

# Law Reform Commission Annual Conference 2006

Family Life and Cohabitation: a  
Social Science Perspective

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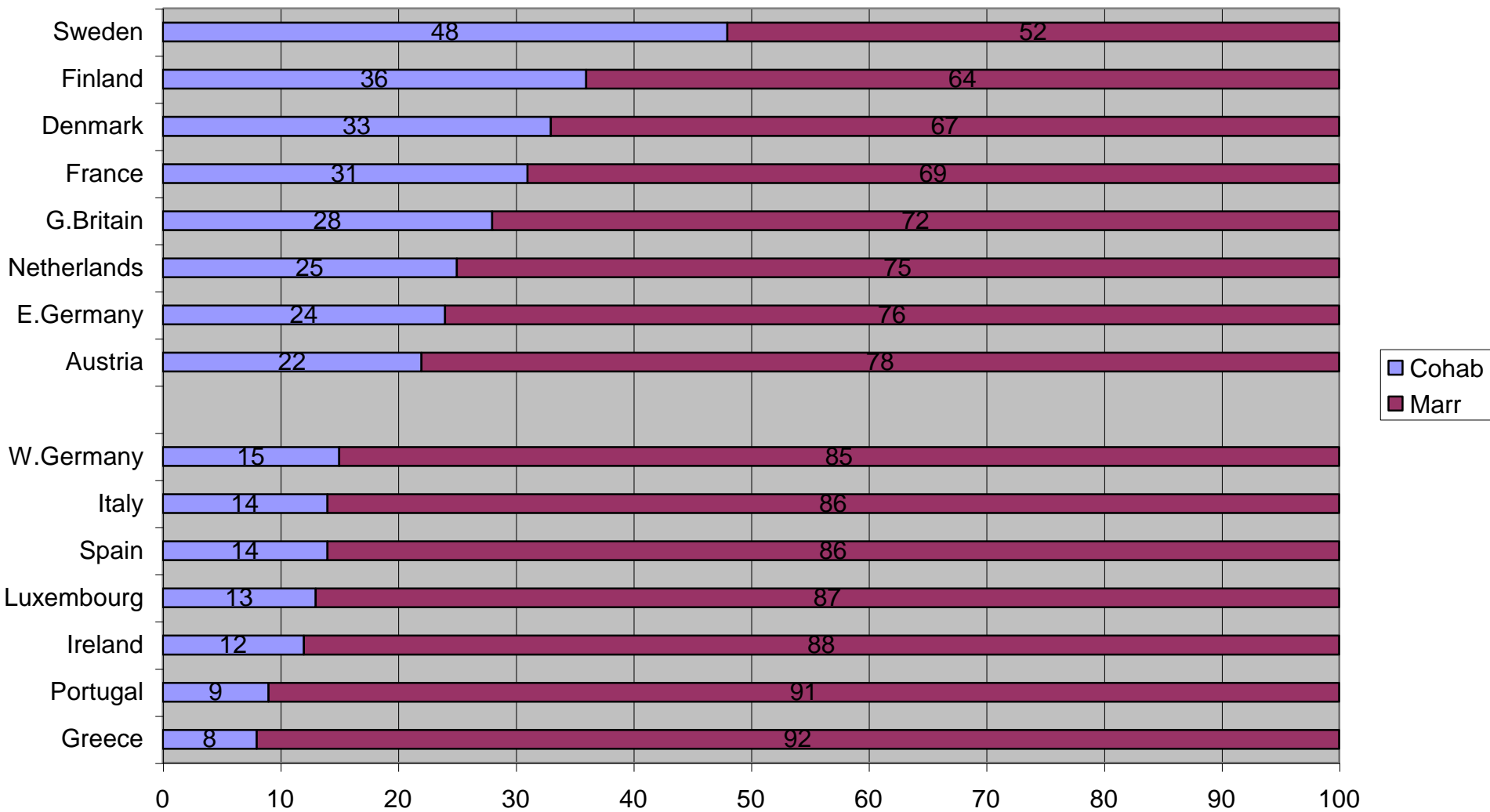
# Changing demography of family life

- Less marriage more cohabitation
- More babies born outside of marriage
- Increased divorce and re-partnering
- More lone parents and complex families

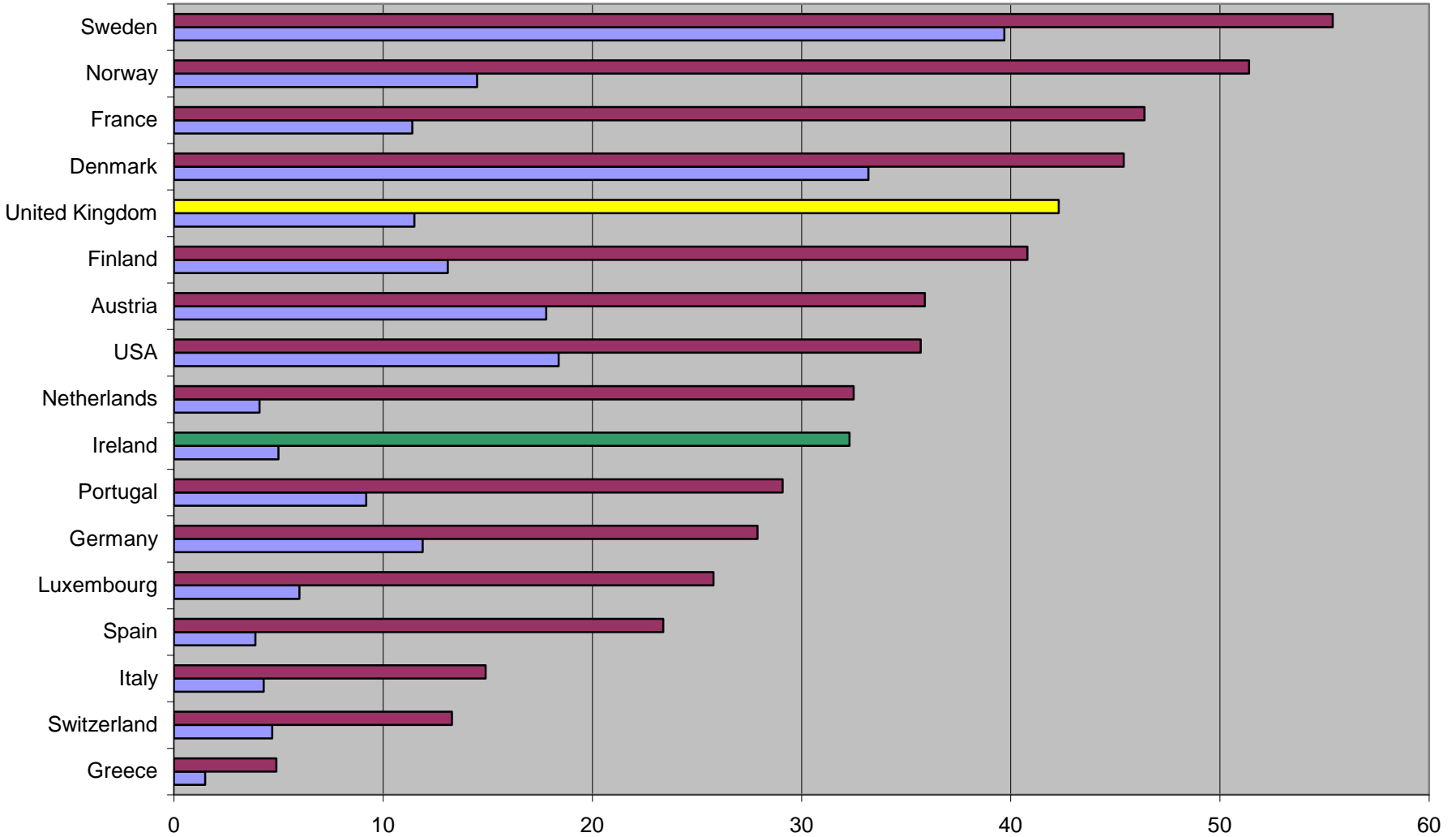
# Themes

- How pervasive is cohabitation and childbearing outside of marriage?
- Cohabiting families in the UK
- Cohabitation Law Reform – does it impact on marriage ?

Percentage cohabiting ages 30-39 2002/3



Percentage of births outside of marriage 1980 and 2004



# Partnership context of the parents at the birth of the child

Married 60%

Cohabiting 25%

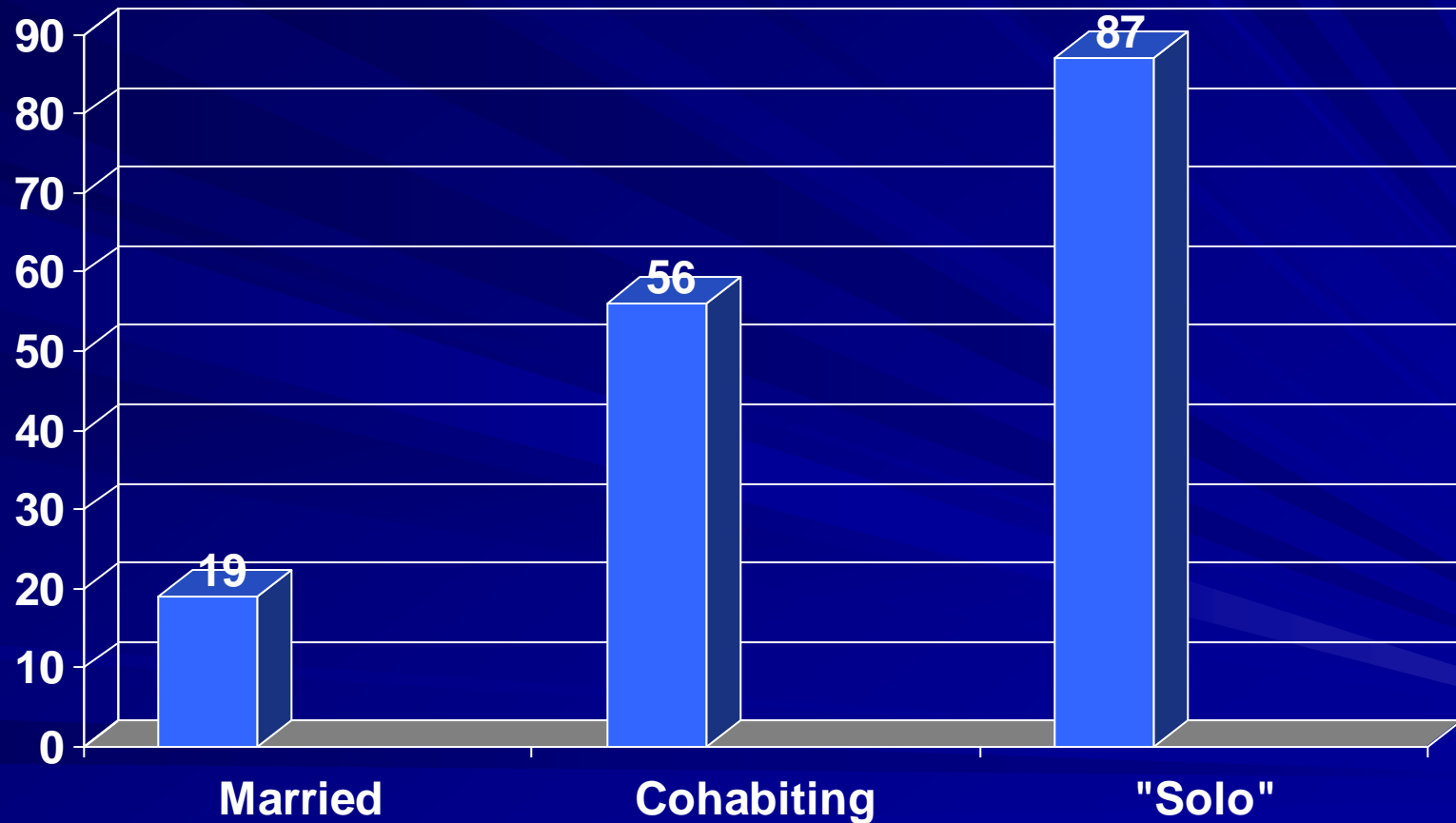
Solo 15%

7% in a relationship

8% not in a relationship

\*A hierarchy of bonding or connectedness\*

# Baby was a surprise

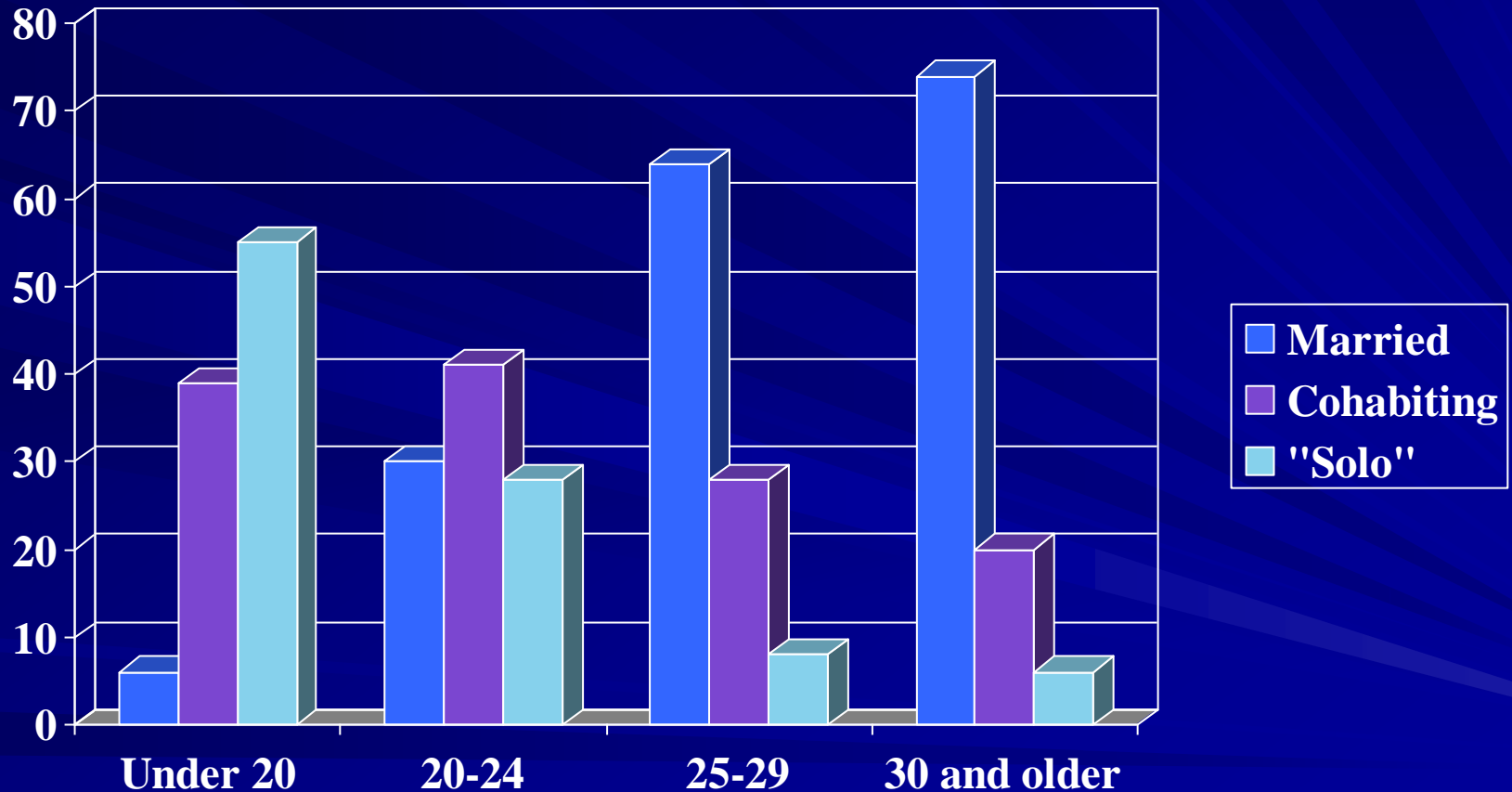


# Partnership context and father involvement at birth

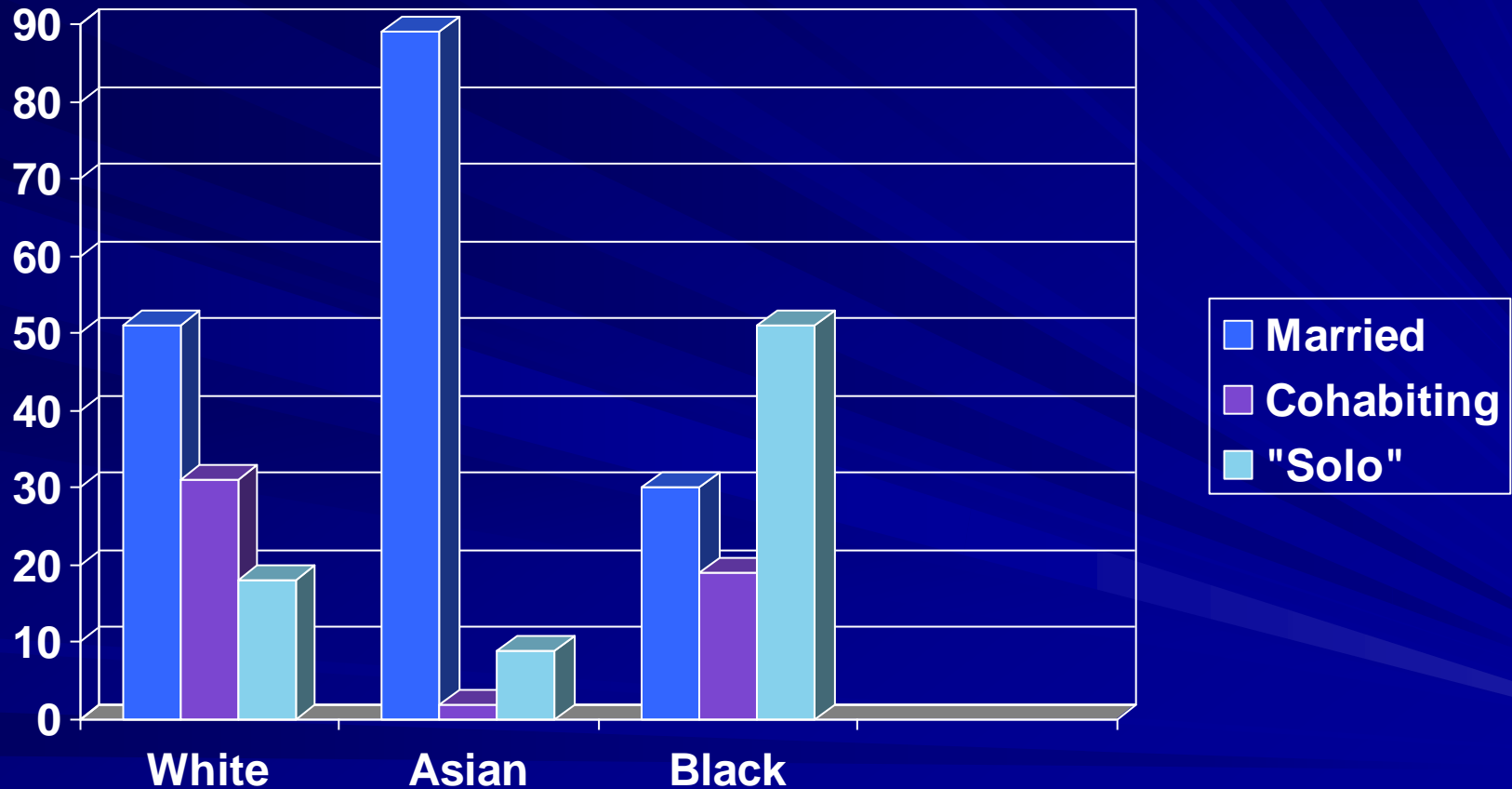
	% At the birth	% On birth certificate
Married	93	N/a
Cohabiting	92	97
Non-partnered ("Solo")	45	62



# Partnership Context at First Birth by Age of Mother



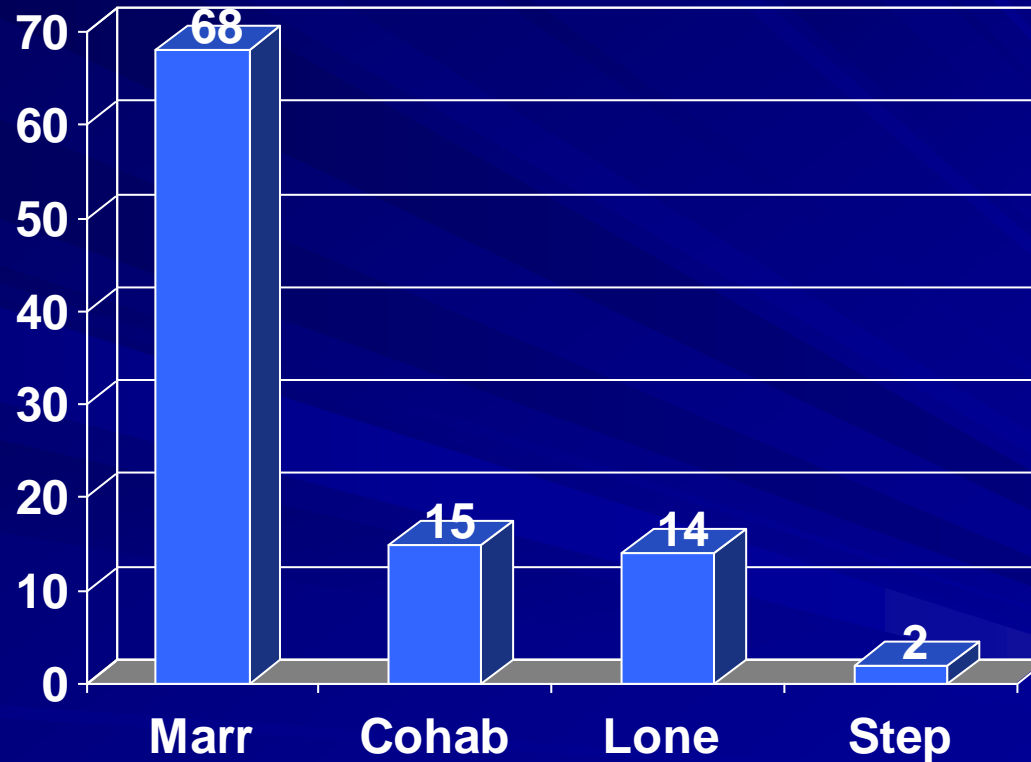
# Partnership Context and Ethnic Group of Mother



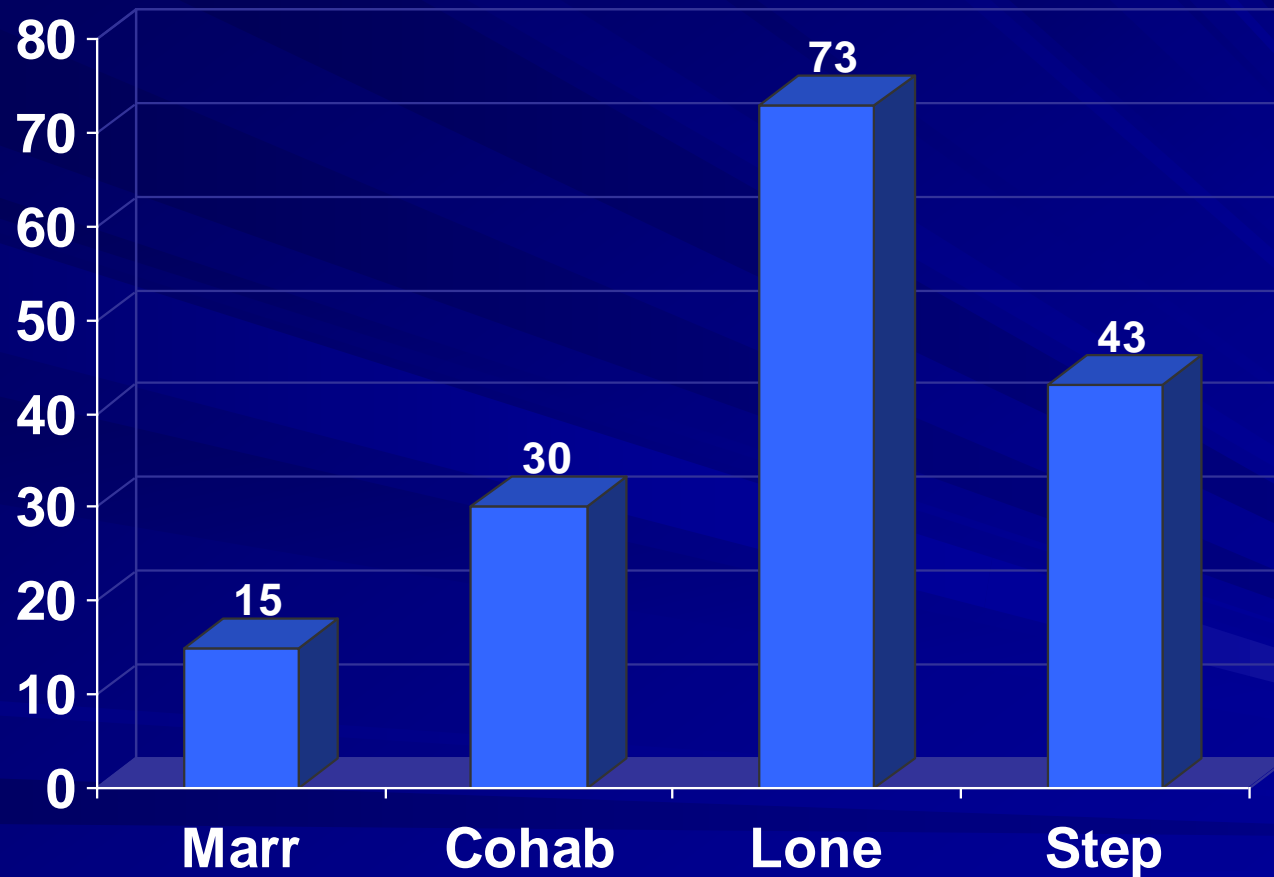
# Family transitions birth to age 3

	At Birth			
	Married	Cohabiting	Solo	Total
At Age 3				
Married- biodad	95	32	11	68%
Cohabiting- biodad	-	51	18	15%
Lone Parent	4	15	63	14%
Step-family	1	3	8	2%
	60%	25%	15%	100%

# Family type at age 3



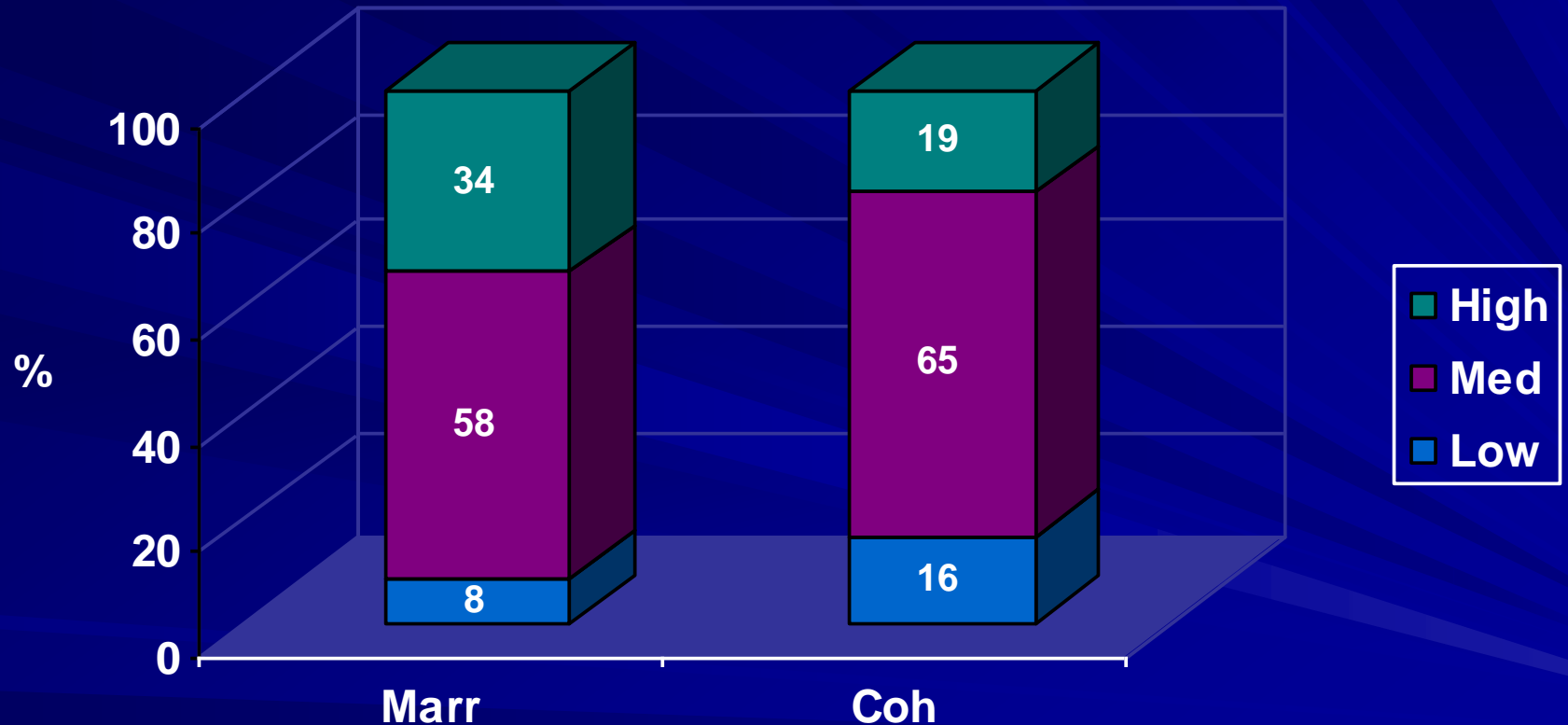
# Family settings and % in poverty at age 3



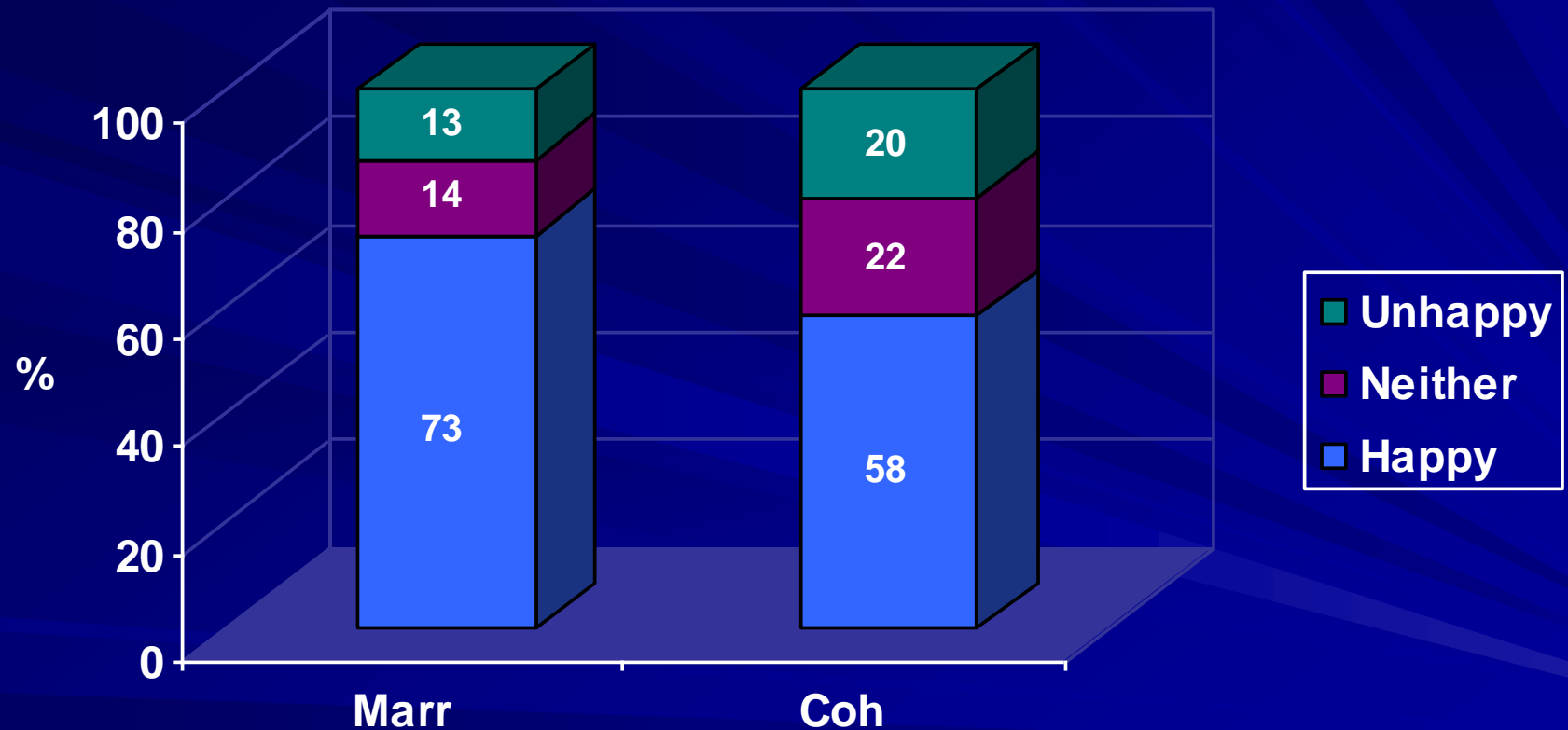
Millennium Cohort Study 2003-4

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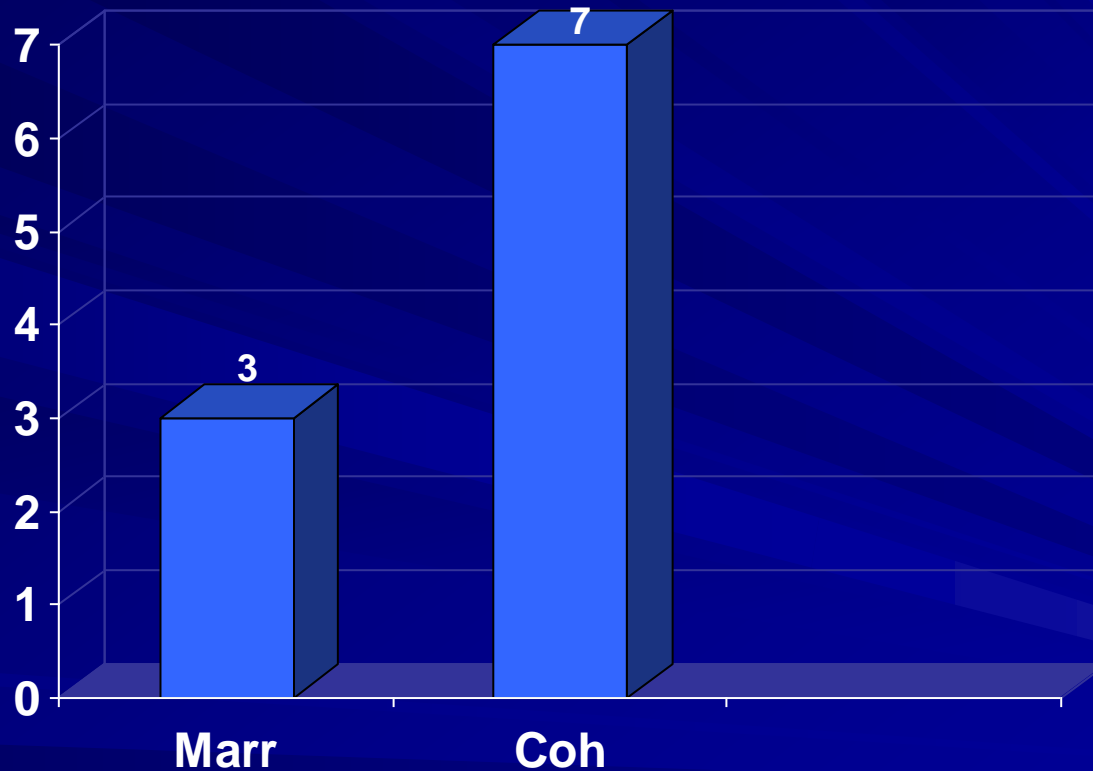
# Level of Income: Top and bottom quintiles



# Level of relationship happiness



# Use of Force %



Millennium Cohort Study 2003-4

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# Does the introduction of cohabitation legislation affect marriage rates?

- Evidence from Australia
- Inferences from Europe

**Table 1: Legislation recognising de facto relationships, Australian jurisdictions**

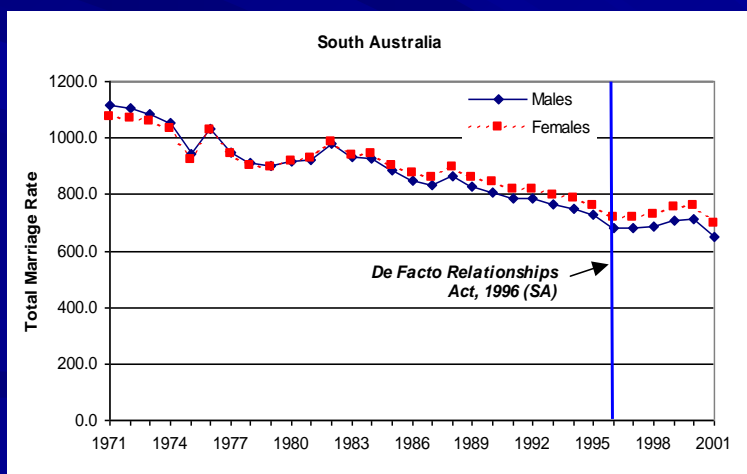
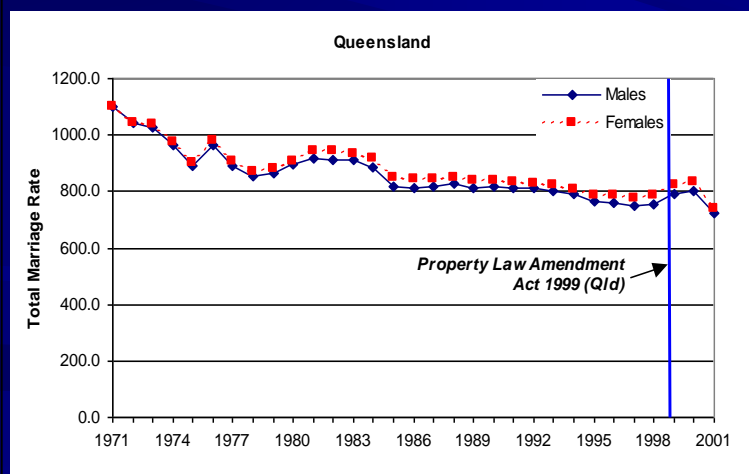
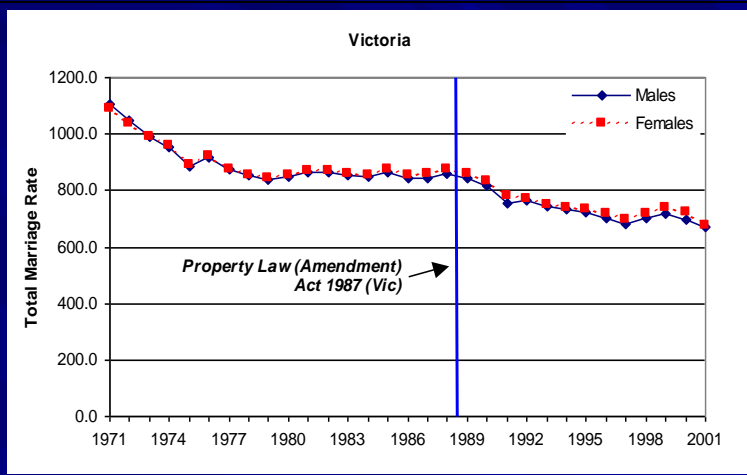
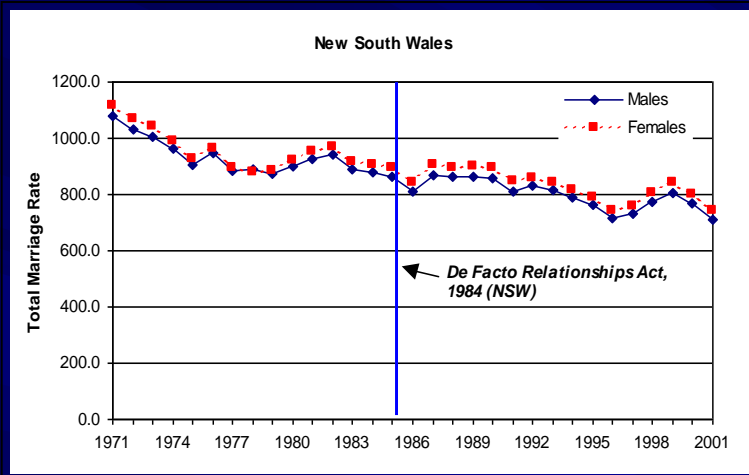
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Act</b>	<b>Date of Assent</b>	<b>Date of Commencement</b>
NSW	De Facto Relationships Act, 1984	10/12/1984	01/07/1985
Victoria	Property Law (Amendment) Act, 1987	01/12/1987	01/06/1988
NT	De Facto Relationships Act, 1991	26/09/1991	01/10/1991
ACT	Domestic Relationships Act, 1994	31/05/1994	31/05/1994
SA	De Facto Relationships Act, 1996	01/08/1996	16/12/1996
Queensland	Property Law (Amendment) Act, 1999	21/12/1999	21/12/1999
Tasmania	De Facto Relationship Act, 1999	15/12/1999	01/06/2000
WA	Family Court (Amendment) Act, 2002	25/09/2002	01/12/2002

Source: Wade et. al. 2002.

# Total Marriage Rates (TMR's)

- The sum of the age specific marriage rates (typically up to age 50 years) operating in a particular year.
- TMR's provide an indication of the intensity of marriage and provide a guide to the proportions that may eventually marry.

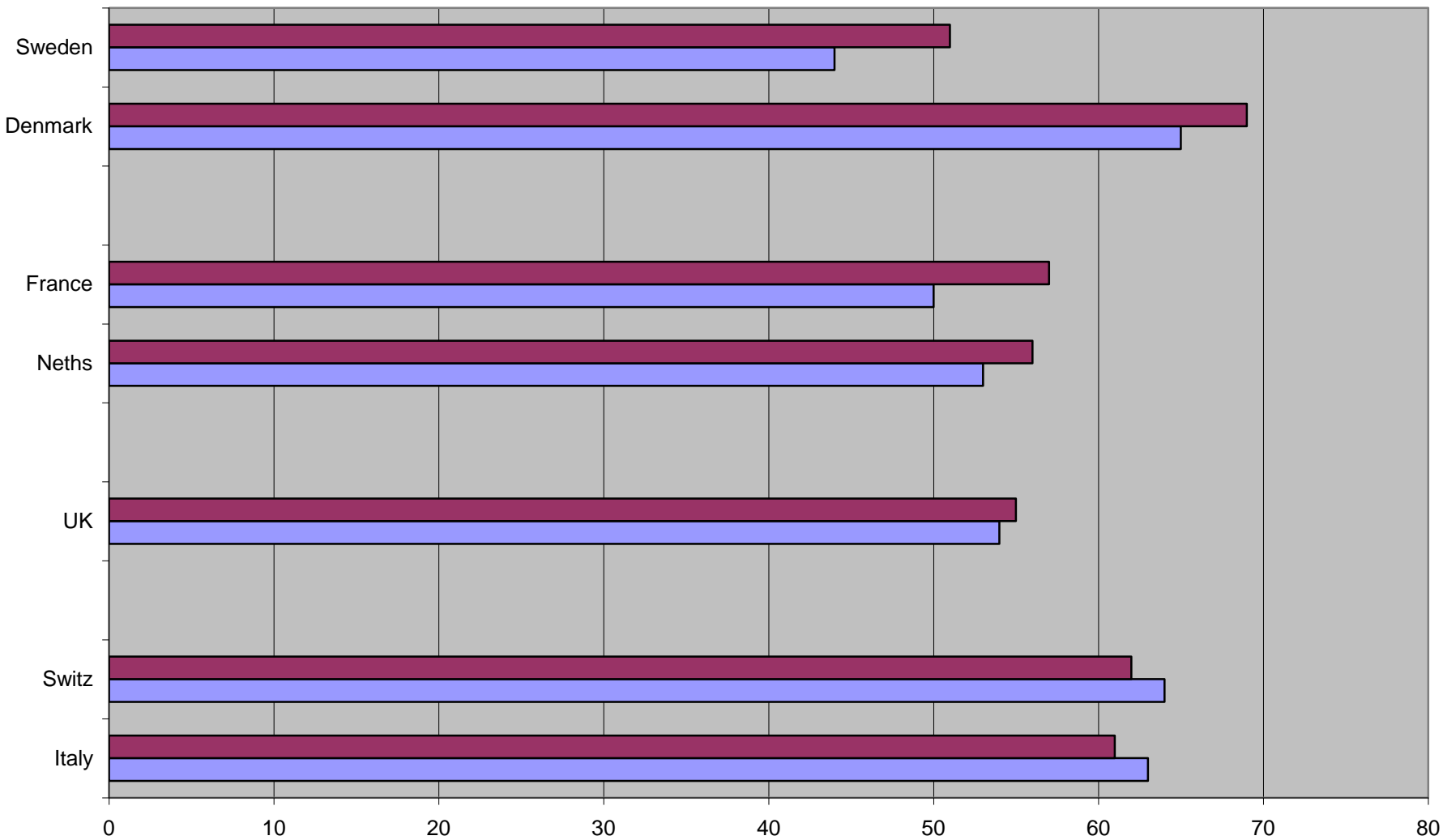
# Marriage rates before and after Cohabitation Law Reform



# Approach and Findings

- The general trends prior to the acts were declining marriage rates and this continued after the acts.
- Need to assess whether the intensity of decline in the marriage rates after the legislation in the different states was greater than would be anticipated from the prior trend.
- Used Intervention Analysis ( a type of regression analysis) which allowed us to assess whether the legislation interrupted the underlying time series.
- The upshot of a quite complex analysis was that there was no statistical evidence of a relationship between the introduction of the legislation giving rights to cohabiting couples and the falls in the propensity to marry.

### Total Female First Marriage Rates (under age 50 years)



# Conclusions in reverse

- Introduction of cohabitation legislation seemingly does not have an impact on marriage rates
- Married and cohabiting families differ in vulnerability and stability – but not causal
- Cohabitation AND Marriage versus Cohabitation OR Marriage –Swedish data

