

Executive Summary Report



EDGE

(Exploring **D**iversity, **G**ender, & **E**xclusion)

Experiences of Being Single in Ireland: Women's Perspectives

Social
Sciences
ConneXions



Women's
Collective
Ireland
Limerick



**EQUALITY
DIVERSITY
INCLUSION**

Report Title:

Experiences of Being Single in Ireland: Women's Perspectives

Report Authors:

Dr Lindsey Liston PI EDGE Research Group, TUS

Yvie Murphy Women's Collective Ireland-Limerick

Karen Sugrue EDGE Research Group, TUS

Year of Publication: 2026



Women's
Collective
Ireland
Limerick



Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Background Context	5
Methodology	8
Ethical Review	9
Participants	9
Informed consent	9
Data Analysis	9
Limitations	9
Identity (Demographic Profile & Who Participants Are)	12
Gender Identity	12
Age Range	12
Current Relationship Status	12
Length of Time Single	12
Sexual Orientation	13
Disability	13
Ethnicity	13
Geographic Location	13
Family Context	14
Parenting Support	14
Key Demographic Trends	14
Lived Experience of Being a Single Woman	15
Level of Satisfaction with Single Status	15
Intimacy Needs	15
Support Systems	15
Benefits and Challenges	17
Challenges of Being Single	18
Financial	18
Housing	18
Lack of Support and Loneliness	18
Dating Challenges	18
Judgment and Social Stigma	18
Mental and Emotional Load	18
Benefits of Being Single	19
Freedom and Independence	19
Peace and Emotional Wellbeing	19
Personal Growth	19
Control Over Time and Lifestyle	19
Improved Mental Health	19
Better Quality Relationships (Non-Romantic)	19

Stereotypes	20
Stereotypes about Loneliness / Sadness	21
Something Wrong with You/Being Undesirable	21
Pressure to be in Relationships	22
“Cat Lady” / Mockery Stereotypes	22
Single Not by Choice Stereotype	23
Societal Pressure	23
Single and Aging	24
Health and Safety when Living Alone	24
Support in old Age	24
Companionship, Intimacy and Loneliness	24
Fear of Missing Out	25
Independence and Vulnerability	25
No Concerns	25
Ideal Living Situation	26
Desire to Live Alone	26
Female-Centred Communal Living	26
Desire for Romantic Partner (with conditions)	26
Housing Security	26
Support and Resources	28
Housing and Cost of Living Support	28
Community and Support Networks	28
Financial Support and Advice	28
Practical Support	29
Safety Awareness	29
Health Planning and Care	29
Policy Recognition	29
Conclusions & Recommendations	30
Recommendations	32
Housing and Financial Policies	32
Community and Social Supports	32
Support for Ageing and Long-Term Care	33
Practical and Safety Supports	33
Challenging Stigma and Social Narratives	33
Useful Resources	34
Bibliography	36



EDGE

(Exploring Diversity, Gender, & Exclusion)

About EDGE Research Group

The **E**xploring **D**iversity, **G**ender, & **E**xclusion (EDGE) research group is situated in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at TUS and is a member of the Social Sciences ConneXions institute. EDGE examines a broad range of topics related to equality, diversity,

and inclusion in contemporary society. Current projects include funded research in the area of gender-based abuse, research on gender and work, issues relating to sexuality and identity, homelessness, social class and mothering in contemporary Ireland.

Working in partnership with WCI Limerick.



Women's Collective Ireland Limerick

WCI Limerick is one of 17 women's community development projects under the Women's Collective Ireland umbrella. They aim to promote gender equality through their work and create supportive and welcoming spaces for women to gather. They provide an information and support service for women and run various courses and events, including

educational and awareness raising workshops. They regularly get involved in local and national campaigns. Additionally, they conduct research and public consultations relating to women's issues and broader issues using a gendered lens and were instrumental in the establishment of the Limerick Women's Caucus, the first of its kind at a local level in the country.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to extend special thanks to all those who participated in the research for this report. In particular, the research would not have been possible without the women who gave generously

of their time to share their experiences and knowledge throughout the research. We would also like to thank the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Office in TUS for funding this research.



Background Context

Amatonormativity refers to the societal assumption that everyone is “better off” when they have an exclusive, romantic, long-term coupled relationship and that pursuing such a relationship is a prominent goal for us all (Diane, 2026). It also promotes the (often false) belief that romantic relationships are more important than friendships, reinforces the narrative that people in couples are never lonely, and is part of the system of beliefs which justifies the structuring of society around married couples (housing, taxes, social groupings) at the expense of those who are single.

Until relatively recently, these assumptions were taken as fact and left unchallenged. However, over the last decade or so international researchers and writers have argued for the need to contest these old certainties. There is now a new emerging area of academic and political research called ‘single studies’ (Carr et al, 2024; DePaulo, 2023; Kislev and Marsh, 2023, Kislev, 2022; McNulty et al, 2016). The numbers of single people are increasing worldwide. For example, between 2009 and 2022 the number of single adult households grew by 29.6% and the growth is 30.7% for

single adult households without children (Eurostat, 2023). The numbers of single people are now so significant in populations (about half) that governments have started setting up new offices charged with incorporating the research being conducted by Single Studies scholars across the globe into developing new public policies that support single people's lives (Goldman et al, 2026; OECD, 2025).

In 2019 Morgan Stanley predicted that by 2030 45% of all women would be single in the US. This prediction has turned out to be an underestimation and by 2021 52% of women and 46% of the population were single (US Census Bureau, 2023). Ireland is lagging behind but only slightly, with 43% being single, with separated/ divorced at 6% and widowed at 5% (CSO, 2022). With some local variations, these trends hold across Europe and most of the Global North. What we are looking at is about half of all adults in 2026 being single. Where nuclear families were once the norm, now they are less common. "In at least 25 nations, if you knock on any door at random, you are more likely to be greeted by a person living alone than a couple and their children. In those countries there are more one person households than nuclear family households. In some of them, such as Finland, Germany, Japan, and Estonia there are about twice as many" (DePaulo, 2024; OECD Family Database, 2016). People are marrying less, and when they do, they are doing it at an older age. People are divorcing and separating more often, and rates of re-marriage are also decreasing. Women are having fewer babies and there is a significant decline in birth

rates with the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation (IMHE) predicting that by 2050 more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the countries in the world will be below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman (UN World Population Prospects, 2024). According to the CSO (2024, Q1) Ireland's fertility rate is already significantly below replacement rate at 1.5.

What is clear from these trends is that significant social change is under way. This has acted as a catalyst for social researchers to become even more eager to find out whether anyone is happy with these changes and who may be benefiting from them. Evidence suggests that it is women. In a recent study Hoan & MacDonald (2024) reported that single women have "higher overall well-being, higher relationship status satisfaction, higher life satisfaction, higher sexual satisfaction as well as a lower desire for a partner". Women are financially independent, have strong social support networks, and are reporting significant unhappiness with "inequalities within heterosexual relationships, including inequitable divisions of household labor and the lack of priority of women's sexual pleasure (the 'orgasm gap')". In other words, there is growing evidence internationally that runs counter to typical stereotypes that women have been subjected to for decades. This evidence suggests that single women live longer, happier, healthier lives, with more money, friends, holidays, sexual satisfaction, and community than married or partnered women. The study also found that "men are unhappier when they are single and have significantly lower well-being". Put

simply, relationships “lead to more rewards for men and more costs for women”. Moreover, when the physical, emotional, and financial violence perpetrated by men against women is factored into the equation, and the extreme burden of care work that falls almost exclusively on them, it would appear that the costs for women of being in relationships are beginning to simply appear too high. The social pressure to be in a couple or what the literature terms as ‘compulsory coupledness’ (Wilkinson, 2012) appears to have resulted in an increasing number of women questioning the little in return they get for their work in a relationship.

Politicians have started to take notice of these trends because of the numbers involved but also because it is an issue that intersects with several other significant concerns of our age including the housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, the climate crisis, violence against women and girls, the aging population, and of course immigration. All of these issues are impacted by the growing trend of singledom and policy makers around the world have begun to look at ways to support this newly emerging group in the middle of the geopolitical omni-crises we are currently living through. As feminists have put it — the personal is always political. We are currently witnessing hyper capitalist, heteronormative, highly performative narratives that attempt to shame single women (‘Crazy Cat Ladies’) (McKeithen, 2017) into adhering to social conventions that benefit men at enormous cost to their health, happiness, and lives. This is in the

context of couples now being the minority (Kislev, 2024), that being in a couple does not mean a person is happy or fulfilled, nor is not lonely. Being alone and being lonely are two very different things. Loneliness is about the quality of connections you have. Many people report being lonely when surrounded by people. Research has consistently revealed that single women with no children have more friends, community and better relationships with their families than women in relationships (DePaulo, 2023). Looking at the age-old threat of dying alone, research has found that men are seven times more likely to leave their partner than the other way around if one of them gets a serious illness (Glantz et al., 2009). Equally, the world’s longest running study on health and wellbeing, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, running now for 80 years, has found that the number one important factor to health and longevity is whether we have positive relationships with people who we feel good around. It is not the type of relationship – it’s the quality of the connection.

Against this background, little of what we have been told about romantic relationships appears to bear up under the scrutiny of research and instead such types of relationships should be seen as just one of many ways of living that are open to people, rather than the only valid way. This makes the need for Irish data for politicians and policy makers more pressing to ensure that policies and services are evidence informed and reflective of demographic changes. It is within this context; this research seeks to make a contribution.

Methodology

The methodological design was informed by the purposes and aims of the project. Specifically, it was designed to:

1. Gather demographic data on single women in Ireland
2. Understand how single status for women intersects with other aspects of their social and embodied experiences in Ireland
3. Provide a foundational data set that can be used by local projects which support women to inform the types of workshops, supports, policy work and programmes they can plan for the following year.

Data was collected using an online Microsoft Forms questionnaire. The questionnaire is comprised of 30 questions broken down into thematic areas that were informed by the growing body of international literature on single studies (Carr et al, 2024; DePaulo, 2023;

Ochnik and Slonim, 2020; Kislev and Marsh, 2023; Kislev, 2022; McNulty et al, 2016). The questionnaire was broken down into three macro thematic areas, including:

1. Identity (demographic profile, who the participants are)
2. Lived Experience of being Single (emotional, social, economic, practical)
3. Societal Influences and Future Needs (Stereotypes, discrimination, social narratives, stigma, support needs, aspirations).

The questions were both open and closed, allowing respondents to expand upon their answers.

Ethical Review

The research was submitted to the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at TUS for Ethical Review, and the application was approved. The fieldwork did not include vulnerable adults or young people under the age of 18 years.

Participants

Participants were recruited through the online questionnaire, media calls and via several online platforms from February 2026 to May 2026. Participants were required to be 18 years of age or over, identify as female and report being single at the time of the study to be eligible to participate. The sample consisted of 159 participants, 145 of whom identified as female/woman, 1 who identified as transgender and 2 individuals identifying as nonbinary, with the average respondent falling into the mid 40s (range = 18–65+).

Informed consent

Consent was obtained from the participants before data collection. This consisted of a detailed description of the purpose of the research, confidentiality, anonymity, and how the data would be used. Participants were also informed of their right to decline to take part in the study and/or to withdraw from it. Consent and permission for the use of the data were provided by participants by ticking the relevant box on the online questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the questionnaires was framed by the questionnaire design. This focused on the thematic areas of demographic profile, family context, relationship status, experiences of being single, challenges and benefits, wellbeing and life satisfaction, social perception and discrimination, support systems, support needs and resources. Demographic data were subjected to descriptive analysis (Loeb et al, 2017). The open data was subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Limitations

The questionnaire targeted single women only and is therefore not representative of all experiences of, or indeed perspectives on, singlehood. The analysis of the questionnaires was done to achieve the objectives of the research, which was to provide insights into how single status for women intersects with other aspects of their social and embodied experiences in Ireland to provide a foundational data set that can be used by local projects which support women to inform the types of workshops, supports, policy work and programmes they can plan for and is therefore indicative.



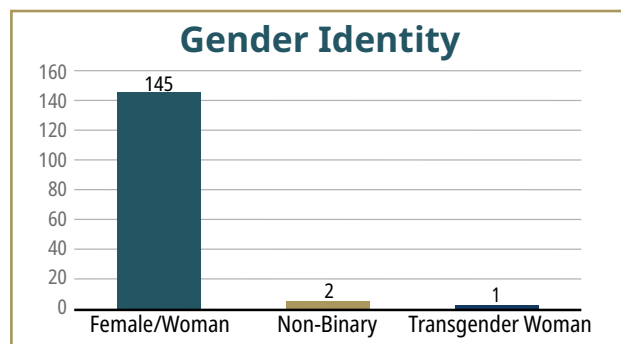


Identity

(Demographic Profile & Who Participants Are):

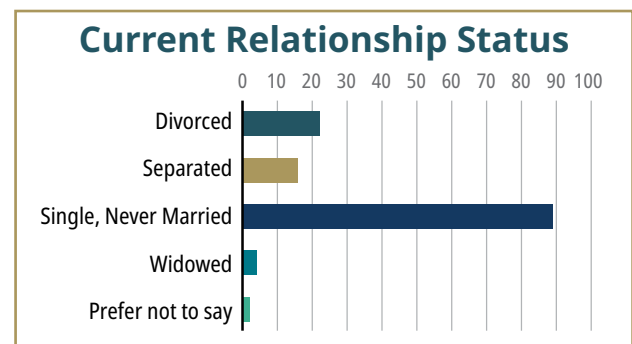
Gender Identity

Of the 159 respondents, the majority (n=145) identified as female/woman. This represented 98% of the sample. Two identified as non-binary, with one respondent identifying as transgender.



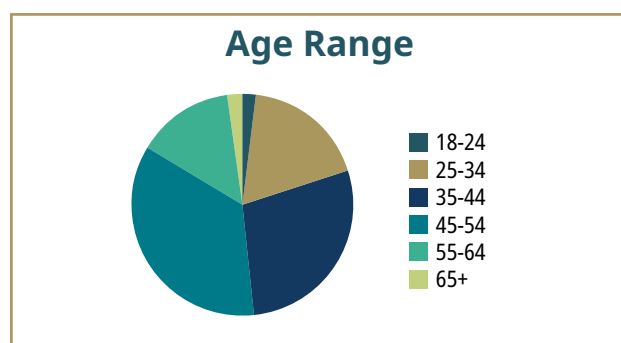
Current Relationship Status

The majority of respondents (67%) described their current relationship status as single, never married. 17% reported being divorced. This was followed by 12% who stated that they were separated. 3% stated that they were widowed, while 1% preferred not to say.



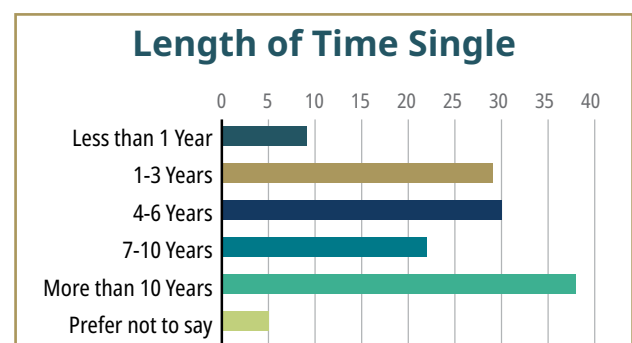
Age Range:

The age range of the respondents spanned from 18-65+. The average respondent fell within the mid-40s range. This was followed by 28% within the 35-44 age range. 18% fell within the 25-34 age range. 14% of respondents fell within the 55-64 age range, while the 18-24 and the 65 and over age ranges both accounted for 2% of respondents.



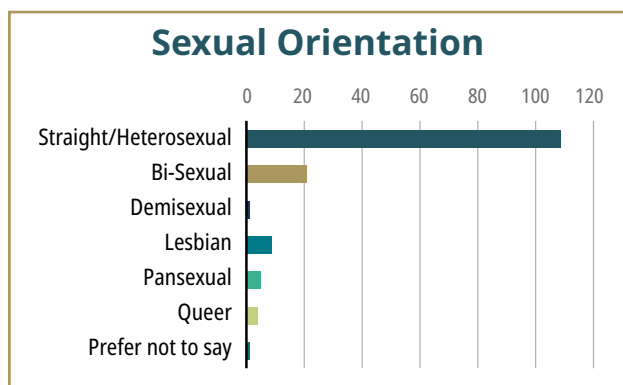
Length of Time Single:

There was a variance in the length of time respondents reported being single. 29% of respondents reported being single for more than 10 years. This was followed by 22% who stated they were single for 4-6 years. Those single for 1-3 years also represented 22% of respondents. 7% of respondents reported being single for less than 1 year, while 4% preferred not to say how long they were single.



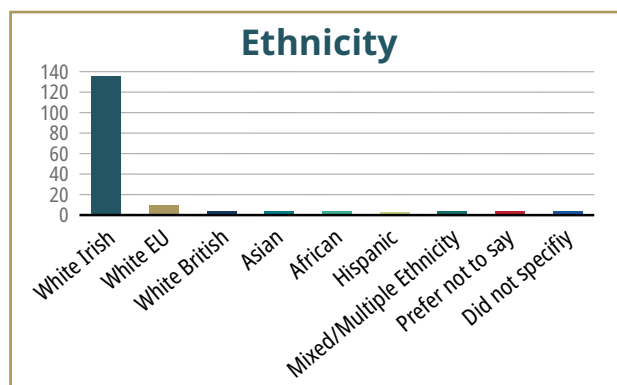
Sexual Orientation:

There was some diversity in terms of sexual orientation among the respondents. 73% of respondents stated that they were heterosexual or straight. 14% stated that their sexual orientation was bisexual. 6% stated that they were lesbian. 3% stated that they were pansexual, while 2% reported being queer, 1% reported demisexual as their sexual orientation, and 1% preferred not to say.



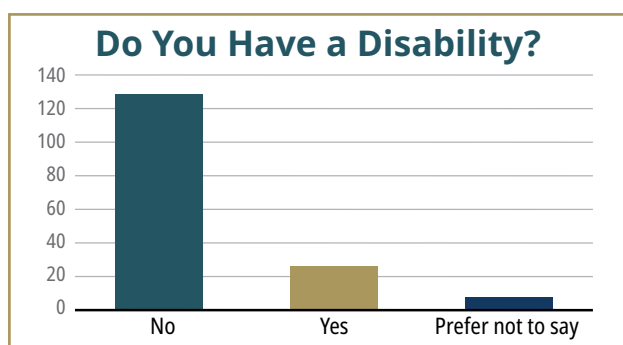
Ethnicity:

In terms of ethnicity, 80% of respondents were White Irish. This was followed by 5% of which were White EU. White British made up 2% of respondents. 2% were of Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Backgrounds, 2% were Asian, followed by African and Hispanic who each made up 1% of respondents. This represents a significant imbalance equating to approximately 87% of total respondents being White.



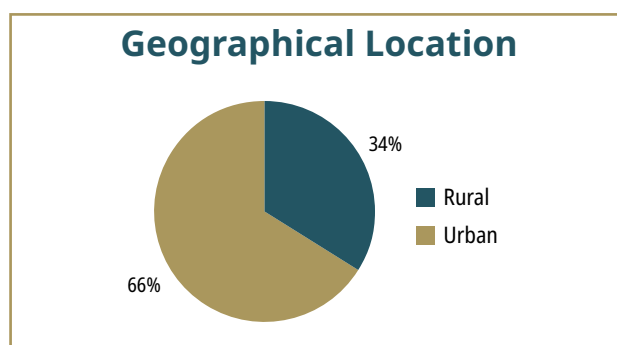
Disability:

The vast majority of respondents (80%) reported that they did not have any disabilities. 16% of respondents reported that they had a disability, while 4% of respondents preferred not to say.



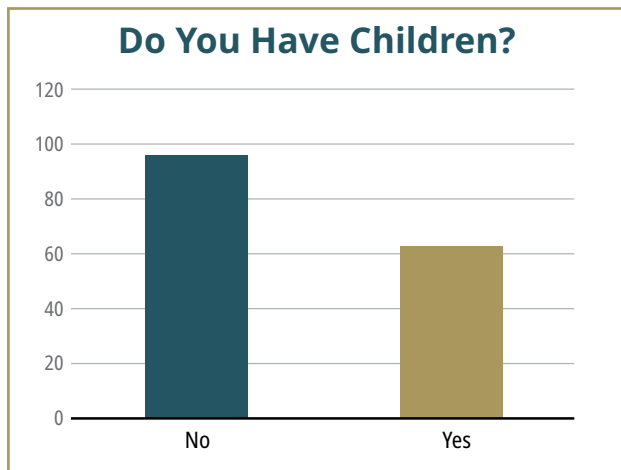
Geographic Location:

66% of respondents reported living in an urban area, while 34% stated that they lived in a rural area.



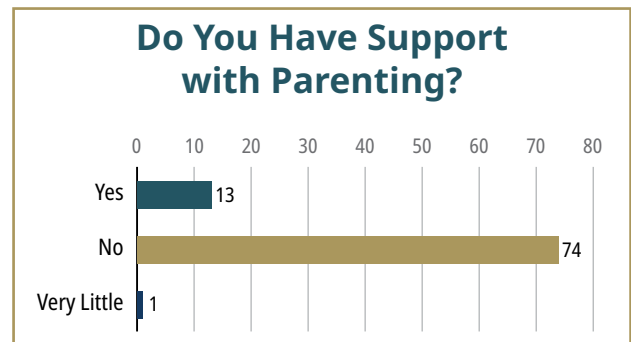
Family Context:

60% of single women reported having no children. 40% of single women reported having one or more children.



Parenting Support:

The majority of respondents (84%) who had children reported that they had no support with parenting. 15% of respondents stated that they did have support with parenting and 1% reported having some or a little support with parenting.



Key Demographic Trends:

The average age range of respondents was mid 40s. In terms of ethnicity, 80% of respondents were White Irish. 5% were White EU. White British made up 2% of respondents. 2% were of Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Backgrounds, 2% were Asian, followed by African and Hispanic who each made up 1% of respondents. 73% of respondents stated that they were heterosexual or straight. 14% stated that their sexual orientation was bi-sexual. 6% stated that they were lesbian. 3% stated that they were pansexual, while 2% reported being queer, 1% reported demisexual as their sexual orientation and 1% preferred not to say.

The majority of respondents (67%) described their current relationship status as single, never married. 29% of respondents reported being single for more than 10 years. This was followed by 22% who stated they were single for 4-6 years. 63% of women reported being satisfied with being single. This is in comparison to 10% who reported being dissatisfied with their single status. This indicates that Irish women are staying single longer, choosing not to get married or at least are waiting longer to do so, and are generally happy with being single. However, of the 40% of single women who reported having one or more children, 84% reported having no support with parenting responsibilities/duties.

Lived Experience of Being a Single Woman

Level of Satisfaction with Single Status:

The vast majority of respondents reported being satisfied with their single status. 16% of respondents reported being extremely satisfied with their single status, followed by 47% who reported being very satisfied. 27% of respondents reported being neutral with their single status. 6% of respondents reported being dissatisfied with their single status, while 4% reported being extremely dissatisfied with their single status. Combining those who reported being extremely satisfied and very satisfied with their single status, this equates to 63% of women being satisfied with being single. This was in comparison to 10% who reported being dissatisfied with their single status.

Intimacy Needs:

In terms of intimacy needs, the majority of respondents reported that their intimacy needs were met citing 'sex toys, causal partners, companions'. Others cited 'being fine alone, needs are low or fulfilled and/or emotional needs are met outside of intimate relationships' such as friendships and family. In contrast, 34% of respondents reported having unmet intimacy needs citing 'non-sexual physical touch such as 'cuddling, hugging and affection' as the most missed form of intimacy. Others cited the loss of 'emotional connection, companionship and someone to talk to/rely on' as unmet intimacy needs.

A strong theme running through the responses was a preference for "peace" over

intimacy with this trade-off being intentional to "avoid stress, toxic relationships" with respondents reporting *"I'd rather go without than compromise"*.

Support Systems:

Responses showed a strong reliance on informal social networks such as friendships and family alongside professional support and self-reliance. Friendships were the most frequently reported support system (78%). Respondents cited female friendships and close friendship groups as a primary source of support. This was followed by family. Parents, adult children and siblings were also cited as a key source of support. This was commonly associated with practical support such as child-care or help during emergencies. A significant number of respondents reported relying on professionals for support, such as therapists. Self-reliance was also cited. Nearly a quarter of respondents reported relying on themselves for support, citing "myself, "no one", and "I don't rely on anything". Approximately 18% of respondents stated that they rely on community and peer groups as a support system, citing "single parents, queer community, disability services, AA, and religious groups". Approximately 15% of respondents reported relying on activities and hobbies as a support system, such as the gym, yoga, travel, and mindfulness, as a source of support. A minority of respondents (approximately 8%) reported having no meaningful support systems to rely on and cited feelings of isolation and lack of dependable support.



Benefits and Challenges

Overall, 91% of respondents reported experiencing benefits as a result of being single. 82% also reported experiencing some challenges. 9% reported experiencing no benefits as a result of being single. An important context here was that even among those who reported challenges, the vast majority also reported benefits, with challenges mainly being related to structural issues such as financial strain and housing, as opposed to psychological and emotional well-being related to being single.



Challenges of Being Single

Financial:

Financial pressure and the cost of living were the most dominant themes by a large margin. 65% of respondents reported the higher cost of living on a single income as a key challenge. Respondents cited difficulty buying and/or renting a house on a single income. They also reported challenges with getting mortgage approval as a single person. Paying “single supplements” associated with travel, hotels, utility bills was also cited as a challenge. Respondents also reported a lack of ‘tax advantages’ compared to couples as a contributing factor to financial pressure with several responses stating explicitly “everything is more expensive”, and that systems “are set up for couples”. Equally, 42% of women strongly agreed that their single status impacts their financial planning with a further 30% agreeing with this statement.

Housing:

Closely linked to finances, housing was reported as another significant challenge for single women. 48% of respondents reported struggling to get on the property ladder as a single woman as a key challenge. Respondents also cited carrying the full responsibility for paying rent/mortgage on a single income. Difficulties maintaining the house was also reported as a challenge by women. Having no one to share household tasks, DIY or dealing with emergencies were cited as key challenges.

Lack of Support and Loneliness:

42% of respondents reported feeling alone when things go wrong as a challenge. Respondents also cited having no one to

rely on during illness or stress and missing championship or shared experiences as a challenge. Social isolation, particularly after a divorce or those parenting alone, was also cited as a challenge by respondents. However, it should be noted that loneliness was often described as occasional as opposed to constant.

Dating Challenges:

36% of respondents cited dating difficulties as a challenge. Respondents reported frustration with poor experiences with dating apps and difficulty meeting genuine or emotionally available partners. Smaller dating pools, particularly as it relates to age, location and sexuality, were also cited as a challenge, coupled with a lack of commitment and inconsistency.

Judgment and Social Stigma:

33% of respondents reported strong societal pressure as a challenge, citing assumptions that there is something “wrong” with being single”. Respondents also cited pity or intrusive questions such as “why are you still single” as a challenge, together with being excluded from couple-centric social settings and feeling undervalued compared to couples as a challenge.

Mental and Emotional Load:

28% of respondents reported carrying the mental and emotional load alone as a challenge. This was especially the case for single parents or previously partnered women. Respondents cited carrying all the decision-making, emotional labor and the stress of having to do everything alone as a challenge in comparison to when they were partnered.

Benefits of Being Single

Freedom and Independence:

The most consistent theme among responses in relation to experiencing benefits as a result of being single were freedom and independence. 78% of respondents explicitly stated freedom and independence as the overwhelming benefit to being single. Respondents consistently cited control over time, life decisions and ability to travel, relocate or change careers freely. Autonomy in parenting decisions was also cited together with 'no need to compromise' on what they want. Words such as 'independence, control, choice and freedom' appeared consistently across the data.

Peace and Emotional Wellbeing:

61% of women reported peace and emotional wellbeing as an important benefit of being single. Women described the benefits of being single as "calmer, less stressful, free from conflict, anxiety and emotional burden". They also described it as a "relief after abusive or difficult relationships". "Peace" and "peace of mind" were recurring phrases when describing benefits experienced as a result of being single.

Personal Growth:

Another benefit of being single was personal growth and self-discovery. 47% of respondents cited increased confidence and self-reliance, learning who they are, being able to rebuild

their identity after relationships and investing in themselves citing education, self-development and career as a key benefit of being single.

Control Over Time and Lifestyle:

44% percent of respondents reported control over their time and lifestyle decisions as a benefit of being single. Women cited having flexibility in routines, the ability to pursue hobbies and interests and spontaneity as key benefits of being single. They also cited space and privacy as important benefits of being single.

Improved Mental Health:

Improved mental health was reported as a benefit of being single. 39% of women, particularly among those who reported leaving relationships, cited this as a key benefit of being single.

Better Quality Relationships (Non-Romantic):

26% of respondents reported improved quality of non-romantic relationships as a benefit of being single. Women reported having "more time for friends and family, healthier interpersonal relationships and less emotional strain as important benefits of being single.

Overall, in terms of benefits and challenges experienced as a result of being single, women identified the challenges as being predominantly systemic and societal, for example, financial, housing, stigma and policies and systems built around couples at the expense of single people. On the other hand, the benefits were predominantly personal and psychological, such as increased freedom, independence, peace of mind, personal autonomy and self-growth. The consistent theme within the data is that being single is financially harder, but quality of life and mental well-being were often better for women compared to when they were partnered.

Stereotypes:

When asked if there were any stereotypes about being single that they would like to challenge, six recurring themes emerged in responses.



1. Stereotypes about Loneliness / Sadness

Frequently cited was the desire to challenge the stereotype that all single women are lonely and sad.



“That single women are sad individuals that are lonely and want a partner”



“That you’re a washed-up spinster if you’re single in your late 30s”



“That you’re lonely or need a man or I’ll change my mind”



“That we are lonely and sit at home doing nothing but watching tv!”



“That single people are unhappy, unfulfilled and lonely”



“That we’re all lonely and will die alone with our cats”

2. Something Wrong with You/ Being Undesirable

Equally, common was the desire to challenge the stereotype that there is something “wrong with you” if you are single underlined by assumptions of “being undesirable” as opposed to it being a choice.



“That there must be something wrong with me”



“That you have something wrong with you”



“That a woman is single not by choice and that she must have been rejected”



“People think I must be mad, gay or high maintenance”



“That single women have something wrong with them that keeps them single”.

3. Pressure to be in Relationships

Another theme was to challenge societal pressure to be in relationships that is informed by perceptions that women need a partner to be happy.

“THAT SINGLE WOMEN NEED A MAN.”

“That women need a partner”

“That you can’t be fulfilled without a partner and children”

“That our lives are over if we don’t get married and have children at a certain age”

“That everyone is better off in a relationship”

“That you need a man to be happy”

4. “Cat Lady” / Mockery Stereotypes

Respondents commonly wanted to challenge mockery stereotypes, citing “cat lady or lonely cat lady” as stereotypes they wanted to most challenge about being a single woman.

“The trope of a single woman in her 30s are all desperate to find love”

“Crazy cat lady”

“That we are surrounded by cats, desperate to meet man etc.”

“I’m certainly not a lonely cat lady!”

“Having cats instead of a man is a bad thing!”

5. Single Not by Choice Stereotype

Another common stereotype respondents wanted to challenge was the thinking that they are not single by choice or that they are lacking options for a partner. Respondents stated that they were happy with their choice, emphasizing they would rather be alone than be with the wrong person.



"I'm single out of choice not out of options"



"I am single by choice"



"There is nothing wrong with it"



"Women are complete in and of themselves and don't need anyone"



"I would much rather be single for the rest of my life than end up with the wrong man"



"I am very comfortable saying never again"

6. Societal Pressure

Finally, respondents reported that they would like to see more 'push back' on societal pressures and the acceptance that it is appropriate to ask people "why they are single". They also stated that they would like to see the "othering of women" challenged and the tendency for women to be defined by what they lack as opposed to what they can do changed.



"I would like people to consider what they are saying to someone when they ask why are you single?"



"It's still a mans world"



"Women are seen as the other. This needs to change"



"Single women are often defined by what they don't have, instead of what they do"

Single and Aging:

Respondents reported a number of concerns about being single and aging. A number of overlapping consistent themes emerged in the data.

Health and Safety when Living Alone:

38% of respondents reported being worried about getting sick or having a fall with no one there to help them. Respondents also cited concern around cognitive or mobility decline and not having someone to assist them. Respondents also noted being vulnerable to exploitation or unsafe situations. However, respondents also noted that these concerns were less about being single but instead related to living alone without immediate backup should such concerns materialize.

Support in old Age:

31% of respondents cited support and care in the absence of relying on children or a partner as concern as they age. Respondents worried about who would advocate for their medical needs and who would help make decisions if they are unable to themselves. However, respondents also expressed awareness that having a partner or children does not guarantee care. In this context, a lack of support structures were key causes of concerns, separate to single status.

Companionship, Intimacy and Loneliness:

34% of respondents reported fear of long-term loneliness, wanting a partner to grow old with, concerns about social exclusion as friends partner up and missing emotional and physical intimacy.

Fear of Missing Out:

18% of respondents expressed concerns about missing out on 'traditional life paths' including finding a partner, not having children or running out of time to do this and fear that they will have regrets in this regard later in life.

Independence and Vulnerability:

12% of respondents expressed concern relating to independence vs vulnerability. Respondents reported valuing independence but worrying about needing help and not being used to asking for it. They also reported fear of losing autonomy by having to go into nursing homes because of not having someone to support them at home.

No Concerns:

25% of respondents cited having "no" concerns about aging and being single. Respondents who reported having no concerns or who worried least about aging and being single cited having built strong friendships and communities, thinking early about long-term financial planning and being socially active.

Ideal Living Situation

Desire to Live Alone:

60% of respondents reported living alone as their ideal preference. This was the case among those who were open to or wanted a romantic relationship. Here, a strong desire for wanting to maintain personal space was expressed. There was also a strong rejection of housing sharing or cohabiting with a partner.

Female-Centred Communal Living:

15% of respondents reported female-centred community living, with their own private space and shared support models as their ideal living situation.

Desire for Romantic Partner (with conditions):

55% of respondents cited wanting love, companionship and/or a long-term relationship. However, this was often connected to conditions such as respect, equality, and emotional safety, with over 30% citing a preference for living separately or not living together full-time, if they entered into a romantic relationship.

Housing Security:

40% of respondents said their ideal living situation would be owning their own home and having a manageable mortgage. However, this was linked explicitly to ensuring stability and control over living conditions. Pets were important to the ideal living situation with 15% of respondents citing dogs, cats and horses as a key part of their ideal living. In some cases, the desire for pets outweighed the desire for a partner in descriptions of ideal living situations.

Overall, across the data on ideal living situations, respondents did not reject relationships or the desire for intimate partners. Instead, they rejected traditional marriage and cohabitation in favor of flexibility and autonomy over rigid living structures.





Support and Resources

When asked what support/resources would be most helpful to you as a single woman, several themes emerged in the data.

Housing and Cost of Living Support:

45% reported support with affordable housing specifically for single-income individuals, citing the need for support to buy, rent or downsize. They also reported the need for fair pricing on utilities, food and the development of co-housing and/or cooperative housing models targeted at single people.

Community and Support Networks:

40% of respondents reported friendship-based social opportunities such as women's groups, walk and talk groups and women's sheds groups to facilitate shared support and reduce social isolation.

Financial Support and Advice:

35% of respondents cited provision of financial advice, including financial planning for single-income households, investment, pensions and retirement planning. Pay equality was also cited as needing to be addressed, as was support specifically for single parents and lower-income individuals.

Practical Support:

Practical support with DIY, repairs and heavy lifting was identified as a key area of support. 25% of respondents cited access to trusted tradespeople or shared tools and skills sharing networks as key areas of support.

Safety Awareness:

15% of respondents cited the need for support with personal safety awareness and opportunities for safe sole travel for single women.

Health Planning and Care:

25% of respondents reported support with planning for illness, mobility decline, and ageing. They also cited the need for support around dignified, non-institutional care options as well as mental health and childcare.

Policy Recognition:

20% of respondents cited recognition in policy of single people, less focus on couples as the norm, higher tax credits for single people and better representation of single lives as key areas in need of policy intervention and support.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The findings of this research offer important insights into the experiences of single women in Ireland. Whilst respondents identified several significant challenges associated with being a single woman, these challenges were predominantly economic, structural and societal as opposed to being rooted in dissatisfaction with being single itself. Financial pressure, housing affordability, the high cost of living associated with being on a single income, and social policies and systems designed primarily around couples emerged as the most consistent barriers affecting the quality of life of single women who took part in the research.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the data demonstrated that being a single woman in Ireland was frequently associated with positive psychological and emotional outcomes. Women consistently reported experiencing greater freedom, autonomy, peace of mind, emotional stability and personal growth when single, particularly in comparison to past 'unequal, stressful or unhealthy relationships'. Independence, control over personal decisions and the ability to shape one's own life emerged as key benefits of being single.

A key finding to emerge from the data was that women are not rejecting intimacy, connection or indeed romantic relationships. Instead, they were rejecting traditional expectations surrounding marriage, cohabitation and gendered relationship roles. A significant number of women expressed a desire for companionship and meaningful relationships while simultaneously valuing personal autonomy, private space and flexible living arrangements. This indicates that traditional relationship models may no longer fully reflect the needs, priorities and realities of many women's lives.

The findings also highlight the important role of informal support systems. Friendships, particularly "female friendships", emerged as the strongest source of emotional and practical support, often functioning as alternative care networks traditionally associated with romantic partnerships or family structures. Community groups, peer networks and "chosen family" were also cited as significant protective factors against isolation and vulnerability.

Concerns about ageing while single further reinforced the distinction between fears associated with being alone and fears associated with inadequate social and care structures. Women's concerns centred less on relationship status itself and more on issues such as health, housing security, future care needs, safety and the absence of reliable State support systems. Importantly, many women recognised that marriage or parenthood does not guarantee care, companionship or security in later life.

Overall, the findings challenge persistent stereotypes that frame single women as 'lonely', 'incomplete' or 'unsuccessful'. Instead, the findings indicate that many single women experience high levels of resilience, happiness, life satisfaction and self-awareness. The greatest difficulties identified by women were linked not to singlehood itself but to broader structural inequality, policy gaps and social stigma surrounding women who choose to live outside the traditional relationship norm of couplehood.

In this context, the findings accentuate the need to reconsider how society understands relationships, independence and adulthood more broadly. The experiences shared by the women who participated in this research demonstrated that single women are not a marginal or incomplete group waiting to transition into "normal or real life" through romantic partnerships. Instead, it revealed that they are actively building meaningful, fulfilling and self-directed lives, often in the face of economic systems and social expectations that continue to privilege couplehood.

Supporting women, therefore, requires more than encouraging and rewarding couple formation. Instead, it requires addressing structural inequities, recognising diverse life choices, including the choice to be single, and developing social and economic policies that value and treat individuals equally regardless of relationship status.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations

Housing and Financial Policies

1. Develop housing policies that specifically reflect the realities of single-income people, including improved access to mortgages, affordable housing schemes and rental support supplements for single people.
2. Expand access to affordable co-housing, communal and cooperative housing models that support independence while reducing financial vulnerability.
3. Review financial systems and taxation policies that disproportionately disadvantage single people in favour of married and/or cohabiting couples.
4. Address the pay inequality between genders.
5. Government responses to cost of living support should address “single supplements” and hidden financial penalties associated with living alone, including utilities, travel and insurance costs, by expanding the criteria for the living alone allowance and the household benefits scheme.

Community and Social Supports

6. Increase investment in community-based projects and initiatives that foster connection and reduce social isolation, including women’s groups, social clubs, peer support networks and female-centred community spaces.
7. Adequately resource and expand accessible mental health supports and counselling services, particularly for women navigating divorce, separation, parenting alone and/or who are experiencing social isolation.

Support for Ageing and Long-Term Care

8. Develop and resource clear pathways for future care planning for people aging without partners or children
9. Increase options and access to dignified, community-based, non-institutional care options that support individuals to maintain autonomy as they age.
10. Promote initiatives focused on health advocacy, emergency planning and social connection for people living alone as they age.

Practical and Safety Supports

11. Develop accessible, practical support services for women living alone, including trusted trade professional networks, DIY support programmes and skill-sharing initiatives.
12. Expand personal safety initiatives and safer travel supports for women living and travelling alone.

Challenging Stigma and Social Narratives

13. Actively promote greater representation of single women in media, public and policy discourse in ways that reflect the diversity and complexity of their lives.
14. Challenge harmful, and often incorrect, stereotypes that portray single women as lonely, undesirable or incomplete.
15. Encourage broader cultural recognition that fulfilment, wellbeing and meaningful lives are not dependent on romantic partnerships or marriage.

Useful Resources

Women's Collective Ireland

<https://www.womenscollective.ie/>

Established in 2002, Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) is a national organisation that works directly with and represents the interests of grassroots women from communities in rural and urban settings throughout Ireland. There are WCI 17 projects located across Ireland.

AkiDwa

<https://akidwa.ie/>

Akina Dada wa Africa-AkiDwa (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. The organisation promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping and applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services, as well as encouraging migrant women's access to mainstream services and initiatives.

Alone

<https://alone.ie/>

ALONE is a national organisation that enables older people to age at home as well as providing befriending services, advocacy and support.

Disabled Women Ireland

<https://www.disabledwomenireland.org/>

Disabled Women Ireland (DWI) is the national representative organisation of disabled women, girls and non-binary people in Ireland. We are a cross-disability organisation, and our members have a diverse range of

impairments and intersecting identities.

DWI is a disabled person's organisation, or DPO, which means that we are led, governed and directed by disabled people.

Family Resource Centers

<https://www.familyresource.ie/family-resource-centres-regions.php>

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based hubs that provide support, education, and resources to strengthen families and individuals. Operating on community development principles, they serve as a central location to address local needs through a mix of universal programs and targeted assistance

LINQ Ireland

<https://www.linqireland.ie/>

LINQ Ireland is the only NGO working exclusively with women (trans and non-binary inclusive) who identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer in Ireland. They envision an Ireland where LBQ women (Trans and Non-Binary) are celebrated, diversity is championed, and their well-being is enriched through advocacy, education, and community development.

National Traveller Women's Forum

<https://www.ntwf.net/>

The National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) was founded in 1988 with the aims of "advancing Traveller women's rights, human rights, equality, cultural recognition, solidarity, liberation, collective action, anti-sexism, anti-racism (and) self-determination"

Network Ireland

<https://networkireland.ie/page/ourbranches>

Network Ireland is a non-profit, voluntary organisation, with over 1,300 members, 17 dynamic branches and a recently launched Virtual Branch. Established in 1983, this is a progressive, dynamic organisation supporting the professional and personal development of women.

One Family

<https://onefamily.ie/>

One Family is Ireland's organisation for people parenting alone, sharing parenting, and separating.

Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

<https://www.localgov.ie/news/ppns-can-help-community-groups-make-their-voices-heard>

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are a way for community groups to ensure that decisions made by local authorities reflect their experiences and expertise. They were set up in 2014 to improve how communities can take part in shaping local policies and plans. Every local authority area in the country has its own PPN. Groups that join can include local clubs, environmental organisations, and community groups focused on social inclusion.

See Her Elected (SHE)

<https://www.seeherelected.ie/>

SHE supports women across rural Ireland to become county councilors and to be part of their campaign teams. They provide free online political education, a free comprehensive practical guidebook, and a continuous series of free interactive workshops covering all the different areas any woman running for election or part of her campaign team needs to think about and have a plan for.

Women for Election

<https://www.womenforelection.ie/>

Women for Election facilitates bespoke training programmes, events and mentoring supports that have helped get hundreds of women elected to local and national government. We are also leading advocacy programmes to increase access to politics for women in all their diversity.

Women's Sheds

<https://www.womensshedsireland.com/>

Women's Sheds are supportive spaces where women of all ages and backgrounds come together to share skills, spark creativity and nurture personal growth.

Resources and guides to support lobbying for improved services for single women

National Women's Council

- A guide to effective lobbying for women's groups in Ireland: https://www.nwci.ie/download/pdf/nwci_lobbying_final.pdf
- Guide for Lobbying for Pension Equality: https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_Guide_to_lobbying_for_pension_equality.pdf

Women's Resource and Development Agency

- Lobbying and Policy Information: <https://www.wrda.net/resources/lobbying-and-policy>

Bibliography

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflective thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Carr, D., Wang, L., & Smock, P. J. (2024). Gender differences in the economic consequences of life-long singlehood among older white U.S. adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 86(4), 1053–1074. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.13011>
- Central Statistics Office.(2024). Vital Statistics First Quarter 2024. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vs/vitalstatisticsfirstquarter2024/>
- DePaulo, B. (2023). Single and flourishing: Transcending the deficit narratives of single life. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12525>
- DePaulo, B. (2018). Toward a positive psychology of single life. In D. Dunn (Ed.). *Positive Psychology: Established and emerging issues*. (pp. 251-275). Routledge.
- Diane, C. (2026). Deconstructing Amatonormativity: Recognising and Challenging the Pressure to Prioritise Romance. Available at: <https://www.caroledianecoaching.co.uk/blog/amatonormativity>.
- Glantz Michael J., Chamberlain Marc C., Liu Qin, Hsieh Chung-Cheng, Edwards Keith R., Van Horn Alixis, Recht Lawrence. (2009). "Gender Disparity in the Rate of Partner Abandonment in Patients with Serious Medical Illness." *Cancer* 115(22):5237–42.
- Goldman N, Alemdar M, Megges H, Matsumoto N, Schoenmakers E, van den Berg P, Lasgaard M, Christiansen J, Junttila N, Goldman A, Draxl D, El-Osta A, Qualter P. National policy responses to address loneliness: A global scoping review of 194 WHO member states. *Health Policy*. 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2025.105553>.
- Hoan, E., & MacDonald, G. (2024). "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves": Gender Differences in Singles' Well-Being. *Social psychological and personality science*, 16(6), 610–619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241287960>

- Kislev, E. (2024). Singlehood as an identity. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 35(2), 258–292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2023.2241937>
- Kislev, E., & Marsh, K. (2023). Intersectionality in studying and theorizing singlehood. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12522>
- Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017). Descriptive analysis in education: A guide for researchers. (NCEE 2017–4023). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- McKeithen, W. (2017). Queer ecologies of home: heteronormativity, speciesism, and the strange intimacies of crazy cat ladies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1276888>
- McNulty JK, Wenner CA, Fisher TD. Longitudinal Associations Among Relationship Satisfaction, Sexual Satisfaction, and Frequency of Sex in Early Marriage. *Arch Sex Behav*. 2016 Jan; 45(1):85-97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0444-6>
- Ochnik, D., & Slonim, G. (2020). Satisfaction with singlehood in never-married singles: The role of gender and culture. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 13(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350102013010017>
- US Census Bureau (2023). Unmarried and Single Americans Week. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/unmarried-single-americans-week.html>
- Wilkinson, E. (2012). The romantic imaginary: Compulsory coupledness and single existence. In S. Hines & Y. Taylor (Eds.), *Sexualities: Past reflections, future directions* (pp. 130–145). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137002785_8

