Demographic Trends in the UK

First report for the project

WELFARE POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY CHANGE.

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INTRODUCTION

In the UK, policies and social institutions have been founded upon the assumption of the nuclear male breadwinner family, consisting of two married (male and female) parents living in a household with their children (McDonald, 2000). Within the male breadwinner family, marriage is viewed as a contract between husband and wife, in which roles are divided between breadwinner (male) and carer (female). Women are considered to be largely dependent on marriage and their husbands for reasons of economic necessity. Moreover, marriage is considered an institution in which love, sex, and above all, childbearing takes place. However, since the 1960s with the contraceptive revolution, the equal opportunities revolution, the increase in individualism and the expansion of the white collar occupations and the creation of jobs for secondary earners, women have began asserting their rights within the labour market and education - signified by the increase in female participation in the labour market and a higher degree of gender equity within these institutions (McDonald, 2000)(see chapter X). These changes in the labour market are contradictory to those that social policies and institutions are founded on and this has led to changes in family formation and childbearing. The account below discusses these changes with particular emphasis on the situation in the 1990s.

POPULATION OF THE UK

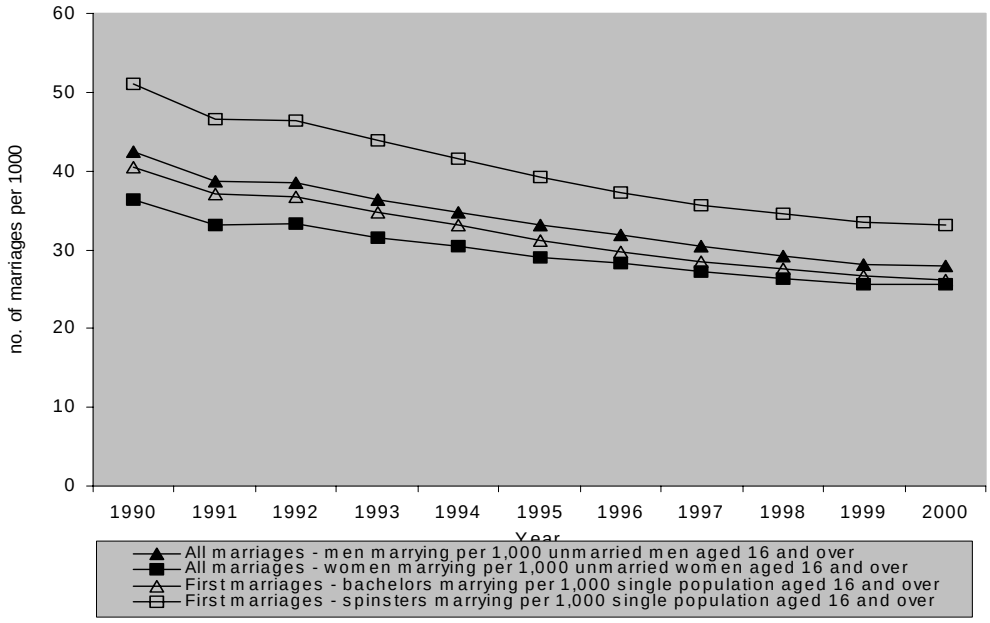
The overall population of the UK has increased from 57,814,000 in 1991 to 59,756,000 in 2000 (Population Trends, 107, Spring 2002). In 2000, 20% of the population were under 16 and 5.2% were under five years old. Different demographic structures, cultural traditions and economic characteristics of the various ethnic groups in Great Britain underlie distinctive patterns of family and household size and composition. In 2000, 7 per cent of people described themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority group, compared to 5 per cent in 1989 (Office for National Statistics (2002), table 3.15).

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Marriage has become less of an economic necessity for women, who are now able to undertake paid work outside the home leading to their increasing

material independence and ability to form separate households. Along with this, there have been marked changes in peoples' attitudes regarding marriage in recent years (Flour and Buchanan, 2001) and the choices available to individuals and couples have become more extensive. As a result, fewer people are getting married - the crude marriage rate in the UK has been declining since the 1970s and has continued to do so in the 1990s. The marriage rate for both men and women has continued a downward trend since 1992 but more recently has shown signs of levelling out. The changing nature of marriage is highlighted by the decline in *first* marriages for both men and women from 40.4/51.0 in 1990 to 26.2/33.1 in 2000. Whilst men are less likely to marry for the first time than women, there are signs of a convergence between the two sexes. This is due to the rate decreasing faster for women than for men, probably because changes in society have had most effect on female, as opposed to male, independence – notably the increased participation of women in the labour market.

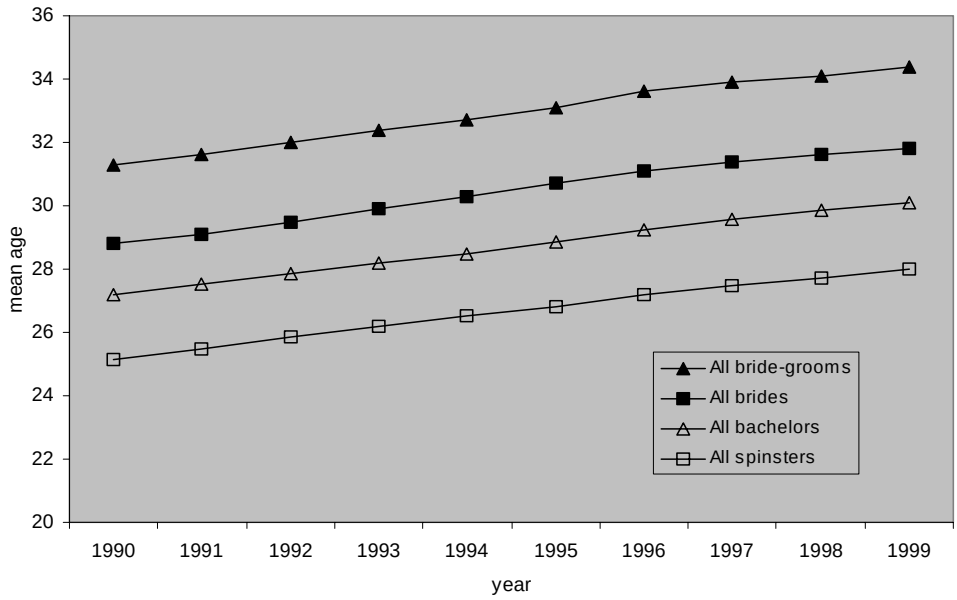
Figure 1: Crude marriage rate – all marriages and first marriages – England and Wales



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002

Not only has marriage declined but people are marrying later. The mean age of people marrying for the first time has increased at the same rate - from 27.2 in 1990 to 30.1 in 1999 for bachelors and 25.2 to 28.0 for spinsters (Figure 2). Women's increased participation in the labour market has made it more desirable (at least for the educated) to postpone marriage (and childbearing) in order to establish a career. In addition, economic insecurities have increased the necessity to prolong education and training for both men and women in order to equip themselves for future employment.

Figure 2: Mean age at marriage by sex – all marriages and first marriages



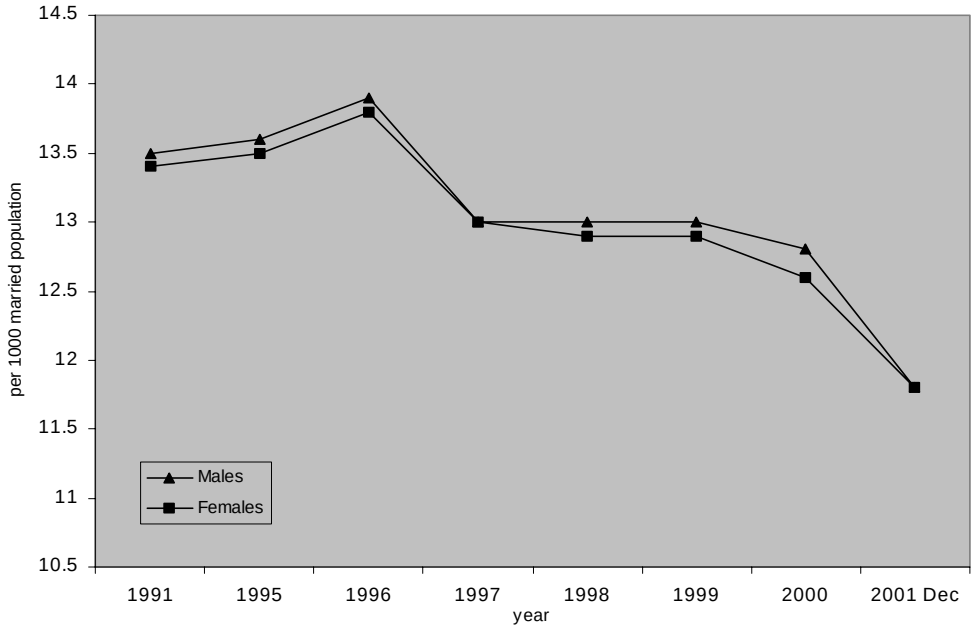
Source: Population Trends 108, 2002

Divorce

Women's economic independence has also contributed to the marked increased in divorce rates over the last four decades, more than quadrupling in size. Greater overall prosperity makes it easier to establish separate households after breaking up. It has also been suggested that the individualisation and privatisation of marriage have meant that individuals seek higher expectations of personal happiness and self-fulfilment (Drew, 1998). Moreover, with the structural changes and the rise in divorce itself, there has been a removal of the stigma attached to divorce, which in turn

plays a perpetuating role in increasing the divorce rate. However, it was the liberalisation of divorce legislation with the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, which came into effect in 1971, that has had the most impact on the divorce rate. This introduced a ‘no fault’ divorce law and meant that one spouse no longer had to bring charges against the other for divorce to be granted (Giddens, 1997). This consequently removed the guilt and punishment associated with divorce and made divorce easier. In a direct response to this the number of divorces increased significantly in the 1970s. However, since the mid 1980s divorce rates have stabilised. In the 1990s, the divorce rate has remained constant at around 13 per 1,000 married couples per year, although the most recent figure shows a drop to 11.8 per 1000, as shown in Figure 3 which presents divorce trends in England and Wales between 1990 and December 2001. The stabilisation of divorce rates can partly be attributed to the decline in marriage and prevalence of cohabitation. Yet, despite their stabilisation in recent years, the rate of divorce still remains very high compared to previous periods and by European standards; if divorce rates by duration of marriage are to persist at these levels, about 4 in every 10 married couples would ultimately divorce (Haskey, 1999). In fact, high divorce rates could help in perpetuating the significant decline in the marriage rate seen in the UK - if women (and men) see a high rate of divorce around them, they may be more likely to sustain there workforce position as a an insurance against a possible future need to be financially independent (Ermisch, 1996).

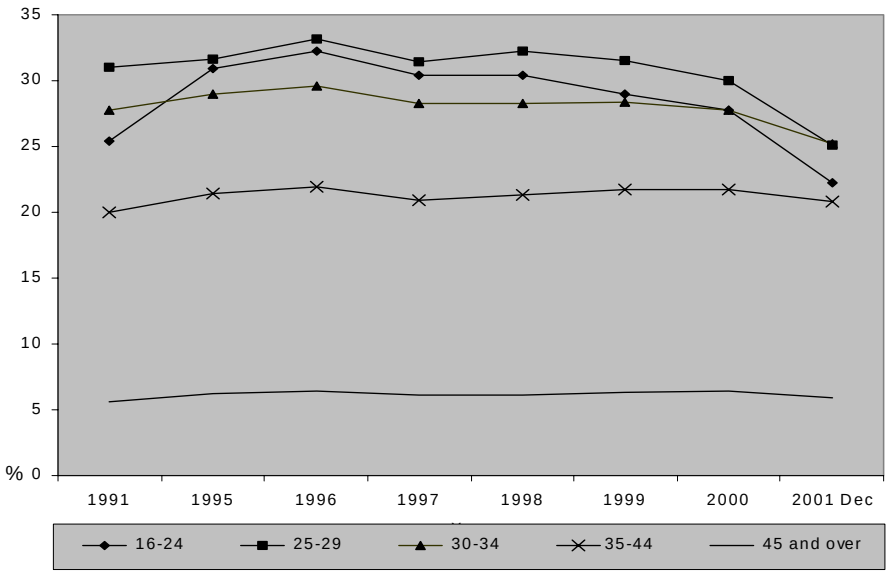
Figure 3: Divorce decrees per 1000 married population aged 16 and over by sex in England and Wales



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

The risk of divorce is highest amongst young people. Those aged 25-29 had the highest divorce rate throughout the 1990s and those under 25, the second highest (Figure 4). There is some evidence that that pre-marital cohabitation is associated with increased risks of divorced and that younger people are more likely to cohabit (Ermish.1996) but this is not conclusive since other demographic factors have contributed to marital breakdown including having a pre-marital birth and having a spouse who has previously been married.

Figure 4: Divorce decrees per 1,000 married population by age

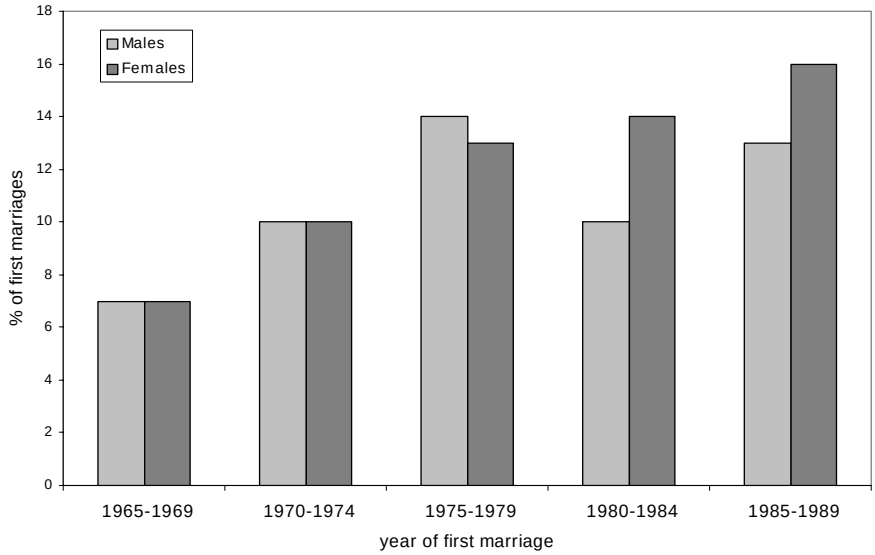


Source: Population Trends 108, 2002

Separation

Separation, often an interim stage between marriage and divorce, has also become more common. Among those who were married in the latter half of the 1980s, around one in eight men and one in six women had separated within the first five years (Figure 5). This was double the proportion for those who first married 20 years earlier.

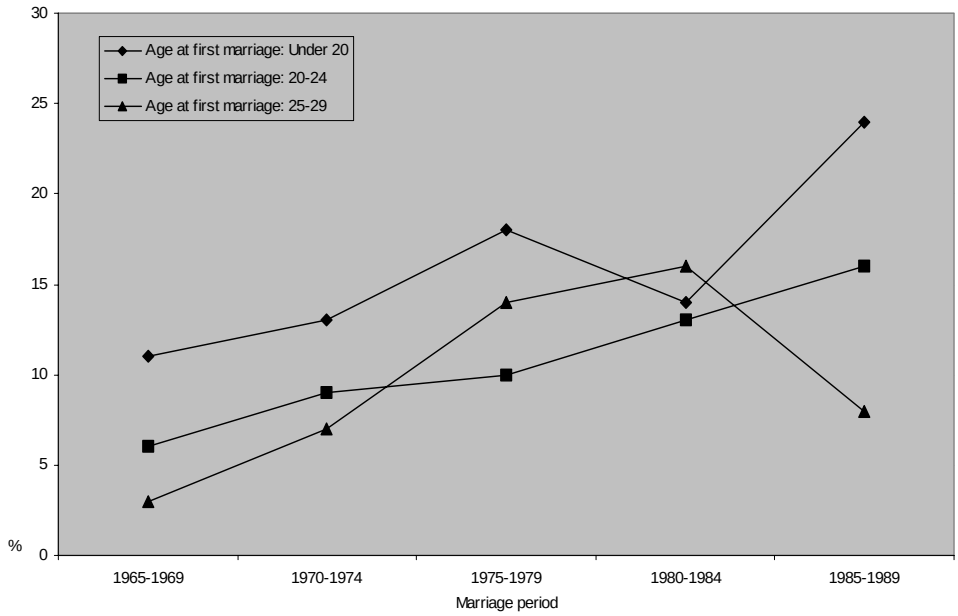
Figure 5: Proportion of first marriages ending in separation within 5 years of marriage by year of first marriage, 1998-99



Source: General Household Survey, 1998-1999, *Office for National Statistics*

The earlier in life a marriage is formed, the more likely it is to breakdown. Teenage marriages have been fairly consistently the most likely to breakdown within 5 years since the late 1960s (Figure 6). There was a marked increase in the proportion of teenage marriages breaking down among those married in the latest period measured, the late 1980s; 24 per cent of women who were under 20 when they first married had separated within five years. This is compared with 8 per cent of women who had married between the ages of 25 and 29.

Figure 6: Women[1] separated within five years of first marriage: by year of, and age at, first marriage, 1998-99



[1]Women born between 1940 and 1978

Source: General Household Survey, Office for National Statistics

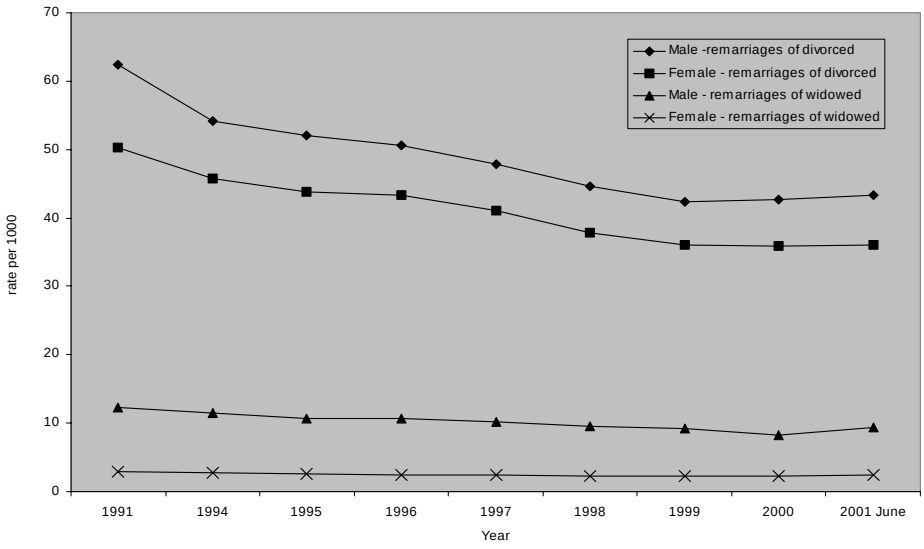
Remarriages

A feature of the high divorce rate is remarriage. Remarriage brings with it a diverse range of family types, which can vary from a young couple with no children to an older couple with adult children. Also, both partners do not necessarily remarry - either partner of the new couple may have been previously single, divorced or widowed. Generalisations about remarriage should be treated with caution, although some general points are worth making. Remarriages involving a divorced person are around ten times as numerous as those involving a widowed person. Ironically, the way to maximise the chances of marrying is to have been married before – the rate for remarriage is higher than that for first marriage for both the sexes. Moreover, the rate of decline in remarriages for the divorced in the last 10 years has been less steep than that for first marriages and now has begun to show signs of levelling out.

A higher proportion of men than women remarry after divorce and the remarriage of a widowed male is more than 3 times as likely as that of a

widowed female. This is partly because of age differences - men marry younger women and, since men die younger, women will have a smaller pool of men to choose from. It also perhaps shows a reluctance on the part of the women to remarry, with women themselves more likely to initiate divorce in the first place (Haskey, 1996). Also, greater (economic) independence of women than in the past makes this a realistic choice. However, it could also be linked to the higher probability that women will have responsibility for children from the previous relationship. This not only makes finding time to meet a new partner more difficult but also means taking into account the feelings of the child. Consequently parental responsibilities serve to constrain the women's choice, making remarriage difficult.

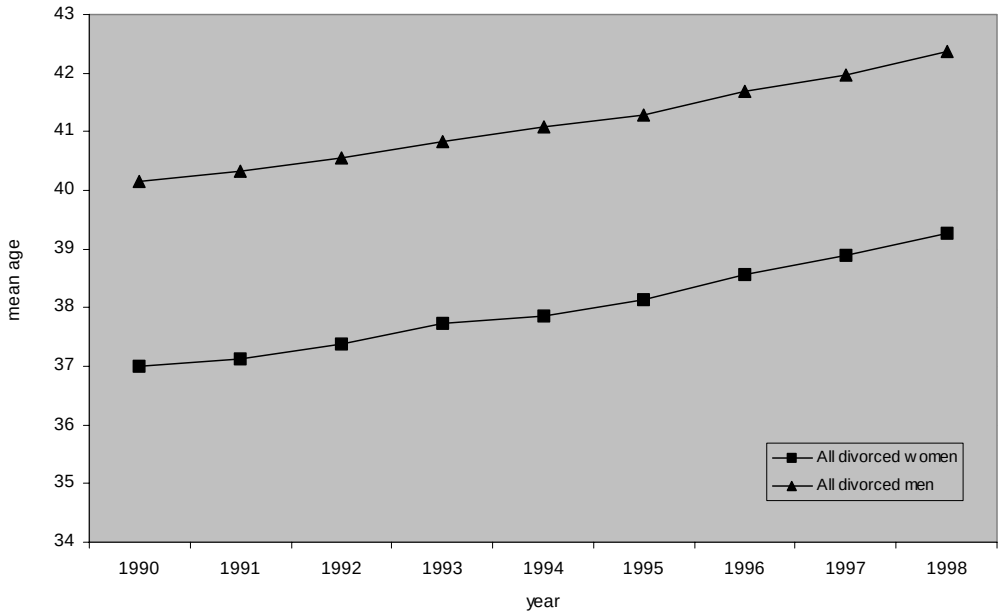
Figure 7: Remarriages: Men and women marrying per 1000 widowed or divorced population



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002

Remarriage takes place more frequently among the younger divorced generations (aged 16-24) for both sexes. Therefore the mean age for remarriage of divorced men and women is fairly low - at 42.4 years for men and 39.3 years for women in 1998, a slight increase in age for both sexes since 1990 – partly due to the increase in average age at first marriage.

Figure 8: Mean age at remarriage of divorced by sex, (England and Wales)



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

ALTERNATIVES TO MARRIAGE

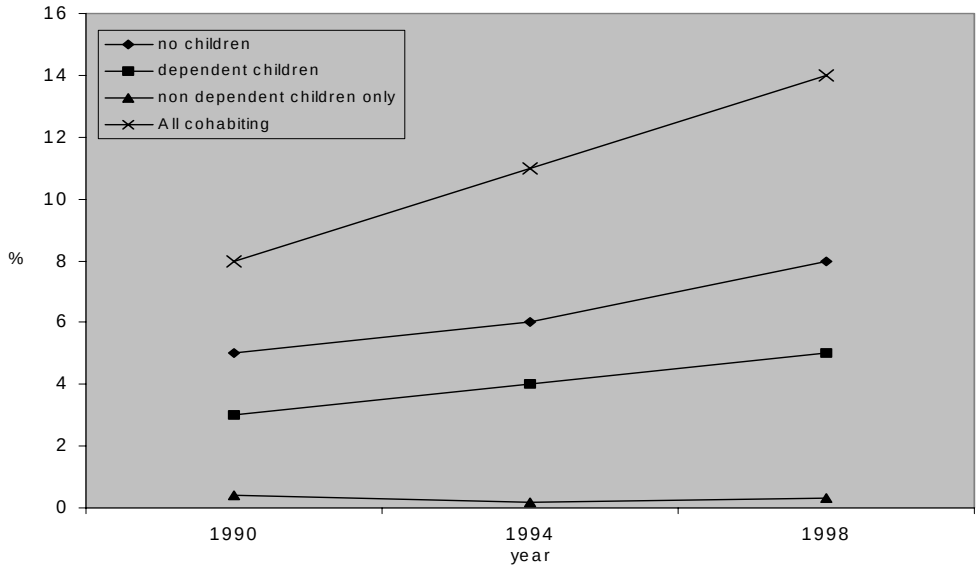
Cohabitation

The decline in the popularity of marriage indicates that 'no longer is marriage seen as the only organising principle for relationships' (Hall, 1993: 8) and therefore legal marriage has 'given way to a variety of optional non-traditional forms of ''living together'' (Boh, 1989: 277). One alternative to marriage is cohabitation, where a couple live together in a sexual relationship without being married. In the UK this form of partnership has become increasingly popular. Figure 9 demonstrates that between 1990 and 1998, cohabiting as a proportion of all family types nearly doubled from 8 per cent to 14 per cent, with the majority having no (dependent) children. In 1996 there were around 1.56 million cohabiting couples in England and Wales and this number is projected to rise to 3 million by 2021 (ref).

About two-thirds of cohabiting men and women are single (never-married) (Shaw and Haskey, 1999). Nevertheless, an increase in cohabitation does not necessarily mean that people will never marry; in 1995, two thirds of all those cohabiting married the partner with whom they were cohabiting (Office for

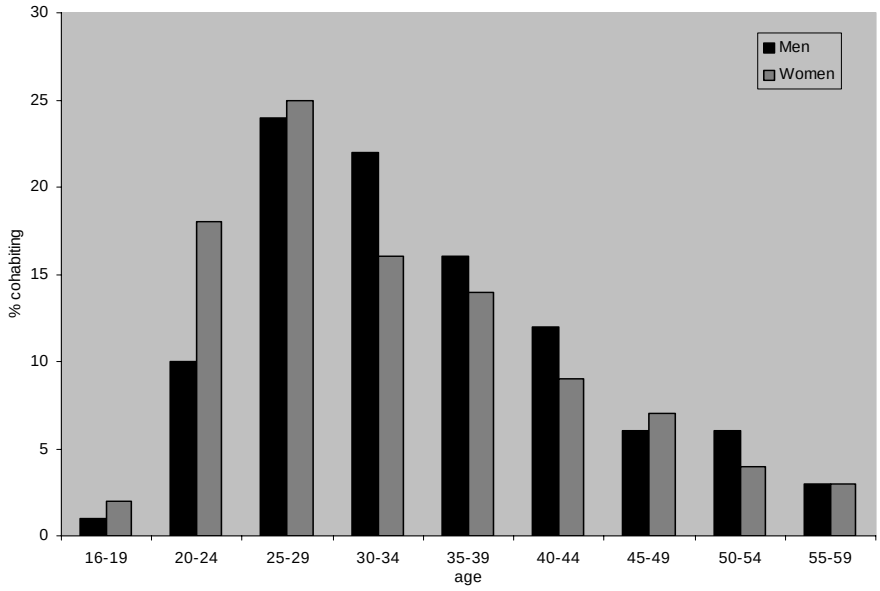
National Statistics, 1997). Moreover, the rate of cohabitation is highest amongst the younger age groups (see Figure 10), especially in the 25-29 age group but also the 20-24 year old age group for women and the 30-34 year old age group for men. This indicates that cohabitation today is mostly an experimental stage before marriage; marriage is still the norm.

Figure 9: Women aged 16-59: percentage cohabiting by whether has dependent children in the household



Source: General Household Survey (GHS)

Figure 10: Cohabiters: age by sex in Great Britain, 2000

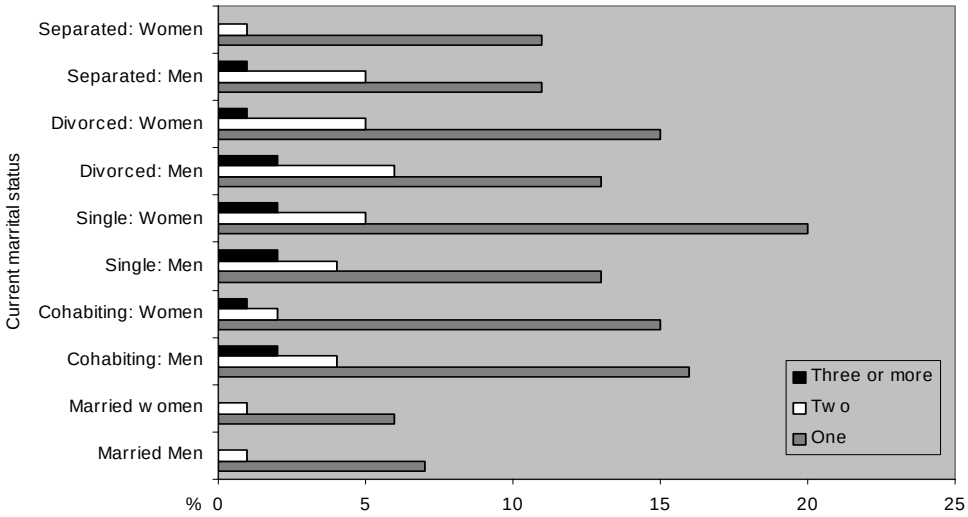


Source: General Household Survey (GHS), 2000

Repartnering

The growth of cohabitation suggests the existence of a group who re-partner (cohabit) after the breakdown of a previous marriage or cohabitation. One way of investigating repartnering is by studying the number of past cohabitations that did not end in marriage. Doing this by marital status adds an extra dimension, which allows us to see the repartnering histories of different populations. Generally married men and women were least likely to have repartnered. Cohabiting men were generally most likely to have repartnered at least once.

Figure 11: Number of past cohabitations[1] not ending in marriage by current marital status and sex (Great Britain, 2000)



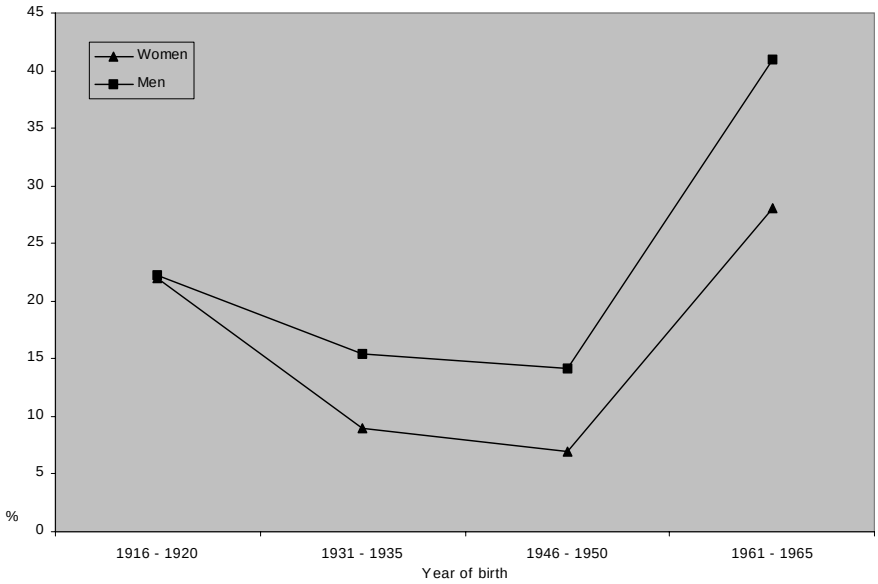
Source: General household Survey

[1] Excluding current cohabitations

Never marrying

Whilst marriage is still the norm, there is evidence of a growing proportion who never marry, although it is difficult to gauge the rate of long term consensual union which do not result in marriage. The proportion of women remaining never married in England and Wales is compared in Figure 11 for four cohorts of women born between 1916 to 1920, 1931 to 1935, 1946 to 1950 and 1961 to 1965. A higher proportion of women from the cohort born in the 1960s remain never married in their early 30s than in previous groups at the same age. By age 32, only 7 per cent of the 1946 to 1950 cohort, 9 per cent of the 1931 to 1935 and 22 per cent of the 1916 to 1920 cohort remained unmarried compared with 28 per cent of those born between 1961 and 1965. The relatively large proportion of women born in the 1916 to 1920 cohort remaining never married by the age of 32 is likely to be as a consequence of the Second World War.

Figure 12: Men and Women remaining 'never married' at 32: by year of birth



Source: Office for National Statistics

"Living apart together" relationships and "Living together apart" relationships

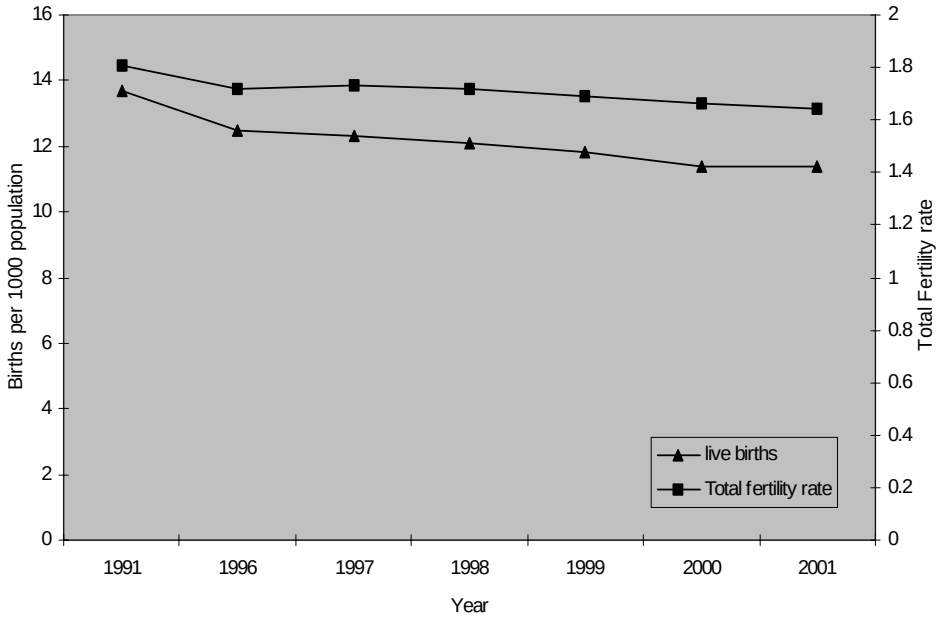
An alternative to marriage is 'living apart together' in separate households. The increase of individualism and equality have made this option possible, together with the increase material independence of women. Some partners who have separated opt to "live together apart" in the same household. This could be for a variety of reasons including housing costs and staying together for the children.

BIRTHS

Births and fertility

The main factors that determine changes in the child population are the birth rate and the fertility rate. These are influenced by many indicators, including trends in marriage described above. The birth rate (births per 1,000) and the total fertility rate (the number of children each woman will have) both began to fall from the early 1990s (Figure 13). Moreover, the fertility rate has been below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) throughout the 1990s.

Figure 13: Fertility and birth rate



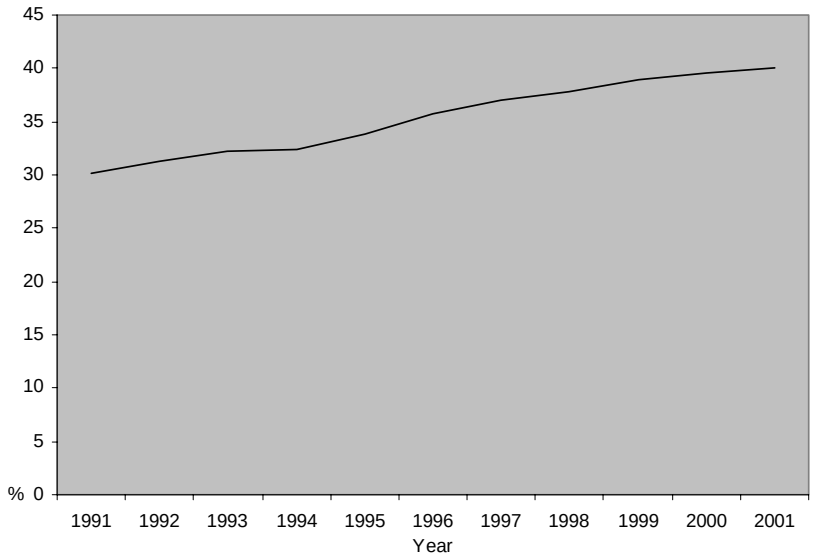
Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

Births outside marriage

The proportion of births outside marriage as a proportion of all births has been increasing steadily throughout the 1990s (Figure 14) – from 30.2 per cent of all live births in 1991 to 40 per cent in 2001. The rise in births outside marriage in a period when, as a result of contraception, it is possible to have virtual total control over fertility, is perhaps surprising. However, their are two types of births outside marriage. Births jointly registered by both parents have risen from 74.4 per cent of all births outside marriage in 1991 to 81.6 per cent in 2001. Most of the increase in the number of births outside marriage in the 1990s has been to cohabiting couples, that is parents living at the same address – rising from 54.6 per cent of births outside marriage in 1991 to 63.2 percent in 2001. Much of the rise in births outside marriage then can be attributed to the increase in cohabitation in Britain. But a significant minority of births outside marriage are solely registered to the mother (Figure 15). These types of births could indicate that single women are able to make a real choice to have a child outside marriage, without a partner, as a result of female economic independence but it is more likely to suggest either an incapacity to plan life or a lack of any alternative choice (ie. a career) – eg. the

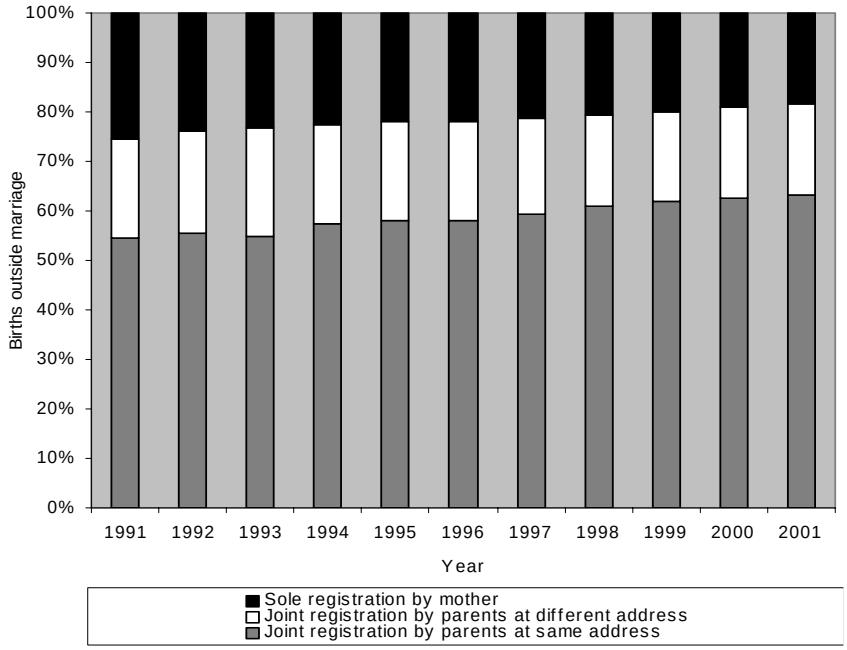
unemployed or those in economic insecurity. This particularly applies to young never married women with no settled partner. However, these births, as a proportion of births outside marriage have fallen from 25.6 per cent in 1991 to 18.4 percent in 2001. The second type of out of marriage births are largely due to a high rate of fertility among young mothers – demonstrated by the UK's high teenage conception rate relative to the rest of Europe.

Figure 14: Live Births outside marriage as a percentage of all live births in England and Wales



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

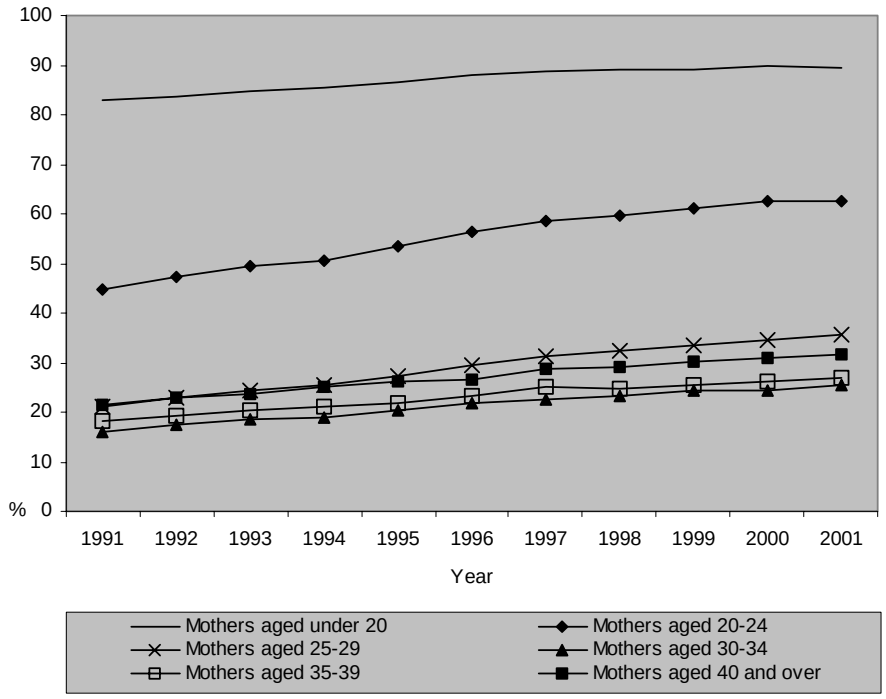
Figure 15: Types of births outside marriage as a percentage of all births outside marriage in England and Wales



Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

Younger women are more likely to give birth outside marriage. In 2001, 90 per cent of all births to mothers aged under 20 were outside marriage – by far the highest proportion of any age group throughout the 1990s (Figure 16). Also noticeable is the high proportion of births outside marriage to 20-24 year olds, whilst a relatively low proportion of births in other age groups are outside marriage, with mothers aged 30-34 the least likely to give birth outside marriage. Births to teenagers are explored below.

Figure 16: Births outside marriage as a percentage of all births in each age group in England and Wales

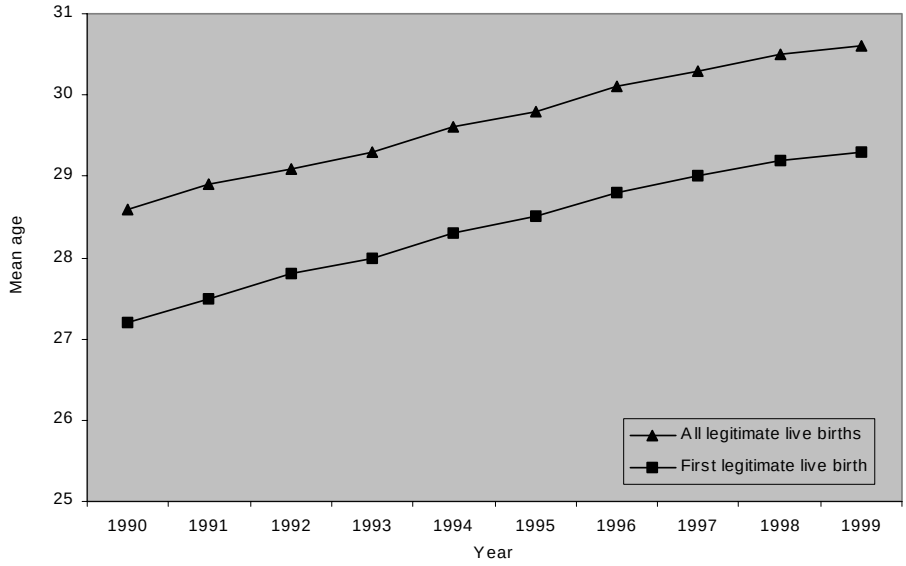


Source: Population Trends 108, 2002.

Maternal age at childbearing

The average age of women at childbearing is influenced by two factors: the duration of women's 'active' reproductive years, and the timing of first births. Presently, these aspects can be characterised by a decrease in higher parity births (i.e. a shorter period of reproductive activity) by older women (which has a decreasing effect on the average age); and a gradual postponement of first births (which has an increasing effect on the average age). The mean age of women at the birth of a child has been increasing in the last decade from 28.6 in 1990 to 30.6 in 1991, which is mainly the result of postponement of first births - from a mean age of 27.2 to 29.2 - exerting a gradual shift towards later average ages at childbearing. These figures are for births within marriage and therefore will be directly affected by the increasing age of marriage.

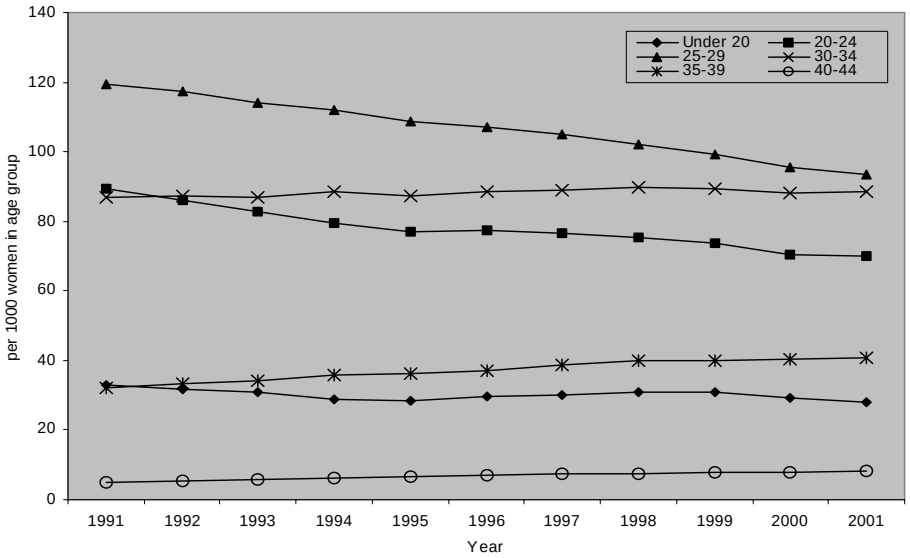
Figure 17: Average mean age of mother at first and all legitimate births in England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics; Birth Statistics, FM1

Between 1990 and 1999 first births to mothers in their early and late twenties as a proportion of all births declined whilst that for mothers in their early and late thirties increased (Figure 18). In fact, at the beginning of the decade, the highest proportion of first births were to mothers in their late twenties but by 1999 the highest proportion of first births were to mothers in their early thirties. The trend in postponement of childbearing mean that women are able to make more deliberate decisions about when to have children and whether to establish themselves in the labour market and in a career before embarking upon motherhood. However, the extent that women are able to make choices varies with socio-economic status.

Figure 18: Births, 2001: Age specific fertility rates 1991-2001, England and Wales.

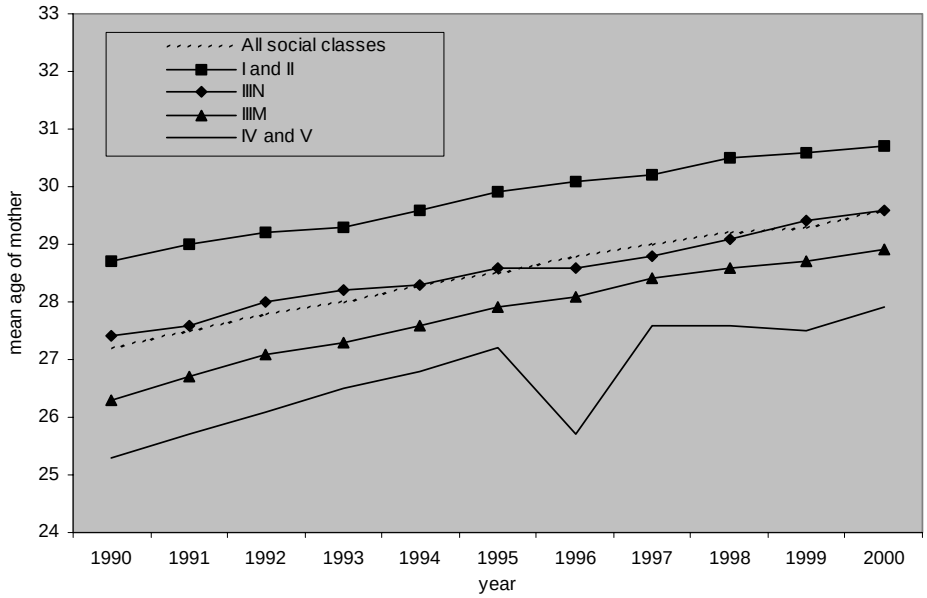


Source: Office for National Statistics; Birth Statistics, FM1

Women in social class I and II on average bear their first child at a later age than those in classes IV and V[1]. Up to 1995, the average age at first birth has been increasing, but amongst the lowest classes, the age has begun to decrease (Figure 19). This suggests a divergence in attitude and behaviour between classes – women with lower education levels are less likely to postpone childhood to build a career and are therefore more likely to uphold the traditional male breadwinner family. Educated women, however, tend to postpone childbearing until they have established themselves a career.

[1] There is a growing tendency for men and women with a similar educational background to marry each other and therefore we can assume that the social class of the mother will be similar to the father's.

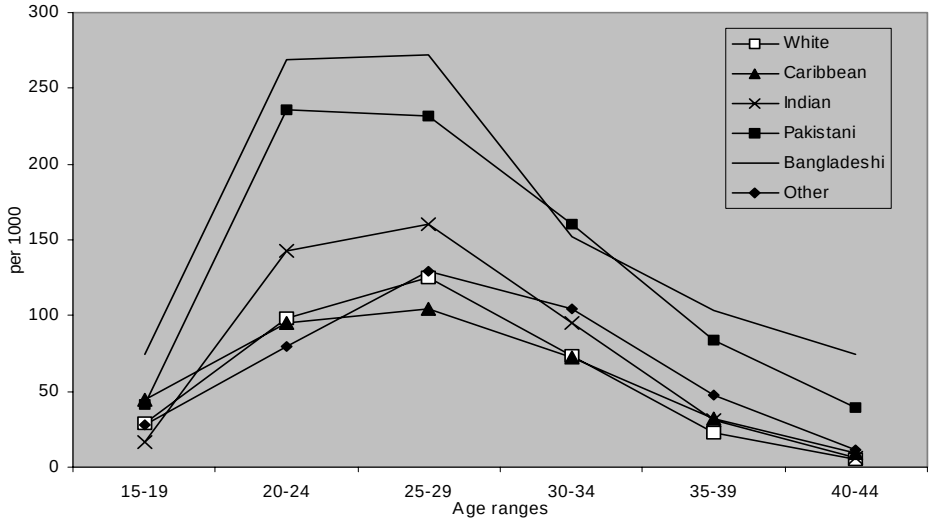
Figure 19: Mean ages of women at first live births within marriage by social class of father in England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics; Birth Statistics, Historical series FM1 No 13

Ethnicity also determines the birth rate, and the age that women have children. Overall, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are the most fertile and the extent of the gap between Indian and Bangladeshi women illustrates the importance of distinguishing between specific ethnic minority groups, rather than treating all Asians as a single category (Figure 20). In most of the ethnic groupings, the birth rate peaked at age 25-29, although for Pakistani women, the peak is at the earlier age of 20-24.

Figure 20: Annual birth rates per thousand population by ethnic group in five year age ranges

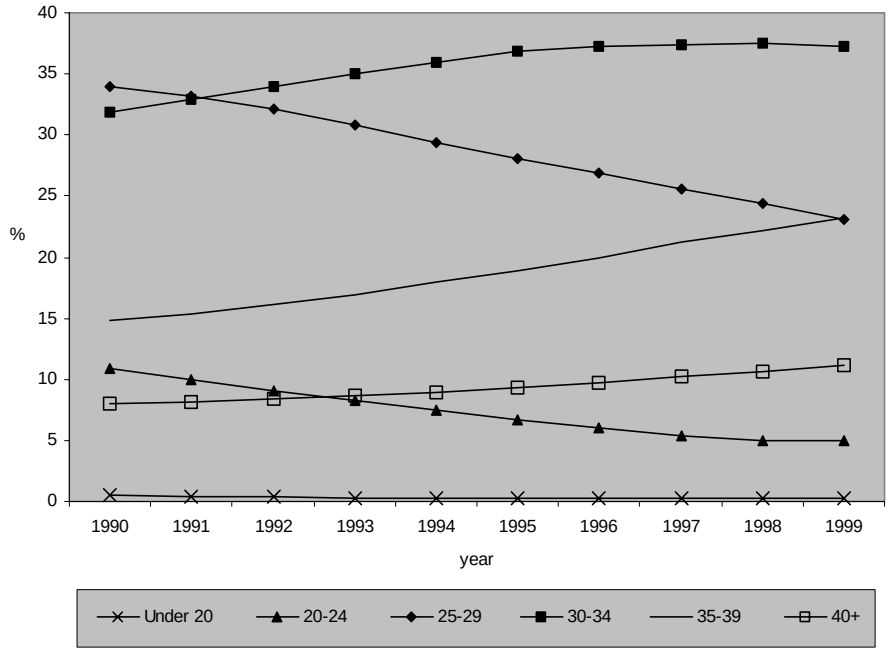


Source: Office for National Statistics

Paternal age at childbearing

Official data sources on fatherhood are relatively scarce. Most national surveys in Britain have not asked men if they have ever fathered a child because of the intrinsic problems with validity: men can conceal parenthood or may not even know about conceptions. However, the Office for National Statistics produces details about the age of the father at the birth of the child within marriage. In instances where the birth is registered solely by the mother, the age of father is not available. In 1971 the average age of the father where the birth occurred inside a married relationship in England and Wales was 27; by 1999 this had increased to 31. The highest proportion of paternities were to fathers in their late twenties at the beginning of the 90s but these have decreased dramatically and now births to fathers in their early thirties make up the highest proportion of all paternities. Moreover, 1999 saw a crossover between births to fathers in their late twenties, which are rapidly declining, and those to father in their early thirties, which are increasing - soon to be taken over by births to fathers in their later thirties.

Figure 21: Paternities, inside marriage live births: age of father as a % of all paternities



Source: Office for National Statistics; Birth Statistics, FM1

Completed family size

The above observed move towards later childbearing by younger women has been coupled with a reduction in the number of higher parity births by older women (Pearce et al, 1999), resulting in a decrease in the average family size (Figure 22). Figure 23 presents the completed average family sizes for women born in different age cohorts. The decrease over the cohorts in the proportion of women with 2 children is substituted by an increase in the proportions remaining childless, which explains the decrease in fertility. Projections suggest that this will continue to increase so that about 23 per cent of women born in 1973 will be childless when they reach the age of 45 in 2018.

Not all men are fathers. Childlessness and fertility have traditionally been emphasised as issues for women and there is a lack of information about male fertility. The 1991 National Child Development Study (NCDS) found that by the age of 33, 34 per cent of men were childless compared with 23 per

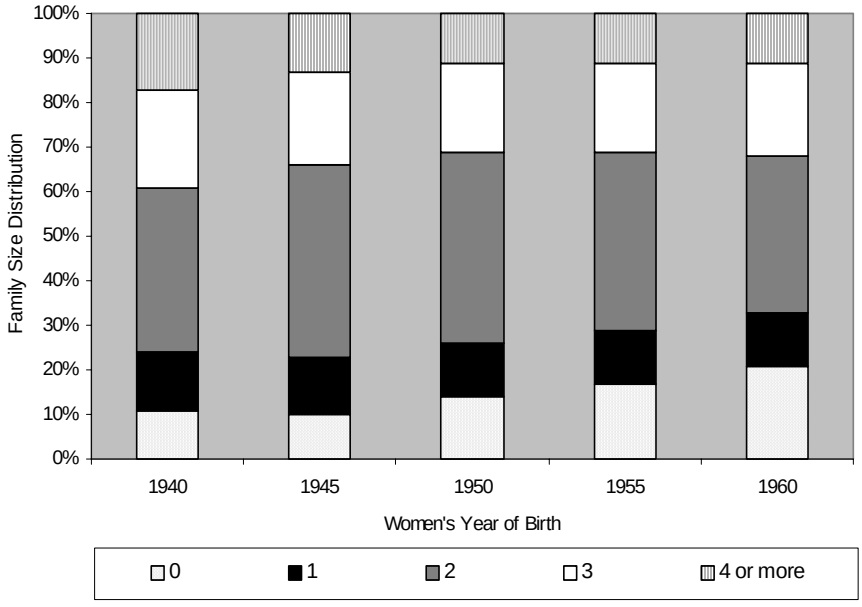
cent of women. The older age at partnership and first parenthood may help to explain some of the differences between the genders.

Figure 22. Completed average family size

**England and Wales*

Source: Pearce et al, 1999.

Figure 23: Family size distributions (%)

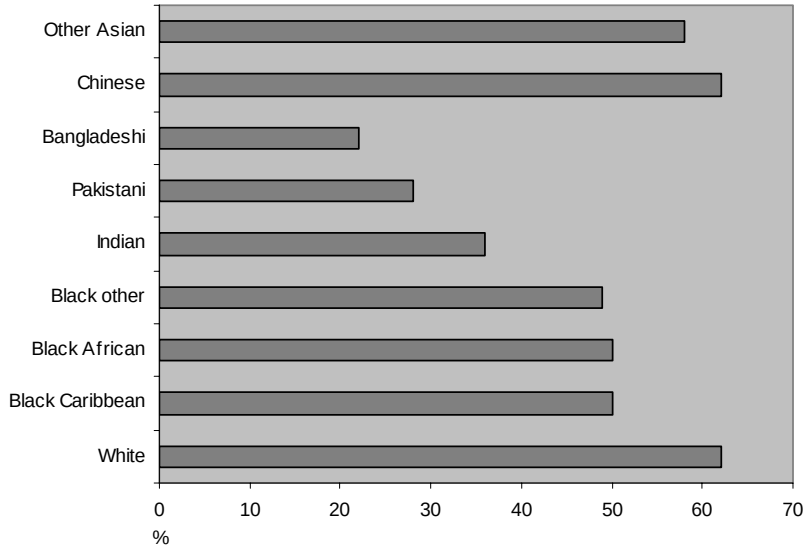


**England and Wales*

Source: Pearce et al, 1999.

Childlessness presents itself differently among different ethnic groups in the UK. Chinese and other Asians have particularly high rates of childlessness (Figure 24)[2]. This could be linked to the higher educational attainments in these groups. On the other hand, Bangladeshi women have exceptionally low rates of childlessness in 1991. Two factors are linked to this: because of British immigration policy women from Southern Asian countries enter Britain as fiancées and wives, and the practice of early and almost universal marriage among Southern Asians (Blackwell, 2000).

Figure 24: Childlessness among 20-29 year olds: variations between new and established members of ethnic groups, 1991[2]



Source: 1991 ONS longitudinal study, Blackwell (2000), Table 2.

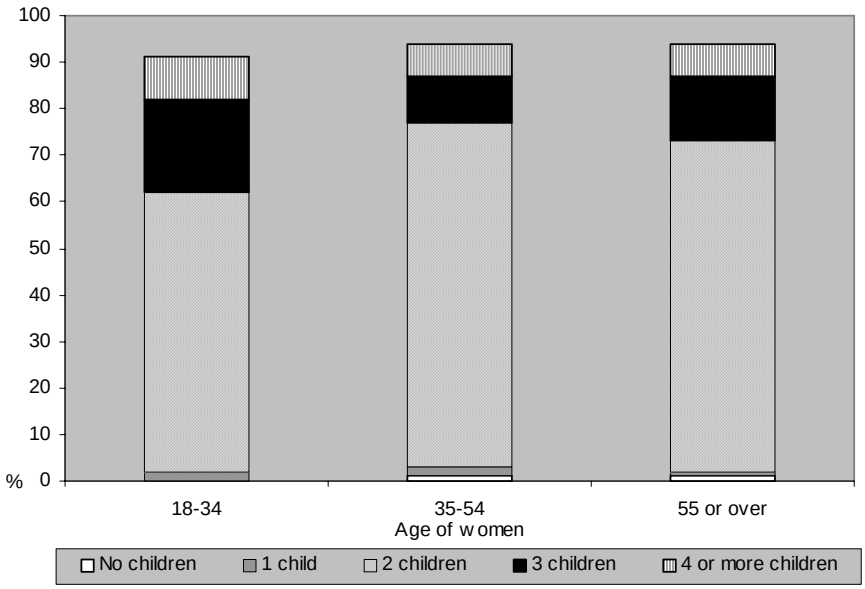
Aspirations

The number of children that women want and the number they actually have are two very different things. Generally, two children is felt to be the ideal, although younger women are more likely think that more than two children is the ideal – 29 per cent of 18-34 year old women (Figure 25). No younger women and only 1 per cent of older women thought that childlessness was the ideal – although, as we have seen, around a fifth will end up being so. Indeed, childless women are not necessarily anti-children, nor are they

[2] It should be noted that 'childless' women have been counted those who weren't parents to any children living within their households in 1991, and who had no live births since 1971. It is therefore possible that some people who have left their children overseas are counted as childlessness here.

dominated by a career, but rather their life has not been suited to children – they haven't found a suitable partner or are not economically secure enough to start a family (McAllister and Clarke, 1998).

Figure 25: Ideal number of children (women), 1994



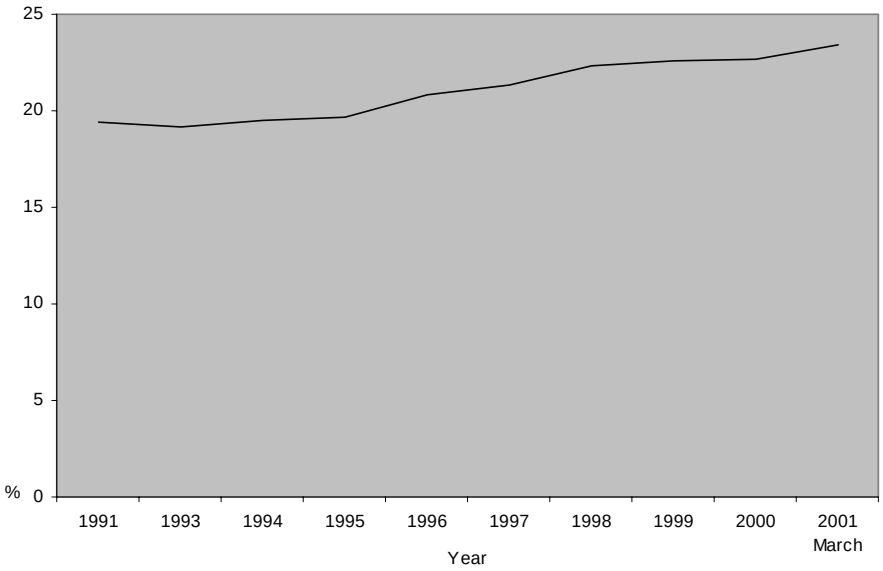
Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1994

Abortion

Abortion can be an expression of two things; either the independence of women (and men) to make choices about their lives or the necessity to postpone childbearing until it is an economically viable option. During the 1990s the abortion rate has increased (Figure 26). In 1991 19.4 per cent of all conceptions were terminated by abortion but by March 2001 23.4 per cent were aborted. Around one-third of conceptions outside marriage are terminated in an abortion. Under 16s have a particularly high rate of abortion - the highest rate of abortion throughout the 1990s (Figure 27). Abortions to the under 18s and under 20 age groups have been increasing since 1995 – having taken over the rate of the over 40s. Mothers aged 30-34 were not only least likely to give birth to a child outside marriage, they were also least likely to abort conceptions. Perhaps this suggests a higher degree of family

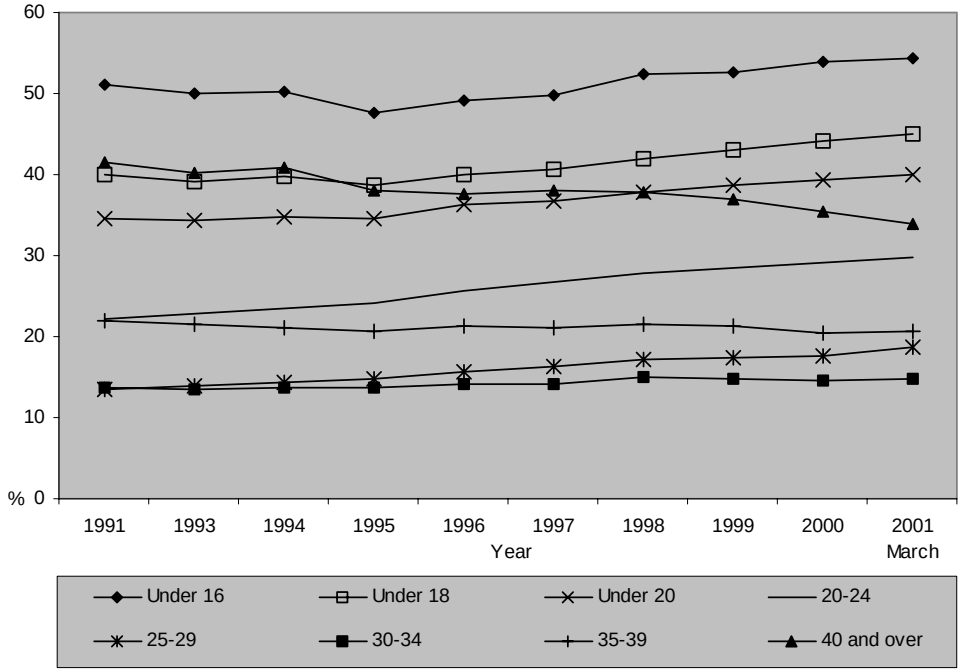
planning amongst this age group, at a time when they are established in a career and more economically prepared.

Figure 26: Percentage of conceptions ending in abortion



Source: Population trends 108, 2002

Figure 27: Percentage of conceptions leading to abortion by age

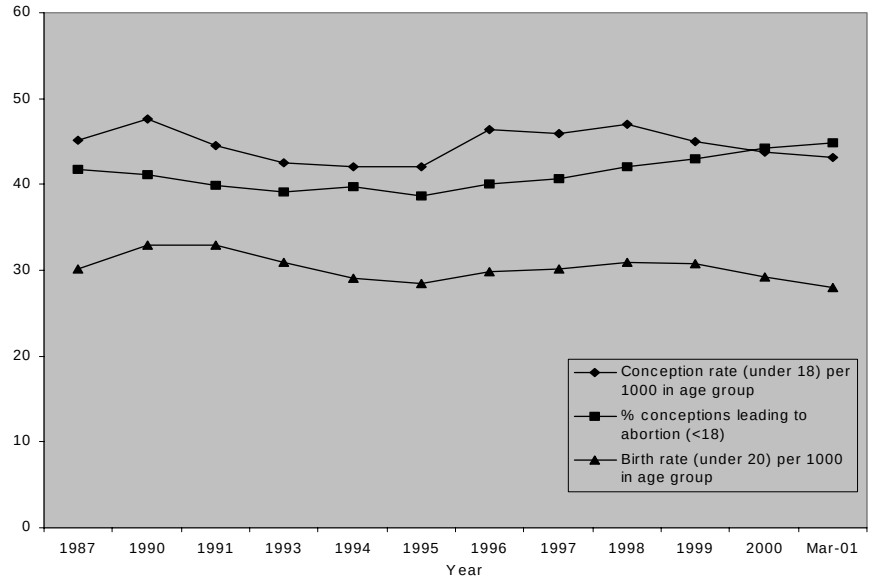


Source: Population trends 108, 2002

Teenage pregnancy

During the last ten years, the conception rate of women aged under 18 has fluctuated from a high in 1990 (47.7 per thousand) to a low of 42 per thousand in 1995. By 1998, the teenage conception rate in England and Wales had risen back to 47 per thousand under 18 women, the highest in the European Union, although this has been decreasing ever since. Whilst the proportion of teenage conceptions that are aborted has been increasing since 1995 (Figure 28), more than fifty percent still lead to motherhood and the majority of these births (60%) are registered jointly by both parents, while nearly all the rest (36%) are registered solely by the mother (Population Trends 98, 1999).

Figure 28: Teenage conception and birth rates, England and Wales



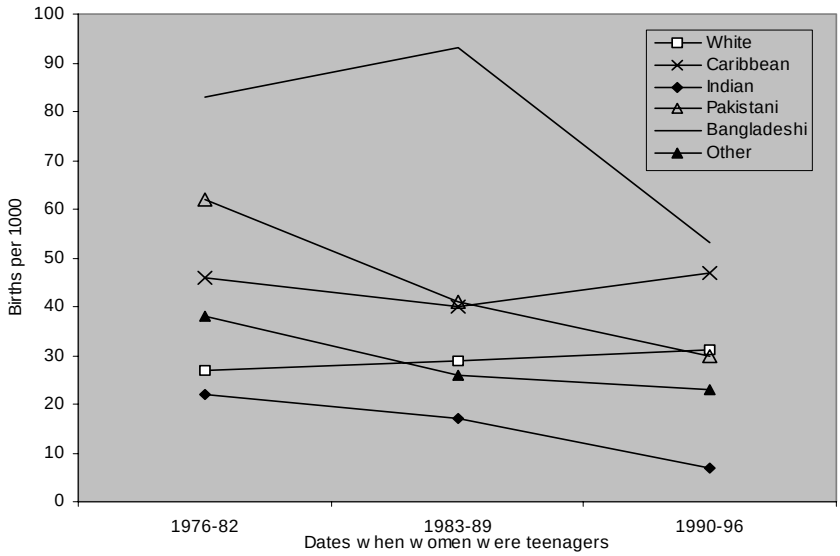
Source: Population Trends 108, 2002

There is a regional variation within Great Britain with respect to teenage conception rates. Wales had the highest under 18 conception rate between 1992-1997 (49 per 1,000 15-17 year-old women) and Scotland the lowest (41 per 1,000 teenage women). In England there was an average conception rate of 43 per 1,000 teenage women between 1992-1997. Within England, the Northern regions had higher conception rates than Great Britain, while the South East, South West and East of England regions had lower rates (Griffiths and Kirby, 2000). There are also considerable differences in the outcomes of these conceptions: 34% of teenage conceptions in the North

East of England are terminated by abortion, compared to 52% in London (Population Trends 98, 1999).

There are strong indications that teenage births occur in different circumstances, depending on the mother's ethnic group. White and Caribbean teenage birth rates appear stable, while Asian rates are falling: Indian teenagers have fallen from below-average to very low indeed; Pakistani teenagers have fallen from above-average to about average; Bangladeshi teenagers have fallen from more than three times the white rate in the mid/late 1980s, to less than twice the white rate in the early/mid 1990s (Figure 29). It is worth pointing out that this measure of teenage *births* does not cover all *pregnancies.* Getting on for half of all teenagers who get pregnant opt for an abortion, but it seems unlikely that many of these are of Asian origin. Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women would probably come closer to the white average if we were able to base the analysis on all conceptions. Most white girls are unmarried when they have their babies; but many of them probably marry later. Most of the Caribbean teenage mothers are unmarried, and most of them probably remain as single parents. The evidence suggests (though it does not prove) that most of the Asian women are married when they have their babies. These points may mean that Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi teenagers are behaving broadly within the expectations of their various cultural groups if they have children; whereas white teenagers are contradicting current normative expectations. However, if early motherhood carries direct physiological consequences for the health of mother or baby, then the disadvantage will affect young families in all ethnic groups.

Figure 29: Teenage birth rates per 1000, by date of observation



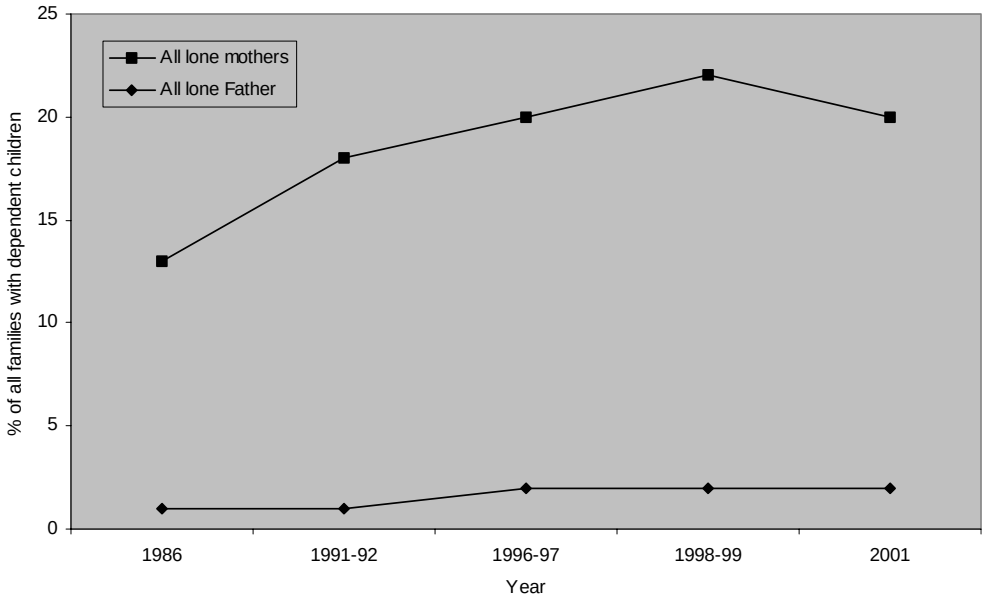
Source: Labour Force Survey, Berthoud, R (2001) in Population Trends 104

LONE PARENTS AND COMPLEX FAMILY FORMS

Lone parents

The increase in divorce, separation and births outside marriage has subsequently led to an increase in proportion of families headed by a lone parent. In a European context, Britain leads with the highest rates of lone parenthood. The number of lone parent families has grown continuously since the 1970s, with accelerated growth in the 1990s and has been levelling out in the most recent period. Haskey (1998) has estimated the lone parent population of Britain in 1995 to be 1.56 million, comprising 22% of all British families with children and containing 2.7 million children, representing 20% of British children. By 1999/2000 the proportion of lone parent families increased to 27% of all families with children, containing 3.1 million children (DWP, 2001). Most lone parent families are headed by the mother, with fathers being the head of single parent families at a relatively constant rate of around 10% of all lone parents.

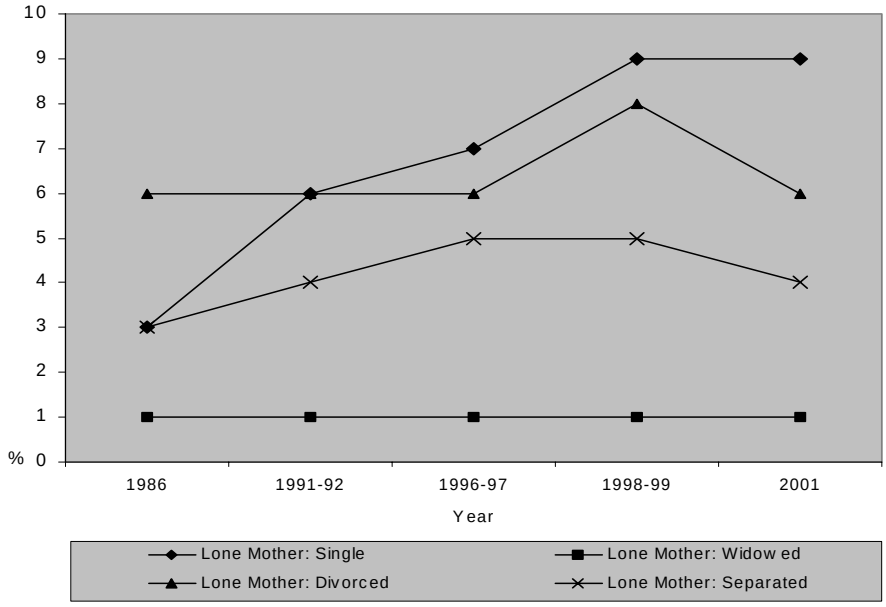
Figure 30:Percentage Lone mothers and fathers as a proportion of all families with dependent children



Source: General Household Survey and Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

The marital status of lone mothers has changed It is estimated that in the UK, there were 577,980 never-married lone mothers (38% of lone mothers) in 1995/6 compared to 82,080 (16% of lone mothers) in 1971 (Haskey 1998). Indeed, over the last 15 years single never married mothers as a proportion of all family types with dependent children have dramatically increased form 3 per cent to 9 per cent, overtaking the proportion who are divorced (Figure 31). However, the largest proportion of lone mothers have been previously married; that is they are divorced, separated or widowed.

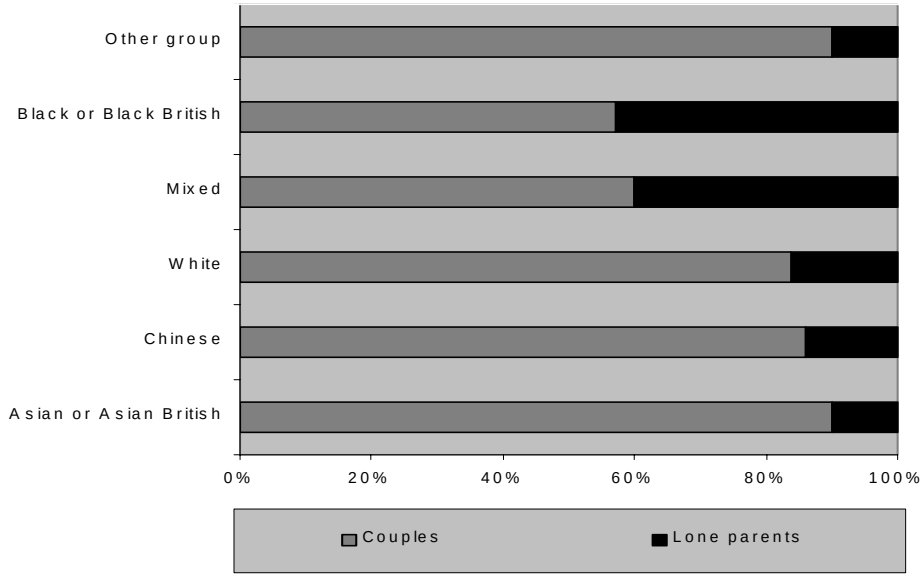
Figure 31: Percentage Lone mothers by marital status as a proportion of all family types with dependent children



Source: Social Trends, Office for National Statistics

In Autumn 2001, of families with dependent children in Great Britain, 49 per cent of those headed by a Black person were lone parent families compared with one in 10 Asian families (Figure 32). This associated with the

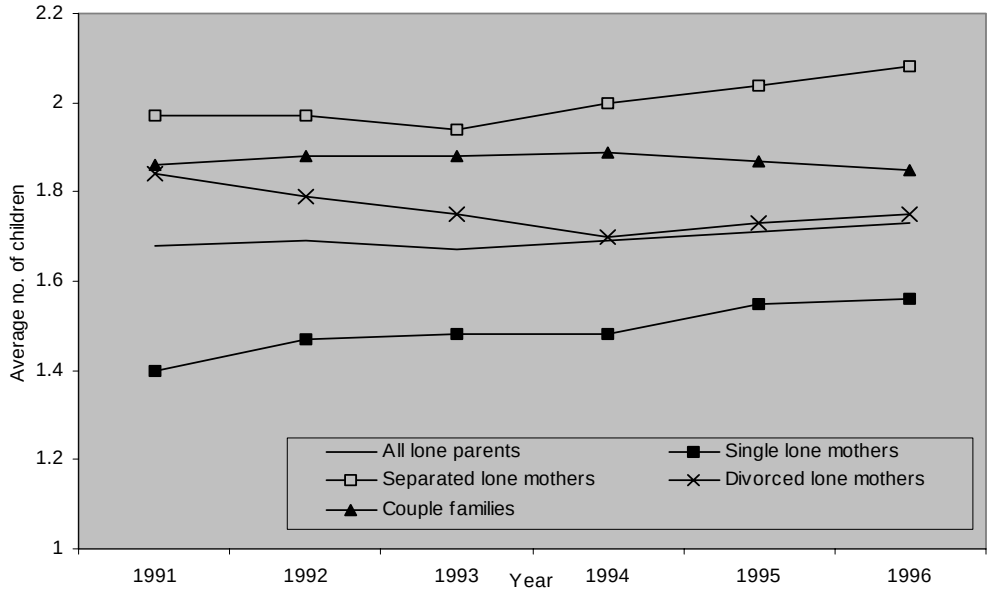
Figure 15: Families with dependent children[1] by ethnic group, autumn 2001



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Overall, lone parent families tend to have fewer children than couple families (Figure 33). However, the average number of children in each is converging – increasing in lone parent families and decreasing in couple families. The type of lone parent family inevitably makes a difference to the number of children in that family. Separated lone parent families have the highest numbers of any group, including couples, and this is increasing. Single lone mothers have fewer children, which is because these women are usually younger, but the number of children in these families is steadily increasing.

Figure 33: Average number of children in lone parent families compared to couple families



Source: General Household Survey

Step parenting

Stepfamilies may be formed when lone parents, whether single, separated, widowed or divorced form new marriages or new partnerships. According to the General Household Survey, in 1999, 6% of all families with dependent children were stepfamilies. There is a tendency for children to remain with their mother after a partnership breaks up. In 2000, the majority (88%) of stepfamilies consisted of a couple with at least one dependent child from the female partner's previous relationship. However the proportion of stepfamilies in which there was a dependent child from the male partner's previous

relationship has risen from 5 percent in 1998-9 to 9 per cent in 2000 and, while 7 per cent of stepfamilies contained at least one dependent child from a previous marriage or relationship of both partners, only 3 per cent did in 2000 (Table 1). This demonstrates the growing proportion of fathers who are being granted custody of their chil(dren).

Table 1: Stepfamilies[1] with dependent children[2] by family type

Great Britain	1998-99	2000
	%	%
Couple with children[2] from woman's previous relationship only	*87*	88
Couple with children[2] from both partners' previous relationship	*7*	3
Couple with children[2] from man's previous relationship only	*5*	9

[1] Head of family aged 16 to 59. [2] One or more children.

Source: General Household Survey, Office for National Statistics

Generally, the average number of children in stepfamilies is greater than in first families, especially when there are births to the new partnership (Table 2). Moreover, the average number of children in married stepfamilies is greater than in cohabiting stepfamilies. This is due to a greater number of natural dependent children of both partners in such families. Also, married step parents are older, on average, than cohabiting step parents and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that they have greater numbers of natural children (Haskey, 1994). Overall, dependent children in step families tend to be older than in first families and children in married couple step families tend to be older than cohabiting couple step families (Table 2). First couples with natural children contain a greater proportion of younger couples who have just started a family.

An added feature to stepfamilies is adoption. Of all adoption in the UK about half are of step-children (http://www.adoption-net.co.uk/). Adoptive parents have legal rights and obligations towards their children, which other adoptive parents do not have. As well as giving a step-parent the right of parental responsibility for the child, adoption also severs any legal links the child has to one of their birth parents and that parent's wider family. In the UK, for a step-

parent to adopt a child, the step-parent and one of the child's birth parents must be married to each other and apply jointly to adopt a child.

Table 2: Stepfamilies, and other families with dependent children, and dependent children living in them, Great Britain 1991-92

	Mean number of children per family	Median age of children
All Married couple stepfamilies	**2.3**	..
Stepfather/natural mother	*2.1*	*9.8*
Stepmother/natural father	*2.4*	*9.7*
Stepfather/stepmother	*3.5*	*11.7*
All Cohabiting couple stepfamilies	***2.0***	..
Stepfather/natural mother	*1.9*	*8.5*
Stepmother/natural father	*1.8*	*8.4*
Stepfather/stepmother	*3.2*	*9.5*
All One-parent families	***1.7***	..
Lone fathers	*1.6*	..
Lone mothers	*1.7*	..
All Couple families with natural children only	***1.9***	..
Married couple families	*1.9*	*8.5*
Cohabiting couple families	*1.5*	*2.9*

..= missing data

Source: OPCS Omnibus Survey Population, Haskey, 1994, table 1

Absent parents (fathers and mothers)

Mothers have long occupied centre stage in Britain as far as parenting is concerned. However, attitudes towards, and expectations of, fathers are changing. During the 1990s the roles, responsibilities and influences of fathers became a matter of public and political debate. The vast majority of fathers are married and living with all of their dependent biological children but changes in family life mean that some fathers may be never married, no longer married or re-married. With the rising divorce rate and the increasing number of lone-parent households, absent fathers have been increasing. The term absent fathers refers to fathers who, as a result of separation or divorce, either have only infrequent contact with their children or lose touch with them all together. While absent mothers also exist, they are not as widespread because they are most likely to care for children after divorce and separation.

It is estimated that between a third and half of all children will experience a period of not living with both natural parents during their childhood. Each one of those children will have a non-resident parent and in most cases it will be the father.

Official information is not regularly available on men who are fathers and who do not live with their children. The number of non-resident parents can be estimated from the number of lone parents whose former partners have not died. It is apparent, however, that most lone parents re-partner and are no longer lone parents. Bradshaw and Millar (1991) found that about 7 per cent of lone parents had had at least one child by a second child-bearing relationship and 1 per cent had a child from a third child-bearing relationship. Similarly, 11 per cent of fathers in their study admitted to having had children with more than one partner and 3 per cent had fathered children with three or more partners. To further complicate matters, men may not know about conceptions, they may conceal parenthood and may think they are the father of the child when they are not, and mothers can wrongly think that a certain man is the father of their child. Given the above problems it is therefore difficult to produce reasonable data on fatherhood in general, and specifically of the number of non-residental fathers in Britain. Bradshaw et al (1999), who have undertaken the most comprehensive study of non-resident fathers, estimated that, given the number of lone parents, there are certainly over two million and there could be as many as five million.

There are three routes to becoming a non residential father: a single man can have a sexual encounter with a women that results in her becoming pregnant and carrying the baby to term; a married couples may separate after a child or children have been born to the marriage, or after the wife is pregnant; and a cohabiting couples may separate from each other, either after the birth of a child or after the female partner is pregnant. In Bradshaw et al's (1999) sample, 10 per cent of non-resident fathers had been single, and 23 percent cohabiting – the vast majority (67 percent) had been married (Table 3)[3]. The

[3] The actual experiences of non-residential fathers are more complex than this suggests. This classification is based on the most recent, or only relationship involving children who were not living with their fathers. However, 10

largest group were divorced from a pervious marriage (25 per cent). Most men were now single (58 per cent); 24 percent were married and 18 per cent were cohabiting. Between these points in time, many of these men may have had other relationships, a few which involved the birth of a child who was now absent from the father's home (Table 3).

Table 3: Relationship status at the time of the interview compared with relationship status to the mother of the youngest non-resident child

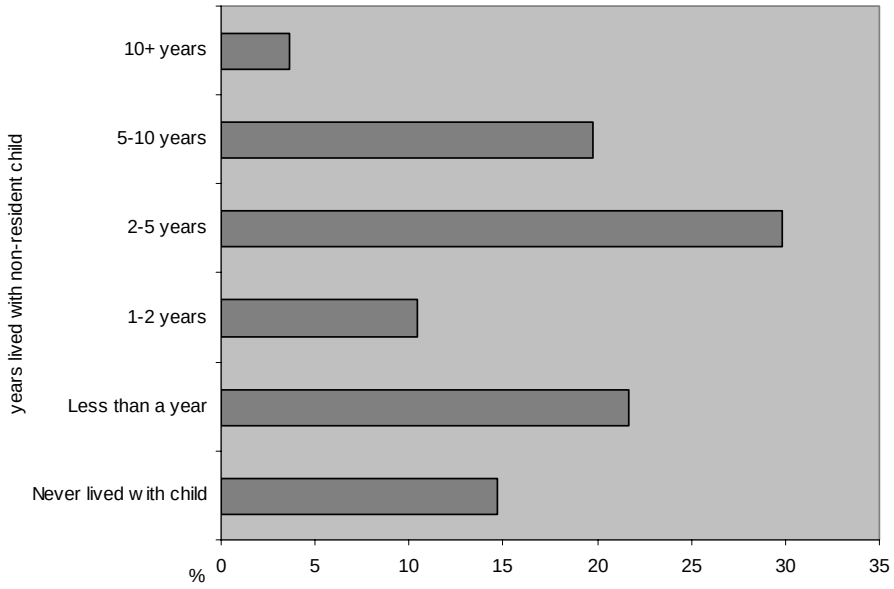
Relationship status to the mother of the youngest non-resident child	Percentage of the total %	Relationship status now	Percentage of the total %
Single	9.8	Single	7.5
		Married	1.0
		Cohabiting	1.3
Married	66.9	Single and separated	9.5
		Single and divorced	24.9
		Remarried	19.0
Cohabiting	23.3	Single	16.1
		Married	4.2
		Cohabiting	3.0
Total N=590	100		100

Source: Bradshaw et al (1999) Table 3.1.

The relationship between the father and child will be very different depending upon whether he has lived with them; in Bradshaw et al's (1999) sample, 15 per cent had never lived with their children (Figure 34). This includes those fathers who had never lived with the mother, and those who had lived with her but the relationship had ended before the child was born. A further 22 per cent of fathers had lived with their youngest or only non-resident child for less than a year, although 23 per cent had lived with them for at least 5 years. The majority of fathers (53 per cent) had only one non-resident child, although 14 per cent had 3 or more.

percent of the fathers in the study had had more than one such relationship. Moreover, many were now or would be in new relationships that might involve the birth of children and these might break down. If you take into account the different relationships that involve children, then the proportion in which the father is single is 11 per cent, cohabiting 23 per cent and married 66 percent.

Figure 34: Number of years father had lived with youngest or only or non-resident child



Source: Bradshaw et al (1999) Table 3.4.

Visiting

Non-resident parenting brings with it a complicated history of maintaining contact with their child(ren). Certain barriers have to be overcome by the non resident father if he is to maintain contact - both practical and emotional – including sustaining reasonable relations with the ex-partner. Bradshaw et al's study demonstrated that over half of non-resident fathers saw his children less than once a week and 21 per cent had not seen their child in the last year. Ten percent had not seen the child for more than 3 years, although only 3 per cent did not see the child at all. Studies of lone parents have suggested a lower level of contact. For example Bradshaw and Millar (1991)'s study with lone parents found that 57 percent of all non-resident parents had contact currently with their children but the proportion with contact tended to decline with the length of lone parenthood.

Visiting can mean very different things. A father seeing his child every week may only do so for an hour or so whilst another seeing his child only once a year may be seeing his child for many days at a time. Each type of contact is likely to result in a different kind and quality of relationship between father and

child. 4.8 per cent (38 fathers) of Bradshaw et al's (1999) sample had an arrangement that could be described as shared care – most commonly half the week with the father and half the week with the mother. These tended to be younger, girls, and only children and the father was likely to be living with a new partner. Excluding those with shared care arrangements and those who had not seen their child in the last year, the most common pattern, experienced by over a third of fathers/children, is for the father/child to stay for up to two nights. However, half of the visits do not involve overnight stays and 7 per cent are less than two hours. In general, the more infrequent contacts involved longer stays – those only seeing the child once or twice a year saw the child for over two nights. Of course frequency of visits may vary – for example in the school holidays - and the father and children may have contact in other ways in between periods – in fact 62 per cent said that they had contact with children via telephone/ letter/cards between visits, although 23 percent said that they had no contact in that way.

Table 4: Length of visits, by the frequency of the visits[1]

	Under 2 hours	2-6 hours	Up to a day not overnight	Up to two nights	Over two nights	***N***
At least once a week	6	25	23	40	7	*254*
Once every two weeks	7	13	18	47	15	*83*
Once a month	15	20	17	27	22	*41*
Once every three months	(2)	14	20	11	49	*35*
Once-twice a year	10	35	20	20	15	*20*
All	*7*	*22*	*21*	*37*	*14*	*433*

[1]*Exlcuding those with shared care and no contact with child in last year.*

Figures in brackets are numbers

Source: Source: Bradshaw et al (1999) Table 6.10.

Same-sex Parents

Relaxation of previously intolerant attitude towards homosexuality has been accompanied by a growing tendency for courts to allocate custody of children to mothers, and less often fathers, living in gay relationships. Moreover,

techniques of artificial insemination means that gay women may have children and become gay parent families without any heterosexual contacts.

LEAVING HOME

The parental home is the focus of inequality between parents and children and therefore leaving home and establishing a home of ones own represents liberation from parental control (Jones, 2000). The reason for leaving home used to be to marry and the median ages of leaving home could therefore be estimated from the median age of marriage. Now martial ages have increased, ages of leaving home have not followed suit. Rather, young people are leaving home before partnership and family formation and, if anything, they are leaving home earlier. Among young people living in households, the proportion is of 16-25 year olds living in their parental homes decreased from 61 % in 1982 to 58% in 1992. In the UK, the median age of leaving home varies between sex and social class – women leave home before men and the middle class before the working class (Jones, 2000). Ethnic differences are also apparent. Heath and Dales (1994) found that African-Carribean aged 16-20 were more likely to have left home than other ethnic groups, while Asian women, least likely. Moreover, those with step-parents tend to leave home before those living with natural parents. The majority of young people leave home in order to start a course or job away from their home area. However, a minority of young people are leaving because they do not get on with their parents. Generally, the younger the home leave, the more likely it is that they are leaving home for negative reasons (Jones, 2000).

Table 5: Proportion of 16-25 year olds by age and sex living in the parental home.

	1982	1987	1992
Males aged 16-17	96	96	95
Males aged 18-20	87	82	82
Males aged 21-25	45	44	46
Females aged 16-17	96	95	94
Females aged 18-20	70	69	68
Females aged 21-25	25	25	28
All	61	58	58

Source: UK Family Expenditure Survey, 1982-1992, Jones, 2000

However, there is evidence that returning home has increased . A study in Scotland found that the proportion of 19 year olds who had left the parental home had returned again doubled between 1987 and 1991 (Jones 1995). They may go back home when the course is finished, when they lose the job or when they split up with a partner.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that people are marrying later, or not at all, and a high proportion of partnerships breakdown. More people are having children outside marriage and an increasing proportion of parents are parenting alone, acting as step parents or undertaking the role of an absent father. The likelihood that a conception will end in abortion is growing, people are having children later, and a growing proportion never have children, which leads to low fertility. The demography of the family is influenced by many factors and these trends can be interpreted in several ways.

One interpretation is that the growth of individual self-realisation, satisfaction of personal preferences, liberalism and freedom from traditional forces of authority (such as religion), the emancipation of women and the consequent role for women in the paid labour market have all lead to increased material independence for women and, together with the contraceptive revolution, increased individual choice in relation to marriage and childbearing (Pearce et al,1999). Consequently, women are able to live independently, build a career, and choose to remain childless (or have fewer children) in order to fulfil their newly emancipated role. This may be the case for some women but we have seen that women's actions do not match their aspirations: women want more children than they actually mother. Far from being emancipated, this suggests that women's choices are being constrained.

A second explanation assumes that in deciding to have a child, people make considered calculation that the benefits of an additional child outweighs the costs. If economic costs of children rise, the psychological benefits will be outweigh and decisions will be made not to have a child. The psychological

benefits fall with each child as a person gets older. In a society in which the psychological benefits of having a child are low or economic costs of having a child are high, fertility will also be low, childlessness high and people will have fewer children. Thus a society that does not compensate for children will inevitably have fewer children. Decreased fertility rates, mainly due to an increase in childlessness, could therefore be a pragmatic response to the lack of social supports - having children is not economically rational or structurally possible.

An extension of this interpretation assumes that in having a child people make a decision to change their *future* life course and their decision depends upon their *future* orientation and therefore *future* cost and benefits. If people perceive economic, social or personal future to be under strain, they may decide not to have a child to avert the risk. As a result, people invest in economic security (education, attachment to the labour force, long hours of work, savings) rather than in the insecurity of having children.

The final interpretation lies with gender equity in family orientated institution and gender equity in individual – orientated institutions. If women are provided with opportunities near or equivalent to those of men in education and the labour market, but these opportunities are severely curtailed by having children, women will restrict the number of children they have and therefore fertility will be very low. Indeed, Hall has concluded that, given the availability of contraception, high level of education, rising living standards and how these impact on women's lives in term of labour force participation, 'it seems unlikely that fertility will rise much unless a wide range of public policy measures are introduced to help parents combine parenthood with paid work.' (1993:7). Women's labour force behaviour lies at the heart of most explanations of fertility and fertility change, and many nations have introduced policy on the incompatibility of caring for children and women's participation in economic activity. The next section will investigate the mother's and father's labour market behaviour in the UK and the final section analyses state support for children, including financial benefits and help towards reconciling work and parenting.

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