

*The Irish Times/Behaviour & Attitudes*  
*Women Today Poll*

Career & Finance

Today's report is the first of a series, based on the findings of the inaugural Irish Times/Behaviour & Attitudes Social Poll. Conducted exclusively on behalf of the Irish Times, the Social Poll covers the views, opinions and behavioural patterns of women in Ireland today.

Over the next few days we will be dissecting the various strands of the poll in the finest of detail, with a view to identifying the issues which matter most to the Irish female, and how they are construed from a sociological, psychological and moral perspective.

On Friday and Saturday we will explore the behaviour and attitudes of Irish women in relation to leisure and entertainment activities, key social topics, and their stance on the more fundamental spiritual and moral issues facing women in Ireland today.

This morning's article covers the broad gamut of Career and Finance, and attempts to shed some light on how Irish women perceive their increasingly complex role in society as we reach a stage where, for the first time ever, a majority are pursuing a career outside the home.

According to the 2006 Census, the total population of Irish female adults aged 18 years plus now stands at over 1.6 million individuals, an increase of almost 140,000 since 2002. Over that same period, the proportion of Irish females participating in the labour force has increased from 47% to 53%. The corresponding percentage of Irish females working outside the home in 1986 was just 32%, highlighting the dramatic changes which have occurred within the Irish work force over the last twenty years, and the expanding role of Irish women in this regard.

These census figures are reflected in the findings from today's poll, with 52% of all survey respondents identifying themselves as being employed outside the home. Of these, almost one in fifteen describe themselves as self-employed, equating to approximately fifty thousand individuals in total.

Seven in ten of all working women are either married or co-habiting, while over half of them have dependent children aged 17 years or younger. In other words, we now have a majority of Irish women working outside the home, yet many are still faced with the task of managing both a household and a career.

Indeed, further questioning reveals that, of the working women who have a husband/partner, less than forty percent report that the partner 'Very

Regularly' shares the domestic chores/cooking/cleaning in the home, with as many as a third of them receiving help around the home only Occasionally or Never.

This is not to ignore of course the role of women who choose not to work outside the home. Of those not currently involved in the work force (i.e. almost half of all Irish women), the great majority describe themselves as home makers, with the balance retired, and only a tiny proportion claiming to be actively seeking employment elsewhere.

Before we begin to explore even further the differing needs and desires of women in relation to Career and Finance, it is worth pausing to deal with some of the more basic facts and figures emerging from the poll.

Table I sets down the amount of money respondents indicated they have to spend on themselves personally each month, once all the bills have been paid.

As can be seen, the average monthly personal disposable income available to the Irish female adult is actually quite low, equating to just over sixty euro per week. The younger female (particularly in the 25 - 34 yrs cohort) spends the greatest amount of money on herself, with the cost of rent, mortgage, family expenses etc all conspiring to place additional financial pressures on those aged 35 years plus.

It may seem inequitable to some that the average female aged 65 yrs and older is left with less than €35 to spend on herself each week, with full-time home-makers relying on around €45 a week for personal expenditure.

In overall financial terms, just under six in ten of all females feel they are able to make ends meet 'Easily' or 'Fairly Easily', with four in ten coping with some difficulty. Curiously, those younger respondents with the greatest amount of personal disposable income claim to be experiencing most difficulty in making ends meet, with almost 70% of the over-65s coping with their lot with ease. The natural conclusion to be drawn here being that, while elderly women have less money available to spend on themselves, their material needs are modest.

Whatever about their ability to cope financially now, it is noteworthy that less than half (48%) of all women in employment outside the home have a pension of any type.

In order to allow us set each of the areas researched within a broader sociological context, respondents were also asked how important as many as nineteen different issues are to them in their lives in general. Issues covered at this question ranged from financial matters to leisure activities, through to family and religion (Table II).

It is quite remarkable to note that, of the 19 issues researched, the single most important one for Irish women today is that of 'Financial Independence'.

As an aside, in the year following a General Election, and the subsequent formation of one of the most unusual coalitions in the history of the state, it will come as a great disappointment to the body politic that more Irish women (55%) claim that politics is of no importance to them, than claim it is important (38%). Indeed, politics ranks as the least important factor to Irish women out of all 19 measured.

A majority of women, whether they are employed outside or inside the home feel that women who work outside the home have a higher standing in society than women who work in the home (Table III).

Furthermore, survey respondents were significantly less inclined to agree that women who work full-time in the home receive higher recognition from the state, or that they are treated more favourably by the authorities.

Meanwhile, the jury is still out as to whether there is any difference in quality of life between home and out-of-home workers.

Finally, respondents were asked to nominate the one individual they would consider to be the best role model for women in Ireland today. This question was entirely unprompted in nature, with the female role models identified arising amongst respondents on a purely spontaneous basis. Table IV sets down the top 10 individuals mentioned in this regard, indicating that the current and previous Presidents of Ireland have between them garnered 40% of the popular "vote" as the best role models in Ireland today.

It is interesting to note that both Mary McAleese and Mary Robinson, while elected to high political office in this country, also stand aloof from the less savoury aspects of the political establishment which the women of Ireland today seem so alienated from.

*Ian McShane*  
*Managing Director*  
*Behaviour & Attitudes*

TABLE I: PERSONAL MONTHLY BUDGET, AFTER ALL BILLS ARE PAID

	ALL WOMEN	AGE GROUP				OCCUPATION		
		18 – 34 yrs	35 -44 yrs	45-64 yrs	65+ yrs	Employed	Self-Employed	Home-maker
€10 – 50	20%	16%	20%	19%	30%	12%	6%	27%
€51 – 100	20%	17%	21%	20%	28%	16%	12%	28%
€101 – 200	24%	24%	25%	26%	18%	28%	39%	18%
€201 – 400	17%	18%	16%	18%	14%	19%	15%	13%
€401 +	16%	25%	16%	14%	5%	24%	24%	9%
DK/Not Stated	3%	1%	3%	4%	6%	1%	3%	5%
Average	€256	€291	€266	€257	€137	€310	€323	€185

TABLE II : IMPORTANCE OF KEY ISSUES

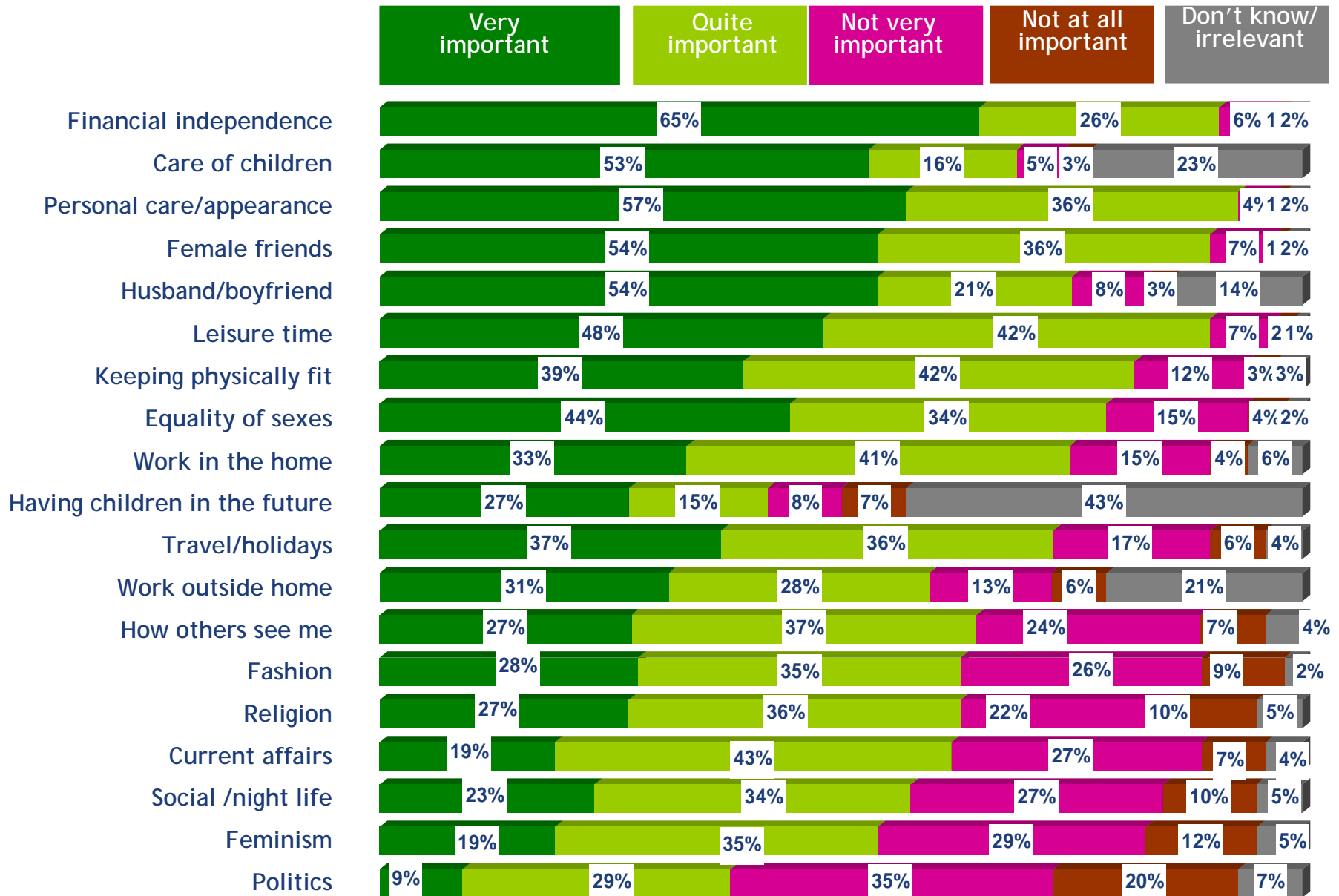
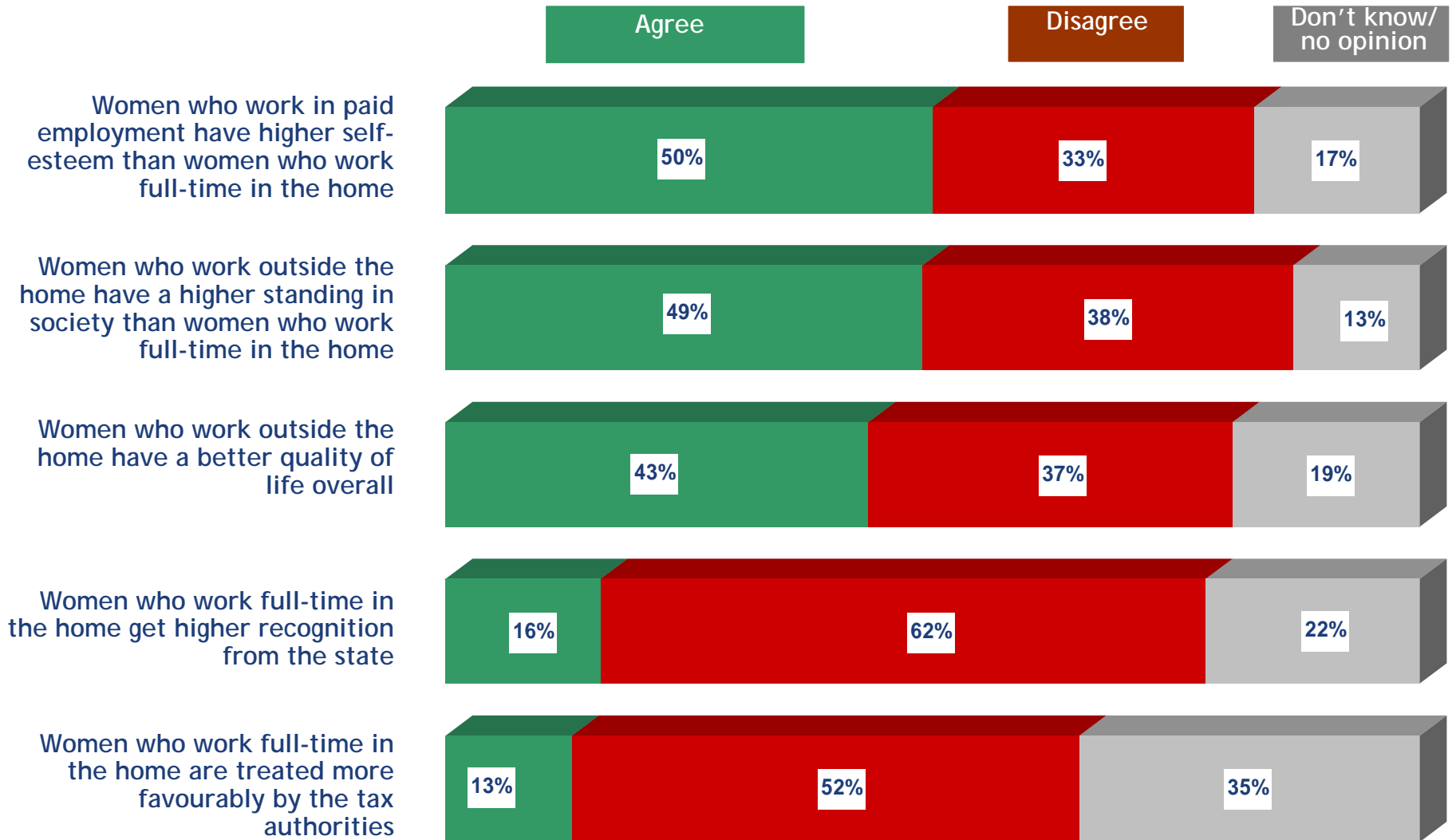
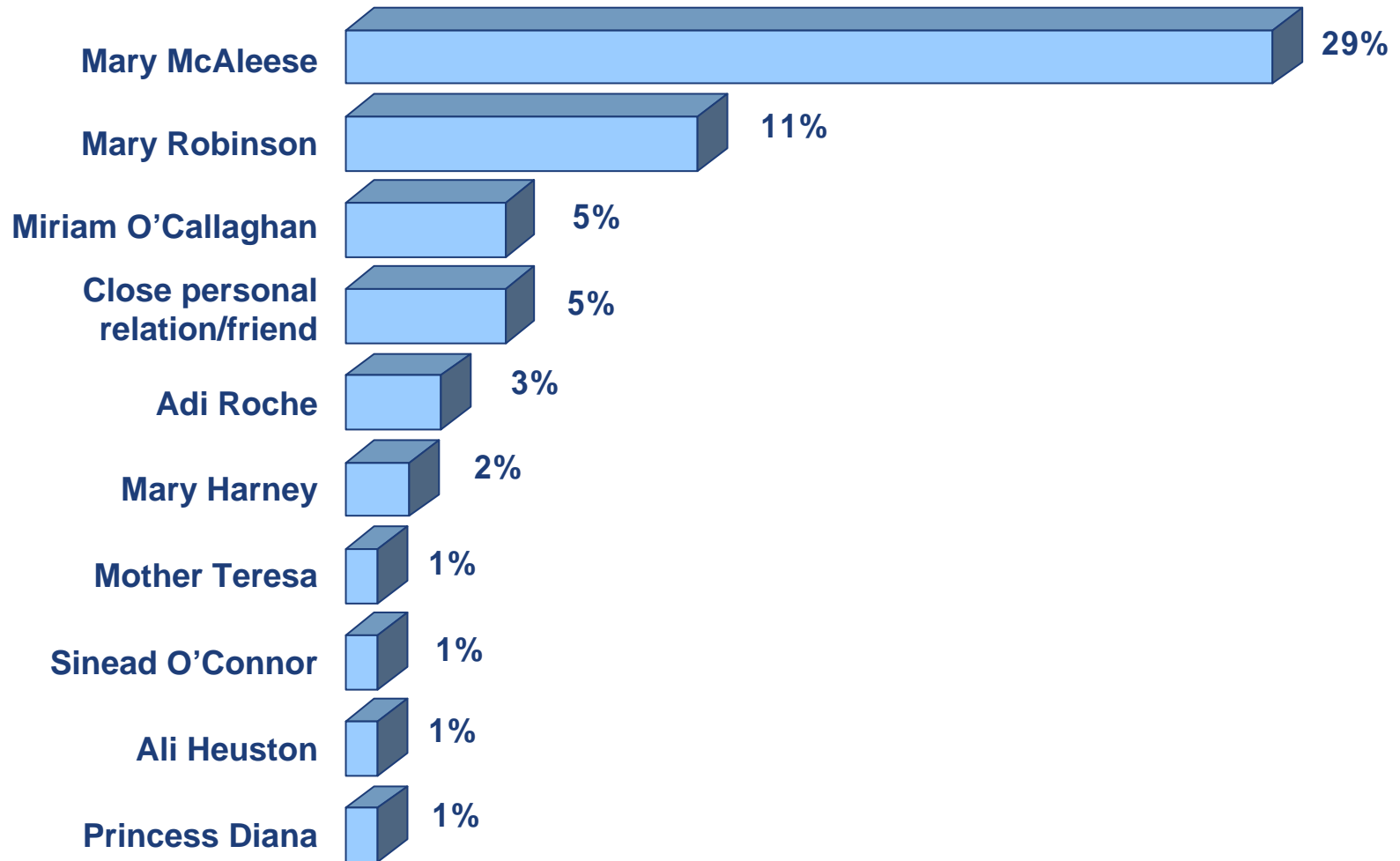


TABLE III : WORK-RELATED ISSUES



**TABLE IV: GREATEST PERCEIVED ROLE MODEL FOR IRISH WOMEN  
(SPONTANEOUS MENTIONS)**



*The Irish Times/Behaviour & Attitudes  
Women Today Poll*

Leisure and Health

Yesterday's coverage of the Irish Times/Behaviour & Attitudes Social Poll revealed that financial independence is the top priority for Irish women today, with many experiencing difficulty in their ability to cope with day to day living expenses.

Today, we explore the manner in which women spend their valuable spare time, and the various sources they turn to when in need of emotional comfort and reassurance.

Table I sets down the frequency with which the survey respondents indicated they participate in a mix of different leisure and entertainment activities. The list of social activities presented to respondents is by no means intended as definitive, but was rather devised as a means of measuring relative levels of engagement with key types of activities.

The first finding of note relates to the remarkably high number of Irish women reading books nowadays. In effect, two thirds in total read a book/books at least once a month, with the great majority of these dipping in on a weekly basis. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the data reveals that these high readership levels remain consistent across all of the key age groups, from the very young to the very old. Evidence perhaps that the new generation of Irish female novelists is truly making its mark on its core target audience.

At the same time, we see that significant numbers of Irish women are utilising new media technologies, with four in ten (approximately 630,000 individuals) browsing the internet from home weekly or more often. A quarter of Irish women claim to be frequently purchasing goods online by this stage, a figure which is bound to rise even further over the next year or so as broadband penetrations continues to grow, and people overcome their initial security concerns regarding online credit card fraud.

Another interesting social phenomenon is that of in-home versus out of home entertainment. In line with yesterday's poll findings regarding the cost of living nowadays, it is perhaps no surprise to find that as many women are entertaining at home each week as are visiting the pub. Indeed, more than two thirds of Irish women are entertaining in their own home at least once a month.

On a related issue, today's poll would indicate that three-quarters of Irish women drink alcohol at all nowadays, a figure which is highest amongst 18-34 year olds at 87%, and lowest amongst those aged 65 years or more where a majority (53%) actually claim to consume no alcohol at all nowadays. While some of these older women will have gradually given up alcohol over the years for primarily health and medical reasons, many of them will have abstained all of their life as was common in their era.

The evidence here is that there are significantly lower levels of abstinence amongst the latest generation of Irish women, although this is not of course in itself an indication that this will lead to higher levels of alcohol dependence in years to come. It is however of interest to note that, of those who do drink alcohol, as much consumption occurs in the home as outside; quite a reversal of the consumption patterns of 5-10 years ago where very few women drank at home on a habitual basis.

It will probably come as no surprise that one in five Irish women have also experimented with soft drugs (e.g. marijuana) in the past, nor that such experimentation is at its highest level within the younger age groups (37% of all 18-34 year olds). Any focus group research conducted amongst young people in relation to social issues in recent years has confirmed that soft drugs are often perceived to be quite socially acceptable, and often as being less harmful than alcohol.

There has of course been lively debate over the last number of years as to whether Ireland's newly found economic success has left a void in the hearts and souls of our citizens, as they become more and more preoccupied with the accumulation of wealth. The fact that religion ranks just fifteenth out of nineteen issues measured on one of the survey metrics is certainly indicative of the importance of material gain in people's lives today. This does not of course mean that spiritual and psychological comfort is not being drawn from other sources.

A glance at the key findings in Table II illustrates the point. These figures are based on the response to a question as to which of a list of featured sources women turn to when in need of emotional comfort and reassurance. The main responses to this question reaffirm one of the general themes emerging from the Poll in general; i.e. that the main source of comfort and reassurance for Irish women today is that of their close family, friends and partners. Within this context, it is notable that just 1 in 5 of all Irish women choose to turn to the Catholic Church for comfort and solace. This figure stands at 1 in 10 of all 18-34 year old women, and peaks at 44% of all aged 65 year old plus.

It is also interesting to note that 7% of all Irish women (the equivalent to approximately 130,000 individuals) identify meditation/yoga/personal reflection as their key source of comfort. One woman in every twenty-five also avails of counselling/psychotherapy sessions, a figure which rises to 7% of all those from the mid to higher socio-economic groupings.

Levels of trust in the Catholic Church in Ireland (Table III) also seem quite weak with 55% trusting the church, 18% distrusting it and the remainder unsure.

There are, as might be expected, some differences between the age groups and regions regarding levels of trust in the Catholic Church. Thus, a minority (45%) of 18-34 year olds trust the Institution, a figure which rises to 64% of those aged 45-64, and 8 in 10 of all aged 65 or more. Similarly, levels of trust in the church are higher in rural areas (6 in 10 of all rural dwellers trusting the church) compared with urban dwellers (52%).

Given the general concern of Irish women with crime and personal security (covered in greater detail tomorrow), it will be encouraging to An Garda Síochána to note that over three-quarters of all women trust the guards, with only 12% registering any distrust of the force.

We saw yesterday how Irish women ranked politics as the least important factor to them out of a total list of 19. Some insight to this finding can be gleaned from Table III, which indicates that just over 1 in 5 (21%) of all Irish women trust our politicians. Just under half of all women actually distrust politicians, with the remainder sitting on the fence in this regard.

One of the key messages from this poll has been the extent to which Irish women are striving to achieve financial independence at a time of unprecedented economic boom, while still keenly preoccupied with balancing the sociological sacrifices which the pursuance of this objective necessitates. There is a real sense from this survey of women drawing upon both their inner resolve and the help and support of those near and dear to them in realising their financial goals, with the Government and the political establishment of little consequence to them in this regard.

This is not to say that women are necessarily struggling with today's societal challenges, as evidenced by the fact that 90% tell us they are satisfied with their life as a whole these days, and 92% satisfied with their home life.

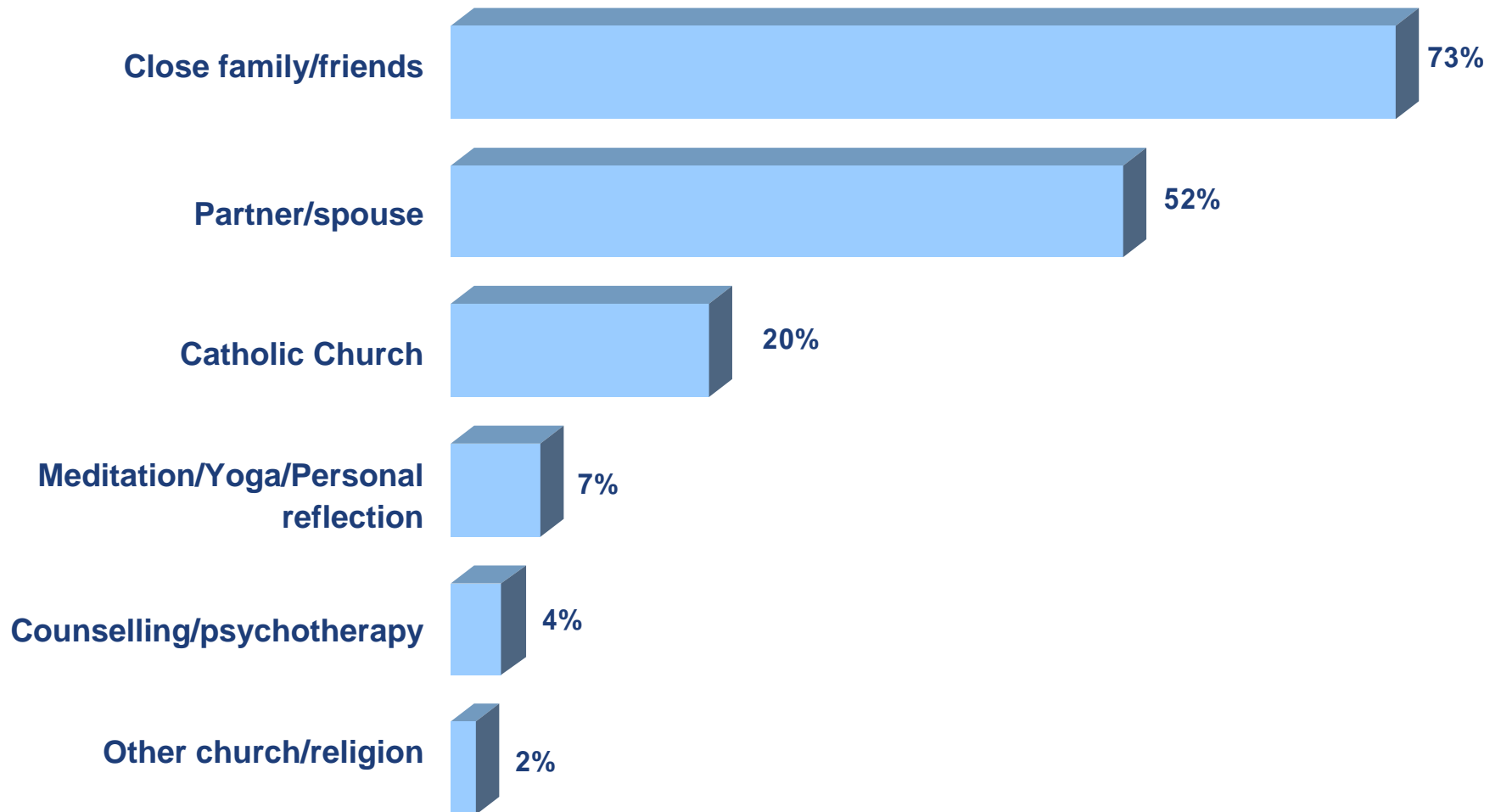
Incidentally, respondents also seem to be quite satisfied with the general state of their personal health, with almost three-quarters of them describing it as "good", a further 25% as "middling", and just 3% (rising to 8% of all 65 year olds plus) complaining that their health is "bad".

*Ian McShane*  
*Managing Director*  
*Behaviour & Attitudes*

**TABLE I: LEISURE AND ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVITIES:  
FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION**

	<b>Read book</b>	<b>Browse internet at home</b>	<b>Entertain friends / relatives in home</b>	<b>Visit pub</b>	<b>Visit restaurant</b>	<b>Games / sports / hobbies outside home</b>	<b>Play / concert / movie</b>	<b>Adult education class</b>
<b>Once a week or more often</b>	42%	39%	32%	32%	21%	26%	6%	9%
<b>Once or twice a month</b>	23%	10%	36%	25%	40%	11%	20%	2%
<b>Every 2-3 months</b>	7%	2%	13%	8%	17%	4%	21%	3%
<b>Less frequently</b>	13%	6%	12%	15%	17%	14%	30%	16%
<b>Rarely / Never</b>	15%	44%	6%	20%	5%	45%	24%	70%

TABLE II: MAIN SOURCES OF EMOTIONAL COMFORT AND REASSURANCE



**TABLE III: LEVELS OF TRUST IN KEY BODIES/INSTITUTIONS**

	<b>Garda Síochána</b>	<b>Catholic Church</b>	<b>Judicial System</b>	<b>Irish Banking Industry</b>	<b>Press/ Radio/TV Journalists</b>	<b>Politicians in Dail Eireann</b>
<b>Trust completely</b>	23%	16%	6%	6%	5%	2%
<b>Trust somewhat</b>	53%	39%	40%	36%	38%	19%
<b>Neither trust nor distrust</b>	12%	26%	29%	31%	29%	31%
<b>Distrust somewhat</b>	10%	12%	19%	19%	22%	30%
<b>Distrust completely</b>	2%	6%	6%	7%	7%	17%

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Social Issues

Today's coverage of the Irish Times/Behaviour & Attitudes Poll touches upon the more personal views of women in Ireland today regarding social and moral issues.

We begin by examining the extent to which Irish women are concerned with social issues at a global, as well as a national level. As is evident from Table I, crime is the one single issue of greatest concern to Irish women today, by quite some margin. Just under 3 out of every 4 Irish women indicate they are either extremely or very concerned about this issue, a proportion which rises to 85% of all women aged 55 years or over. It is particularly worrying to note that concern with crime in general is as high in the major cities and towns of Ireland (72%) as it is in rural communities (73%), indicating that this is a scourge seen to permeate through all strands of Irish society.

Women are also fearful of their personal security, a topic which is of relevance to all age groups, from the very young to the elderly. Similarly the issue is worrying to women across all socio-demographic groupings, and in all parts of the country.

One of the more interesting findings of today's poll relates to the high levels of concern expressed by Irish women regarding world climate change. As a social issue, the environment and climate change has always ranked relatively low in relation to other aspects such as education, international terrorism etc. There is no doubt however that climate change has well and truly arrived on the agenda in Ireland, following a summer of severe weather across the globe, the success of such spokespersons as Al Gore in bringing the "green" message to a wider audience, capped by the inclusion of the Green Party in an Irish government for the first time ever.

Thus, almost 8 in 10 of all Irish women now tell us they are concerned about world climate change to some extent.

Interestingly, concern with the environment at a global level actually increases as women become older, certainly up until the age of 64 years. For example, 76% of all 18-34 year old women are worried about world climate change, a proportion which rises to 83% of all those aged 45-64. The issue is also of concern to women of all socio-economic backgrounds;

from the middle to upper classes, through to those employed as skilled and unskilled industrial workers.

No longer the sole preserve of the idealistic young, nor the comfortable middle class "intellectuals", world climate change is a real issue for women in Ireland today and is very firmly on the socio-political agenda.

We have also read and heard much about the social implications of increased immigration to the country, and the moral obligations that a rapidly changing society places on Irish citizens as hosts to a new wave of new nationals. Indeed, most recent Central Statistics Office Census figures indicate that as many as 10% of the Irish population were born outside the country, equating to almost half a million people. By all accounts, this is if anything a conservative estimate.

The opinions of Irish women towards immigration are quite interesting (Table II), insofar as they seem to draw a distinction between the fundamental presence of new nationals in the country on the one hand, and the volume of such individuals currently entering the country. Thus, we see that two-thirds of all women feel there are far too many immigrants coming into the country these days, a figure which is lowest amongst younger women (just 53% of all 18-24 year olds), and highest amongst those aged 45+ (approaching three-quarters of whom agree there are too many immigrants entering the country).

This pattern of response is in stark contrast to that which emerges when the respondents were asked if they would be disappointed if their son or daughter married a new national person. Here, almost two-thirds state they would by no means be disappointed in such an event, suggesting that where resistance does occur to net inward migration, it is significantly more likely to be based on socio-economic rather than cultural or indeed racist motives.

With regard to the traditional sanctity of marriage, a number of interesting findings also emerge. If we refer again to Table II, we see that a majority of those expressing an opinion agree that everyone marrying nowadays should consider entering a prenuptial agreement. It is particularly interesting to note that this majority view holds constant across all of the age groups, up to and including women aged 65 and older. With separation and divorce levels increasing year on year, we have true evidence here of Irish women taking a far more pragmatic view of marriage than could ever have been imagined even ten years ago.

On this very point, we see that 21% of all women agree they are likely to become divorced or separated at some stage in the future, rising to one-

third of all women aged 18-24. Of this younger age group (i.e. those who, in the main, have yet to take the marital plunge), only one-third disagree they are likely to become divorced/separated, with the remaining one-third unsure.

There is also reason to believe that the social opprobrium which might once have been associated with a family divorce or separation is by now a thing of the past. As such, almost two-thirds indicate that they would not disapprove in the event of a son or daughter separating or divorcing, a figure which stands at almost 7 in 10 of all women in the 18-44 years category.

The whole issue of abortion has of course been a burning topic in Ireland for the last 20 years or more. As such, it is noteworthy that a majority of Irish women (54%) now believe that the Government should legislate to allow abortion take place in Ireland. Table III illustrates. 31% feel the Government should not introduce such legislation, with 15% undecided. Support for abortion is highest amongst younger and single women, although a majority of all women up to the age of 64 years who express an opinion are in favour of its introduction.

When women are asked whether they would support abortion where there is a real and substantial risk to the life and health of the mother, support levels actually rise to almost seventy percent. Such high levels of support for abortion legislation in Ireland can perhaps be explained to some extent by the significant percent (42%) of women who profess to personally knowing someone who has had an abortion in the past.

Finally, we turn to the issue of women's views of sex and sexuality. Today's poll reveals that the great majority of Irish women feel that attitudes towards sex in Ireland nowadays compared to 20 years ago are a lot more liberal, with only one third of women of the opinion that this liberalisation represents a negative force. Furthermore, the great majority of those who view the liberalisation of sex positively believe that the changes have been either better for women (22%), or equally good for both men and women (71%). As to how this liberalisation of sex has manifested itself in practical terms, we can see from Table IV that the great majority of women have had between just 1 and 3 sexual partners in their lifetime, although the average number of sexual partners does increase significantly amongst the younger age groups (18 - 34 years).

While the average number of sexual partners has obviously increased dramatically generation by generation, the fundamentals of a faithful and monogamous relationship still hold true for the majority of Irish women. As

such, it emerges that just 6% of those women who are married or in a long term relationship have had another sexual relationship while they were still with their current partner, with younger women and those from the middle to upper professional classes more likely than all others to have strayed in this regard.

*Ian McShane*  
*Managing Director*  
*Behaviour & Attitudes.*

TABLE I : ISSUES OF CONCERN

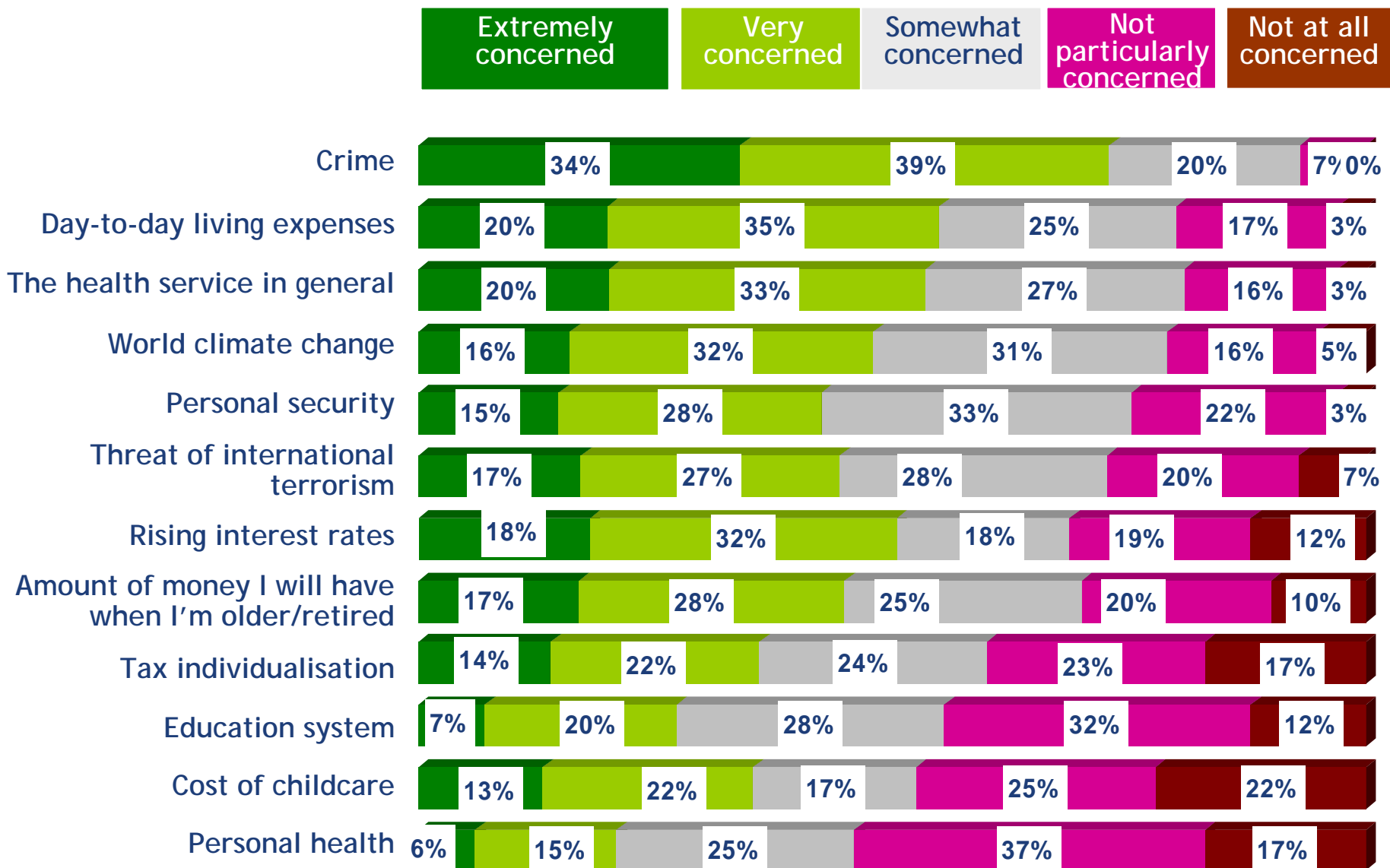


TABLE II: AGREE/DISAGREE THAT ...

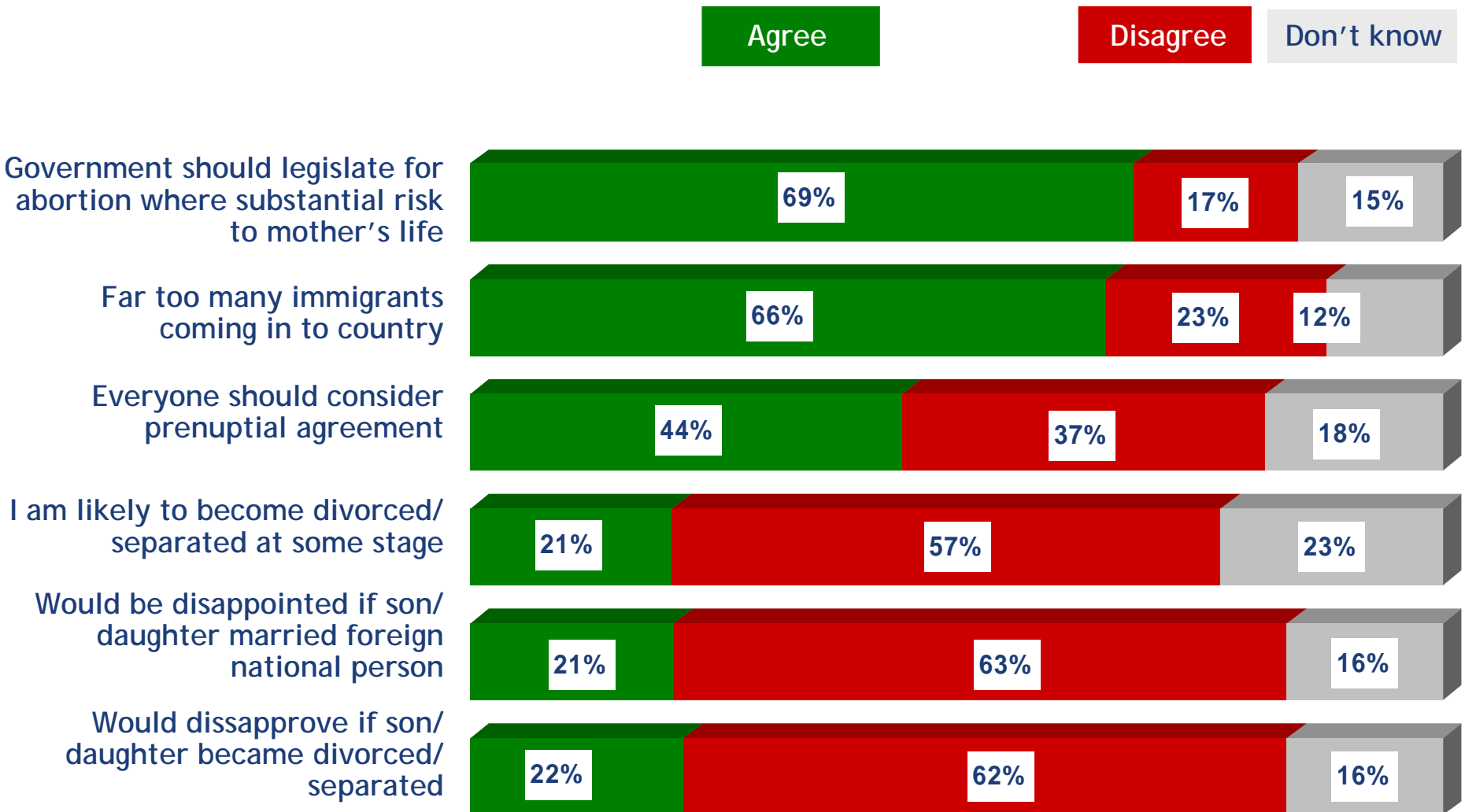
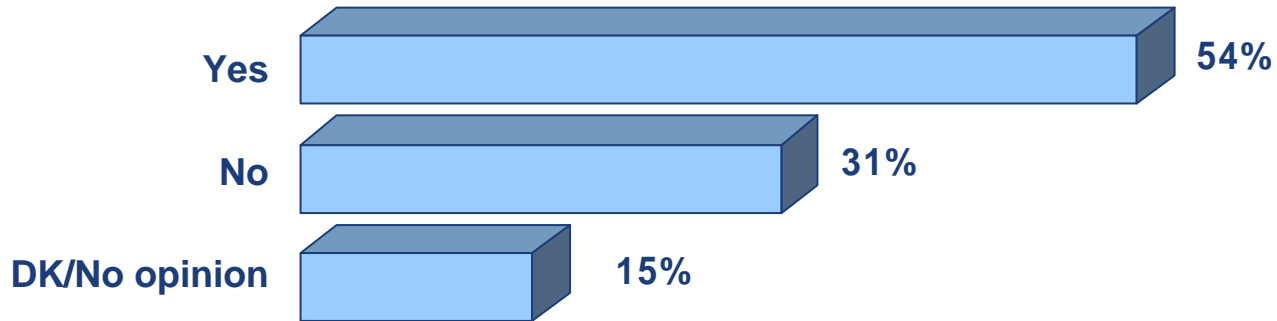
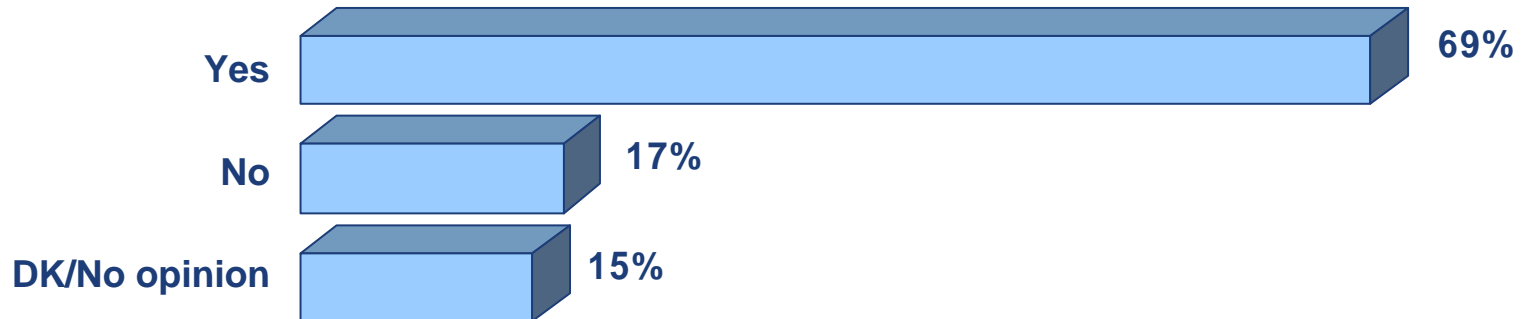


TABLE III: SUPPORT LEVELS FOR ABORTION IN IRELAND

In General



Where Life and Health of  
mother at risk



**TABLE IV: NUMBER SEXUAL PARTNERS**

	<b>All women</b>	<b>18-24 yrs</b>	<b>25-34 yrs</b>	<b>35-44 yrs</b>	<b>45-54 yrs</b>	<b>55-64 yrs</b>	<b>65yrs+</b>
<b>None</b>	8%	18%	4%	3%	6%	8%	15%
<b>1-3</b>	65%	47%	50%	67%	75%	77%	78%
<b>4-6</b>	15%	23%	28%	18%	8%	8%	0%
<b>7-10</b>	6%	7%	12%	5%	7%	1%	1%
<b>11-15</b>	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
<b>16-20</b>	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%
<b>20+</b>	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
<b>DK/Not stated</b>	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%	5%	6%