

Overview

Social Trends provides a unique overview of the state of the nation. In this year's edition there are updated statistics on population changes, labour market participation, key health indicators, travel patterns and environmental behaviour. In addition to these staple items, we also examine changing aspects of households, families and children, the theme of this year's *Social Trends*.

Chapter 1: Population shows that demographic patterns in the UK continue to change. In 2007, there were 61.0 million people resident in the UK. Falls in birth rates and decreases in mortality have resulted in the UK population being skewed towards the older age groups. Population projections indicate that by 2031 there will be more than 1.1 million people aged 90 and over in Great Britain. Population growth can also be attributed to changes in the pattern of people entering and leaving the UK. In 2007, net migration was 237,000, slightly below the record 244,000 in 2004. Of the UK nationals moving abroad in 2007, almost one-third were destined for Australia or New Zealand, with Spain and France also continuing to be a popular destination (24 per cent each).

As the UK population continues to grow there are notable changes in family and household types. **Chapter 2: Households and families** highlights the growing trend in one person households and lone parent families. In Q2 (April–June) 2008 these household types accounted for almost one-quarter of the proportion of the population living in private households in Great Britain. We also learn that adult children in the UK are living with their parents for longer and getting married later in life. Changing attitudes are affecting the age at which women give birth. In 2007, the average age for women giving birth in England and Wales was 29.3 years, compared with 26.6 years in 1971. Despite these changes in society more than one-half (56 per cent) of adults surveyed in 2006 agreed that marriage is still the best kind of relationship.

Chapter 3: Education and training highlights the major expansion in early years education and the different strategies available across the countries of the UK. The focus on pre-school education has undoubtedly helped to build a foundation for future learning and in 2006/07, we learn of increased numbers of young people in the UK continuing in full-time education beyond school leaving age. In this year, there were around 3.6 million further education students, more than twice the number than in 1970/71. In addition to following these traditional education routes, there has been an increase in job-related training and in the award of vocational qualifications.

Chapter 4: Labour market indicates that although the gap in employment rates between men and women was the smallest on record in Q2 2008, rates differ by household composition and the presence of dependent children. We learn that almost three-quarters of married or cohabiting mothers were in employment compared with more than one-half of lone parent mothers. The opportunity to work flexible hours may have contributed to women balancing home and work responsibilities. We also learn that people aged 50 and over and people born overseas have become an increasing feature of the labour market. The employment rate of older people increased from 33 per cent in Q2 1997 to 39 per cent in Q2 2008, while employment levels for non-UK born workers increased from 2.0 million to 3.7 million over the same period.

As well as differences in employment rates by household type, **Chapter 5: Income and wealth** indicates that the composition of income also varies between the different types of households. Wages and salaries formed 81 per cent of gross income in 2006/07 for couple households without dependent children in the UK under state pension age (65 for men and 60 for women). Social security benefits, excluding state pension, were more important to lone parent households, at 50 per cent of gross income. In addition, children were at greater risk of living in a low income family if they were living in a lone parent family. However, household net wealth has more than doubled in real terms over the last 20 years to 2007, and in 2006/07 we learn that households with two adults and no dependent children, where one or both were over state pension age, were most likely of all household types to have savings in excess of £20,000.

The increase in household wealth is reflected in **Chapter 6: Expenditure** where the volume of expenditure by UK households has almost tripled over the last 36 years. A result of this expenditure has been an increase in household ownership of consumer durables. Modern technology is a key feature of everyday life. In 2007, 78 per cent of UK households owned a mobile phone and 61 per cent had an Internet connection. We also examine the changes in expenditure patterns in 2008 as the economic downturn began. The amount of lending in the UK secured on dwellings fell to £4.4 billion by the third quarter of 2008, and bankruptcies in England and Wales rose sharply between 2003 and 2007.

Chapter 7: Health indicates that healthy lifestyles and improved diets have contributed to lower death rates for circulatory diseases among males and females in the UK. Over the past 33 years there has been a substantial decline in the proportion of adults in Great Britain who smoke cigarettes.

Despite these falls there are an increasing number of children and adults in England who are overweight or obese. We examine the link between affordability and access to a healthy diet. In England in 2007 the higher the level of weekly household income the more likely men and women are to meet the recommendation to eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

Changes in demographic patterns and household structures undoubtedly have an influence on social security benefit expenditure. [Chapter 8: Social protection](#) shows that £74.9 billion (60 per cent of benefit expenditure in Great Britain) in 2007/08 was directed at people above state pension age. In this year, 2.9 million people in Great Britain were in receipt of disability living allowance and 1.5 million received attendance allowance. The main support given to sick and disabled people is care provided through the National Health Service (NHS). According to the British Social Attitudes Survey in 2007, around one-quarter (24 per cent) of adults aged 18 and over in Great Britain thought that staffing levels of nurses in NHS hospitals were in need of a lot of improvement. Charities offer another source of social protection in the UK. The total number of calls and letters received by Childline increased by 53 per cent between 1997/98 and 2007/08, and the number of boys using this service more than doubled over this period.

[Chapter 9: Crime and justice](#) reports that the most recorded crime in England and Wales in 2007/08 was theft and handling stolen goods, with particularly high incidence rates of personal theft among young people. According to the 2006/07 British Crime Survey (BCS) 5 per cent of young people aged between 16 and 24 had their mobile phone stolen in the last 12 months. Of those offenders found guilty of, or cautioned for, theft and handling stolen goods in England and Wales in 2007, the most common sentence given was a community sentence (38 per cent). According to the BCS, overall confidence in the police in England and Wales increased between 2006/07 and 2007/08, and 83 per cent of respondents believed local police would treat them with respect if they had contact with them.

Changes in family and household structure combined with recent economic pressures have impacted on housebuilding and the housing market. In [Chapter 10: Housing](#), we examine the first percentage decrease in the number of housebuilding completions in the UK in more than five years. In the 11 months to November 2008 there were 870,000 residential property transactions in the UK, a large decrease from the 1.5 million recorded during the same period in 2007. We also learn that of all household types in England in 2006/07,

lone parents with dependent children spent the highest proportion (24 per cent) of their monthly income on mortgage repayments.

[Chapter 11: Environment](#) reveals that climate change is a key environmental concern of the European Union (EU-27) population. Individuals are taking measures to become more environmentally-friendly, although attitudes differ by household type. In 2007, couple households with dependent children in England were more likely to do one or two things that are environmentally-friendly than lone parent households with dependent children, 40 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. Recyclable material collected from households in England has increased rapidly over the last decade, possibly as a result of more recycling schemes and collections being introduced. Despite increased awareness of environmental issues, nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of adults aged 16 and over in England in 2007 left their television on stand-by overnight.

In [Chapter 12: Transport](#), we learn that in November 2008 the UK was the 12th most expensive country in the EU-27 in which to buy a litre of premium unleaded petrol. Despite this, the proportion of households with two cars in Great Britain increased more than fourfold between 1971 and 2007, to 27 per cent. We also find that government targets to improve road safety have contributed to the UK having one of the lowest road death rates among EU-27 member states in 2006, at 5.4 per 100,000 population. International travel and in particular the demand for air travel continued to rise. In 2007, 189 million passengers were carried between the UK and abroad, with 2009 projections suggesting that passenger numbers could reach 464 million by 2030.

Finally, [Chapter 13: Lifestyles and social participation](#) examines the growing popularity of holiday trips by UK residents to the EU member states that joined in 2004. Between 2003 and 2007 holiday trips to Latvia by UK residents increased by 1,164 per cent. Traditional leisure activities also remain popular: watching TV remained the most common activity undertaken in free time by men and women in England in 2006/07. In the same period theatre performances were the most common type of art event attended by all types of households, apart from lone parent households, for whom carnival and street events were more popular. The use of social networking sites on the Internet has become a popular way of communicating with family and friends. In 2007, nearly one-half (49 per cent) of people aged eight to 17 in the UK who use the Internet had a page or profile on a social networking site, compared with 15 per cent of parents with children in this age group.

Households, families and children

The underlying theme of *Social Trends 39* is households, families and children, and this introduction aims to provide an insight into how these three topics overlap. As illustrated by the contents of this edition, there are many national and official statistics produced relating to households, families and children. Sometimes it can be difficult to digest the volume of information available, in part because of the different ways in which households, families and children can be analysed. The first part of this introduction explains the different levels of analysis to help provide a better understanding of families in the UK.

Many topics, such as social security and benefits, naturally relate to households and families rather than to individuals. Household and family statistics also provide a greater understanding of kinship, social participation and economic dependence. The final part of this section explores some aspects of households, families and children based on the content of this edition of *Social Trends*.

The difference between households and families

Definitions of households and families have changed over time and are often the subject of debate. Nevertheless, existing definitions make clear the distinction between a household and a family. [Figure A.1](#) provides a summary of different household types, illustrating that not all households are family households.

A household may contain unrelated people who are financially or socially independent, but a family is defined as a couple (with or without children) or a lone parent with children. For

the purpose of government statistics, a family unit is almost identical to a benefit unit, although family units may include non-dependent children (children who are over 18 or aged 16 to 18 and not in full-time education).

In 2007 the UK population was 61 million (see [Table 1.1](#) in this edition of *Social Trends*), but not all of this population live in households, with approximately 1 per cent living in non-households (mainly communal establishments). The remaining 99 per cent live in either family or non-family households. [Table A.2](#) gives estimates of the household population in 1998 and 2008 based on the same categories shown in [Figure A.1](#) (the household population is also shown in [Table 2.3](#) in the Households and families chapter in this edition). Family households may include one family, more than one family or a family living with non-family members. The largest group of non-family households are one person households.

Families and children

There are three main types of family: a married couple, a cohabiting couple or a lone parent family. A family may also be a civil partnered or same-sex cohabiting couple ([Figure 2.15](#) shows the number of registered civil partnerships in the UK since 2005). Importantly, families may also be classified according to whether they contain children. A family may have: no children, dependent children, or non-dependent (adult) children only. Dependent children are those aged under 16 or those aged 16 to 18 and in full-time education.

Families with no children tend to be newly formed couples or couples whose children have either moved away from home or formed their own family. Once a child forms their own family (through partnership or having children) they are no longer included in their parent’s family, even if they live in the same household.

A common explanation for differences between family statistics is whether they look at all families or only families with children. The type of child is also important: many people use the term ‘child’ as shorthand for ‘dependent child’, so statistics on children often include only families with dependent children. It is important to remember that families may contain adult children, also known as non-dependent children. Different definitions are required for different purposes: for example, adult children are counted as separate benefit units from their parents ([Table 2.8](#) shows the number of adult children living with their parents and [Figure 2.9](#) indicates their reasons for staying at home).

The majority of dependent children in the UK live in families, but statistics on dependent children can still be confusing. For

Figure A.1
Household types

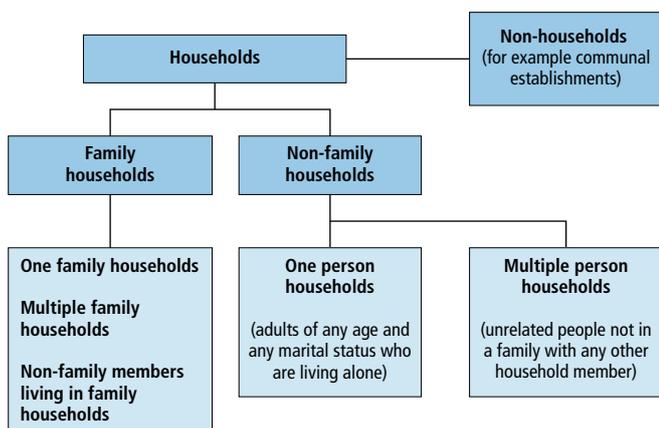


Table A.2

The household¹ population

United Kingdom

	1998 ²		2008 ²	
	People in households (millions)	People in households (percentages)	People in households (millions)	People in households (percentages)
People in family households	49.0	85	50.8	84
Family members ³ in one family households	47.6	82	48.7	80
Family members ³ in multiple family households	0.8	1	1.2	2
Non-family members ⁴ in family households	0.6	1	0.8	1
People in non-family households	8.7	15	9.8	16
People in one person households	6.7	12	7.5	12
People in multiple person households	1.9	3	2.3	4
All people in households	57.7	100	60.5	100

1 See Appendix, Part 2: Households.

2 Data are at Q2 (April–June) each year and are not seasonally adjusted. See Appendix, Part 4: Labour Force Survey.

3 Family members are nuclear family members (according to the ONS definition of a family). See Appendix, Part 2: Families.

4 Non-family members may still be related to other household members (for example, aunts and uncles).

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

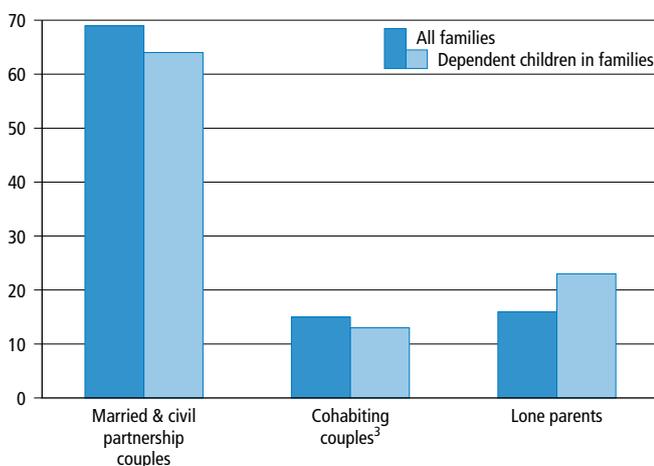
example, some statistics show the proportion of lone parent families with dependent children, while others show the proportion of dependent children living in lone parent families. To illustrate this point, [Figure A.3](#) shows that although lone

Figure A.3

Proportion of all families and dependent children¹ in families: by family type, 2008²

United Kingdom

Percentages



1 Children aged under 16 and those aged 16 to 18 who have never married and are in full-time education. See Appendix, Part 2: Families.

2 Data are at Q2 (April–June) and are not seasonally adjusted. See Appendix, Part 4: Labour Force Survey.

3 Includes same-sex couples.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

parent families accounted for 16 per cent of all families in the UK in Q2 2008, 23 per cent of dependent children lived in lone parent families.

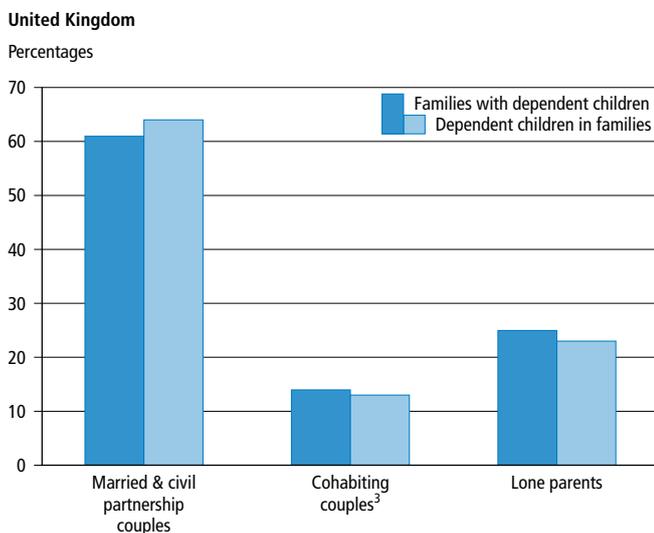
The main reason for this difference is the inclusion of couple families with no children in the overall family proportions (used to calculate the 16 per cent). A second difference is that the number of families includes families with adult (non-dependent) children only. As illustrated by [Figure A.4 overleaf](#), a more appropriate comparison might use the proportion of families with dependent children that are lone parents rather than overall family proportions. The comparison in [Figure A.4](#) shows that the proportion of dependent children in lone parent families (23 per cent) is actually slightly lower than the proportion of families with dependent children that are lone parents (25 per cent).

Family transitions

Aside from estimates of households and families at a given point in time, another consideration is the stability of household and family forms. One aspect of this is family transitions, or the flow of people between different family types over time. For example, the proportion of married couples may remain the same from one year to the next, even if there are large changes in the number of marriages and divorces. Marriage and divorce are two types of family transition (for more information see Chapter 2: Households and families in the Partnerships section). The birth of a child

Figure A.4

Proportion of families with dependent children¹ and proportion of dependent children in families: by type, 2008²



- 1 Children aged under 16 and those aged 16 to 18 who have never married and are in full-time education. See Appendix, Part 2: Families.
- 2 Data are at Q2 (April–June) and are not seasonally adjusted. See Appendix, Part 4: Labour Force Survey.
- 3 Includes same-sex couples.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

is another event that may cause a family transition (a change in family type). This depends on the family for which the birth occurs. A couple without children will become a couple with dependent children. Female adults living alone will become lone mothers and therefore be defined as a family from the moment they register their child's birth.

Some family transitions are easier to measure than others. As cohabitations are not registered or formally dissolved, it is very difficult to measure the flow of people into and out of cohabiting families. The same could be said for other household types such as one person households. One particular issue is that changes in the estimates of different household and family types will not only occur because of partnership formation and dissolution, or births to parents, but also because of migration, death and children leaving (or returning) home. Any attempt to reconcile movements of people between household and family types will be confounded by these issues. These issues are in addition to any misreporting of families by survey respondents. It is worth remembering that different individuals will respond to questions about families and relationships in different ways. For example, parents may report that their adult children still live at home, while the children believe that they are living independently.

Aspects of households, families and children

There are many aspects of society that vary according to household or family type. *Social Trends* gives an insight into these aspects and how they change over time. The remainder of this overview introduces some key aspects of households, families and children that appear in *Social Trends* (see the individual chapters for more information).

Since the 1960s there have been several long-term trends that have affected UK families (see Chapter 2: Households and families). The most significant of these include rises in the numbers of people cohabiting and living alone, and a fall in marriage rates. Fertility rates fell after reaching a peak in the 1960s and stabilised in the 1980s (although they have recently begun to rise). Additionally, there was an increase in divorce rates in the 1970s, after which divorce rates have remained broadly stable (and have fallen in the last few years). There is much debate in academic research about the reasons for these social changes: many factors are likely to be involved, but two of the most commonly cited are the rise of individualism and changes in the roles of the sexes.

Families, employment and income

The economic activity of women in the UK has increased over the last ten years (Table 4.2) and the median gender pay gap in Great Britain has decreased since 1975 (Figure 5.10). Nevertheless, broad social changes have not affected all people equally. For example, the gender pay gap is much larger at older ages and employment rates vary by family type and age. Young lone mothers in the UK have the lowest employment rate (Table 4.6), and lone parents (male and female) with dependent children are more likely to be unemployed than couples with dependent children (Table 4.17). Despite this, women with dependent children over 10 years old are no less likely to be in work than women who have no dependent children (Table 4.3). In some cases, caution should be exercised when generalising about differences between the sexes. Table 4.17 shows that although men and women have similar levels of unemployment overall, in some families men are more likely to be unemployed than women. In Q2 2008, unemployment rates for 16 to 24-year-old married or cohabiting fathers (20 per cent) were slightly higher than for equivalent mothers (14 per cent).

There is an obvious link between employment and income, but income is also affected by savings and benefits. This is particularly true for lone parents with one or more dependent children. Compared with other households in the UK, a smaller

proportion of lone parent household income is from wages and salaries, and a larger proportion is from benefits (Table 5.7). For families with dependent children, 89 per cent of lone parents receive one or more income-related benefit compared with 56 per cent of couples (Table 8.19). Both family types are equally likely to be claiming child benefit, but lone parents in Great Britain are more likely to have persistent low incomes (Table 5.19). Another factor affecting income is household savings (excluding pension rights and property). In 2006/07 lone parent households with one or more dependent children in the UK were more likely than couple households with one or more dependent children to have no savings, 53 per cent and 28 per cent respectively (Table 5.21).

Children in families

Parents with young children often require child care to enable them to work and working mothers in Great Britain were more likely to rely on informal child care than formal child care (Table 8.20). More than one-quarter of working mothers used formal child care, regardless of family type, and a similar proportion of working mothers in each family type used informal care provided by grandparents (31 per cent for lone parents and 32 per cent for couples). Lone parent working mothers were more likely than those in couples to use other types of informal care, such as ex-partners or non-resident parents, and older siblings or other relatives.

Children enter the education system at different ages, but in the long-run there has been an increase in early years education. The proportion of children at school in the UK aged under five has risen from 21 per cent in 1970/71 to more than 60 per cent in 2007/08 (Figure 3.1). The majority of dependent children are in education, which means that leaving the education system is usually synonymous with becoming non-dependent (children aged 16 to 18 are only defined as dependent if they are in full-time education). Eventually, most non-dependent children will leave home, but the number of these (adult) children living with their parents has increased over the last six years, particularly for those aged 20 to 24 (Table 2.8). The most common reason given for this is because they cannot afford to buy or rent, (Figure 2.9 and Table 10.17).

Living arrangements

There are variations in the proportion of households living in different types of dwelling (Table 10.6). For example, compared with other household types in Great Britain, couples are more likely to live in houses or bungalows, whereas one person households are more likely to live in a flat or maisonette. Lone parents are more likely than other household types to live in a

terraced house, and in England they are also more likely to be accepted as homeless (Figure 10.9), or to report poor living conditions (compared with all households with children, Table 10.12).

Overall satisfaction with the area lived in is strongly related to household type (Table 10.14). For example, couple households with no dependent children are more likely than other household types to be satisfied with the area where they live.

Other aspects of families

Another important activity that concerns many UK households is the provision of informal care. When informal care is provided from within the same household, the carer is most likely to be a partner (Figure 8.8). However, it is important to remember that over 60 per cent of informal care is provided by a non-household member, most often by a parent. Families are not just a source of care, but also a source of help: 40 per cent of men aged 55 and over reported receiving help with shopping or work around the house and garden from a partner and 23 per cent from a child or child-in-law (Table 8.18). The equivalent figures for women were 29 per cent and 36 per cent respectively.

There are many other aspects of households and families discussed in this edition of *Social Trends*, and the above is just a flavour of the information available. Other items relating to families and households include:

- the qualifications of couples and lone parents by family type (Table 3.19)
- work and workless households by regions and countries of the UK (Table 4.4)
- household expenditure by selected household types (Table 6.5 and Table 6.6)
- attitudes towards extra spending on social benefits by household type (Table 8.2)
- attitudes towards the environment by household type (Table 11.2)

Conclusion

One aim of this overview is to help explain the definitions and terminology relating to households, families and children. The text, tables and charts provide an explanation of the different types of analysis. This helps to make the statistics more accessible and help to build a more comprehensive understanding of households, families and children in the UK.

Increasing understanding is not only helpful for interpreting the information in Chapter 2: Households and families, but

also the rest of the chapters in this edition. There are very few aspects of society that do not touch upon households, families and children, and these three themes provide one way to explore the wealth of information in this edition of *Social Trends*.

Looking to the future, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) continuously aims to improve data, methods and statistical reporting on households, families and children. Work is under way to develop knowledge of family transitions and link analysis of families with other topics in demography. Other

project work aims to develop knowledge of non-resident parents using the Omnibus survey. In addition, ONS continues to focus on preparations for the 2011 Census, which should provide more detailed information on families than any previous census.

ONS welcomes any questions, comments or contributions relating to this section or the content of this edition of *Social Trends*. For questions relating specifically to families, please contact: ben.wilson@ons.gov.uk. For all other questions, please email: social.trends@ons.gov.uk.