

**BRITAIN IS MORE TOLERANT THAN MANY OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Evidence from across Europe finds widespread acceptance of 'non-traditional' family arrangements, such as having a child outside marriage or choosing not to have children.

According to the latest NatCen British Social Attitudes report, disapproving attitudes are more common in countries that are less well off and more religious, and have lower divorce rates and lower rates of female participation in the labour force. Disapproval is lowest in Nordic countries and highest in post-communist countries, with Britain being towards the more tolerant end of the spectrum.

People in Britain are generally tolerant of non-traditional family arrangements:

- 14% disapprove of cohabitation, compared with just 3% in Sweden but 34% in Poland.
- In most countries, including Britain, a higher proportion disapprove of cohabitation if the couple have a child. One in five (20%) in Britain disapprove of this.
- 8% disapprove of people choosing never to have children, compared with 6% in Denmark and 53% in Slovakia.
- 27% disapprove of divorce if the couple have a child under 12, compared with 14% in Denmark but 49% in Poland.

When it comes to a parent working full-time while their child is aged three or under, all countries judge women more harshly than men:

- In Britain, nearly two in five (38%) disapprove of a mother with a young child working full-time; a small minority (3%) disapprove of the same behaviour by a father. In the Netherlands, half (51%) disapprove of a mother doing this, while only around one in ten (9%) disapprove of a father.
- The lowest disapproval rates for mothers working full-time are in Denmark (15%), Portugal (17%) and Cyprus (14%).

Eric Harrison, co-author, comments:

'In most European countries, including Britain, we are unlikely to hear a chorus of disapproval if people behave in ways that go against traditional norms.'

'The exception in Britain concerns mothers working full-time while their children are young. This issue may be one area where social attitudes do not get any more liberal – or it may be the next stage of social liberalisation waiting to happen.'

ENDS

This summarises 'A chorus of disapproval? European attitudes to non-traditional family patterns' by Eric Harrison and Rory Fitzgerald, in British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report, published by Sage for NatCen.

## Notes to Editors

- 1 **British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report** is published on Tuesday 26th January, 2010 by SAGE, price £50.00. It is edited by Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, Elizabeth Clery and Sarah Butt. SAGE is at <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book234304&series=Series30&>.
- 2 The report includes two additional chapters not covered by this press release. Findings from these chapters, on religion, were released earlier in the year.
- 3 British findings are from the British Social Attitudes survey, with the exception of the chapter by Andy Ross and Amanda Sacker, which also uses data from the British Household Panel Study, and the chapter by Rossy Bailey, Elizabeth Fuller and Rachel Ormston, which also uses data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey and the Health Survey for England. Findings that compare Britain with other countries are taken from the European Social Survey ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)) or the International Social Survey Programme ([www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org)).
- 4 The British Social Attitudes survey series has been conducted annually since 1983. The 2008 survey consisted of 4,486 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain.
- 5 The survey is funded by charitable and government sources. The questions in the 2008 survey were funded by the following government Departments: Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (now Business, Innovation and Skills); Children, Schools and Families; Health; Transport; and Work and Pensions. Other funders came from: the Economic and Social Research Council; the Food Standards Agency; the Gatsby Charitable Foundation; the Hera Trust; the John Templeton Foundation; the Leverhulme Trust; and NORFACE.
- 6 NatCen, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better-informed society through high quality social research ([www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)).

## Contacts

**Emma Cutting**

**(NatCen Press Officer)**

**07912 668664**

**[emma.cutting@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:emma.cutting@natcen.ac.uk)**

**Alison Park**

**(Co-director BSA)**

**020 7549 7029 (work)**

**07825 667 561 (mobile)**

**[alison.park@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:alison.park@natcen.ac.uk)**

