The Way We Are Now

The state of the UK’s relationships 2015
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To find out more about the report visit: relate.org.uk/waywearenow
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Forewords

Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE
President of Relate

Relationships are the life-blood of a thriving society, they sustain us through good times and bad. *The Way We Are Now* offers a rare insight to the state of the nation’s relationships – whether between partners, within families, at work or with friends. And it illustrates how our different relationships interact.

The positive news is that most of us enjoy good relationships and we know that when we do, we also tend to be happier, healthier and more productive. However there is also food for thought, in terms of the impact of money worries, work-life balance, and ill-health on our relationships. And this shows us that the separation between the ‘public’ realm and our ‘private’ lives is more blurry than is often understood.

As the findings from the survey of relationship support practitioners highlight, all relationships need work - and we neglect them at our peril. However the good news is that, with the right support, we can build strong relationships that can see us through whatever life throws at us.

Stuart Valentine
Chief Executive of Relationships Scotland

Our partners, family and friends provide us with the relationships that give meaning and substance to our lives. This report highlights both the joys and the difficulties of living life in relationship with others and offers an insight into how our relationships are affected by life events: the birth of a first child; the use of technology; the pressures of money and alcohol – and through it all the relationships that form the bedrock of our lives.

Relationships are perhaps the most vital part of human existence. This report reminds us that we need to take care of ourselves and those around us, and that it’s OK to ask for help. No one is immune to the pressures that life brings and no one is beyond help. What unites us is the need to be in relationship with others, and this report offers an excellent insight into where we are at today and what we might do better in the future.

Mark Molden
Chief Executive of Marriage Care

As a nation we remain understandably private about our relationships and yet their flourishing or failure has enormous public consequences. This report reminds us of an important truism; relationships matter to us and affect every aspect of our lives. Revealing the highs and lows that characterise most relationships, it presents a critical challenge: if our relationships are so obviously precious, are we doing enough to nurture and protect them?

The encouraging news is that many of us report a good relationship with our partners. We value commitment but life’s transitions, such as having children, change our attitudes towards it. Marriage continues to be prized as an important sign of commitment, but it’s the quality of our relationships – sharing problems in particular – that communicates commitment more than anything else. This report also warns of real pressures on our relationships, which is why we must do more to strengthen and support them. Healthy, committed relationships help us flourish; they hold the potential to transform the life chances of a nation.
The state of the UK’s relationships

Following the publication of The Way We Are Now in 2014, Relate, Relationships Scotland and Marriage Care have once again commissioned a representative survey of over 6,000 people throughout the UK to profile the nation’s relationships, offering a rich insight across five areas of our lives.

This unique survey offers us a glimpse of the home lives, working lives and sex lives of people in the UK and offers a perspective on the quality of our relationships with partners, families, friends and colleagues.

The Way We Are Now offers plenty to celebrate — the vast majority of people enjoy good quality relationships: 87% of people in couples are happy with their relationships; 71% of us enjoy good relationships with our colleagues; and nine out of ten of us report having close friends.

However, it also gives us an insight into the strains people face — with 61% of parents identifying money worries as a top strain on relationships; 22% of workers saying they work more hours than they want to and this damages their health; and one in six people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions reporting that they have no close friends.

For Relate, Relationships Scotland and Marriage Care this is a familiar picture. Our work with individuals, couples and families throughout the UK gives us first-hand experience of how people are working hard to stick together through good times and bad. And The Way We Are Now reflects these insights, including the results from a poll of over 450 of our relationship support practitioners.

Digging deeper, our findings tell a story about the interconnectedness of our lives, demonstrating why to consider relationships a purely private matter is to miss the point entirely. Issues traditionally considered to fall within the remit of public policy — such as the state of people’s finances, conditions at work and provision for people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions — have real impacts on our relationships. And conversely our relationships impact these realms — affecting our health, our wellbeing and even our productivity at work. To that end, it’s heartening that politicians, policy makers, and commentators are increasingly recognising that relationships matter.
Executive summary

“The Way We Are Now” considers relationships in five areas:

**Families**
We explore the diversity of family structures, and consider the challenges families face. We found that almost one in four people (24%) have experienced the breakup of their parents’ relationship, with signs that this can have lasting impacts on relationships. We also found that money worries were a significant cause for concern – especially for parents.

**Partners**
We look at the quality of relationships and what people look for in their partners. Across the generations most people who have a partner (87%) report that this relationship is good, and 50% never or rarely argue. There are some differences across age groups in what people look for in a partner and what signifies commitment, but for people of all ages the top three signs of commitment were sharing problems, exclusivity and getting married.

**Sex**
We explore the importance of and our satisfaction with sex and also consider the impact of technology. Nearly two thirds of us (62%) say our sex life is important, but fewer than half (45%) are satisfied (45%) and over half (51%) haven’t had sex in the last month.¹ While the importance we attach to sex is slightly lower for the older and younger generations than for 24–44 year olds, and slightly lower for women than for men, the divides are not that great.

**Work**
We explore our relationships at work, and how our work affects our relationships. The good news is most workers (71%) enjoy good relationships with colleagues. However, many people still feel pulled in different directions by the demands of work and home life. More than a quarter (28%) aged under 35 agreed the ideal employee is available 24 hours a day, and 22% of workers agreed that they work longer hours than they want and it’s damaging their health.

**Friends**
Finally we look at relationships with our friends. Happily, most of us have good friends to support us, and the picture for older people is particularly positive: 81% of people aged 60 or over have good relationships with friends, compared to 75% for those aged under 60. Sadly though, one in ten people say they have no close friends. And those with children and people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions seem to face particular challenges in this area.

Relationships are our bedrock; they see us through the tough times. It’s therefore good news that the majority of us enjoy good relationships with our partners, families, friends and colleagues.

However, as our survey shows, life can put up barriers to relationships – such as money worries and work pressures. And for some groups the barriers seem to be higher – with our findings in relation to people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions offering particularly worrying insight.

When it comes to couple relationships, the majority of us understand the vital importance of communication and sharing problems, and we value commitment, and marriage as a sign of that commitment. And with the advent of equal marriage more of us are now free to choose to express our commitment in the way that suits us best.

However we know our lives are built upon a rich patchwork of relationships and it’s the quality of these relationships overall which will determine whether or not we thrive.

As our practitioner survey confirms, relationships need work. When our attentions are directed elsewhere – to making ends meet, or battling ill-health, or by being chained to our desks – our relationships can suffer. However with the right support, and with the time and energy to invest, we can all enjoy the benefits of strong and healthy relationships throughout our lives.

¹ In the month before the survey was conducted.
Our 2015 survey in pictures

71% of parents who have separated have a good relationship with their mum compared to 57% with their dad

61% of people with children said that money worries are one of the top strains on their relationships compared to 47% without children

50% said sharing problems is a top sign of commitment

81% of those aged 60+ have a good relationship with their friends

1 in 4 employees aged under 35 agree that the ideal worker is available 24/7

1 in 10 have no close friends

71% have a good relationship with their work colleagues

Less than half are satisfied with their sex life

YouGov survey of 6,512 people aged 16 and over in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Full methodology available at relate.org.uk/waywearenow
Families
Standing the test of time

The message from our survey was clear: family life is hard, but ultimately worth every drop of blood, sweat and tears. Our findings show that balancing work and home life, managing on a tight budget and raising small children all take their toll on our relationships. However, despite this, the majority of us still say we have good relationships which we value highly. In this chapter, we will look more closely at how family life is changing, what the key strains are, and how they affect our relationships with those we love.

Everything changes but you

Family life is changing but then, it always has. Not only do family structures continually evolve and shift but family relationships are deeply personal: what we count as ‘family’ is different from one person to the next.

Our survey found that a quarter of respondents (24%) had experienced the breakup of their parents’ relationship. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2012 there were 118,140 divorces in England and Wales and the latest figures show an estimated 42% of marriages end in divorce.¹

The percentage of families which involved a married couple (including civil partnership) in England and Wales reduced from 70% to 65% between 2001 and 2011, and in 2011 cohabiting couples made up 17% of families.²

18% of families were headed by a lone parent and more than 2.2 million working mums were family breadwinners — an increase of one million since 1996/97³. The number of young adults aged 20–34 who lived with their parents increased by 25% from 1996 to 2013, with one in three men and one in five women in this age group living with their parents.⁴

As parents who have separated embark on new relationships, we’ve seen the rise of the ‘blended family’, with step-families accounting for 4.5% of all families in 2011.⁵ There is also a growing awareness of the prevalence of other family arrangements — for example more than 200,000 grandparents in the UK provide full-time care for their grandchildren.⁶
There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ family model.

Changes in family structures can enrich how we live our lives, providing additional sources of support with bringing up children, allowing couples to form strong and lasting partnerships with those they love and reducing the number of people living in unhappy or poor quality relationships. The good news is that the majority of us have warm and positive relationships with our parents, and with our children and grandchildren.

In response to our survey, 78% said they had a good relationship with their mum and 72% with their dad. And we were encouraged to learn that 86% of grandparents said they had a good relationship with their grandchildren and nine out of ten parents (90%) a good relationship with their children. When asked who their best relationship is with, over two fifths of respondents said their partner (43%), followed by children (16%), then their mum (15%).

So, while the structure of families may change, we continue to hold our family close and the majority of us enjoy good relationships.

**Breaking up is hard to do**

However, the figures are not universally positive and changes in family structure, for example through divorce, can be hard to manage, creating stress and potentially putting strain on relationships. Of those people in our survey whose parents had separated, 71% said they have a good relationship with their mums, slightly lower than the 78% for those whose parents remain together. However, the difference is far more marked when it comes to dads, where the percentage who said they have a good relationship fell from 72% for those whose parents are together, to 57% for those whose parents have separated. The reasons for this are likely to be complex; we know that breaking up is hard and, for many families, will leave a lasting legacy.

Similarly, in contrast to the 90% of parents who reported good relationships with their children, only 58% of step-parents said the same about their relationships with their step-children. These findings show some of the challenges of adjusting to change following separation and of forming new families. All this makes it even more vital that support is available to families through these times of change.

> “The majority of us have warm and positive relationships with our parents and with our children and grandchildren.”

> “We know that breaking up is hard and, for many families, will leave a lasting legacy.”

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2 Figure excludes those who report not having a relationship with this person.

3 These figures are across the whole survey sample, regardless of which of these relationships people have. Therefore the figures may also reflect the frequency of these types of relationship occurring across the sample.
Feeling the squeeze

Whatever its shape, managing family life isn’t always easy, and there are a range of factors that can serve to increase the pressure on our family relationships.

Our survey suggests that money worries remain one of the key challenges faced by families, with 55% of respondents ranking it in the top three strains on a relationship. However our findings do suggest some cautious improvement since 2014 for older people in particular: 54% of people aged 65 and over reported money worries as a top strain this year, compared to 69% last year. Unfortunately, though, for families with children money worries appear to be a particular pinch point. 61% of those with children said money worries are one of the top strains on a relationship, compared to 47% for those without.

As well as money worries, those with children under five also identified childcare and bringing up children as a significant strain, with nearly a third (32%) putting this in the top three. Interestingly, while this falls slightly once children get older, 27% of those with their youngest children aged five to 18 still state that this is a top strain on relationships.

People with children under five were also more likely than those without children to rank household chores (18% compared to 8%), working long hours or a lack of work-life balance (47% compared to 43%) and family rows (21% compared to 14%) as a top strain on relationships. This highlights the difficult juggling act so many parents have to manage, balancing raising children, running a house and working, all of which may leave money very tight, putting strain on the partner relationships within those families.

At the recent general election all parties sought to recognise these issues with significant pledges around supporting families including, for example, extending access to free childcare. With significant policy change in the area of family finances and support already taking place at the start of the new parliament, and the potential for more ahead, it will be interesting to see how the number of families reporting that relationships are under strain as a result of money worries will change in future surveys.

4 While we can make reasonable observations drawing on the two surveys, it’s important to note that the figures for 2014 and 2015 are not directly comparable. While the question itself was identical, the response options differed slightly in their wording. In 2015 the response option ‘childcare’ was changed to ‘childcare/bringing up children’.
When we talk about family it’s important to remember the wide range of structures and experiences this includes. But while our families aren’t all the same, our research shows that there are some things which are true of most. On the whole we have good relationships with parents, partners and children. Having babies can take its toll on relationships, and money worries and childcare are significant strains. But when we take the time to invest in our families we can build relationships that stand the test of time.

5 These questions were only asked to those respondents who reported having a current partner relationship at the time of the survey.
Partners
Endless love

Despite headlines telling us how wrong love can go, our survey found that it mostly goes right. The vast majority of couples said they have a good relationship with their partner and half of those asked said they rarely or never argue.

We look here at what makes a relationship work, what puts it under strain and whether there is a generational divide when it comes to love.

A nation of romantics

While there are, of course, exceptions, generally speaking we’re a nation of happy couples enjoying good relationships with our partners and valuing them very highly. Over two fifths of our respondents, 43%, said their best relationship is with their partner; 87% of those with a partner said that their relationship is good and 50% said they rarely or never argue.

While we may still be romantics at heart, some things are changing. The impact of technology on our relationships is one area where we have seen a significant shift, as we will look at later in this chapter. 16% of 16–34 year olds who are in a relationship report having met their current partner online, falling to just 3% for those aged over 64. However, while young people are more likely to have met their partner online, meeting through friends is still the most common way for people to find their ‘other halves’. Our survey found 23% of people said they met their partner through friends, a finding roughly consistent across all age groups.
Let’s stay together

So if we remain a nation of romantics, are wedding bells still the ultimate sign of commitment? Our survey said… sort of.

When asked to pick their top three signs of commitment in a relationship, those most commonly identified were sharing problems, exclusivity and getting married, with sharing problems coming out top across all age groups (50% of respondents included it in their top three). Sharing problems is an important part of strong, resilient relationships so it’s a very positive sign that all age groups agreed it was a key sign of commitment.

Last year brought marriage equality to the UK, opening up this important form of commitment to everyone for the first time. Yet while getting married remains an important sign of commitment across all age groups, some interesting differences in attitudes emerged. 35% of those aged 65 or over thought getting married was the most important sign of commitment, falling to just 12% for the 16–24 year olds. Similarly, more than half those aged 65 or over ranked getting married in their top three signs of commitment (53%) compared to 27% of 16–24 year olds.

What we don’t know is whether these differences indicate generational changes in attitudes or are the result of the different life experiences of the respondents. It may simply be that those who are or have been married may be more likely to consider marriage an important sign of commitment than those who haven’t yet reached this stage of life.

Interestingly, those with children aged over 18 were much more likely to say that getting married is one of their top signs of commitment (48%) than those without children (30%), with those with children aged under five sitting somewhere in the middle (39%).

And one in three 16-24 year olds, the group most likely to be living with family and spending a lot of time with friends, said that having a good relationship with each other’s friends and family is a top sign of commitment, compared to just 14% across all of the other age groups.

Perhaps, then, it’s key moments in life — like leaving home, getting married or having children — that shape our view of commitment, rather than there being a true generational divide. Over time our surveys will indicate to what extent today’s younger people are carrying their differing attitudes to commitment with them as they grow older.

As well as signs of commitment, our survey also showed some interesting similarities and differences in what people thought were the most important factors in a relationship more generally. The factors most commonly ranked in respondents’ top three were honesty (33%), communication (22%) and commitment (19%). However, while 31% of 16–24 year olds said personality was top of their list, only 8% of those aged 65 or over agreed, again perhaps reflecting the influence of life experience on what we value in a relationship.

6 Respondents were asked to pick their top three signs of commitment in a relationship from a list of 16 options. Sharing problems was the option most frequently included in the top three.

7 Selected from a list of seven options.
Across all age groups, sex life and physical attraction were not considered to be as important for a relationship as honesty and communication. Nearly seven in ten people (68%) said they did not rank sex life and physical attraction in their top three important factors in a relationship. There were some differences between age groups here — 77% of those aged 65 or over did not rank this among their top three factors; compared to 55% of 16–24 year olds. However it’s clear that, while sex can play an important part in an intimate relationship and can be the match that lights the fire, whatever our age, sex is rarely the fuel that keeps the fire going.

Love on the rocks

While most of us say we’re happy in our relationships overall, this doesn’t mean they’re always plain sailing. Our survey found that significant numbers of people are feeling the strain. Of those in a relationship, one in ten (9%) said they argue with their partner most of the time, more often than not or all of the time, and 15% said they regret being in their relationship occasionally, more often than not, most or all of the time.

So what are the key pressures on our relationships? Our respondents told us that the top strains are money worries (24%), affairs (21%) and working long hours and lack of work-life balance (13%). As highlighted in the previous chapter looking at families, more than half of the people we asked (55%) put money worries in their top three strains on couple relationships. And 53% of those in a couple relationship said financial matters are one of the top issues about which they were most likely to have differing opinions with their partner.

Just as we’ve seen that the signs of commitment and what we’re looking for in a relationship vary by age, so do the top strains on our relationships. It’s possible these are connected; the challenges we face as couples may well influence the qualities that we look for in a partner.

39% of people aged 16–24 said disagreements about the future of the relationship are a top source of strain, compared to just 13% across other age groups, perhaps reflecting the earlier stage their relationships are likely to be in. This younger age group was also more likely to say that working long hours or a lack of work-life balance is a top strain on relationships (48%) than those in other age groups (41%).

Those aged 25–44 were more likely to rank household chores as a top strain on relationships (14% compared to 6% across other age groups), perhaps reflecting the fact that this age group is more likely to have young children, and to be running a home and family life.

8 When asked to rank their top three strains on a relationship, this is the percentage of people who chose each of these as the number one strain.

“One worrying difference for older people was the increased likelihood of reporting that alcohol is one of the top strains on relationships. 18% of those aged 65 or over identified it as a top strain compared to just 10% of those under 65. This is in line with statistics showing that the number of older people admitted to hospital with mental and behavioural problems as a result of alcohol has significantly increased over recent years.”

Whatever the source of the strain though, no age group has things easy. There is clearly more that could be done to reduce the strains on couple relationships, by addressing sources of tension such as work pressure and money worries, but it’s also important to look at how we strengthen relationships to be able to withstand these strains. In our survey of relationship support practitioners, 99% agreed that all relationships need work and yet 80% said that they believe that the majority of people invest the most effort in relationships with their children, not their partner.
The Skype goodnight generation

While the foundations of our relationships show little signs of changing, it would be wrong to suggest that we’re standing still. Developments in technology have had a huge impact on almost every aspect of our lives and our relationships are no exception. While our desire to reach out, communicate and form a strong bond with another person remains unchanged, technology is increasingly altering the way we choose to do it.

As might be expected, the younger respondents to our survey were more likely to report that technology had an impact on their current relationship. After all, this is the generation of which four in five feel “lost” without the internet (compared to three out of five people over the age of 25, according to a survey by the Science Museum in 2012). And in line with research in the US, our survey found that they report positive and negative effects on their relationships.

However, younger people don’t have a monopoly on the benefits of technology. Among people aged 65 or over who are using technology which allows them to keep in touch with a partner when they’re away from each other for long periods, 79% said that this has had a positive impact on their relationship.

Across all age groups our survey highlighted that, among the various ways technology has affected our relationships, its role in aiding communication was considered to have the most significant positive impact. 84% of people under 35 who use technology to keep in touch with a partner on a daily basis said this had a positive effect on their relationship. As earlier results showed, communication is considered to be one of the most important factors in a relationship, so it’s no great surprise that technology appears to have given a particular boost to those who aren’t able to communicate face-to-face as much as they would like. Couples who don’t live together were most likely to report a positive impact of technology on their relationship overall (39%, compared to 20% cohabiting and 16% married) and 87% of that group who use technology to stay in touch with their partner when they’re apart for longer durations said that it had a positive impact.

New technologies are, in part, providing new, faster and more efficient ways to communicate — enabling behaviour that was already part of our relationships. However, we have yet to see whether technology might act as more of a ‘disruptive innovation’, changing not just how we conduct our relationships, but also shaping them. It will be interesting to see whether technology allowing better communication between couples who live apart or over long distances will lead to more of these relationships staying the course, or whether the ability to communicate easily 24 hours a day leads to increasing pressure for couples to stay in touch and be connected for a greater part of their lives, for better or worse.

What we found interesting is that at the moment couples tend to have a rosier view of technology than relationship support practitioners: 62% of practitioners said technology plays a negative role in relationships compared to just 13% of our respondents. This may be because counsellors and other relationship support professionals are more likely to hear about problems caused by technology than its benefits. In the next chapter we look at how technology has affected couples’ sex lives, which is also an important area of change and has wider implications for our relationships.

Conclusion

Across the generations most people in relationships report that they’re happy with them. There are some differences between age groups in what people look for in a partner and what they think of as commitment, but at the end of the day we have a great deal in common.

Getting married continues to be understood as a key sign of commitment across all generations, though our survey suggests that life experience may affect just how much priority we attach to the institution.

However, across all age groups, we find a strong desire, at the heart of our relationships, to communicate, share problems and keep in touch. Technology plays an increasing role in helping us to communicate with one another and while young people lead the field in this area, older people are also finding technology can be helpful.

Perhaps the greater differences lie in the strains that challenge our relationships, with different pressures presenting themselves at different stages of our lives. The good news is that given the importance we attach to communication and sharing problems, it’s clear we already understand some of the most important things that will help our relationships weather these storms.

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This question focused on the impact of technology on respondents’ current relationship and was asked only to those in a relationship. This is reflected in all figures about the impact of technology that follow.
**Behind Britain’s bedroom doors**

While we’re bombarded with messages about sex in the media and can read in great detail about celebrities’ sex lives, we very rarely have an open and honest conversation about our own. When we peel back the covers it becomes obvious that not everyone is having as much fun as they’d like. In this chapter we explore how factors such as age, gender, health, and sexuality affect our sex lives, what impact technology has in the bedroom and whether it’s possible for a relationship to recover after an affair.

**Is it really all that?**

There’s a reason why promises of increased sex appeal are so often used to market products — most of us think our sex lives are important.

Nearly two thirds of those surveyed (62%) said a good sex life is important to them.

There were some very interesting gender differences: while 67% of men said a good sex life is important to them, only 57% of women said this. And while nearly a third of men (31%) said they have slept with ten or more people in their lifetime, only a fifth of women (19%) reported the same.

These differences may go some way to explaining why we also found that sex is a significant cause of disagreement for couples — one in ten people in a relationship (10%) said sex is the issue about which they’re most likely to have differing opinions to their partner about, with men more likely to list sex life as one of the top three strains on relationships than women (14% compared to 9%).

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10 Respondents were asked to select which issues they and their partner were most likely to have differing opinions about from a list of eight options; figures exclude those who answered ‘don’t know’.
However, every relationship is unique and it’s certainly not always the case that men value sex more highly than women, or that it’s only heterosexual couples that argue about sex.

It’s also important to recognise that, for a significant number of people, sex is not such a big issue: 35% of respondents said a good sex life is not important to them. And 8% report they have never had a sexual partner, which for some (though probably not all) may be a reflection of a lack of priority attached to sex.

Factors such as age, and living with a long term health condition or being disabled, also appear to change our perspective on sex. 45% of people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions reported that a good sex life is not important to them — a finding which is likely to be influenced by a complicated range of factors, and will reflect the huge diversity of experiences within this group. It’s apparent from our work that some people with disabilities may face barriers to engaging in sexual activity, including other people’s false assumptions or perceptions that sex isn’t for them.

Age too seems to have an impact on the importance we attach to our sex lives, although the generational divide is perhaps not as significant as is often made out. While 73% of those aged 25-44 said that a good sex life is important to them, both older and younger respondents tended to rate sex as less important. Which is probably a reflection of the way the things we value change in light of our experiences and shifting priorities. 48% of those aged 65 or over said a good sex life is not important to them compared to 35% across the whole sample. However, when we factor in the increased likelihood of living with long term health conditions in later life, given the trend noted above, we can see that age may be less of a factor than has often been assumed.
Can’t get no satisfaction?

While most of us may agree our sex lives are important, when it comes to our sexual satisfaction we’re a nation divided: fewer than half of respondents said they’re satisfied with their sex life (45%). For some this may be linked to a lack of sex itself. 51% of respondents told us that they hadn’t had sex in the month before the survey. Our lack of satisfaction may also be exacerbated by unrealistic expectations fuelled by portrayals of sex in pornography and films such as Fifty Shades of Grey; we may compare our own sex lives with those on screen and feel we come up short.

The reality is, it’s perfectly normal for our sexual satisfaction to vary throughout our lives as a result of factors such as stress, health, work, or relationship status. Our survey found the highest levels of sexual satisfaction among couples who don’t live together, with 73% saying they’re satisfied with their sex lives, compared to 60% of cohabiting couples, and 52% of married couples. However, the differences here may be more to do with people’s age and the length of relationship than relationship status in itself. Perhaps of greater concern are the considerably lower levels of satisfaction among respondents who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), of whom only 38% reported they were satisfied with their sex lives, compared to 46% of heterosexual respondents.

Having children is also associated with changes in frequency of sex. Of those in a relationship, those with children were much more likely to report they hadn’t had sex in the last month (43%) compared to those without children (26%). While this can be extremely difficult, it may help for parents to know this is not unusual. Tiredness, stress and lack of interest in sex were reported as some of the most common causes of sex problems for men and women by relationship support practitioners, and yet these problems are hard to avoid as a parent.

Age is another factor that appears to affect the frequency of sex. 74% of those aged 65 and over said they hadn’t had sex in the month prior to the survey, compared to 34% of those aged 25–34. This is in contrast to the figures we’ve seen showing that sex is still important for a majority of older people. It’s therefore vital that support is available to ensure we can all continue to enjoy sex as we age.

Our survey showed higher levels of sexual dissatisfaction among people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions, of whom nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) said they’d not had sex in the past month (compared to 47% among those who are not disabled or living with long term health conditions) and 37% said they are satisfied with their sex life (compared to 48%). Despite the difficulties health conditions and disabilities can present in pursuing a fulfilling sex life, sexual desire is no less important among this group. Counsellors are increasingly working with couples who wish to incorporate sex back into their relationship after treatment for life-changing illnesses such as cancer, or when living with a long term condition, and it’s important that our desire for a fulfilling sex life is recognised, whatever our circumstances.

“It’s perfectly normal for our sexual satisfaction to vary throughout our lives as a result of factors such as stress, health, work or relationship status.”

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11 This excludes people who answered ‘prefer not to say’, who are also excluded from any subsequent calculations or figures relating to this question.
12 In our survey of relationship support practitioners, 73% ranked ‘tiredness/stress/lack of interest’ in the top three causes of sex problems for women and 68% for men, from a list of 11 options.
Download and dirty

As the march of technology continues into the bedroom, our survey reveals an interesting picture of its impact. While the Partners chapter highlights the largely positive impact technology has on communication within relationships, its effect on our sex lives is decidedly more mixed.

Increased ease of access to online porn is one particularly controversial development that may have an effect on relationships. 23% of 16–34 year olds who were in a relationship, and who say that accessing online porn has affected this relationship, reported an overall negative impact, and this is an increasingly common topic in the counselling room. However, nearly one in five (19%) of this same group responded that accessing online porn has overall had a positive impact on their relationship. This is obviously a broad age range, and captured within it are individuals with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives. What’s important is that young people in particular are supported to develop positive and safe sexual relationships, and know where to turn if they see something online that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Our survey also highlighted a distinct gender divide over porn. When asked about the impact of accessing porn online on their current relationships, 72% of women in a relationship said the question was not applicable as they ‘don’t use/do this’, compared to just 46% of men, with only 25% of men aged under 40 who are in a relationship reporting they don’t use porn. We have seen earlier in the chapter the potential for our sex lives to be a source of conflict, and different attitudes to the use of pornography may well be one area of tension. It’s clear that the message here is complex and more work is needed to establish the true impact online porn has on relationships.

However the rise of online porn is by no means the only way in which technology has started to affect our sex lives. Many of us strive for variety, and are continuously looking for ways to ‘spice things up’ or ‘keep the magic going’. Sending flirtatious or sexually suggestive text messages and pictures is now a part of many people’s sex lives and appears to be a particular favourite of unmarried couples, nearly half of whom said it’s had a positive impact on their relationship (49%), compared to just 28% of those who are married or in a civil partnership. This way of connecting is particularly popular with younger generations — with over half of 16–34 year olds who say that they send sexy or flirtatious messages and pictures reporting that it had a positive impact on their relationship. However, we also found that sexy messages aren’t just benefitting those in the early days of a relationship, with 18% of those who’ve been together for 15 years or more and who send suggestive messages saying that these had a positive impact on their relationship.

Unfortunately, not everyone has had a positive experience with using technology as part of their sex life. 17% of 16–34 year olds responding to our survey who have a current partner and send sexy or flirtatious messages said that these messages or pictures had a negative impact on their relationship. Just as technology can add variety to our sex lives and help sustain intimacy when we’re apart, it may also bring real risks. Frequent stories in the media about ‘sexting’ highlight some of the real issues when this goes wrong, with, for example, increasing numbers of people finding themselves victims of ‘revenge porn’.

“Just as technology can add variety to our sex lives and help sustain intimacy when we’re apart, it may also bring real risks.”

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13 This excludes people who answered the question but said ‘prefer not to say’ (3% of those who answered the question) and those who responded ‘not applicable – I don’t use/do this’ (60% of those who answered the question). These people are excluded from all future analysis of this question.

14 Excluding people who answered ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘not applicable – I don’t use/do this’). These people are excluded from all future analysis of this question.
After the affair

‘Playing away’ or ‘a bit on the side’: whatever we call it, infidelity is a common threat to our relationships – whether it takes the form of a physical affair or sharing explicit sexual conversations online. In our survey of relationship support practitioners, more than a third cited affairs as one of the top challenges for couples trying to maintain their relationships, ahead of issues such as working long hours and work-life balance (30%), stress of childcare and bringing up children (15%) and partners drifting apart (26%).

Our findings on affairs are fairly consistent with last year’s survey, with nearly a quarter of people in a relationship (24%) reporting they have physically cheated on a partner. 41% of women and 35% of men reported being cheated on and our survey suggests this may be increasing – in 2014, 36% of women and 30% of men said the same. In this year’s survey, 44% say they have cheated either physically or ‘virtually’, or have been tempted to. We know that novelty can be key for creating sexual arousal and technology offers new opportunities for engaging with new people, as well as both creating and viewing sexually explicit material. One reason for the higher numbers cheating ‘virtually’ may be because our inhibitions can be reduced when we’re behind a screen, and the temptation to take risks and try out fantasies can instantly be acted upon without time to reflect on the consequences.

Our survey showed that nearly half of people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions reported that they’d been cheated on (43%), compared to 36% of those who are not. While this may reflect that, on average, people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions are more likely to be older, and therefore to have been in more relationships for longer, creating more possibility of being cheated on, there may also be more direct links. Advances in treatment mean more people are likely to survive serious and life-threatening illnesses, but they can often be left with significant side effects, which can have implications for relationships and sexual intimacy. For example impotence is a common side effect of some forms of cancer treatment and can be a complication of diabetes. For couples who’ve been through serious illness, sex is often a very low priority in the early stages of recovery; however, as time goes by desire may return. When sexual desire or ability becomes mismatched between partners, this can cause issues and sometimes leads to one partner looking for sexual satisfaction elsewhere. Sex therapy and counselling can be invaluable at this point to help couples discover a ‘new normal’ for them and rebuild the intimacy in their relationship.

In addition to actual infidelity, speculation about affairs and a lack of trust can have a negative impact on relationships. Over one in ten respondents (11%) said they suspect they have been cheated on but have no evidence, which makes it no surprise that a third (33%) of people under the age of 45 admitted to checking their partner’s phone or social media account without permission. Women seem more likely than men to check: 26% of women across all age groups admitted to this compared to only 16% of men. However, while the technology that facilitates this is relatively new, the behaviour is not — checking our partner’s Facebook messages or reading their texts is just the 21st century equivalent of going through their pockets. Unfortunately, over time this suspicious behaviour can become just as damaging to relationships as the affairs it seeks to detect.

Sadly our fear of affairs is, to some extent, well founded — as few of us believe our relationships could survive one. Coping with the aftermath of an affair remains a significant reason for people to seek counselling and there is a clear difference of opinion between relationship

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15 Relationship support practitioners were asked to rank the top three challenges for couples in maintaining their relationship from a list of 18 options.

16 Excluding those who answered ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘not applicable – I have never had a partner’ who are also excluded from any subsequent calculations or figures relating to this question.
Conclusion

This year’s survey revealed that when it comes to sex, there’s a clear dividing line between the haves and have-nots.

For the majority of us, sex is important and that’s true regardless of our age, gender, sexuality, or disability status. What differs is whether we’re happy with what we’re getting and in this regard it’s clear that some groups experience greater challenges, including in particular people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions. While technology can, and does, have a positive impact on many people’s sex lives, there are some significant risks that come with this — including creating unrealistic expectations of what we think our sex lives should be.

At the end of the day, the intimacy of sex is a vital part of our relationships and when our trust is broken by an affair, or when our sex lives become unsatisfying, problems can arise. In this context, support for those who want to regain or develop sexual relationships is increasingly important.

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17 Excluding those who answered ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘not applicable – I have never had a partner’ who are also excluded from any subsequent calculations or figures relating to this question.

18 Selected from a list of eight options, excluding those who answered ‘not applicable’.

19 While the sample overall is representative of age and gender, it’s not constructed to be representative of sexuality and disability, therefore caution should be taken in how results from these groups are reported and referenced.
Work
A difficult juggling act

The impacts of work on our relationships at home, of our home life on performance at work, and of our relationships with colleagues on both, are many and varied.

Most of us enjoy good relationships at work. However our survey indicates that stress at work can affect our relationships at home, and that family responsibilities can be difficult to juggle with work. Not everyone is supported to manage work and home commitments, and many people continue to feel pressured to work more than they want to.

In this chapter we consider how relationships at home and work interact, and explore some important differences between the experiences of particular groups in the workplace.

Live to work, or work to live?

Whether you live to work or work to live, the way we earn our living is a major part of our lives. Work matters, and not just for our bank balance.

When we asked those who are in work whether they thought it should be the primary priority in our lives, 58% of respondents said they disagree. However, whether work is number one or not, experiences in the workplace can have wide-ranging implications for the rest of our lives.

If our experience at work is poor, our health can suffer, and worryingly 22% of those in work said they work more hours than they want to and this damages their health. For those out of work, the impacts on health and wellbeing can also be significant.
People don't leave jobs, they leave managers

Whether we feel defined by our work or see it as a necessary evil, our colleagues are central to our experiences of working life.

According to research by The Work Foundation, strong relationships in the workplace are one of the main features of ‘good work’ — work that maximises employees’ health and wellbeing, which in turn are linked to productivity, reduced sickness absence and staff turnover.10

The good news is that the majority of those we surveyed who are in work (71%) said they have a good relationship with their colleagues, over half (57%) said they have a good relationship with their boss, and 57% said they count at least one colleague as a ‘close friend’. Given that most of us see our boss more often than our mum (38% of those in employment see their boss every day compared to only 27% for mums20), this is certainly positive news.

However, this isn’t the case for everyone. A recent study of workplace conflict found four in ten UK employees reported some form of interpersonal conflict at work in the last year and working life can be particularly hard for some groups of people.11 For example, our survey found people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions and are in work were more likely to agree that their boss behaves in a bullying or intimidating way towards them (15% compared to 12% overall).

“Being unhappy or under pressure at work can, in turn, have a damaging impact on people’s relationships at home.”

It’s said ‘people don’t leave jobs, they leave managers’ so given the links between good relationships and productivity noted above, it makes sense for employers and employees alike to invest in relationships in the workplace.

Taking our work home?

It’s not just relationships with colleagues that affect our work; our relationships at home interact with workplace experiences too. The 2012 Happy Homes and Productive Workplaces study found that work engagement — which links to productivity — and quality of couple relationships are positively associated with each other, independent of other factors.12 Essentially, good relationships at home are linked to better performance at work.

It’s no surprise, then, that nearly a quarter (24%) of those respondents to our survey who were currently employed tended to agree that stress from home adversely affects them at work, rising to nearly a third (32%) for people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions. But while stress from home affects experiences at work, in our survey of relationship support practitioners the vast majority (94%) also agreed that being unhappy or under pressure at work can, in turn, have a damaging impact on people’s relationships at home.

We need to remember that we’re essentially social animals, at work and at home. So naturally, relationships are vital to our ability to get the job done and function effectively in all aspects of our lives. If we want healthy, happy, productive workplaces, we need the people within them to have healthy, happy relationships, both at home and at work.

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10 This excludes those who report that they have no current relationship with their mums.
Babies and briefcases

While the earlier chapter on families set out the effect that having children can have on the couple relationship, it’s clear from our survey that for many parents, the workplace provides little escape from stress at home, and may be the source of additional pressures.

We know that those with children can feel pulled in many directions — by their boss, co-workers, children, partner and other commitments. Our survey showed people with children are more likely to report that there are negative attitudes to caring responsibilities in the workplace than those without children. Workers with children aged under 19 were much more likely to agree that attending to caring responsibilities is frowned on at work (35%) than those without children (21%). And 40% of workers who have children under five agreed it’s assumed the most productive employees put work before their family life, compared to just 33% of workers without children. So what’s informing these different perspectives? Are working parents over-sensitive in their assumptions about how they’re perceived when they leave to do the school run? Or, given that working parents may experience these attitudes very personally, are they just in a better position to judge than colleagues who don’t have to balance work and care to the same extent? Whether or not working parents are objectively under increased pressure, it’s clear that they feel they are, and this is likely to lead to a more negative experience of the workplace overall.

As well as feeling the impact of their home life on work, 37% of working parents with children under five agreed that work interferes with their home, personal life and caring responsibilities, compared to 27% of those without children. It’s clear that many parents are struggling to balance work and family life, and this is likely to create pressure and feelings of guilt wherever they are.

Unfortunately it seems the UK may have a particularly long way to go in addressing these issues. The European Social Survey — a study of eight European countries — found that UK dads report the highest levels of conflict between paid work and family life. 35% of UK dads said they always or often worry about work problems when not working, and 37% of UK dads said they’re always or often too tired after work to enjoy the things they would like to do at home. Although mums’ attitudes were not studied, it seems likely that these tensions would be shared. As discussed in the previous chapters, parents of young children face strains in a range of areas of their lives and it’s, therefore, particularly important that employers take action to address these negative experiences of work.

“37% of working parents with children under five agreed that work interferes with their home, personal life and caring responsibilities.”
All work and no play?

While we’ve seen some changes in the make-up of the UK workforce over the years — with more women working and increasing numbers of people working beyond state pension age — there remain some distinctive differences in attitudes to, and experiences of, work by gender and age.

Those aged 60 or over who are working were less likely to agree that the most productive people put work before family life (22% compared to 35% of people under 60), whereas those under 35 were more likely to agree that the ideal employee is one who is available 24 hours a day: 28% compared to 20% for those over 35.

What’s not clear is whether these differences represent a generational shift between an older generation used to a ‘job for life’, nine-to-five form of career, and a younger generation used to being plugged into work via technology 24/7; or whether the greater commitment to life outside of work is simply the product of life experience and the accumulation over the years of a larger family and a wider range of priorities and interests into which we wish to invest our time.

Our survey also revealed clear differences between women’s and men’s views about, and experiences of, work. When we asked working respondents whether they agree with the view that work should be the primary priority in someone’s life, 61% of women disagreed, compared to only 51% of men. Women were also more likely to agree that taking care of family responsibilities is frowned upon — with 30% saying this compared to 23% of men. Worryingly, women were also more likely to agree that they feel pressured by their manager to work even if they’re ill — 36% said this compared to 28% of men (32% overall). This ‘presenteeism’ is an area of real concern that needs further research to understand whether, as this survey suggests, women are particularly affected, and if so why.

However one area of our survey in which women seemed to be doing better than men is discussing personal problems in the workplace. 42% of working women said they could do this, compared with just 35% of men — suggesting that women fare better in developing the relationships they need to promote their wellbeing at work.

“Our survey also revealed clear differences between women’s and men’s views about, and experiences of, work.”
An uneven playing field

Gender and age are not the only factors that shape our experience at work. Our survey showed that the experiences of people in different socio-economic groups were also significantly different. Those in lower socio-economic groups are likely to be earning less, and our survey found they’re also likely to have more difficult experiences in work in terms of their relationships.

We found that, of those in work, respondents in ‘C2DE’ groups (the ‘working class’, particularly including manual and service workers) were less likely to report a good relationship with their boss — 53% said this compared to 60% of those of a higher socio-economic group (‘ABC1’ groups, the ‘middle class’). The ‘working class’ group were also more likely to feel pressured by their manager to work when ill (36% agreed compared to 30% in the ‘middle class’ group); less likely to agree that they have ample opportunity to perform their job and family responsibilities well (48% compared to 54%); and more likely to agree that caring responsibilities are frowned upon (29% compared to 25%). Furthermore they were less likely to agree that they’re able to discuss personal problems at work (34% compared to 41%).

The British Social Attitudes Survey suggests employees across all socio-economic groups are experiencing increased levels of stress from work and increasing difficulties in establishing an acceptable work-life balance. However our findings demonstrate that those in lower socio-economic groups may be particularly at risk of negative experiences at work. The reasons for these differences are unclear, but factors such as pay freezes, increased job market uncertainty and the growth of short term and zero-hours contracts may be particularly affecting this group.

Our survey also revealed disturbing differences in the experiences of people who are disabled or living with long term health conditions. This group was more likely to say their boss behaved in a bullying or intimidating way towards them (15% compared to 11% of those who are not disabled or living with a long term health condition) or that stress from home adversely affects them at work (32%, compared to 23%). As we’ve seen in previous chapters this group is also more likely to experience other relationships stresses, so it’s vital action is taken to ensure that the impact of work on disabled people’s relationships is positive rather than negative.

“Gender and age are not the only factors that shape our experience at work. Our survey showed that the experiences of people in different socio-economic groups were also significantly different.”

Conclusion

Whether we ‘live to work’ or ‘work to live’, it’s clear work has an enormous effect on our wider lives. Our relationships outside work impact upon, and are impacted by, our experiences in the workplace and the people we work with make a huge difference to more than just our lunch break.

The good news is most of us enjoy good relationships at work and negative experiences only affect a minority. However it’s clear that our gender, age, sexual orientation, disability status and socio-economic group all affect our chances of having a good experience at work, and this is cause for concern.
Friends
Friends are the ‘convoy’ who carry us through life. They cheer us in our successes and comfort us in the difficult times. For many they act like a second family — one we get to choose. Not only are friends our first choice for support with our romantic relationships but research has shown they’re even good for our health: people with strong social relationships are 50% more likely to survive a life-threatening illness than those without. In this chapter we look at the state of our friendships today and focus particularly on the one in ten people who told us they’re without any close friends.

Alone in a crowd

With hundreds of ‘friends’ on Facebook and the constant chatter of Twitter and other social media, it can be easy to feel as if we live life in a crowded room. But our survey has once again shown that many of us feel ‘alone in the crowd’.

Consistent with last year’s findings, one in ten respondents said they have no close friends (10%) but when we dug a little deeper we found that this sense of lacking confidantes was even more common among some groups. While just 7% of those without children said they have no close friends, 11% of those with children reported this. As we saw in previous chapters, those with children under five were more likely to argue with their partner regularly and more likely to find work interferes with their home life, and those with children of any age are more likely to say that money worries are a top strain on relationships. So it’s worrying that this group is also less likely to have the support of close friends to draw upon when facing these challenges.

Equally, we’ve seen throughout the report that those who are disabled or living with long term health conditions are more likely to report being dissatisfied with their sex life and more likely to say that their boss behaves in a bullying or intimidating way. And in our survey among this group a staggering one in six people reported having no close friends to help them through (16%). Furthermore, we know from other research that this problem may be even more prevalent among particular sub-groups of this population — for example one qualitative study of 67 people with learning disabilities found that one in four said they didn’t have any close friends.

Developing and maintaining friendships takes time and effort. When life gets in the way of this, when all our time and energy is taken up keeping our family together or just keeping well, or when society puts up barriers to our full participation in social life, friendships may suffer.
Quality not quantity

Social media can fool us into thinking that, when it comes to friends, more equals better. But it’s the satisfaction that we gain from a really solid friendship that can make us feel happy and fulfilled. A strong set of friendships can make us feel we’re at the centre of that ‘convoy’, held safe on all sides and supported to move forward in life by people who care about us.

The good news is that this year’s survey showed most of us enjoy good and satisfying relationships with our friends, although there are notable differences between men and women. 82% of women and 71% of men (77% of people overall) said they have a good relationship with their friends.21

We also found that respondents who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) were slightly less likely to say they have good relationships with their friends (72% compared to 78% who identified as heterosexual). This is worrying in light of research from Stonewall, which has found that older LGB people are more likely to be single and live alone, and less likely to see family members on a regular basis, than heterosexual people, making their ‘convoy’ of friendship all the more important.

We also see, again, that those who are disabled or living with long term health conditions, and those with young children, seem to be at a disadvantage. 70% of those who are disabled or living with long term health conditions said they have good relationships with their friends, compared to 79% of those who are not. Similarly, 69% of parents of young children (under five) reported good friendships, compared to 77% across the whole sample.

However, there is some hope for those struggling to balance bringing up small children with sustaining friendships; it appears it may get better as time for friendships returns. Parents whose youngest child is aged over 18 were among the most likely to say that they have good relationships with their friends (80%).

Overall, older people were the more positive age group when it came to the quality of their friendships: 81% of people aged 60 and over (86% of women and 76% of men) reported good relationships with their friends, compared to 75% of those under 60. This may be the result of the additional time that many people in later life have to invest in their friendships, once the pressures of work and childcare are behind them. However while it’s positive that so many older people have good quality relationships to draw upon, sadly we know that not everyone is happy with their relationships in later life — as loneliness and social isolation are a significant problem for a number of older people. Research shows one in ten older people say they are always or often lonely. xx
I’ll be there for you

As TV’s best known Friends told us, we need our friends to be there “when the rain starts to pour”. Our survey showed friends are second only to partners as a source of support, and are particularly counted on by women and those who identified as LGB in our survey. One in five women said they confide in their friends the most when worried or stressed (21%), compared to 14% of men. However, nearly a third (30%) of LGB respondents said they confide most in their friends, equal to the 30% who confide the most in their partner. This compared to 16% and 47% respectively for all heterosexual respondents, with heterosexual men in particular more likely to choose to confide the most in a partner. While there are many reasons why this may be the case, some research has suggested the experience of ‘minority stress’ (unequal treatment of minority groups leading to increased risk of psychological distress) may impact on LGB people’s trust and openness with a partner.\textsuperscript{xix}

When it came to troubles of the heart, half of those surveyed (49%) said they would turn to friends for support if there was a problem with their relationship, and there was a significant gender divide, with women more ready to turn to a friend than men (56% women, 43% men). As relationships go on, our survey suggests that people are more likely to report having no friends and to see those they do have less often; 12% of those who’ve been in a relationship for ten or more years say they have no close friends and 35% say they see their friends less than once a week, compared to 6% and 29% for those in newer relationships. With the chance of divorce highest between the fourth and eighth wedding anniversary, it’s a worry that the primary source of relationship support for half the population is less available the longer they’re in their relationship.\textsuperscript{xxii}

“Friends are second only to partners as a source of support.”

Conclusion

The positive news is most of us report that we have good friends who we turn to for support when life is difficult, and older people in particular say the quality of their friendships is high.

However, we found that the very people who are least likely to have this support available, particularly those with young children or who are disabled or living with long term health conditions, are also more likely to have a difficult time in their wider relationships, and may be most in need of the support of a friend.

Sadly the very strains in life with which we most need support seem, ultimately, to make it harder to keep our ‘convoy’ together. However it’s clear that friendship matters, and when we have friends around us we feel safe to weather the storms of life.
Methodology

In total, we polled 6,512 people aged 16 and over in a survey of relationships across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We achieved sample sizes of over 400 for each of the nine regions in England as well for Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. This means that in many cases we have the sample power to examine the data within individual regions. In addition to the survey of the public, we captured survey responses of 464 relationship practitioners from Relate, Relationships Scotland, and Marriage Care. Practitioners were sent an email providing a link to the survey and inviting them to take part.

We were supported in developing surveys by our advisory group (see Acknowledgements). In the main survey we asked about people’s relationships, including their sexual relationships, and relationships with their partners, colleagues, friends, and family. We asked about the existence of these relationships, how they’re maintained, how people feel about these relationships, and how they’d been feeling about themselves.

The survey was carried out by YouGov. It was conducted using an online survey administered by members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of over 360,000 individuals who’ve agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample, according to the sample definition (UK population aged 16 or over), inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. Responses were gathered between 27 March and 7 April 2015. YouGov Plc normally achieves a response rate of between 35% and 50% to surveys, although this varies according to the subject matter, complexity, and length of the questionnaire. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

The results of this survey do come with some caveats regarding representativeness. The results were weighted to make the data more representative of the population (of UK adults aged 16 or over) in terms of last vote, age, gender, newspaper readership, region, and an indicator of social class (based on census information). However, our sample may still differ from the population at large according to other unobserved factors, including those that are the subject of our survey, such as disability status, relationships, and sexual behaviour (which did not have quotas set or weight targets used for the sample).

The raw data were analysed by Relate using Stata 13 with individual weights attached to all sample members; direct replication of the statistics featured in this report using the tables published by YouGov may therefore be subject to rounding errors. Any inaccuracies or errors in the further analyses of these data are the sole responsibility of Relate.

Additional variables, such as relationship status, which were not available in the standard output provided by YouGov, were subsequently created and feature in the results throughout the report. All of the bivariate analyses that we present show statistically significant patterns and differences — i.e. these are patterns that we would not expect to see by chance.

Data tables for the survey are available on the YouGov website.
## Definition of terms

Throughout this report the following terms are used in the description of findings from our surveys. For clarification:

- **‘Agree’** — includes those responding ‘tend to agree’ and ‘strongly agree’
- **‘Bad’** — includes those responding ‘fairly bad’ or ‘very bad’
- **‘Disagree’** — includes those responding either ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’
- **‘Dissatisfied’** — includes those responding either ‘fairly dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’
- **‘Good’** — includes those responding either ‘fairly good’ or ‘very good’
- **‘Important’** — includes those responding either ‘fairly important’ or ‘very important’
- **‘LGB respondents’** — refers to people who self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual in our survey. This group of respondents should not be taken to be representative of all lesbian, gay or bisexual people.
- **‘Negative’** — includes those responding either ‘very negative’ or ‘fairly negative’
- **‘Not important’** — includes those responding ‘not very important’ or ‘not at all important’
- **‘People who are disabled or living with long term health conditions’** — refers to people who reported in our survey that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. This group of respondents should not be taken to be representative of all disabled people or those living with long term health conditions.
- **‘Positive’** — includes those responding ‘very positive’ or ‘fairly positive’
- **‘Relationship support practitioners’** — includes counsellors, sex therapists, mediators and relationship educators employed by Relate, Marriage Care or Relationships Scotland. Figures that refer to this group are all taken from our survey of over 450 professionals, which is separate to the YouGov survey from which the bulk of the findings in this report are drawn.
- **‘Satisfied’** — includes those responding either ‘fairly satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’
- **‘Sex’** — refers to any form of genital contact with another person that respondents themselves consider to be sex
- **‘Top strains’** — refers to the strains most frequently included in the top three when respondents were asked to rank their top three strains on relationships from a list of 17 options
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About Relate

Relate is the UK’s leading relationship support organisation, serving more than one million people each year through information, education, support, mediation and counselling. Our vision is a future in which healthy relationships are actively promoted as the basis of a thriving society.

We aim to develop and support healthy relationships by:

• delivering inclusive, high quality services that are relevant at every stage of life;
• helping couples, families and individuals to make relationships work better;
• helping both the public and policy makers to improve their understanding of relationships and what makes them flourish.

About Relationships Scotland

Relationship Scotland’s network of 22 affiliated local services provide relationship counselling, family mediation, child contact centres and other family support services across all of mainland and island Scotland. Our work supports individuals, couples and families experiencing relationship difficulties. Around 30,000 people have contact with our services each year.

We are a national voice for relationship support services and we influence policy and legislative policy development in the area of family life and wellbeing. We support people to live with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy and respectful relationships.

About Marriage Care

Marriage Care is a national charity committed to helping couples build and sustain strong, fulfilling, healthy relationships. We provide marriage preparation and relationship counselling services for thousands of people each year, supporting couples and individuals in both the best and worst of times in their relationships, and have been doing so for nearly 70 years.

We’re the largest faith-based relationship support charity in the UK delivering our services through a network of 53 centres, more than 100 counselling locations and the sheer dedication of over 700 professionally trained and accredited volunteers.