

Patterns of Family Formation and Change in New Zealand

Arunachalam Dharmalingam,
Ian Pool, Janet Sceats and Ross Mackay





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Acknowledgements

The 1995 New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment survey, on which this report is based, was funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, the Ministries of Health and Women's Affairs, the Social Policy Agency, Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Midland Regional Health Authority. The Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato, also contributed to the funding. Thanks are due to Sandra Baxendine, Research Fellow Statistician at the Population Studies Centre, for data extraction and derivation of the life-table estimates and to Bev Campbell for preparing the tables. Funding for the present study by the Ministry of Social Development is gratefully acknowledged.

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ISBN: 0-478-18311-9

was published by

Centre for Social Research and Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development, Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora
2004

Copies of this report can be obtained from:

Ministry of Social Development, Bowen State Building, PO Box 12 136, Wellington
Information@msd.govt.nz, +64 4 916 3300, or it can be viewed on: www.msd.govt.nz

Design and print management by Skulduggery Design Ltd

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Foreword

Change is endemic to family life. Families are forged out of dynamic processes, through the formation of unions between adults and the birth of children within or outside such unions, and they grow and evolve through other dynamic processes, as unions are dissolved and reconstituted and as children grow up and eventually leave home. Moreover, these fundamental processes that shape families have themselves been undergoing profound change over recent decades in all countries across the developed world. In New Zealand, there has been a dearth of research that has studied these dynamic processes.

This new report in the **Raising Children in New Zealand** series was commissioned from the Population Studies Centre at the University of Waikato to begin to fill this gap. The report draws on data from the 1995 New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment survey, which was partially funded by the Social Policy Agency, a predecessor organisation to the Ministry of Social Development. The report represents a double change of focus from earlier reports in the series, which had largely involved synthetic reviews of the international literature. The focus now switches to New Zealand and, rather than relying on secondary sources, the report provides an empirical analysis of the changing shape of New Zealand families and examines how these changes have altered the contexts in which children grow up.

The report shows that, in the years since the Second World War, the dynamic processes that shape families have undergone profound and multifaceted change. Fewer women are marrying than among earlier generations and those who do marry do so at a later age. In place of marriage, cohabitation has emerged as a preferred form of first union among younger women. Women are having fewer children and are having them at a much later time in their reproductive lifespan. Rates of separation from marriage have increased, as have rates of repartnering. These changes have had significant implications for the shape of families: in particular, they have fuelled the growth of sole-parent families and blended families. There is also a systematic pattern of ethnic differences in these changes: Māori women enter into unions and have children at earlier ages than non-Māori women. These differences have deep historical origins and continue to the present day.

Many of the results presented in the report have implications for public policy. They indicate that we cannot rely on a single or narrow conceptualisation of the family. Families now encompass a variety of forms. This raises questions about whether public policies reflect the current reality of New Zealand families. The report provides a firmer basis for understanding that reality and will help the task of building appropriate policy frameworks.

Results on the family contexts in which children are reared also raise important policy issues. Many children now spend at least part of their lives in sole-parent families or blended families, which means that they have generally experienced one or more (possibly traumatic) family transitions, as their parents separate and repartner. This raises questions about whether public policies are in place to meet the needs of such families and to help to ensure the optimal development of their children.

One thing that is clearly evident is that families are continuing to evolve over time. Indeed, many of the most interesting shifts concern members of the youngest age cohorts. It is clear that these changes should not be seen as historical shifts that have brought us to a new stable model of the family. Rather, we are in the midst of ongoing processes of change, some of which will have consequences that are yet to emerge. This indicates a strong need for continuing research in this field. It is to be hoped that, in addition to throwing light on some aspects of family changes that have not been well documented to date, the report will also provide a stimulus for future research.

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Overview

Over the past 50 years, there have been major changes across the developed world in the fundamental processes that shape families – the formation, dissolution and reconstitution of adult unions, and the patterns of childbearing that occur within and outside these unions. The report provides a detailed account of how these changes have occurred in New Zealand, drawing on data from the 1995 New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment survey, which collected information on the family histories of a large random sample of New Zealand women.

Patterns of union formation have changed significantly. Age at first marriage has been rising and more women are forgoing marriage entirely. The overwhelming majority of younger women enter cohabitation as a first union. These trends have counterbalanced each other, with the net result that there has been little change in the overall proportions of women living in a union. In effect, cohabitation appears to be replacing marriage as a preferred first union. Most cohabiting unions do not last long: more than half are either dissolved or converted into a marriage within two years. The number of unions women enter during their lifetime has also been increasing.

Significant increases have occurred in the dissolution of unions, most notably between the 1960s and 1970s. While rates of separation continued to grow in the 1980s, there was little further increase in the 1990s, indicating that they may now have stabilised. Around one woman in three can be expected to separate within the first 20 years of marriage. The increases in propensity to separate have also been mirrored by increases in propensity to repartner. Around one woman in three can be expected to repartner within two years of a separation.

Patterns of childbearing have also undergone significant changes. The age of women at first birth has been rising, so that decreasing proportions of women have had children by any given age. However, results on women's future childbearing intentions suggest that most of those who postpone childbearing in their 20s are likely to catch up in their 30s. Another notable change has been a widening of intervals between births. Rates of childbearing outside marriage have also been rising. Almost all teenage mothers now give birth outside marriage.

The incidence of sole parenthood has grown significantly in recent decades. Nearly half of all mothers had spent some time as a sole parent before they turned 50; among the youngest age group, nearly a fifth had already spent some time as a sole parent before they turned 20. For many women, sole parenting is a transitory state: more than half had ceased to be a sole parent within five years. Around a quarter of women had spent some time living in a blended family, with children from a previous union of one or both partners. Children's experience of blended families was generally short: for nearly half, the spell had ended within five years. Children in such families, especially girls, left home at an earlier age than children in other family circumstances.

An important aspect of the findings is a pattern of distinct differences between Māori and non-Māori. While Māori women are equally as likely to form a partnership and to have children as non-Māori women, Māori women tend to experience these events at an earlier age than non-Māori women. In particular, Māori women have a significantly elevated likelihood of entering a union and giving birth before the age of 20, compared with their non-Māori peers.

Overall, the results show that changes affecting families have been significant and profound, and encompass all aspects of fundamental family dynamics. Moreover, the changes continue, with some of the most significant shifts involving members of the youngest cohorts. This indicates a need for continuing research both to document changes and to understand their implications.



1



Introduction



Since the 1940s, patterns of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution have undergone major changes in New Zealand, as they have in the rest of the developed world. While the proportion of women marrying has declined, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage have all increased. Over 90 percent of first marriages, for recent birth cohorts, are preceded by one or more periods of cohabitation. Compared with the 1950s and 1960s, relatively fewer women marry; they also marry later, have fewer children and have them at a much later time in their reproductive span. As a mechanism facilitating all these changes, contraception has played an important role. These changes affect all subsequent aspects of women's family life cycles. For Māori women, an equally important pattern for the entire family life cycle is the propensity for early union formation (and dissolution) and early childbearing. Both Māori and non-Māori women today are more likely to get divorced and remarried than was true for their mothers' generation, and children today are more likely to have stepsiblings as they grow up.

1a Rationale for the Study

The primary purpose of this report is to provide a better understanding of patterns of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution in New Zealand and how these patterns have changed in recent decades. It is also motivated by a desire to understand how these changes have affected the family contexts in which children grow up. Thus, in addition to providing a picture of broad shifts over time in dynamic processes of family formation and change, the report focuses on the proportions of children who spend part of their lives in sole-parent and reconstituted or "blended" families, the duration of time children spend in sole-parent families and patterns of leaving home among children in different family circumstances.

An empirical analysis of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution in New Zealand at the individual level is long overdue. The absence of such an analysis until recently has been due to the lack of good survey data in New Zealand on various aspects of family formation. This gap was almost unique among OECD countries. But with the availability of data from the New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment (NZWFEE) survey, it has become possible to analyse changes in family formation, dissolution and reconstitution through the lens of women's individual histories.

1b Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to document and describe the dynamic processes of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution as experienced by a sample of New Zealand women born during the period 1936–1975 and covering the period 1950–1995.

More specifically, we investigated:

- the patterns and correlates of marriage and cohabitation
- the patterns and correlates of marriage dissolution and repartnering
- the patterns and correlates of parenthood, non-marital births and birth intervals
- the incidence and duration of sole parenthood and their correlates
- the prevalence of reconstituted families and the duration of time children spend living in such families and
- patterns of leaving home among children in different family circumstances.

1C Data Source

We used the data set that was already available from the NZWFEE survey, which had been undertaken in 1995 by the Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato. This was the first comprehensive and nationwide retrospective survey of women to be undertaken in New Zealand with the aim of investigating dynamic processes of family formation and change.

The sample

The survey involved interviews with 3,017 women aged 20–59 in 1995 and collected retrospective information on their partnerships, use of contraception, pregnancies, births, education and work histories, among other things. The respondents were selected using a multi-stage proportionally stratified cluster sampling procedure.



Māori were oversampled, using the same multi-stage cluster sampling procedure, to give sufficient numbers of observations for meaningful analysis. The overall response rate was 67 percent. Comparison of selected sample characteristics with 1991 census data showed a high degree of representativeness. A detailed analysis of both sampling and non-sampling errors showed that, on most issues, the data are robust (for details, see Marsault et al. 1997). As the survey did not collect data on same-sex couple relationships, the results presented in this study are based only on unions involving partners of the opposite sex.

Missing data

An important issue in the analysis of survey data is how to deal with cases that have missing or not-specified values for one or more variables. In the NZWFEE survey, the overall amount of missing information in the entire survey was small. For the large majority of variables, the proportion of missing data was less than one percent. In the process of cleaning the data, we imputed missing values for many cases based on the values of other variables. The imputation of missing values helped to further reduce the volume of missing values. In each of the analyses presented here, we dropped those cases for which we could not impute missing values of variables that were pertinent to the analysis in question. For example, if a case had a missing value on one variable that was used in the analysis of sole parenthood, it was dropped from this analysis; however, the case was included in other analyses if full data were available in these other areas.

Weighting

The data used in the analyses were weighted to make sure that the sample reflected the composition of the total population. Weights were developed to adjust for over- or under-representation of subgroups within the sample according to a number of characteristics: age; ethnicity; region; education; occupation; and marital status. Data from the 1996 census for women aged 20–59 cross-classified by age, ethnicity, region, education, occupation and marital status were used to compute the weights. While all statistics presented in the report are based on weighted data, the total Ns reported in tables are based on the unweighted sample numbers.

1d Definition of Variables

In most of the analyses presented in the report, the dependent variables are either age at the time of a particular event (such as marriage, separation from a union or the birth of a child) or duration in a particular status (such as marriage or sole parenthood). Variation in the dependent variables is analysed in terms of variation in a set of independent or explanatory variables. We refer to these variables, interchangeably, as covariates, correlates, factors or determinants. The selection of independent variables was based on both their theoretical and empirical importance as borne out by the international literature and their availability in the NZWFEE data set.

For analytical purposes, we classified the independent variables into *fixed* or *time-varying* variables. Fixed variables take values that remain constant for the period under observation. A person's ethnicity and gender are examples of fixed variables. Such variables take the same value at different times. But a variable like occupation or age can change over time – either regularly (in the case of age) or irregularly (in the case of occupation). We allowed those variables that are time-varying to take a different value every year. Thus, for instance, a woman's occupation was represented by a variable that recorded her occupation at each year of her age.

Time-varying variables are used only in multivariate analyses, while the fixed variables are used in both bivariate and multivariate analyses (see section 1e **Method of Analysis**).

A list of the fixed and time-varying variables used in the analyses is contained in Box 1.1 at the end of this chapter.

1e Method of Analysis

Censoring

All aspects of family formation that we examined in this study are *time- or duration-dependent* and are also *censored*. Duration in single conjugal status, for instance, is a primary determinant of timing of union formation, whether the union is cohabitation or marriage. A second issue in family formation analysis



is the *censored nature* of the experience of individual women as this is reflected in the data set. At the time of the survey, some women had not had a full opportunity to experience the event under consideration. For instance, a woman aged 20 and single at the time of the survey in 1995 may or may not form a union in the future, but we are in no position to predict whether or not this will occur. *Censoring* occurs when we have some information about individual survival time in a particular status (eg single, married, childless), but we do not know how much time is yet to elapse before the next status is achieved (eg entering a union, becoming a sole parent, having a first birth) (Allison 1984). The reason censoring occurs in our study is that the woman may not yet have experienced the event under consideration *before the time of the survey*. The statistical method that is commonly used to take into account the censored nature of such data is *survival analysis* based on *life-table techniques*.

Bivariate analysis

Each chapter begins with bivariate life-table analyses of selected key events in the process of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution (eg marriage, entry into cohabitation, first birth, separation, repartnering). The dependent variables in these analyses are either cumulative proportions or rates, typically of women who had achieved a certain status by varying ages. In the case of marriage, for instance, we report both the cumulative proportion who had married by a given age and age-specific rates of marriage. At the bivariate level, we derive life-table measures for each subgroup of three independent variables: birth cohort; ethnicity; and education. For example, in the case of the independent variable “birth cohort”, we derive life-table measures relating to various events for each five- or 10-year cohort.

We have not provided standard errors and confidence intervals for the life-table measures for practical reasons. The life-table procedure contained in the statistical package we used (STATA; StataCorp 2001) generates confidence intervals for each of the cumulative proportions and age-specific rates we have presented, but we have not reported these as this would have made the tables very clumsy. In interpreting the bivariate results, however, we have generally highlighted only those results that are statistically significant. Wherever possible, we have also interpreted the bivariate results in conjunction with the results of the multivariate analysis.

Multivariate analysis

As the analysis becomes more complex when dealing with more than three variables at a time, we also employed multivariate statistical modelling. This provides a measure of the strength of the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, with the influence of other variables held constant. Some associations that appear at the bivariate level vanish in the multivariate analysis, because they arise entirely out of correlations with other variables and have no independent effect on the dependent variable. The multivariate analysis thus provides a deeper understanding of the main sources of variation in the dependent variable.

We included several independent variables in the multivariate analysis that could not be used in the bivariate life-table analyses, because they change in value over the observation period. These include: occupation; age; calendar period; age of youngest co-residing child; and number of co-residing children. For instance, a woman’s occupation might change over her life course, while she may also experience changes in her union status, in her parenthood status and in the number of children she has given birth to. Her age also naturally varies with time. The appropriate multivariate statistical technique that can be applied to this type of data is *discrete-time hazards modelling* (Allison 1984; Aitkin et al. 1989). Discrete-time hazards models combine life-table and regression methods.

The estimated effects of independent variables in the multivariate hazards models are presented as *incidence rate ratios* (IRRs). IRRs are ratios of two incidence rates.

They are computed as follows: one value of the independent variable is selected as the reference category; for any other value of the independent variable, the IRR is given by the incidence rate for that value expressed as a ratio of the incidence rate for the reference category.

Let us take as an example the likelihood of living with a sole mother and consider how this likelihood might be affected by an independent variable, say, the gender of the child. The variable gender has two values: male and female. If we designate “female” as the reference category, then the estimated effect of gender is the ratio of the incidence rate of living with a sole mother among male children over the incidence rate of living with a sole mother among female children. An IRR that is *equal*



to 1 means that there is *no difference* in the likelihood of living with a sole mother between male children and female children. If the IRR is *greater than 1*, then male children are *more likely* than female children to live with a sole mother. Similarly, if the IRR is *less than 1*, then male children are *less likely* to live with a sole mother than female children.

1f Structure of the Report

This introductory chapter is followed by six chapters that present the substantive results of the study and a chapter that provides a summary and conclusion. In Chapter 2, we examine patterns and changes in first marriage and cohabitation. In Chapter 3, we investigate patterns of separation from first marriage and repartnering. This is followed by an examination of timing of parenthood, birth intervals and non-marital births in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we analyse sole parenthood from the perspective of both the mothers and the children. Chapter 6 provides a limited analysis of some aspects of reconstituted or blended families. Chapter 7 examines the ages at which children in different family circumstances leave home. In Chapter 8, we provide a summary of the major findings and some concluding remarks.

Box 1.1

Fixed and Time-Varying Variables

Fixed variables

Ethnicity

This refers to the ethnicity of the woman as reported by her at the time of the NZWFEE survey. If a woman reported multiple ethnicities, then we followed the Statistics New Zealand prioritisation procedure in assigning a single ethnicity.¹ Ethnicity is used as a dichotomous categorical variable (Māori and non-Māori) in almost all analyses. We could not treat Pacific women separately in most of the analyses, as there were insufficient cases to allow meaningful statistical analysis. However, in the analyses of children living with sole parents in Chapter 5 and of children leaving home in Chapter 7, we used a three-way breakdown – Māori, Pacific and Other – as the number of children was large enough to permit analysis of Pacific children separately. It is important to note that the “Other” category in this analysis includes both the European/Pākehā group and those of ethnicities other than Māori, Pacific or European/Pākehā.

It is also important to note that the ethnicity of both the mother and her children was recorded at the time of NZWFEE survey. However, people sometimes change the way they describe their ethnicity, which leads to mobility between ethnic groups. Ethnic mobility is known to peak during transitions in living arrangements.

Educational qualification

This refers to the highest educational qualification the woman had completed at the time of the survey. It takes four values: no qualification obtained, secondary qualification, tertiary – other qualification and university qualification. It may be noted that, in some cases, women with tertiary – other qualifications may not have a high school qualification; these types of qualifications may therefore be closer to a secondary qualification than to a university degree. University qualification includes both bachelors and post-graduate degrees.

¹ This procedure operated as follows: if NZ Māori was one of the ethnic groups reported, then ethnicity was classified as Māori; otherwise, if any Pacific group was one of the ethnic groups reported, then ethnicity was classified as Pacific; otherwise, if any group other than a European/Pākehā group was one of the ethnic groups reported, then ethnicity was classified as Other; otherwise, ethnicity was classified as European/Pākehā (Department of Statistics 1993).



Birth cohort of women

This refers to the calendar year in which the woman was born. It has been reclassified into four categories: 1936–1949; 1950–1959; 1960–1969; and 1970–1975.

Year of marriage

This refers to the calendar year in which the woman was married. It has been reclassified into a small number of categories.

Year of entering first cohabitation

This refers to the calendar year in which the woman entered her first cohabitation. It has been reclassified into a small number of categories.

Age at marriage

This refers to the age at which the woman married for the first time. It has been reclassified into five- or 10-year age groups.

Age at first cohabitation

This refers to the age at which the woman entered her first cohabitation. It has been reclassified into a small number of age groups.

Gender of child

This refers to the child's gender: female or male.

Ethnicity of child

In the NZWFEE survey, the respondents were asked to report the ethnicity of each of their own children (but not that of any adopted or foster children). Thus, the ethnicity of children was reported directly and not derived indirectly from their mothers' ethnicity. This variable takes three values: Māori, Pacific and Other. If a woman reported multiple ethnicities for a child, then we followed the Statistics New Zealand prioritisation procedure in assigning a single ethnicity to the child.

Birth cohort of child

This refers to the calendar year in which the child was born. It has been reclassified into four categories: before 1970; 1970–1979; 1980–1989; and 1990–1995. It is used only in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Number of live births the mother had

This refers to the number of live births the woman had had up to the time of the survey. It has been reclassified into a small number of categories.

Time-varying variables

Age of woman or child

This refers to the woman's age when an event occurred. It has been reclassified into five- or 10-year age groups.

Calendar period

This refers to the calendar year in which an event occurred. It has generally been reclassified into 10-year periods.

Occupation

This variable refers to the woman's occupation at any given age or event. It takes four values: professional; semi-professional; non-professional; and not working. It was measured for every year of the woman's age. A woman was considered to be not working if she did not work for at least six months in a year.

Number of years worked by any age

This refers to the number of years the woman had worked by any given age or event. It has been reclassified into four values: not worked; worked for less than two years; worked for more than two years but less than five years; and worked for more than five years.

Number of co-residing children

This refers to the number of co-residing children the woman had at any given age or event. It has been reclassified into three categories: one child; two children; and three or more children. We included all children, irrespective of their age, in deriving this variable. We did not make any distinction between "dependent" and "independent" children (eg those aged over 16 years) in deriving this variable.

Age of the youngest co-residing child

This refers to the age of the youngest co-residing child the woman had at any given age or event. It has been reclassified into a small number of categories.

2



Marriage and Cohabitation



In this chapter, we present results on the first stage in the family life cycle: union formation. The chapter opens with an examination of the first unions of New Zealand women (including both marriage and cohabitation). This is followed by separate analyses of first marriage and cohabitation as a first union. Some results on the duration of time women spend in cohabitation are also presented, including an examination of whether this varies for second-order cohabitations. Then we discuss how delayed first marriage has been counterbalanced by an increased propensity to cohabit among more recent cohorts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of an emerging form of union among younger cohorts (“living-apart-together”) and a brief analysis of trends in the number of unions women have entered during their lifetime.

2a First Unions

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women who had entered a first union of any type (marriage or cohabitation) before a given age are given in Table 2.1. Before reaching 30 years of age, over 90 percent of New Zealand women had entered their first union. This remained more or less unchanged across the two cohorts of women who had reached the age of 30 by the time of the survey (those born before 1950 and those born in the 1950s). However, there appears to have been a significant change in the probability of entering a first union before 20 years of age between the pre- and post-1950 cohorts. Whereas only a quarter of women born before 1950 had entered their first union before 20 years of age, around 40 percent of those born after 1950 had entered a first union before they turned 20.

Ethnic differentials are evident in the teen years, but not once women are past their teens. Over half of Māori women were living in some form of union before reaching 20 years of age, compared with a third of non-Māori women. However, in age groups beyond age 20, there was no difference between Māori and non-Māori women in the proportion who had entered a first union.

There were also some differences by education in the proportion of women entering first unions. A noticeable difference existed between those with a university degree and those with lower educational qualifications or no qualifications at all. Moreover, the difference was greater at younger ages than at older ages. While only 14 percent of women with a university qualification had entered their first union before 20 years of age, the corresponding proportion was around a third among those with secondary or other tertiary qualifications, and nearly half among those with no qualifications. By 30

years of age, however, the educational differential had narrowed. There was only a 10 percentage point difference between university-qualified women and those with no qualifications in the proportion who had entered their first union before the age of 30.

In the following two sections, we explore changes in the type of first union that women enter: marriage or cohabitation.

2b First Marriage

Bivariate results

In Table 2.2, we show the cumulative proportion of women who had entered a first marriage before a given age, again classified by birth cohort, ethnicity and educational qualifications. It is clear from this table that there are substantial differences between younger and older birth cohorts. Women of recent birth cohorts have been less likely to enter into a first marriage before any given age. Among those born during the 1960s, only 49 percent had entered a first marriage before age 25, compared with 71 percent among those born in the 1950s. The change is even more noticeable at younger ages: only four percent of those born in the early 1970s had married before 20 years of age, compared with 11 percent and 25 percent of those born in the 1960s and 1950s respectively.

Table 2.3 gives the proportion of women marrying at different ages, given that they had not married until then. These proportions could also be interpreted as probabilities of entering a first marriage in each age band. Consistent with the results in Table 2.2, Table 2.3 shows that the likelihood of marriage has declined between older and younger birth cohorts. Those born



before 1950 who remained unmarried at age 20 had a 71 percent chance of marriage between the ages of 20 and 24, while the corresponding figure for those born during the 1960s was 43 percent. The probability of marriage remained relatively high (around 50 percent) among women aged 25–29 across the two birth cohorts for which data are available and declined to around 30 percent in the 30–34 year age group.

Across the table, there is a clear pattern of reducing probability of marriage for successive cohorts of women, as far as data are available on this. However, because of the nature of the data, some questions remain unanswered. In particular, it is not possible to determine whether the significantly reduced probabilities of marriage at younger ages for the most recent cohorts simply reflect postponement of entry into marriage or whether they prefigure a shift away from marriage altogether.

With the exception of those under 20 years of age, Māori women had a lower probability of marriage at all ages (Table 2.3). Consequently, while 76 percent of non-Māori women had married by 30 years of age, the corresponding percentage for Māori women was 61 percent (Table 2.2). Although no data on this are presented in the table, the ethnic differential persisted across all birth cohorts.

Although higher education was associated with an overall reduction in the probability of marriage, there was some variation on this pattern by age. While women with a tertiary qualification (particularly a university degree) were less likely than those with no qualifications to marry before the age of 25, the relationship reversed once they reached 25 (Table 2.3). University-qualified women were especially unlikely to marry before the age of 20: only three percent had done so compared with a quarter of those without any qualifications. These differentials in the propensity to enter a first marriage are reflected in the cumulative proportion married before a given age. While 67 percent of women with no qualifications had married before age 25, the figure was just 39 percent for those with a university qualification. By age 30, the educational differential had narrowed, although it had not entirely disappeared even by age 35 (Table 2.2).

Multivariate results

In Table 2.4, we present the results from the multivariate analysis. The results in the table confirm what has been described above based on the bivariate results. Of the three time-related variables included in the multivariate model (birth cohort, calendar period and age), birth cohort and age were found to be associated with the likelihood of a first marriage. In general, women of more recent birth cohorts were much less likely to marry than women born in earlier decades. For instance, women born during the 1960s were only about half as likely as those born before 1950 to have married, while women born in the 1970s were only a fifth as likely to have married. The propensity to marry peaked in the early 20s and then declined. For instance, a woman's chances of marrying in her early 30s were less than half her chances of marrying in her early 20s.

Non-Māori women were in general about 50 percent more likely to marry than their Māori counterparts. University-level education was associated with a reduced likelihood of marriage. Women with a university qualification were about 30 percent less likely to marry than those with no qualifications. Although women with no educational qualifications were more likely to marry than others, this differential was not substantial enough to offset the much lower likelihood of marriage among Māori women. Thus, the net outcome for Māori women was that they were more likely to remain unmarried than non-Māori women.

Participation in the labour force increased women's chances of marriage. Those working were between 52 and 66 percent more likely to marry than those not working. Interestingly, there was not much difference in the likelihood of marriage by type of occupation, as this rather narrow range of probabilities shows.

We also included in the analysis three variables that are related to processes of family formation: duration of prior cohabitation at any age; whether a woman was pregnant at any age; and whether she had given birth by any age. Duration of cohabitation was derived from all past cohabiting unions, as well as the current union, if the woman was cohabiting at the given age. The chances of marriage were highest when a woman had cohabited for a short period only – up to six months. If a woman had cohabited for more than six months, or if she had not cohabited at all, then her likelihood of marriage was



substantially reduced. For example, if a woman had not cohabited in the past and was not currently cohabiting, then her chances of marriage were only 46 percent of those of women who had cohabited for six months. The probability of marriage was even lower among women who had cohabited for long periods: women who had cohabited for more than five years were only a third as likely to marry as women who had cohabited for six months or less.

It is also interesting to note that, while pregnancy enhanced the chance of a subsequent marriage, having a birth outside marriage had little effect on the chances of marriage. Being pregnant at any age increased the propensity to marry at that age by six-and-a-half times, compared with those who were not pregnant. But there was no difference in the likelihood of marriage between those who had already given birth and those who had not.

2C Cohabitation as a First Union

Bivariate results

The postponement and decline of marriage has coincided with a parallel rise and spread of cohabitation. The following analyses of patterns of cohabitation are based on women who had not yet married. Thus, they have a slightly different interpretation from the preceding results on first marriage, which covered all women in the sample. Here the proportions are based on a diminishing pool of women as age increases (ie those who remained unmarried at that age).

Among those born during the 1950s who remained unmarried, 71 percent had entered cohabitation as their first union before they reached 30 years of age (see Table 2.5). The corresponding figure for those born before 1950 was only 29 percent. While only 22 percent among the 1950s birth cohort who remained unmarried were in a cohabiting union by 20 years of age, the proportion had increased considerably to 38 percent among the most recent birth cohort of 1970–1975. For cohorts born prior to 1950, cohabitation before the age of 20 had been very rare (only four percent of those who remained unmarried).

Age-specific proportions of women entering cohabitation as a first union by birth cohort, ethnicity and education are given in Table 2.6. It is clear that the younger

the birth cohort, the greater the chances of entering cohabitation as a first union, at any given age. Increasing numbers of women are moving into cohabitation as a first union in their late teens and early 20s. Among the most recent cohorts for which data are available, over a third of women aged less than 20 who remained unmarried had entered cohabitation as a first union, while half of women in their early 20s who remained unmarried had entered cohabitation as a first union.

Māori women were, in general, more likely to enter cohabitation as their first union than non-Māori women, except at ages 25–29. Indeed, the difference is relatively large at younger ages: before age 20, Māori women were twice as likely as non-Māori women to cohabit. However, the higher proportion of Māori women who were cohabiting did not seem to translate into a higher proportion who subsequently married (as documented in section 2b **First Marriage**). This could partly be because, once six months' duration of cohabitation has passed, the likelihood of marriage declines (see Table 2.4).

Women's level of educational qualifications also had a strong influence on the likelihood of cohabitation. Among those with no qualifications who remained unmarried, 30 percent had entered a cohabiting union before reaching the age of 20, compared with 11 percent of those with university qualifications (Table 2.5). The difference reduced, although it did not vanish entirely, as age increased. Up to the age of 35, university-qualified women remained less likely than other women to have entered cohabitation as a first union. These results parallel those for marriage and show that university-qualified women were least likely either to marry or to enter cohabitation right up to their mid-30s.

The results on age-specific rates of entry into cohabitation as a first union show a more complex pattern across the different educational qualification groups (Table 2.6). For the three groups of women with different types of qualifications, a similar pattern was evident: low rates of entry into cohabitation below age 20 and after turning 30, and higher rates during their 20s. University-qualified women exemplified this trend to the strongest degree: among this group, only 11 percent of those who remained unmarried entered cohabitation as a first union before age 20 and after turning 30, while 38 percent entered cohabitation as a first union in their early 20s. Women with no qualifications stood apart from this typical pattern.



This group of women showed little change in the probability of entering cohabitation across the four age bands and they were actually a little less likely to enter cohabitation during their 20s than before age 20 or after age 30.

Multivariate results

Results from the multivariate analysis of the propensity to enter cohabitation as a first union are given in Table 2.7. They confirm what has been described so far: that women born after 1950, Māori women and women without qualifications were more likely to enter cohabitation as their first union.

Those born after 1950 were about twice as likely to enter cohabitation as a first union as those born before 1950. As well as a cohort effect, a period effect was also evident. Compared with the 1960s, women have been more than four times as likely to enter cohabitation as a first union in the years since 1980. By contrast, women were only a quarter as likely to enter cohabitation as a first union before 1960 as they were during the 1960s. Thus, the propensity to enter cohabitation as a first union has increased several-fold both among younger birth cohorts and in more recent calendar periods.

An age effect was also evident: women's propensity to enter cohabitation as a first union peaked in their early 20s and then declined substantially after age 30. Women who remained unmarried in their early 30s were only just over half as likely to enter cohabitation as a first union as those aged less than 20.

Non-Māori women were 33 percent less likely to enter cohabitation as their first union than Māori women. Women with some form of educational qualification were between 20 and 30 percent less likely to enter cohabitation as a first union than those with no qualifications at all, university-qualified women being least likely to do so. Type of occupation was not related to the propensity to cohabit. However, length of work experience was positively associated with the propensity to enter cohabitation as a first union. Those with at least one year of work experience were three to four times more likely to enter cohabitation as a first union than those who had had no work experience.

2d Duration of Cohabitation

Given the rise in the propensity to cohabit as a first union, it is of interest to explore the duration of time women spend in cohabiting unions. There were 1,389 women whose first union was cohabitation. At the time of the survey in 1995, only 11 percent of these cohabitations were still intact; almost half (48 percent) had been converted into a marriage and the rest (41 percent) had been dissolved. In Table 2.8, we present life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of first cohabitations that had been either dissolved or converted into a marriage within varying durations of time. The table shows that about 30 percent of cohabiting unions had either been dissolved or converted into a marriage within the first year, and more than half had been dissolved or converted into a marriage within two years. Within five years, the vast majority of first cohabiting unions (86 percent) had ended in one way or the other.

As these figures are much higher than rates of separation from first marriages (see Table 3.1), it is tempting to speculate that cohabiting unions are less stable than marriages. However, it should be remembered that the figures in Table 2.8 include cohabitations that ended because the couple married. The results indicate clearly that cohabiting unions are less enduring than marriages, but it is less easy to draw inferences about the stability of such unions compared with marriages. Other evidence, however, shows that cohabiting unions are more likely to lead to sole parenthood (see Chapter 5), which lends support to the hypothesis that they are less stable than marriages.

Table 2.8 shows that there were differentials in the duration of cohabitation by birth cohort and by age at cohabitation. In general, the cohabiting relationships of younger birth cohorts were less likely than those of older cohorts either to dissolve or to be converted into marriage. For instance, among women born in the period 1970–1975, 22 percent of cohabiting relationships had either been dissolved or converted into a marriage within the first year, compared with 37 percent among women born before 1950. Similarly, among women born in the 1960s, 51 percent of cohabiting relationships had either been dissolved or converted into a marriage within two years, compared with 69 percent among



those born before 1950. On the face of it, these results would seem to indicate that cohabiting relationships may be becoming more enduring.

Age at cohabitation was also associated with the duration of the relationship. In particular, the cohabitation relationships of younger women were less likely to end quickly. While nearly two-thirds of first cohabitations (64 percent) ended within two years among women who had entered the union after they turned 25, the corresponding figure among women who had entered the union before the age of 18 was 45 percent. Although there were some ethnic and educational differences, they were neither large nor clear.

To examine whether the average duration of cohabiting unions varied between the first cohabitation and subsequent cohabitations, we derived life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of second-order cohabiting unions that had ended by various ages. Three groups of women were included in this analysis: those who were in a second cohabitation that was a second union (ie cohabitation–cohabitation); those who were in a second cohabitation that was a third union (ie cohabitation–marriage–cohabitation); and those who were in a first cohabitation that was a second union (ie marriage–cohabitation). In the last group, the union was in fact their first cohabitation, but because of their similarity with the second group of women in terms of their prior marital union experience, we decided to include them as part of the group of “second-order cohabitants”. Thus, we derived life-table estimates separately for those second-order cohabitations that had been immediately preceded by a first cohabitation and those that had been immediately preceded by a marital union (which might in turn have been preceded by an earlier cohabitation). The results are given in Table 2.9.

It is interesting that the pattern of duration of second-order cohabitations was different depending on whether the cohabitation had been preceded immediately by a marital union or by a prior cohabitation. Where a cohabitation had been preceded by an earlier cohabitation, the pattern of dissolution was very similar to the pattern for first cohabitations, as can be seen from the second row of Table 2.9. However, where a cohabitation had been preceded by a marital union, then the union was less likely to end within a given duration. For instance, only 37 percent of cohabitations

that had been preceded by a marital union had ended within two years, compared with 57 percent of those that had been preceded by an earlier cohabitation. These results suggest that cohabiting unions that follow the termination of a marriage are more enduring than other cohabiting relationships.

As there were insufficient cases to derive life-table estimates for Māori, for some birth cohorts and for the various educational groups, we did not examine the differentials across the various subgroups within each of these variables as we did above for the duration of first cohabitations. The sparse data that were available, however, suggested that there were no major socio-demographic differentials in terms of the duration of second-order cohabitations.

2e Shift-share between Cohabitation and Marriage

The above results show that trends and patterns in cohabitation and marriage are moving in opposite directions. While cohabitation has become the preferred first union for most women of the youngest birth cohort, marriage has increasingly been postponed to later ages and even forgone by a significant minority. Table 2.10 shows the scale of this shift. Among those born before 1950 who had entered a first union before the age of 20, the overwhelming majority had married rather than cohabited. Indeed, among this birth cohort, 22 percent of all women had married by the age of 20, compared with only four percent who had entered cohabitation, a ratio of more than five to one. In contrast, among those born in the early 1970s who had entered a first union before the age of 20, an even larger majority had entered cohabitation rather than marriage. Among this cohort, 38 percent had entered cohabitation as a first union, while only two percent had married, a ratio of nearly 20 to one.

The increase in cohabitation and decline of marriage have more or less counterbalanced each other, with the net effect that the proportion of women living in a union of any type (whether cohabitation or marriage) has remained very similar at any given age for the various birth cohorts and time periods (see Table 2.1 and Table 2.10). For instance, among the two birth cohorts for which data are available, very similar proportions of women had entered a first union before 30 years of age



(92 percent and 94 percent) and before 35 years of age (95 percent and 96 percent). This shift-share between cohabitation and marriage may indicate that one form of conjugal union is gradually replacing another.

2f Living-Apart-Together Relationships

A separate, but related, emerging development is the tendency for couples to live separately, often with their parents, but at the same time to pursue an intimate relationship. Such relationships have been referred to by other researchers as *living-apart-together* relationships (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1990; Pool 1998; Burch and Bélanger 1999). This phenomenon seems to be predominant among young people in their early 20s, as can be seen in Table 2.11. Respondents to the NZWFEE survey were asked “Are you *currently* having an *intimate relationship* with someone who lives in a separate household?”. This question was preceded by one that sought to identify current cohabitation: “Are you *currently* living in the *same household* with someone with whom you have an *intimate relationship* but to whom you are *not married*?” (emphases in both questions in the original). Thus, the survey contextually defined living-apart-together relationships as very much like cohabiting relationships, except that the parties did not live in the same household. In the analysis of cohabitation presented above, these living-apart-together relationships were not included. For all analytical purposes in this report, only marriage and cohabitation were considered as unions.

The distribution of women’s union status at the time of the survey in 1995 is given in Table 2.11. In the 20–24 age group, 20 percent of women were in a living-apart-together relationship, compared with 27 percent who were cohabiting. This percentage increases to 32 percent if it is based only on women who were living in a relationship of any form: that is to say, about a third of women in their early 20s who were in a relationship were in a living-apart-together relationship. Similar patterns of living-apart-together relationships are also recorded for Sweden, France and Australia, among other countries. This constitutes a major shift in patterns of union formation at the younger ages (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997 documents this for France; see also Villeneuve-Gokalp 1990 and Burch and Bélanger 1999).

2g Number of Unions

Alongside the emergence of cohabitation as the preferred first union, there has also been an increase in the number of unions entered during a lifetime. This may be linked to the nature of cohabitational relationships, which are less enduring than marriages, although cohabitation itself is likely to be undergoing major changes. As can be seen in Table 2.11, 22 percent of women aged 25–29 at the time of the survey had lived in two or more unions before they reached 25 years of age. This group corresponds approximately to those born in the period 1965–1969. The corresponding figure for those born 10 years earlier was only 14 percent. Seven percent of women aged 25–29 at the time of the survey had lived in two or more unions by the age of 20. This had grown from one percent among those born 10 years earlier.

2h Summary

The various results presented above show that major changes have been occurring in patterns of union formation in New Zealand. While women who were mothers during the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s generally entered marriage as their first union, an overwhelming proportion of women born during and since the baby boom have entered cohabitation as their first union. The propensity for women to delay marriage continued to increase among the most recent birth cohorts. A question which must remain unanswered for the present is whether this simply reflects a further postponement of entry into marriage or whether it prefigures a shift away from marriage altogether.

Even among women who did marry, the vast majority of those who were born after 1960 had lived in a cohabitation relationship before they married. These unions did not generally last long: the great bulk of first cohabitations (86 percent) were either converted into a marriage or dissolved within five years. Indeed, over a quarter were dissolved or converted into a marriage within a year and over a half were dissolved or converted into a marriage within two years. It is interesting that cohabitations that had been preceded by a marital union lasted longer than those where the woman had not previously been married.

The overall trends in cohabitation and marriage are systematic and parallel, but run in opposite directions.



As a result, the cumulative proportion of women entering any form of first union, whether marriage or cohabitation, has remained high and stable.

There were some significant differences between Māori and non-Māori. Māori women were generally more likely to enter cohabitation as a first union, particularly at young ages, than their non-Māori counterparts. On the other hand, they were less likely to marry than non-Māori women, except during their teens. Although Māori women were more likely to be in a union of any form at younger ages, by 30 years of age, there was no difference between Māori and non-Māori women in the proportions who had entered into a first union of any type.

Two other changes in union formation have occurred alongside changes in cohabitation and marriage. First, there has been an increasing propensity for New Zealand women to have lived in more than one union in their lifetime: among more recent cohorts of women, more than a fifth had lived in at least two unions by the age of 25 and seven percent had lived in at least two unions by the age of 20. Secondly, there has been an increasing tendency among younger women to be in a living-apart-together relationship. In 1995, about one in three women in their early 20s who were in a union of any form were living apart from their partners, typically with their parents. This phenomenon is not unique to New Zealand. It is also found in Australia, Sweden and France.

Table 2.1

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women entering a first union (cohabitation or marriage) before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion in first union before:				Number of women
	20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	35 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.25	0.80	0.92	0.95	803
1950–1959	0.39	0.85	0.94	0.96	934
1960–1969	0.39	0.80			860
1970–1975	0.40				420
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.53	0.83	0.90	0.94	513
Non-Māori	0.33	0.80	0.92	0.95	2,504
Education					
No qualifications	0.47	0.85	0.93	0.97	787
Secondary qualifications	0.35	0.83	0.95	0.97	765
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.31	0.79	0.91	0.94	1,163
University qualifications	0.14	0.66	0.83	0.87	302
Overall	0.35	0.81	0.92	0.95	3,017


Table 2.2

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women entering a first marriage before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion married before:				Number of women
	20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	35 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.23	0.78	0.90	0.93	803
1950–1959	0.25	0.71	0.84	0.88	934
1960–1969	0.11	0.49			860
1970–1975	0.04				420
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.21	0.47	0.61	0.67	513
Non-Māori	0.16	0.62	0.79	0.85	2,504
Education					
No qualifications	0.25	0.67	0.79	0.83	787
Secondary qualifications	0.16	0.63	0.80	0.85	765
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.14	0.58	0.75	0.83	1,163
University qualifications	0.03	0.39	0.64	0.75	302
Overall	0.17	0.61	0.77	0.83	3,017

Table 2.3

Rate of first marriage in various age groups, for selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Rate of first marriage				Number of women
	15–19 yrs	20–24 yrs	25–29 yrs	30–34 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.23	0.71	0.54	0.34	803
1950–1959	0.25	0.61	0.45	0.28	934
1960–1969	0.11	0.43			860
1970–1975	0.04				420
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.21	0.32	0.26	0.15	513
Non-Māori	0.16	0.55	0.44	0.29	2,504
Education					
No qualifications	0.25	0.56	0.36	0.21	787
Secondary qualifications	0.16	0.56	0.46	0.23	765
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.14	0.51	0.41	0.32	1,163
University qualifications	0.03	0.37	0.41	0.30	302
Overall	0.17	0.53	0.41	0.27	3,017



Table 2.4

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity to enter into a first marriage			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	Before 1950 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	0.80	2.40 **
	1960–1969	0.48	5.59 **
	1970–1975	0.18	7.91 **
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1960	0.74	2.50
	1960–1969 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	0.98	0.21
	1980–1989	0.85	1.28
	1990–1995	0.81	1.15
Age of woman (tv)	Under 20 years	0.27	20.02 **
	20–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	0.73	3.94 **
	30–34 years	0.45	5.84 **
	35–59 years	0.16	7.31 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	1.47	4.64 **
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	1.10	1.31
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.92	1.19
	University qualifications	0.70	3.80 **
Occupation (tv)	Professional	1.66	6.41 **
	Semi-professional	1.52	6.18 **
	Non-professional	1.53	4.76 **
	Not working ^R	1.00	–
Duration of cohabitation (tv)	No cohabitation	0.46	7.07 **
	1–6 months ^R	1.00	–
	7–12 months	0.67	2.69 **
	13–24 months	0.77	1.99 **
	25–60 months	0.58	4.24 **
	61+ months	0.36	6.01 **
Pregnant at any given age (tv)	No ^R	1.00	–
	Yes	6.51	22.42 **
Had given birth by any given age (tv)	No ^R	1.00	–
	Yes	0.94	0.56

Log likelihood = 10662
 χ^2 (df = 25) = 2065

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$

Table 2.5

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women entering cohabitation as a first union (given that they are not married) before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics				
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion entering cohabitation before:			
	20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	35 yrs
Birth cohort				
1936–1949	0.04	0.12	0.29	0.40
1950–1959	0.22	0.53	0.71	0.78
1960–1969	0.34	0.67		
1970–1975	0.38			
Ethnicity				
Māori	0.44	0.70	0.78	0.83
Non-Māori	0.21	0.48	0.65	0.72
Education				
No qualifications	0.30	0.48	0.61	0.71
Secondary qualifications	0.24	0.54	0.73	0.78
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.22	0.51	0.66	0.72
University qualifications	0.11	0.45	0.61	0.66
Overall	0.24	0.51	0.66	0.73

Note: Sample numbers are not reported for this table, because the number of women on which the proportions were based diminished with increasing age (ie the number who remained unmarried at each age).

Table 2.6

Rate of entry of women into cohabitation as a first union (given that they are not married) in various age groups, by selected socio-demographic characteristics				
Characteristics	Rate of cohabitation			
	15–19 yrs	20–24 yrs	25–29 yrs	30–34 yrs
Birth cohort				
1936–1949	0.04	0.09	0.19	0.16
1950–1959	0.22	0.39	0.39	0.25
1960–1969	0.34	0.50		
1970–1975	0.37			
Ethnicity				
Māori	0.43	0.47	0.27	0.24
Non-Māori	0.21	0.34	0.33	0.19
Education				
No qualifications	0.30	0.25	0.25	0.27
Secondary qualifications	0.24	0.39	0.42	0.17
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.22	0.37	0.31	0.19
University qualifications	0.11	0.38	0.30	0.11
Overall	0.24	0.35	0.32	0.20

Note: Sample numbers are not reported for this table, because the number of women on which the proportions were based diminished with increasing age (ie the number who remained unmarried at each age).



Table 2.7

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity to enter into cohabitation as a first union			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	Before 1950 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	1.81	3.77 **
	1960–1969	1.95	3.40 **
	1970–1975	2.36	3.52 **
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1960	0.25	3.05 **
	1960–1969 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	3.09	6.94 **
	1980–1989	4.15	6.98 **
	1990–1995	4.28	5.74 **
Age of woman (tv)	Under 20 ^R	1.00	–
	20–24 years	1.26	2.61 **
	25–29 years	1.02	0.10
	30–34 years	0.56	2.17 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	0.67	4.71 **
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	0.82	2.13 **
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.80	2.44 **
	University qualifications	0.68	2.79 **
Occupation (tv)	Professional	1.10	0.84
	Semi-professional	1.05	0.54
	Non-professional	1.16	1.14
	Not working ^R	1.00	–
Years worked by any given age (tv)	Not worked ^R	1.00	–
	< 2.0 years	3.32	10.31 **
	2.1 – 5.0 years	3.81	9.41 **
	5.1 and over	3.42	6.87 **

Log likelihood = 5759
 χ^2 (df = 21) = 670

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = p ≤ 0.05

Table 2.8

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women whose first cohabitation (that was also the first union) was either dissolved or converted into marriage within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion whose union had ended within:				Number of women
	< 1 yr	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.37	0.69	0.91	0.99	117
1950–1959	0.33	0.58	0.89		430
1960–1969	0.27	0.51	0.86		581
1970–1975	0.22	0.44			261
Age at cohabitation					
Under 18 years	0.27	0.45	0.84	0.94	289
18–20 years	0.26	0.52	0.87	0.95	567
21–24 years	0.31	0.56	0.87	0.93	314
25 years and over	0.36	0.64	0.87	0.97	219
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.29	0.49	0.80	0.91	338
Non-Māori	0.28	0.54	0.88	0.96	1,051
Education					
No qualifications	0.27	0.49	0.84	0.93	347
Secondary qualifications	0.28	0.51	0.88	0.94	369
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.32	0.58	0.88	0.96	535
University qualifications	0.26	0.58	0.86	0.97	138
Overall	0.29	0.53	0.86	0.95	1,389



Table 2.9

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women for whom a second-order cohabitation had ended within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
	Cumulative proportion whose union had ended within:				Number [#]
	< 1 yr	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Cohabitations that were preceded by a marital union	0.18	0.37	0.69	0.86	347
Cohabitations that were preceded by another cohabitation	0.33	0.57	0.84	0.96	397
Overall	0.27	0.48	0.77	0.91	744

Number of women in a second-order cohabitation.

Note: The unweighted numbers of women included in the derivation of estimates given in Table 2.10 are: 122 in second cohabitation but third union (ie cohabitation–marriage–cohabitation); 397 in second cohabitation and in second union (ie cohabitation–cohabitation); and 225 in first cohabitation but second union (ie marriage–cohabitation).

Table 2.10

Type of first union entered before a given age, by birth cohort						
Characteristics		Cumulative proportion entering first union before:				Number of women
		20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	30+ yrs	
1936–1949	Union type					
	Marriage	0.22	0.72	0.81	0.84	666
	Cohabitation	0.04	0.08	0.11	0.14	118
	Not yet entered	–	–	–	–	17
	All unions	0.26	0.80	0.92	0.98	801
1950–1959	Marriage	0.19	0.47	0.51		485
	Cohabitation	0.20	0.38	0.43		431
	Not yet entered	–	–	–		18
	All unions	0.39	0.85	0.94		934
1960–1969	Marriage	0.05	0.20			217
	Cohabitation	0.33	0.60			581
	Not yet entered	–	–			58
	All unions	0.38	0.80			856
1970–1975	Marriage	0.02				30
	Cohabitation	0.38				261
	Not yet entered	–				128
	All unions	0.40				419

Table 2.11

Union status at the time of the survey and number of unions before 25 years of age for women aged under 40 (percentages)				
	Age at interview in 1995 (percent)			
	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39
Union status				
Cohabiting	27	20	14	9
Partnership but living apart	20	8	7	6
Married	14	50	62	70
No current relationship	37	18	11	7
Other	2	4	6	8
Number of unions before age 20 years				
None	61	61	62	58
1 union	32	32	34	41
2+ unions	7	7	4	1
Number of unions before age 25 years				
None	–	18	22	13
1 union	–	60	60	73
2+ unions	–	22	18	14
Number of women	353	398	441	503



3



Separation from Marriage and Repartnering



Major changes have occurred in recent decades not only in the formation of unions but also in their dissolution. In addition to the shift to older age at marriage and the growing preference for cohabitation as a first union described in Chapter 2, the period since the 1970s has witnessed substantial increases in separation and divorce. In this chapter, we describe the pattern of dissolution of first marriages and repartnering after separation. Three points should be noted about the results on separation. First, the analysis focuses only on dissolution of legal marriages. Separations from periods of cohabitation are not covered. Secondly, the analysis includes separations only from first, and not subsequent, marriages. Thirdly, because the NZWEE survey included information on the age at which a woman separated but not on her age at divorce, the analysis of marriage dissolutions focuses on separation, rather than divorce. In support of this approach, it may be noted that, while a marriage ends legally only with a divorce, most marriages are effectively ended when spouses separate.

3a Separation from First Marriage

Bivariate analysis

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of women who had separated from a first marriage by varying durations of marriage are given in Table 3.1. About one in five first marriages had ended in separation within 10 years and about a third of first marriages had ended in separation within 20 years.

The table shows that younger birth cohorts and more recent marriage cohorts have higher rates of separation than older and earlier cohorts. For instance, within the first 10 years of marriage, 28 percent of those born in the 1960s had separated, compared with 13 percent of those born before 1950. Similarly, among those who had married in the period 1980–1995, 26 percent had separated before their 10th wedding anniversary, compared with 13 percent of those who had married before 1970.

Age at marriage is also strongly correlated with the likelihood of separation. Among those who had married before 20 years of age, 25 percent were separated within 10 years of marriage, compared with 16 percent among women who had married after they turned 25. Māori women had a greater likelihood of separation by any given duration of marriage than non-Māori women. For instance, 25 percent of Māori women had separated within 10 years of marriage, compared with 19 percent of non-Māori women. It is interesting that there were no significant educational differentials in the likelihood of separation, but there were differences by occupation

at marriage. Relatively fewer professional women had separated than non-professional or non-working women.

In Table 3.2, we present rates of separation within varying durations of marriage classified by the usual socio-demographic variables. To determine whether the risk of separation varied as the duration of the marriage increased, it is necessary to combine the figures for the first two columns, since these two columns together cover the first five years of the marriage, an equivalent period to the other intervals in the table. It is evident that, overall, there was no association between duration of marriage and probability of separation. Ten percent of marriages had ended in separation within the first five years, compared with 11 percent, nine percent and nine percent for the following three five-year periods. It should be noted, however, that this result was not confirmed by the multivariate analysis (see the following discussion).

Rates of separation were greater for younger birth cohorts and more recent marriage cohorts, those who had married before 20 years of age and Māori: all of these results are consistent with the earlier results on cumulative proportions separated by varying durations of marriage. Among younger birth cohorts and more recent marriage cohorts, marriages were more likely to break down quickly: 18 percent of those born in the period 1970–1975 had separated before reaching their second wedding anniversary, compared with only two percent of those born before 1950. And 10 percent of those who had married in the period 1980–1995 had separated more than two years but less than five years after they had married, compared with only one percent of those who had married before 1970.

Multivariate analysis

Results from the multivariate analysis are given in Table 3.3. Four time-related variables were included in the analysis: birth cohort; age; duration of marriage; and calendar period. All four variables were found to be important covariates of the likelihood of separation. Women of more recent birth cohorts have been more likely to separate than those born in earlier years. For instance, women born between 1970 and 1975 were nearly four times as likely to separate as those born before 1970.

In addition to a cohort effect, there was also a period effect. The likelihood of separation has consistently been higher in the years since 1970 compared with the years prior to 1970. Indeed, a woman's chances of separation since 1970 have more than doubled compared with earlier years. The biggest shift in the probability of separation occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s. Although it continued to increase in the 1980s, there was little further growth in the 1990s. This indicates that the likelihood of separation may now have stabilised.

Older women also had a higher probability of separation. Compared with women aged less than 25, the chances of separation increased by around 25% for women in their late 20s, by around 50% for women in their early 30s and by around 75% for women in their late 30s.

Duration of marriage was also strongly associated with the likelihood of separation, in contrast to the results of the bivariate analysis. For women whose marriages had been intact for more than 10 but less than 20 years, the chances of separation were only about 40 percent as high as those of women who had been married for less than five years. For those in marriages of longer duration than 20 years, the likelihood of separation was further reduced: among women who had been married for this long, the chances of separation were only 20 percent as high as among women who had been married for less than five years. These results indicate that the longer a marriage has lasted, the less likelihood there is of a separation.

We included two characteristics relating to children in the analysis: the number of live births a woman had had; and the age of the youngest co-residing child. It

is interesting that childless women were only about half as likely to separate as those with at least one child, but that the likelihood of separation did not vary further by the number of live births a woman had had. The age of the youngest co-residing child had a complex association with the probability of separation. Women with pre-school children and women with no children aged younger than 16 were both more likely to separate than those with children in middle childhood. This indicates that the risk of separation varies across the family life cycle, with a heightened risk both when children are very young and when they have reached their mid-teens.

We also included five socio-demographic variables in the model: age at marriage; cohabitation before marriage; ethnicity; education; and occupation. Age at marriage turned out to be an important predictor of propensity to separate: the older a woman was at marriage, the lower the likelihood of separation. For those who had married in their early 20s, the chances of separation were only about 60 percent as high, and for those who had married in their late 20s, the chances of separation were only about 40 percent as high, as for those who had married in their teenage years. Prior cohabitation increased the chances of separation by 35 percent compared with those who had not cohabited prior to their marriage. Interestingly, there was no difference between Māori and non-Māori women in the probability of separation once all the factors included in Table 3.3 were controlled for.

Women's levels of education and occupation had a more complex pattern of associations with the likelihood of separation, and these results are more difficult to interpret. First, these two variables had opposite influences on the likelihood of separation. While higher occupational status of women increased the likelihood of separation, higher education decreased it.² However, it should be noted that the educational effects were significant only at a lower level of significance.³ They should perhaps be partially discounted for this reason. The detailed pattern of results for women's occupations was complex. Women with professional jobs and those with semi-professional jobs were both more likely to separate than those with non-professional jobs. However, women who were not working were also more likely to separate than those with non-professional jobs.

² The result for occupational status is the reverse of what was found in the bivariate analysis. In that case, however, occupation was measured once only, at the time of marriage. Here, it is a time-varying variable that might change from year to year.

³ $p \leq 0.10$ (see note to Table 3.3).



It is unclear what might be giving rise to these complex effects, although it is possible to speculate that different mechanisms might be involved. In particular, it is possible that women with professional and semi-professional occupations might be more easily able to leave an unsatisfactory marriage because they have more economic independence, while women who are not working might be living in more straitened financial circumstances, which might place their marriages under strain. Such speculative hypotheses would, however, need to be confirmed by further research.

3b Repartnering after Separation

Bivariate results

Although rates of separation have increased substantially since the 1960s, there has not been a parallel decrease in the cumulative proportion of their lives that women spend in unions. This is due to a simultaneous increase in the propensity to remarry or repartner in cohabitation.

In the NZWFEE data set, there were 710 women who had separated from a first marriage. Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of these women who went on to another partnership, whether cohabitation or marriage, within varying durations of the separation are given in Table 3.4. A vast majority of separated women (74 percent) had repartnered within 10 years. In fact, within the first two years after separation, about 30 percent had repartnered.

There were some differences between birth cohorts. The younger the birth cohort, the higher the likelihood that the woman would have entered another union. These differences, however, were relatively small.

Substantial differentials in the likelihood of repartnering were found by age at separation, the number of children the woman had given birth to and the age of her youngest co-residing child. In general, the older her age at separation, the less likely it was that a woman would repartner. For instance, among women who had separated from a first marriage after reaching 40 years of age, only 17 percent had repartnered within two years of separation, compared with 33 percent among women who had separated in their late 20s and 44 percent among women who had separated before the age of 25. Women with more children were less likely to

repartner: only 14 percent of those who had had four or more live births had repartnered within two years of the separation, compared with about 30 percent of those who had had one or two live births and half of those who had not had any children. Having an older co-residing child also decreased the propensity to repartner. It should be noted, however, that number of live births and age of the youngest co-residing child are both correlated with age at separation. Thus, it is unclear which of these variables is the more fundamental determinant of the probability of repartnering. This issue is subsequently addressed in the multivariate analysis.

There were no significant differences in the probability of repartnering between Māori and non-Māori women. On the other hand, there was a significant difference in the probability of repartnering between those who were working and those who were not. For instance, 84 percent of those with professional jobs had repartnered within 10 years of the separation, compared with 63 percent of those who were not working.

The likelihood of repartnering was highest in the years immediately following separation. As Table 3.5 shows, the rate of repartnering was 30 percent in the first two years after separation (which equates to 15 percent per year) and 39 percent in the next three years (which equates to 13 percent per year). Following this, the rate dropped to 38 percent during the following five-year period (which equates to below eight percent per year).

As expected, the duration-specific rates of repartnering repeat the pattern seen in the cumulative figures: repartnering was more likely among younger birth cohorts, among women who had separated at younger ages, among women with fewer live births and among women with younger dependent children. There were no ethnic differentials in the likelihood of repartnering, but women with no educational qualifications were somewhat less likely to repartner than those with secondary or other tertiary qualifications (at least after two years had passed). However, the figures for university-qualified women are something of an anomaly. While the chances of repartnering among the other three groups remained relatively high once two years had passed, those for university-qualified women declined significantly after five years of separation. As a result, this group of women had a lower chance of repartnering after five years of separation than those

with no qualifications. Women in employment were also more likely to repartner than those who were not working, and those with professional occupations tended to have a higher probability of repartnering.

Multivariate results

The results of the multivariate analysis presented in Table 3.6 only partially support the observations made from the bivariate analyses. The analysis confirmed that two of the strongest influences on the probability of repartnering were duration of separation and age at separation. The longer a woman had been separated, the less likely it was that she would repartner. The propensity to enter another union was highest in the first two years after separation from a first marriage; it then decreased progressively. For women who had not repartnered within the first five years after separation, their chances of repartnering in the next five years were only about 40 percent as high as in the first two years after separation. After 10 years had passed, a woman had only a 16 percent chance of repartnering compared with her chances during the first two years after separation.

The analysis also confirmed that a woman's chances of repartnering were highest if she had separated before the age of 30. If she had separated after turning 40, her chances of repartnering were greatly diminished. The chances of repartnering among women who were aged over 40 when they separated were only a little over a quarter of those of women who were aged under 30 when they separated.

For the two child-related variables, the pattern of results was different from that observed in the bivariate analysis. In the case of the age of the youngest co-residing child, the pattern was reversed: those with no children aged less than 16 were significantly more likely to repartner than those with a child aged under 10. The number of live births was no longer important, in contrast to the results of the bivariate analysis. Rather, what was important was whether the woman had had any children or none at all: childless women were about 60 percent more likely to repartner than those with at least one child.

There was no significant ethnic differential in the propensity to repartner. Similarly, there were no differences in the propensity to repartner between less

educated and more educated women. However, the occupational status of women made some difference: women with professional jobs were about 70 percent more likely to repartner than those who were not working.

3c Summary

The major findings on patterns of separation and repartnering among New Zealand women are broadly consistent with results from North America, Australia and Europe. The post-1970 period has seen substantial increases in rates of separation. Although the probability of separation continued to increase in the 1980s, the major change was between the 1960s and 1970s; the increase in the 1980s was more modest and there was little further growth in the 1990s. This indicates that rates of separation may now have stabilised.

In addition to this period effect, women in the most recent birth cohort (1970–1975) have been nearly four times more likely to separate than those born in earlier years.

Within the first 20 years of marriage, one in three women can be expected to separate from their husbands. Getting married at a young age increased the probability of separation: among women who married at ages 25–29, the chances of separation were only about 40 percent as high as among those who had married before the age of 20.

The probability of separation declined as the duration of the marriage lengthened: for women who had been married for 20 years, the chances of separation were only a fifth as high as those of women who had been married for less than five years. Furthermore, a woman's chances of separation diminished with increasing age. The age of her youngest co-residing child also influenced a woman's chances of separation: those whose youngest child was in middle childhood or early adolescence (ie between five and 14 years of age) were less likely to separate than those whose youngest child was a pre-schooler or an older adolescent.

Although ethnicity was an important correlate of separation at the bivariate level, it was no longer significant when other factors were statistically controlled for in the multivariate analyses.

Parallel to the increased propensity to separate since the 1960s is an increased tendency to enter a new partnership after separation. In fact, about one in three women had repartnered within two years of separation (in either cohabitation or marriage) and about three in four women had repartnered within 10 years of separation. Duration of separation had the strongest effect on a woman's chances of repartnering.

In particular, repartnering was most likely shortly after separation. Being of a younger age at the time of the separation, being childless, having no co-residing children under the age of 15 years and holding a professional occupation all increased the propensity of a separated woman to enter into a new union. There was no difference, however, between Māori and non-Māori women in the likelihood of repartnering after separation.

Table 3.1

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women separated from a first marriage within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion separated within:					Number of women in first marriage
	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	< 15 yrs	< 20 yrs	
Birth cohort						
1936–1949	0.02	0.04	0.13	0.19	0.24	766
1950–1959	0.04	0.09	0.19	0.28	0.37	850
1960–1969	0.06	0.17	0.28			593
1970–1975	0.18					86
Year of marriage						
Before 1970	0.02	0.03	0.13	0.19	0.25	549
1970–1979	0.04	0.09	0.18	0.26	0.34	1,254
1980–1995	0.07	0.16	0.26			492
Age at marriage						
Under 20 years	0.06	0.11	0.25	0.32	0.41	616
20–24 years	0.04	0.09	0.18	0.25	0.30	751
25 years and over	0.04	0.08	0.16	0.23	0.29	928
Ethnicity						
Māori	0.07	0.15	0.25	0.32	0.39	294
Non-Māori	0.04	0.09	0.19	0.26	0.32	2,001
Education						
No qualifications	0.06	0.10	0.20	0.27	0.34	618
Secondary qualifications	0.04	0.10	0.21	0.27	0.31	563
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.03	0.08	0.17	0.24	0.32	903
University qualifications	0.04	0.10	0.17	0.26	0.37	211
Occupation at marriage						
Professional	0.03	0.07	0.14	0.19	0.28	504
Semi-professional	0.04	0.08	0.19	0.26	0.32	887
Non-professional	0.04	0.09	0.22	0.30	0.36	244
Not working	0.06	0.13	0.23	0.30	0.37	640
Overall	0.04	0.09	0.19	0.26	0.33	2,295

Table 3.2

Rate of separation from a first marriage within various durations of marriage, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Rate of separation by duration of marriage:					Number of women in first marriage
	0–2 yrs	2–5 yrs	5–10 yrs	10–15 yrs	15–20 yrs	
Birth cohort						
1936–1949	0.02	0.02	0.10	0.07	0.07	766
1950–1959	0.04	0.05	0.11	0.10	0.12	850
1960–1969	0.06	0.12	0.14			593
1970–1975	0.18					86
Year of marriage						
Before 1970	0.02	0.01	0.10	0.07	0.07	549
1970–1979	0.04	0.05	0.11	0.09	0.11	1,254
1980–1995	0.07	0.10	0.12			492
Age at marriage						
Under 20 years	0.06	0.06	0.15	0.10	0.12	616
20–24 years	0.04	0.06	0.10	0.08	0.07	751
25 years and over	0.04	0.05	0.08	0.08	0.08	928
Ethnicity						
Māori	0.07	0.08	0.12	0.09	0.10	294
Non-Māori	0.04	0.05	0.11	0.09	0.09	2,001
Education						
No qualifications	0.06	0.04	0.12	0.09	0.10	618
Secondary qualifications	0.04	0.07	0.12	0.08	0.05	563
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.03	0.05	0.10	0.08	0.10	903
University qualifications	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.10	0.15	211
Occupation at marriage						
Professional	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.10	504
Semi-professional	0.04	0.05	0.11	0.10	0.07	887
Non-professional	0.04	0.06	0.14	0.11	0.08	244
Not working	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.08	0.10	640
Overall	0.04	0.06	0.11	0.09	0.09	2,295

Table 3.3

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of selected covariates on the likelihood of separation from a first marriage			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	1936–1949 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	1.10	0.68
	1960–1969	1.52	1.96 **
	1970–1975	3.70	3.35 **
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1960	1.01	0.02
	1960–1969 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	2.06	3.07 **
	1980–1989	2.37	3.10 **
	1990–1995	2.39	2.73 **
Age of woman (tv)	15–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	1.28	1.54
	30–34 years	1.55	1.98 **
	35–59 years	1.75	2.07 **
Marriage duration (tv)	0–5 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–10 years	0.85	1.11
	10–20 years	0.42	3.83 **
	20+ years	0.20	4.69 **
Number of live births (tv)	0	0.53	2.77 **
	1 ^R	1.00	–
	2	1.15	1.02
	3	1.01	0.09
	4+	1.06	0.32
Age of co-residing youngest child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	0.59	3.00 **
	10–14 years	0.74	2.00 **
	15 years and over	1.07	0.41
Age at marriage	Under 20 ^R	1.00	–
	20–24	0.62	4.56 **
	25–29	0.41	4.36 **
Cohabitation before marriage	No ^R	1.00	–
	Yes	1.35	3.09 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	0.92	0.62



Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of selected covariates on the likelihood of separation from a first marriage ... Continued

Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	0.80	1.93 *
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.81	1.98 **
	University qualifications	0.82	1.08
Occupation (tv)	Professional	1.80	3.38 **
	Semi-professional	1.60	2.92 **
	Non-professional ^R	1.00	–
	Not working	1.38	2.04 **

Log likelihood = 4275
 χ^2 (df = 30) = 171

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$
 * = $p \leq 0.10$

Table 3.4

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women repartnering after separation from a first marriage within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics				
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion repartnering within:			Number of separated women
	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Birth cohort				
1936–1949	0.21	0.51	0.67	272
1950–1959	0.35	0.60	0.77	282
1960–1969	0.36	0.64		140
1970–1975				16
Year of separation				
Before 1980	0.30	0.66	0.81	189
1980–1989	0.31	0.55		310
1990–1995	0.29			211
Age at separation				
Under 25 years	0.44	0.74	0.90	151
25–29 years	0.33	0.65	0.82	186
30–34 years	0.26	0.52	0.66	147
35–39 years	0.25	0.49	0.65	109
40 years and over	0.17	0.34	0.47	117
Number of live born children at separation				
0	0.50	0.78	0.91	125
1	0.29	0.58	0.81	106
2	0.28	0.60	0.72	242
3	0.27	0.51	0.69	138
4+	0.14	0.33	0.51	99
Age of youngest child at separation				
0–4 years	0.48	0.87	0.95	162
5–9 years	0.24	0.59	0.90	134
10–14 years	0.20	0.44	0.76	113
15 years and over	0.11	0.25	0.34	176
Ethnicity				
Māori	0.33	0.60	0.75	100
Non-Māori	0.30	0.57	0.74	610
Education				
No qualifications	0.30	0.53	0.69	228
Secondary qualifications	0.35	0.63	0.79	156
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.26	0.57	0.76	272
University qualifications	0.29	0.61	0.70	54



Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women repartnering after separation from a first marriage within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics ... Continued

Characteristics	Cumulative proportion repartnering within:			Number of separated women
	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Occupation at separation				
Professional	0.38	0.66	0.84	157
Semi-professional	0.34	0.66	0.81	179
Non-professional	0.41	0.62	0.76	55
Not working	0.23	0.47	0.63	311
Overall	0.30	0.58	0.74	710

Table 3.5

Rate of repartnering among separated women within various durations, by selected socio-demographic characteristics				
Characteristics	Rate of repartnering by duration			Number of separated women
	0–2 yrs	2–5 yrs	5–10 yrs	
Birth cohort				
1936–1949	0.21	0.38	0.32	272
1950–1959	0.35	0.39	0.43	282
1960–1969	0.36			140
1970–1975				16
Year of separation				
Before 1980	0.30	0.52	0.44	189
1980–1989	0.31	0.35		310
1990–1995	0.29			211
Age group at separation				
Under 25 years	0.44	0.53	0.62	151
25–29 years	0.33	0.47	0.50	186
30–34 years	0.26	0.35	0.28	147
35–39 years	0.25	0.32	0.31	109
40 years and over	0.17	0.21	0.19	117
Number of live born children at separation				
0	0.50	0.56	0.60	125
1	0.29	0.41	0.56	106
2	0.28	0.44	0.31	242
3	0.27	0.33	0.38	138
4+	0.14	0.22	0.28	99
Age of youngest child at separation				
0–4 years	0.48	0.75	0.60	162
5–9 years	0.24	0.47	0.75	134
10–14 years	0.20	0.30	0.57	113
15 years and over	0.11	0.16	0.12	176
Ethnicity				
Māori	0.33	0.40	0.38	100
Non-Māori	0.30	0.39	0.38	610
Education				
No qualifications	0.30	0.32	0.34	228
Secondary qualifications	0.35	0.43	0.43	156
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.26	0.43	0.44	272
University qualifications	0.29	0.45	0.23	54
Occupation at separation				
Professional	0.38	0.45	0.51	157
Semi-professional	0.34	0.48	0.45	179
Non-professional	0.41	0.35	0.36	55
Not working	0.23	0.32	0.29	311
Overall	0.30	0.39	0.38	710

Table 3.6

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity to repartner after separation from a first marriage			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Age at separation of marriage	< 30 years ^R	1.00	–
	30–34 years	0.65	2.97 **
	35–39 years	0.55	3.02 **
	40+	0.28	4.73 **
Year of separation of first marriage	Before 1980 ^R	1.00	–
	1980–1989	0.88	1.21
	1990–1995	0.74	1.66
Duration of separation (tv)	0–2 years ^R	1.00	–
	2–5 years	0.71	3.09 **
	5–10 years	0.41	5.42 **
	10+ years	0.16	5.54 **
Number of live births (tv)	0	1.62	2.69 **
	1 ^R	1.00	–
	2	1.06	0.42
	3+	1.05	0.31
Age of youngest co-residing child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	0.97	0.22
	10–14 years	1.33	1.41
	15+ years	1.82	2.26 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	0.81	1.44
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	1.26	1.64
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.96	0.32
	University qualifications	0.95	0.25
Occupation at exposure (tv)	Professional	1.70	3.23 **
	Semi-professional	1.14	1.03
	Non-professional	1.31	1.32
	Not working ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 4299
 χ^2 (df = 25) = 128

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$



4



Timing of Parenthood and Birth Interval



This chapter examines whether and when New Zealand women have children and what changes have occurred in patterns of childbearing over recent decades. As with union formation, the timing of first births has undergone substantial change since the baby-boom period. We first provide life-table estimates of the proportion of women having children before varying ages. We then discuss marital status at first birth and the interval between births. This is followed by an examination of the future childbearing intentions of childless women. We also carried out a multivariate analysis of timing of first births, but have not presented the results here as they were not very different from the bivariate results. More importantly, the bivariate analysis provided a more detailed picture of the results by birth cohort and ethnicity.

4a First Births

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of women having a first birth before varying ages are given in Table 4.1. Although the overall figures show that close to 90 percent of New Zealand women have had a child before 40 years of age, this may not necessarily prove to be true for the youngest cohorts of women. For instance, while 60 percent of women born before 1950 had had their first child before they turned 25 years of age, only 42 percent of those born during the 1960s had done so. Similarly, there are differences between birth cohorts in the proportion of women who had had a child before reaching 30 and 35 years of age, although the differences narrow as the age of the women increases. A pertinent question here is whether the lower rates of birth at younger ages are simply a reflection of delays in childbearing or whether they prefigure a reduction in the total proportion of women who will eventually give birth. These data do not allow us to answer this question in a definitive way. The future childbearing intentions of childless women, examined later in this chapter, provide an additional perspective on this issue.

Māori and non-Māori women differ significantly in the timing of their first births. While 72 percent of Māori women had had a first birth before the age of 25, only 46 percent of non-Māori women had done so. Similarly, a higher proportion of Māori women had had their first child in their teenage years (around one in three), compared with non-Māori women (around one in eight). However, the higher rates of earlier childbirth among Māori are almost counterbalanced by higher rates of later childbirth among non-Māori, leaving only a small residual difference in the proportions of women who had given birth by age 40.

There are clear differences by educational qualifications in the proportions reaching parenthood at younger ages. Before they turned 25, 70 percent of women with no qualifications had had their first child, compared with 47 percent among those with secondary qualifications and just 17 percent of those with university qualifications. The differentials persist, although they narrow, as the age of the women rises.

To complement the data on the cumulative proportions of women attaining parenthood discussed above, we provide in Table 4.2 rates of first births in different age groups by the same set of socio-demographic characteristics. It is clear from this table that the likelihood of having a first child was greatest in the 25–29 age group; following this, the chances of having a first birth were more or less equal in the 20–24 and 30–35 age groups. If a woman was childless at age 25, she had a 52 percent chance of having a child in the next five years; whereas her chances of having a child in the next five years were 40 percent at age 20 and 41 percent at age 30.

The birth cohort and ethnic differentials in first birth probabilities are of particular interest. The younger their birth cohort, the less likely women were to have their first child before the age of 25 and, correspondingly, the more likely they were to have their first child in their 30s. This has resulted in a shift in women's relative odds of having a first child in their early 20s compared with their early 30s. This can be seen by comparing the rates of first births among women born before 1950 and those born in the 1950s. While the probability of a first birth peaked in the 25–29 age range for both groups, those born in the 1950s had a higher probability of having their first birth after they turned 30 than before age 25; in contrast, those born before 1950 had a higher



probability of having their first birth before age 25 than after they turned 30. The further reduction in the probability of a first birth before age 25 for the cohort of women born in the 1960s suggests that this trend is likely to intensify in the future.

For Māori, the probability of a first birth peaked in the age range 20–24 (at 58 percent), followed by the age range 25–29 (37 percent). But for non-Māori, the peak rate was in the age range 25–29 (at 53 percent), followed by the age range 30–34 (42 percent). It is interesting that, for Māori women, the chances of having a first birth in their teenage years were very similar to the chances of having a first birth in their early 30s, but for non-Māori women, the chances of a teenage birth were less than a third of the chances of having a first birth in their early 30s.

Those with higher levels of education were more likely to have their first child in their late 20s or early 30s, while those without qualifications were more likely to have their first child during their 20s. Women with a university qualification had a lower probability of having a first birth before the age of 35 than other women, but had a higher probability of having a first birth in the 35–39 age group (34 percent) than other women (eg nine percent among those with no qualifications).

4b Non-Marital First Births

One of the most striking features of family formation trends in the western world in the post-war period is the increasing proportion of children being born outside marriage. During the peak of the baby boom, marriages were frequently precipitated by pregnancy: many couples entered into marriage to legitimise the birth of a child conceived pre-maritally. This was particularly the case among those who had a child in their teens. In more recent years, however, an ex-nuptial pregnancy has been much less likely to precipitate a marriage.

The distribution of marital status at the time of first birth by ethnicity, birth cohort and age at first birth is given in Table 4.3. Māori women had a higher likelihood

of having their first child outside marriage than their non-Māori counterparts. Among those who had their first birth before reaching 20 years of age, about a third of both Māori and non-Māori women did so outside any union. However, more Māori women had their first birth in a cohabitation relationship (35 percent) than non-Māori women (21 percent). On the other hand, non-Māori women had a greater tendency to legitimise a first birth by marrying than Māori.

The data presented in Table 4.3 establish that there is a strong correlation between early first birth and non-marital status at the time of the birth. This is strongest among non-Māori women: 56 percent of non-Māori women who had their first birth before the age of 20 did so outside of marriage, compared with only 17 percent of women who had their first birth after they had turned 20. Among Māori, a similar, although weaker, pattern was evident: 69 percent of Māori women who had their first birth before the age of 20 did so outside of marriage, compared with 53 percent of those who had their first birth after they had turned 20. The association between early first birth and non-marital status at the time of the birth has grown stronger across successive birth cohorts. For instance, among women who were born in the 1960s and who had their first birth before the age of 20, only 14 percent (of both Māori and non-Māori) had given birth within marriage. This was down from 54 percent of non-Māori women and 37 percent of Māori women among the cohort who were born in the 1950s.

Although the data for the most recent birth cohort are incomplete and sparse, it appears that having first births (and probably subsequent births) in cohabitation is gaining momentum for older as well as younger women. For instance, among non-Māori women born in the period 1960–1969, 15 percent of those who had their first birth after they turned 20 did so in cohabitation; this figure was up from nine percent among those born during the period 1950–1959. The corresponding figures for Māori women were 45 percent (for the 1960–1969 birth cohort) and 22 percent (for the 1950–1959 birth cohort).



Thus, it is evident that women of more recent birth cohorts have a higher likelihood of having their first births (and possibly higher-order births) in cohabitation or outside any union. This likelihood is substantially higher for Māori than for non-Māori among women aged 20 or more. It is also clear that, if a first birth occurs in a woman's teenage years, then it is several times more likely to take place outside marriage. In fact, for the youngest birth cohort (1970–1975), around nine out of 10 non-Māori women who gave birth in their teenage years were either cohabiting or not in any form of union. For Māori, the pattern was even more striking: around 19 out of 20 Māori women who gave birth in their teenage years were either cohabiting or not in any form of union.

It has been argued in the literature that the childbearing patterns of women are related to the childbearing patterns observed among their mothers. More specifically, it is often posited that the likelihood of teenage childbearing is strongly correlated with whether or not the teen's mother had herself given birth in her teenage years. We could not test this hypothesis using the 1995 data. Thus, we collected new information in a related survey to allow an examination of this issue.⁴

The results given in Table 4.4 show that, if a mother had had her first birth in her teenage years, her daughter was more likely also to have her first birth in her teenage years. For instance, among women who had given birth, 29 percent of those whose mothers had had a teenage birth had their own first birth in their teenage years, compared with 13 percent among those whose mothers who had had their first birth after they had turned 20. The figures presented in Table 4.4 confirm this pattern across all birth cohorts: a woman was about twice as likely to have her first birth in her teenage years if her mother had also been a teenage mother than if her mother had had her first child after she had turned 20.

4C Spacing of Births

In most countries in the developed world, relatively low priority has been accorded to research on spacing between births. This is especially the case in New Zealand. It is important to study this aspect of family formation, however, because it is directly related not only to the number of children a woman is likely to have in her lifetime, but also to the health and wellbeing of both mother and children.

Past analyses of the fragmentary data available on spacing of births have shown that New Zealand women have had relatively short intervals between births, compared with countries like Canada and the United States. The proportions of New Zealand women having a second birth within 24, 36 and 60 months of their first birth, by calendar period, are given in Table 4.5. Those who had had their first birth in the late 1950s (ie during the baby boom) had a second birth sooner than women who had had their first birth 10 years later. Among women who had had their first birth in 1955–1959, 57 percent had a second birth within two years; this percentage declined to 44 percent among women who had had their first birth 10 years later (1965–1969) and declined further to 26 percent among those having their first birth another 10 years on (1975–1979).

Although the average interval between births has lengthened in more recent years, it is still marginally shorter for New Zealand women than for, say, American women. The changes in birth intervals for New Zealand women over the course of the 1960s and 1970s were quite dramatic, as the above figures show. These changes coincided with, and were largely driven by, the modern contraceptive revolution, during which the introduction and spread of hormonal contraceptives gave women greater control over both timing and spacing of births, as well as the capacity to limit the total number of births.

⁴ We undertook a small-scale CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview) survey to update and extend the 1995 NZWFEE survey for some key variables. This survey included 1,814 women aged 20–64, who were interviewed during August–September 2001. The survey had a response rate of 63 percent, but Māori women and women aged under 30 were under-represented among the respondents. To compensate for this, we derived weights using the 1996 census and applied them to the information extracted from the CATI survey. Because there were some discrepancies in estimates of the same statistics between the 1995 and 2001 surveys, we have not used the 2001 survey data in the report, except to investigate this particular issue, on which no data were available from the 1995 survey.



4d Childbearing Intentions of Childless Women

The data presented above indicate that, from the middle to the end of the twentieth century, decreasing proportions of women had reached parenthood by any given age. All the evidence presented here points to a continuation of this trend. More recent cohorts of women have delayed having their first child, raising the possibility that many of them may remain childless by the time they reach the end of their reproductive span.

The preceding results have shown that, among recent cohorts of women, increasing proportions remained childless in their 20s. To estimate the proportion of women who will remain childless at the end of their childbearing years, we asked women who had not yet given birth whether they intended to have children in the future. The results are given in Table 4.6.

Although over 50 percent of women aged 20–29 were childless in 1995, a vast majority of them (77 percent) said that they intended to become parents in the future. A smaller majority (55 percent) of childless women in their early 30s also said they intended to become parents in the future. As the last columns in Table 4.6 show, if women's stated intentions to have children in the future were to be realised, between five and 13 percent would remain childless by the end of their reproductive span. The data point to the conclusion that most of those who postpone childbearing in their 20s are likely to catch up in their 30s. Overall, it is estimated that about 11 percent of women will remain childless at the end of their reproductive lives, a similar figure to that among the older cohorts in the study.

4e Summary

The experience of those born in the 1950s shows that the vast majority of New Zealand women are likely to become parents by the time they reach the end of their reproductive lives. However, most women, particularly non-Māori women, now do so in their late 20s and 30s, compared with their counterparts in the baby-boom period when childbearing occurred at somewhat younger ages. In fact, among the most recent birth cohort for which we have data, although the peak age range for childbearing remains 25–29, women are now more likely to have their first child in their early 30s than in their early 20s.

Although there are only small differentials between Māori and non-Māori women in the proportion who eventually reach parenthood by 40 years of age, Māori women are much more likely to become mothers in their teenage years and early 20s than their non-Māori counterparts. There has also been an increased tendency for early childbearing to occur outside of marriage. For the most recent birth cohorts and time periods, where a woman had her first child before the age of 20, in an overwhelming majority of cases the child was born in cohabitation or outside any form of union, rather than within a traditional conjugal union. It is also evident that, in all age groups, having a first birth (and probably subsequent births) in cohabitation has gained momentum since the 1970s.

During the baby boom, the average interval between births to New Zealand women was one of the shortest in the developed world. Although it has widened recently, the average birth interval in New Zealand is still shorter than in countries like Canada, the United States and Australia. The widening of birth intervals was facilitated by the introduction and spread of hormonal contraception since the 1960s.

The increased proportion of women who remain childless in their 20s and early 30s among younger birth cohorts might be interpreted to mean that more among them may remain childless as they near the end of their reproductive span. However, data on their future childbearing intentions show that only about 11 percent of women are likely to remain childless if these intentions were to be realised. This is close to current rates of childlessness among older cohorts of women in the study.



Table 4.1

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of women having a first birth before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Cumulative proportions having first births before age:					Number of women
	20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	35 yrs	40 yrs	
Birth cohort						
1936–1949	0.15	0.60	0.84	0.90	0.92	803
1950–1959	0.18	0.52	0.75	0.86		934
1960–1969	0.14	0.42				860
1970–1975	0.14					420
Ethnicity						
Māori	0.35	0.72	0.83	0.88	0.91	513
Non-Māori	0.13	0.46	0.75	0.85	0.88	2,504
Education						
No qualifications	0.29	0.70	0.87	0.92	0.93	787
Secondary qualifications	0.12	0.47	0.77	0.87	0.90	765
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.11	0.43	0.71	0.83	0.86	1,163
University qualifications	0.03	0.17	0.50	0.68	0.79	302
Overall	0.15	0.50	0.76	0.86	0.88	3,017

Table 4.2

Rate of first births at various ages, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Age-specific rate of first birth					Number of women
	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	
Birth cohort						
1936–1949	0.15	0.53	0.61	0.38	0.21	803
1950–1959	0.18	0.41	0.47	0.45		934
1960–1969	0.14	0.33				860
1970–1975	0.14					420
Ethnicity						
Māori	0.34	0.58	0.37	0.33		513
Non-Māori	0.12	0.39	0.53	0.42	0.19	2,504
Education						
No qualifications	0.28	0.58	0.57	0.41	0.09	787
Secondary qualifications	0.12	0.40	0.57	0.41	0.26	765
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.11	0.36	0.48	0.44	0.14	1,163
University qualifications	0.03	0.14	0.40	0.37	0.34	302
Overall	0.15	0.40	0.52	0.41	0.19	3,017

Table 4.3

Marital status at first birth, by ethnicity, birth cohort and age at first birth (percentages)					
	Birth cohort				All
	1936–1949	1950–1959	1960–1969	1970–1975	
NON-MĀORI					
Age at first birth < 20 years					
Post-maritally conceived	22.5	21.8	3.9	4.5	15.7
Legitimated by marriage	48.0	32.7	10.5	4.5	28.6
Born in cohabitation	5.9	10.0	39.5	50.0	20.8
Born outside any union	23.5	35.5	46.1	40.9	34.9
All (Number of mothers)	100 (100)	100 (112)	100 (70)	100 (40)	100 (322)
Age at first birth ≥ 20 years					
Post-maritally conceived	83.2	78.0	65.7		74.4
Legitimated by marriage	8.4	7.9	9.8		8.4
Born in cohabitation	1.9	9.0	15.4		9.4
Born outside any union	6.5	5.1	9.1		7.8
All (Number of mothers)	100 (559)	100 (599)	100 (444)	–	100 (1657)
MĀORI					
Age at first birth < 20 years					
Post-maritally conceived	22.7	12.5	6.1	4.2	10.4
Legitimated by marriage	63.6	25.0	8.2	0.0	20.7
Born in cohabitation	0.0	27.5	44.9	58.3	34.8
Born outside any union	13.6	35.0	40.8	37.5	34.0
All (Number of mothers)	100 (30)	100 (53)	100 (67)	100 (37)	100 (187)
Age at first birth ≥ 20 years					
Post-maritally conceived	60.9	51.0	20.0		37.3
Legitimated by marriage	10.9	12.2	9.2		10.2
Born in cohabitation	8.7	22.4	44.6		31.1
Born outside any union	19.6	14.3	26.1		21.5
All (Number of mothers)	100 (53)	100 (67)	100 (89)	–	100 (236)

Note: Estimates have not been made for women in the 1970–1975 birth cohort whose first birth was after the age of 20. This is because these women would have been aged only between 20 and 25 at the time of the survey. As the peak years for childbearing are at older ages than this, the subgroup of women who had already given birth by age 25 constitutes a biased sample of women aged over 20 and thus does not provide a good basis for generating statistics about marital status at first birth among this age group.





Table 4.4

Age at first birth of survey respondents by the age at which their mothers had their first child, classified by age of respondents at the time of the survey					
Age group of respondents	Age at which respondents' mothers had their first birth	Proportion of respondents having their first birth when they were aged:		Total	Number of women
		Under 20 years	20 years and above		
20–29 years	Under 20 years	45.2	54.8	100	73
	20 years and above	22.1	77.9	100	104
	All	31.6	68.4	100	177
30–39 years	Under 20 years	16.5	83.5	100	85
	20 years and above	10.7	89.4	100	291
	All	12.0	88.0	100	376
40–49 years	Under 20 years	33.9	66.1	100	59
	20 years and above	13.1	86.9	100	298
	All	16.5	83.5	100	357
50–64 years	Under 20 years	22.9	77.1	100	48
	20 years and above	11.7	88.3	100	317
	All	13.2	86.8	100	365
All ages	Under 20 years	29.4	70.6	100	265
	20 years and above	12.9	87.1	100	1,010
	All	16.3	83.9	100	1,275

Note: In contrast to all other tables in the report, this table is not sourced from the NZWFEE survey, but was based on a subsequent survey carried out in 2001. See footnote 4 for an account of this survey.

Table 4.5

Cumulative percentage of women having a second birth within 24, 36 and 60 months, by period			
Period of first birth	Months since first birth		
	24 months	36 months	60 months
1955–1959	57.3	80.2	88.4
1960–1964	47.7	76.5	88.1
1965–1969	44.1	69.9	82.4
1970–1974	32.3	60.7	80.8
1975–1979	26.1	55.4	75.6
1980–1984	27.4	55.6	74.9
1985–1989	24.7	53.9	75.0
1990–1994	27.4		

Table 4.6

Proportion of women childless at the time of the survey who intended to have children in the future, by age group							
Age group	Yes (1)	No (2)(N)	Don't know (3)(N)	Number of childless women (4)	Total number of women (5)	Expected proportions childless (6) ¹	(7) ²
20–24	81.4	10.3(30)	8.2(24)	291	403	7.4	13.4
25–29	70.2	21.6(37)	8.2(14)	171	420	8.8	12.1
30–34	54.5	31.3(31)	14.1(14)	99	454	6.8	9.9
35–39	32.0	50.0(25)	18.0(9)	50	440	5.7	7.7

Note: In contrast to practice elsewhere in the report, the Ns given here are weighted numbers, rather than unweighted. This is to ensure that the computations, which were based on weighted figures, are fully transparent.

1.
$$\frac{\text{Number of women who do not intend to have children (col. 2)}}{\text{Total number of women (col. 5)}} = \text{col (6)}$$
2.
$$\frac{\text{Number of women who do not intend (col. 2) plus don't know (col. 3)}}{\text{Total number of women (col. 5)}} = \text{col (7)}$$





5



Sole Parenthood



An important consequence of changes in union formation and dissolution in New Zealand since the 1960s is the increased prevalence of sole parenthood. Earlier chapters have shown that cohabitation, separation from first marriages and ex-marital childbearing have all increased substantially over the past 30 years or so. In this chapter, we look at the major implication of these changes for mothers and children: an increased propensity for mothers to be sole parents and for children to be living in a sole-parent family or household. The links between marriage breakdown and sole parenthood and between ex-marital childbearing and sole parenthood are clear enough. But the increased prevalence of cohabitation also makes a contribution to the growth of sole parenthood when such relationships dissolve. There is also evidence to suggest that such relationships are less stable than marriage and more likely to lead to sole parenthood. Again, as in the earlier chapters, we use both life-table measures and multivariate analysis.

5a Sole Parenthood: Experience among Mothers

Incidence of sole parenthood

This section examines the incidence of sole parenthood among New Zealand women who have ever given birth to a child. It is important to note that the analysis focuses on women who are mothers rather than the full sample of women. Thus, estimates of the likelihood of sole parenthood and the factors that influence this apply not to women generally but only to women once they have given birth.

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of mothers who had ever spent any time as a sole parent before varying ages are presented in Table 5.1. Before reaching the age of 25, about one in five mothers (19 percent) had spent some time as a sole parent. About two in five mothers (39 percent) had been a sole parent by the time they reached 40 years of age, and close to one in two mothers (46 percent) had been a sole parent by the time they reached 50 years of age.

The life-table estimates given in Table 5.1 show that there is a strong relationship between birth cohort and the likelihood of becoming a sole mother. In general, the younger the birth cohort to which a mother belonged, the more likely she was to spend some time as a sole parent before any given age. In fact, among the youngest cohort of women (those born during the period 1970–1975), over one in five mothers (21 percent) had spent some time as a sole parent before the age of 20. This figure had increased from 10 percent among women born in the period 1960–1969. These birth cohort differentials

persisted at ages 25 and 30. This association was confirmed by the multivariate analysis (Table 5.2). For instance, mothers born during the 1970–1975 period were about two-and-a-half times more likely to have spent some time as a sole parent than those born prior to 1960.

Although the bivariate life-table estimates given in Table 5.1 show that a much higher proportion of Māori mothers than non-Māori mothers had spent some time as a sole parent at all ages, the multivariate results given in Table 5.2 show no ethnicity effect. This indicates that the apparent differences between Māori and non-Māori mothers in the likelihood of becoming a sole parent are explained by other differences between Māori and non-Māori women. When the effects of all other variables are statistically controlled for, ethnicity is not a significant determinant of the propensity for mothers to become sole parents.

The level of mothers' educational qualifications is another important covariate of sole parenthood at the bivariate level (Table 5.1). Those with no qualifications were more likely to become sole parents than those with some form of educational qualification. But the multivariate analysis showed a more restricted pattern of associations (Table 5.2). The main difference was that mothers with a secondary qualification were less likely to become sole parents than those with no qualifications. There was also a difference between those with "other" tertiary qualifications and those with no qualifications at a more marginal level of significance. Those with university qualifications, however, were no less likely to become a sole parent than those with



no qualifications. While it is difficult to know how this pattern of results can be interpreted, it is evident that the educational qualifications of mothers, like their ethnicity, were not a strong determinant of the likelihood of becoming a sole parent.

An important finding is the strong relationship between the partnership status of a mother at the time of the birth of her last child and her likelihood of becoming a sole parent. Women who had had their last child in a cohabiting relationship were much more likely to become sole parents than those who had had their last child in a marriage. For example, only three percent of those who had had their last child in a marriage had become sole parents before reaching the age of 25, compared with 38 percent among those who had had their last child in cohabitation. The corresponding proportions who had become sole parents before 30 years of age were nine percent and 57 percent respectively. These results support our earlier speculation that cohabitational relationships may be less stable than marriages.

In the multivariate analysis, we included a number of time-varying variables that could not be used in the life-table analysis: age; calendar period; occupation; number of co-residing children; and age of the youngest co-residing child.

It can be observed from the multivariate results presented in Table 5.2 that there was no significant association between calendar period and the likelihood of becoming a sole mother. But, as pointed out earlier, there was an association with birth cohort: mothers in younger birth cohorts were more likely to become sole parents. There was also a negative relationship between a mother's age and her likelihood of becoming a sole parent: the older a mother was, the less likely it was that she would become a sole parent. The likelihood of becoming a sole parent was highest in the teenage years. Mothers aged under 20 were over four times as likely to become sole parents as those aged 20–24, while mothers in their 30s were only about a third as likely as those aged 20–24 to become sole parents.

The age of the youngest co-residing child was not an important influence on the likelihood of becoming a sole parent. But the number of co-residing children did have a significant influence on this likelihood: mothers with two or more co-residing children were only about

a third as likely as those with one co-residing child to become sole parents. The higher likelihood of mothers with one child becoming sole parents is likely to be due to the fact that a significant number of sole-parent families result from births to non-partnered women. It is important to remain aware that there are different pathways into sole parenthood, one of which is via the birth of a child outside a partnership.

The occupation of mothers was also included as a time-varying covariate in the multivariate model: this allowed the occupational status of a mother to change with each year of her age. The results of the analysis were quite unclear, however. There was some difference between mothers not in paid work and those with a semi-professional or non-professional job; however, these ran in different directions. Compared with mothers who were not in paid work, mothers in non-professional jobs were about 25 percent less likely to become sole parents, while those in semi-professional jobs were about 25 percent more likely to become sole parents. On the other hand, there was no discernible difference between mothers in professional occupations and those who were not in paid work. Overall, it is difficult to offer any straightforward interpretation of these results. They do suggest, however, that occupation was not a strong determinant of the probability of becoming a sole parent.

Duration of sole parenthood

It is clear from the above evidence that the incidence of sole parenthood has been increasing since the 1960s. Another issue of considerable interest is how long mothers remain sole parents and whether there have been any changes in the duration of sole parenthood over time. How long a woman remains a sole mother depends on her chances of entering another union and on when the last dependent child leaves home. Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of women who had ceased to be a sole mother within varying durations of time are given in Table 5.3. Within a year of becoming a sole mother, about a quarter had ceased to be a sole mother, either because they had repartnered or because they no longer had co-residing children. Within five years, a majority (60 percent) had ceased being sole mothers. By the time 10 years had passed, less than a quarter were still sole mothers.

The multivariate results are given in Table 5.4. The table models the propensity to cease being a sole mother as



a function of a number of factors. Time-varying factors included in the analysis are: age; calendar period; age of the youngest co-residing child; number of co-residing children; occupation; and duration of sole parenthood. It is interesting that there were no clear differentials in the propensity to cease being a sole mother by birth cohort, calendar period, ethnicity, educational qualifications or number of co-residing children. The propensity to exit from sole parenthood was greater if a woman was younger, held a professional or semi-professional job, had been a sole parent for a shorter duration or had no co-residing children aged under 15.

The probability of exiting from sole parenthood was highest for mothers aged under 20. Sole mothers of this age were nearly twice as likely to exit from sole parenthood as those aged 20–24. Conversely, sole mothers aged over 40 were only 25 percent as likely as those aged 20–24 to exit from sole parenthood. Sole mothers with a professional job were about 60 percent more likely (and semi-professional women about 40 percent more likely) to leave sole parenthood than those who were not working. Sole mothers were about three-and-a-half times more likely to exit from sole parenthood within the first two years than after 10 years of sole parenthood. And sole mothers with no children aged younger than 15 were twice as likely to exit from sole parenthood as those with younger children. This last result is not unexpected, given that older children are closer to the age of leaving home.

In summary, a majority of sole mothers either repartner or no longer have co-residing children within five years of becoming a sole parent. Younger sole mothers, those in professional jobs and those with no children aged under 15 were more likely to exit from sole parenthood. Interestingly, there were no major differences in the propensity to exit from sole parenthood between Māori and non-Māori mothers, between those with different levels of educational qualifications or between those born at different times. Nor did calendar period have any association with the propensity to exit from sole parenthood. This indicates that there has been no change in the duration of sole parenthood over time.

Entering employment after becoming a sole parent

The living standards and wellbeing of sole parents and their dependent children depend to some degree on whether the sole parent is engaged in paid employment

at the time of, and after, becoming a sole parent. In Table 5.5, we provide data on the employment status of women at the time they became a sole parent. A majority of sole mothers (59 percent) were not in paid employment at the time they became a sole parent. Moreover, the proportion of sole mothers who were not working was higher among those with lower educational qualifications, among Māori and among those from younger birth cohorts.

Two-thirds of mothers with no educational qualifications (67 percent) were not working when they became a sole parent, a substantially higher proportion than among those with a university degree (43 percent). Moreover, a higher proportion of Māori (65 percent) than non-Māori sole mothers (58 percent) were not in paid employment at the time they became a sole parent. Although information on this is not provided in the table, there was also an interaction between occupation and ethnicity: among those in paid employment when they became a sole parent, non-Māori sole mothers were more likely to hold professional or semi-professional jobs than Māori sole mothers. In contrast, Māori sole mothers were more likely to be in non-professional jobs.

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of sole mothers who had entered employment by different durations of sole parenthood are given in Table 5.6. The table includes only those sole mothers who were not working at the time they became a sole parent. In the first two years after becoming a sole mother, 21 percent of those who were not working when they became a sole mother started working in paid employment. This proportion increased to 64 percent by the time 10 years had elapsed.

Two-thirds of non-Māori mothers had entered into employment within 10 years, compared with just over half of Māori mothers. However, when the effects of other variables were statistically controlled for in the multivariate analysis (Table 5.7), the ethnic differential disappeared: Māori and non-Māori sole mothers were equally likely to have entered paid work within 10 years.

The bivariate analysis shows that women who had a pre-school child when they became a sole parent were much less likely to work than those with older children (Table 5.6). This is as would be expected. The differential diminished over time and had disappeared after 10 years. Again, this is a pattern that would be



expected. The results from the multivariate analysis give a more ambiguous picture, however. Sole mothers with a youngest child aged five to nine were significantly more likely to enter employment than those with a pre-school child. However, those with older children were no more likely to enter employment than those with pre-school children. It is unclear how these findings should be interpreted, since mothers with older children would be expected to be more likely to work. Interestingly, the number of co-residing children had no effect on the propensity to enter the workforce.

Educational qualifications and prior work experience were the major socio-demographic correlates of entry to paid employment after becoming a sole mother (Table 5.7). Of these two factors, educational qualifications had a stronger effect: the higher the educational qualification, the greater the likelihood of entering paid work. In particular, those with a university degree were over three times more likely to enter paid employment than those with no educational qualifications. Similarly, compared with those with no prior work experience, those with between two and five years of prior work experience were 75 percent more likely to enter employment, and those with more than five years of prior work experience were about twice as likely to enter employment. Although this effect was statistically weak (and was significant only at the $p \leq 0.10$ level), it is in the expected direction: women with prior work experience had an increased propensity to enter employment.

5b Sole Parenthood: Experience among Children

Children who have ever lived with sole mothers

There were a total of 6,276 births to the women participants in the NZWFEE survey. Twenty percent of these births were to Māori women and the rest were to non-Māori women. All the children were born between 1953 and 1995. About one in 10 of these births were to women who were not in any form of union. The rate of such births was higher for Māori mothers than for non-Māori mothers: about 17 percent of the births to Māori women occurred outside any form of union, compared with seven percent among non-Māori women. As was noted in Chapter 4, such births have become increasingly common among more recent cohorts of women, especially where the mother was young.

Around one in eight of the children were born in cohabitation and, again, the rate was higher among Māori women than among non-Māori women. While 27 percent of the children of Māori women were born in cohabitation, the corresponding figure for non-Māori women was eight percent. As a result of the higher propensity for Māori women to give birth in cohabitation or outside any form of relationship, only 56 percent of all children born to Māori women in the sample were to those in married unions. The corresponding figure for non-Māori women was 85 percent.

Thus, a significant number of births, particularly those since the 1960s and those to Māori women, have been to sole mothers. Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children who had spent some time living with a sole mother are given in Table 5.8. A fifth of children had lived with a sole mother before reaching their fifth birthday, and more than a third (37 percent) had lived with a sole mother before they turned 17 years of age. There was no difference between male and female children in the likelihood of living with a sole mother.

These life-table estimates show that having Māori ethnicity substantially increased the propensity for a child to live with a sole mother, compared with “Other” children (who had neither Māori nor Pacific ethnicity). Pacific children had a similarly elevated propensity to live with a sole mother. Thus, while 36 percent of Māori children and 39 percent of Pacific children had lived with a sole mother before reaching five years of age, only 15 percent of “Other” children had done so. Before they reached their 17th birthday, 56 percent of Māori children, 49 percent of Pacific children and 31 percent of “Other” children had lived with a sole mother at some point in their lives. On average, Māori and Pacific children were more than twice as likely to live with a sole mother during the early years of childhood than their “Other” counterparts (see Table 5.8), although the differentials tended to reduce as the children aged.

In terms of birth cohort, there has been a continuous increase since the 1960s in the proportion of children who had ever lived with a sole parent. For instance, among children born during the 1950s and 1960s, 12 percent had lived with a sole mother before their fifth birthday; this increased to 23 percent among those born in the 1980s. Among children born during the period 1990–1995, nearly 20 percent had lived with a sole



mother in their first year of life alone. The multivariate results presented in Table 5.9 show that children born during the period 1990–1995 were about seven times more likely to live with a sole mother than those born prior to 1970. The likelihood of living with a sole mother was highest in the first five years of a child’s life. Children aged under five were about twice as likely to live with a sole mother as children of older ages. Children of Māori and Pacific ethnicity were, respectively, 75 and 91 percent more likely to spend some time living with a sole mother than “Other” children.

The probability that a child would spend some time living in a sole-mother family was also strongly influenced by the age of the mother at the birth of the child. Children born to mothers aged under 20 were about two-and-a-half times more likely to spend some time living in a sole-mother family than children born to mothers aged 20–24. The risk of living in a sole-mother family continued to fall with increasing age of the mother. Among children born to a mother aged under 20, the chances that they would spend some time living in a sole-mother family were about four times higher than among children born to a mother aged 25–29, about five times higher than among children born to a mother aged 30–34 and about six times higher than among children born to a mother aged 35–39.

Mothers’ education and occupation were also associated with the probability that children would spend at least some time living in a sole-mother family, although the patterns were not straightforward and are somewhat difficult to interpret. Children whose mothers had a secondary qualification, or a tertiary qualification other than a university degree, were less likely to spend time living in a sole-mother family than those whose mothers had no qualifications. However, children whose mothers were university-qualified were not less likely than those with no qualifications to spend time in a sole-mother family. And while children whose mothers were working in non-professional jobs were less likely to spend time in a sole-mother family than those with mothers in any of the other occupational groups, there was no difference between children of mothers in professional or semi-professional jobs, on the one hand, and those whose mothers were not working, on the other. As was noted above, it is difficult to see any clear pattern in these findings. Like the results presented earlier in section 5a **Sole Parenthood: Experience among Mothers**, they

suggest that the education and occupation of mothers did not strongly influence children’s chances of living in a sole-parent family.

Duration of stay in sole-mother families

The length of time a child spends living with a sole mother depends on whether and when the mother repartners and when the child leaves home. Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of children who were no longer living with a sole mother (either because they had left the sole mother’s care or because the sole mother had repartnered) by duration of stay are given in Table 5.10. Where children had left the sole mother’s care, it is not known whether they had left to live with their father, to live with other kin or to live independently.

Among all the children who had ever lived with a sole mother, three out of five lived in this situation for less than five years. About a quarter lived with a sole mother for a year or less, while another quarter lived with a sole mother for 10 years or more. Although Māori children were more likely to have spent some time living with a sole mother than their non-Māori counterparts (as earlier results have shown), there were no significant ethnic differences in the duration of stay with a sole mother. Nor were there any significant differences by the gender of the children.

In the bivariate results given in Table 5.10, there were birth cohort differentials in the duration of stay in sole-mother families. For example, around a third (34 percent) of children born between 1990 and 1995 had lived with a sole mother for less than one year, compared with around a fifth (19 percent) of children born before 1970. But the multivariate results in Table 5.11 show that there was no relationship between the birth cohort of a child and propensity for the spell in the sole-mother family to end. However, there was a strong association between duration of stay and calendar period. For children living with sole mothers in the 1980s and 1990s, the spell in the sole-mother family was only around half as likely to end as among their counterparts in the 1960s. This indicates that children are now staying longer in sole-parent families than in earlier decades. The multivariate results also confirm the bivariate-level observations that there were no differences in duration of stay by gender or ethnicity.



While there were no differentials by educational qualifications of mothers, there were differentials by age of the child and by occupation of mothers. The association with age was a complex one. For instance, among children aged 15 or over, the spell in a sole-mother family was more likely to end than among children aged under 15. This result is as would be expected, both because older children are closer to the point of leaving home and because mothers of older children are more likely to repartner. However, among children aged between 10 and 14, the spell in a sole-mother family was less likely to end than among children aged 0–4, which is not so readily interpretable. The association with mothers' occupation was more straightforward. A child's spell in a sole-mother family was more likely to end if the child's mother had a professional job (by 50 percent) or a semi-professional job (by 28 percent) than if the mother was not working. This result is consistent with the earlier finding that professional women were more likely to repartner than women not in work (see Table 3.6).

The strongest covariate of the termination of a child's spell in a sole-mother family was duration of stay in the family. As time passed, a child's spell in a sole-mother family became progressively less likely to end. The chances that the spell would end were nearly three times as high during the first two years than after four years had passed. This result might be regarded as contrary to general expectation, since one might expect children to be more likely to leave home as time passes and as they move closer to an age at which they can live independently. However, this maturation effect is overshadowed by the strong influence of duration since separation on a woman's chances of repartnering (see Table 3.6): as the time since separation increased, women's chances of repartnering diminished markedly.

5C Summary

In this chapter, we have explored sole parenthood from the perspective of both the mothers and the children. Nearly half of all mothers had spent some time as a sole parent by the age of 50. Before reaching their 25th birthday, one in five mothers had spent some time as a sole parent. Birth cohort and current age were important covariates of the probability of becoming a sole parent. Teen mothers and mothers from more recent birth cohorts were more likely to have spent time as a

sole parent than older mothers and mothers from earlier cohorts.

While the age of the youngest co-residing child was not a strong covariate of the probability of becoming a sole mother, the number of live births was. In particular, those with just one co-residing child were more likely than those with several co-residing children to have spent some time as a sole mother. A number of these single-child sole-parent families would have resulted from births to non-partnered women. This reinforces the importance of remaining aware that there are different pathways into sole parenthood, one of which is via the birth of a child outside a partnership. Overall, the pattern of results seems to suggest that, as pathways into sole parenthood, having children outside any union and having children in cohabitation may be becoming as important as separation from marriage. In fact, having a birth in cohabitation increases the risk of sole parenthood by several times compared with having a birth within marriage.

Once a woman had become a sole parent, how long she stayed in that status did not depend on birth cohort, ethnicity, education or number of co-residing children. But younger sole mothers, those who had just become sole mothers (in particular, those who had been a sole mother for less than two years) and those with professional or semi-professional jobs were more likely to exit from sole parenthood – either by repartnering or by no longer having a co-residing child living with them – than their counterparts (older sole mothers, sole mothers of longer duration, and non-professional or non-working sole mothers).

Three in five sole mothers were not working at the time they became a sole parent. How likely they were to move into the paid workforce, and how quickly this was likely to happen, depended on their educational qualifications and prior work experience. In general, women with higher levels of education, especially those with university qualifications, were more likely to enter the paid workforce than those with less education. Work experience also played a role, although the effect was weaker. If a woman had more than two years' work experience prior to becoming a sole mother, this increased her chances of entering the paid workforce.

About a fifth of all children born to women in the survey had spent some time living with a sole mother before



their fifth birthday. By the time they reached 17 years of age, this had increased to just under two-fifths of all children. Since the 1960s, there has been a continuous increase in the proportion of children who have spent some time in a sole-mother family. Children were more likely to have spent some time living with a sole mother if the mother had given birth in her teens or if they were of Māori or Pacific ethnicity. The likelihood of living in a sole-mother family was highest during the early years of childhood.

Among children who had ever lived with a sole mother, 60 percent spent less than five years living in that situation. A child’s spell in a sole-mother family was most likely to end within the first two years; after that, the chances that the spell would end progressively diminished. This is primarily due to the mother’s declining chances of repartnering as the duration of sole parenthood lengthened. There were no significant differentials in duration of stay in a sole-mother family by the ethnicity or gender of the children. However, children’s durations of stay in sole-mother families have lengthened in recent decades.

Table 5.1

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of mothers becoming sole parents before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics							
Characteristics	Cumulative proportions becoming sole parents before age:						Number of mothers
	20 yrs	25 yrs	30 yrs	35 yrs	40 yrs	50 yrs	
Birth cohort							
1936–1949	0.04	0.09	0.15	0.21	0.27		736
1950–1959	0.08	0.15	0.21	0.28			830
1960–1969	0.10	0.25					667
1970–1975	0.21						158
Ethnicity							
Māori	0.18	0.39	0.50	0.54	0.57	0.65	420
Non-Māori	0.07	0.16	0.23	0.30	0.36	0.43	1,971
Partnership status when the last child was born							
Marriage	0.01	0.03	0.09	0.16	0.23	0.32	1,792
Cohabitation	0.09	0.38	0.57	0.69	0.76	0.82	265
No partnership	0.50	0.88	0.96	0.98	1.00	–	334
Education							
No qualifications	0.14	0.27	0.34	0.40	0.47	0.55	716
Secondary qualifications	0.06	0.15	0.24	0.31	0.35	0.41	589
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.06	0.16	0.23	0.30	0.35	0.44	905
University qualifications	0.04	0.08	0.14	0.18	0.31	0.34	181
Overall	0.08	0.19	0.26	0.33	0.39	0.46	2,391

Table 5.2

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity of a mother to become a sole parent			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	Before 1950 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	1.07	0.51
	1960–1969	1.66	2.53 **
	1970–1975	2.57	3.05 **
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1980 ^R	1.00	–
	1980–1989	0.90	0.81
	1990–1995	1.03	0.17
Age of woman (tv)	Under 20 years	4.33	10.17 **
	20–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	0.44	6.61 **
	30–34 years	0.35	6.47 **
	35–39 years	0.34	5.20 **
	40+ years	0.19	5.38 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	0.94	0.56
Age of youngest co-residing child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	1.07	0.45
	10–14 years	1.39	1.62
	15+ years	1.01	0.06
Number of co-residing children (tv)	1 ^R	1.00	–
	2	0.36	10.87 **
	3+	0.35	9.02 **
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	0.80	2.25 **
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.85	1.71 *
	University qualifications	0.87	0.81
Occupation (tv)	Professional	1.14	1.02
	Semi-professional	1.26	2.21 **
	Non-professional	0.76	1.90 **
	Not working ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 4370
 χ^2 (df = 22) = 1124

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$
 * = $p \leq 0.10$



Table 5.3

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion who had ceased to be a sole mother by given durations of sole parenthood, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion who had ceased to be a sole mother by duration of sole parenthood				Number of sole mothers
	< 1 yr	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.23	0.33	0.60	0.77	268
1950–1959	0.26	0.39	0.61	0.80	299
1960–1969	0.22	0.38	0.59		261
1970–1975	0.31	0.41			91
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.27	0.38	0.63	0.78	228
Non-Māori	0.24	0.37	0.60	0.78	691
Education					
No qualifications	0.26	0.39	0.62	0.77	346
Secondary qualifications	0.29	0.42	0.65	0.82	199
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.19	0.32	0.56	0.76	325
University qualifications	0.11	0.21	0.48	0.74	49
Occupation at becoming sole parent					
Professional	0.23	0.38	0.61	0.80	113
Semi-professional	0.29	0.41	0.69	0.86	184
Non-professional	0.19	0.28	0.53	0.77	80
Not working	0.24	0.38	0.59	0.75	534
Age of youngest child when became sole parent					
Under 5 years	0.26	0.40	0.62	0.79	701
5–9 years	0.17	0.25	0.60	0.73	104
10–14 years	0.11	0.21	0.50	0.79	77
15+ years	0.28	0.35	0.58	0.74	37
Age at becoming sole parent					
Under 20 years	0.48	0.63	0.78	0.90	204
20–24 years	0.23	0.42	0.65	0.83	240
25–29 years	0.18	0.25	0.60	0.78	169
30–34 years	0.19	0.19	0.43	0.63	134
35–39 years	0.18	0.28	0.53	0.69	96
40+ years	0.11	0.21	0.36	0.64	76
Number of co-residing children when became sole parent					
1	0.31	0.46	0.65	0.84	534
2	0.16	0.26	0.59	0.72	233
3+	0.13	0.22	0.45	0.64	152
Overall	0.24	0.37	0.60	0.78	919



Table 5.4

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity to cease being a sole mother (due to repartnering or no longer having a co-residing child)			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	Before 1950 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	0.89	0.81
	1960–1969	0.67	1.89 *
	1970–1975	0.61	1.50
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1980 ^R	1.00	–
	1980–1989	1.04	0.26
	1990–1995	0.98	0.11
Age of woman (tv)	Under 20 years	1.91	4.38 **
	20–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	0.71	2.14 **
	30–34 years	0.51	3.41 **
	35–39 years	0.38	3.78 **
	40+ years	0.25	3.86 **
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	1.11	1.05
Age of youngest co-residing child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	1.04	0.26
	10–14 years	1.24	0.99
	15+ years	2.19	2.95 **
Number of co-residing children (tv)	1 ^R	1.00	–
	2	0.90	0.88
	3+	1.00	0.03
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	1.23	1.86 *
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.95	0.55
	University qualifications	0.71	1.53
Occupation (tv)	Professional	1.59	3.22 **
	Semi-professional	1.43	3.15 **
	Non-professional	0.95	0.31
	Not working ^R	1.00	–
Duration of sole parenthood at exposure (tv)	Under 2 years	3.50	6.08 **
	2–3 years	1.40	1.57
	3–5 years	1.43	1.78 *
	5–10 years	1.31	1.32
	10+ years ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 2273
 χ^2 (df = 26) = 339

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$
 * = $p \leq 0.10$



Table 5.5

Employment status at the time of becoming a sole parent, by selected socio-demographic characteristics (percentages)						
	Professional	Semi-professional	Non-professional	Not working	Total	Number of sole mothers
Education						
No qualification	3.1	18.1	12.2	66.7	100.0	346
Secondary qualification	8.3	27.0	7.1	57.5	100.0	199
Tertiary – other qualification	22.3	20.4	6.2	51.2	100.0	324
University qualification	35.7	19.0	2.4	42.9	100.0	49
Total	10.9	21.3	8.8	59.0	100.0	918
Birth Cohort						
1936–1949	17.4	27.8	11.6	43.3	100.0	267
1950–1959	14.1	21.4	9.5	55.0	100.0	299
1960–1969	4.7	17.1	6.2	72.0	100.0	261
1970–1975	0.0	13.8	5.7	80.5	100.0	91
Total	10.9	21.3	8.8	59.0	100.0	918
Ethnicity						
Māori	2.9	17.5	14.6	64.9	100.0	228
Non-Māori	12.8	22.3	7.2	57.6	100.0	690
Total	10.9	21.4	8.7	59.0	100.0	918



Table 5.6

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of sole mothers starting work within a given duration of sole parenthood, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion starting work by duration of sole parenthood				Number of sole mothers
	< 1 yr	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Birth cohort					
1936–1949	0.12	0.25	0.36	0.59	113
1950–1959	0.15	0.29	0.45	0.73	162
1960–1969	0.08	0.13	0.31		186
1970–1975	0.12	0.23			73
Ethnicity					
Māori	0.10	0.23	0.44	0.53	148
Non-Māori	0.12	0.21	0.37	0.67	386
Education					
No qualifications	0.08	0.16	0.33	0.49	230
Secondary qualifications	0.13	0.22	0.34	0.69	115
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.15	0.28	0.47	0.79	167
University qualifications	0.20	0.39	0.68	0.95	22
Number of co-residing children when became sole parent					
1	0.11	0.19	0.37	0.64	341
2	0.11	0.25	0.39	0.66	99
3+	0.13	0.24	0.42	0.62	94
Age of youngest co-residing child when became sole parent					
Under 5 years	0.10	0.20	0.38	0.65	475
5–9 years	0.31	0.36	0.48	0.60	36
Overall	0.12	0.21	0.39	0.64	534

Note: There were 23 children aged over nine who are not included in this table, as this was too small a number to allow life-table estimates.





Table 5.7

Multivariate hazards model estimates of the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the propensity to enter into employment if not working at the time of becoming a sole mother			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort	Before 1950 ^R	1.00	–
	1950–1959	1.33	1.04
	1960–1969	0.85	0.36
	1970–1975	1.69	0.88
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1980 ^R	1.00	–
	1980–1989	0.68	1.19
	1990–1995	0.99	0.03
Age of woman (tv)	Under 20 years	1.08	0.24
	20–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	1.10	0.32
	30–34 years	0.78	0.66
	35–39 years	0.77	0.56
	40+ years	0.47	1.16
Ethnicity	Māori ^R	1.00	–
	Non-Māori	1.03	0.14
Age of youngest co-residing child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	1.69	1.85 **
	10–14 years	0.96	0.08
	15+ years	1.08	0.11
Number of co-residing children (tv)	1 ^R	1.00	–
	2	1.13	0.60
	3+	0.99	0.03
Education	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	1.35	0.34
	Tertiary – other qualifications	1.85	3.18 **
	University qualifications	3.34	4.62 **
Years of work experience at sole parenthood (tv)	No work experience ^R	1.00	–
	Under 2 years	1.26	0.73
	2–5 years	1.75	1.97 *
	5+ years	1.94	2.15 *
Duration of sole parenthood (tv)	Under 2 years	2.18	2.45 *
	2–3 years	0.93	0.22
	3–5 years	0.82	0.65
	5+ years ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 588
 χ^2 (df = 25) = 83

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$
 * = $p \leq 0.10$

Table 5.8

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children who had ever lived with a sole mother, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion by age of children					Number of children
	< 1 yr	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	< 17 yrs	< 20 yrs	
Birth cohort of child						
Before 1970	0.07	0.12	0.18	0.27	0.30	1,211
1970–1979	0.09	0.17	0.24			1,766
1980–1989	0.12	0.23				2,001
1990–1995	0.19					1,298
Gender of child						
Male	0.11	0.20	0.28	0.37	0.39	3,279
Female	0.12	0.21	0.28	0.37	0.41	2,996
Ethnicity of child						
Māori	0.23	0.36	0.46	0.56	0.57	1,417
Pacific	0.22	0.39	0.46	0.49	0.49	291
Other	0.08	0.15	0.22	0.31	0.35	4,568
Age of mother when child was born						
Under 20 years	0.37	0.48	0.57	0.66	0.69	637
20–24 years	0.12	0.22	0.30	0.39	0.41	2,084
25–29 years	0.06	0.14	0.21	0.30	0.34	2,148
30–34 years	0.08	0.14	0.22	0.30	0.32	1,069
35+ years	0.08	0.15	0.20	0.25	0.25	338
Education of mother						
No qualifications	0.16	0.26	0.34	0.43	0.46	2,093
Secondary qualifications	0.09	0.18	0.24	0.30	0.34	1,429
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.10	0.17	0.25	0.35	0.38	2,313
University qualifications	0.07	0.12	0.22	0.37	0.37	441
Number of live births to mothers						
1	0.34	0.51	0.58	0.66	0.69	415
2	0.10	0.19	0.28	0.37	0.42	1,770
3	0.08	0.16	0.23	0.32	0.35	1,878
4+	0.11	0.20	0.27	0.36	0.38	2,213
Overall	0.12	0.20	0.28	0.37	0.40	6,276





Table 5.9

Multivariate hazards model estimates by the effects of socio-demographic correlates on the propensity of children to live with a sole parent at any age			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort of child	Before 1970 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	1.60	4.29 **
	1980–1989	2.79	7.29 **
	1990–1995	6.86	11.63 **
Age of child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	0.53	8.17 **
	10–14 years	0.58	4.91 **
	15+ years	0.51	4.45 **
Ethnicity of child	Māori	1.75	3.42 **
	Pacific	1.91	3.42 **
	Other ^R	1.00	–
Gender of child	Male ^R	1.00	–
	Female	1.05	0.91
Calendar period	Before 1970 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	1.24	1.73 *
	1980–1989	1.06	0.59
Age of mother when child was born	Under 20 years	2.50	10.34 **
	20–24 years ^R	1.00	–
	25–29 years	0.64	6.46 **
	30–34 years	0.53	6.05 **
	35+ years	0.41	4.78 **
Education of mother	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	0.65	3.78 **
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.80	2.20 **
	University qualifications	0.85	0.84
Occupation of mother (tv)	Professional	0.97	0.20
	Semi-professional	1.05	0.47
	Non-professional	0.75	2.13 **
	Not working ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 9857
 χ^2 (df = 21) = 605

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = $p \leq 0.05$
 * = $p \leq 0.10$

Table 5.10

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children who were no longer living with a sole mother (either because the mother had repartnered or because the child had left home), by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion by duration of stay				Number of children with sole mothers
	<1 yr	< 2 yrs	< 5 yrs	< 10 yrs	
Birth cohort of children					
Before 1970	0.19	0.30	0.61	0.79	653
1970–1979	0.23	0.37	0.57	0.75	669
1980–1989	0.24	0.37	0.57		516
1990–1995	0.34				127
Gender of child					
Male	0.22	0.34	0.60	0.78	1,018
Female	0.24	0.36	0.59	0.77	947
Ethnicity of child					
Māori	0.23	0.35	0.55	0.73	553
Non-Māori	0.23	0.35	0.61	0.79	1,412
Overall	0.23	0.35	0.60	0.77	1,965





Table 5.11

Multivariate hazards model estimates by the effects of socio-demographic covariates on the likelihood that a child's spell in a sole-mother family would end (either because the mother had repartnered or because the child had left home)			
Covariates		Incidence Rate Ratio	Z-Statistic
Birth cohort of child	Before 1970 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	1.04	0.31
	1980–1989	1.10	0.48
	1990–1995	1.22	0.75
Age of child (tv)	0–4 years ^R	1.00	–
	5–9 years	0.86	1.36
	10–14 years	0.73	2.14 **
	15+ years	1.48	2.41 **
Duration living with sole mother (tv)	Under 2 years	2.79	8.32 **
	2 years	1.28	1.84 **
	3 years	1.24	1.93 **
	4+ years ^R	1.00	–
Ethnicity of child	Māori	0.90	1.06
	Non-Māori ^R	1.00	–
Gender of child	Male ^R	1.00	–
	Female	1.00	0.08
Calendar period (tv)	Before 1970 ^R	1.00	–
	1970–1979	0.75	1.54
	1980–1989	0.56	2.26 **
	1990–1995	0.43	2.92 **
Education of mother	No qualifications ^R	1.00	–
	Secondary qualifications	1.08	0.72
	Tertiary – other qualifications	0.93	0.80
	University qualifications	0.78	1.49
Occupation of mother (tv)	Professional	1.50	3.83 **
	Semi-professional	1.28	2.49 **
	Non-professional	1.03	0.19
	Not working ^R	1.00	–

Log likelihood = 4439
 χ^2 (df = 20) = 215

tv = time-varying covariate
 R = reference category

** = p ≤ 0.05

6



Blended Families



Blended families have become more prevalent since the 1970s due to an increased propensity for separation from marriages and cohabiting relationships and for formation of new partnerships. For the purposes of this report, we have defined a blended family as one comprising a couple, plus one or more children from a previous union (or unions) of one or both partners. We have made a distinction between blended families that include children from a previous union (or unions) of one partner only (which we have designated partial-blended families) and blended families that include children from previous unions of both partners (which we have designated full-blended families).

Although usage of the term “blended families” is not widespread in the literature, we have preferred it to “stepfamilies” (partly because it allows us to make a distinction between partial- and full-blended families). This definition may be at slight variance with other literature where the term is used, since blended families are sometimes defined as families that include children from previous relationships of both partners. However, it should be noted that usage of the term is not consistent in the literature.

The procedure used to derive statistics on blended families was somewhat complex, because of various constraints on the available data. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of these issues and presents results on the prevalence of blended families, from the perspective of both the mothers and the children.

6a Identifying Blended Families in the NZWFEE Sample

The NZWFEE survey was not designed for the purpose of studying blended families and the information it collected did not lend itself to the identification of blended families in any simple way. Instead, it was necessary to use an indirect process of inference to identify blended families – a process, moreover, that was only applicable to a subgroup of all unions. The procedure that was used to identify blended families and the data limitations that constrained this procedure are described in detail in a box at the end of this chapter. A number of particular problems that arose from this procedure are also discussed and consideration is given to how these might have affected the results of the analysis of blended families. The process of identification of blended families is also displayed graphically in Figure 6.1. The figure shows that the procedure served to identify only a subset of the total pool of blended families.

This discussion shows that the process for identifying blended families was an imprecise one that did not encompass all such unions. The results on blended families should therefore be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

6b Definition of Blended Families

Taking into consideration all of the issues discussed in Box 6.1, we define a blended family as one where a woman has a second or subsequent partner and co-residing children either of her own from a previous union (or unions) or of her partner from a previous union (or unions), or where both partners have children from previous unions. This definition encompasses families where a woman has not only entered into a second or subsequent partnership, but where we also have evidence of co-resident stepchildren. If the blended family includes children from previous unions of both partners, we denote this as a full-blended family; if it includes children from a previous union (or unions) of one partner only, then we denote it as a partial-blended family. This is regardless of whether or not the woman and her partner together have their own biological children.

6c Blended Families: Experience among Mothers

In this section, we present findings on the prevalence of blended families (at least as far as this is reflected in data on the family status of women at the start of a second or subsequent union). Table 6.1 gives the number of women who had ever lived in a blended family expressed as a proportion of all women who had ever had a child (including adopted and foster children). About 18 percent of mothers had spent some time living in a blended family. A vast majority of these blended families included children of one partner only (partial-



blended families); only one in eight blended families (13 percent) included children from previous unions of both partners (full-blended families). Overall, only a very small proportion of mothers (2.5 percent) had lived in full-blended families.

The data on blended families given in Table 6.1 by birth cohort require careful interpretation, as we have not controlled for censoring (ie women of younger birth cohorts have had shorter periods of exposure to the possibility of living in a blended family). Nevertheless, the fact that similar proportions of women born in the 1960s (who would have been aged between 26 and 35 at the time of the survey) and the first half of the 1970s (who would have been aged between 20 and 25 at the time of the survey) had lived in a blended family as women born in earlier decades suggests that, by the time the younger birth cohorts reach the end of their reproductive lives, more among them are likely to have lived in a blended family than has been true for the older cohorts.

There was a significant ethnic differential in the prevalence of full-blended families. Such families were more than twice as common among Māori (4.8 percent) as among non-Māori (2.1 percent). Partial-blended families were also a little more common among Māori than among non-Māori.

There was also an educational differential in the prevalence of blended families. Women with a university degree were less likely to have lived in a blended family (either full or partial) than those with a lower qualification. Women with no qualifications were more likely than others to have lived in a blended family (specifically, in a partial-blended family).

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of mothers who had ever lived in a blended family (full or partial) before varying ages are presented in Table 6.2. In this case, the analysis includes only women who had had biological children of their own. Women who had only had adopted or foster children were excluded, as no information was available on when these children were adopted or fostered or on when they had left home. According to the results in Table 6.2, over a quarter of mothers (28 percent) had lived in a blended family before they reached 50 years of age.

There were substantial differentials in the probability of living in a blended family by birth cohort, ethnicity and level of educational qualifications. The younger her

birth cohort, the more likely a woman was to have lived in a blended family. For instance, about 14 percent of mothers born during the period 1950–1959 had lived in a blended family before the age of 30, compared with eight percent of those born during the period 1936–1949. What is particularly striking is that 13 percent of mothers born during the period 1970–1975 had lived in a blended family before they turned 20 years of age. This compares with just three percent for earlier cohorts.

Māori mothers were more than twice as likely as non-Māori mothers to have lived in a blended family before the age of 30. The ethnic differential persisted, although it had diminished a little, at higher ages. The differential by educational qualifications was equally clear. Higher education was associated with a lower likelihood of having lived in a blended family. For instance, only 15 percent of mothers with a university qualification had lived in a blended family before the age of 40, compared with 29 percent of those with no educational qualifications. In other words, mothers with a university qualification were only around half as likely to have lived in a blended family before they turned 40 as those with no educational qualifications. The differential was even higher among younger women, but had reduced somewhat by the time the women had reached the age of 50.

6d Blended Families: Experience among Children

Children who had ever lived in blended families

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of children of women in the survey who had ever lived in a blended family are given in Table 6.3. One in five of the children had lived in a blended family before they reached 17 years of age. There was a clear pattern of variation by the children's birth cohort: children born before 1970 were less likely to have lived in a blended family than those born after 1970. For instance, around one in 10 children born after 1970 had lived in a blended family before they turned five, compared with one in 20 children born before 1970.

There were differences between Māori and non-Māori children in the likelihood of living in a blended family. While 29 percent of Māori children had lived in a blended family before they reached 17 years of age, only 18 percent of non-Māori children had done so.



There were also differentials among children by the level of their mothers' educational qualifications. Among children whose mothers had university-level qualifications, only six percent had lived in a blended family by 10 years of age, compared with 18 percent of children whose mothers had no educational qualifications and 13 percent of children whose mothers had a secondary qualification.

No differences were evident by the gender of the children.

Duration of stay in and propensity to leave blended families

In this section, we examine children's length of stay in blended families. A child's spell in a blended family may have come to an end either because the child had left the family or because the family had broken up. It was not possible to conduct separate analyses of length of stay according to these two reasons for the end of a child's spell in a blended family, so the following analysis includes both cases where the child had left home and cases where the family had broken up.

The analysis reported in this section was based on the experience of women's own biological children only. Stepchildren, foster children and adopted children were all excluded, as the NZWFEE survey did not collect information on when these children moved in to live with the woman or when they left the home to live elsewhere. In addition, it should be noted that, where a child had left a blended family, we have no information on where the child went. It may be that some of these children went to live with their fathers; however, we are not able to say anything about this given the data limitations.

In Table 6.4, we provide life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of children whose spell in the blended family had ended (either because they had left the family or because the family had broken up) by varying durations of stay. Within their first three years of stay, the spell in the blended family had ended for about a third of the children. Within 10 years of stay, the spell in the blended family had ended for more than two-thirds of the children.

As expected, the age of the child on entering a blended family had a strong association with how long the child stayed in the blended family. Among children who were aged 15 or more when the blended family was formed, the spell had ended within the first year for around a third, within three years for nearly 60 percent and within

five years for nearly 90 percent. Among children who were aged 10–14 when the blended family was formed, the spell had ended within five years for around a half. And among children who were aged under 10 when the blended family was formed, the spell had ended within five years for around 40 percent.

The birth cohort of the child was also strongly associated with duration of stay in a blended family. In general, the younger the birth cohort, the shorter the stay in the blended family. While the spell in the blended family had ended within five years of stay for 54 percent of those born during the period 1980–1989, the corresponding figure for those born during the period 1970–1979 was only 39 percent. However, 10 years after the blended family had formed, the spell was more likely to have ended for children born before 1970 than for those born during the 1970s. It is not clear what might underlie this turnaround in the pattern.

There was no significant ethnic differential in the duration of stay in a blended family. Nor was there any clear pattern of differences by the level of mothers' educational qualifications. The main exception was that, among children of university-qualified mothers, the spell in a blended family had a very low probability of ending within the first year, compared with other groups of children. Finally, the gender of the child did not make any difference to the duration of stay in a blended family, according to this analysis. However, a subsequent analysis of rates of leaving home showed that female children were more likely to leave blended families at an earlier age than male children (see Chapter 7 **Children's Patterns of Leaving Home**).

6e Summary

The data collected in the NZWFEE survey did not lend themselves to a definitive analysis of blended families. The results presented in this chapter are, therefore, necessarily tentative. The limited evidence presented here suggests that the blended family is becoming increasingly widespread. It is estimated that close to a fifth of all women who had ever had children (18 percent) had lived at some point in a blended family. The great majority of these blended families included children from a previous union of one partner only (partial-blended families). Only one in eight of these families were full-blended families. Thus only 2.5 percent of women had ever lived in a full-blended family.



Māori mothers were more than twice as likely as non-Māori mothers to have spent some time living in a blended family. Mothers with no educational qualifications were more likely to have lived in a blended family than those with some form of qualification, and mothers with a university degree were least likely to have lived in a blended family. Being in a younger birth cohort also meant an increased probability of having ever lived in a blended family.

A fifth of children had spent some time living in a blended family before they turned 17. The birth cohort and ethnicity of the child were important covariates of the probability of living in a blended family, as was the level of educational qualifications of the child's mother.

Māori children and those born since the 1970s were more likely to have lived in a blended family than were non-Māori children and those born during the 1950s and 1960s. But the birth cohort and ethnicity differentials among children were not as large as those found among their mothers. Children of mothers with university qualifications were less likely to have lived in a blended family, at least before the age of 10.

The duration of time children spent living in a blended family was generally short: for a third of children who had ever lived in a blended family, the spell had ended within three years; for nearly half, the spell had ended within five years; and for two-thirds, the spell had ended within 10 years. It should be noted that these statistics include both cases where the family broke down and cases where the child left the home to live elsewhere. For children who left the home, we do not know whether they went to live with other kin (perhaps the father) or to set up an independent household. The analysis thus leaves a number of unanswered questions about children's experience of blended families. Even so, it is clear that, at least for some children, the spell in a blended family occupied a relatively small portion of their childhood.

Box 6.1

The Procedure used to Identify Blended Families

The process of identifying blended families was a complex one. Blended families could not be identified directly because of various constraints on the data and thus it was necessary to use an indirect process of inference to identify a family as a blended family.

Stepfather families (ie families that included a child or children from a previous union of the mother) could be identified in a relatively straightforward fashion. If a woman had at least one child living with her when she repartnered, the family was identified as a blended family. (There was one difficulty with this process, which is discussed below under the heading **The problem of excluded first unions.**)

The main difficulty was in identifying stepmother families (ie families that included a child or children from a previous union of the woman's partner). No information was available on whether the woman's new partner brought with him children from a previous union. Nor was there full information available on each relationship of women in the survey to each child living in the household for each union they had ever had. This necessitated the use of an indirect process to infer the presence in the household of children who were not the biological children of the woman.

For each woman and for each of her unions, a count of the number of her biological children who were co-residing with her at the time of formation of the union was derived from data on the number of children she had ever given birth to at that time and the dates on which each of these children left home. The total number of children living with the woman and her new partner at the time of formation of each new union was reported by women in the survey. These two figures were used to infer the presence of children of the woman's new partner. Specifically, it was inferred that children of the woman's partner were present if the number of the woman's own biological children who were living with her at the time of formation of the new union was fewer than the reported total number of children the woman and her partner had living with them at that time.



This procedure was not a perfect method for identifying blended families. Four particular problems arose from the procedure, which will have had varying impacts on the results of the analysis of blended families. These four problems, and their potential effects, are discussed below.

The problem of dynamic change in families

It is important to note that the identification of a family as a blended family was made only at the time a new union was formed. This is because information was available on the total number of children living in the household only at this point. The make-up of households may have changed subsequently in ways that alter the picture, even though the union itself may have remained intact. In particular, it is possible that a woman who was not living in a blended family at the time of repartnering could have entered into one subsequently while staying in the same union. This could have come about because the woman's own children from a previous union, or her new partner's children from a previous union, arrived to live with the family after the new union was formed.

We also do not have data on those situations – which are likely to be relatively common among blended families – where children of the woman's new partner spend only part of their time living with him in the new union. It is quite probable that many children who spend only part of their time living with their father were not recorded as living in the household when the new union was formed.

For these reasons, the aim of the analysis was restricted to producing estimates of point-in-time prevalence rates of blended families (ie at the time of formation of unions). The data do not permit any attempt to address the goal of deriving period-prevalence rates (ie over a period of time).

The problem of imprecision in estimates

Because the inference process relied on information on, among other things, the dates at which children left the family home, any imprecision in women's recall of these dates will have introduced error into the process for identifying blended families. In addition, other errors may have arisen if women had had varying understandings of the questions they were asked. That the rate of error could be relatively high is illustrated by the fact that there were 43 women whose information on the number of children co-residing with them at

the time of repartnering was not consistent with their information on the dates at which their children left home. Consequently, these women had to be excluded from the analysis. It is possible that in a significant number of other cases errors in recall of dates may have led to misidentification of blended families.

The problem of excluded first unions

It was not possible to identify blended families where a woman was in her first union. This is because the available information did not allow us to determine whether or not the woman's first partner was the biological father of any children she may have had before entering her first union. Thus, the count of blended families was restricted to women in second or subsequent unions (see Figure 6.1).

This is not considered likely to pose a major problem for the derivation of estimates of the prevalence of blended families, because the number of women who enter into blended families as a first union is likely to be small. In fact, of all the women who had been in just one union at the time of the survey in 1995, only about 40 (two percent) reported that they had ever had stepchildren living with them. Because we do not have information on when these stepchildren moved in to live with the women, it is not possible to include these cases in our point estimates of blended families at the time of formation of new unions.

The problem of adopted and foster children

The total count of children that the woman and her new partner had living with them at the time they formed their new union specifically included adopted children and foster children. This means that the process described above will have resulted in an over-estimate of the number of families with stepchildren. The women were asked a separate question in the survey about how many stepchildren, adopted children and foster children they had ever had living with them, but they were not asked when these children moved in to live with them or when they left home. Thus, this information could not be used to adjust the process for inferring the presence of stepchildren.

An examination of some relevant information showed that this effect might not be very large, however. For instance, of the 694 women who had had at least two



unions, 84 women reported that they had ever had adopted or foster children living with them. Of the 84, 23 women also reported that they had ever had one or more stepchildren living with them. This leaves 61 of these women who had ever had adopted or foster children, but had not had stepchildren. Application of the procedure described above would have been likely to identify these women as living in a blended family at the time of repartnering. In practice, the rate of misidentification is likely to be smaller, since foster children are likely not to have been present at the beginning of all unions.

On the other hand, about 40 women who had been in just one union but reported that they had ever had stepchildren were excluded from the analysis (as noted

above). Thus, the net effect of these two sources of error on estimates of the prevalence of blended families is likely to be small, since they run in opposite directions. However, the effect on the bivariate analyses will be somewhat larger, since both of these sources of error contribute in different ways to misidentification of the total pool of blended families that is the basis of these analyses.

In summary, the process for identifying blended families was a somewhat imprecise one that did not encompass all unions. The results on blended families should therefore be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

Figure 6.1

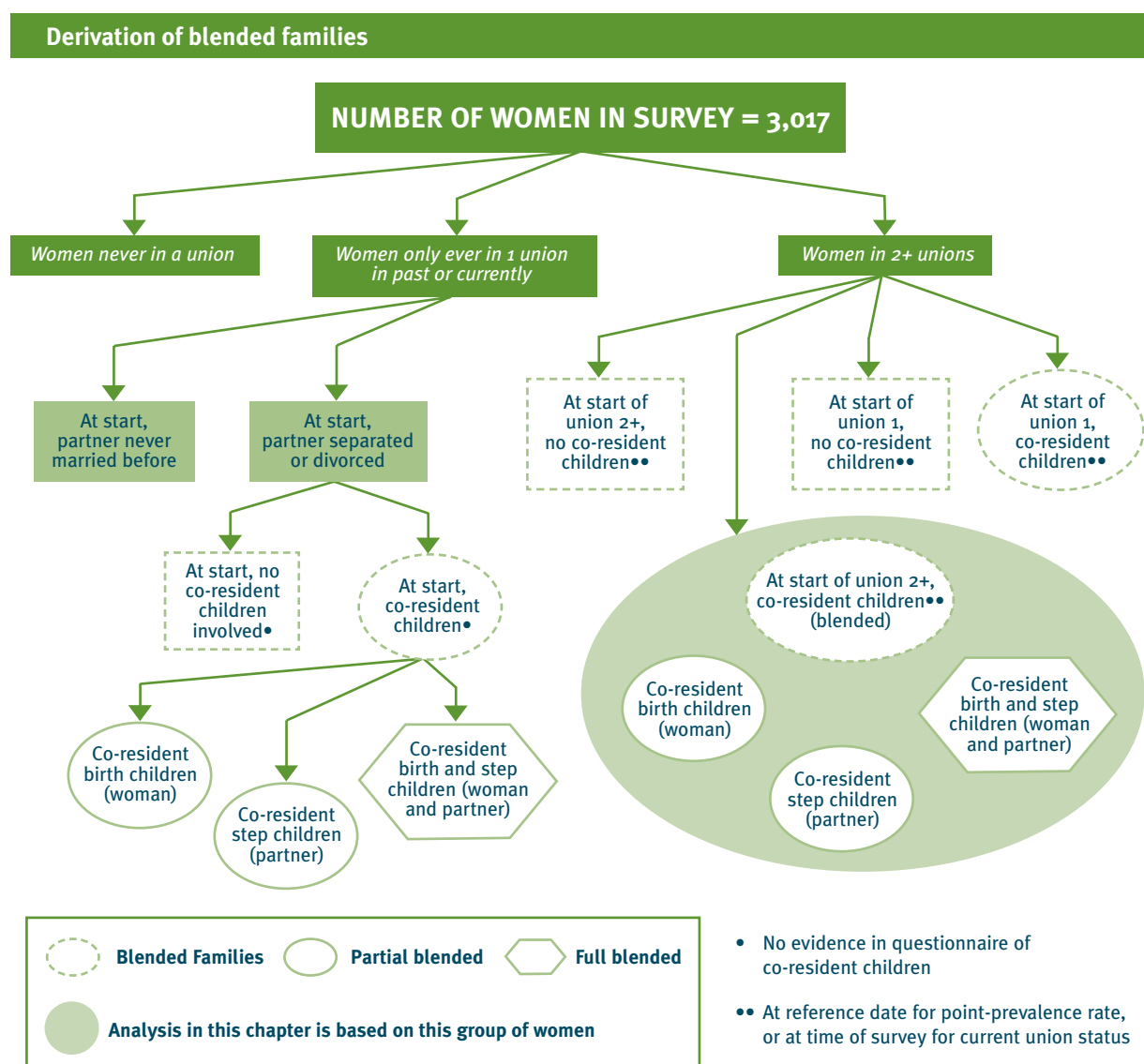




Table 6.1

Number of women who have ever lived in a blended family as a percentage of women aged 20–59 who have ever had a child				
	Full-blended	Partial-blended	Blended	No. of women who have ever had a child
	Percent	Percent	Percent	N
Birth cohort				
1936–1949	2.4	13.7	16.1	731
1950–1959	2.7	17.5	20.2	836
1960–1969	2.1	16.6	18.7	657
1970–1975	3.0	16.4	19.4	146
Total	2.5	15.9	18.4	2,370
Ethnicity				
Māori	4.8	19.9	24.7	398
Non-Māori	2.1	15.3	17.4	1,972
Total	2.5	15.9	18.4	2,370
Education				
No qualifications	2.2	19.7	21.9	693
Secondary qualifications	2.8	13.5	16.3	587
Tertiary – other qualifications	2.5	15.0	17.5	906
University qualifications	1.8	13.5	15.3	184
Total	2.5	15.9	18.4	2,370

Table 6.2

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of mothers who have ever lived in a blended family before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion in blended family before age:				Number of mothers
	20 yrs	30 yrs	40 yrs	50 yrs	
Birth cohort of women					
Before 1950	0.01	0.08	0.16		736
1950–1959	0.04	0.14			830
1960–1969	0.03				667
1970–1975	0.13				158
Ethnicity of women					
Māori	0.08	0.31	0.41	0.42	420
Non-Māori	0.03	0.12	0.21	0.26	1,971
Education of women					
No qualifications	0.05	0.20	0.29	0.34	716
Secondary qualifications	0.03	0.14	0.21	0.26	589
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.02	0.11	0.20	0.26	905
University qualifications	0.02	0.05	0.15	0.20	181
Overall	0.03	0.15	0.23	0.28	2,391

Table 6.3

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children who have ever lived in a blended family before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics					
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion in blended family before age:				Number of children
	5 yrs	10 yrs	17 yrs	20 yrs	
Birth cohort of children					
Before 1970	0.05	0.09	0.15		1,211
1970–1979	0.08	0.14			1,766
1980–1989	0.09				2,001
1990–1995					1,298
Gender of child					
Male	0.08	0.14	0.20	0.21	3,279
Female	0.08	0.14	0.20	0.22	2,996
Ethnicity of child					
Māori	0.14	0.22	0.29	0.30	1,417
Non-Māori	0.07	0.12	0.18	0.20	4,859
Education of mother					
No qualifications	0.10	0.18	0.23	0.25	2,093
Secondary qualifications	0.08	0.13	0.17	0.18	1,429
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.06	0.11	0.19	0.22	2,313
University qualifications	0.03	0.06	0.20	0.23	441
Overall	0.08	0.14	0.20	0.22	6,276



Table 6.4

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children whose spell in a blended family had ended (either because the child had left the family or because the family had broken up) within a given duration, by selected socio-demographic characteristics						
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion whose spell in a blended family had ended					Number of children
	<1 yr	<2 yrs	<5 yrs	<10 yrs	<20 yrs	
Age of child when entering blended family						
Under 5 years	0.16	0.25	0.40	0.56	0.87	452
5–9 years	0.13	0.23	0.39	0.69	0.97	262
10–14 years	0.11	0.21	0.53	0.90		174
15 years and over	0.33	0.57	0.89			63
Birth cohort of child						
Before 1970	0.11	0.18	0.36	0.72	0.96	193
1970–1979	0.11	0.20	0.39	0.61		355
1980–1989	0.19	0.31	0.54			314
1990–1995	0.32					89
Gender of child						
Male	0.15	0.25	0.46	0.69	0.91	495
Female	0.15	0.26	0.43	0.66	0.95	456
Ethnicity of child						
Māori	0.15	0.25	0.47	0.70	0.94	282
Non-Māori	0.15	0.26	0.44	0.67	0.93	669
Education of mother						
No qualifications	0.14	0.24	0.47	0.72	0.94	391
Secondary qualifications	0.19	0.28	0.40	0.59	0.89	185
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.16	0.28	0.45	0.66	0.94	325
University qualifications	0.04	0.21	0.51	0.75	0.96	50
Overall	0.15	0.26	0.45	0.68	0.93	951

Note: This table includes only the biological children of survey respondents. Stepchildren, foster children and adopted children were all excluded, as the NZWFEE survey did not collect information on when these children moved in to live with the respondent or when they left the home to live elsewhere.



7



Children's Patterns of Leaving Home

In this chapter, we examine patterns of leaving home among children in different family circumstances (including original two-parent families, sole-parent families and blended families). The analysis presented here includes all children, regardless of the union status of their mothers, with one exception: children who were not the biological child of the mother but were living with their biological father and a stepmother were excluded. This is because we have no information on when these children first began to live with the blended family or when they left home. Nor do we know, for children who left home, whether they went to live alone, to live with other kin, to live with other unrelated adults, or to set up a family of their own.

7a Leaving Home

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportions of children who had left home by varying ages are given in Table 7.1. Less than a fifth (18 percent) of children had left home before reaching their 17th birthday, but more than 60 percent had left home by the time they turned 20. As life-table estimates beyond age 5 could be derived only for those children born before 1980, our capacity to make comparisons between the various birth cohorts of children was limited. Nevertheless, the table does show an emerging tendency for children of more recent birth cohorts to stay longer with their parents than children of older birth cohorts. Among children born before 1970, nearly a quarter (23 percent) had left home by the age of 17, while among those born during the 1970s, the proportion had dropped to 15 percent.

Age-specific rates of leaving home are given in Table 7.2. There was no gender differential in the rate of leaving home up to the age of 16. But, after their 16th birthday, female children had higher rates of leaving home than male children. Similarly, Māori children left home at a higher rate (62 percent) between the ages of 17 and 20 than “Other” children who were of neither Māori nor Pacific ethnicity (51 percent). At older ages, the ethnic differential reversed direction: among those aged between 21 and 24, 34 percent of Māori children left home compared with 57 percent of “Other” children. Pacific children were the least likely to leave home from the age of 10 onwards and the differential grew more pronounced with increasing age. Between the ages of 21 and 24, for example, only 15 percent of Pacific children left home compared with 34 percent of Māori children and 57 percent of “Other” children.

The partnership status of the mother was an important influence on the age at which children leave home,

particularly after their 10th birthday (Table 7.2). Children living with both original parents had the lowest rates of leaving home, while children living in sole-parent families and blended families both tended to leave home at earlier ages. Between the ages of 10 and 16, children living with a sole mother were more likely to leave home (16 percent) than children living with both original parents (10 percent) (although, after age 20, children living with sole parents had lower rates of leaving home, for reasons that are not entirely clear). Children living with their mother and a stepfather were most likely to leave home at an early age: nearly a quarter (23 percent) left home between the ages of 10 and 16. The elevated likelihood of leaving home among children living with their mother and a stepfather also held in the 17–20 age group: 65 percent of children in these families left home at these ages compared with 49 percent of those living with a sole mother and 51 percent of those living with both original parents.

To examine whether the partnership status of the mother had a differential effect on the likelihood of leaving home for female and male children, we derived age-specific rates of leaving home by the partnership status of the mother, controlling for the gender of the child. The results are given in Table 7.3. The effect of living with a mother and a stepfather increased the likelihood of leaving home more for female children than for male children. For instance, while 28 percent of female children living in this type of family left home at ages 10–16 and 71 percent left home at ages 17–20, the corresponding figures for male children were 20 percent and 60 percent respectively. Thus, the presence of a stepfather heightens the likelihood that a child will leave home – and to a greater degree for female children than for male children – from early adolescence onwards.



7b Summary

Among the total pool of children born to mothers in the survey, about one in five had left home before reaching 17 years of age and about three in five had left home before the age of 20. There were differences in rates of leaving home by gender and ethnicity. Although the gender differences only emerged after 16 years of age, the ethnic differences emerged earlier. After their 16th birthday, female children were more likely to leave home than males. Māori children were more likely to leave home than other children between the ages of 10 and 20, but were less likely to leave home between the ages of 21 and 24 than children who were neither of Māori nor Pacific ethnicity. Pacific children were least likely of all to leave home, from the age of 10 onwards.

The partnership status of mothers was strongly associated with children's propensity to leave home. Children living with sole mothers had higher rates of leaving home between the ages of 10 and 16 than children living with both their original parents. The group of children who had the highest rates of leaving home at a young age were those living with their biological mother and a stepfather. (Children who were living with their biological father and a stepmother were not able to be included in this analysis.) Female children who were living with their biological mother and a stepfather were especially likely to leave home at a young age. The presence of a stepfather, then, appears to increase the likelihood that female children will leave home at an early age.

Table 7.1

Life-table estimates of the cumulative proportion of children leaving home before a given age, by selected socio-demographic characteristics							
Characteristics	Cumulative proportion leaving before age:						Number of children
	1 yr	5 yrs	10 yrs	17 yrs	20 yrs	25 yrs	
Birth cohort of child							
Before 1970	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.23	0.72	0.88	1,211
1970–1979	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.15			1,766
1980–1989							2,001
1990–1995							1,298
Gender of child							
Male	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.17	0.57	0.79	3,279
Female	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.18	0.65	0.85	2,996
Ethnicity of child							
Māori	0.04	0.07	0.10	0.25	0.71	0.81	1,417
Pacific	0.03	0.05	0.08	0.17	0.49	0.56	291
Other	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.16	0.59	0.82	4,568
Education of mother							
No qualifications	0.03	0.06	0.08	0.22	0.64	0.83	2,093
Secondary qualifications	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.12	0.56	0.81	1,429
Tertiary – other qualifications	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.17	0.61	0.81	2,313
University qualifications	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.20	0.56	0.79	441
Partnership status of mother when child leaves home or at survey							
Same partnership	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.13	0.57	0.82	4,294
Sole parent	0.06	0.08	0.11	0.25	0.62	0.77	1,286
Different partnership to when born	0.00	0.03	0.06	0.28	0.75	0.88	696
Number of live births by mother							
1	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.20	0.55	0.72	415
2	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.13	0.54	0.82	1,770
3	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.17	0.58	0.80	1,878
4+	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.21	0.67	0.83	2,213
Overall	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.18	0.61	0.82	6,276

Table 7.2

Rate of leaving home of children in given age groups, by selected socio-demographic characteristics							
	Rate of leaving home						Number of children
	< 1 yr	1–4 yrs	5–9 yrs	10–16 yrs	17–20 yrs	21–24 yrs	
Birth cohort of child							
Before 1970	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.18	0.63	0.57	1,211
1970–1979	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.11			1,766
1980–1989	0.01	0.02					2,001
1990–1995							1,2
Gender of child							
Male	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.12	0.48	0.51	3,279
Female	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.13	0.58	0.56	2,996
Ethnicity of child							
Māori	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.17	0.62	0.34	1,417
Pacific	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.10	0.38	0.15	291
Other	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.12	0.51	0.57	4,568
Partnership status of mother when child leaves home or survey							
Same partnership	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.51	0.57	4,294
Sole parent	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.16	0.49	0.38	1,286
Different partnership to when born	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.23	0.65	0.54	696
Number of live births by mother							
1	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.13	0.43	0.38	415
2	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.47	0.60	1,770
3	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.12	0.50	0.52	1,878
F4+	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.15	0.58	0.50	2,213
Overall	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.13	0.52	0.53	6,276

Table 7.3

Rate of leaving home of children in given age groups, by gender of child and partnership status of mothers								
Gender of child	Partnership status	Rate of leaving home						Number of children
		< 1 yr	1–4 yrs	5–9 yrs	10–16 yrs	17–20 yrs	21–24 yrs	
Male	Same partnership	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.46	0.53	2,254
	Sole parent	0.05	0.02	0.05	0.17	0.46	0.45	660
	Different partnership to when born	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.20	0.60	0.50	365
Female	Same partnership	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.10	0.57	0.62	2,039
	Sole parent	0.06	0.03	0.02	0.15	0.53	0.30	626
	Different partnership to when born	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.28	0.71	0.59	331

8



Summary and Conclusions



In this chapter, we bring together the major findings of the study and make some general observations on patterns of family formation and change in New Zealand. The major purpose of the report was to document the changing patterns of family formation, dissolution and reconstitution in New Zealand over the period since the Second World War and to show how this has affected the contexts in which children are raised. More specifically, we have examined patterns of union formation (including both cohabitation and marriage), separation from marriages, repartnering, timing of parenthood, sole parenthood, prevalence of blended families and children's patterns of leaving home.

We examined these topics using data from the first-ever nationally representative sample survey of women, carried out in 1995, that had the aim of investigating family formation dynamics. We used bivariate life-table methods and multivariate discrete-time hazards modelling techniques to analyse these various aspects of dynamic family processes.

Union formation has been undergoing a major transformation in New Zealand, particularly since the 1960s. Women who had children during the baby-boom years of the 1950s and 1960s were the last generation among whom a majority adhered to traditional expectations surrounding marriage and childbearing. Since the baby-boom period, marriage has given way to cohabitation as the preferred first union. Consequently, age at first marriage for women has progressively been delayed until the late 20s and 30s. Over 90 percent of first marriages are now preceded by cohabitation and this phenomenon is very similar for both Māori and non-Māori women.

However, there remains a major ethnic difference in union formation: Māori women are more likely to enter into a first union in their teens than their non-Māori counterparts. There is also a historical difference in cohabitation rates between Māori and non-Māori: for all birth cohorts, including the older ones, Māori women have had a greater propensity to cohabit than non-Māori women. While the preference for early union formation among Māori means that Māori women are more likely than non-Māori women to marry during their teenage years, they are less likely to marry than non-Māori women once they have turned 20.

The trends in cohabitation and first marriage run parallel but in opposite directions. Consequently, the proportion of women who had entered a union of any form (marriage or cohabitation) by 30 years of age has remained high and stable. By 30 years of age, there

was very little difference between Māori and non-Māori women in the proportions who had entered a first union.

The changes in cohabitation and marriage have been accompanied by two related phenomena. There is an increased propensity now, compared with the past, for women to have lived in at least two unions by the time they reach 30 years of age. There is also an emerging relationship pattern among younger women: living-apart-together. In 1995, one out of every three women aged 20–24 who were in a relationship was living apart from her partner. Typically, these women were still living with their parents.

The period since 1970 has also seen substantial increases in rates of separation from first marriages. Although the propensity to separate continued to increase in the 1980s, the major change had occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s. The increase in the 1980s was more modest and there was little further increase in the 1990s. This indicates that the likelihood of separation may now have stabilised.

About one in five women had separated from a first marriage within 10 years. The risk of separation was highest during the early years of marriage and declined as the duration of the marriage lengthened. A woman's chances of separation also diminished with increasing age. Women from the most recent birth cohort were much more likely to separate than those born earlier. Getting married at a young age also increased the probability of separation.

The increased propensity to separate from first marriages has been accompanied by an increased propensity to enter new partnerships after separation. In fact, about three out of four women had repartnered within 10 years of their separation. Repartnering was most likely shortly after separation and the longer a woman had been separated, the less likely it became that she would repartner. Being younger at the time of

the separation, being childless, having no children aged younger than 16 and having a professional occupation all increased the propensity of separated women to enter into a new union, whether this was a cohabitation or a marriage. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between Māori and non-Māori women in the likelihood of repartnership after separation.

Despite the transformations in union formation and dissolution, most women can be expected to reach parenthood by the end of their reproductive lives. However, the timing of parenthood has also undergone major changes. Childbearing is now concentrated between the ages of 20 and 29 for Māori women and between the ages of 25 and 39 for non-Māori women. Delayed childbearing is more common among the more recent birth cohorts, among non-Māori women and among highly educated women.

A corollary of delayed childbearing is that an increasing proportion of women in their 20s and early 30s remain childless. This raises the possibility that many women may remain childless as they near the end of their reproductive span. However, data on women's future childbearing intentions showed that only about one in 10 women might remain childless if these intentions were to be realised. This is close to current rates of childlessness among the older cohorts of women in the survey.

Changes have also occurred in the family context in which children are born. Increasing numbers of births are occurring outside legal marriage, both in cohabitation and outside any form of union. For the most recent birth cohorts and time periods, where a woman had her first birth before the age of 20, in an overwhelming majority of cases the child was born either in cohabitation or outside any form of union, rather than within a traditional conjugal union. Indeed, it is evident that, in all age groups, having children in cohabitation has gained momentum in recent years.

Although teenage motherhood is not as common as during the peak of the baby-boom period, it is still more common among Māori women than among non-Māori women. Moreover, there was a strong association between the childbearing patterns of mothers and their daughters. The daughter of a teenage mother was more likely to become a teenage mother herself than the daughter of a woman who had had her first baby after the age of 20.

A major outcome of all these changes has been the emergence of sole-parent families as a significant component of the total population of families. Women who have children now have roughly a 50 percent chance that they will spend some time during their lives as a sole mother. Teenage mothers and mothers of more recent birth cohorts are several times more likely to become sole parents than other mothers. The educational qualifications of mothers, along with their ethnicity, were not strong determinants of the probability of becoming a sole parent. Once a woman had become a sole parent, she was more likely to exit from sole parenthood if she was younger, held a professional or semi-professional job or had been a sole parent for a shorter time.

About three in five sole mothers were not in a paid job when they became a sole parent. Sole mothers who were Māori, were younger or had few or no educational qualifications were less likely to be in paid work. A sole mother's chances of moving into the paid workforce were greater if she had a higher-level educational qualification or at least three years' prior work experience. Interestingly, there was no major difference between Māori and non-Māori sole mothers in the probability of entry into the workforce.

Just under 40 percent of children had spent some time living with a sole mother before they turned 17. Children of Māori and Pacific ethnicity were about 75 percent and 90 percent more likely, respectively, to have spent some time living with a sole mother than other children. Children of teenage mothers were more likely to have spent some time living with a sole mother and the probability of living with a sole mother was highest in the preschool years.

A majority of children leave home between the ages of 17 and 20: around three out of every five children had left home before they turned 20. However, there appears to be an emerging tendency among children of more recent birth cohorts to stay at home longer than children of older birth cohorts did. There was also a gender difference in the age at which children leave home. After their 16th birthday, female children were more likely than male children to leave home.

The partnership status of the mother was also an important determinant of children's propensity to leave home. Children who were living with their mother and a





stepfather had the highest likelihood of leaving home at an early age, followed by those who were living with a sole mother. Those who were least likely to leave home early were children living with both original parents. This tendency was more pronounced for female children than for male children: indeed, from the age of 10 on, female children were more likely than male children to leave home if they lived with their mother and a stepfather. The presence of a stepfather, then, appears to increase the probability that children will leave home at an early age, especially for females.

Another major outcome of the changing dynamics of union dissolution, repartnering and childbearing is the increasing prevalence of blended families. Although the data on blended families available from the NZWFEE survey did not lend themselves to definitive analysis, it was possible to draw some indicative conclusions. The results suggest that close to a fifth of women have, at some time, been parents in a blended family. In the vast majority of cases, these were partial-blended families, which include children from a previous union (or unions) of one partner only. Only a very small number of mothers (2.5 percent) had lived in a full-blended family, which includes children from previous relationships of both partners. Māori women were about twice as likely as non-Māori women to have spent some time in a blended family. Similarly, women with no educational qualifications were about twice as likely to have lived in a blended family as those with a university degree. The experience of living in a blended family was also more common among more recent birth cohorts.

Among the children of women in the survey, a fifth had spent some time living in a blended family before 17 years of age. Māori children and those born since the 1970s were more likely to have lived in a blended family than were non-Māori children and those born during the 1950s and 1960s. The duration of time children stayed in a blended family was generally short. For a third of the children who had spent time living in a blended family, the spell had ended within three years and, for nearly half, the spell had ended within five years. While there remain a number of unanswered questions about children's experience of blended families, it is clear that, at least for some children, the spell in a blended family occupied only a relatively small portion of their childhood.

In summary, the data presented in this report confirm that there have been major changes in patterns of family formation, dissolution and repartnering in New Zealand over recent decades. These changes mirror those observed in other developed countries where delayed marriage and childbearing, cohabitation, separation, repartnering and multiple unions are all more common now than in the past. As a result of these changes, family structures are also changing, which in turn is altering the contexts in which children are raised. These changes, and the underlying factors that have given rise to them, have wide-ranging implications across the whole domain of social policy. While it is beyond the scope of this report to discuss these implications, the information provided here should assist with the task of planning public policy responses, by providing a sounder information base about the nature, scope and effect of changes that have been reshaping New Zealand families over recent decades.

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ISBN: 0-478-18311-9