The Way We Are Now

The State of the UK’s Relationships 2014
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank members of our advisory group for their advice and support at all stages of this project:
Dr Samantha Callan, Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE, Andrew Ketteringham, Anjula Mutanda, Stuart Valentine and Professor Janet Walker OBE.

We would like to thank Helen Moreno of Relate who managed the design and production of the report.

We would also like to thank Ann Addison (Relate) and Anne Chilton (Relationships Scotland) for their input into the design of the counsellor survey and Tanya Abraham (YouGov) for her input into the national survey.

Thanks also to the Relate project team: Jessica Faulkner, David Marjoribanks, Sarah Milsom and Patrick Sholl; as well as Ross McCulloch of Relationships Scotland.

To find out more about the report visit: www.relate.org.uk/waywearenow
## Forewords

Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE, President of Relate  
Stuart Valentine, Chief Executive of Relationships Scotland

## Executive summary

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Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE, President of Relate

Good quality relationships remain key to our wellbeing and happiness, even as the world around us changes rapidly. In fact, strong relationships are our best asset when coping with the challenges that modern life throws at us. The Way We Are Now has a positive story to tell about the state of the UK’s relationships, and I welcome this message wholeheartedly.

Relationships impact on every aspect of our lives, and this report provides a snapshot of the way we interact with one another in different spheres. It covers not only the more obvious areas of personal relationships, such as couple relationships and families, but also our wider interactions with friends and work colleagues. These relationships are extremely important to our general wellbeing and the way we feel about ourselves, but they are not often examined in such detail as we have here.

In particular, I think the report raises some important issues around relationships in the workplace. Too often, we forget to count the relationships we have with colleagues, despite the fact that we spend such a large proportion of our time at work. During the average working week, we spend around twice as much time (awake at least!) with our colleagues as we do with our families or partners. Having positive, supportive relationships with our colleagues is vital to our wellbeing and wider happiness as well as impacting positively on our lives at home.

It’s very encouraging to see that so many of us enjoy good relationships with our bosses. However, a third of us think that our bosses would like us to be available 24/7. In this modern world of increased connectivity, it is ever more possible to be online, available and in ‘work mode’ at all times. When we have the opportunity to work from home, or to flex hours around child care, this may seem ideal. But what happens to our family life, to our couple relationships and to our sexual satisfaction when we’re checking emails in the bedroom or conference calling from the beach on a family holiday? And when we’re stressed by work and the expectation that we will be available at all times, what sort of impact does that have on those who care most for us?

As we move further and further into a world of 24-hour connectivity these are questions which we must address, keeping relationships at the forefront of our minds.

There are many positive stories in the report about the state of our relationships, but we must be careful not to become complacent. All relationships take effort and investment, and what’s so important about this report is the way in which it highlights the areas where we’re not as content as we could be. There is a challenge here for all of us. We know that our wellbeing depends upon strong, stable, happy relationships. How do we ensure these remain a priority in all areas of our lives?

“Strong relationships are our best asset when coping with the challenges that modern life throws at us”
Stuart Valentine,
Chief Executive of Relationships Scotland

The Way We Are Now provides a unique view of the UK’s relationships and on behalf of Relationships Scotland, I welcome this survey and report.

What the report really reflects is the importance of all our relationships to our general wellbeing and our sense of ourselves. Whether it’s our love life, how we get on with our friends or how well we communicate at work, the report finds that good, healthy, fulfilling relationships enrich how we feel about life. They make us more positive and more confident in ourselves. Relationships make us more resilient to the tough times in life – they also make us appreciate the good times all the more.

One of the slightly surprising results of this study is the relative lack of regional difference in the results. As Chief Executive of Relationships Scotland, I was interested to see that Scotland very closely reflects the rest of the UK in every category explored. It goes to show that the same things remain important to us, wherever we live, and equally that the same or similar pressures are brought to bear on all of us.

Relationships have always been the shock absorbers of life, and this is no different in the modern world. Some of the challenges we face might be new, but the important role of relationships in helping us to navigate through life remains unchanged. It’s easy to assume that in our modern world of technology and connectivity, we have all but forgotten our personal relationships. This study shows that this is not the case and that good relationships are still intrinsic to our happiness.

There are some serious challenges highlighted in this report. I am hugely concerned that one in ten of us feel that we have no close friends at all. How, in an era of heightened connectivity, are we allowing 10% of the population to feel, to all intents and purposes, alone?

Also concerning is the number of people who said they never or rarely felt loved in the run up to this survey. This is a terribly sad statistic in itself, but when we bear in mind what the report tells us about the link between good relationships and wellbeing, this becomes even more worrying.

I hope that this report will be used to frame the debate around the role and importance of relationships in our everyday lives. Relationships are not to be taken for granted – they need nurture and support. If we want to reap the significant benefits of a society with relationships at its heart, we must ensure our busy lives make room for building, nurturing and improving our personal relationships.

“The report finds that good, healthy, fulfilling relationships enrich how we feel about life”
In spring 2014, Relate and Relationships Scotland commissioned a representative survey of over 5,000 people across the UK to profile the nation’s relationships. This wide-ranging survey (one of the largest of its kind) offers a rich insight into the home lives, working lives and sex lives of people in the UK. Following on from a report that Relate published in 2010, the study gives a unique perspective on our relationships with partners, families, friends and colleagues to better understand the connections and inter-dependencies between them.

The Way We Are Now report offers plenty to celebrate – the vast majority of people enjoy good quality relationships at home, work and play. We find that four in five people (85%) enjoy a good relationship with their partner, 81% of women and 73% of men describe their friendships as good or very good, and three-fifths of people (59%) have a good relationship with their boss.

On the flip side, we also see some concerning results. A quarter of people (24%) are dissatisfied with their sex lives, and one in five people (19%) never or rarely felt loved in the two weeks before the survey. The results also show that many employees are struggling to find the right balance between work and family life – more than one in three people (35%) said that their bosses believe the most productive employees put work before family, and over a fifth of people think their employers would like them to be available 24/7.

“Each chapter in the report tells a similar story - those with better quality relationships are more likely to feel better about themselves”

Relate and Relationships Scotland commissioned this survey in response to the interactions they have with over a million people each year across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Both organisations have gained a first-hand picture of how people are working hard to keep their families together and their relationships going, through good times and bad. Alongside the findings of the nationwide survey, The Way We Are Now includes the results from a poll of 250 Relate and Relationships Scotland counsellors and sex therapists, adding another dimension to this study.

The Way We Are Now reveals the headline stats, from the number of friends we have to how many sexual partners we’ve had – but goes beyond this to explore the connection between people’s relationships and their personal wellbeing, and in particular to find out how people feel about themselves. Each chapter in the report tells a similar story – those with better quality relationships are more likely to feel better about themselves. We also take a closer look at how things like gender, age, income and technology impact on people’s relationships.

“Relationships act as shock absorbers when times are hard, and can provide the boost that we need to help us in achieving our goals”
The Way We Are Now considers relationships in five areas:

**Families**
We explore how family life is changing in response to economic and broader social trends. Here we find that almost one in four people (23%) have experienced the breakdown of their parents’ relationship, and three-fifths (62%) of people think that money worries are one of the biggest strains on a relationship.

**Partners**
We look at the quality of couple relationships and what puts them under stress. Honesty, commitment and communication are revealed as the top three ingredients of a loving relationship according to our respondents. We also reflect on the relative happiness of the UK’s couples – and worryingly, find that over one in ten people currently in relationships didn’t feel loved in their day-to-day lives in the two weeks before the survey.

**Sex**
We look beyond who’s doing what and how many times a week, to consider how people feel about their sex lives. The survey finds that nearly half of respondents are fairly or very satisfied with their sex lives, and also reveals that a quarter (24%) of people report having had an affair. Interestingly, the vast majority (94%) of the counsellors and sex therapists in the parallel survey of practitioners think that a relationship can survive an affair – but only a third of our public respondents agree.

**Work**
We explore relationships in the workplace and the balance that many working people are trying to achieve between work and family life. The survey finds that three out of five people may feel dissatisfied or ambivalent about the support they receive from their employers in striking a work-life balance. Looking at friendships in the workplace, the survey finds that over two-fifths of respondents (42%) who are in work didn’t count any colleagues as a close friend, although the majority (58%) had at least one close friend at work.

**Friends**
Finally, we look at relationships between friends and discover that the UK’s friendships are in good health, with more than 90% of people saying that they have at least one good friend (though sadly, one in ten people don’t). The survey also contains some interesting findings about how men’s friendships differ from women’s, how people’s friendships change with age, and the impact of couple relationships on friendships – and vice versa.
Families
**The changing face of family life**

Divorce and separation continue to shape modern family life for many of us, with one in four people in our survey having experienced their parents’ breakup. The married-with-2.4-children model is becoming less typical, and these days children are increasingly as likely to grow up with parents who are cohabiting, in lone-parent households or with a step-parent and step-siblings. But one thing that hasn’t changed is how much our families matter to us. Clearly, we still believe in the importance of these relationships and we want them to be better.

**Family (still) matters**

In 2012, there were 236,000 divorces,¹ almost equal to the number of marriages (248,000 in 2011),² and an estimated 42% of UK marriages now end in divorce.³ Other factors, such as people getting married or having children later – or deciding not to marry or have children – have all impacted on the make-up and dynamics of our families.

But whatever the shape, size and complexity of the modern family, it’s still the quality of the relationships within families that really matters. And one of the most striking features of our survey is that the majority of respondents enjoy good or very good relationships with their parents. Most people continue to see their mums and dads frequently, and many would like to see them more often if they could.iv

Mums come out on top in our survey, with 78% of people describing their relationship with their mother as good or very good.¹ Dads don’t fare quite as well, with 66% of people describing their relationship with their father as good or very good, and 15% describing it as bad, very bad or saying that they had no contact with him (for mothers this figure was lower, at 9%).

Interestingly, it seems that people who have good relationships with their parents are more likely to feel good about themselves.² Four in five people who enjoy a good or very good relationship with their mother and father also reported that they felt good about themselves some, often or all of the time.³ This compares to only three in five of those who said that they had a bad or very bad relationship with their parents.

Of course our relationships with our parents aren’t the only thing influencing how we feel about ourselves – our lives are far more complex than that. Furthermore, these results only tell part of the story about who matters to us in our family. Our relationships with our grandparents, brothers and sisters, and other family members are also hugely important to us – not just when we’re young but also as we move into adulthood and have families of our own.

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¹ Among those with a mother/father who was alive at the time of the survey.
² Even after adjusting for a range of factors including age, gender, whether people were in a relationship, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, a crude indicator of ethnic group (white/non-white), a measure of sexual orientation, and highest level of education. Results are available upon request.
³ In the two weeks prior to the survey.
Breaking up is hard to do

Our survey also reflected on the changing face of family life in modern Britain. Overall, almost a quarter (23%) of adults we talked to had experienced the breakdown of their parents’ relationship at some point in their lives. For almost four-fifths of this group, the separation happened when they were aged 18 or under.4

Our report confirms what we already know – that people born since the late 1970s are far more likely to have experienced the breakdown of their parents’ relationship when 18 or under, with 25% of those aged under 35 having experienced their parents’ divorce or separation in childhood, compared to 14% of those aged 35-49 and 11% of those aged 50-64.

Mum’s the word

In our 2010 survey we considered the role that fathers play in people’s lives, and found that most people reported a much stronger bond with their mums. Our recent survey looked at the role of fathers when parents part. Our findings suggest that experiences of parental relationship breakdown correspond to differences in the way we describe our relationships with our parents in adulthood.5

When the parental relationship breakdown was experienced in childhood, this appears to have a negative impact on relationships with fathers but not with mothers. Among those whose parents separated when they were aged 18 or under, 71% reported that they have a good or very good relationship with their mother, while less than half (46%) said that they have a good or very good relationship with their father. This effect was less marked amongst those whose parents parted when they were adults; over half (56%) told us that they had a good or very good relationship with their father, while 70% reported having a good or very good relationship with their mother – a very similar figure to those whose parents had parted when they were children. Both sets of findings contrast with the views of those whose parents are still together – with 80% reporting a good or very good relationship with their mother, and 77% with their father.

Of course experiences of separation aren’t the only thing influencing our relationships with our parents – although even when we adjusted for other factors we found that people whose parents stayed together are still much more likely to report a good or very good relationship with both parents.6

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4 6% of adults in our survey experienced their parents’ relationship breakdown as adults.
5 Based on people with a mother/father who was alive at the time of the survey.
6 Even after adjusting for a number of factors including age, gender, whether people were in a relationship, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, a crude indicator of ethnic group (white/non-white), a measure of sexual orientation, and highest level of education. Results are available upon request.
Families under pressure

Family relationships are coming under all kinds of external pressures, not least the impact of one of the toughest recessions in living memory. When we asked people to identify the top three challenges to relationships (from a list of 17), money worries came out as a clear winner, with three-fifths of people (62%) citing it as one of the three biggest strains on relationships. Maintaining a work-life balance or working long hours came second (40%), infidelity came third (36%), followed in fourth place by not understanding each other and communication problems (34%). In contrast, 62% of counsellors in our parallel survey saw not understanding each other and communication problems as the number one strain on couple relationships.

We were surprised to find that far more older than younger people identified money worries as a major strain on relationships (69% of people aged 65 and over, compared to just 37% of those aged 16-24), despite older people having higher levels of asset wealth, and the current high levels of young people who are not in employment, education or training. Perhaps this finding can be put down to the optimism of youth, or to the greater need for financial security in our later years due to poor pension provision and increased life expectancy. It could also be because increasing numbers of older people are supporting their adult children for longer, whether with higher education fees or helping them buy their first home. Unsurprisingly, higher earners were less likely to cite money worries as a strain on relationships (28% of people with household incomes above £70,000 identified money worries as the number one strain, compared to 40% of people with household incomes of less than £20,000).

Also featuring high in our poll was the struggle to balance family life with work, which we discuss further in the Work chapter. Among those with children aged under five, 12% perceived disagreements over child care to be a significant stressor on relationships – a much higher proportion than we found among people with older children (6% among parents with children aged 5-18). Given the increasing costs of child care, it is unsurprising that this appears as a concern for families. Household chores also emerged as a problem area, with one in 12 people identifying disagreements about housework among the top three relationship strains, and working women more likely to report this than working men (12% vs 7%).

7 The term child care was kept open in the survey so could refer to both formal, paid-for child care and/or informal care of children in a family setting.
Young, free, and living with mum and dad

The rise in the numbers of young people staying or returning to live in the family home after school and university was reflected in our survey results – which also uncover some interesting regional differences among the ‘boomerang generation’.

We found that young Londoners are far more likely than their peers in other regions to live with their parents; 35% of people in the capital whose youngest child was aged 18+ are living with at least one of their adult children. Elsewhere in the UK this figure is significantly lower: in Scotland, only 24% of people with children aged 18+ live with them, and in the South West this drops to 15%. Even when we restrict our focus to parents whose youngest child was aged 25+ (and therefore less likely to be studying) the regional variation persists (London 27%, Scotland 13%, South West 9%). It’s maybe not surprising that young Londoners are more likely to continue living with their parents as they move into adulthood. A vibrant jobs market and the attractions of big city life encourage many to stay in the capital, while prohibitive housing costs can prevent them from getting a place of their own.

There are variations by income too, which are revealing. Overall, a third of parents with household incomes of £70,000 or more whose children were all aged 18 or over reported having at least one of their children living with them (34%), compared to just 17% of parents with household incomes of less than £20,000 with stay-at-home young people. This could reflect the higher proportion of young people from more affluent backgrounds who attend university and return home afterwards.

So, are parents driving their grown-up children up the wall? Or is it the other way round? Young people may feel pretty frustrated with their situation – trying to gain independence and explore new experiences and relationships can be difficult with your parents tracking your every move. On the other hand, the availability of a free laundry, housekeeping and catering service courtesy of mum, may mean that some young people are in no hurry to move out.

Likewise, we tend to imagine that parents of adult children still living at home yearn for the day when their grown-up children leave the nest. But surprisingly, our survey found virtually no difference between how parents of adult children who live at home and those whose children have moved out described their relationships with their children – suggesting that we’re able to adapt, get along together and make the best of our changing family dynamics.

Parents with only adult children with at least one child living at home – by region

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Conclusion

While the shape of the modern family may have changed dramatically, our relationships with our families matter to us as much as ever. Happily, our results reveal that most of us enjoy a good or very good relationship with our parents and with our mums in particular. However we also found that almost a quarter of adults in our survey have experienced the breakdown of their parents’ relationships.

While separation and divorce are increasingly common in the UK, the evidence here and elsewhere shows that many find it difficult, and our survey suggests it can take a toll on father-child relationships in particular. The modern family faces all kinds of external pressures. However, it’s important to remember that whether the strains we face are money worries, separation, or grown-up children staying longer in the family home, our capacity for adaptability can help us to manage these transitions and stresses. Relate and Relationships Scotland are also here to help – both in good times and bad.
Enduring love

It’s official – relationships are good for us, and there’s plenty of evidence that we live longer, happier, more prosperous lives when we share them with someone we love. And the great news is that our survey shows over four-fifths of people in a couple relationship are enjoying a good or very good relationship with their partner. On the flip side, over one in ten people currently in relationships don’t feel loved in their day-to-day lives. Here we reflect on the relative happiness of the nation’s couples, look at what puts relationships under stress, and reveal the top three ingredients of a loving relationship according to our respondents.

A nation of happy couples

The security that comes from feeling loved by a partner is really important for our personal wellbeing. Of course it’s not all about roses and romantic mini-breaks in the country. Often the most important demonstrations of love for partners are those everyday things, from making them a cuppa in the morning, to paying them a compliment or asking how their day has been. Thoughtful gestures, no matter how small, help to ‘feed’ a relationship and sustain it through good times and bad.

Our survey gave us plenty to celebrate, and one of the best bits of news is that the vast majority of people we talked to are happy with their relationship with their partner, with 85% reporting a good or very good relationship. Very few people described their relationship with their partner as fairly or very bad (3%).

It seems that women aren’t quite as content as men in their relationships, with 14% of women describing their relationship with their partner as average, bad or very bad, compared to 11% of men – a small but significant difference. People who were lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) were also more likely to describe their relationships as average, bad or very bad than heterosexual couples (19% compared to 12%), a difference which may in part be explained by a continuing lack of recognition, acceptance and support for LGB relationships in some quarters.

“Often the most important demonstrations of love for partners are those everyday things, from making them a cuppa in the morning to asking them how their day has been”

4 in 5 have a good relationship with their partner

\[^{4}\] Partnerships include marriages, cohabiting partnerships, living apart together partnerships, and dating. This variable was derived by Relate from the data provided by YouGov.
Feeling loved

When it comes to feeling loved there’s more good news, with four in five people telling us they felt loved some, often or all of the time. Sadly though, one in five said they never or rarely felt loved in their day-to-day lives.

A further surprising – and worrying – finding was that over one in ten people currently in a relationship said that they had rarely or never felt loved in their day-to-day lives, suggesting that a significant minority of us could be in a ‘loveless relationship’.

Young people (aged 16-24), who were less likely than older people to be in a couple relationship, were also the most likely to feel unloved, with a quarter of them reporting that they had rarely or never felt loved. In stark contrast, only one in ten older people (aged 65 and over) told us that they rarely or never felt loved. We accumulate partners, friends and family as we journey through life, which may account for some of the differences in feeling loved between the age groups, however we also know that loneliness and social isolation are a major problem affecting older people.

19% never or rarely felt loved in the two weeks before the survey

“A quarter of 16-24 year olds said they never or rarely felt loved”

Relationships are good for us

Being in a relationship is good for our wellbeing, and our survey showed that people who are in a relationship tend to feel better about themselves than those who are not. Almost four-fifths of people (81%) in our survey who were married or cohabiting reported that they felt good about themselves, compared to 69% of people who were single. Interestingly, we found very little difference in the way people felt about themselves between those who are married and those who are cohabiting.

Simply being in a relationship doesn’t guarantee that people feel good about themselves. Various studies have shown that it is the quality of the relationship that matters. And in our own survey, we found indications that the positive impact on the way people feel from being part of a couple doesn’t hold true for people who are unhappy with their relationship with their partner.

According to our findings, feeling good about yourself and feeling happy in your relationship go hand in hand.

Those who are married or cohabiting who described their relationship as ‘very good or good’ were most likely to report that they had been feeling good about themselves prior to the survey (83% sometimes, often or all the time). In contrast, less than two-thirds of people who described their relationship with their partner as average, bad or very bad reported that they had been feeling good about themselves (62% sometimes, often or all the time); this was lower than the proportion of single people who’d been feeling good about themselves (69%).

Our survey also found that the length of the relationship made little difference to the way people described their relationship with their partner. Even after adjusting for other factors including age, gender, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, a crude indicator of ethnic group (white/non-white), a measure of sexual orientation, highest level of education, length of relationship, and sexual frequency and satisfaction. Results available upon request.

9 We use this single indicator of wellbeing here for simplicity – this being identified as a main measure of general wellbeing elsewhere (see Frydenberg and Lewis 2009) – although the same patterns are replicated in analysis of a more comprehensive inventory measuring wellbeing (not shown here).

10 Even after adjusting for other factors including age, gender, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, a crude indicator of ethnic group (white/non-white), a measure of sexual orientation, highest level of education, length of relationship, and sexual frequency and satisfaction. Results available upon request.
Arguments can be a natural part of a healthy relationship, but for some couples they can be a sign that things aren’t going well. In the counselling room, Relate and Relationships Scotland encourage couples to examine how and why they argue, and to discuss different ways they can resolve disagreements. Around half (49%) of those who took part in our survey said that they never or rarely argue with their partner with a further 41% of people arguing only occasionally. Only 10% of people said that they argue with their partner more often than not, most, or all of the time.

We did observe a ‘honeymoon period’ for people in relatively new relationships – with those who have been with their partner for two years or less being most likely to say that they rarely or never argue (63%). After this point the differences even out so that around half of people report rarely or never arguing with their partner, regardless of the length of their relationship.

Relate and Relationships Scotland has long known that becoming a parent can place a considerable strain on a couple’s relationship. So we weren’t surprised by our survey’s findings that parents of children and teenagers were significantly more likely to report arguing with their partner than those who didn’t have children, or whose children were now adults. Parents whose youngest child was under five were the most likely to report arguments – with 38% reporting that they never or rarely argued with their partner compared to 43% of those whose youngest child was aged 5-18 years, 51% of those whose youngest child was aged 18+, and 56% of people with no children.

When it comes to regrets, it seems that a significant minority of people have some serious doubts about their current relationship, with 14% of those who are married or cohabiting occasionally or frequently regretting their decision to marry or move in together. But our survey also finds that the vast majority of people have few if any regrets and are happy with their current relationship – with two-thirds of people never regretting their decision, and a fifth only rarely experiencing regret.

The length of a relationship had little influence over whether people regretted getting married or moving in together. Among those who’d been with their partner for four years or less, 68% never regretted getting married or moving in together, a similar proportion to those with no regrets who’d been with their partner for 35 years or more (70%).

We did find that people who are cohabiting are more likely to regret moving in together than married people are to regret getting married. For example, 68% of those who were married never had regrets, compared to just 56% of cohabitees who never regretted moving in with their partner. This result may reflect the fact that more and more people are living together before they get married – so marrying a partner throws up fewer surprises than moving in with them.

For our indicator of arguing, survey respondents were asked about the frequency with which they quarrelled with their partner.

Few other factors appeared to be associated with the level of arguing once we adjusted for a number of factors simultaneously. We included age, gender, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, a crude indicator of ethnic group (white/non-white), a measure of sexual orientation, highest level of education, and length of relationship in our model. However, other factors relating to the quality of the relationship may be influential. Results available upon request.

This was true even after adjusting for a range of factors including the length of the relationship, how people described their relationship with their partner and sexual satisfaction.
Ingredients for success

So what’s the secret to a good relationship lasting the course? We asked people in our survey to select the two most important factors in sustaining a good quality relationship from our list of six: commitment, honesty, a good sex life/physical attraction, shared interests, compatible personality, and communication. Honesty, commitment, and communication came out on top: 54% selected honesty as one of the two most important ingredients in sustaining a good quality relationship, 44% chose commitment and 40% felt communication was essential to success.

Our survey revealed that the qualities people value most highly change over the course of relationships. For example, 59% of people in a relationship of 25 years or more ranked commitment as the most important factor, compared to only 35% of those who had been with their partner for less than five years. People who had been together for less than five years were more likely to rank honesty as their number one factor. Unsurprisingly, a good sex life and compatible personality were more highly prized by those in the earlier stages of a relationship than by those who’d been together for 25 years or more. These results reflect the different needs and expectations of couples at different stages of their relationship, and resonate with the issues that our clients bring into the counselling room at different life stages.

“Honesty, commitment, and communication are revealed as the top three ingredients of a loving relationship”

Conclusion

The happy news is that most people who took part in our survey report a good or very good relationship with their partner. We also found that people in a relationship are more likely to feel loved and enjoy greater wellbeing than those who are not, and only a small minority of couples are facing significant difficulties.

Sustaining a good relationship through everything life throws at us, the good and the bad, requires us to nurture and invest in our relationship if we want to enjoy the benefits being part of a couple can bring. Honesty, commitment and communication were rated by our respondents as the key ingredients of relationship success. From their experience of working with thousands of couples each year across the UK, Relate and Relationships Scotland practitioners identified ‘open communication’ (a good basis for honesty and commitment) as the cornerstone of a happy and loving relationship.
A nation divided

There’s nothing new about sex surveys, and you don’t have to look too far for the latest headlines about who’s doing what, with whom and how many times a week. We delve deeper to reveal how people feel about sex. So alongside the usual figures about how often we’re having sex and how satisfied we are – or aren’t – with our sex lives, we look at how sex affects our relationships, health and wellbeing (not to mention how our relationships, health and wellbeing affect our sex lives).

The sex factor

A good sex life does seem to be important to most people, with 58% rating it very or fairly important. That said, around one in eight people feel that a good sex life is not at all important. We also found that the value we place on our sex lives changes with the length of a relationship: 33% of people who have been together for less than two years saw sex as very important, while this drops to 22% among those in partnerships of 10-14 years, reducing further to 15% for couples of 25 years or more. Our survey confirms what we already knew – that companionship and friendship increase in importance as we grow older together.

In our parallel survey, our counsellors underline the importance of investing in our relationships if we want to sustain a good quality sex life. The top three factors rated by counsellors for improving couple’s sex lives are improving communication, making time to be together, and learning how to talk about sex with your partner.

14 Excluding people who ‘preferred not to say’. Around 10% of people preferred not to give a response; they are not included in these calculations or figures hereafter.
**Sex**

**Satisfaction**

When it comes to sexual satisfaction, we’re a nation divided. Just under half the people who took part in our survey are enjoying an active and rewarding sex life, while at the other end of the scale one in four are feeling unfulfilled. This was particularly true for those aged 25-44, with half reporting being fairly or very satisfied with their sex life but a quarter feeling things could be better.

It seems that people who place more importance on their sex lives are also more likely to be satisfied. Almost two-fifths (39%) of people who said a good sex life was very important were also very satisfied – a substantially higher level of satisfaction than we found among people who said that a good sex life is less important to them. However, this can work both ways, with one in seven of those who rate a good sex life as being very important also saying they are very dissatisfied, with reality not living up to expectations. High expectations placed on a good sex life could also perhaps explain the greater dissatisfaction among men (with twice as many men than women reporting sexual dissatisfaction) – 64% of men say that a good sex life is fairly or very important to them compared to 53% of women.

Single people are much more likely to say they’re dissatisfied with their sex life than those in a relationship (36% vs 19%). Health also appears to play a role: 16% of people with a disability or a long-term health condition told us that they are very dissatisfied with their sex lives, compared to a much lower 9% among those without.

“64% of men say that a good sex life is fairly or very important to them compared to 53% of women”

**Sex and wellbeing**

So does feeling good about ourselves improve our sex life? In a word, yes. A convincing 85% of people who are satisfied with their sex lives also told us they’d been feeling good about themselves sometimes, often, or all the time shortly before the survey. Amongst those who are dissatisfied with their sex lives, a much smaller percentage (66%) said they’d been feeling good about themselves.

We also looked at the connection between an individual’s satisfaction with their sex life and how they rated the quality of their relationship with their partner. Those who feel most sexually fulfilled were also more likely to report a good or very good relationship with their partner – over three-quarters (77%) of those who are fairly or very satisfied with their sex life also said they had a very good relationship with their partner. However, sex may be important, but it isn’t everything: over a third (35%) of people who were fairly or very dissatisfied with their sex life still said they had a very good relationship with their partner.

15 Excluding people who ‘preferred not to say’; a further 4% fell into the ‘don’t know’ category.
16 People who were currently single were also much more likely to say they didn’t know if they were satisfied (11%) than people who were in a relationship (2%).
17 A long-standing health condition or disability that considerably limits an individual’s day-to-day activities.
‘Have lots’ and ‘have nots’

A surprising finding was that only around half of people we talked to had had sex\(^{18}\) in the past month (49% of men and 48% of women), and less than a quarter told us they have sex the equivalent of once a week or more (23%).\(^{4}\) This contrasts with the results of some larger surveys – including a recent UK survey which found higher levels of sexual activity, with men and women reporting having sex on average 4 and 4.3 times a month respectively.\(^{41}\)

Less surprisingly, we found that people in relationships are more sexually active than single people – around three in ten people in a relationship have sex once a week or more compared to less than one in 20 of those who are single. Of the single people who took part in our survey, 85% hadn’t had sex in the month before the survey, whereas this was the case for 37% of those who are married.

So how does frequency of sex affect how satisfied we are with our sex lives? People who’d had more sex in the previous month were less likely to report being dissatisfied with their sex lives, but it was by no means a clear-cut relationship. For example, when we look at those who had no sex in the month before the survey, we find that over a third are very or fairly dissatisfied with their sex lives, but conversely almost a quarter (23%) are also fairly or very satisfied with their sex lives.\(^ {19}\)

The results show that sexual satisfaction is about an individual’s sex drive and needs, and is about quality and not just quantity.

“Less than half of the people surveyed had had sex in the past month”

Too tired for sex

Our counsellors and sex therapists also told us that tiredness and stress are the main causes of sex problems for men, and the second most common cause for women (after a lack of emotional intimacy). So we asked people whether they had energy to spare (for all activities, not just sex) in the two-week period prior to our survey, and found that those who had energy to spare all of the time are also the most satisfied with their sex lives, with 35% reporting that they are very satisfied. At the other end of the scale, those with the least energy to spare have the lowest levels of sexual satisfaction, with 15% reporting that they are very satisfied. While these results in themselves don’t prove that low energy is linked to poor sexual satisfaction, previous Relate research has found a connection between tiredness and frequency of sexual activity – with one in five people reporting that they were too tired for sex.\(^ {22}\)

Number of sexual partners

We found that 31% of men and 21% of women had slept with more than ten people in their lifetime. The number of sexual partners people reported over their lifetime peaked among those aged 35-44 years, with over a fifth reporting 20 or more sexual partners.\(^{20}\) In contrast, just 9% of people aged 65+ reported having 20 or more sexual partners during their lifetime, reflecting more liberal attitudes towards sex since the late 1960s.

At the other end of the scale nearly one in ten people (8%) reported that they have never had a sexual partner and a further fifth (17%) said that they have had only one sexual partner. Older and younger people were the groups most likely to report lower numbers of sexual partners (none or one), with a quarter of people aged 65+ and people aged 19-24 reporting having one sexual partner in their lifetime (25%). Women were slightly more likely than men to report no or one sexual partner (26% vs 23%), although the largest gender differences were found among those who’d had sex with over 20 people (8% vs 16%).

“31% of men and 21% of women have slept with more than ten people in their lifetime”

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\(^{18}\) Sex was defined as any genital contact with another person which the survey respondent considered to be ‘sex’.

\(^{19}\) 8% of those who had no sex in the past month didn’t know if they were satisfied.

\(^{20}\) Excluding people who ‘preferred not to say’; a further 4% fell into the ‘don’t know’ category.
Playing away

 Barely a week goes by without another celebrity affair hitting the headlines, but despite the media hype around infidelity the majority of people who took part in our survey told us that they’ve been faithful to their partners. One in four people said they’d cheated on a partner at some point in their lives, with a further fifth reporting that they had considered cheating or had felt tempted to cheat in their current or past relationships. In our 2010 survey, we found that one in three people admitted to having been unfaithful. Changes in attitudes towards separation and divorce may mean that it’s now easier to leave an unhappy relationship rather than be unfaithful.

An area which highlighted differences between men and women was the reporting of affairs, with men slightly more likely than women to admit to having cheated (26% vs 22%), and much more likely to admit to having wrestled with temptation (22% vs 13%). So it’s not surprising that greater numbers of women than men (36% vs 30%) reported having been cheated on. A significant proportion of people (58%) say they have never had an affair and have not been tempted to do so.

One of the most interesting revelations of our survey is that only 33% of people we spoke to thought a relationship could survive an affair. This is in stark contrast to the optimism of our counsellors, 94% of whom believed that a relationship can survive and potentially thrive after a partner has cheated.

You, me and the iPad

Surprisingly, very few people reported online pornography or the internet more generally as causing a problem in their relationship. Only 1% of respondents told us that they’d cheated with someone online but not in person. This clashes with the findings from our survey of counsellors, with many of them reporting the use of social media and online pornography as an issue that frequently comes up in the counselling room. As one counsellor put it, “it is something that comes up so regularly as a source of distress and relationship breakdown – ‘I caught him/her sending sexy messages.’” It was also cited as a common reason for poor communication: “’We hardly talk because he/she is on the internet all evening!’”

“Only 33% of people think a relationship can survive an affair compared to 94% of counsellors”

24% have had an affair

Conclusion

 When it comes to our sex lives, it seems that we’re a nation divided – around half of those surveyed are fairly or very satisfied with their sex lives but for a significant minority, experience falls short of expectations. Despite – or perhaps, because of – the wealth of information available about sex on the internet, in magazines and on TV, our survey found that many people don’t know where to go to get practical advice or who to talk to about problems in their sex life. Fortunately Relate and Relationships Scotland are here to help.
Work
A delicate balancing act

We spend a considerable amount of our lives at work, and our survey reveals that we’re almost as likely to have daily contact with our colleagues as with our children. While the workplace has become a more level playing field over recent decades, employees’ wellbeing has not improved significantly during that period. Balancing work and home life is increasingly a challenge facing both partners in a relationship, especially for those with children. We looked at how people feel about coping with the pressures and expectations of work and home life, and how this affects our relationships and wellbeing.

Working 24/7

Maintaining the delicate balance between work and home continues to be a source of frustration and guilt for many employees. The report shows that Britain’s culture of the long working day – one of the longest in Europe, which does little to support our family lives – continues and shows no signs of changing. Worryingly, a third of people agreed or strongly agreed that their employers think that the most productive employees are those who put work before their family life.

Furthermore, a fifth of people believe their employer’s ideal employee is someone who is available 24/7. The positive news is that over a third of people did not think that their employers view the most productive employees as those who put work before family life. However, this does mean that three out of five people in the survey may feel dissatisfied or ambivalent about the support they receive from their employers in striking a work-life balance.
After taking a closer look at the survey results, we found differences depending on income levels as to whether people felt more pressure from employers to prioritise work over family life. Less than a third of employees with a household income of under £20,000 felt pressured to put work before family, compared to almost two-fifths of people with a household income above £70,000. This is unsurprising and could reflect the differences between those paid on an hourly rather than salaried basis. However, these results do not represent the full picture, as we know that those on lower incomes are increasingly likely to take on additional hours or other part-time roles to make ends meet. In the wake of the great recession there has also been a rise in the number of self-employed workers and people on zero-hour contracts, where the pressures to balance work and family life can play out in different ways.

The Centre for Mental Health has found that ‘presenteeism’ – where people are present in work but not fully engaged or achieve less as a result of mental ill health – costs the UK economy £15.1 billion per annum, while absenteeism costs £8.4 billion. The pressure that we put ourselves under to be present in work is only one part of the story though – our survey finds that a significant minority of people may feel under pressure from their employer to be on call around the clock and to put work before family. Technology makes it even harder for us to switch off – taking the iPad to the beach or using the laptop in bed is sadly all too common for many individuals, impacting negatively on family life.

Getting ahead

An interesting finding in our survey is that people aged 25-34 were the most likely to believe that their employers viewed the most productive employees as those who put work before family life – with almost two-fifths agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement, compared to less than three in ten people aged 55-64. Almost half of those aged 16-24 agreed with this statement (48%), although this was based on a small sample of 81.

Whilst people in this age group may be building a career and getting ahead in the workplace this is also the time when they’re likely to be forming long-term relationships, starting a family and setting up a home, compounding the pressures on achieving a balance between work and family life. It seems that this group are trying to juggle many competing priorities – with time for themselves and their relationships a scarce commodity.

Beyond age and income, the other factors that we might have expected to influence how we balance work and family life, such as being parents of young children, appeared to have little impact. This is not as surprising as it sounds though, as we know that many parents (particularly mothers) will choose family-friendly jobs or employers where the pressures to prioritise work over family life are less apparent. Some parents also stop working entirely or opt for part-time working or flexible hours, often due to the costs and availability of good quality child care. So it’s worth noting that if we’d asked people about their own experiences (rather than perceptions of their employers’ attitudes), and included former as well as current employees, this may have led to different results.
Work

**Attitude problems**

So what impact, if any, do perceptions about our employers’ attitudes have on how we feel about ourselves? We found that almost a quarter of people who agreed or strongly agreed that their employers thought the most productive employees put work before family life rarely or never felt good about themselves, whereas this dropped to 19% among those with a positive view of their employer’s attitudes. Even after we had adjusted for a number of factors, the pattern held, and people with negative perceptions of their employers’ attitudes to balancing work and family life were less likely to feel good about themselves.

The impact on couple relationships of feeling unsupported by employers in maintaining a work-life balance is a complex area, and the results of our survey are inconclusive. However, our counsellors report that working long hours can lead to problems in a relationship, and may even prevent couples from accessing support when things start to go wrong. As one counsellor put it, “Recently the majority of our couple referrals have been where one partner works away, or works shifts or extended hours. This causes problems in the relationship and also in clients being able to commit to counselling sessions.” On the flip side, research has shown that good quality couple relationships can help employees to better manage the stresses and strains of the workplace.

We ignore the importance of a good work-life balance at our peril. There’s plenty of evidence that happy employees are successful across many areas of life, such as marriage, friendship, and – crucially for employers – health and job performance. Organisations that support their employees to manage the competing demands of family and work life will be rewarded by having employees who are happier, healthier and, ultimately, more productive.

“**We’re much more likely to have daily contact with our bosses than with our mums or our friends.**”

**“A fifth of people believe their employer’s ideal employee is someone who is available 24/7”**

**Why working relationships matter**

For many of us, the majority of our waking hours can revolve around work – if we’re not physically in the workplace we’re on the daily commute, working at home, or thinking about work. We asked people about their contact with significant others, including face-to-face, telephone, text, email, and other online contact. And we found that among those in full-time work, contact with colleagues and bosses by far exceeds contact with many other family members. In fact, we’re about as likely to have daily contact with our colleagues (62%) as we are with our own children (64%), and much more likely to have daily contact with our bosses (44%) than with our mums (26%) or our friends (16%).

Given the amount of time we spend with them, it’s hardly surprising that the quality of our relationships with colleagues has a substantial influence on our mental wellbeing. Poor workplace relationships can contribute to stress, result in lower performance, and – more fundamentally – can reduce our wellbeing. Our employers would do well to take note: given that many of us leave our jobs because we don’t get on with our boss or colleagues, the quality of these relationships is vital to retaining talented employees and maintaining productivity.

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24 Felt good about themselves in the two weeks before the survey; we use this single indicator here for simplicity although the same patterns are replicated in analysis using a more comprehensive measure of wellbeing (not shown here).

25 Adjusting for age, whether people were in a relationship, the presence of children, region, health, income, employment status and education.

26 Among people in full-time work with any (not all) of these relationships.
Friendships at work

Surprisingly, we found that two-fifths of people (42%) in work didn’t count any colleague or boss as a close friend, although the majority of people (58%) had at least one close friend at work with over a fifth (22%) having three or more close friends amongst their colleagues.27

When it comes to the quality of these relationships, thankfully, the survey results reveal that the majority of people are positive about their working relationships: 70%28 described their relationships with colleagues as good or very good, while six in ten people (59%) described their relationship with their boss as good or very good. A small minority described their relationship with colleagues as bad or very bad (2%), although more described their relationship with their boss as bad or very bad (7%).

We looked for a pattern in terms of the quality of our workplace relationships and how good we feel about ourselves. The figures revealed that 87% of those who describe very good relationships with colleagues felt good about themselves sometimes, often or all the time in the two weeks before the survey, compared to 83% and 69% respectively for those who describe their workplace relationships as good or average.29

59%

have a good relationship with their boss

Conclusion

Our survey shows that the delicate balancing act between work and family life continues to be a concern for a significant number of workers as the lines between work and home become increasingly blurred. Seven in ten of our counsellors agree, “the couple relationship suffers if one or both partners work long hours”.

But family/work life conflict isn’t inevitable; work can serve to enrich family life and vice versa.xxii When employees aren’t forced to choose one over the other, their performance can be more effective.xxiii It will be interesting to see how things change when we pose these questions again in the future.
Friends
The Way We Are Now: The State of the UK’s Relationships

Friends

Through thick and thin

While technology may have changed how we communicate with our friends, the support that we give and expect from our friends is the same as it ever was. Happily, our survey found that the nation’s friendships are in robust good health, with more than 90% of people saying that they have at least one good friend, and most people rating their friendships as good or very good. It also shed light on how men’s friendships differ from those of women, how our friendships change with age, and the impact of couple relationships on friendships – and vice versa.

Keeping our friends close

The good news is that nine in ten people in our survey report having at least one close friend. On the downside, this leaves almost one in ten people who report having no close friends (9%) – a slight increase on our 2011 survey when 6% said they had no close friends. Another interesting difference is that the proportion of people with very high numbers of close friends has increased – in 2010, 1.6% of people reported having 15 or more close friends, while in 2014 this has doubled to 3.4%.

There is further good news – the majority of people enjoy regular contact with their friends, with half of our survey respondents reporting weekly contact and nearly a fifth reporting daily contact. Three in ten told us they have less regular contact (less than once a week) with their friends. These days our friends can be scattered across the country or even across the globe, making face-to-face contact difficult, but technology and social media can enable us to maintain long-distance friendships and enjoy regular contact with our close friends even across the miles.

“Seven in ten people have contact with their friends at least every week”

1 in 10 don’t have a close friend

Contact could be face-to-face or by phone, text, email etc.
Friends

Friendships and age
So which age group has most friends? Young people may seem a likely contender as they have plenty of opportunities to make new friends at school and university and are more likely than other age groups to make use of social networking. In fact, we found that older people – those aged 65 and over – were almost as likely as young people to report very high numbers of close friends (4.4% reported 15+ close friends, compared to 5.4% of those aged 16-24). We accumulate friends as we journey through life, so perhaps these figures aren’t so surprising.

Despite this good news, the picture of older people’s relationships is complex. Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness suggests that older people are at risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation, with 10% of the general population over 65 in the UK feeling lonely all or most of the time;xxiv whilst recent research by Relate and Ipsos Mori found that one in five people aged 50+ lack confidence in forming new friendships and relationships.xxv In our survey, we found that older men were more likely than younger men to report having no close friends, but on the flip side were also more likely to have a larger number of close friends (ten or more) than men aged 35-64. This contrasts with women, where we saw no relationship between age and the number of close friendships. Whilst our survey suggests that the majority of older men enjoy good quality and varied friendships, a significant minority (14%) have no close friends and could therefore be at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

Quality of friendships
In an age where ‘friends’ can be counted on social media, from Facebook friends to Twitter followers, sometimes it can seem like it’s all about quantity. But our survey shows that, as with all of our relationships, it’s the quality of friendships that really matters. We rate our friendships highly; apart from our partners and our mums, our friends are the people we trust the most. Happily, we found that little has changed in this area since our 2010 survey, with around four in five people describing good or very good relationships with their friends. Worryingly though, we also found that 3% of people reported having no friends to describe a relationship with.31

Perhaps the most striking finding from our survey is that quality and quantity of friendships do seem to go hand in hand in most people. Those with a higher number of close friendships were also more likely to rate their friendships as good or very good. For example, among those with 10-14 close friends, over half described their relationship with their friends as ‘very good’, whereas this dropped to just a quarter among those with only one close friend.

Friendship groups
People with higher numbers of friends were also most likely to have felt close to others: of those with 10-14 close friends, over half had felt close to someone else often or all the time, compared to a third of those with just one close friend.32 These results make sense intuitively, in that having a wider social network implies having a greater choice of close friends to turn to, and more likelihood of them being available when you need someone to have fun with or confide in.

Of course it’s also the case that some people might prefer to keep their distance from others and may choose to have fewer friends. And sadly, it seems that having a wide friendship group isn’t necessarily a guarantee of feeling close – with a surprising 7% of those who report having ten or more friends also saying they never or rarely feel close to others.33

“We rate our friendships highly; apart from our partners and our mums, our friends are the people we trust the most”

31 Those with no friends are excluded from our analyses of the quality of friendships.
32 We also adjusted for a number of factors that could explain the extent to which people feel close to others, including couple relationship status, age, gender, region, whether people had children, an indicator of health (limiting long-term illness), household income, social grade, employment status, and whether people were white or non-white.
33 In the two weeks prior to the survey.
Friendships and gender

A surprising finding in our survey was that contrary to popular belief, men were more likely than women to have a higher number of close friends – one in 20 men told us that they have 15 or more close friends compared to just one in 50 women. However, while men are more likely than women to have lots of friends, they’re also more likely to have none, with 11% of men saying they have no close friends compared to 7% of women.

Whilst men in our survey were more likely than women to report having a higher number of close friends, women were more likely to rate their friendships as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (81% vs 73%). This supports other findings that have shown that men are more likely to be members of a group of close friends, whilst women are more likely to form closer connections with their individual friends.xxvi

The other good news for women is that their friendships also seem to get better as they age – one in four women aged 16-24 described their relationships with their friends as very good, while this rose to three in five women aged 65 and over. In contrast, men’s views about the quality of their friendships stayed relatively constant across the different age groups.

Someone to turn to

So who do we go to when we need to discuss a burning issue, get something off our chests or clear our consciences? Our survey explored the differences in how men and women confide in others, looking in particular at people who had at least one close friend and were in a relationship. We found that both men and women turn to their partners first, although men confide in their partners much more than women do (76% and 58% respectively). In contrast, twice as many women as men confide the most in their friends (20% compared to 10%). And when we asked the same people who they would go to first about a problem in the relationship, we again found that almost twice as many women as men would talk to a friend (19% vs 9%).

However many friends we have, however close we feel to them, and whether or not we tell them our secrets, it’s clear that our friendships have a substantial impact on our wellbeing and the way we feel about ourselves.33 As we’ve seen with people who report higher quality relationships with their partners and family, those with good quality friendships are also more likely to report feeling good about themselves. Among people who described their friendships as good or very good, 87% said they felt good about themselves sometimes, often or all of the time. Whilst among people who described their friendships as average or bad, only 63% said they felt good about themselves sometimes, often, or all of the time.34 Of those who report not having a friend, the figure is 62%.

33 The same patterns are replicated in analysis using a more comprehensive measure of wellbeing (not shown here).
34 In the two weeks prior to the survey.
Pals and partners

Our counsellors know that for many people it can be tricky to balance partner relationships, family and friendships. Being in a long-term relationship often comes with greater family commitments, such as having children or keeping up with two sets of families, which may reduce the time (and energy) available for catching up with friends – so we weren’t surprised to see evidence of this in our survey. People in a relationship were less likely to have regular contact with friends than single people or those who are dating. Over two-fifths of men in a cohabiting relationship and a third of those who are married have contact with their friends less than once a week, compared to a fifth of men in a non-cohabiting relationship or who are single. Women exhibited a similar pattern, with those who are married or living with their partner having lower levels of contact with friends.

But it’s well worth finding the time for friendships, and not just for the sake of our individual wellbeing. Our counsellors have seen that maintaining social ties outside a relationship may actually help to strengthen a couple relationship, not only by giving each partner ‘space’ but also because friends can play an active role in supporting a relationship. This is to some extent borne out by our findings, which show that men who had at least weekly contact with their friends were more likely to report having a very good relationship with their partner (65%) compared to those who had less frequent contact (55%), although for women no difference was apparent.

Conclusion

The difference between men’s and women’s friendship patterns is a strong theme in this chapter. On average, we find that men report a higher number of close friends than women, but when we probe deeper we find the picture is more complex than it first appears. Men are also more likely than women to say they have no close friends, to report weaker quality friendships, and to rely less on their friends when they need someone to confide in. While not spending time with friends may on the surface suggest a tight-knit couple, in fact this can cause problems in a relationship. Seeing friends creates a healthy ‘space’ and can actually strengthen relationships with partners. Friends listen to us, make us laugh, put up with us and make us feel good about ourselves – they make a vital contribution to our wellbeing, and are well worth investing in.
Methodology

In total, we polled 5,778 people aged 16 and over in a survey of relationships across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We achieved sample sizes of approximately 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 the responses of 250 counsellors and sex therapists from Relate and Relationships Scotland in a poll that was co-designed by practitioners from both organisations.

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 are maintained, how people feel about these relationships, and how they’d been feeling about themselves. The Way We Are Now shares some of the main survey findings; we aim to present further analysis of the results, including using more comprehensive measures of the constructs described below, in later publications.

The survey was carried out by YouGov. It was conducted using an online survey administered by members of the YouGov UK panel of 442,100 individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample, according to the sample definition, providing a link to the online survey and inviting them to take part. Responses were gathered between 25 February and 18 March 2014.

YouGov normally achieves a response rate of around 35% 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 around representativeness. The results were weighted to make the data more representative of the population (of UK adults aged 16+) in terms of age, gender, region and country, 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 relationships and sexual behaviour.

The data were analysed 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. In many cases, we also examine the impact of other factors in multivariate analyses, often using regression modelling.

Data tables for the survey are available on the YouGov website.
The State of the UK's Relationships

The Way We Are Now


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

Relationships 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 political 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.