using maximum likelihood procedures. These estimate the equation so that the probability of observing the given values of the dependent variables is as high as possible. We have to be careful in interpreting the estimates given by logit regression because the magnitude of the effect varies with the value of the independent variables, i.e., the effect is nonlinear. However, the sign of the estimates does determine the direction of the effect and the effect does tend to be larger as estimates get larger. Significance tests are also reliable. Details of logit analysis can be found in Maddala (1983); Hanushek and Jackson (1977) and Aldrich and Nelson (1984).

We present the results of this logit regression in Table 5.8 below, where we summarise the results of 5 regression equations examining the effects of socio-economic and socio-cultural background characteristics, local area factors and educational and labour market success on the decision to leave the parental home. The results are presented in terms of the "odds" of a person taking the value 1 rather than the value zero, even though the actual estimation is done using log-odds. Any odds less than 1 suggests that

the person is likely to be still in the parental home (e.g., an odds of .5 means that there is a 2 to 1 chance against the person having left home) while an odds greater than 1 means that this group is relatively likely to have left home.

Table 5.8: *Logit Regression of Social Background Characteristics, Educational and Labour Market Success, Age, Marriage and Parenthood on Leaving the Parental Home (Results Given as Odds of Leaving Home)*

Explanatory Variables	*Eqt. 1*	*Eqt. 2*	*Eqt. 3*	*Eqt. 4*	*Eqt. 5*	*Eqt. 6*
1. Father's Occupation	0.77	0.97	0.96	1.02	1.03	1.05
2. Father's Unemployment	1.03	1.07	1.09	1.12	1.18	1.23
3. Mother's Education	0.81***	0.80***	0.79***	0.92	0.92	0.91
4. No. of Siblings	1.09***	1.08***	1.08***	1.10***	1.08***	1.08***
5. Gender		1.22*	1.23*	1.00	0.82	0.71**
6. Farmer's Daughter		1.70***	1.42*	1.27	1.43*	1.36
7. Remoteness			1.002*	1.001	1.001	1.002**
8. County Unemployment Rate			1.05***	1.04***	1.05***	1.05***
9. No. of Honours Subjects				1.07**	1.08**	1.11***
10. Educational Level				1.12***	1.12***	1.18***
11. Vocational School				1.06	1.04	1.05
12. No. of Vocational Subjects				- .82***	- 0.85**	- 0.81***
13. Current Unemployment					- 0.44***	- 0.33***
14. "Home Duties"					18.35***	4.48***
15. Age						- 0.90*
16. Marriage						63.43***
17. Single Motherhood						- 2.05
N	1501	1501	1501	1501	1501	1501
Proportion of cases correctly predicted	55.6%	57.3%	59.2%	62.8%	65.3%	72.6%
Log-likelihood	-949.42	-942.29	-932.89	-911.07	-863.84	-755.84
Chi-square	27.9	42.2	61.0	104.6	198.92	415.12
Significance, p.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

A number of separate processes seem to be at work in influencing this decision. While father's occupation or unemployment experience do not have any significant impact on leaving home, there are some, apparently contradictory, socio-cultural background effects. High levels of mother's education and being a farmer's daughter both tend to push people away

from home. But these effects are almost fully mediated through the level of education attained, and presumably operate through the process we noted in Chapter 3 of young people with good Leaving Cert results leaving home to attend third-level colleges, or to take up white collar jobs away from home. A different type of effect is that where a larger number of children in the family has a significant positive effect on leaving home, even controlling for class background and educational and labour market experiences. This would seem to be a consistent "push" factor within the home which motivates young people to try to leave the parental home. The effect of gender is also quite clear: women are apparently more likely to leave home but once we control for their better education, lower unemployment and higher rates of marriage they actually appear less likely to leave. Young women do tend to leave home earlier but perhaps for reasons more related to taking up other roles than is the case for young men.

Apart from these individual social background characteristics, the type of area or community one lives in seems to strongly influence the decision to leave home, presumably linked to migration out of the area. Remoteness of place of origin has a consistent positive effect on leaving home – the more remote the area the greater the tendency. Local economic conditions also, as measured by the county unemployment rate, have a highly significant effect on pushing young people out of the parental home. Clearly economic opportunities are important in the decisions of young people of all social backgrounds in these areas.

Educational level attained has a substantial additional effect, as we have noted above; those with higher educational qualifications tending to leave home more readily. And the introduction of educational level mediates the effect of most preceding social background variables – except size of family. This educational effect is undoubtedly related to third-level students leaving home to attend college. But the effect is also clearly observable at Leaving Cert level (see Table 5.9), indicating that many such non-urban people leave home to compete fully in the national labour market which, as we observed in Chapter 2, exists for those with a good Leaving Cert education. Apart from general level of education, the number of honours subjects a person has taken also has a positive effect on the odds of leaving home, further indicating the importance of access to education and labour market opportunities in the process of leaving.

Interestingly, the number of vocational-technical subjects a young person has taken decreases the odds of leaving home and is highly statistically significant. Although these qualifications do help young men in particular in gaining employment, as we saw in our analysis of

unemployment experiences, it would seem likely that they can be more readily taken advantage of in local labour markets as manual work is less geographically concentrated than clerical or professional work which requires a more academic education.

Table 5.9: *The Percentage of Young People with Certain Characteristics Who Have Left Their Parental Home by 1987*

		% Having Left Home	*(N)*
(A)	*Mother's Education*		
	Primary	46.4	(805)
	Inter Cert	51.0	(416)
	Leaving Cert	50.3	(295)
	Third-Level Cert/Dip	71.2	(34)
	Third-Level Degree	70.5	(44)
(B)	*No. of Children in Family*		
	1 – 3	43.8	(738)
	4 – 6	51.9	(600)
	7 +	57.1	(217)
(C)	*Educational Level Attained*		
	No Qualifications	41.9	(113)
	Group Cert	34.1	(131)
	Inter Cert	43.9	(328)
	Leaving Cert	51.4	(718)
	Third-Level Dip/Cert	53.5	(109)
	Third-Level Degree	65.5	(198)
(D)	*Time in Labour Force Spent Unemployed*		
	None	49.0	(525)
	Less than 20%	48.2	(423)
	20 to 40%	46.6	(194)
	40 to 60%	41.1	(110)
	60 to 80%	59.4	(77)
	80 to 100%	45.8	(118)
(E)	*Current Employment Status and Leaving Home*		
	Employed:	49.9	(1216)
	In Full-time Education:	71.0	(61)
	Unemployed:	29.0	(261)
	Home Duties:	94.5	(77)
	Other:	49.0	(11)

There are, then, two major processes at work here through the education system – those who do well in academic streams at school tend to leave home, often to migrate, for further education or employment. And those who specialise in the vocational-technical area do well as regards gaining employment but are far more likely to stay in their local area, where there is a more uniform demand for this type of labour. Those who fare poorly educationally are more likely to end up unemployed and often remain in the parental home in unfavourable circumstances.

The effect of unemployment is also very important, with current unemployment making it very difficult for the young person to leave home. Controlling for age and marital status, the odds are 3 to 1 against an unemployed young person having left the parental home. Being in "home duties" is highly predictive of leaving home, even when marriage, (itself having a huge effect), is controlled for. Single motherhood, although it increases the odds of leaving home, does not have a statistically significant effect and indeed many more single mothers than married women do remain in the parental home. There is also a tendency for decreasing numbers of young people to leave home as they get older – when one controls for all other variables. This unusual finding can be explained by the fact that our sample is restricted to a particular age group (in practice those under 24) and that we do not, therefore, capture the full process of transition for all those in the sample. Almost all of those in the sample will leave the parental home eventually, so what we are looking at here is really the process of relatively early home-leaving. It would appear, therefore, that – all other things being equal – there is a small tendency for those who leave home in their late teens or early 20s to leave earlier rather than later. This effect is, of course, very minor compared to the powerful structuring forces of local labour markets, education, labour market success and marital transitions. It does suggest, however, that the social-developmental process of leaving home which we discussed in Chapter 3 is slow to develop in Ireland and that the impact of education and labour markets overwhelms any such tendency among those in their late teens.

The decision to leave home seems to be influenced by a number of different factors, seemingly affecting different groups, which may explain the general lack of significance of socio-economic background effects. The most advantaged of those leaving home seem to be those whose mothers are well educated, and farmers' daughters, who do well educationally and leave home early either for third-level education or to take up white collar employment on getting good Leaving Certificate results. Those with vocational-technical qualifications tend to remain at home and participate in local labour markets. There also appears to be a number of other factors

operating which push young people out of the parental home – those we found to be significant were the number of children in the family and the structure and level of opportunities in the local area. Unemployment, however, clearly blocks such a transition. The decision to leave home is also closely linked to marriage or parenthood. These are the elements of the transition to adulthood which we now examine.

Marriage and Parenthood

As we saw in the previous chapter, marriage and parenthood are distributed differently among people with varying social backgrounds and different schooling and labour market experiences. We will examine here the typical social background characteristics and experiences of those who marry early, those who start families early once married or who choose or are compelled by circumstances into single parenthood.

While we saw in Chapter 3 that there is a small number of the better educated who have stable sexual relationships and become parents outside of marriage, early marriage, premature pregnancy and larger families are generally associated with less advantaged backgrounds. Unemployment might be expected to have a substantial impact on these processes (Ineichen, 1977; Payne, 1989). On the other hand, marriage is generally seen as improving employment prospects for males. While the interrelationships between the transitions we have examined are complex, it would seem safe to suppose that those from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds will tend to be married earlier, be more likely to be single parents and show higher fertility levels, particularly if from families where high fertility was the norm. Early marriage, however, may not be so predictable, as those without resources may have to postpone marriage until they can accumulate what is seen as an acceptable material basis for marriage.

Unfortunately, as such small numbers in our sample had children (8.0%) or were married (12.2%), we found multiple regression techniques of little use in our analysis. Instead, we rely on the patterns revealed in the percentages given in Tables 5.10 and 5.11. Looking first at the social background characteristics in Table 5.10 we find a number of statistically significant relationships. Interestingly, socio-economic background seems to have some minor effects on single parenthood and marriage. Young women from working class backgrounds and those having unemployed fathers, have higher premarital pregnancy rates; while early marriage also tends to be more characteristic of working class girls. There are some indications that father's low occupational status tends to push up fertility within marriage but not to any significant degree.

Table 5.10: *The Relationships Between Social Background Characteristics and Marriage and Parenthood Among Women: Percentage Single Parents, Married and Percentage with Children*

Social Background Characteristics	*% of Single Women with Children*	*% of Women Married*	*% of Married Women with Children*
(A) Father's Occupational Status			
Upper Middle Class	1.3 (69)	12.7 (79)	36.5 (10)
Middle Class	2.6 (110)	8.9 (120)	34.3 (11)
Lower Middle Class	3.8 (131)	19.5 (162)	29.6 (32)
Upper Working Class	8.4 (155)	21.9 (198)	36.3 (43)
Working Class	3.3 (87)	20.1 (109)	66.7 (22)
Lower Working Class	8.4 (87)	19.6 (108)	53.0 (21)
(Chi-squared, p)	(10.27, <.07)	(11.13, <.05)	(9.48, n.s.)
(B) Father's Unemployment			
Employed	4.0 (511)	17.3 (618)	42.1
Unemployed	13.3 (70)	15.7 (83)	50.6
(Chi-squared, p)	(10.3, < .01))	(n.s.)	(n.s.)
(C) Mother's Education			
Leaving Cert or higher	2.7 (156)	7.4 (169)	41.8 (13)
Inter Cert	3.3 (184)	17.5 (223)	30.7 (39)
Primary	6.7 (325)	21.6 (415)	48.0 (90)
(Chi-squared, p)	(5.02, <.08)	(16.66, <.001)	(3.35, n.s.)
(D) Number of Children in Family			
1 – 3	5.6 (318)	12.8 (365)	42.4 (47)
4 – 6	4.1 (237)	20.5 (298)	39.4 (61)
7 +	7.3 (92)	23.0 (120)	40.7 (28)
(Chi-squared, p)	(1.52, n.s.)	(20.16, <.01)	(0.10, n.s.)
(E) Farm Background			
All Women	5.1 (677)	17.6 (821)	43.8 (144)
(Farmer – Farmer's Daughters	2.4 (110)	24.0 (144)	39.2 (35)
– Others)	5.6 (567)	16.2 (676)	45.2 (109)
(p)	(n.s.)	(p < .05)	(n.s.)

Table 5.11: *The Relationships Between Educational and Labour Market Success and Marriage and Parenthood Among Women*

Characteristics of Women	*% of Single Women with Children*	*% of Women Married*	*% of Married Women with Children*
(A) Level of Education Achieved			
No Qualifications	19.0 (47)	18.1 (57)	51.0 (10)
Group Cert	0 (22)	11.9 (25)	76.3 (3)
Inter Cert	13.2 (112)	26.5 (153)	53.7 (40)
Leaving Cert	2.6 (355)	18.8 (438)	36.3 (82)
Third Level Completed	1.0 (130)	5.2 (137)	55.1 (7)
(Chi-squared, p)	(43.96, <.00001)	(23.63, <.001)	(5.35, n.s.)
(B) Occupational Status Attained for First Job			
Middle Class	–	8.6 (153)	25.5 (13)
Lower Middle/Upper Working Class	–	12.6 (257)	19.1 (32)
Working Class	–	15.7 (188)	35.9 (30)
(Chi-squared, p)	–	(3.90, n.s.)	(2.25, n.s.)
(C) Proportion of Time Unemployed/ Before Birth of Child			
80 to 100%	24.8 (41)	37.5 (65)	64.2 (24)
60 to 80%	9.7 (27)	12.0 (31)	49.3 (4)
40 to 60%	2.5 (35)	7.7 (38)	0 (3)
20 to 40%	2.2 (82)	10.0 (91)	47.3 (9)
1 to 20%	0.7 (199)	9.2 (219)	6.7 (20)
None at all	4.1 (210)	23.0 (272)	39.6 (63)
(Chi-squared, p)	(51.45, <.001)	(41.56, <.0001)	(17.62, <.01)

However, socio-cultural factors seem to have a greater impact with mothers' educational level seemingly influencing both single parenthood and propensity to marry. These effects seem to be direct, as they do not vary by the level of education achieved by young persons themselves, and may be due to the cultural influence of the mother in the family of origin. Another, presumably cultural, influence is the number of children in the family of origin. But while there does seem to be a trend towards earlier parenthood, married or unmarried, among those from larger families the only significant effect is that on early marriage. Thus, those from large families tend to show a consistent pattern of earlier marriage. However, there is some variation in this pattern for different genders, with 43 per cent of married males coming from families with 3 children or less but only 1 in 3 of married women coming from such families. On the other

hand, 47 per cent of married women come from families with 4 to 6 children, while only 31 per cent of married men do. In other words, originating family size affects young women's marriage decisions disproportionately.

Another interaction of interest between gender and social conditions is seen by comparing the marriage and parenthood patterns of farmers' daughters with those from other occupational groups. While there is no statistically significant difference between the incidence of premarital pregnancy in the two groups, farmers' daughters have slightly lower rates but do show a significant tendency to get married earlier. Added to their lower incidence of single parenthood, this does seem to suggest a set of values and practices around marriage and fertility that are different from other groups.

Table 5.11 shows how some other transition experiences affect the transition to marriage and parenthood. It first shows the effect of education but this has been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. While it is clear that early single parenthood is characteristic of those with poor education, occupational status attained has little effect – though this is somewhat biased for single parenthood since 80 per cent do not hold a job, and the type of jobs sought would have been predominantly of very low status. An important issue is how the experience of unemployment affects marriage and fertility practices. This is measured by the proportion of time spent unemployed while the young person was in the labour force (and before the birth of the first child, where relevant). We find that generally – with some exceptions – as the proportion of time spent unemployed rises, so rates of premarital pregnancy, marriage and fertility within marriage rise; and are particularly concentrated among those who have spent almost all their time, since leaving school, unemployed. This finding is hardly surprising but is extremely alarming for it would appear that a "vortex of disadvantage" (Ineichen, 1981, 1977) clearly exists for those in poor labour market situations and with high marital and parental responsibilities. A more surprising finding is that large numbers of those who have not spent any of their time in the labour force unemployed (or only a negligible amount of time) marry and start families at an early age. However, most of these women had spent hardly any time at all in the labour force so this result is somewhat spurious. Socio-economic disadvantages and effective exclusion from the labour market seem to be most important factors affecting early marriage and fertility practices.

Overall then, we find that unemployment, both personal and of the family of origin, can have a substantial effect on marriage and fertility practices and may lead to a concentration of disadvantage in certain

groups. Other, more specifically socio-cultural, factors also have important but varying effects – such as mother's education, number of children in the family of origin, gender and farming background. Level of education attained also has a substantial impact on marriage and parenthood processes as those with least opportunities and prospects of advancement tend to marry and have children at earlier ages.

These various factors also tend to cluster together so that social class background and educational and labour market experiences can jointly affect the chance of becoming a mother or getting married at a young age. Young women from working class backgrounds, whose mothers received only a primary education, who themselves gained the Intermediate Certificate or less and who spent over 60 per cent of their time in the labour force unemployed show a strong propensity to become single mothers. Of these women, 14.5 per cent are single mothers which compares to the 3.9 per cent of all women (5.1 per cent of all single women), and 0.6 per cent of those women from the opposite extreme – middle class women whose mothers had more than primary education, who stayed in education after the Intermediate Certificate and who spent less than 60 per cent of their time in the labour force unemployed. Most important influences here would appear to be educational experiences. Single motherhood, therefore, typically follows a particularly unsatisfactory set of transitions through education into the labour market.

The most disadvantaged group tends to marry less, however, with only 4.9 per cent of the original group we described above being married. This is actually the lowest marriage rate, with the next lowest rate being among the most advantaged group. In general, early marriage among women is associated, as we have seen, with disadvantaged backgrounds and poor educational and labour market experiences – although not as much as is true of single motherhood. It does seem, however, that some basic level of resources is necessary for marriage as those in the most deprived circumstances combine a low rate of marriage with a high rate of single motherhood. There is also some suggestion that this group's situation is aggravated in Dublin. There are only 8 women in question in Dublin from working class backgrounds, whose mothers had only a primary level of education, who had a very poor education themselves and who had a very poor employment record. Of these none is married while 4 are single mothers – suggesting that single motherhood is becoming a common alternative to marriage (although of course these numbers are very small). Overall, then, social background factors can carry through to affect young

people's marriage and parenthood patterns but the process of transition to adulthood through education and the labour market can itself also change these patterns.

Summary: Social Background Characteristics and Transitions to Adulthood

We have now examined a number of the most important dimensions of the transition to adulthood – getting educational qualifications, gaining access to employment and getting a good job, leaving the family home, becoming a parent and getting married – and how various social background characteristics influence these transitions. We can now draw together some of these influences and show how social background factors impact on the overall transition process.

Looking at occupational status of origin, we find that it has a direct effect on educational and labour market transitions, with those from higher status backgrounds faring much better in both respects. Only part of the effect on employment is mediated through educational attainment, particularly on the level of occupational status attained. Having your father unemployed while you were at school has a direct effect on personal experience of unemployment which is not mediated by level of education attained, and which suggests that, as Payne (1987) claims, unemployment does run in families. It also increases the chances of young women becoming single parents. However, it does not seem to have much of an impact on educational or occupational attainment levels (unlike father's occupational status), nor on household formation processes.

The socio-cultural background of the young person is also found to be of great importance, with both mother's educational level and being a farmer's daughter affecting labour market success and independent household formation strongly; though both effects are wholly mediated through educational level attained. The number of children in the family of origin also affects occupational status attained through its impact on education. Such large families seem also to push young people into forming new households earlier. Both factors also affect marriage and fertility practices, with large families and low mother's education affecting early marriage. Being a farmer's daughter has a very interesting effect here in that while this group tends to marry at an early age, they seem to exercise quite tight control over their own fertility both within and outside of marriage. While gender of itself seems to have little effect on the success or otherwise of the various transitions in their broadest forms, farmers' daughters appear to enjoy greater educational and consequently labour market success, and also to be able to postpone parenthood until well established.

As regards local area and community effects, both remoteness of community of origin and living in a county with high unemployment rates tends to push young people into leaving home early – through migration. Those from remote areas tend to do well educationally, and those from areas of high unemployment seem to suffer less in terms of experience of unemployment – because of migration – than in the level of occupational status attained. It appears that in high unemployment areas, all else being equal, the better educated are willing to take lower status jobs – these jobs in any case being relatively more plentiful.

The follow-on effects of one transition experience on others are quite marked: e.g., the crucially important role of educational attainment on all other transitions. Education is highly determinative of almost all aspects of the transition – whether to the labour market, to new household formation, or to marriage and parenthood. Labour market experiences on leaving school are also vitally important, particularly the experience of unemployment. Unemployment tends to prevent the young person leaving the parental home, although the unemployed are also more likely to become parents or get married earlier. Amongst the latter – who also tend to be poorly educated – there is a concentration of disadvantages from their original social backgrounds to poor employment records, which appears to leave them with very few options except to undertake alternative and usually premature transitions to adulthood.

Overall then, social class remains a highly determinative factor in the life chances of young people: particularly the substantial impact of social origin factors on own educational attainment, and its follow-on impact on other own transition processes. The impact of unemployment, both parental and personal, appears to have become increasingly important – undermining and even corroding the transition to adulthood for many young people, as Wallace (1987c) argues. There is a serious danger of a specific subgroup of deprived young people becoming isolated from mainstream social life from an extremely early age.

Related to socio-economic background, but not wholly determined by it, are a number of family socio-cultural factors – like mothers' level of education – which impact strongly on education and through this on labour market success, and even on fertility practices. Gender differences are quite marked, showing particular patterns in the case of farmers' daughters who seem to be making quite successful transitions.

Finally, the effects of size of place of origin and its remoteness are very marked – with increased outmigration mitigated by higher levels of educational achievement.

Appendix Table A5.1: *The Relationships Between Socio-Cultural Status of Origin and Educational Level Achieved by 1987*

Socio-Cultural Status of Origin	*1 No Quals*	*2 Group Cert*	*3 Inter Cert*	*4 Leaving Cert*	*5 Cert/ Diploma*	*6 Degree*	*Total*
(A) Father's Occupational Status				- % -			
1. Upper Middle Class (High Prof./Employer/ Large Farmer)	-	4.0	7.0	48.5 (9.0)	9.6	32.3	100 (162)
2. Middle Class	3.1	6.2	12.4	50.4 (6.9)	10.5	17.5	100 (232)
3. Lower Middle Class	3.8	5.2	20.0	50.7 (4.0)	8.7	11.6	100 (34)
4. Upper Working Class	7.8	12.9	27.5	40.7 (4.0)	5.4	5.7	100 (362)
5. Working Class	11.4	10.8	28.0	39.6 (3.5)	3.8	6.3	100 (199)
6. Lower Working Class (Unskilled Manual)	17.9	12.5	26.3	37.3 (3.7)	1.1	4.8	100 (213)
Total	7.2	8.7	21.2	44.7 (4.9)	6.6	11.6	100 (1513) (r = -.37)
(B) Mother's Level of Education							
1. Degree/Dip	-	-	1.3	38.2	14.5	44.7	100 (76)
2. Leaving Cert	0.5	1.6	10.5	52.5	8.6	26.2	100 (286)
3. Inter Cert	4.4	6.7	18.9	49.4	7.3	13.3	100 (420)
4. Primary only	11.1	12.0	26.6	40.5	5.2	4.6	100 (202) (r = -.43)
(C) Father's Employment/ Unemployment Status							
1. Employed	5.1	8.4	18.9	47.6	8.0	12.0	100 (1240)
2. Unemployed	19.5	8.1	29.7	33.7	2.2	6.8	100 (145)
3. Other	9.9	7.4	24.8	34.7	5.0	18.3	100 (201)
			(Chi-squared = 101.6, p <.01)				
(D) No. of Children in Family							
1 - 3	7.5	7.1	16.7	48.5	6.0	14.2	100 (399)
4 - 6	5.0	7.6	19.8	46.0	7.8	13.7	100 (798)
7 +	11.4	11.0	26.1	36.1	6.5	8.9	100 (341) (r = -.12)

Appendix Table A5.2: *Logit Regression Analysis of the Odds of Being Unemployed One Year After Leaving School (1983) and the Effect of Social Background, Education and Migration*

	Explanatory Variables	*Equation 1 Social Background*	*Equation 2 1 + Local and Educational Factors*	*Equation 3 2 + Vocational Education*	*Equation 4 3 + Migration*
1.	Father's Occupation	.20**	.13**	.13**	.13**
2.	Mother's Unemployment	.32	.32	.33	.31
3.	Mother's Education	.35**	.16*	.15	.14
4.	No. of Siblings	.02	−.02	−.04	−.04
5.	Gender	−.15	−.10	−.12	−.13
6.	Farmer's Daughter	.01	.29	.25	.27
7.	Remoteness		−.002*	−.002*	−.002*
8.	County Unemployment Rate		.02	.02	.02
9.	Level of Education		−.03	−.02	−.02
10.	No. of Honours Subjects Taken		−.30**	−.29**	−.28**
11.	No. of Vocational-Technical Subjects Taken			−.05	−.05
12.	Attended Vocational School			.26	.25
13.	Migrated from Home Area				−.24
14.	Intercept	−3.14**	−1.62**	−1.68**	−1.61**
	Log-Likelihood	−815.15	−771.55	−769.93	−768.47
	% of Cases Classified Correctly	73.4%	73.0%	73.6%	74.3%
	N	1538	1538	1538	1538

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Appendix Table A5.3: *Mean County Unemployment Rates for each Occupational Status Category*

	County Unemployment Rate	*(N)*
	%	
Upper Middle Class	11.5	(92)
Middle Class	12.4	(212)
Lower Middle Class	11.6	(340)
Upper Working Class	12.5	(211)
Working Class	12.4	(246)
Lower Working Class	12.7	(112)
Total	12.2	(1213)

Appendix Table A5.4: *The Relationships Between Social Background Characteristics, Educational Attainment and Occupational Status Attainment by 1987 (not including Full-time Students in 1987)*

	Occupational Status Achieved						
Individual Characteristics	*Lower Working*	*Working*	*Upper Working*	*Lower Middle*	*Middle*	*Upper Middle*	*Total*
(A) Father's Occupational Status							
1. Lower Working Class	16.4	34.0	15.7	24.0	8.3	1.6	100 (140)
2. Working Class	12.0	33.1	19.9	19.5	13.6	1.9	100 (144)
3. Upper Working Class	10.0	24.7	18.8	31.1	11.1	4.4	100 (250)
4. Lower Middle Class	8.2	13.9	20.7	29.5	19.8	7.9	100 (279)
5. Middle Class	7.2	12.4	16.2	30.2	25.4	8.6	100 (201)
6. Upper Middle Class	2.7	15.5	11.1	29.8	23.2	17.5	100 (128)
Total	9.3	21.1	17.7	28.1	17.1	6.8	100 (1143)
(Chi-squared = 127.9, p < .001)							
(B) No. of Children in Family							
1 – 3	6.5	18.2	17.9	28.3	18.3	10.8	100 (568)
4 – 6	9.7	21.9	15.4	30.1	17.4	5.5	100 (455)
7 +	15.3	26.5	19.8	22.0	13.9	2.5	100 (159)
(Chi-squared = 37.6, p < .001)							
(C) Gender and Farm Background							
Male	12.3	15.4	30.8	16.5	14.2	10.7	100 (633)
Female (incl. Farmers' Daughters)	5.7	25.7	2.9	40.0	21.2	4.5	100 (590)
Farmer's Daughter	8.8	22.9	4.1	31.4	26.8	5.9	100 (106)
(D) Educational Level							
1. No Qualifications	24.8	36.4	21.3	17.5	–	–	100 (56)
2. Group Cert	18.1	38.4	29.1	11.9	2.6	–	100 (95)
3. Inter Cert	14.0	27.1	29.4	22.3	5.2	2.0	100 (222)
4. Leaving Cert	7.0	19.3	14.2	38.3	15.6	5.5	100 (606)
5. Third Level Dip/Cert	4.9	9.2	14.8	23.6	39.2	8.4	100 (98)
6 Third Level Degree	–	3.5	2.5	9.8	49.5	34.6	100 (133)
(Chi-squared = 492.2, p < .001)							

Chapter 6

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL PATTERNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

Feelings of personal well-being are influenced by many factors external to the individual. We investigate in the rest of this study the well-being effects on young people of differences in their social background, education and employment experiences as they affect their transition paths to adulthood. We have already seen how the various dimensions of transition link together, and how the process is affected by a variation in social origins and educational level achieved. We now go on to examine how these broader processes impact on the individual's feelings of stress or well-being. Before we begin our analysis, however, it is worth recalling some of the crucial factors affecting stress.

As we saw in the Chapter 2, we can identify three major conceptual domains of psychological stress (Pearlin, 1990; Whelan *et al.*, 1991). These are the *sources*, the *mediators* and the *manifestations* of stress. The *sources* of stress can be usefully thought of as *acute* or *chronic* stressors (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). Acute stressors are generally associated with particular life events which have direct stress effects. Early laboratory research emphasised the number and pacing of changes in life events in explaining stress effects, assuming that the individual human being was essentially hostile to change and distressed by it. More recent work, as Pearlin *et al.* (1981) point out, has concentrated on the nature and quality of the life events in question – including factors such as the desirability of the event and the degree of control over it. Equally, stressful life events do not often erupt without warning. They are often expected and may be only one in a series of continuing problems (Pearlin, 1990). Certain transition sequences could well fall into this category – such as educational failure and subsequent unemployment, etc.

More attention is now focused on chronic stressors, that is sources of stress which are enduring and difficult-to-change. Avison and Turner (1988) outline three major types of chronic strain: role strain, where difficulties arise with the definition or performance of roles or where there is conflict between roles – for instance, work and home (Pearlin, 1991); ongoing, disadvantageous life circumstances – such as financial stress; and, enduring interpersonal difficulties. Our focus in looking at the social-

psychological effects of the process of transition to adulthood will be on the first two of these stressors but these will, of course, generally aggravate interpersonal difficulties.

Of course, both types of stressors – acute and chronic – are intimately related and should not be thought of as mutually exclusive (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; Whelan, 1992a). Events may cause stress not only directly but by affecting more enduring life conditions (e.g., redundancy may lead to poverty), and persistent domestic problems may cause a young person to leave home prematurely. Unexpected life events and chronic (continuing) strains may also interact in ways which give meaning to each other, so that differences in prior circumstances – whether being long-term unemployed or not, for instance – may cause the same event (such as premarital pregnancy) to be experienced either as very stressful or as of minor significance: "just as *preceding* conditions colour the meaning and the impact of the event, *consequent* conditions may also regulate the impact of the event" (Pearlin, 1991, p. 247).

This suggests, in the light of these comments, that in the transition to adulthood life events – such as employment, marriage, parenthood and leaving the parental home – occur in the context of quite different life histories experienced by young people, such as differences in social background and in educational experience, or family unemployment history. Such differences in background and setting can have a profound influence on the young person's ongoing roles, circumstances and experience of stress. The transition to adulthood remoulds the life patterns of the young person, and the nature of that remoulding may be more or less stressful. A stressful life event early in the transition, such as becoming unemployed, may structure subsequent roles and conditions of life (e.g., increased financial strain or social isolation), which may in turn provide the context for, and affect the outcomes of, later life events (such as leaving home or becoming a parent). When assessing the psychological impact of various aspects of the transition, therefore, we will need to examine carefully the effects of both acute and chronic stressors and how they interact. We have already discussed the impact of some aspects of the transition, particularly unemployment, in great detail in the second chapter.

The *mediators* of psychological stress are factors which govern (or mediate) the effects of stressors on stress outcomes (Pearlin, 1990) and have also been discussed in great detail in Chapter 2. We will examine their role in Chapter 8 and will focus particularly on the role of financial strain, peer group contexts, perceptions of social support and social contact, labour market attitudes and beliefs, and personal feelings of control and efficacy – all of which have been discussed in Chapter 2.

The *manifestations* of stress are the outcomes of the stress process and in this study we focus on a well-known and extensively validated measure of minor psychiatric disorder and non-psychotic depression – the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). In the next sections we discuss this measure and then present some initial results on the pattern of psychological distress among different social groups.

Measuring Psychological Distress

We use the GHQ in its 12-item format in this study to assess the respondent's current mental and emotional state. The 12 items consist of 6 positive and 6 negative items with two different sets of response categories allowed. The two sets of response categories were printed on cards and handed to respondents. Positively and negatively worded questions were alternated to minimise response "sets" or bias. The individual questions were preceded by the general question: "I would like to ask you some questions about your health and how you have been feeling recently".

The first set of 6 questions had 4 response categories:

1. More so than usual
2. Same as usual
3. Less than usual
4. Much less than than usual.

And these individual questions were each preceded by the question:
– "Have you recently ..."

1. "Been feeling unhappy and depressed?"
2. "Felt capable of making decisions about things?"
3. "Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?"
4. "Been feeling reasonably happy all things considered?"
5. "Been able to face up to your problems?"
6. "Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?"

The respondent was expected, and prompted if necessary, to answer using that 1 of the 4 response categories – on a card handed to the respondent – which most closely expressed his/her feelings – and was so recorded by the interviewer.

The second set of 6 questions had slightly different response categories:

1. "Not at all"
2. "No more than usual"
3. "Rather more than usual"
4. "Much more than usual"

Again, each question was preceded by: "Have you recently ..."

7. "Felt able to enjoy your day-to-day activities?"

8. "Lost much sleep over worrying?"
9. "Felt that you are playing a useful part in things?"
10. "Felt constantly under stress?"
11. "Been able to concentrate on what you are doing?"
12. "Been losing confidence in yourself?"

The GHQ was, therefore, adapted so that it could be administered by interviewers, to avoid the grouping of "positive" or "negative" items as well as the need to change the response format. So, it was administered in two sets, with an equal number of positive and negative items in each set. The procedure used and its implications for the analysis are discussed fully in Whelan, *et al.* (1991). International evidence on the validity of the GHQ as a measure is also presented by these authors. They also find that the GHQ is a valid and reliable measure of psychological distress in the Irish context, and that it behaves much as it does in other international studies (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991).

The precise meaning of a GHQ score can be thought of in two ways. Allowing each respondent a score of 0 or 1 on each item (dichotomised) a minimum score of 0 and a max. score of 12 is possible on the scale. A respondent's score can be thought of as indicating her/his position on a continuum from no to very severe stress and even psychiatric disturbance. However, the GHQ scores can also be used to estimate what proportion of the population fall above a particular threshold that would be likely to be assessed as having a clinically significant disturbance if interviewed by a clinical psychiatrist (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, pp. 21-22). The GHQ items are chosen to differentiate likely psychiatric patients from those who would not be classified as such. The "threshold score" is the number of symptoms at which the probability that an individual will be thought to be a psychiatric case exceeds 0.5. In keeping with international studies (Goldberg and Williams, 1988) and previous Irish work (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; McCarthy and Ronayne, 1984) the threshold score for such a case is taken as 2; that is, any respondent exhibiting more than two symptoms is more than likely to be independently assessed as being psychiatrically ill.

The 12-item GHQ in its interview format would seem to be a valid measure of psychiatric disturbance in the population. It is also a reliable measure with a Guttman split-half coefficient of .80 and a Cronbach's alpha of .81 which is highly reliable. Since this reliability is reduced by the removal of any one of such items, all of them are retained. This measure should give us a good indication, therefore, of the levels of psychological distress experienced by young people making the transition to adulthood.

Young People and Psychological Distress: A First Look

The distribution of scores on the GHQ among our sample of young Irish people is presented in Table 6.1 – with comparison figures from Whelan, *et al.* (1991, p. 24) estimates for the population. For each item a score of 1 is given for each response that is *more negative* than normal (usual).

Table 6.1: *Distribution of General Health Questionnaire Scores for School Leavers, and Estimates for the Adult Population*

GHQ Score	*School Leavers*		*Adult Population (Whelan, et al., 1991)*	
	Per Cent	*Cumulative Percentage*	*Per Cent*	*Cumulative* Percentage*
0	70.6	70.6	65.2	65.2
1	11.6	82.2	11.8	77.0
2	6.2	88.4	5.9	82.9
3	3.8	92.2	4.5	87.4
4	2.5	94.7	3.6	91.0
5	1.8	96.5	2.7	93.7
6	1.5	98.0	2.6	96.3
7	1.0	99.0	1.2	97.5
8	0.5	99.5	1.0	98.5
9	0.3	99.8	0.7	99.2
10	0.1	99.9	0.3	99.5
11	0.0	99.9	0.2	99.7
12	0.1	100.0	0.2	99.9

* These percentages may not add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding errors.

There are, therefore, 11.6 per cent of the sample above the threshold score of 2. This compares with the figure of 17.1 per cent for the adult population in Whelan *et al.* (1991). This suggests, initially at least, that young people suffer less from psychological distress than the adult population at large – even though Whelan *et al.* (1991) find no significant overall age effect on distress. The overall distribution of scores, given the higher levels of distress among adults, is, however, remarkably similar for the two groups.

Of course, as we saw in Chapter 2, levels of psychological distress will vary among young people according to the stress factors to which they are exposed, and the resources with which they can respond to it. An initial way of investigating these variations is to examine how socio-demographic

differences – indicating differences in exposure and vulnerability to stress – affect GHQ scores. This is done in Tables 6.2 to 6.6 where the results for young people (based on our survey) are compared with those for the adult population as a whole (using the results in Whelan *et al.*, 1991).

Table 6.2: *GHQ Scores by Gender*

Gender	*Percentage above GHQ Threshold*		*Mean GHQ Score*	
	School Leavers	*Adults**	*School Leavers*	*Adults**
Female	12.4	19.0	0.81	1.23
Male	10.9	15.1	0.78	0.99
(N)	1136	6095	1136	6095
Statistical Tests	$X^2 = 0.63$ p = n.s.	$X^2 = 16.1$ p<.001	$Eta^2 = .001$ F = .08 p = n.s.	$Eta^2 = .003$ F = 20.6 p<.001

Source: * Whelan *et al.*, 1991, p. 26.

Table 6.3: *GHQ Scores by Social Class*

Social Class	*Percentage above GHQ Threshold*			*Mean GHQ Score*		
	School Leavers (Father's Occupation)	*School Leavers (Own Occupation)*	*Adults**	*School Leavers (Father's Occupation)*	*School Leavers (Own Occupation)*	*Adults**
Upper middle class	12.8	8.1	8.1	.82	.39	.57
Middle class	8.0	5.7	10.8	.64	.37	.72
Lower middle class	6.3	8.7	13.4	.56	.61	.86
Upper working class	14.6	3.5	19.3	.94	.33	1.19
Working class	9.7	8.3	19.3	.59	.56	1.26
Lower working class	18.5	2.9	23.2	1.22	.47	1.58
N	1078	817	5726	1078	817	5726
Chi square	18.7	6.3		$Eta^2 = .02$	.023	
p	<.01	n.s.		F = 4.1	26.3	
Pearson's r	.07	–.02		p = < .01	< .01	

Source: * Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, pp. 28-29

Table 6.4: *GHQ Scores by Father's Occupation/Social Class of Origin*

Father's Occupational Status	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*	*Mean GHQ Score*
Manual	14.4	0.93
Non-manual	8.3	0.64
Total	11.5	0.79
N	1,078	1,078
	$X^2 = 9.9$ $p < .001$	$Eta^2 = .01$ $F = 7.98$ $p < .01$

Examining gender differences first, we find, as in most international studies, that adult women suffer more distress – although the differences observed here are not large (see Table 6.2). The direction of the difference for school leavers is similar to that for the adult population (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, p. 26), but the differences are statistically insignificant. However, there may to be important interaction effects between gender and other social-background and transition factors which affect psychological distress, and this will be explored later. Experiences of unemployment or of marriage may vary quite substantially by gender, for instance.

Socio-economic status might also be expected to affect psychological well-being given the well-documented differences in experiences and life-chances of those in different social classes. Indeed, Table 6.3 shows that there is a clear decline in well-being among the adult population as we go down the social class scale. The pattern is not at all as clear among young people, however. Although Table 6.4 shows that there is a significant difference between those from manual class backgrounds (14.4 per cent being above the GHQ threshold) and those from non-manual backgrounds (8.3 per cent above the GHQ threshold) this relationship is not as linear as it is in the adult population. Those from upper middle class backgrounds show above average levels of distress, for example, while those from lower middle and semi-skilled manual backgrounds have above average levels of mental health. Overall, however, the only consistent difference between class origins is between those from lower working class backgrounds and others – with the former having substantially higher levels of distress. Of course, the figures relating to the adult population use a measure of social class which is based on the individual's own household situation whereas

the measure for young people is really one of social class of origin. Different transition experiences and particularly experiences of social mobility are therefore confounded with the figures which we present here.

Table 6.5: *GHQ Scores by Rural/Urban Place of Origin (School Leavers) or Present Place of Residence (Adults)*

Area of Origin		*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*		*Mean GHQ Score*	
		School Leavers	*Adults**	*School Leavers*	*Adults*
Dublin		17.3	1.16		
Other cities	Urban	11.5	19.3	0.80	1.25
Towns		10.2	0.70		
Rural areas	Rural	7.3	15.2	0.47	0.99
N		1122	5720	1122	5720
Chi Square		12.4	18.6	$Eta^2 = .081$	.004
p		<.01	<.001	F = 6.94	23.9
				p = <.0001	<.0001

Source: *Whelan, et al., 1991, p. 30.

The relationship between "social class" and mental health is, therefore, less clear among young people, particularly those in employment where we find an even weaker relationship than for social class of origin (see Table 6.3). Why class of origin or current class position – for those in employment – should have a less pronounced relationship to mental health for school leavers is not self-evident.

Our results, however, bear out the evidence of previous studies regarding urban/rural differences in levels of distress, the highest levels being found in urban areas (see Table 6.5). A more unexpected result is the particularly high levels of distress in Dublin, even in comparison with the other major urban centres. Whether it reflects the concentration of stressors in Dublin, or factors specific to the social environment in Dublin, this is the most extreme expression of a general urban/rural differential.

Transitions to Adulthood and Psychological Distress

We saw in Chapters 2 and 3 that unemployment looms large in young people's transitions to adulthood, and particularly for those from already disadvantaged backgrounds. The research reviewed in Chapter 2 also

indicated that this experience was likely to be highly distressing for most young people. We now examine the effects of employment transition, as well as educational success or failure, on well-being. Transitions in the domestic life cycle such as marriage and parenthood will be examined in Chapter 7.

Employment Status and Psychological Distress

There is, of course, a variety of ways in which young people can participate in the labour force and a number of alternative statuses which they can take up. Table 6.6 shows the levels of distress among the most significant of these groups.

Table 6.6: *Labour Force Status (in 1987) and Psychological Distress*

Labour Force Status	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*		*Mean GHQ Score*		*Proportion of Young People in this Status* (by 1987)*
	School Leavers	*Adults***	*School Leavers*	*Adults***	
Employed	7.0	7.4	0.48	0.54	71.9
Students (full-time)	10.2	–	0.53	–	2.4
Home duties	16.3	22.0	0.96	1.36	5.0
Unemployed, previously held job	28.6	36.6	1.93	2.20	16.6
Looking for first job	23.2	25.7	1.52	1.72	2.6
Total	11.6	17.8	0.79	1.18	98.5
(No.)	(1,134)	(6,089)	(1,134)	(6,089)	(1,134)
Tests of Significance	$X^2 = 128.2$ p<.0001		$Eta^2 = .117$ F = 18.65 p<.0001		

Note: * This column does not add up to 100 per cent because those on employment or training schemes and those with long-term illnesses are not included due to their small numbers and the unreliability of data on these groups.

Source: ** Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, p. 34.

Working for pay or profit is clearly the most desirable status with a very low level of distress. The majority (72%) of young people are in this group and only 1 in 20 show even one symptom of distress on the GHQ. Full-time students show slightly greater levels of distress, although at this stage – over 5 years after leaving school – very few (2%) remain in full-time education. Being a student is basically a reasonably stress-free occupation. Those in

"home duties" show levels of distress well above the average and over twice as high as those working for pay or profit. Most of these young people, exclusively women, are married (a status which the evidence, as we will see, suggests to be relatively free of stress), while a minority are single mothers, most of whom are living independently. These different domestic circumstances will be examined in Chapter 7. The number of children in the home does not seem to affect the well-being of women in "home duties" unduly – although the numbers are small here and the results tentative.

Clearly, the most distressed group are the unemployed, with those who held a job at some stage being the most damaged. Over 1 in 4 of the unemployed are over the threshold score. The levels of distress among these young people is all the more worrying given that 1 in 6 of our sample were unemployed at the time of interview and many others were likely to have experienced periods of unemployment at some stage.

Other groups examined – though the results are unreliable given the small numbers involved – were the long-term sick or disabled (generally a highly distressed group), and those on State unemployment or training schemes. These latter seem to fare relatively well in the adult population, particularly in comparison with the position of the unemployed (Whelan *et al.*, 1991). Overall, in fact, the pattern of our results mirrors almost exactly that found by Whelan *et al.* (1991, p. 34) for the adult population as a whole although for each status the distress levels of the youth population are below (sometimes substantially) those of the adult population. Distress amongst the young unemployed, for instance (at 29%), is well below the levels among adults where 37 per cent were found to be above the threshold (Whelan *et al.*, 1991: p. 34). There is some evidence, therefore, to support the hypothesis that unemployment is less distressing for young people (O'Brien, 1986; Warr and Jackson, 1984; Warr, 1987) as they have less commitments and responsibilities. However, the issue of the long-term damage to psychological and social development remains open. The extent to which such high levels of distress amongst the young unemployed might translate into later problems is a worrying question, given the present historically high levels of unemployment.

We can examine the differences between the employed and unemployed in greater detail by looking at the responses to individual items on the GHQ, as outlined in Table 6.7 mirroring the analysis by Whelan *et al.* (1991, p. 38).

The item which distinguishes most clearly between the employed and unemployed is the perception of "playing a useful part in things", which illustrates the vital role of employment in providing goals and a socially valued position (Warr, 1987). Other items which show highly negative

responses are those concerned with general feelings of unhappiness, loss of confidence and feelings of competence, and being under strain. The least negative and least discriminatory items are those which relate to more concrete, activity-oriented aspects of life such as decision-making, ability to concentrate and to tackle problems. The unemployed feel only slightly less capable in these areas. Comparing the 3.5 per cent who say they find it difficult to concentrate on things and the 7-10 per cent who felt unable to face up to problems and were incapable of making decisions, to the 25-28 per cent who said that they felt unhappy and distressed and suffered from loss of confidence, we can see that the main problem that unemployment creates seems to flow from the resultant exclusion from socially valued work/activities, from feelings of exclusion and the stress and strain experienced as a result, to (at least temporary) impairment of belief – or lack of confidence – in one's ability to solve one's problems, and of self judgements following on from these beliefs.

The differences between the employed and unemployed in terms of psychological distress is, therefore, clear and fairly consistent. This emphasises both the validity of the GHQ as a measure of psychological distress and the importance of employment in psycho-social health.

A very important aspect of the transition to adulthood is educational success which is highly predictive of employment chances. We now go on to examine the interaction of these two factors and how they jointly affect GHQ scores.

Table 6.7: *Negative Responses to Individual Items on the General Health Questionnaire, by Employment or Unemployment*

Individual GHQ Items	*Unemployed*	*Employed*
	Per cent Negative	
Been feeling unhappy and depressed	28.3	7.9
Felt that you are playing a useful part in things	25.8	2.1
Been losing confidence in yourself	25.3	4.3
Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties	19.4	3.5
Felt constantly under strain	17.0	8.4
Been feeling reasonably happy all things considered	16.5	6.1
Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person	12.9	2.9
Lost much sleep over worry	12.4	4.4
Felt able to enjoy your day to day activities	10.2	1.0
Felt capable of making decisions about things	9.6	3.3
Been able to face up to your problems	7.3	3.7
Been able to concentrate on what you are doing	3.5	1.4

Level of Education Attained, Unemployment and Psychological Well-Being

The effect of educational attainment on psychological well-being is well-documented in international studies, with those having higher levels of education showing lower levels of distress. Table 6.8 shows, however, that when we control for employment status, education has no (statistically significant) effect. There is some remaining effect for the lower levels of education – those with no qualifications or with the Group Cert being particularly distressed. However, most of the effects of education on GHQ scores are explained by the differential employment chances of the poorly and well educated.

Unemployment, therefore, has a much greater effect than education on well-being – with the differences between the employed and unemployed at all levels of education being more than twice as great as the most extreme difference by level of education. There are some educational differences amongst the unemployed. Those who attended third-level appear best able to soften the blow of unemployment – such young people being likely to suffer less stressful forms of unemployment, and are equipped with greater coping resources. Those with Group Cert qualifications are amongst those with the lowest distress among the employed, and amongst the highest among the unemployed, suggesting that the well-being of the group is particularly tied up with employment. This is perhaps not so surprising given the vocational emphasis at this level of education, fostering a particularly work-oriented self-image.

Table 6.8: *Psychological Well-Being by Level of Education Attained and Employment Status*

	Employed		*Unemployed*		*Total*	
Level of Education	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*	*Mean GHQ Score*	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*	*Mean GHQ Score*	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*	*Mean GHQ Score*
No qualification	15.7	0.72	29.0	2.10	23.0	1.41
Group Cert	4.1	0.50	35.9	2.22	12.8	0.98
Intermediate Certificate	4.3	0.38	29.2	1.92	13.1	0.91
Leaving Certificate	6.7	0.52	25.9	1.77	9.2	0.69
Attended third level	9.5	0.50	19.6	1.33	10.2	0.60
Pearson's r	.01	(ns)	-.05	(ns)		

The most important results to emerge here, therefore, is the overwhelming impact of unemployment on the well-being of those at all levels of education, but also the high levels of distress amongst those with no educational qualifications (particularly, but not only, the unemployed). Simply because occupational aspirations may be lower among the poorly qualified does not mean that having employment will be any less important to them. This may also throw some light on the weak relationship between the occupational status of current jobs and mental health which we observed earlier. The very fact of having a job would seem to be so crucial to those from working class backgrounds that this outweighs any extra stress associated with the lower status jobs they hold. It may be that such factors will become more prominent as time goes on, however, and that the clear distress effects of lower social class found by Whelan *et al.* (1991) for the adult population will manifest themselves. However, in the first few years in the labour market such status effects appear to be minor.

The Experience of Unemployment in Social Context

The distressing effects of unemployment on young people's transitions to adulthood are clear. However, unemployment may be experienced in different ways according to the social context in which it occurs, as well as how it interacts with chronic stressors such as might occur amongst those with a disadvantaged social background. The nature of the unemployment experienced may also vary in important ways: so that length of time spent unemployed, or previous experiences of unemployment may influence the level of distress associated with current unemployment. We first examine how the impact of unemployment varies by gender, socio-economic status and urban/rural background and then assess the affects of unemployment duration and history.

Gender

Because of the different ways in which men and women experience employment and unemployment we might expect some difference in their psycho-social effects. These effects may be due to the nature of employment or unemployment themselves: e.g., poorly educated young women generally work in poorly paid service occupations, or "choose" other "gendered" roles – such as working in the home – which are options generally unavailable for men. So, the sets of choices associated with employment and unemployment vary by gender. Indeed, women may face more complex sets of choices and constraints than men (Marshall, 1984). It should be remembered that while those in "home duties" (exclusively women) show lower levels of distress than the unemployed, they are more

than twice as distressed as those in employment; so this status is not a satisfactory alternative to employment for women. As we also saw earlier and as is borne out by other studies, women generally suffer more psychological distress than men (see Whelan *et al.*, 1991).

The interrelationships of gender and employment to stress levels are summarised in Table 6.9. This shows that although employed females suffer somewhat more from distress than males, the latter have slightly higher distress levels when unemployed. In neither case is the effect statistically significant, however. The overall gender difference in distress is largely explained by the somewhat greater distress levels of women in employment and also those in other statuses such as "home duties".

The greatest effect, however, is clearly for unemployment with both sexes suffering almost identical levels of distress, unlike in the adult population where males suffer significantly high levels of distress.

Table 6.9: *Psychological Well-Being by Employment Status and Gender*

Gender	*Employed*		*Unemployed*	
	School Leavers	*Adult**	*School Leavers*	*Adult**
	– *Percentage above GHQ threshold* –			
Female	8.1 (387)	9.7	27.7 (96)	28.0
Male	5.9 (367)	5.9	28.1 (121)	36.5
	$X^2 = 1.51$; p = n.s.		$X^2 = 0.0$; p = n.s.	

Source: *Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, p. 41.

Socio-Economic Status

As we have already seen, respondents from manual class backgrounds (as indicated by father's occupation) were more distressed than those from non-manual backgrounds. Some of this difference is undoubtedly due to the greater exposure of those from manual backgrounds to the risk of unemployment (see Chapter 5, Tables 5.4 and 5.5). However, there is also the possibility that those from one class might be more vulnerable to the effects of unemployment due to perhaps a lack of coping resources or different attitudes to work. Table 6.10 shows the overall relationship of social class of origin and employment status to psychological well-being.

Table 6.10: *Psychological Well-Being by Employment Status and Social Class Origin (Father's Occupation)*

Father's Occupational Status	*Employed*		*Unemployed*	
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold		*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold*	
	School Leavers	*(Adults)**	*School Leavers*	*(Adults)*
	– Per cent above GHQ Threshold –			
Manual	5.9	(8.3)	32.3	(36.6)
Non-manual	7.2	(6.5)	19.0	(29.8)
	$X^2 = .46$ p = n.s.		$X^2 = 4.02$ $p < .05$	

Source: *Whelan, *et al.*, 1991, p. 47.

Those from manual backgrounds who are employed are slightly less distressed than their counterparts from non-manual backgrounds, but the differences are not significant. However, the effects of unemployment are very different on those from different backgrounds. One in 3 of those from manual origins are above the GHQ threshold compared to less than 1 in 5 of those from non-manual backgrounds.

Appendix Table A6.1 shows the full social class range and its effects on distress. This shows that the higher distress of non-manual employees is confined almost entirely to those from higher professional or managerial backgrounds. The stresses of maintaining this status and experiences of downward mobility may be important factors here. The effects of unemployment become more serious among those from working class backgrounds, with those from lower working class families faring particularly badly – almost 1 in 2 being above the threshold score. The processes at work here are clearly very important as the effects of this concentration of disadvantage appear almost unbearable. The pattern of results does not vary by gender; so the answer must lie in a different type – or severity – of unemployment experience, or in a different response to the experience itself.

The aspect of unemployment that impacts most variably on people from different backgrounds is the duration of current unemployment, as

duration progressively exhausts the resources available for coping with unemployment; but current unemployment may also differentially affect people's expectations. Those from manual backgrounds are also likely to experience longer periods of unemployment and, therefore, are most likely to suffer greater stress. However, while those from manual backgrounds do tend to spend longer unemployed, even if we discount this unemployment still appears more distressing for them. Equally, they also tend to suffer more periods of unemployment, and this also causes them more distress than their non-manual counterparts. Clearly certain additional economic, social and psychological resources accrue to those from non-manual backgrounds which enable them to cope better with the stresses associated with unemployment. The exact nature of these resources – whether they relate to material supports, emotional support, labour market attachments and networks, personal resources – will be examined in Chapter 8. From the preceding analysis, however, it is clear that the effects of unemployment on psychological distress vary among social groups according to their differential *exposure* to unemployment, their different types of *unemployment experiences* and their *vulnerability*. We have shown that on each of these criteria young people from manual backgrounds fare badly.

Another socio-economic background factor of importance is the history of unemployment in the respondent's family. Table 6.11 shows the effects of father's unemployment (as the respondent was leaving school) on the well-being of employed and unemployed respondents.

Table 6.11: *Psychological Well-Being by Father's Unemployment and Respondent's Employment Status*

Employment Status of Father	*Respondent employed*		*Respondent unemployed*	
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)	*Mean GHQ Score*	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)*	*Mean GHQ Score*
Father employed	6.8 (600)	0.48	25.7 (139)	1.75
Father unemployed	9.3 (52)	0.51	29.6 (35)	1.79
Test of Significance	$X^2 = 0.46$ p = n.s.		$X^2 = .22$ p = n.s.	

The effect of father's unemployment, although consistently negative for both employed and unemployed respondents, is not sufficiently pronounced to be statistically significant. The relevant question, however, referred to father's employment status at the time the respondent left school – not to current status. But at least in so far as the long-term unemployment of father is concerned the effect appears to be minimal.

We have examined the impact of unemployment on young people's well-being, but there are likely to be significant differences amongst the employed also according to how satisfactory that work is – specifically by the level of occupational status achieved. There are, however, no significant difference in GHQ by respondent level of occupational status achieved ($r = .02$). On the other hand, there are reasons other than failure to achieve the level of occupational status aspired to – because there is a very pronounced relationship between the level of dissatisfaction with present job/employment[5] and GHQ ($r = .35$, $p < .01$); the relationship being somewhat more pronounced for males ($r = .41$) than females ($r = .30$). So the higher the dissatisfaction with one's present job the higher the level of stress. Dissatisfaction with income earned from employment is almost equally as stress causing, but we will deal with that issue later.

Urban/Rural Background

Those in urban areas suffer more from distress than those in rural areas as we saw earlier. This relationship remains even when we control for levels of unemployment; Table 6.12 shows the impact of urban or rural place of origin on distress, controlling for employment status and gender. In interpreting these results it must be remembered that they refer only to place of origin and not to place of residence at the time of the survey.

For the total sample the pattern is relatively clear: for the unemployed those from urban backgrounds, particularly Dublin, show higher levels of distress. Indeed those from Dublin have the highest levels of distress regardless of employment status or gender. However for the employed these "remoteness" effects are minor and statistically insignificant. Unemployed females from Dublin exhibit the highest levels of distress, while those from the more remote rural areas show the lowest levels of stress. These differences are just statistically significant at the .05 level. For unemployed males the pattern is similar though much less pronounced, and not statistically significant. The main finding, therefore, is much

[5] "How satisfied with your present employment?" - 1 = very satisfied to 4 = very dissatisfied.

higher levels of distress in Dublin amongst the unemployed, where almost 1 in 2 (and over 1 in 2 women) are over the GHQ threshold.

Overall, then, we see that the experience of unemployment varies little by gender, but is significantly more distressing for those from working-class backgrounds, particularly young women from urban areas. The social context in which unemployment is experienced can, therefore, have very significant effects on how it is experienced at a personal level. Our results support the idea that chronic stressors – as indicated by disadvantaged social position, and acute stressors – such as unemployment, can interact in important ways to either increase or moderate distress. However, social context is just one aspect of how unemployment is experienced – another major factor is the nature of the unemployment experience.

Table 6.12: *Psychological Distress (% Above GHQ Threshold) by Urban/Rural Location, Controlling for Employment Status and Gender*

Remoteness of Place of Origin	*Male*		*Female*		*Total*	
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Employed*	*Unemployed*	*Employed*	*Unemployed*
	– *Percentage above GHQ threshold (N)* –					
Dublin	8.7 (90)	40.2 (25)	12.5 (96)	52.5 (25)	10.7 (186)	46.4 (50)
Other cities	7.6 (64)	24.3 (25)	4.4 (92)	20.1 (21)	5.8 (156)	22.4 (46)
Towns	4.8 (159)	27.7 (54)	7.2 (141)	23.0 (34)	5.9 (300)	25.9 (88)
Rural areas	2.3 (51)	18.5 (17)	9.6 (54)	9.7 (13)	6.1 (105)	14.7 (30)
Correlation (r) (Remoteness by GHQ)	–.05	–.10	–.06	–.20*	–.05	–.15*
(N)	(411)	(121)	(405)	(96)	(820)	(217)

* $p < .05$.

Unemployment Duration and History

Current unemployment gives us a "snapshot" of the person's current status. However, the experience of current unemployment may vary widely depending on previous experience of unemployment and on the length of the current spell of unemployment. If a young person has been unemployed for long periods before the current spell this could be thought to result in reduced distress due to adaptation to unemployment or to having learned how to cope better with it. However, it could equally be hypothesised to produce higher levels of distress due to a weakening of personal, social and material resources due to prolonged unemployment.

The impact of past employment experience – as proportion of time in the labour force spent unemployed – on those who are currently employed or unemployed is presented in Table 6.13.

Generally it would appear that those best able to cope with the current experience of unemployment are those with least previous experience of it – controlling for length of time in the labour force. For those unemployed there is a clear trend toward increasing distress with greater unemployment history, except for those who have been unemployed for almost all of their time in the labour force. They have significantly lower distress levels than the middle group (20-40, and 60-80) and are not much different from those with very little experience of unemployment. These differences are statistically significant.

Among the employed there is no clear pattern: with very little difference amongst people with very different lengths of experiences of unemployment. Current employment is clearly health engendering. While we do find some support for the hypothesis that previous spells of unemployment does increase distress levels amongst those currently unemployed, such previous experience of unemployment has little or no effect on those currently employed. This would seem to indicate that unemployment does not seriously damage a person's long-term abilities to fulfil work roles, and that unemployed people's well-being improves dramatically on re-employment. The importance of this result for employment policy cannot be overemphasised as it suggests that unemployment does not create long-term personal problems – provided that individuals regain employment. Overall, therefore, the major psychosocial effects are due to current unemployment, with a history of unemployment having a small additional impact.

Table 6.13: *Levels of Distress by Current Employment Status and by Proportion of Time in the Labour Force Spent Unemployed. (Excluding Those who Went to Third Level - i.e., with Roughly Equivalent Labour Market Experience)*

Current Employment Status	*Per cent of Time in Labour Force Spent Unemployed*						*Statistical Tests x Row*
	<10	*10-20*	*20-40*	*40-60*	*60-80*	*80-100*	
	- Per cent above GHQ Threshold (N) -						
Employed	5.0 (359)	8.2 (82)	9.5 (71)	0.0 (21)	0.0 (9)	14.1 (19)	$X^2 = 7.45$; $p = .18$
Unemployed	25.0 (27)	0.0 (14)	43.1 (29)	- (0)	37.5 (28)	21.6 (9)	$X^2 = 11.31$; $p < .05$

However, of course, current unemployment may be experienced quite differently if it has only just occurred or if it is more long term. The duration of one's present unemployment status – rather than any preceding unemployment – can be used to test the hypothesis of a "stages" theory of the effects of unemployment: where initial shock and distress is followed by a stage of optimistic job-seeking. Pessimism then sets in on the failure of repeated job-seeking efforts, and there is finally a fatalistic adaptation to unemployment (Jahoda *et al.*, 1933). As we saw in Chapter 2 the evidence on this is inconsistent although a number of recent studies have suggested that there is an immediate deterioration of psychological health which tends to stabilise after 3 to 6 months, but may improve subsequently (Banks and Ullah, 1988; Fryer and Payne, 1986; Warr and Jackson, 1984; Winefield and Tiggemann, 1989b). Table 6.14 shows the effect of duration of unemployment on levels of distress among those currently unemployed.

Table 6.14: *Duration of Current Unemployment and Psychological Distress*

1 month	*1-6 months*	*6-12 months*	*1+ year*
	– Percentage above GHQ Threshold (N) –		
18.2 (45)	33.3 (63)	43.1 (27)	25.3 (83)
	$X^2 = 8.64$, df = 3, $p < .05$		

These figures support the "stages" hypothesis. The differences in the dichotomised GHQ scores are significant at the 5 per cent level. The decline in well-being within the first month continues to fall until the end of the first year of unemployment, but then seems to improve somewhat, especially after 2 years of unemployment. There may, therefore, be some adaptation to the experience of unemployment after 1 year, but levels of distress remain always above those for any other labour force status; and over twice the levels of distress for those in employment. The psycho-social effects of the first year of unemployment appear to be particularly severe; but appear to decline amongst the longer-term unemployed. However, since an element of self-selection may exist amongst the long-term unemployed – in that the most seriously damaged by unemployment may be less employable – and we are dealing with a cross-sectional sample rather than a time series, our interpretation needs to be cautious.

Overall, however, we do find some distress effects of the respondent's history of unemployment, particularly amongst those currently unemployed. The well-being effects of duration of the current spell of joblessness appear curvilinear, being highest in the middle. However, the major factor undoubtedly remains the stark fact of current unemployment and we will concentrate on this in the rest of our analysis.

We have now seen how people with earlier experiences of unemployment and less resourced social backgrounds appear to have fewer personal and material resources to cope, so that the experience of current unemployment is more distressing. The stress of current unemployment, however, seems to be the crucial factor.

State Schemes and Psychological Well-Being

An increasingly common experience for young people making the transition to adulthood is participation in State employment or training schemes, ostensibly as a part of the transition to stable employment. Breen (1991) has discussed the relatively limited impact of training schemes on a young person's chances of gaining employment over the long term, although there do seem to be beneficial short-term effects. Given the high rates of unemployment still prevailing among those who have been on such schemes the personal consequences of such schemes are clearly of importance. Do they ameliorate or aggravate the effects of unemployment on personal well-being?

Table 6.15 shows the correlations between time spent on schemes, percentage of the time spent on schemes and psychological distress. The only statistically significant effect is for the unemployed: with time spent on schemes appearing to increase levels of personal stress. These results are borne out by the multiple regression analysis in Table 6.16 which shows a statistically significant interaction between unemployment and participation in schemes even when controlling for social background and educational variables. While those in employment who had been on a scheme were not affected there was a clear effect on those currently unemployed. Clearly these young people had either had a good experience on a scheme but had had their expectations of employment frustrated on completing it, or else they had been on an unsatisfactory scheme which had only increased their distress. Alternatively it may be that those worst affected by unemployment were more likely to apply for and participate in schemes – but the kind of fatalism and passivism associated with the stress caused by unemployment would suggest this to be unlikely.

Table 6.15: *Correlations between Psychological Distress and Participation in State Training Schemes (Pearson's Correlation)*

	Currently Employed	*Currently Unemployed*	*Total*
		(Correlation with GHQ)	
Actual Time of Schemes	−.002	.15*	.06
Percentage of Time in Labour Force on Schemes	.008	.11	.05

* p<.05.

Table 6.16: *Multiple Regression of the Effects of Unemployment and Participation in State Schemes on Psychological Distress, Controlling for Social Background and Educational Variables.*

Variables	*Regression Coefficients*
1. Father's Occupation	−.02
2. Father's Unemployment	−.10
3. No. of Siblings	−.03
4. Mother's Education	−.04
5. Gender	.08
6. Farm Origins	−.38*
7. Farmer's Daughter	−.17
8. Remoteness	.001
9. County Unemployment Rate	-.02
10. Level of Education	−.04
11. No. of Hons Subjects	−.02
12. No. of Vocational-Technical Subjects	−.07
13. Unemployment	1.22***
14. Ever Participated on a Scheme	.03
15. Unemployment * Scheme	.69**
R^2	.13
N	847
F	9.76
p	<.001

*** p <.001; ** p <.05; * p<.10.

Social Background, Youth Unemployment and Psychological Distress

We have analysed the impact of unemployment on the psycho-social well-being of young people. We have just examined the effects of unemployment history and duration of unemployment and found that, while the damaging impact of unemployment does tend to increase with length of time unemployed, the most detrimental effect on mental health is clearly current unemployment.

We also investigated the likely mediating role of a number of social background characteristics of young people on their experience of and vulnerability to unemployment. There was a small difference between the sexes with females showing slightly greater levels of distress, but these were statistically insignificant. The relationship between social class and psychological distress appears to be dependent on employment status as there is little differences for the employed, but young people from working class origins do suffer more distress when unemployed. In addition, those from urban areas (especially Dublin) suffer more when unemployed.

As we have seen in the previous section, a young person's level of education can also affect their experience of unemployment in important ways. A particularly alienated and distressed group are those with no educational qualifications, but most of this effect appears to be due to their greater rates of unemployment – since, when we control for the effects of unemployment, educational level retains no statistically significant additional effect; though amongst the employed those with no qualifications have higher stress levels.

Of course, in our analysis so far we have looked at these social background factors independently of each another – examining at most two of them together. However we need to look at their combined additive and interactive effects, given the extent to which these predictive factors are related to one another, and the extent to which they may be "confounding" each other's real impact in the preceding analysis. We can assess their joint and independent effects using a multiple regression analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 6.17. In this analysis we examine social background, educational and employment effects on psychological distress – using the full GHQ measure (ranging from 0 to 12) as our dependent variable.

We first examine the effect of social background and educational variables, and use a series of dummy variables for urban/rural background and level of education as there were indications in our earlier analysis that these factors did not have straightforward linear effects on levels of distress. We find looking at Equation 1, that women and those with unemployed fathers show greater levels of distress – though these effects

are not statistically significant. Equally those from working class backgrounds are more distressed than their middle class counterparts, but again these effects are very small and not statistically significant.

As to urban/rural differences the pattern is clear with those in more urban settings – even when controlling for class and education – suffering more from distress. Once again, the particularly bad position of those in the capital can be seen, with the Dublin effect being highly significant. There is a clear relationship between level of education attained and levels of distress (Equation 2) with those with no qualifications at all, suffering significantly greater distress. However all these factors combined explain only 3 per cent of the variation in the GHQ scores.

Table 6.17: *The Effects of Social Background, Education and Unemployment on Psychological Distress: A Multiple Regression Analysis*

	Equation 1 Social Background	*Equation 2 Social Background and Education*	*Equation 3 2 plus Unemployment*	*Equation 4 3 plus Interaction Terms*	*Bivariate (Pearson's) r*
			Beta (beta weights)		
Father's unemployment	.22 (.04)	.12 (.02)	–.04 (–.01)	–.02 (–.0004)	.05
Father's social class	.04 (.04)	.01 (.004)	–.03 (–.02)	–.09 (–.08)*	.03
Gender	.03 (.01)	.11 (.03)	.16 (.05)	.18 (.06)	.02
Urban/Rural:					
Dublin	.75 (.20)**	.74 (.20)**	.72 (.19)**	.69 (.18)**	.15
Other cities	.27 (.07)	.25 (.06)	.22 (.05)	.22 (.05)	–.02
Towns	.17 (.05)	.16 (.05)	.16 (.05)	.16 (.05)	–.07
Education:					
No qualifications		.66 (.10)**	.48 (.08)*	.42 (.07)*	.11
Group Cert		.30 (.06)	.30 (.06)	.34 (.06)	.07
Leaving Certificate		–.12 (–.04)	.06 (.02)	.06 (.02)	–.05
Third level		–.13 (–.03)	–.07 (–.02)	–.02 (–.004)	–.05
Current unemployment			1.26 (.31)**	.02 (.01)	.32
Unemployment * class background				.34 (.36)**	.34
Unemployment * gender				–.14 (–.03)	.21
Constant	.26	.36	.14	.35	
R^2	.02	.03	.12	.14	
N	790	790	790	790	
F	4.02	3.78	11.25	10.69	
p	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

The independent effect of unemployment (see Equation 3) explains an additional 9 per cent; by far the most important variable. It also has some important effects on the other variables in the analysis. Once the independent effect of unemployment is controlled for the effects of educational qualifications decreases – though those without any qualifications remain significantly more distressed. The "Dublin" effect, however, remains largely undisturbed. There are some additional changes in the effects of social class and gender but they are not statistically significant. It is interesting that little of the urban/rural effect is explained by unemployment experience, though the poorer mental health of some of those with no educational qualifications can be explained by their higher unemployment rate – although still retaining a strong independent damaging effect on well-being.

Equations 1, 2 and 3 give us some insight into important aspects of the stress process therefore: with poor education, being from Dublin and being unemployed being the major predictors of stress levels. Women are generally more distressed than men regardless of socio-economic status or educational level but the effects are minor.

However, the results of this analysis may be misleading in some respects as we suggested earlier that there may be interaction effects between unemployment and gender on the one hand (see Table 6.9) and with social class on the other (see Table 6.10). To assess these possibilities we introduced two multiplicative interaction terms into our analysis which can test if the effect of one of the variables may be dependent on the value of the other variable; for instance, the effect of unemployment on well-being may vary by the individual's social class. The multiple regression analysis allows us to examine this possibility while controlling for a range of other social background and educational effects.

The results for gender and unemployment indicate that, while there is a very small interaction effect, it is not statistically significant. However, when we look at the joint relationship of "class by unemployment" on psychological distress we can see that the effect of each variable is highly dependent on the value of the other: the unemployment effect being significantly more serious for working class respondents. We can see the implications of our analysis more clearly in Table 6.18.

We can look at these results in two ways: the effect of unemployment is dependent on social class, being much larger for those from working class backgrounds (1.52 rise in GHQ distress scores – versus 0.27 for the upper middle class unemployed); or the effect of class (e.g., being from a working class background) depends on employment status: lowering distress (-0.54) to a far greater extent if employed but disproportionately

increasing it (1.52) if unemployed.

In fact, looking at Equations 1 to 3, we can see that the effect of social class is not significant, only becoming significant when the interaction term is subsequently included. Thus, class background in itself has no consistent effect on psychological distress, but it is important when we examine the different social classes' experiences and effects of unemployment. Equally, while there is a direct effect of unemployment which clearly increases distress when introduced in Equation 3 this effect disappears when the interaction term is introduced into the analysis. While these two variables are highly intercorrelated – making their relative effects difficult to disentangle statistically – it does seem clear that it is the interaction between class background and unemployment which is crucial rather than the additive effect of unemployment itself. It is not only that the interaction term remains highly significant but also that it increases the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable. This is also evident from the basic cross tabulations which we presented earlier (see Table 6.10 and Appendix Table A6.1). The effects of unemployment clearly vary by the class background of the young person involved.

Table 6.18: *The Interaction of Unemployment and Social Class Background: Comparing Effects on Psychological Distress Showing Relative Changes in Distress Related to Status (Equation 4)*

	Upper Middle Class	*Lower Working Class*
Employed	–0.09	–0.54
Unemployed	0.27	1.52

Conclusions

In this chapter we examined the effects of employment status on psychological distress, and related those effects to their socio-demographic context. The least psychologically distressed were those in employment while the worst off were the unemployed, with full-time students and those in "home duties" in between. This contrast between employment and unemployment is the most relevant one for most of the young people in our sample, particularly for men. The effect of young people's history of unemployment and the length of time spent unemployed was also studied. While there are important effects of previous unemployment experience, and unemployment duration, on psychological distress it is the brute fact of current unemployment which has the greatest effect. The current

experience of unemployment appears also to be aggravated by prior participation in a State training employment scheme as raised hopes are dashed. Obviously, if such participation raises "employment commitment" without delivering employment, it can have serious dis-welfare effects. However, the evidence suggests that such schemes do alleviate distress while one is actually involved in them (Whelan *et al.*, 1991).

Different kinds of people appear to vary systematically in their felt experience of employment and unemployment. Women tend to be slightly more distressed than men, particularly those employed. However, their better education and employment experiences mitigates their more stressful circumstances. The greater distress associated with one's father being unemployed is mainly due to the poorer educational and employment chances associated with such a background. The effects of unemployment appear to vary by class background, with those from manual backgrounds being less distressed than those from non-manual backgrounds when in employment but far more distressed if unemployed.

Those from urban communities show much higher levels of distress than those from more rural areas, independently of the effects of all social composition, educational and unemployment factors - with those from Dublin showing particularly high levels of distress. There is also a clear relationship between higher levels of education and greater well-being, with those leaving school with no qualifications at all being highly distressed.

In this chapter, therefore, we have seen the highly disruptive effects of unemployment on psychological well-being, and how over time persistent unemployment can pile stress upon stress. We have also seen how important the young person's social background and current social context is in explaining the different patterns of distress amongst employed and unemployed young people. In the next chapter we go on to examine in detail the effects of other related transitions on young people's well-being - particularly transitions to new residences, marriage and parenthood; as well as "out of phase" transitions such a single motherhood. In Chapter 8 we return to examine in more detail some of the factors which might explain how and why unemployment - the most crucial of "failed" transitions - has such a detrimental effect on psychological well-being.

Appendix Table A6.1: *Psychological Well-Being by Employment Status and Social Class (Father's Occupation)*

Father's Occupational Status	*Employed*		*Unemployed*	
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)	*Mean GHQ Score*	*Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)*	*Mean GHQ Score*
1. Upper middle class	14.6 (76)	0.81	14.7 (11)	1.24
2. Middle class	6.2 (132)	0.52	24.3 (22)	1.55
3. Lower middle class	4.6 (164)	0.46	17.1 (34)	1.25
4. Upper working class	6.7 (160)	0.43	31.0 (72)	1.96
5. Working class	5.3 (79)	0.34	18.4 (31)	1.14
6. Lower working class	5.3 (89)	0.35	44.3 (44)	3.02
		$X^2 = 9.42$ $p = <.10$ Pearson's r = -.07		$X^2 = 10.63$ $p = <.05$ Pearson's r = .16

Chapter 7

DOMESTIC LIFE CYCLE TRANSITIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

The damage caused to young people's psychological well-being by unemployment and the deprivations associated with it is very clear. However, as we saw in earlier chapters, there are other dimensions to the transition to adulthood which are equally important. These dimensions relate to changes in young people's domestic lives and social roles: their movement out of the parental home and establishment of new households, their marriage and parenthood. In this chapter we will examine young people's progress through these domestic transitions and how these affect young people's psychological well-being.

We first examine the impact of leaving the parental home on well-being, and then the effects of marriage, and parenthood – whether within or outside of marriage. We also study the economic and social circumstances surrounding marriage and single parenthood, and how variation in these affects psychological well-being. Finally, we assess how such domestic and labour market transitions relate to each other in various ways in affecting levels of well-being or distress.

Leaving Home and Psychological Distress

If getting a job and establishing an independent residence is an important part of the process of becoming an independent adult, we might expect young people who remain in the parental home for a prolonged period to be more distressed at such curtailment of their independence – particularly for those remaining unemployed. Of course, as we have seen, many choose to remain in the parental home where they may find themselves in relatively comfortable circumstances, and with a good deal of individual autonomy. Table 7.1 shows how the experience of leaving home, and of being employed or unemployed, affects psychological well-being. The data relate only to those still in Ireland in 1987 as we have GHQ scores for very few emigrants.

The effects of different living arrangements are substantial, especially for the employed. There are, however, no statistically significant difference amongst the different groups of the unemployed. The effects of unemployment appears to be overwhelming in all "living arrangement"

effects. Those who emigrated but returned to Ireland to the parental home are particularly distressed (24.8 per cent of the employed and 33.4 per cent of the unemployed). Amongst the employed group this level of distress is 3 to 4 times greater than amongst any other residential group. There is clearly something distinctive about this returned emigrant group. Levels of distress among returned emigrants who are employed and living outside the parental home are, however, very low (4.6 per cent); while "internal migrants" who have returned home and who are employed have about equally low levels of distress. It is not self-evident why returned emigrants who are employed and living at home should suffer such high levels of distress, equal to that of any of the unemployed groups. It cannot just be enforced loss of independence, since equally re-domesticated internal migrants have low levels of distress. It may be that "failed"

Table 7.1: *The Psychological Distress Effects of Leaving the Parental Home, controlling for Employment Status, for Young People Now Living in Ireland*

Experience of Leaving Parental Home	*Total*	*Employed*		*Unemployed*
	– *Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)* –			
Never Lived Outside Parental Home	10.3 (579)	3.7(403)	$X^2 = 76.73$ $p < .001$	31.2(117)
Living in Parental Home, Lived Independently in Ireland at Some Stage	9.4 (100)	8.4 (70)	$X^2 = 1.24$ p, n.s.	16.8 (21)
Living in Parental Home, Emigrated at Some Stage	24.0 (72)	24.8 (38)	$X^2 = 0.53$ p, n.s.	33.4 (24)
Living Outside of the Parental Home, Never Emigrated	11.2 (294)	7.4(180)	$X^2 = 12.41$ $p < .001$	26.6 (40)
Living Outside of the Parental Home, Emigrated at Some Stage	7.4 (30)	4.6 (21)	$X^2 = 0.22$ p, n.s.	– (5)
Relationship between "Distress" and Living Arrangements for Each Employment Subgroup	$X^2 = 13.51$ $p < .05$	$X^2 = 27.76$ $p < .001$		$X^2 = 5.23$ p, n.s.

emigrants feel defeat and loss of independence most strongly. It may equally, however, be the reverse – that such returned emigrants are particularly selective of those most hurt psychologically by the emigration experience. Whatever the reason, such re-domesticated emigrants – returned to living at home – are the most distressed of all groups, whether employed or unemployed. However, it may equally be that they are selections of particularly disadvantaged social and educational groups. So, it is only when we control for these other variables later that we can come to any conclusion on this question

Another group which shows particularly high levels of distress (31.2 per cent) are those unemployed people who have never lived outside the parental home. Although there are no, statistically significant, differences amongst the various categories of the unemployed the greatest contrast between employed and unemployed youth are amongst those who never left the parental home – those who are employed being the least distressed of all groups and those unemployed being amongst the most distressed. Of course, staying at home and being happy there is probably a chosen status for most of the employed; or rather, perhaps, that the unhappily homebound employed are most likely to have left!

Household formation transitions can, therefore, affect young people's psychological well-being in important ways. We can see that living in the parental home 5 years after leaving school is not necessarily particularly distressing if transition to employment is successful and staying at home is chosen. However, such prolonged parental dependence is very distressing if the circumstances are unfavourable and the young person is in some sense trapped in the parental home: as appears to be the case with those who are unemployed or returned emigrants whether employed or unemployed!

In general, however, the results in Table 7.1 clearly indicates that, with one exception, employment status is the main variable affecting distress – not independent residence. Our exceptional group is the "returned emigrant" employed group, which may well be highly self-selective.

Marriage, Parenthood and Psychological Distress

While we would expect such important aspects of a person's life as marriage and parenthood to have significant effects on well-being, it is not self evident what these effects might be. The potentially supportive and satisfying socio-emotional contexts provided by marriage and parenthood would lead us to expect a reduction in levels of distress. However, the increased commitments associated with these roles might also suggest some negative effects. For many young women in particular, marriage and

parenthood provides socially esteemed roles which could be attractive alternatives to other statuses – particularly remaining single and unemployed at home. For women, much more than men, however, marriage involves a greatly increased domestic workload. Marriage can also create serious role conflicts, particularly between work and family roles. While we can examine this to a limited degree by analysing how marriage and labour force participation interact to affect stress levels, we do not have any information on the internal organisation of these young marriages. Our analysis focuses, therefore, on changes in such domestic roles, the economic and social circumstances associated with such changes, and on how both of these affect psychological well-being. The processes involved may also vary significantly by gender, so our analysis is presented separately for each gender. The general pattern of distress associated with marital and parental roles is shown in Table 7.2.

Women generally tend to suffer greater distress than men, as we have already seen. However the analysis here shows clearly that this relative disadvantage is due mainly to single parenthood, the slight disadvantage suffered by single women not being statistically significant. Marriage and parenthood appears to be experienced quite differently by men and women, however; at least for those younger marriages. Marriage itself appears to dramatically improve the psychological well-being of women, reducing distress levels to only 1 per cent. However, it does very little, it would seem, for young men. Distress among married men is substantially higher than among married women, particularly for those without children – the only statistically significant effect of gender within domestic statuses – except for single parenthood, a status unacknowledged by males.

Table 7.2: *The Relationship between Marriage, Parenthood and Psychological Distress, Controlling for Gender*

	Marital and Domestic Status				
Gender	*Single*	*Married, No Children*	*Married With Children*	*Single Parent*	*Chi-Square Tests by Row*
	– Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N) –				
Female	13.3 (440)	1.2 (45)	6.9 (63)	27.4(31)	$X^2 = 13.8$, $p < .01$
Male	11.0 (509)	14.6 (14)	8.8 (32)	–	$X^2 = .34$, $p <$ n.s.
Chi-Square Tests by Column	$X^2 = 1.2$ p, n.s.	$X^2 = 4.7$ $p < .05$	$X^2 = 0.1$ p, n.s.	– –	

Becoming a parent within marriage appears to changes things; reducing distress somewhat among men, but increasing it for women: although they are still significantly better off than single women. Overall, however, if the satisfaction associated with marriage is related in some way to gaining an esteemed social role it would seem that it is being married itself which is most valued by young women, whereas young men appear to gain more from fatherhood – although these latter differences are minor and not statistically significant. It is interesting that marriage and parenthood tends to be more beneficial to young women, as they are making these transitions at a relatively young age and they disproportionately come from less advantaged backgrounds. These are the marriages which one might expect to come under special stress; but at this early stage this is not apparent – except for the much smaller number of young men involved. Short-circuited transitions to single parenthood are, however, very distressing for young women – but as we have already seen such early transitions are highly self selective.

This is not to say, however, that favourable experiences in other areas of such young people's lives cannot improve their experience of marriage. For instance, only 2 of the 30 married males and none of the 50 married females who are in employment scored above the GHQ threshold for distress. So, employment and marriage can be combined in ways which are very satisfactory for both young women and men. It is amongst the unemployed (clearly affecting men) and those withdrawn from the labour force (almost exclusively women) that the highest levels of distress occurs.

Table 7.2 also shows that single mothers can suffer a great deal of distress – with over 1 in 4 above the GHQ threshold. Interestingly, however, in further analyses it was found that of the 6 single mothers who are in employment none is distressed while 4 of the 9 who are unemployed are above the threshold. Three of the 13 in "home duties" also suffer such distress. The stresses of single motherhood, therefore, can be relieved by a satisfactory labour force status. We will examine this issue more closely later but is important to note at this stage the particularly disadvantaged position of single unemployed mothers. The combination of motherhood with an unsatisfactory labour force status appears to be very damaging to the psychological well-being of young women. Overall, therefore, marital and domestic status transitions seem to be as important to young women's well-being as employment transitions.

The Economic and Social Context of Marriage and Parenthood

Getting married or becoming a parent at an early age are "shocks" to the transition process being undergone by the young person in question

and can produce changes in that person's economic and social circumstances. In Table 7.3 we look at differences in financial satisfaction and security, social support networks and social integration and patterns of labour force participation between young men and women who are single or married (with or without children).

Table 7.3: *Economic and Social Circumstances and Patterns of Labour Force Participation of Men and Women in Different Domestic Statuses*

	Marital Status and Sex						
	Single		*Married, No Children*		*Married With Children*		*Single + Child*
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	
% Dissatisfied with their income	40.3(490)	37.6(421)	46.2(13)	19.6(45)	51.2(32)	49.2(60)	31.4(30)
	$X^2 = .65$		$X^2 = 3.72$		$X^2 = .03$		
	p, n.s.		$p < .05$		p, n.s.		
% Lacking financial support	9.8(503)	4.4(438)	16.9(14)	7.2(45)	19.1(32)	6.7(63)	0(31)
	$X^2 = 10.2$		$X^2 = 1.2$		$X^2 = 3.3$		
	$p < .01$		p, n.s.		$p < .10$		
% Lacking socio-emotional support	6.8(506)	1.8(440)	18.1(14)	0(45)	7.5(32)	1.1(63)	0(31)
	$X^2 = 13.8$		$X^2 = 8.6$		$X^2 = 2.7$		
	$p < .01$		$p < .01$		p, n.s.		
% Met 3 or less people outside house in last week	2.9(508)	3.9(440)	10.7(14)	2.2(45)	4.2(32)	3.8(63)	18(31)
	$X^2 = .79$		$X^2 = 1.93$		$X^2 = .01$		
	p, n.s.		p, n.s.		p, n.s.		
% Spent less than 1 hour with friends in last week	2.8(506)	3.5(440)	9.2(14)	8.8(45)	3.9(32)	16.9(63)	17(31)
	$X^2 = .39$		$X^2 = .001$		$X^2 = 3.3$		
	p, n.s.		p, n.s.		$p < .10$		
% Unemployed	16.9(766)	14.2(639)	16.2(24)	9.3(81)	39.1(32)	7.3(63)	32(31)
	$X^2 = .97$		$X^2 = .92$		$X^2 = 14.46$		
	p, n.s.		p, n.s.		$p < .01$		
% in "Home Duties"	0(766)	0.4(639)	0(24)	24.1(81)	0(32)	58.2(63)	47(28)
	$X^2 = 2.7$		$X^2 = 7.03$		$X^2 = 30.4$		
	p, n.s.		$p < .01$		$p < .01$		

* The numbers in each category may vary down the columns due to missing values in the variables in the left-hand column. The last two items relating to labour force participation may have much greater numbers as there are large numbers of missing values on attitudinal and other social context variables.

Once again, the numbers in some of these categories are very small but it is worth reporting these results in order to give an indication at least of how marriage and parenthood are related to other aspects of young people's lives. For males, both income dissatisfaction and financial insecurity increase as role commitments pile up with marriage and parenthood – 40 per cent of single males are dissatisfied with their income compared to 46 per cent of married males and 51 per cent of fathers. While financial insecurity does increase among married women with children, the changes are quite small, and income dissatisfaction is actually almost halved amongst married women with no children – where there is a significant sex difference. Those married women who have children are, however, as highly dissatisfied with their income (49.2 per cent) as are married males generally, re-emphasising the increasing material demands involved in childrearing, especially perhaps at this relatively young age.

What is the most interesting finding in this table, however, is that which shows that young single mothers are amongst the least dissatisfied financially of the lot (only 31 per cent dissatisfied). Of course, their level of education and income aspiration is rather low, their unemployment experience has been very severe, and they are, therefore, more likely to be easily satisfied. The lack of stigma attached to welfare payments to single mothers, compared to unemployment payments, may also be a factor here.

Marriage and parenthood might also be expected to have profound effects on the immediate social environment of young people as it involves them in a new set of very intensive (but sometimes more restricted) social relationships – which may isolate them from previous less intensive ones. Men are generally in less supportive and integrated social networks, and marriage seems to increase this isolating effect. They have somewhat less emotional support available than do young women (18 per cent of married men lacking such support), and have less general and peer social contact (around 1 in 10 being quite isolated) than their single counterparts. Unfortunately our results are based on only 14 married males without children so we obviously cannot generalise the results. Nevertheless the pattern across all the indicators is so consistent that it suggests clear lines of inquiry for future research. Compared to single men, married men clearly report higher levels of financial dissatisfaction. Becoming a parent seems to improve things significantly in terms of social and emotional support, which, allied to our earlier observations on the improvement in well-being associated with fatherhood, suggests that this is a particularly important social role for those men who marry at a fairly young age.

Among women, of course, the story is different. Levels of emotional support are significantly higher for all women and general social isolation

is low, even among married women with children whom we might expect to have less contacts outside the home. However, the content of these contacts may be another matter entirely as the proportion of women spending hardly any time chatting with friends and having a good time rises steadily with marriage and with parenthood (16.9 per cent of married mothers losing out here). These new roles would seem to affect social relations with peers more for women than for men. Overall, then, women tend to have a more supportive social environment although marriage – and particularly motherhood – isolates them somewhat from peers. There are signs that marriage without children is associated with a lack of emotional support and social contact among men. For that small proportion of young single women who have become mothers, social-emotional support does not seem to be a problem, although they are isolated to a somewhat greater extent from their peers (17.0 per cent) – and to a slightly higher level than among married mothers.

Labour force participation is also related to changes in the domestic life cycle. Although this is far more important for women there is evidence in Table 7.3 that those young men who become fathers at a relatively early age tend to have very poor labour market experiences, with 2 in 5 being unemployed. It would seem to be young parenthood rather than young marriage which is associated here with unemployment, and such a combination of unemployment with parenthood most likely explains the heavy financial stresses faced by such young men, and the concentration of problems in this group. Women's labour force participation is, of course, intimately related to the domestic life cycle and while we can see that unemployment among women decreases with marriage and parenthood this is almost totally due to these women withdrawing from the labour force on assuming these new domestic roles. Employment among these women also decreases as there is a huge shift into "home duties", particularly on becoming a mother – about 6 out of 10 married mothers being in "home duties".

Early single motherhood is characterised by an even more deprived economic status than is early (married) fatherhood (unfortunately we have no information on early single fatherhood). Less than 1 in 4 of such young women are employed – most being dependent on single mothers' welfare support. However, aspirations are so low and horizons so limited that the level of income dissatisfaction is amongst the lowest of all groups (see row 1, Table 7.3).

There are a number of clear-cut differences, therefore, in the economic and social situations of young people at different stages of the domestic transition. For men, economic circumstances disimprove with

both early marriage and parenthood, with early parenthood being associated with high levels of unemployment. Young married men also seem to lack a supportive, integrated social environment, though this appears to improve on becoming a father. Parenthood increases financial stress and insecurity among women, although marriage seems to actually reduce such stress until children arrive. Levels of emotional support are higher for all women but there is some evidence of an increased isolation from friends on getting married or becoming a parent. This is particularly so for single parents. Marriage and, particularly, parenthood also result in withdrawal from the labour force into "home duties" among women. Such an isolating and dependence creating economic role is particularly characteristic of young single mothers. So, the economic and social environment of young men and women very significantly over the different stages of the domestic cycle. We now go on to examine how these changes affect the well-being of these different groups.

Marriage, Parenthood and Psychological Distress

We have seen that early marriage and parenthood can have profound effects on a person's circumstances and also that both are associated with differences in psychological distress – marriage improving well-being for women but not for men. We now try to assess how all these factors combine to jointly affect distress levels by carrying out a multiple regression analysis of the effects of marriage and parenthood and of the other relevant factors on levels of psychological distress. Table 7.4 presents the results of this analysis. The differences in predicted GHQ scores for single and married males and females, controlling for a number of different sets of variables, are presented in Appendix Table A7.1 to help with interpretation. This is somewhat complex because, as marriage tends to improve well-being among women but not among men, we included an interaction term – "Marriage x Gender" – in the analysis to capture these different effects. We look here only at the effects of marriage. The importance of parenthood within and outside of marriage is illustrated in later analyses.

Remoteness of place of origin and high levels of education both have significant positive effects on psychological well-being, and father's unemployment or having a working class occupation has a small negative but statistically insignificant effect (see Equation 1). The effects of marriage on psychological well-being appear to be relatively small. Equation 2 indicates that females show slightly lower distress levels when married but this effect is not statistically significant. Any bivariate effects appear to be fully mediated by the extent of social and educational selectivity in the backgrounds of the early married. Unemployment

(Equation 3) has a drastic negative effect on well-being – independently, as well as by damaging one's financial situation. Being in "home duties" has no additional significant effect on psychological well-being among women. But when all these latter "domestic variables" are controlled for it is revealing that women come to have higher distress levels than men.

Financial deprivation, of course, plays a leading part in the stress process and we can see that low income and financial dissatisfaction both have negative effects on well-being. Financial dissatisfaction has a very large, statistically significant, distressing effect. It explains a great deal of the negative effects of unemployment.

Table 7.4: *The Effects on Psychological Distress Among Young People of Social Background, Education, Marriage, Labour Force Status, Financial Strain and Availability of Social Support (Single Mothers Excluded from Analysis)*

	Equation 1 Social Background and Education	*Equation 2 1 + Marriage*	*Equation 3 2 + Labour Force Status*	*Equation 4 3 + Financial Strain*	*Equation 5 4 + Social Support*
1. Remoteness	-.001*	-.001*	-.001*	-.001	-.001
2. Father's Occupation	.02	.02	-.01	-.01	-.02
3. Father's Unemployment	.15	.17	.05	-.0	-.001
4. Gender (female = 1)	.08	.18	.24**	.22**	.27**
5. Level of Education	-.18***	-.19***	-.13***	-.12**	-.08*
6. Marriage		-.16	-.14	-.15	-.31
7. Marriage x Gender (female)		-.40	-.41	-.31	-.18
8. Unemployment			1.20***	.60***	.54***
9. Home Duties			.26	.04	-.01
10. Income				-.001	-.001
11. Financial Dissatisfaction				.49***	.47***
12. Lack of Social Support					.68***
Constant	1.35***	1.36***	1.00	.02	-.96
N	825	825	825	825	825
Adjusted R^2	.02	.03	.10	.15	.17
F	3.84	3.93	10.84	14.20	15.17
p	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.01

*** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .10

We also constructed a composite measure of social support based on material and emotional support and levels of social contact which is fairly reliable (Alpha = .55). Lack of overall social support proves to have a highly significant negative effect on well-being and also reduces the effects of unemployment. Also, when we control for labour force experiences and financial strain, the gap between married men and women disappears. So, in general, when we control for the effect of social background and employment experience, marriage, *per se*, appears to have no additional independent effect on senses of well-being.

Having a child, however, can change the experience of early marriage significantly as we have seen: raising the distress levels of married women, increasing financial stress for both spouses, improving married men's social environment and being associated with higher levels of unemployment among men and widespread withdrawal from the labour force among women (Table 7.2 and 7.3). Table 7.5 presents a similar analysis of the sources of distress associated with parenthood within

Table 7.5: *Multiple Regression of the Effects on Psychological Distress Among Married Young People of Social Background, Education, Parenthood, Labour Force Status, Financial Strain and Availability of Social Support*

	Equation 1 Social Background and Education	*Equation 2 1 + Parenthood*	*Equation 3 2 + Labour Force Status*	*Equation 4 3 + Financial Strain*	*Equation 5 4 + Social Support*
1. Remoteness	-.001	-.001	-.001	-.001	-.001
2. Father's Occupation	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.05
3. Father's Unemployment	-.001	-.10	-.13	-.12	-.06
4. Gender (female = 1)	-.26	-1.18***	-1.16***	-1.13***	-.93**
5. Level of Education	-.02	.01	.01	.04	.11
6. Parenthood		-1.10***	-1.12***	-.97**	-.92**
7. Parenthood x Gender		1.37***	1.30**	1.05*	.97*
8. Unemployment			.29	-.11	-.36
9. Home Duties			.15	-.29	-.40
10. Income				-.01*	-.01*
11. Financial Dissatisfaction				.19	.14
12. Lack of Social Support					.76***
Constant	.98	1.55**	1.50**	1.48*	.27
N	121	121	121	121	121
Adjusted R^2	.01	.03	.03	.04	.09
F	.68	1.49	1.24	1.50	1.95
p	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	<.05

*** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .10

marriage to that presented for the effects of marriage. We analyse only those who are married in this analysis, and examine what effects the above-mentioned variables have on levels of distress. Once again, the differences in predicted GHQ scores for men and women with or without children, controlling for a number of different sets of variables, are presented in Appendix Table A7.2. This should make it easier to see which groups are most affected by these variables.

Social background characteristics have no significant effect among those who are married, but the effects of parenthood on distress levels are more clear-cut as is evident from Equation 2. The coefficient for the variable "parenthood" represents the effect of becoming a parent and is highly significant and consistently reduces distress. However, the interaction term "parenthood x gender" gives the effect for females and shows an increase in distress with parenthood, no matter what variables are controlled for. So, it appears, that young married childless women are happiest, with childbirth/childrearing significantly increasing stress levels for mothers – but not for fathers. Men are less happy than women when married – but the effects are very minor and statistically insignificant. Differences in distress levels narrow considerably on becoming a parent, indeed reverse (see also Appendix Table A7.2).

Exposure to, and the experience of, unemployment once again has a negative (though statistically insignificant) effect on well-being among these young people, as can be seen from Equation 3. However, this effect is quite weak and disappears when we control for differences in access to income and social support. Participation in home duties also pushes up distress levels but its effect is very weak.

Compared to results from the general sample, financial strains play a smaller part in explaining distress differences amongst married people; and distress associated with parenthood is not due to changes in the married couple's economic situation. Low income does have a small significant effect. It does explain some of the differences between fathers and mothers because when we control for income differences we find that father's situation worsens somewhat and mother's improves somewhat. However these effects are very minor. The young parents immediate social context is once again of great importance, with a lack of social support having an additional large negative effect on distress among these young marrieds; with some indication of being of much more importance to married women.

In contrast to the transition to marriage, where financial dissatisfaction tended to push up distress levels and reduced exposure to unemployment tended to reduce them, the distress levels associated with parenthood

among young married people appear to have little to do with either of these factors, but is strongly related to actual income levels – rather than dissatisfaction with income. In addition a lack of social support, although less common among parents than others, is much more detrimental to their psychological well-being, with feelings of social isolation appearing to be particularly damaging to married women who may be in particular need of such social contact. Married women who have not become mothers are the least distressed group overall.

In conclusion, however, we can explain less of the variation in distress levels among those who are married than among the sample as a whole. This suggests that a range of influences which are not included in our analysis are of greater importance – perhaps particularly those factors relating to the quality of interpersonal relationships and the internal organisation of marriage roles. Of course, our sample is very small and quite biased toward early marriages. Later follow-up studies will hopefully allow us to study this cohort at ages 27-30 when most people will have married.

Single Motherhood, Social Context and Psychological Distress

Single motherhood has become a more common status among young Irish women, and we suggested earlier that it may be a particularly troublesome one as it is associated with disadvantaged social backgrounds and poor educational and labour market histories. In this section we carry out a similar analysis to that undertaken for marriage and parenthood within marriage, looking first at the economic and social circumstances associated with single motherhood and then at how these factors can help to explain its apparently distressing status. In Table 7.6 we can see significant differences between the economic and social background and educational level circumstances of single mothers and other young married women. Once again, although the sample numbers are small, the results do give a clear indication of the type of experiences and processes associated with single motherhood.

We have seen how, although single mothers' actual income is very low, they express less dissatisfaction with their income and report a greater availability of financial support (see Table 7.3). Single mothers were shown to have reasonable socio-emotional support available to them, although there appears to be a somewhat higher degree of social isolation among them. Both married and single mothers spend less time with friends than do other women; but there is a striking gap in general social contact levels between single mothers and other young women. Almost 1 in 5 single mothers, for instance, had met 3 or less people outside their home in the

week before interview compared to less than 1 in 25 of any other group. Dramatic differences arise too, as we saw, in the extent of unemployment suffered by these young women: 1 in 3 single mothers being unemployed and almost half being in "home duties" – much higher levels than among young married women.

Table 7.6: *The Socio-Economic Background and Educational Levels of Single Mothers*

	Single Mothers (1)	*Other Young Married Women (2)*	*All Other Women (3)*
A. Father's Occupation		*Per cent*	
Lower Working Class	27.5	28.8	26.3
Upper Working/Lower Middle Class	55.2	53.2	43.1
Middle and Upper Middle Class	17.2	17.9	30.8
	n = 29	156	627
		$X^2 = 16.2$; p, n.s.	
B. Father's Employment Status			
Unemployed	31.0	9.0	9.6
Employed	69.0	91.0	90.4
	n = 29	156	675
		$X^2 = 21.1$; $p < .05$	
C. Educational Level Attained			
No Qualifications	27.6	6.1	6.5
Group/Inter Cert	37.9	30.8	18.9
Leaving Cert	31.0	56.4	49.9
Third Level	3.4	6.4	24.8
	n = 29	156	627
		$X^2 = 81.4$; $p < .01$	

It is clear then that the "objective" conditions of the lives of single mothers – in terms of income, employment opportunities and general social integration – are much less favourable than for married mothers, and particularly for single women. However, they do seem reasonably satisfied with their income – probably due to the lower expectations, and they do receive reasonably high levels of social support.

Table 7.6 shows that single mothers tend to come from deprived backgrounds – particularly as regards father's unemployment: 1 in 3 of their households of origin compared to less than 1 in 10 of other households. In addition they are less likely to come from middle class families – though the differences are not statistically significant. But the

main difference is in their very poor educational experiences, with 28 per cent having no qualifications at all and only 1 in 3 going as far as the Leaving Certificate – compared to 75 per cent of other young single women. Interestingly, although not different in terms of their class origins, other young married women are much less likely to come from families with unemployed fathers and are significantly better educated than single mothers. Young single mothers, therefore, come from deprived backgrounds, and generally have unsatisfactory educational and labour market experiences. Given their consequent unfavourable economic and social circumstances it is not surprising that their level of distress is very high.

It is important, however, to assess which of these various background and current social factors are the most important causes of distress among single mothers, particularly if effective policies are to be devised to deal with them.

The multiple regression analysis in Table 7.7 shows how these various factors affect the psychological well-being of young women, including single mothers. Equation 2 shows that there is a modest effect on distress levels of being a single mother, although not statistically significant. However, since single motherhood is closely associated with low educational attainment (which has a large negative effect) and also with father's employment, once these factors are controlled for single motherhood has no additional significant effect.

In addition, a substantial part of the distress associated with single motherhood is explained by the very high levels of current, and previous, unemployment among these young women. In contrast, married women benefit from lower levels of unemployment, and therefore are not affected in the same way by statistical controls for unemployment. Single motherhood is, therefore, clearly not a satisfactory alternative status to unemployment as lack of a jobs appears to have more serious effects on their well-being than on that of others.

Income dissatisfaction has substantial additional negative effects on well-being for all groups of women and, when controlled for, only unemployment retains any significant effect. Lack of social support also significantly increases distress levels but the addition of this variable has no significant influence on the effect of any preceding variable. Once included only itself, unemployment and income dissatisfaction retain any significant effects. So the positive effects of marriage, and the negative effects of single motherhood, appear to be explained by different unemployment, income and social support rates: marriage being positive and single motherhood being negative on these variables.

Table 7.7: *Multiple Regression of the Effects on Psychological Distress, Among Women, of Social Background, Single Parenthood and Marriage, Labour Force Status, Financial Strain and Availability of Social Support*

	Equation 1 Social Background and Education	*Equation 2 1 + "Domestic" Variables*	*Equation 3 2 + Labour Force Status*	*Equation 4 3 + Financial Strain*	*Equation 5 4 + Social Support*
1. Remoteness	−.002**	−.002*	−.002*	−.001	−.001
2. Father's Occupation	−.01	.003	−.02	−.01	−.04
3. Father's Unemployment	.22	.16	−.01	.001	−.06
4. Level of Education	−.21**	−.19**	−.15*	−.09	−.08
5. Single Motherhood		.60	.29	.49	.24
6. Marriage		−.65**	−.57**	−.40	−.41
7. Married with Children		.21	.04	−.18	−.31
8. Unemployment			1.31***	.70***	.61**
9. Home Duties			.33	.16	.26
10. Income				−.002	−.001
11. Financial Dissatisfaction				.56***	.56***
12. Lack of Social Support					.80***
Constant	1.68***	1.63***	1.38***	−.04	−.99
N	435	435	435	435	435
R^2	.02	.03	.09	.15	.17
F	2.85	3.12	5.97	8.02	8.37
p	<.05	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.01

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10.

Single motherhood is clearly a distressing experience for young women in Irish society, relative to the experiences not only of other single women but especially of those who are married. The vast bulk of this distress can be explained by a combination of a narrow, though emotionally supportive, social network environment which cannot deal adequately with the stresses placed on young single mothers, and the extremely poor educational and labour market histories which most of these women have experienced. These material conditions of life, which are clearly open to significant policy interventions, appear to explain single mother's greater distress. It appears to be the economic and social circumstances predating or associated with single motherhood, rather than other aspects of the status itself, which causes distress to the young women in this position.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have assessed how aspects of the domestic life cycle in young people's transitions to adulthood affect their psychological well-being. We found that while, with some exceptions, the distressing effects of domestic transitions were not as significant as those related to unemployment and problems with labour market transitions, these transitions did affect young people's well-being in many ways.

The process of leaving home seemed to cause little enough distress to young people and most of those remaining in the parental home 5 years after leaving school also seemed relatively happy. However, those who were in some sense "trapped" in the parental home did suffer; particularly those young people who were unemployed and had never left the parental home, and also those who had emigrated but had returned to resume living with their parents – whether employed or unemployed. Those returned emigrants who lived independently of their parents suffered no such psychological distress.

The well-being effects of marriage and parenthood varied by gender in important ways – single women being slightly more distressed than single men, their well-being improving dramatically on marriage but apparently deteriorating slightly on becoming a mother. In contrast, men's situation appears to decline slightly on getting married but they are least distressed after becoming fathers. Unlike the results for women, however, these differences are very small and not statistically significant. Interestingly, employment seems to improve the well-being of all groups of respondents regardless of their domestic situation, so it would appear that possible role conflicts between marriage and employment roles are of little importance to well-being; even among married mothers where societal resistance to employment appears to have broken down somewhat.

Marriage does have reasonably important effects of its own, although these effects are not statistically significant. Declines in disposable income (particularly per capita) and increased financial dissatisfaction often accompany marriage, especially for men; and can cause distress among married men although not, apparently, among women. Married women tend to have a more supportive social environment although showing some signs of isolation from friends. Young husbands particularly seem to be quite socially isolated. These young men suffer somewhat increased levels of distress because of this. Marriage also tends to be associated with increased employment among men and less unemployment among women as many withdraw into "home duties". This appears to improve the well-being of both. Controlling for labour force status and financial factors an important difference remains, with women happier in marriage than men

– although differences in social support to some extent cancel out this advantage.

Becoming a parent, once married, redresses the balance between the sexes somewhat. Parenthood generally means further loss of per capita disposable income and increased financial dissatisfaction among both fathers and mothers. Husbands' social environment, however, seems to improve on becoming a father but motherhood seems to increase social isolation, and the distress this causes women in particular helps to explain some of the decline in their well-being. Unemployment appears to be strongly associated with becoming a father at a young age, and appears to cause some additional distress among these young men. It might be suggested, however, that while much of the distress or sense of well-being associated with marriage itself is due to changes in financial circumstances and patterns of labour force participation and how significant these are in the individual's changed situation, the arrival of a child in a family may make internal considerations more important to partners' well-being although social and employment factors remain significant.

The most important aspect of the domestic transition from the point of view of social policy implications is the transition to single motherhood among a small but growing number of, usually substantially disadvantaged, young women. These young single mothers tend to be the most distressed of all groups of young Irish women. They tend to be from poor social backgrounds, have lower levels of education, have low incomes, be relatively isolated from general social contact, and experience high rates of unemployment and withdrawal from the labour force. They do, however, appear relatively satisfied with their financial position – probably due to lower expectations – and are relatively confident of the availability of financial and emotional support. These mitigating factors cannot cancel out the overall negative effects of single mothers' objective standard of living, social isolation and unemployment, however. Poor levels of educational attainment also hamper these young women. When differences in these factors are controlled for, single mothers' sense of well-being is only slightly less satisfactory than that of single women generally. The distressing consequences of single motherhood are largely due, therefore, to the clustering of multiple deprivations around these young women: deprivations to which they are exposed before becoming single mothers in most cases but which are exacerbated by this problematic transition.

Despite the emphasis in the literature on labour market transitions, which are of course crucially important, we have seen in this chapter that domestic life cycle transitions can affect young people's psychological well-

being both in their own right and through their interaction with labour market processes. These effects are, however, somewhat weaker than those associated with labour market transition problems. A significant part of the effect of domestic transitions on well-being appears to be explained by factors "external" to the organisation of domestic relationships themselves. Factors such as changes in financial situation, adjustments or dislocations in the immediate social environment and patterns of labour force participation explain much of the differential well-being of young men and women in different domestic statuses. These factors can affect mental health directly through their association with changes in domestic status, and may indeed cause internal strains in relationships which could be removed if these "external" problems were dealt with.

Appendix Table A7.1: *Effects on Psychological Distress of Marriage and Gender with Single Men as the Reference Category (from Multiple Regression Analysis in Table 7.4)*

	Controlling for			
	Social Background and Education	*1 + Labour Force Status*	*2 + Financial Strain*	*3 + Social Support*
	1	2	3	4
Single Men	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Single Women	0.18	0.24	0.22	0.27
Married Men	–0.16	–0.14	–0.14	–0.31
Married Women	–0.38	–0.31	–0.24	–0.22

Appendix Table A7.2: *Effects on Psychological Distress Among Married Men and Women of Becoming a Parent with Childless Married Men as the Reference Category (from Multiple Regression Analysis in Table 7.5)*

	Controlling for			
	Social Background and Education	*1 + Labour Force Status*	*2 + Financial Strain*	*3 + Social Support*
	1	2	3	4
Men, no Children	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Women, no Children	–1.18	–1.16	–1.13	–0.93
Fathers	–1.10	–1.12	–0.97	–0.92
Mothers	–0.91	–0.98	–1.05	–0.88

Chapter 8

EXPLAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS: THE ROLE OF MEDIATING FACTORS

Differences in social background and in educational and labour market experiences are important factors in explaining how stressful experiences translate into actual psychological distress – as we have already seen in Chapters 6 and 7. These factors greatly influence both the young person's exposure and vulnerability to stressful experiences. However, a closer examination of the stress process is required, particularly the role of "mediators" as factors which can greatly affect the personal consequences of "stressors" such as unemployment. And unemployment as we have noted in the two preceding chapters is the crucial barrier to successful transitions.

We discussed the nature of these mediating factors in detail in Chapter 2. In this chapter we investigate their actual impact on the respondents in our study. We first examine the role of economic hardship and financial stress in explaining the distressing impact of unemployment. The mediating effects of the immediate social context of young people is next examined: their peer groups, their levels of social integration and contact, the emotional and financial support available to them. We also examine the role of various aspects of young people's attitudes to the labour market. Particularly important here are the young people's perceptions of the causes of their employment or unemployment, and their level of employment commitment. The final mediating factors which we examine are personal feelings of control and efficacy or, put negatively, fatalism. By analysing the role of these mediating factors we will be able to identify some of the main reasons why unemployment is such a distressing experience, as well as some of the factors which can alleviate this distress.

Economic Hardship and Youth Unemployment

The crucial importance of poverty and financial strain in explaining the impact of unemployment among adults is well documented as is the independent impact of economic hardship on psychological distress (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; Whelan, 1992b). While some have suggested that financial strain may be a less serious problem for young people than for middle-aged adults with a greater range of commitments, young people

themselves place great emphasis on lack of money as a distressing consequence of unemployment (Sheehy-Sheffington, 1985; McRae, 1987). Ullah (1990) finds that low income leads to psychological distress among young people only if it is subjectively experienced as insufficient to meet everyday needs and desires. However, low income might also have a direct detrimental effect on well-being by causing a deterioration in one's standard of living, an effect which need not necessarily operate via subjectively experienced financial stress.

Our measure of income is based on the respondents' self-reported net income from paid employment or State benefits. The then average net income (personal, not household, income) of the unemployed was less than half that of those in employment (£38 a week, compared to £83) and shows far less variation (with a standard deviation of £19 per week compared to £50 per week). The income consequences of unemployment are, therefore, very damaging. However, there is little difference in income levels between those above and below the GHQ threshold for the employed or the unemployed. So lower income, as such, cannot be the main factor which explains why some unemployed people become more distressed than others.

As expected, unemployed young people show far higher levels of perceived financial stress – with 81 per cent of the unemployed saying they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their income as compared to 28 per cent of those in employment. Table 8.1 shows the joint effects of experienced financial stress and unemployment on psychological distress. The unemployed are, of course, substantially more distressed than the employed – whether satisfied or dissatisfied with their income; although the importance of financial strain as a cause of distress is clearly illustrated by the substantial increase in the proportions of the employed or unemployed dissatisfied with their income (by 10 to 16 percentage points). Almost 1 in 3 of the financially dissatisfied unemployed are above the GHQ threshold compared to less than 1 in 7 of the employed: showing clearly the high degree of concentration of hardship in this sub-group. Overall, however, both variables have roughly equal effects on GHQ scores: with the average "percentage difference" between the "satisfied" and "dissatisfied" groups being 13, and that between the employed and unemployed groups being 15.

Of course the measure "financial dissatisfaction" is not a direct measure of actual financial stress or actual difficulties in "making ends meet": i.e., of funding purchases of basic necessities. However, it does measure feelings of financial stress, and is moderately correlated with low income (Pearson's r = -0.39 with income). Income dissatisfaction among the unemployed and those on low incomes generally would appear, therefore, to mean somewhat

the same as financial stress or economic hardship, while at higher incomes or among the employed generally income dissatisfaction is likely to be more closely linked to unfulfilled aspirations rather than actual hardship. So, amongst the unemployed at least, income dissatisfaction appears to be closely linked to economic hardship or experienced financial stress, leading to very high levels of psychological stress.

Table 8.1: *Psychological Distress by Employment Status and Perceived Financial Stress: Percentage above GHQ Threshold*

Employment Status	*Financial Stress*	
	Satisfied/ Very Satisfied	*Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied*
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold	
Employed	4.2	14.0
Unemployed	16.1	32.3

Another important aspect of a person's financial situation is the perceived availability of financial support should financial stress become too great. This sense of financial security was measured by asking respondents: "If you were to get into financial difficulties, or you needed to borrow money for some emergency, is there anybody you feel you could go to who would help you out?"

Among the unemployed 18.6 per cent said that there "probably" or "definitely" was not, while only 4.4 per cent of the employed gave this response. Table 8.2 shows the effects of lack of perceived financial support on psychological well-being among the employed and unemployed.

The results are somewhat similar to those relating to financial stress in Table 8.1. However, in this case having financial support available does not improve psychological well-being to the same extent as satisfaction with income levels. This is especially the case amongst the unemployed amongst whom there is almost no difference in stress levels between those with and without support (27 per cent versus 33 per cent). Such a lack of support has greater impact among the employed. The combined effects of unemployment and lack of financial support are not purely additive it

would seem: the latter having little effect when unemployed, though much greater when employed.

Table 8.2: *Percentage above GHQ Threshold Score by Perceived Availability of Financial Support and Employment Status*

Person's Employment Status	*Financial Support Available?*	
	Probably/Definitely Yes	*Probably/Definitely No*
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold	
Employed	6.7	14.3
Unemployed	26.7	33.1

Clearly the role of financial strain is important in partly explaining the impact of unemployment on psychological distress. Loss of income, savings and other "stored resources" is strongly associated with unemployment and is likely to be an important part of the mechanism by which unemployment increases financial and psychological distress. Such financial stress and lack of support also have independent effects on distress once employment status is controlled for. So, increased financial stress and a perceived increase in lack of financial support explain some of the impacts of unemployment, though both retain important independent effects also on psychological distress even among the employed. We will examine the relative effects of these variables using multiple regression analysis at the end of this chapter.

Local Social Environment

We have seen that economic hardship is a very important part of the experience of unemployment and one which significantly increases distress among unemployed young people. However, other aspects of the young person's lived experience of unemployment may also be important. Most important of these is probably the immediate social context of unemployment – the young person's peer groups, the levels of emotional and social support potentially and actually available to the young person, and levels of social contact and integration. Access to supportive social networks and social ties may vary a great deal by employment status, and so too may their effects on young people's well being. We go on now to examine some of these relationships.

Membership of high or low unemployment friendship networks could be expected to affect a person's well-being in a number of ways. Reference group theory – in its comparative aspect – would suggest that people maintain a self-image based on judgements of their own status relative to that of their peers. If so, we would expect employed respondents in high unemployment networks to be particularly happy, and unemployed respondents in high employment networks to be especially unhappy. However, such membership group effects may also take the form of respondents adopting the standards of their peer groups – i.e., their normative effects – to make judgements about themselves. Indeed, this appears to be the case for the assessments of their education by young people in our sample – those in high unemployment networks being less satisfied regardless of their own employment status (Hannan and Shortall, 1991). There is also the possibility that the well-being effects of particular group contexts may be more affected by the availability of material and social support from such groups rather than from any comparative or normative reference group influences. The main issue, however, from the point of view of trying to assess the impact of unemployment on distress is whether being unemployed in a high unemployment context "insulates" the young person from the worst effects of unemployment or "amplifies" those distressing effects.

There is a tendency for employed and unemployed people to be friendly with those in similar employment statuses. It is not possible to say from our data how much of this is due to a current choice of similarly situated peers and how much to previous groups of friends, generally from similar localities and social backgrounds, being caught up in similar labour market processes and outcomes. Either way, some 77 per cent of employed but only 40 per cent of unemployed young people say that "most" or "almost all" of their friends are employed; and 5 per cent of the employed and 19 per cent of the unemployed say that "most" or "almost all" of their friends are unemployed. While there is no gender differences in such peer groups among the employed, unemployed men tend to be in more highly unemployed networks – 24 per cent compared to 14 per cent for women. These differences are minor compared to those relating to employment status, however.

In Table 8.3 we can see how the nature of a young person's peer group can effect the experience of employment or unemployment. We can see in this table that while the overall effect of being in a high unemployment peer group is to raise levels of distress, this effect is mostly explained by an individual's own employment status: there are substantially more unemployed people in high unemployment networks. Although there is a

slight tendency for employed people in high unemployment networks to have lower levels of distress those effects are not statistically significant. And equally although the opposite is the case for the unemployed – feeling worse in high unemployment networks – these differences also are small and not statistically significant. There is a small positive correlation of GHQ with percentage of friends unemployed but since the naïve reference group hypothesis had predicted the opposite result the appropriate statistical test is a "two tailed" one and is not significant. Those suffering most from unemployment are those whose friends are generally unemployed: in this case alienation shared is alienation amplified – though only moderately so. So, having unemployed friends clearly does not provide insulation from the worst effects of unemployment. That hypothesis is at least clearly rejected. Perhaps those in high unemployment networks who are themselves unemployed suffer a double deprivation of reduced living conditions and coping resources which outweighs any "social buffering" advantages of membership groups. However, these peer group effects appear to be relatively minor compared to the effects of being unemployed itself.

Table 8.3: *Psychological Distress by Own Employment Status and Employment Rate of Peer Group: Percentage above GHQ Threshold*

Own Employment Status	*Most/Almost All Employed*	*Half Employed/ Half Unemployed*	*Most/Almost All Unemployed*	*Correlation between GHQ and % Unempl.*
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)			
Employed	7.4 (582)	6.5 (137)	3.1 (35)	r = –.06
Unemployed	24.7 (88)	29.3 (87)	30.8 (42)	r = .11
Total	9.8 (769)	14.1 (266)	19.4 (100)	r = .11**

** = p<.01

We have more direct measures of social support. We can think of the social support available to young people in two ways (Pearlin, 1990): the objective social conditions relating to social contact or integration, and also the individual's sense of the availability of emotional or material support. We have already assessed the effects of the perceived availability of financial support and found that it reduces distress among both employed and unemployed respondents. The measures of socio-emotional support

used comes from the question asked of respondents: "amongst your friends and relatives are there some people you feel you can talk to about things that trouble you, someone you can call on for advice and support?" And we measured levels of social integration by asking respondents: "During the past week: (i) "how many different people outside your house would you have met and talked to for some time?", and (ii) "how much time would you have spent with friends chatting and having a good time?"

Although these measures of socio-emotional support and social contact are rather crude their use can provide us with some indication of how important a favourable interpersonal social environment is. The effects of social support and integration on the well-being of the employed and the unemployed are presented in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4: *Psychological Distress Levels by Availability of Socio-Emotional Support and Levels of Social Contact, for Employed and Unemployed Respondents*

	Employment Status		
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Total*
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N)		
(1) *Socio-Emotional Support Available*			
Definitely/Probably Yes	6.7 (726)	28.1 (205)	11.6 (1085)
Definitely/Probably No	16.4 (26)	24.3 (12)	14.9 (48)
(2) *People Met in Past Week*			
4 or More	6.4 (733)	27.1 (203)	10.9 (1092)
3 or Less	27.5 (21)	36.7 (14)	29.3 (44)
(3) *Time Spent With Friends in Past Week*			
2 or More Hours	6.9 (737)	28.1 (193)	11.1 (1082)
1 Hour or Less	11.1 (17)	25.3 (23)	22.3 (52)

Social support and integration might be expected to have independent direct effects on well-being, irrespective of the person's employment status: if social support were drawn on routinely by young people in the course of their lives. However, if such social resources are only called into play when

the person is under stress we would expect the "buffering" to be at its greatest when unemployed; so that unemployed young people would show particular improvement in well-being when support was available to them or when they were well integrated into local social networks. Our results, however, do not support this latter hypothesis. We can see that all three measures of social support/integration have a positive effect on the well-being of those who are employed, but have almost no such effect for the unemployed. This would appear to refute the social "buffering" hypothesis: as the less stressed employed group benefit most highly from available social support.

A supportive interpersonal environment appears to benefit only those who are already in a relatively favourable position and are able to take advantage of it. The problems faced by the unemployed may be too great to be ameliorated by peer and neighbourhood contact and social-emotional support. As already noted, the content of these relationships may be different for the unemployed but this is something which we cannot investigate here. However, before we conclude on this issue we would need to control for many social background factors which could influence both the nature and strength of social networks, and this we will do at the end of the chapter.

Overall, therefore, the major distressing factor in many young peoples' lives remains the fact of being unemployed. Beside this, the impact of their social environment appears to be relatively minor – at least the aspects of it which we have measured.

Labour Market Attitudes

Young people's perceptions of and attitudes towards employment and their own labour market situation can affect psychological well-being in different ways. We will look particularly at young people's analysis of the causes of their own employment situation and their own level of employment commitment.

We measured young people's causal attributions of their employment or unemployment by asking them a series of questions about their views of the main causes of their own situation. Respondents were asked "how much of your present situation – i.e., being employed or unemployed – is due to the following factors", and seven different "causes" were allowed. Four scaled responses were allowed. Factor analysis revealed two dimensions of causal attribution amongst respondents, and two attitude scales were constructed which were highly reliable (see Appendix 8.1). The two dimensions of causal attributions related to whether these factors were perceived as "personal" or "political/structural" in nature. The items involved were:

Personal Causal Attributions:

(a) "Your own skills and training"
(b) "The amount of effort you put into work"
(c) "How good you are at your work and the quality of your skills"

Political/Structural Causal Attributions

(a) "Largely a matter of luck!"
(b) "Ireland's poor economic position in the world"
(e) "The policies of the government"
(g) "The way in which our society is set up to benefit the rich and powerful."

Respondents could answer for each item that their present situation was:

(1) "Not at all due to it"
(2) "Very little due to it"
(3) "Somewhat due to it"
(4) "Very much due to it"

The two dimensions which we identified are two different aspects of causal attribution. However, a summary measure of both the "personal" and "political" attitude scales combined is more illuminating. If a respondent had a low score (1 or 2) on the "personal" scale this meant that the person was denying the importance of personal factors as causes of their own situation, whereas a high score (3 or 4) meant that a respondent felt that personal factors were important. On the "political" scale, a low score meant that political factors were not seen as important whereas, once again, a high score meant that they were. By dichotomising each scale we were able to combine them as follows:

		Political Factors	
		Not Important	*Important*
Personal Factors	*Not Important*	1	4
	Important	2	3

Combining the two scales gave us the following four categories into which each respondent's causal attributions could be classified:

(1) No clear view of causes of present situation
(2) Sees only own characteristics as important causes
(3) Sees both own characteristics and political/structural factors as important causes
(4) Sees only political/structural factors as important causes.

We therefore have a neat summary measure of the respondents' own evaluations of the causes of their present situations, weighing up both personal and political factors. The different reasons given by employed

and unemployed respondents for their situation are presented in Table 8.5 and show that while the employed clearly see personal factors as the main reasons for their "success" (79.6 per cent contemplating them), the unemployed tend to focus on more structural factors (45.9 per cent). Over 1 in 3 of the unemployed are, however, unclear as to the causes of their predicament.

These results would not be totally unexpected, of course, as those who have been relatively successful would be likely to claim the credit for their own success, and those who have not been so successful would be likely to avoid blaming themselves for their situation. However, this interpretation of respondents' causal attributions as *post-fa tum* rationalisations, designed to maintain positive self-images, looks very unlikely when we examine the distress consequences of the various causal attributions of employed and unemployed respondents (see Table 8.6).

Table 8.5: *Percentage Distribution of Employed and Unemployed Respondents by Type of "Causal Attributions"*

Causal Attributions		*Employed*	*Unemployed*
		Per Cent	
No Clear View (1)		8.7	34.8
Personal Factors Most Important (4)		79.6	6.9
Personal and Structural Factors (3)		9.8	12.4
Structural Factors Most Important (2)		1.8	45.9
Total	%	100	100
	N	754	217

Table 8.6: *Percentage above GHQ Threshold by Respondent's Employment Status and Attribution of Causes of Present Situation*

Causal Attributions	*Employed*	*Unemployed*	*Total**
	Percentage Above GHQ Threshold(N)		
1. No Clear View	15.5 (66)	23.4 (75)	18.5 (200)
2. Personal Factors Most Important	5.7 (600)	26.1 (15)	6.0 (686)
3. Personal and Structural Factors	10.0 (74)	14.7 (27)	10.4 (110)
4. Structural Factors Most Important	7.5 (150)	35.1 (100)	33.0 (126)

* Includes other statistics.

We can see immediately that overall the least advantageous set of causal attributions for the unemployed is one crediting structural factors only for one's present situation (over 1 in 3 being distressed), followed by personal factors (26 per cent) and the lack of any clear view on the causes of one's situation (23 per cent being distressed). Since the majority of the unemployed see structural factors as most important in bringing about their situation, and this appears to increase their stress levels, there is little evidence of rationalisation here. Rather than rationalising away the causes of their predicament in order to lessen the pain the opposite appears to be the case – their sense of powerlessness increases distress. These feelings of "loss of control" over one's own life is a very real possibility – as we shall see later. There is little evidence, however, to support Sheehy-Skeffington's (1985) view that unemployed young people may be shielded from the impact of unemployment by ignorance of the full implications of their situation.

Employment Commitment

Another aspect of the young person's attitude to the labour market is their overall commitment to employment or to the importance and inherent value of work. This is measured in our study by four statements with which respondents were asked to "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree". The statements were:

(i) "Even if I won a great deal of money on the lottery I would still want to work!"
(ii) "There are many more important things in life than having a job!"
(iii) "I hate/would hate to be on the dole!"
(iv) "If unemployment benefit/assistance was high enough I would prefer not to work!"

A scale was constructed using 3 of these items which was moderately reliable (Alpha = .63). This was taken as measuring overall "employment commitment". The second statement was left out of the scale, as including it greatly reduced the reliability of the scale. On close examination the item seems to be dealing with a slightly different underlying attitude to those tapped by the other three items. The other three statements cast the respondent's choice of reply in terms of a decision to work when offered sufficient income to live on without working – or, at least, seem to be interpretable in this way. This is not true of the item which was excluded.

The literature would suggest that those who are highly committed to employment suffer more from unemployment (Banks, Ullah, Warr, 1984; Banks and Jackson, 1982; Warr, *et al.*, 1988; Feather, 1990; Jehoel-Gijsbers and Groot, 1989; Marsh and Alvaro, 1990; Stafford, Jackson and Banks, 1980), though the unemployed themselves are likely to have lower levels of

employment commitment. The direction of causality here remains controversial – does low commitment cause unemployment or is it an adaptive reaction to unemployment, if such a lowering occurs at all. Furlong (1988), for instance, suggests that "employment commitment" is a learned value, which is gained through habituation to work life by those who have been employed for some time.

Table 8.7 shows that those in employment do have the highest levels of employment commitment and that there does seem to be an "habituation" effect in that those likely to have little or no work experience show much lower levels of commitment: the lowest levels of commitment being amongst those who have never been employed (still seeking their first job) and those in "home duties", who have withdrawn from the labour force.

While the differences are not dramatic and the percentages are based on small numbers in some cases, a relatively clear picture does emerge: of very high levels of overall employment commitment if employed, with a small negative effect of becoming unemployed. Further analysis showed us evidence of a reduction in employment commitment among the long-term unemployed. There is significant evidence, however, of an "habituation effect" for those never employed and amongst those who have withdrawn from the labour force into "home duties".

Table 8.7: *Levels of "Employment Commitment" by Respondent's Current Labour Force Status*

Employment Commitment Scale Score		*Employment Status*					*Total*
		Working for Pay or Profit	*Unemployed (Lost Job)*	*Seeking First Job*	*Student*	*Home Duties*	
				Per Cent			
1 + 2 (Low)		2.6	7.1	12.2	4.3	19.8	4.6
3		34.6	38.8	58.7	47.3	50.9	37.2
4 (High)		62.8	54.1	29.1	48.4	29.3	58.2
Total	%	100	100	100	100	100	100
	N	816	188	29	28	57	1134

The interaction between employment status and employment commitment in terms of how they affect the young person's psychological well-being is also quite clear (see Table 8.8): those who are highly committed to employment fare best when employed (only 6.3 per cent being distressed) and worst when unemployed (32.6 per cent distressed).

Table 8.8: *Psychological Distress by Employment Status and Score on Employment Commitment Scale*

Employment Status	*Employment Commitment Score*			*Pearson Corr. Between Empl., Commitment and GHQ*
	1 + 2(low)	*3*	*4 (high)*	
	– Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N) –			
Employed	15.1 (19)	7.7 (270)	6.3 (466)	r = –.01
Unemployed	21.7 (17)	23.3 (90)	32.6 (110)	r = .15*

* $p < .05$.

From these results it is clear that the effect of unemployment on well-being varies quite significantly according to the young person's level of employment commitment or, to put it another way, that the effect of employment commitment on well-being varies by employment status. For those unemployed the higher the level of employment commitment the greater the level of stress (r = +.15). No such relationship exists for those who are employed – though there is a slight tendency for those with low employment commitment to be more stressed. The nature of the relationship between these variables is often raised in public debate on unemployment – "the unemployed don't want to work" is a common complaint. However, a longitudinal study of employment commitment over the whole of the 1980s could hardly be expected to show a drop in employment commitment sufficient to explain the rise in unemployment over that period, and there is also the basic result that overall levels of employment commitment are high – 60 per cent of the employed, but 50 per cent of the unemployed, for instance, had the highest levels of employment commitment. The above results indicate that lower employment commitment levels among the unemployed, to the extent that they occur, can be most plausibly interpreted as an adaptive reaction to

unemployment and not a cause of it; and are quite likely to rise again once a job is gained. There is some psychological benefit for the less committed unemployed, but their levels of distress still remains very high; and this can hardly conform with a picture of a choice of unemployment as a preferred lifestyle.

Looking at unemployed young people's labour market attitudes overall then we can see that the idea that the unemployed make personal choices to remain unemployed is not persuasive in the vast majority of cases. Most unemployed young people are either unclear as to the causes of their situation or clearly blame structural factors; very few see their own attitudes as having had any effect on such life-chances. These beliefs (in structural causes) do little to lessen the distressing impact of unemployment, however; as it is precisely those unemployed people who hold these beliefs who are the most distressed. Clearly they feel their chances in the future to be at the mercy of others and this is of course a highly depressing prospect.

While there is some evidence that commitment to employment is weakened by a spell of unemployment, levels of commitment remain high; except among those who have had very little if any experience of work. While students can be reasonably expected to gain employment fairly quickly, those who are "seeking their first job" are in a very worrying position. Most are poorly qualified and seem disillusioned with the world of work. Getting this group into employment as soon as possible is imperative if they are not to become totally detached from the labour market.

Feelings of Control and Mastery

Many of the labour market attitudes which we have just looked at seem to impact on the young person's psychological well-being through feelings of control over the course of one's life and the ability to shape one's own future. We can look more directly at these feelings of control or mastery over one's life using some questions asked of our respondents in the final resurvey carried out in 1987. "Control" can be interpreted either as a relatively fixed social-psychological attitude of respondents (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986), or as a variable set of feelings which essentially mediate or "carry" the impact of stressors on the individual and lead to distress (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). We will examine this issue by analysing the variations in feelings of control (or, put negatively, "fatalism") among respondents, assessing the sources of these feelings, and their impact on young people's psychological well-being.

The construction of the scale used in our analysis is discussed more fully in Appendix 8.1 but the questions used on the scale are presented

below. Respondents were asked whether they "Strongly Agree," "Agree", "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with eight questions. The first set of questions had positive responses indicating strong feelings of control, and the second set includes questions where a positive response indicates weak feelings of control. The numbers beside the items show the order in which they were asked of respondents.

"Positive" Items:

(ii) I often feel good about myself and about the things I do.

(iii) I believe I'm as good as anybody else in any task I set my mind to.

(v) Generally I'm very satisfied with my life so far.

"Negative" Items:

(i) I often get discouraged about not doing things as well as I'm able to.

(iv) Sometimes I feel that there is almost nothing I do that is needed by anyone.

(vi) I feel I have very little control over things that happen to me.

(vii) Sometimes I think that other people have been given an unfair advantage over me.

(viii) I often feel helpless in dealing with problems in my life.

These items were recoded to provide a score of 1 to indicate low control and up to 4 to indicate very strong feelings of control. These scores were summed and scaled to give a highly reliable (Alpha = .73) scale: ranging between 1 and 4, with a high score indicating strong feelings of control. There are very few respondents at either of the extreme values of the measure so in our analysis we speak only of "high" and "low" feelings of control – taking the average of the scale as the dividing line (high = > 2.5; low = <2.5).

Table 8.9 shows that those who are unemployed feel that they have far less control over their lives than do the employed. Of course, the issue of the direction of causality arises once again: do more fatalistic young people take a less active orientation to their situation and, therefore, end up unemployed; or is it the experience of becoming, and being, unemployed which reduces personal feelings of control? Our data cannot answer these questions conclusively but the latter interpretation does seem more plausible.

What is absolutely clear, however, is that low feelings of control result in high levels of personal distress (Table 8.10). This applies to both groups. Although "control" partly explains the damaging psycho-social effects of unemployment it clearly has an equally important independent effect. Strong feelings of personal control and efficacy, while having a more beneficial effect among those in employment, do help greatly in making

the experience of unemployment less distressing (reducing levels of distress from 41.8 per cent to 20.3 per cent).

Table 8.9: *Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Feelings of Control by for each Employment Status*

Respondents' Empoyment Status	*Control*		*Total*
	High	*Low*	
		– Per cent –	*(N)*
Unemployed	64.7	35.3	100 (217)
Employee	84.7	15.3	100 (752)

Table 8.10: *The Effects of Feelings of Personal Control/Mastery on Psychological distress by Employment Status*

Employment Status	*Feelings of Control*		
	High	*Low*	
	– Percentage Above GHQ Threshold (N) –		
Employed	5.0 (637)	18.6 (115)	$p < .01$
Unemployed	20.3 (140)	41.8 (77)	$p < .01$
Total	7.6 (914)	28.7 (219)	

Overall, then, the unemployed generally feel themselves much less in control of their own lives and the effect of this is to amplify their feelings of distress. There may be important benefits to unemployed young people, therefore, from interventions designed to improve young peoples' feelings of personal efficacy. Of course, such measures would only deal with one aspect of the distress caused by unemployment, as distress levels still remain high even amongst those with high feelings of control. Of course, given the higher levels of distress among the employed who have low feelings of control, such measures could also greatly benefit some people in employment.

We can get some indication of the sources of feelings of low personal control by relating them to some of the factors which we have already examined: low income levels and high income dissatisfaction, personal and structural causal attributions for one's employment situation, and low levels of social support and social contact. Looking first at income levels and income dissatisfaction we can see (Table 8.11) that there are in fact fairly weak correlations between these variables and feelings of personal control. However, the one relationship which is relatively large is the association between low income and low feelings of personal control among the unemployed (r = .26), an association stronger than in the sample as a whole and much stronger than amongst employed respondents (r = .07). Unlike those in employment, unemployed respondents show a far stronger association between actual income and feelings of control than between dissatisfaction with income and feelings of control. This suggests that at least part of the low personal control associated with unemployment is linked to the grind of everyday living on low incomes.

Table 8.11: *The Relationships Between Income Levels, Income Dissatisfaction and Feelings of Personal Control, by Employment Status (Pearson Correlation Coefficients)*

	Respondents' Employment Status		
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Total*
	Correlations with "Control"		
Income	.07*	.26*	.18**
Income Satisfaction	.08*	.09	.16**

* p .05 ** p < .01

The social support available to young people and their levels of social contact might be expected to affect their feelings of control over their lives. But the results in Table 8.12 bear this out only in very limited respects. The availability of socio-emotional support appears to have no effect. The availability of financial support, however, does improve feelings of control for both the employed and unemployed. There is some support for the "buffering" hypothesis but we will test the joint effects of "support" and control on stress in later analyses. Levels of social contact and integration by contrast appear to have a negative effect on feelings of control for both the employed and the unemployed: quite contrary to our hypothesis. It can

hardly be argued that increased social contact/integration decreases "control" *per se;* so it may well be that the reverse holds, that people with low levels of personal control/competency "need" higher levels of social contact. Whether such increased social contact decreases stress will be explored later.

Table 8.12: *The (Pearson) Correlations Between "Control" and Extent, and Nature of Social Support, for Employed and Unemployed Respondents*

Measure of Social Support and Interpersonal Context	*Employed Respondents*	*Unemployed Respondents*
	Correlations with "Control"	
1. Extent of Social-emotional Support (1 = low –> 4 = High)	r = .01	r = .05
2. Extent of Financial Support Available from Intimates (1 = low –> 4 = high)	r = .10**	r = .14*
3. Frequency of Social Contact with Friends (1 = low –> 4 = high)	r = –.11**	r = –.13*
4. Amount of Time Spend with Friends	r = –.11**	r = –.13*
	(n = 751)	(n = 217)

The relationship between assignments of one's current employment position to external political causes and feelings of personal control has previously been found to be very weak. Whelan, *et al.,* (1991) find no association in the adult population between control or "fatalism" and such causal attributions of poverty.

Table 8.13 shows that among young people, however, there is some relationship between personal feelings of control and specific sense of control over one's own employment situation (personal causal attributions); though only for the employed. Giving personal factors the greater weight increases feelings of control among those in employment (r = .15), but to a limited extent appears to damage unemployed young

people's feelings of control. Feelings of control are generally weakened by structural causal attributions, on the other hand, particularly among the unemployed (r = -.34): not surprisingly, perhaps, those unemployed who believe that the causes of their unemployment are structural – and therefore out of their control – are also more likely to be generally fatalistic in their attitudes. There is no such relationship for the employed, however.

Table 8.13: *The Correlations between Personal and Structural Causal Attributions of Own Employment/Unemployment Situation and Feelings of Personal Control, by Employment Status*

Causal Attributions	*Respondents' Employment Status*		
	Employed	*Unemployed*	*Total*
	Pearson's Correlation Coefficients with Feelings of Control		
Personal Causal Attributions	.15**	-.12	.18**
Structural Causal Attributions	-.06	-.34**	-.20**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Overall, then, we can see that those who feel less in control of their own lives show far higher levels of psychological distress than those with high feelings of control. Weak feelings of control or a sense of powerlessness are particularly associated with unemployment and, although they do not fully explain the negative psychological impacts of unemployment, the diminution of feelings of personal efficacy and control appears to be an important part of the reason why unemployment is such a distressing experience. This evidence on the association of feelings of powerlessness with unemployment, low income and structural causal attributions for unemployment suggests that such feelings are partly based on fairly realistic assessments of people's own situation. Although policy interventions must necessarily emphasise material conditions involved, policy also need to pay attention to the stress amplifying effects of changes in beliefs and attitudes due to persistently high levels of unemployment, or indeed to interventions which might change these attitudes – such as employment commitment – without changing the chances of employment.

It is likely, for instance, that feelings of lack of control over one's life and low self image, although responses to fairly realistic assessments of employment chances, may come to be more extreme than is realistically warranted over time (such feelings are likely to "feed off themselves" in situations of deprivation), and therefore also come to have fairly negative

effects on psycho-social functioning. Table 8.14 shows, however, that a past history of unemployment reduces feelings of control to an approximately equal extent for currently employed and the currently unemployed. However, most of this historical effect for those currently employed is explained by a small proportion of people who had very high levels of unemployment, whereas amongst the unemployed the effect was more evenly spread. In both cases this historical effect (of previous unemployment) was minor compared to current unemployment experiences. In short, feelings of control over one's own life are affected most by current status, though a preceding history of unemployment does significantly increase levels of fatalism – but this needs to be quite an extended duration to have any effect amongst those currently employed.

Table 8.14: *Correlation (Pearson) between Feelings of Personal Control and Percentage of Time in Labour Force Spent Unemployed for Employed and Unemployed Respondents (1 = low feelings of control, 4 = high feelings of control)*

Unemployment Experience	*Employment Status*	
	Employed	*Unemployed*
	Correlation with "Control"	
Percentage of Time in Labour Force Spent Unemployed:	r = –.19** (n = 742)	r = –.16* (n = 199)
Average Values		
(1) "Control"	2.65 (.26)	2.41 (.34)
(2) "Per cent Time Unemployed"	.13 (.21)	.49 (.33)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

The Joint Effects of All Independent Variables

In this chapter so far our results show a number of ways in which unemployment affects young people's economic and social circumstances, and political and personal attitudes. These changes in life circumstances and attitudes explain some of the distressing effects of unemployment on the individual, but they can also exacerbate the effects of unemployment, as well as independently affect individuals' senses of well-being.

We can examine the combined effects of all of these factors by including them in a multiple regression analysis, and testing which are the most important factors and what form their effects take. Table 8.15 presents the result of this analysis.

Table 8.15: *Multiple Regression of the Combined Effects on Psychological Distress of Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Unemployment, Financial Strain, Local Social Environment, Labour Market Attitudes and Feelings of Personal Control*

Independent Variables	*Equation 1 Social Background + Unemployment*	*Equation 2 1 + Financial Strain*	*Equation 3 2 + Local Social Environment*	*Equation 4 3 + Labour Market Attitudes*	*Equation 5 4 + Feelings of personal Control*	*Bivariate Correlation*
				– β wts. –		
A. *SOCIAL BACKGROUND, EDUCATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT*						
1. Educational Level	-.05	-.02	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.12
2. Dublin	.14**	.14**	.15**	.14**	.11	.05
3. Gender	.03	.03	.01	.03	.03	-.00
4. Father's Occupational Status †	.01	.02	.03	.04	.04	-.06
5. Unemployed	.23**	.11**	.08*	.02	.04	.36
6. Unemployed x Class ‡	.13**	.12**	.11*	.11**	.06	.25
B. *FINANCIAL STRAIN*						
7. Income		-.04	-.02	.00	.00	-.23
8. Financial Dissatisfaction		.20**	.20**	.19**	.16**	.33
9. Financial Support from Friends		-.11**	-.08*	-.07*	-.05	-.18
C. *LOCAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT*						
10. Peer Group Unemployment			.04	.02	-.01	.15
11. Lack of Socio-Emotional Support			-.03	-.03	-.04	-.10
12. Lack of General Social Contact			.13**	.13**	.12**	.21
13. Isolation from Friends			.00	.00	-.02	.14
D. *LABOUR MARKET ATTITUDES*						
14. Personal Causal Attributions				-.07	-.05	.29
15. Structural Causal Attributions				.14**	.09*	.29
16. Employment Commitment				.05	.06*	.03
E. *FEELINGS OF PERSONAL CONTROL*						
17. Feelings of Personal Control					-.28**	-.42
N	987	987	987	987	987	
R^2 (adjusted)	.14	.18	.20	.22	.28	
F	27.56	25.73	19.84	17.76	23.34	
P	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	

Notes: *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10.

† Occupational status has 6 values based on re-coding occupation of father: 6 = Upper Middle Class (Professional, Employer, etc.); 5 = Middle Class (Senior Professional/Manager); 4 = Lower Middle Class (Clerical, etc.); 3 = Skilled Manual; 2 = Semi-Skilled Manual; 1 = Unskilled Manual (*Source: Classification of Occupations, 1986*, Dublin: Central Statistics Office).

‡ This is an interaction term which is a multiple of "unemployment" (1 = unemployed, 0 = other) and having working class origins (1 = skilled, semiskilled, unskilled; and 0 = other). The term, therefore, has a value of 1 if unemployed and from working class origins and 0 otherwise.

Equation 1 shows the effects of social background, educational achievement and unemployment on GHQ scores. Three social background variables are used which we have already shown to be significant: gender, being from Dublin, and socio-economic status of origin – measured by father's occupational status (6 values). Educational level attained has nine values: from 1 = left school early before doing any examination, to 9 = having a university degree. Unemployment is measured using a dummy variable (1 = unemployed; 0 = other). In addition an interaction term is employed (class of origin by unemployment) which is scored 1.0 if unemployed and from working class origins, and 0 if not. Since we have already shown that the effects of unemployment appear to be more serious for those from working class origins the inclusion of this interaction term tests for such an effect while controlling for other relevant variables.

The six variables combined explain 14 per cent of the variation in GHQ scores, with only unemployment, the unemployment interaction term and being from Dublin having significant effects. So, the effects of social class of origin and educational level achieved appear to be fully mediated by current employment status and by the unemployment by "class" interaction term. Besides the quite negative direct effects of unemployment, it is clear that working class respondents suffered significantly greater damage from unemployment than the average respondent – controlling for all other relevant variables. In addition being from Dublin has significant additional negative effects on GHQ scores, which is not explained by any of the other variables.[6]

Equation 2 adds in the effects of income and of financial strain and support measures. Economic hardship has been shown to be extremely distressing to Irish people in general (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; Whelan, 1992b); and we have already seen that financial strain is an important stressor in young people's lives. Here, however, it is clear that despite the fact that income varies substantially amongst young people it plays no independent role as a "stressor" – being fully mediated through people's perceptions of its adequacy: which is a highly significant stressor. This finding supports that of Ullah (1990). In addition the perception of lack of financial support from family, friends and intimates is also quite stressful. Combined, these three additional financial strain variables add 4 per cent to the explained variances while having very little effect on the explanatory power of the preceding variables – except for the effects of unemployment, which is slightly reduced. So, part of the unemployment effect is mediated through financial strain – but only part of it.

[6] Dubliners are, of course, much less migratory than others, and are, therefore, far more likely to have to stay on at home than others.

While these financial variables explain some of the distressing effects of unemployment, in fact they barely reduce its impact. So, distressing as the economic hardship associated with unemployment obviously is, there are other aspects of the social and social-psychological context of unemployment which may cause even more distress. Particularly relevant here are some of the elements which Warr (1987) points to as fundamental to a healthy social environment – the opportunity to participate in socially organised activities with externally generated goals and demands, the opportunity to partake in a variety of experiences and lifestyles, and the opportunity for interpersonal contact. Recognising this, we can examine some aspects of the immediate interpersonal environment of the unemployed in order to see whether such differences between the employed and the unemployed reduce or increase the levels of distress. Our earlier analysis (particularly Chapter 6) examined some of these issues, and the distress causing effects associated with particular social environments and social-psychological characteristics are examined in Equations 3 to 5 of our regression analysis.

Equation 3 examines the additional effects of four "social environment" factors: proportion of peers unemployed ($r = .15$ with GHQ), extent of social-emotional support ($r = -.10$), extent (number) of social contacts with friends ($r = .21$); and amount of free time spent with friends ($r = .14$). The latter two variables are negatively scored – the highest score (4) is the lowest level of contact. Only one of these variables has any additional independent effect on GHQ scores – lack of general contact with friends which increases the variance explained by two points, to 20 per cent in total. What is equally as interesting is that it barely affects the influence of any of the preceding independent variables. So, both the perception of the availability of financial support from friends and relatives and general level of interpersonal social integration are important "buffers" in stress situations. Of course, these effects can operate in the opposite way also – as already discussed – in isolating unemployed people in curtailed social groups who have high unemployment rates.

There is no evidence among these Irish young people, however, of a "subculture of unemployment" which can help to insulate unemployed young people from the distressing effects of their situation. Instead, it would appear that there is some concentration of disadvantage, with such poorer social environments providing little support for those young people who need it most. Indeed such "social and attitudinal environments" appear to amplify personal distress; with the unemployment and "class by unemployment" effects remaining strong.

There were also important differences between the employed and the

unemployed in the causes they gave for their present employment situation. Not surprisingly, employed young people tend to perceive personal factors as most important while the unemployed are biased toward structural explanations. Many unemployed people also have no clear view as to the causes of their situation. These beliefs are not simply rationalisations of respondents' positions constructed to reduce the distress felt, as it is precisely those unemployed people who see structural forces as most important who are most distressed. The results (Equation 4) show that the most distressing perception of the causes of one's situation is one which stresses structural factors. There is some evidence that this effect is substantially increased where the individual is unemployed – but the high intercorrelations amongst the independent variables do not allow us to use this interaction term in the equation. However, when introduced into the equation – and excluding the other interaction terms – the direct effects of unemployment disappear, so much of these employment effects appear to be mediated through such social-psychological variables as "causal attributions" and employment commitment.

Commitment to employment and to a general work ethic are high among almost all young people. The unemployed do show slightly lower levels of commitment overall and those unemployed young people with lower levels of commitment suffer less psychological distress. However, those effects are rather small and are not statistically significant, when we control for all other factors in the analysis in Equation 4.

There is some evidence that employment commitment does not appear to be a permanent personality characteristic. At least, as measured here, it appears to be more an attitude which is learned – largely in the work situation: it is precisely those young people with least employment experience – students, those in home duties or those looking for their first job – who showed least employment commitment. And previous unemployment experience has little effect on the currently employed. There appears to be little danger, therefore, of those who have lost a job developing serious, long-term alienation from employment at an early age. However, there is some clear evidence of decline in commitment amongst those who have never been employed. First job-seekers in particular – most being 5 years out of school – show low levels of commitment. However, given the very high unemployment rates and their low educational levels such a social-psychological adjustment would appear to be highly functional for their emotional and mental health.

Apart from these attitudes relating to labour market and political issues, we also examined the effects of respondents' feelings of personal control or efficacy in their own lives at GHQ scores. A feeling of lack of

control over one's life is particularly associated with unemployment, and with low income levels, poorer financial support. Seeing the causes of one's situation as basically structural – and so outside one's control – has quite substantial negative effects on the individual's psychological well-being.

The results of the regression analysis in Equation 5 of Table 8.15 show how important feelings of control are to psychological well-being. There is a significant reduction in distress levels when feelings of control are high: and introducing "feelings of control" into the analysis explains an additional 6 percentage points in GHQ scores while having minimal effects on the influence of most preceding independent variables in the analysis. The one exception is unemployment – where the effect of the unemployment by "class" interaction term becomes insignificant. It would appear then that the effects of unemployment even for those from working class backgrounds are fully mediated through their social-psychological consequences – on dysfunctional "causal attributions", employment commitment and, particularly, loss of feelings of control. If feelings of control are one of the mechanisms whereby distress is aggravated or ameliorated, and not a permanent personality feature (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991) then it would seem from the reduction in the "unemployment" coefficient in Equations 4 and 5 that it is an increasingly important mechanism as we go down (to working class) the social class scale.

We have gone some way in this chapter to explaining how unemployment has such a distressing impact on the young person's life. Economic hardship, an impoverished social environment and both political and personal feelings of lack of control over one's own life contribute greatly to the distress suffered by the unemployed – in many cases, piling distress upon distress in an ever-increasing concentration of disadvantage where there is high local concentration of unemployment. Policy interventions are clearly possible at many levels of the problem which we have discussed here – the provision of jobs, of course, being the most fundamental need. But interventions to improve economic welfare, social services, peer group and community support and vitality, as well as on individuals' feelings of control would be almost equally important. However, any intervention aimed at tackling these issues, or at strengthening feelings of political, economic or personal efficacy at individual or community level should be careful to balance such social-psychological interventions with actions designed to improve the actual material circumstances affecting unemployed young people. The evidence strongly suggests that the distress they suffer is not so much due to an excess of self-pity, personal weakness or rationalisation for their failures, but is based as much on their own reasonable assessments of their situation

and the intolerable strains placed on their personal resources and access to financial and social support and resources. Interventions, on the other hand, which increase levels of employment commitment while not delivering employment are likely to do significant damage.

The Additional Effects of Other "Failed Transitions"

The preceding regression took only labour market transitions into account. As the preceding chapters show, however, "success" or "failure" in other transitions – such as the successful establishment of new households, marriage and children; or unsuccessful or very prolonged transitions such as early "single motherhood", failed emigration and return to unemployment in the parental home, complete failure in employment search and prolonged dependence on family of origin – all have significant negative effects on well-being which appear to be independent of unemployment. However, we need to test whether these effects hold when we use the full explanatory model in Table 8.16 – excluding the non-significant variables.

However, when we add in variables measuring successful social transitions – such as independent residence, marriage, marriage with children, or even "home duties" – such variables have no additional independent effects. So, at least as judged by these measures the effects of success in these "social transitions" on GHQ scores are clearly overshadowed, or mediated, by labour market outcomes. However, the effects of "serious failures" in transition – such as single motherhood, failed emigration (having emigrated and returned to live at home and still being unemployed), complete failure of "take-off" (never been employed and still living at home), have significant additional effects.

The main additional social transition factors of significance are those of being stalled at home having failed to get any job, and secondly the effects of "failed emigration" and return home. Obviously, referring back to our scaling of the various transition stages in Chapter 6, failure to even get on the first rung of the ladder – by getting a job – is highly distressing, controlling for all relevant social background, education and unemployment variables; and even for all relevant social-psychological variables. Interestingly, and quite contrary to our hypothesis, failed emigration – returned emigrant who had come back to live at home and is unemployed – has a positive impact on well-being. Obviously compared to living abroad unemployed, living back at home has some positive advantages. With all other relevant variables controlled for, however, single motherhood has no significant effect on the GHQ score; although it increased the score the effect is not statistically significant.

It is worth noting that with all social psychological variables controlled for (in Equation 2) the two unemployment variables return no significant effect, but the "social" transition variables do. So, irrespective of how people feel about employment or even of levels of control and self direction, as well as social support/contact, failure to "get started", and return of emigrants to the parental home retain their well-being effects.

So, other than those two "failed transitions", the main factors influencing feelings of well-being are those related to labour market entry – and to those social interactional and social psychological "buffering" variables which either aggravate, or moderate, the effects of unemployment and financial stress.

Table 8.16: *Multiple Regression Results of the Combined Effects of Social Background, Education, Unemployment, Social Transition Outcomes, and Social Psychological Variables on GHQ Scores*

Independent Variables	*Equation 1: Effects of Social Background, Unemployment and Social Transition Variables*	*Equation 2: 1+ Effects of Social–Psychological Variables*
	ß wts.	
1. Father's Occupational Status	.02	.05
2. From Dublin	.14**	.11
3. Level of Education	–.05	–.01
4. Unemployed	.22**	.02
5. Interaction: Unemployment x Working Class	.13**	.07
6. Single Motherhood	.04	.01
7. "Failed Emigration" (+ at home unemployed)	–.15**	–.12**
8. Unemployed, Still at Home and Single	.12**	.11**
9. Income Dissatisfaction	–	.17**
10. Financial Support	–	–.05
11. Social–Emotional Support	–	–.03
12. Social Contact	–	.11**
13. Employment Commitment	–	.06*
14. Personal Causal Attributions	–	–.04
15. Structural Causal Attributions	–	.09**
16. Feelings of Personal Control	–	–.27**
N	994	994
R^2 (adjusted)	.15	.29
F	22.66	25.79
p	<.001	<.001

Conclusions

In this chapter we have reviewed the main factors which increase the level of distress amongst young people – particularly the young unemployed. The experience of unemployment itself is the main distress causing factor: both in itself and in its consequent "blocking" effects on other transitions. Revealingly also this unemployment effect appears to be more stressful among those from working class origins.

Instead, therefore, of supporting the popular, but now academically discredited, viewpoint of the existence of an adaptive "culture of poverty" amongst unemployed youth and their families and communities, this research strongly supports an opposite viewpoint: of a reinforcement, even aggravation of deprivation and distress amongst unemployed young people and their families, friends and communities by both the concentration of unemployment and poverty amongst them but also by the increasing restrictiveness and declining supportiveness of social networks as unemployment increases and lengthens. Strong and supportive – both materially and emotionally – social networks clearly help to lessen the distressing impact of unemployment. These "social environmental" effects seem to be most pronounced in Dublin.

The social-psychological variables appear to be at least as equally distress causing as unemployment – in terms of growth of fatalism and passivism and of beliefs that impersonal economic and political forces control the economic environment and employment chances. Although a realistic perspective on the macro-economic forces determining the overall unemployment rate these are a highly depressing set of convictions when applied to one's own unemployment causes. In addition, feelings of loss of control and decline in feelings of personal efficacy increase significantly with unemployment – and, when present, significantly increase levels of distress. Both of these latter social-psychological processes partly mediate (or even express) the distress causing effects of unemployment, though only partly explaining them away. Not all unemployed people become fatalistic, feeling hopeless in the grasp of external circumstances, and such a retention of personal confidence and control significantly reduces distress levels. Equally not all unemployed young people lose the support of strong friendship, family and community networks, both in the material and social-emotional sense; and the retention of such material and social support significantly reduces distress levels. However, the retention of strong feelings of employment commitment do not help. Although those decline with length of unemployment the great majority of the unemployed retain strong feelings of work commitment and these paradoxically increase levels of distress. So, interventions designed to

increase such commitments without increasing chances of actual employment do significant damage. On the other hand, interventions which increase feelings of personal control and efficacy, reduce fatalism and passivism, and increase interpersonal and communal support networks – particularly if linked to actual reductions of material poverty - could significantly reduce the level of psychological and social stress suffered by the unemployed.

Besides these labour market influences two apparent "social transition" failures have additional distressful or well-being effects. Failure of "take off" by employment and inability to leave home – the first crucial stepping stone to the whole transition process as we saw in Chapter 4 – significantly increases distress. However, returning home to unemployment after failed emigration significantly improves feelings of well-being – quite contrary to our hypothesis. Of course, we have no measure of those unemployed emigrants' feelings before they left for home, nor of the feelings of current emigrants, but it appears reasonable to assume that being at home significantly improves levels of well-being amongst those whose emigration had been unsuccessful. Obviously their significantly higher levels of distress, identified in the previous chapter, are primarily due to their relationships to the extensive set of control variables we used in Table 8.16, rather than the direct "causal" effects of return migration itself.

Appendix 8.1: *Establishing the structure of Young People's Labour Market Attitudes and Feelings of Personal Control*

The analysis of young people's assessments of the causes of their own employment situation, their feelings of personal control and efficacy and their overall commitment to employment is based on a number of "attitude scales" constructed from their responses to a number of separate questions asked to measure each concept. In this Appendix we provide an explanation of the scales used to measure these attitudes and dispositions. We do this by presenting first the results of a factor analysis of the scaled responses to these questions. This was carried out to test the hypotheses as to which particular items, presented in the main body of the chapter, clustered together as valid and reliable measures of specific attitudes. Our focus here is on statistically establishing the reliability and, to a lesser extent, the validity of our measures. The theoretical arguments as to the validity of our measures (that is, as to the actual meaning of these scales: that they measure what we say) are presented in the main text and are further supported by the clearly intelligible way in which these measures relate to socio-demographic background characteristics, educational and labour market histories and to other social-psychological measures.

Factor analysis is a statistical technique for analysing correlation matrices – for instance, the correlations amongst all the scaled responses to the questions asked of respondents regarding the causes of their employment/unemployment situation. The technique enables us to determine whether some consistent underlying pattern of relationships exists in the data such that we can abstract out a small number of underlying "factors" or "components" that may be taken as "latent variables" which account for the observed consistencies in the pattern of correlations (Kim and Mueller, 1978). The idea is to come up with a number of "factors", or separate intercorrelated sets of items – but with low or no correlations between such "factors" or clusters of items.

Factor analysis is based on analysing correlation matrices, so the original response categories item must be scaled at least ordinally – e.g., low, high, higher, etc. In fact all of the item responses which we are dealing with are scaled ordinally from 1 to 4, as outlined in the main body of the chapter. It is also possible when carrying out factor analysis to allow the factors to be correlated with each other and to allow for this in the calculation of the factors themselves. We carried out such an analysis ("oblique rotation") but this gave the same factors as the analysis which assumed the factors to be independent of each other, and which is more easily interpreted. The crucial point here, however, is that our test of the

structure of young people's attitudes is robust and not sensitive to allowing the factors to be correlated.

Table A8.1 provides the main results from the factor analysis (Principal Components with Varimax Rotation) of responses to seven questions which were proposed to measure respondents' attributions of the causes of their employment/unemployment situation and to eight questions proposed to measure their feelings of control and efficacy. It was decided to combine these two sets of items in the factor analysis as they could be related due to the way in which both were based on a distinction between respondents' feeling that they had some personal control over their situation and feeling that they were largely at the mercy of external (structural) forces. However, as it turns out, the items relating to "causal attributions" and those relating to feelings of "personal control" are not mixed in any of the factors derived.

The 4 factors which were extracted from the 15 original items – or rather scaled responses to the 15 questions asked – are clearly defined with each variable loading on only 1 of the factors. Three-fifths of the variation in the correlation matrix is explained by the 4 factors, with each of the factors contributing a reasonable amount of that explained variance. The factors are also conceptually sensible.

The first factor obviously clusters those items which relate to personal causes of employment or unemployment and the third is composed of items dealing with political or structural causes of employment/unemployment. These factors are combined in our analysis in the first part of the chapter to give greater information on respondents' causal attributions, i.e., not only whether they emphasised personal or structural attributions but also whether they had any clear views at all.

The second and fourth factors are more problematic to interpret as both seem to relate to very similar underlying concepts – feelings of personal control and efficacy. It was decided in fact to combine these two in one scale measuring these feelings as the fourth factor contains only 2 items (loading at .10 and .20 on F2 respectively) and explains the least amount of the variance explained. Both items also contribute to the increased reliability of the combined scale as we see below.

Our factor analysis, therefore, leaves us with three scales – one measuring feelings of personal control and two measuring causal attributions of employment/unemployment, personal and political.

Each of these scales are fairly reliable, as discussed in our earlier analysis. Looking at Table A8.2 we can see that the 2 items from factor 4 (i.e., items 2 and 3) do contribute to the reliability of the overall scale.

We also constructed a scale to measure respondents' overall

"employment commitment" using 4 questions asked of respondents. This scale was not as reliable as a reduced 3 item one, as the inclusion of the item – "There are many more important things in life than having a job" – reduced the reliability of the 4 item scale. Since it appears to have a somewhat different and broader meaning than the other 3 items it was excluded from the scale. The 3 item scale is, however, moderately to highly reliable (Alpha = .63).

Table A8.1: *Factor Weightings, Communalities and Eigenvalues for 15 Attitudinal Variables. 4 – Factor Solution, Principal Components with Varimax Rotation. (Weightings of .35 or greater)*

	Factors				*Communality*
	F1	F2	F3	F4	h^2
	– Factor Loadings –				
I. Personal Causal Attributions of Employment Situation					
Employment/Unemployment is Due to:					
1. Quality of your Work and Skills	.90	–	–	–	.85
2. Amount of Effort you put into Work	.88	–	–	–	.84
3. Own Skills and Training	.84	–	–	–	.71
II Feelings of Control (A)					
4. Often Feel Helpless in Dealing with Problems	–	.77	–	–	.61
5. I have Very Little Control Over What Happens to Me	–	.66	–	–	.46
6. Other People Have Unfair Advantage	–	.65	–	–	.47
7. Almost Nothing I Do That Is Needed by Anyone	–	.62	–	–	.47
8. Often Get Discouraged About Not Doing Things As Well As I'm Able	–	.50	–	–	.28
9. Generally I'm Satisfied With My Life So Far	–	.44	–	–	.45
III Political Causal Attributions of Employment Situation					
Employment/Unemployment is Due to:					
10. Policies of the Government	–	–	.83	–	.72
11. Ireland's Poor Economic Position in the World	–	–	.81	–	.73
12. Society Benefits Rich and Powerful	–	–	.77	–	.62
13. A Matter of Luck	–	–	.44	–	.30
IV Feelings of Control (B)					
14. I am as Good As Anybody Else in Any Task I Set My Mind To	–	–	–	.82	.69
15. I Often Feel Good About Myself	–	–	–	.80	.70
Eigenvalues	4.1	1.9	1.7	1.1	Cumulative
% of Variance Explained	27.2	12.9	11.5	7.6	59.4

Table A8.2: *Reliability of the "Personal Control" Scale (Factors 2 and 4 Combined)*

	Cronbach's Alpha for Total Scale =	.73
		Alpha of Item Deleted
1.	Often Get Discouraged About Not Doing Things As Well As I'm Able	.73
2.	Often Feel Good About Myself	.70
3.	As Good As Anybody Else in Any Task I Set My Mind To	.72
4.	Almost Nothing I Do That Is Needed By Anyone	.69
5.	Generally I'm Satisfied With My Life So Far	.69
6.	I Have Very Little Control Over What Happens To Me	.70
7.	Other People Have Unfair Advantage	.70
8.	Often Feel Helpless in Dealing With Problems	.68

Table A8.3: *Reliability of the "Employment Commitment" Scale (4 – item and the final 3-item scales)*

	(Overall Alpha)	*4-item scale (.53)*	*3-item scale (.63)*
		Alpha of Item Deleted	
1.	Even if I won a great deal of money on the lottery I would still want to work	.40	.59
2.	I hate/would hate to be on the dole	.43	.54
3.	If unemployment benefit/assurance was high enough I would prefer not to work	.38	.47
4.	There are many more important things in life than having a job	.63	–

Chapter 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Initial transitions to adulthood are a vital first step in a person's life course as the statuses first attained set the scene in many important ways for the rest of life. For instance, the status of one's first job is the most important predictor of future occupational status, particularly in Ireland (Blau and Duncan, 1968; Breen and Whelan, 1992). In this study we have shown how the different aspects of transition are structured by social and economic forces, and how varying transition outcomes have quite different personal and social consequences. We now review the most important findings from our analysis and try to draw these together into an overall picture of the transition to adulthood.

Dimensions of the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a process consisting of "a series of interrelated events representing movement from economic dependence and participation in the family of origin to economic independence and establishment of a family of procreation" (Marini, 1984, p. 229). There are three main dimensions to this process: the labour market – the attainment of satisfactory employment; the formation of new domestic arrangements – eventually marriage and parenthood; and the housing market – the establishment of an independent residence (Wallace, 1987a, b). The attainment of this set of statuses – employment, independent residence, stable adult sexual and family relationships – is usually taken to measure the attainment of full adulthood in modern society.

Powerful cultural and institutional norms underlie the notion of a "normal" transition to adulthood (Hogan and Astone, 1986; Hogan, 1978). These refer to the sequencing of stages, the ages at which they are attained, and the means by which they are attained. The "normal" – both in terms of culturally expected/accepted and statistically average – pattern of transition has been entrance into employment directly upon finishing education, stable courtship and eventually marriage after a period of secure employment, the establishment of an independent residence – which may precede or coincide with marriage, and starting a family of one's own after marriage. Problematic – or even "failed" – transitions are

seen in this normative framework as deviations from the "normal": whether *premature,* such as teenage marriage or single parenthood, or *postponed,* such as the single over 30s still living at home, or married couples continuing to live in the parental home.

The idea of a "normal" transition suggests a singular, or unidimensional, process underlying the various transition patterns. However, transitions can be much more differentiated. Wallace, in summarising social research findings, has shown how transitions vary among different social groups, both in relation to schooling and the labour market, and the interaction of the labour market and young people's domestic life cycles (1987a, pp. 33-33; 1987c, pp. 112-114). Those from middle class, professional and managerial, homes tend to have extended educational careers and develop long-term career orientations, often postponing marriage and child-bearing into their 30s. The children of skilled manual and clerical workers, on the other hand, tend to have quite good levels of post-primary education and tend to enter similar occupations to their parents, marrying at a fairly young age. However, children from lower working class backgrounds are most likely to do worst at school, leave at an early age, enter "careerless" manual occupations or are subject to high levels of unemployment, and marry youngest of all social groups. These differentiated patterns are shaped both by the young person's social background, their educational careers, and the nature of the labour market niches they entered.

However, dramatic increases in unemployment, and changing attitudes and normative orientations to sexuality, to women working, to fertility and the family itself have all altered such transitions in important ways. The destinations aimed at in the transition are no longer as secure, the sequencing of stages no longer as certain, and the selection of those to fill the appropriate roles no longer as clear-cut, although no less structured by social and economic forces. The transition process has become more uncertain, more flexible and even reversible, and many young people are experiencing very long transitions, caught "between the family and the state" (Wallace, 1987a, b). The most fundamental change is the huge increase in unemployment in the 1980s, which has had serious implications for all dimensions of transition: since almost all other aspects depend on gaining employment. Unemployment, for instance, is likely to block the young person from establishing an independent residence, can put the young person in a position of prolonged dependence on their family of origin, and tends to be also linked to postponed marriage. Employment is linked to marriage, but marriage itself appears to generate employment security among men, though leading to significant withdrawal from the labour force among women – particularly on the birth of the first child.

However, discrepancies exist. There are significant numbers of unemployed young people who marry in their teenage years – so employment is not always a necessary precondition for marriage. Single motherhood also is closely linked to a poor educational and employment history among already disadvantaged women. So, births do not always follow on marriage, nor marriage on successful employment. In many cases such "non-normal" transitions lead to a concentration of disadvantages among people who were already severely disadvantaged before they left school.

Clearly, there are a number of different ways of analysing the transition to adulthood. The two broad frameworks outlined above may be treated as complementary: the "normal" transition approach used to examine the broad status changes – employment, marriage, etc., and the second approach to focus on the experiences of different groups within the broad model. Both direct attention to the links between the various dimensions of the transition process, and identify similar "problem" transitions: e.g., early marriage of the unemployed, single motherhood, the postponed departure of poorly qualified and unemployed young people from the parental home and so on.

In this study we examined in turn the links between the individual dimensions of the transition process, the extent to which a "normal" pattern of transition exists, deviations from such normality and some effects of various transition "failures" – such as unemployment – on individuals' well-being.

Social and Personal Consequences of Transition Differences

The various transition trajectories outlined above are likely to have very different consequences for young people's economic welfare, social relationships, and feelings of well-being. The implications of different labour market and domestic life cycle transitions for income, social relationships, and the possibility of the growth of "subcultural" peer groups amongst the unemployed is explored. However, our main measure of well-being is a psychological one which we measure using the standard 12-item interview version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). (See Whelan, *et al.*, 1991 for details.)

This is an internationally validated measure of the degree of stress or mild psychiatric disturbance which a person is suffering. Each person's well-being is measured along a continuum from no symptoms of disturbance to the possible presence of 12 symptoms. The proportion of the population which would be thought to have a clinically significant psychiatric disturbance if they were interviewed by a clinical psychiatrist

can also be estimated from the GHQ measure. International studies have shown that a probability of more than 50 per cent that an individual would be categorised by a psychiatric as a mild psychiatric case if he or she shows more than 2 symptoms of disturbance. This is called the "threshold" score. This measure has been shown to be both valid and reliable and has already been applied extensively in Irish research (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; McCarthy and Ronayne, 1984). So we can compare our data with national norms.

Psychological distress has three main conceptual domains (Pearlin, 1990): the *sources, mediators* and *manifestations* of stress. The GHQ can be taken as a measure of the *manifestations* of psycho-social stress: i.e., low self-esteem, feelings of lack of personal competence, unhappiness and worry, etc. We discussed the main *mediators* of psychological stress – factors that influence, or mediate, the effects of stressors on stress outcomes. These include factors such as financial hardship and insecurity, peer group contexts, level of social support and integration, labour market attitudes and beliefs and personal feelings of control and efficacy (see Chapter 2).

The *sources* of stress are, however, the main focus of our analysis. They can be thought of as either *acute* or *chronic* stressors. Acute stressors are generally associated with particular "life events" – employment/unemployment, leaving home, marriage, illness, etc. – which have direct stress effects. While earlier work emphasised change itself as a stressor, more recent research has focused on the importance of the (change) event to the person and of the individual's control over it (Pearlin, 1989). Job loss or unwanted pregnancy might be examples of acute stressors in the transition. Chronic stressors are sources of stress which are enduring and difficult to change. These are typically in the form of "role strains"; e.g., balancing employment and domestic roles, or ongoing disadvantageous life circumstances – like severe financial deprivation, or enduring interpersonal difficulties (Avison and Turner, 1988).

Of course, both types of stressors – acute and chronic – are intimately related and should not be thought of as mutually exclusive (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991; Whelan, 1992a). Sudden shock events – like the sudden death of parents – may cause stress not only directly but by affecting more enduring life conditions. Persisting problems – like alcoholism or marital disharmony – may also trigger sudden stressful events. Other unexpected life events tend to be interpreted by individuals in the context of more enduring circumstances and strains (Pearlin, 1989). We can only understand the effects of life events on psychological well-being, therefore, by taking account of context.

The "coping resources" young people possess to deal with stressful situations influence how they experience them. Some young people can

fall back on financial resources or a supportive social environment, others cannot. They can also vary systematically in the way they interpret their situation, and these variations can be more or less distressing to them. The availability of these resources and the way in which they are used or interpreted are themselves highly related to young people's social background and educational and labour market histories.

The combined effect of these factors on young people's psychological well-being, can be analysed using Warr's (1987) model of the social environment of joblessness (see Chapter 2). To summarise, Warr outlines 9 crucial elements of the "stress environment", the absence or presence of which significantly influencing how potentially stressful the environment might be. The most important and relevant aspects of these environments can be summarised as follows:

- the opportunity for *control* over what happens to the individual;
- the opportunity to participate in *goal-directed* satisfying activity;
- the availability of *financial* and *physical security;*
- the opportunity for *interpersonal contact;*
- a *valued social position.*

In our analysis we examined how the interrelationships between these crucial elements of the social environment and acute and chronic stressors impact on the transition to adulthood and on psychological well-being.

In the following we first review our findings on the various dimensions of the transition to adulthood and how these are interrelated. Secondly, we look at variations in these transitions and, finally, we examine the social and personal consequences of success or failure in the transition process.

Education, Employment and Leaving Home

Education has a major impact on labour market success. The better educated show higher levels of employment and far lower unemployment rates. These education differences widen the longer the individual is in the labour market. The only major exception to this trend is the tendency for unemployment rates among poorly qualified women to fall as they withdraw from the labour force into "home duties" – largely due to marriage and parenthood. Five years after leaving school, for instance, over 1 in 4 of young women with no qualifications, but only 1 in 50 of those with third-level education, have so withdrawn from the labour force.

The process of leaving the parental home is closely related to the success of job search and third-level entry strategies, especially in Ireland. One year out of school, those with Leaving Certificate qualifications or

those attending third-level colleges are markedly more likely to have left home. Four years later, this pattern is still clear but differences by level of education have decreased as increasing numbers of all young people move out. Very few have moved out locally 5 years later, however, so inter-county migrants and emigrants dominate amongst those who have left home. A very high proportion of the unemployed, however, remain in the parental home, even 5 years out of school – a substantial proportion having returned home on becoming unemployed.

A number of processes are at work. Many of those from rural areas and small towns who attend third level colleges must leave home in order to attend the college of their choice; while Dublin and Cork students, for instance, remain predominantly at home. And those seeking employment with "good" Leaving Certificate qualifications (especially women) to a large extent enter a national labour market for clerical and administrative jobs which are heavily concentrated in Dublin. Those entering local labour markets tend to stay on at home – although the tendency to leave home increases with age – even up to 21/22.

Unemployment is a substantial obstacle to a young person seeking to leave home, but there is a general tendency for young people to leave home as they age, no matter what their circumstances. Five years out of school, however, only just over half of Irish young people have left home.

We can look more closely at the role local, national and international labour markets play in the process of leaving home by examining the relationship between remoteness of place of origin, educational attainment, employment chances and migration strategies. The level of education a young person attains gives them access to different types of labour markets, which may be organised very differently by the nature of recruitment, the type of "careers" on offer, and the spatial concentration or distribution of jobs.

In Ireland, remoteness of place of origin tends to be associated with higher levels of education, even when we control for the distribution of social classes throughout the country. Therefore, well educated young people with most advantages in the labour market are relatively widely dispersed by place of origin. While local labour markets are of greatest importance for those seeking manual or service work, those with high educational qualifications enter labour markets where employment tends to be concentrated in major urban centres, be it in Ireland or internationally. Even clerical and administrative work (attracting mainly those with "good" Leaving Certificate qualifications) tends to be highly concentrated in urban areas; while professional and managerial work (increasingly open only to those with third-level qualifications) is even

more highly centralised. And while the labour market for clerical/administrative work is largely national, that for professionals is more often than not organised internationally. The highly qualified, therefore, tend to be spatially mobile in order to pursue their careers and so have to leave the parental home and migrate at a fairly young age. The urban concentration of third-level educational institutions, despite decentralisation in recent years, accelerates this process.

Those of the employed who can get suitable jobs locally tend to stay on at home and few move out in order to live independently locally – at least up to 5 years after leaving school. This is particularly true of those from Dublin. However, many of the employed have had to leave the home area in order to get jobs. The main group who stay on at home are the persistently unemployed. For the first 5 years, therefore, the search for employment is the main reason for leaving home – excluding the main involuntary movement for third-level entry.

There is no clear relationship between remoteness of place of origin and leaving the parental home among the less well qualified. This is to be expected as local labour markets are most important for this group who are mainly seeking manual or lower service work and who are unlikely to fare much better elsewhere, unless they can successfully emigrate. However, the remoteness/rurality relationship is much clearer at higher levels of education, particularly among those with third-level qualifications. And it tends to become even more pronounced over time with those from more remote areas becoming increasingly more likely to leave home. Among those with the Leaving Certificate, almost one-third of those from the most remote areas had left home 1 year after leaving school; but this had risen to 80 per cent 4 years later. At the other extreme Dubliners with the Leaving Certificate, were almost all still at home 1 year after leaving school; and only one-third had left home by the time they had been out for 5 years. In the first year out of school for those attending third-level the tendency to leave home is a function of the location of third-level institutions, with the major universities being located in the cities and the RTCs regionally decentralised. So the most and least remote school leavers entering third-level are amongst the least likely to have left home. By 1987, however, this relationship had become clearer, with the most remote increasingly likely to have left home as they completed their courses and entered the labour force.

The process of leaving home is, therefore, crucially linked to job search strategies for young people in Ireland, far more so than in other countries where there appears to be a greater resistance to migration. However, this is balanced by a greater reluctance to move out of the parental home and live locally, even if one is employed and has the resources to do so. And if

one is unemployed and poorly educated the chances of leaving home are very limited indeed. The necessity for those with higher levels of education to leave home in order to pursue their educational and occupational careers, and the inability of the unemployed to do so, accelerate and obstruct, respectively, the attainment of independent adult statuses.

Marriage, Moving Out and Labour Force Participation

Five years out of school only 7 per cent of males are married but almost 20 per cent of young women are, with a further 4 per cent being single mothers. In 1987, the *Labour Force Survey* estimated that 21 per cent of females and 11 per cent of males were married in the age group 20-24 – somewhat older than the group surveyed. Marital and domestic transitions are, therefore, more important to women, at this stage of the life course. Marriage rates differ only slightly by level of educational qualifications, except for the third-level educated – who tend to postpone marriage. Single motherhood, however, is firmly concentrated among the most poorly qualified. Both marriage and single motherhood often mean withdrawing to "home duties", especially for those with less education. Married women also migrate out of their home county slightly more than single women do. In fact, transitions to marriage and parenthood are the most important reasons for leaving the parental home for poorly educated women, whereas educational and employment opportunities are the more significant influences for the educationally advantaged.

Because women tend to leave school older and to marry younger the "freedom gap" between school and new family formation is typically almost 3 years shorter for women than for men. The average width of this gap is between 6 and 9 years among all young people but the actual ages at which these transitions take place also vary. Young people who leave school early are most likely to marry early, and the oldest to marry are those who go on to third-level education. The education to marriage "freedom gap" remains about equal, therefore, although the latter group make their, more advantageous, transitions when they are much older.

Overall, however, the occurrence of particular transition events is closely linked to age. The 15-19 age group is dominated by attendance at educational institutions with labour force participation only becoming a majority status in the 20-24 age group. Only 21 per cent of women in the 20-24 age group were married in 1987 (*Labour Force Survey, 1987*), although by the age 25-29 marriage rates among men are beginning to catch up, with half of all men married and two-thirds of women (*Labour Force Survey, 1987*, p. 15). Women leave school later, are slower to enter the labour force, get married earlier and many withdraw from the labour force after

the age of 25. The modal pattern for females now is for school completion at Leaving Certificate level – at 17-18, a clerical or service occupation, and marriage by age 25. There is a fairly even chance of retirement from the labour force at the birth of the first child or of staying on in the labour force – with a higher probability of part-time work. Increasing numbers of married women have stayed in the labour force over the 1980s but this is still mainly among women with higher levels of education. Labour market factors and migration strategies influence establishment of an independent residence among women but marital and domestic life cycle transitions are much more important – particularly in comparison with young men.

A "Normal" Transition to Adulthood?

Although young people from differing backgrounds, and with unequal resources, vary in the speed and pacing of transitions to adulthood, there may still be dominant patterns in the transition process such that an underlying order to these transitions exist. We investigated whether a single summarising measure of the transition process incorporating the main transition events was applicable to our data; i.e., whether a single orderly sequence of stages was applicable. Guttman scaling of these transition changes for both sexes proved possible, and yielded highly reliable unidimensional scales.

For females the sequence of stages in the transition was: (i) from being single and unemployed in the parental home –> (ii) employment, being a student or being in "home duties" –> (iii) leaving the parental home –> (iv) marriage –> (v) with spouse's employment –> (vi) purchasing one's own accommodation. Among men, the sequence of basic transition stages was very similar: from being (i) single, unemployed in the parental home –> (ii)) employment or being a student –> (iii) leaving the parental home –> (iv) marriage –> (v) having children within marriage. Establishing a satisfactory labour force status, setting up an independent residence and getting married are common elements of different transition processes. Changes associated with marriage vary by gender, the domestic cycle and spouse's employment status being more significant for women. Migration is not a necessary stage of the transition to independent adulthood as, although many young people do find it necessary to migrate, at least as many are able to attain adult statuses while remaining in their home area.

Some transitions do not fit the "normal" (in the sense of "majority") pattern. Parenthood may occur without marriage – such as single motherhood, and may also occur without leaving the parental home, or while still unemployed. There is also a minority of unemployed young people who are able to overcome the obstacles created by unemployment

to leaving home, marriage, parenthood and home-ownership.

There is substantial support, therefore, in our data, for a "normal" or majority pattern of integration into adult life which exists for over 90 per cent of young people at least up to age 22. The broad sequencing of transition events up to that age is quite clear. For young people unemployment either completely blocks further transitions or predicts a variety of problematic transitions such as single parenthood. Of course, the respondents in this study were still at the early stage of transition to adulthood, so the traditional "normality" of the transition process may change as the whole cohort progresses towards adulthood. Variations in the speed of transition are, to some extent, linked to differences in young people's origins and career destinations and this is summarised in the next section.

Social Background, Education and Labour Market Experiences

The effects of social background advantages on educational success are well documented and are strongly supported by our analysis. Socio-economic and socio-cultural factors are highly important, with those from unemployed or lower working class backgrounds, or with mothers who have low levels of education, all doing less well at school. Farmers' children and especially daughters tend to do well. So do girls in general – although this is partly explained by the added disadvantages of poorly achieving boys concentrated in vocational schools. Those from more remote areas do better educationally, particularly from small farmer or working class families, and this holds true even when we control for other social background factors.

Education is an important part of the transition to adulthood both as a socialisation experience in itself and as a qualification resource for further transitions. Access to employment is crucial to a successful transition, and we found a number of factors to be very important in explaining success or failure in employment search. Educational qualifications significantly boosts a young person's chances of gaining employment at any stage of their career, with vocational-technical specialisations further improving employment chances. In the long term, females appears to have an advantage over males in the transition process. This is partly related to their tendency to avoid unemployment by withdrawing from the labour force into marriage or parenthood: but for "single mothers" this fast track to adulthood is a mixed blessing. Besides educational achievement, those whose fathers were unemployed also lost out in employment terms – possibly due to a lack of job search resources such as contacts and experience. Local area factors were of little importance – at least as

measured at county level. This appears to be mainly due to the willingness of Irish young people to migrate in search of work.

Although of less significance than unemployment in terms of the numbers involved and the distress caused, participation in "home duties" is significant for many young women. Young women from large families spend more time working in the home. Social background characteristics have little predictive power in this respect; educational, labour market and marital and domestic transitions are much more important in the take-up of a "home duties" career. The proportion of time in the labour force a young woman spends unemployed significantly increases the amount of time spent in "home duties"; emphasising the importance of labour force failure and withdrawal for some young women. Success in initial entry into employment for young women reduces the amount of time spent in home duties. Labour force withdrawal is, however, also closely linked to marriage and parenthood. Despite changes in recent years, marriage and parenthood still substantially reduce women's labour force participation.

We find that an almost classical "status attainment" model fits the occupational attainment process among those actually in employment. Father's occupational status directly affects a young person's own occupational status, but also affects it indirectly – in that in combination with family size and mother's education, it is highly predictive of the young person's own level of educational attainment. Besides father's occupational status, therefore, those whose mothers have high levels of education and those who come from smaller families do much better in terms of occupational attainment; but this effect is due almost entirely to their improved levels of education. Education attainment, therefore, has a very strong and direct effect on occupational attainment. It would appear, however, that those in high unemployment areas "trade down" their qualifications in order to avoid unemployment and stay locally.

The major factors influencing educational and labour market experiences among young people, therefore, seem fairly clear. The socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects of class background have important effects on almost all aspects of the transition – the importance of the socio-cultural factors being largely due to the boost they give to educational attainment. Education plays the major role in determining labour market access and success. Besides educational level effects, working class boys benefit from vocational-technical specialisations in seeking employment. The characteristics of the young person's local area appear to be of limited importance in determining labour market success, although those from remote areas do tend to do better educationally. However, "local" here means origin county; so, if data had been available at a local school

catchment area level, for instance, they may have given a different result. Gender has more influence on labour force participation and withdrawal than on success once in employment – although this may change as these young women's careers progress.

Who Leaves Home?

We have seen already how the process of young people leaving the parental home is closely linked to job search strategies. Decisions to leave the parental home appear to be explainable less in terms of personal inclinations to leave (at least 5 years after completing second level education) than in terms of access to resources which make it possible to leave, local factors which push people out and the requirements of particular employment and domestic life cycle transitions.

Children of highly-educated mothers, young women in general and farmers' daughters in particular, all show a greater tendency to leave the parental home but this is explained mainly in terms of their higher levels of education. The better educated are not only better equipped for leaving the parental home but are, as we have seen, far more oriented to national and international labour markets which require them to migrate. For working class boys a vocational-technical specialisation in school actually decreases their chances of leaving home, mainly due to their improved chances of local employment and ability to avoid migration.

Domestic and local factors also figure strongly in young people's decisions to leave home. Those from large families leave younger, and some young people may be forced out of the parental home by unfavourable domestic circumstances before they are fully prepared for this transition. Those from areas which are remote or which have high local unemployment rates also leave their homes at a younger age.

Other transition processes are also important to the chances of a young person leaving home. Unemployment blocks the transition out of home, or enforces return to it; while participation in "home duties" due to marriage or childbirth usually involves the young person leaving home. Women, in general, tend to leave home earlier than men, but show a greater tendency to stay when statistical controls are introduced for their better education, different employment experiences and higher marriage rates.

Marriage and Parenthood

Within the first 5 years out of school marriage and parenthood whether inside or outside of marriage are quite rare among young men but are more frequent among young women. Working class young women and those with unemployed fathers and with poor educational and

employment records, have higher premarital pregnancy rates; while early marriage also tends to be more characteristic of those from working class origins. Socio-cultural factors are also important where young women whose mothers are less well educated show higher rates of marriage and single motherhood, regardless of their own level of education. Women from larger families also marry younger.

Single mothers are typically less well educated and have spent much of their time in the labour force unemployed. As the proportion of time spent unemployed rises, so rates of single motherhood, marriage and fertility within marriage rise. Single motherhood in particular, but also early marriage among women, is associated with poor backgrounds and poor personal transition experiences. However, rates of marriage are actually quite low among the most disadvantaged group with multiple social background, educational and employment deprivations. Single motherhood is particularly prevalent amongst the most deprived, and it is those with some minimum level of resources (but not much more) who tend to marry earliest. The most advantaged young women generally avoid early marital, childbirth and associated domestic transitions.

The transition to adulthood among young Irish people is, therefore, structured in a very particular manner. The various dimensions of transition influence each other in important ways, and "success" or "failure" on each dimension is heavily influenced by young people's differential experiences, resources and social and economic contexts. Young people's subjective experience of the transition to adulthood is also highly structured, however, and we now go on to summarise our findings on the relationship of transition "success" or "failure" to distress, the literature on which we summarised earlier in this chapter.

The Experience of Unemployment in Social Context

Unemployment is the main source of stress in the transition to adulthood and its effect is quite acute, the event of becoming unemployed itself being stressful, with chronic unemployment having seriously damaging and enduring effects. Less young people than adults are psychologically distressed – 11.6 per cent being over the GHQ threshold, compared to 17.1 per cent of adults (estimated by Whelan, *et al.*, 1991). The young unemployed are also less distressed than their adult counterparts. However, levels of distress are still quite extreme among the young unemployed with 28 per cent above the high distress threshold. The most damaging aspects of unemployment are lack of a socially valued position, general feelings of unhappiness and loss of feelings of competence and confidence. The least distressing aspects, and those which

discriminate least between the employed and the unemployed, are perceived loss of concrete problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

The experience of unemployment varies substantially from one person to another – partly due to differences in the nature of unemployment suffered. Previous spells of unemployment seem to have no effect on the well-being of those who are currently employed. However, those who are currently unemployed do suffer greater distress the longer their previous experience of unemployment. They may be more vulnerable to the currently distressing effects of unemployment – in that resources are exhausted for instance, or may see their prospects for future employment in a worse light. The length of time a young person spends unemployed is also important, with distress levels rising sharply after 1 month and continuing to rise until 1 year has been spent unemployed. After this point, however, well-being begins to improve, with those unemployed for more than 2 years showing the lowest levels of distress of all the unemployed. However they still remain far more distressed than those in employment.

The effects of employment and unemployment on well-being also vary by social contexts. Distress levels are very similar among men and women, and unemployment has the same damaging effect on both groups. Working class young people, however, are much more distressed when unemployed, and somewhat less distressed than others when in employment. Employment is, therefore, particularly crucial to the well-being of those from working class backgrounds. Those whose fathers were unemployed were slightly more distressed, but this appears to be due mainly to their less satisfactory educational and labour market experiences.

As is the case in the adult population (Whelan, *et al.*, 1991) those from urban backgrounds are more distressed, regardless of other influences. Young people from Dublin show particularly high levels of distress. It may be that the spatial concentration of unemployed and other problem families in such urban areas exacerbates distress.

The resources, material and cultural, which young people gain from their education provide them with advantages not only in the labour market but also in avoiding and coping with stress. Those with no educational qualifications show higher levels of distress even when in employment, and this group seems likely to contain a significant number of highly alienated young people. Apart from this group, there is little difference in well-being between those with different levels of education among the employed. However, the relationship of education to distress is largely as predicted among the unemployed, with the better qualified

being less distressed.

People's experience of unemployment can vary, by both its duration and by previous history of unemployment, as well as by the social context in which it occurs. Those from working class backgrounds, from urban areas or with particularly low levels of education suffer more than others in all of these respects. However, the dominant influence on feelings of well-being, or distress, is the cold reality of current unemployment. This remains the most distressing labour force status no matter what context it occurs in.

The impact of unemployment may be mediated, however, by factors such as the degree of economic hardship which it entails, how supportive the individual's social environment is, the young person's beliefs and attitudes regarding their employment situation and feelings of personal control over one's life. We turn now to look at some of these factors in greater detail.

Unemployment, Economic and Social Deprivation and Psychological Distress

The economic impact of unemployment is, of course, large (Callan, *et al.*, 1989), so unemployed young people have substantially lower incomes than the employed. This, however, appears to have little direct effect on psychological well-being. It is their perception of income and income adequacy that is important – i.e., financial dissatisfaction and perceived lack of available financial support (in the form of someone to borrow from). So, the household, familial, kinship and communal contexts in which unemployed young people live substantially modulates the effects of unemployment. These factors also impact on the employed. However, financial dissatisfaction among the employed and unemployed is likely to have different meanings, since dissatisfaction among the unemployed is much more closely linked to actual income deprivation and can be taken to be an indicator of serious financial stress. Even controlling for financial differences, real or perceived, however, the unemployed remain much more distressed than those with a job.

Unemployed young people may also become socially isolated. Most young people's friends are in similar employment situations to themselves. This social separation of the employed and unemployed works to the disadvantage of the unemployed. Being in high unemployment social networks if anything amplifies distress. In addition not only have the unemployed less socio-emotional support available to them and less general social contacts, but they also appear to benefit less from supportive social environments.

There is a concentration of disadvantage among the unemployed, therefore, which considerably deepens their distress. Financial

dissatisfaction and insecurity, unemployed peer group networks and less supportive and less integrated social environments are more typical of the young unemployed and impact most severely on them.

Labour Market Beliefs and Attitudes and Levels of Psychological Distress

A young person's beliefs about the causes of their employment situation may affect their well-being by contributing to the "credit" or "blame" which they attribute to themselves, or by affecting their feelings of control over their situation. Employed young people overwhelmingly ascribe their own good fortune to their own efforts and skills. The unemployed, however, are more likely to ascribe their poor fortunes to structural or political factors over which they had no control, or else were unclear as to what the causes were. Among the employed, those who took "credit" for their situation were least distressed, so that the majority viewpoint was quite a satisfying one. The most common "causal factor" given by the unemployed – structural factor – was, however, the most distressing. Even if unemployed young people, therefore, take on such structural (causal) beliefs as defensive rationalisations of their situation, such beliefs have substantially painful consequences.

There is some evidence that prolonged unemployment reduces overall commitment to employment. Low work commitment is, however, far more typical of those who have never worked. Furlong (1988) claims that employment commitment is developed in the work situation, and the lack of commitment amongst those still seeking their first job after 5 years confirms this. It would appear important, therefore, to get such young people into employment before they become completely alienated from the labour market. Other groups who have worked less – students and those in "home duties" – are also less committed. Employment commitment, as we would expect, improves psychological well-being if the young person is in employment; but damages it if the person is unemployed. Although this effect is quite small, it clearly shows the effect on people's well-being of denying someone such a valued status.

Besides labour market attitudes, feelings of control over the course of one's life and ability to shape one's own future impact even more strongly on well-being. The unemployed, not surprisingly, feel much less in control; although feelings of low personal control are seriously damaging to the well-being of both employed and unemployed. Feelings of control are also reduced by low income, lack of financial or emotional support and social isolation generally. Previous unemployment weakens feelings of control but only in the most extreme cases of labour market exclusion. Weakened feelings of personal control, and increasing feelings of fatalism, are some

of the main ways in which current unemployment becomes a highly distressing experience; but where present significantly inflate the diswelfare effects of unemployment.

Marital and Domestic Transitions: Changing Circumstances and Well-Being

Increasing importance has been given in recent years to the domestic life cycle in explaining patterns of inequality, and of personal and social problems. The major transitions involved are marriage (cohabitation being an increasing but still very much a minority option in Ireland), and parenthood (within or outside of marriage). Another significant dimension of the process of becoming an adult which is related to the domestic life cycle is the decision to leave the parental home. While there are few differences between the well-being of those in a variety of residence statuses there can be serious psychological consequences if young people remain "trapped" in the parental home. Unemployed young people who have never left the parental home are particularly highly distressed; such extreme and prolonged dependence on the family of origin being very damaging psychologically. Interestingly, however, while "failed emigrants" who have returned home to live and who also remain unemployed have higher levels of distress, when we controlled for all other relevant variables – such as social background and education, etc. – they, in fact, came to have lower levels of distress. Being unemployed at home appears to be significantly preferable to being an unemployed emigrant.

Single women are slightly more distressed than men but their situation improves when married. Married men show slightly higher levels of distress. While the psychological consequences of marriage are not nearly as powerful as those of unemployment, there appears to be some difference between men's and women's experiences of marriage with young women having, on average, slightly better feelings about it. However, by far the most distressed group in any domestic situation are single mothers – over 1 in 4 are very distressed, compared to just over 1 in 10 of all single young people and even fewer among married young people. Employment improves individuals' psychological well-being regardless of their domestic situation. The strains of carrying out multiple (employment and domestic) roles as such are not, therefore, important factors in explaining distress levels.

These, then, are the major effects of domestic and marital status transitions. Being "stuck at home" and unemployed is highly distressing. Women tend to find marriage more satisfactory, but single mothers show very high levels of distress. While the internal organisation and quality of domestic relationships are obviously the most important factors in

happiness or stress within marriage – but were not measured in this study – a great deal can nevertheless be explained by the social background characteristics and economic and social circumstances associated with the various transitions. As men get married and become fathers they suffer a significant loss in per capita income. Marriage also appears to isolate them socially, although fatherhood does not appear to do so. The young fathers in our sample, however, appear to have high rates of unemployment. Marriage, on the other hand, actually reduces financial dissatisfaction among women, but this appears to increase again on becoming a mother. There is also a clear process of withdrawal from the labour force as women enter more demanding domestic roles, with unemployment decreasing and the proportion in "home duties" rising rapidly.

Among single mothers, who come from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, unemployment is high. However, financial dissatisfaction is low – probably due to these young women's preceding low incomes and lower levels of expectations. They have, however, high levels of social-emotional support available to them; though they are somewhat socially isolated. There may, of course, be elements of self-selection among our respondents because of the particular age cohort which we are studying. One must be careful, therefore, about generalising from this group of early marriages/parents, to future experiences of marriage or parenthood among the whole sample.

The psychological well-being of women in marriage is explained by their lower levels of unemployment, greater financial satisfaction and, most importantly, the far higher levels of social-emotional support available to them. While gender differences are important, the overall effects of marriage on distress levels are not that significant once we have controlled for the effects of the social background and educational characteristics of those who get married.

Parenthood outside of marriage is almost an exclusive female status as few single men are willing to take on the responsibility of looking after their children. The negative effects of single motherhood on psychological well-being is present, but not statistically significant once we control for these young women's particularly disadvantaged social backgrounds and education. Single mothers' greater financial satisfaction mitigates their distress somewhat. However, their worse unemployment experiences and lower levels of social-emotional and social contact, given their deprived status, are highly distressing.

It is mainly changes in economic circumstances and in patterns of labour force participation that play the crucial roles in explaining the well-being effect of most transitions. The personal consequences of most

"failed" domestic transitions appear to be less damaging than those of unemployment. Only those who have failed completely to "get started" – being still unemployed and still resident at home 5 years after completing full-time education – show independent sources of distress. The effect of other "failed" domestic transitions appear to be explainable in terms of social background, educational attainment or labour market factors – leaving no independent effect once these factors are statistically controlled.

Becoming an Adult in Irish Society

The first 3 to 5 years a young person spends in the labour market after they leave school are the most crucial ones in establishing adult statuses. Integration into the labour market begins, and the first occupational status attained is particularly important in Ireland given the low levels of occupational mobility over an adult's work-life in this country (Breen, Whelan, 1991). Early disadvantages very often persist into adult life. Early marital and other adult domestic transitions are generally more disadvantaged as they are strongly associated with deprived social backgrounds and poor educational experiences – particularly among single mothers. However, since we deal only with the first 5 years out of second-level schools, we must be careful in generalising the experience of these early transition groups, or in predicting others' future experiences. Such early, or even mainstream, life cycle transitions are extremely important in themselves.

Differences in the social background of persons brings with it differences in access to cultural and material resources, in social and cultural contexts and constraints on opportunities or choices. The transition to adulthood, therefore, is highly structured by people's social backgrounds and educational experiences, and early labour market experiences. However, the transition process does not simply reproduce social patterns from generation to generation. Significant social mobility does occur between generations and over time the nature and structure of labour market opportunities also change. However, despite these changes, substantial differences in life cycle careers exist. In the following we summarise the typical patterns of transition of those from different social backgrounds and some of the consequences of these differentials in transition.

Education is the most important influence on the transition to adulthood, but is itself built upon social background factors. Children of middle class parents do best at school, and class inequalities in education still remain pronounced. In addition, certain socio-cultural aspects of class, such as mother's education and family size, have important additional

effects on the transition process, though these are consistently mediated through their impact on educational attainment. Girls, and particularly farmers' daughters, do better educationally, though schooling also plays a highly significant role in directing girls towards particular subjects and occupations (Hannan, Breen, *et al.*, 1983; Hannan, Commins, 1992).

There is a remarkably clear link between social origins, educational attainment and occupational attainment among those Irish young people who do gain employment. Father's social class influences the child's occupational status directly but mainly through its effect on educational attainment. Socio-cultural aspects of class also affect occupational attainment but exclusively through their impact on levels of education. The independent and very strong effect of educational attainment on both employment chances and on levels of occupational attainment indicates not only its own importance, but also its role in reproducing patterns of social inequality.

Level of educational qualification and gender place young people in separate labour market situations or segments. While we lack a rigorous typology of the segmentation of the Irish labour market (Breen, 1985), the broader patterns are clear enough from this study. Young people from working class backgrounds with poorer educational qualifications seek manual or lower service jobs on leaving school. The local labour market is crucial for these young people. Opportunities for such manual work are relatively evenly spread geographically. In any case the individuals involved have few portable qualifications. The most successful of this group are those with vocational-technical education – an almost exclusively male option. Their employment chances are better and they are more likely to find employment and stay in their home area. The stakes for these poorly educated young people are high. Unemployment levels are high and transitions out of the parental home can be very difficult. Unemployment is also particularly high among those from families where the father is unemployed. Those with poor educational qualifications who are unemployed are in a highly disadvantaged labour market position, being the first to lose from rising unemployment and the last to benefit from any upturn in the domestic or international economy.

Those who do get better second-level educational qualifications are generally from more privileged working class, farm or middle class backgrounds. Young people with Leaving Certificate qualifications – depending mainly, though not exclusively, on grades – can either seek employment or pursue a third-level qualification and either strategy is likely to involve migration. This is because the jobs which they seek – typically clerical or administrative jobs – are much more concentrated in

the major urban centres and are generally recruited for on a national basis. Third-level educational institutions are also spatially concentrated, although there has been some decentralisation of RTCs.

Those who gain third-level qualifications have to be even more geographically mobile in order to pursue their careers, and for professional and semi-professional/ managerial work they are now in an international labour market. The necessity of migration at the higher educational and occupational levels is due to a combination of better qualifications among those from more remote areas, the concentration of third-level colleges and job opportunities in urban centres and the increasing geographical range of recruitment to non-manual positions. The apparent willingness and ability of Irish young people to migrate in search of work is striking. Whereas regional labour markets are important in explaining local levels of unemployment in the UK and in parts of the US this is not true in Ireland – at least as measured by county unemployment rates, due to this readiness to migrate or emigrate, as well as the "culture of emigration" prevalent in many families and areas.

In their first 5 years out of school marital and domestic transitions are far less developed than those related to the labour market. One in 5 young women is married, however, with a further 4 per cent being single mothers. Such early marriage generally occurs among young women from working class backgrounds and whose mothers are likely to have been less well educated. It appears that marriage is a relatively satisfactory alternative status to being single in a poor labour market position for such young women from less advantaged social and educational backgrounds. Marriage and parenthood also lead to high levels of withdrawal from the labour force into "home duties", particularly among young working class women. Single motherhood is concentrated among the most disadvantaged women. High proportions of single mothers are from lower working class families, or from families with an unemployed father. They tend to have no or very poor educational qualifications and to have spent almost all of their time in the labour force unemployed. Such early marital (or single parenthood) transitions are very rare among women from advantaged middle class backgrounds. The consequences of early marriage and parenthood for women's labour force participation are extremely damaging, despite some advances recently in this regard (Callan, 1992).

Labour market and marital transitions together explain many of the patterns of leaving the parental home. Migration is necessary for many educational and labour market transitions, but unemployment is a serious obstacle to leaving home – or a serious reason for returning home. Marriage and parenthood are particularly important reasons for leaving

among working class young women. Education and occupational mobility underlie most of the decisions of middle class youth. Despite this, however, Irish young people generally show a reluctance to leave home unless it proves to be necessary – when, of course, they are unusually willing to migrate compared to young people from many other countries.

The actual length of time involved in the transition process varies according to the young person's social origins and transition destination. Working class transitions generally occur at an earlier age and are shorter or more "compressed". Such young people typically leave school earlier, get jobs which are "careerless" or have a short-term career orientation, and marry younger. This compression is even stronger among working class women as they stay longer in school but get married and become parents earlier. In contrast, middle class transitions are more "elongated" as they are likely to include some participation in third-level education, a longer time spent establishing a "career", and marriage and parenthood at a much older age. Middle class young people, despite their longer periods of transition, are more advantaged and more satisfied than their working class counterparts at least during the period of transition observed.

A number of crucial events in the transition to adulthood have particularly serious personal and social consequences for the young people involved. These events are significant both in themselves (i.e., as acute stressors) and in the chronic stress effect they have on the roles and enduring life circumstances of the young people. Most important of these transition events are unemployment, single motherhood and marriage and parenthood in general.

While those with lower levels of occupational attainment are in a more disadvantaged position generally, it is the unemployed who are the most disadvantaged and distressed of all young people. Over 1 in 4 of the unemployed are above the GHQ psychological distress threshold while only 1 in 15 of those in employment are. However, the experience of unemployment does vary for different people. The duration of unemployment is important, distress intensifying in the first year but some adaptation to unemployment after that time. Previous experience of unemployment has a small distress effect but only on those who are currently unemployed. Current unemployment is the most distressing experience and well-being appears to improve rapidly on re-employment. Those from already disadvantaged backgrounds suffer more from unemployment, with working class origins and low levels of education being the most distressing backgrounds. Urban places of origin are also more distressing, particularly Dublin; so it may be that the geographical concentration of those with serious social problems aggravates the

personal effects of unemployment. On the whole, however, social structural patterns of distress appear to be less clear among young people than in the adult population. This is probably due to the greater uncertainty and fluidity in young people's social position as they make their transitions to full adult statuses. Even so, and even at this early stage of people's lives, the personal damage done by multiple social deprivations is quite clear.

Unemployment affects personal well-being by changing a whole range of factors in the person's economic and social environment. Unemployment means a huge loss of income as well as a lack of financial support to fall back on if necessary. Financial dissatisfaction is consequently very high and causes a great deal of distress. Involvement in high unemployment peer groups and social networks, relative social isolation and lack of availability of social-emotional support are typical features of the immediate social environment of the unemployed, and aggravate the distress caused. It might be supposed that unemployed young people suffering economic hardship and social isolation, would develop beliefs and attitudes which would act as psychological defences against the distressing consequences of unemployment. However, those whose peers are in a similarly disadvantaged situation actually suffer greater distress. The most common beliefs among unemployed young people as to the causes of their plight – emphasising structural or political factors or else being unclear on the causes – are these beliefs which have the most distressing effects. The unemployed also feel least in control of their own lives, and this too causes great distress. While there is some weakening of the general work ethic among the unemployed, this is quite small and the lowest levels of employment commitment are actually among those who have been least exposed to work situations and therefore to socialisation into work norms.

Unemployed young people, therefore, suffer a series of deprivations associated with their unemployment – economic deprivation, social isolation and a set of beliefs about control over their own situation which, while defensibly realistic (from an outsider perspective), are deeply distressing. While these young people are somewhat alienated from their contemporaries and adult society, however, they do not appear to form "subcultures" which develop new, psychologically protective, social norms. In fact, they hold closely to more general social norms and standards about work – despite their distressing effects; but they recover quickly in terms of well-being if re-employed. In short these are not "problem young people" but young people who have problems inflicted on them, and suffering extremely damaging consequences.

Single mothers, a still small but growing number among young women, are also highly distressed. These women come from the most deprived backgrounds and typically have had very bad educational and labour market histories. They continue to suffer high levels of unemployment once a parent, and their income remains very low. However, their expectations are also low so that they are actually reasonably satisfied with their income – particularly in comparison to their previous status. While they do have reasonable levels of social-emotional support available to them, most of their friends are likely to be unemployed and they remain relatively isolated socially. The concentration of multiple deprivations amongst them produces high levels of distress, and the effects of single motherhood on reduced chances of employment and increased social isolation add to their deprivations and distress. However, when we control for the effects of all relevant social background, educational and employment factors, single motherhood does not have any additional independent effects. In contrast to unemployment, single motherhood, and being "stuck at home", the other set of domestic transitions which has occupied us most in this study – marriage and parenthood – have far less substantial effects on well-being, at least as measured here in the first 5 years out of school.

Conclusions

Youth may well be a time of freedom and self-indulgence in some ways but this study has shown that it is a highly structured and regulated experience and that success or failure in early transitions can have quite distressing consequences, and these outcomes affect the course of their adult lives in very important ways. Generally, the transitions and experiences which are most distressing are also the most damaging to long-term opportunities. Chief among these are unemployment and single motherhood – both of which are associated with particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, but both aggravate that disadvantage and both are highly distressing.

These major problems cannot be seen in isolation from the overall reproduction of social inequalities during the transition to adulthood. Social class background and gender have powerful effects on the process of becoming an adult, as regards both labour market and domestic life cycle transitions. The decline in employment opportunities, domestically and internationally, and the increasing marginalisation of those from lower working class origins means that unemployment and single motherhood have become particularly disadvantaged outcomes for those who were already losing out in the transition. While unemployment in particular has

impacted on all sections of society, it has affected those from lower working class backgrounds most of all. They are most exposed to unemployment and suffer most from it psychologically. Rising unemployment has raised the stakes of "failure" in the transition among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Women from such backgrounds can also be caught in the "vortex of disadvantage" associated with single motherhood where heavy domestic and maternal demands are simply too much for the resources which they possess. This can cause very high levels of personal distress.

There are some signs also of a concentration and intensification of problems in urban areas and particularly in Dublin. The concentration of economic deprivation and impoverished social environments found in such areas may increase high levels of personal distress and makes it more difficult for deprived young people in these situations to escape. This does not mean that rural areas are without problems: indeed provision for (FÁS, etc.) training or work experience is very poor in remoter areas. In general, however, their problems are different in nature: they relate to the necessity to migrate (or emigrate) from their areas, primarily in search of jobs or education, rather than to young people being trapped in particularly disadvantaged situations. However, for that (smaller) proportion of young people with no or failed qualifications in such areas migration is not generally successful. As a result, these lower achievers tend to be both "cooped up" and uncatered for to a greater extent than others.

Education's influence on a young person's entry into adulthood and their adult life chances is very clear. The pace and the nature of the transition to adulthood are strongly related to the level of educational qualifications achieved. Those with high educational attainments experience a very extended transition and generally avoid the most unsatisfactory transition outcomes. While educational attainment is strongly influenced by social background characteristics and mediates their effects in many ways, it also has an independent moulding effect on processes of transition. Attention has already been drawn to the crucial role of the education system in structuring young people's roles and opportunities (Breen, 1991 and 1984b; Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Hannan with Boyle, 1987; Hannan, Breen, *et al.*, 1983), and our findings emphasise how important the consequences of these inequalities in the system are.

Social groups appear to differ, however, in the courses, qualifications and educational outcomes which they value. Educational achievement is not necessarily perceived or valued in the same way or to the same extent by all social classes. Vocational-technical education, for instance, is perceived and treated as particularly important for working class boys, who

– if successful in it – are provided with the resources to achieve their "traditional" occupational goals and lifestyles; particularly in their local labour markets and communities. On the other hand, middle class and most farmer families – especially for girls, disproportionately value academic second-level education, third-level – particularly University – entry and achievement of professional and semi-professional qualifications. This cultural bias can be to the detriment of the life chances of their less academically able children. Educational failure, however, is concentrated amongst the lower working class, those from small farming backgrounds and those from families who have become excluded from the labour market. This is a consequence both of the family and community cultures involved – of their expectations, and values and their psycho-social reactions to unemployment and deprivation, as well as of the rigidity and inflexibility of schools and educational system provisions, and the class biased cultural presumptions on which they are based.

Young people have been shown to be very active and enterprising in seeking to achieve success in their transitions. They adopt a variety of strategies in their attempts to achieve satisfactory adult statuses for themselves. This resourcefulness, even within the severe structural constraints in which they operate, is important to take into account in devising policy interventions, as the likely reactions of the groups at whom policy is aimed is crucial to this success. For example, "Youthreach" programmes have been developed to take into account the alienation from formal schooling of young people who have failed in, or were failed by, the educational system. Class and gender variations in educational goals and strategies, the various migration strategies adopted by differently qualified people in dissimilar labour markets, the various meanings given to marital and domestic transition by those from different social backgrounds and in different employment situations, and the great inequalities in the coping resources available to young people, all have crucial effects on how successful the various transitions to adulthood are; and these variations need to be taken into account in designing intervention programmes.

The aim of policy should be at a minimum to significantly reduce failures in education – which have such damaging effects on later employment and life course transitions. It should also empower young people on as equal a basis as possible, to make real choices in transition processes – and help them to avoid, or being forced to adopt, socially damaging choices. At present, the sets of opportunities which are available to young Irish people and the resources provided to take advantage of them are very unequally distributed. We spend, for instance, enormous amounts of public funds in educating middle class young people to

become medical doctors – so many of whom then emigrate. And at the other extreme, we spend very little on educational intervention programmes – such as the "Home-School-Liaison" Scheme – for that very disadvantaged 10 per cent of the youth cohort who are being failed miserably by current educational provisions.

This study has shown how a number of the major problems which beset young Irish people today arise directly out of inequalities in general social life. We have also looked at some of the processes which generate these problems – both in the attainment of transition statuses and in maintaining psycho-social well-being. Efforts to lessen economic hardship, to boost sources of social support and to increase feelings of personal control and efficacy can all help to lessen the burden of distressing situations such as unemployment – although they cannot eliminate the distress which it causes. We have seen which groups need these resources most, so this provides us with a basis for development of future policy measures. Of course, the expansion of opportunities generally, and the reduction of unemployment in particular, is crucial to improving the transition to adulthood amongst all young people. There would seem to be little use in relying on a general expansion of opportunities to solve the problems of all groups, however, given the wide differences in successful transitions to employment, and in marital and domestic transitions among various social groups. Explicit attention must, therefore, be given to the distributional aspects of State policy, and the differential consequences of economic growth and social change – not only from the point of view of social equity but also to maximise resource use by all groups in society and to minimise societally damaging consequences. A number of situations stand out as in need of particular and immediate attention. The damage and extreme distress caused to young people by high unemployment and by single motherhood is so great, and the obstacles they present to a full and satisfactory transition so formidable, that policy measures designed both to attack their causes and to ameliorate their effects are of the utmost importance.

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