

## Households and families

- The number of households in Great Britain increased by 30 per cent between 1971 and 2005 from 18.6 million to 24.2 million. (Table 2.1)
- The proportion of one-person households in Great Britain increased by 9 percentage points between 1971 and 1991, and a further 2 percentage points to 29 per cent in 2001 and then remained at this level to 2005. (Table 2.1)
- In England, young men were more likely than young women to live with their parents. In 2005, 57 per cent of men aged 20 to 24 did so compared with 38 per cent of women of the same age. (Table 2.5)
- In spring 2005 nearly one in four dependent children lived in a lone-parent family in Great Britain. (Page 24)
- In 2001 people from the Mixed ethnic group were the most likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group in England and Wales. (Figure 2.10)
- In England and Wales the average age of mothers at childbirth increased by over two years from 26.6 in 1971 to 28.9 in 2004. (Table 2.17)
- There has been a rise in the proportion of births occurring outside marriage. In 1980, 12 per cent of all births in the United Kingdom were outside marriage; by 2004 this had increased to 42 per cent. (Table 2.19)

People live in a variety of household types over their lifetime. They may leave their parental home, form partnerships, marry and have children. They may also experience separation and divorce, lone-parenthood, and the formation of new partnerships, leading to new households and second families. People may also spend more time living on their own, either before forming relationships, after a relationship has broken down, or after the death of a spouse.

## Household composition

There were 24.2 million households in Great Britain in spring 2005 (Table 2.1). Although the population has been increasing, the number of households has increased faster because of the trend towards smaller household sizes. The number of households in Great Britain increased by 30 per cent between 1971 and 2005. The average household size fell over this period from 2.9 to 2.4 people. More lone-parent families, smaller family sizes, and the increase in one-person households has contributed to this decrease. The rise in one-person households has levelled off in recent years. As a proportion of all households it increased by 9 percentage points between 1971 and 1991, and a further 2 percentage points to 2001 and then remained at this level to 2005.

There has been a decrease in the proportion of households containing the 'traditional' family unit – couple families with dependent children – and an increase in the proportion of lone-parent families (Table 2.2). The proportion of households in Great Britain comprising a couple with dependent children fell from over a third in 1971 to less than a quarter in 2005. Over the same period the proportion of lone-parent

**Table 2.1**  
**Households:<sup>1</sup> by size**

Great Britain	Percentages				
	1971	1981	1991	2001 <sup>2</sup>	2005 <sup>2</sup>
One person	18	22	27	29	29
Two people	32	32	34	35	35
Three people	19	17	16	16	16
Four people	17	18	16	14	13
Five people	8	7	5	5	5
Six or more people	6	4	2	2	2
All households (=100%) (millions)	18.6	20.2	22.4	23.8	24.2
Average household size (number of people)	2.9	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.4

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Part 2: Households.

<sup>2</sup> At spring. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting.

Source: Census, Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

**Table 2.2**  
**Households:<sup>1</sup> by type of household and family**

Great Britain	Percentages				
	1971	1981	1991	2001 <sup>2</sup>	2005 <sup>2</sup>
<b>One person</b>					
Under state pension age	6	8	11	14	15
Over state pension age	12	14	16	15	14
<b>One family households</b>					
<b>Couple<sup>3</sup></b>					
No children	27	26	28	29	29
1–2 dependent children <sup>4</sup>	26	25	20	19	18
3 or more dependent children <sup>4</sup>	9	6	5	4	4
Non-dependent children only	8	8	8	6	6
<b>Lone parent<sup>3</sup></b>					
Dependent children <sup>4</sup>	3	5	6	7	7
Non-dependent children only	4	4	4	3	3
<b>Two or more unrelated adults</b>	4	5	3	3	3
<b>Multi-family households</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>All households</b> (=100%) (millions)	18.6	20.2	22.4	23.8	24.2

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Part 2: Households, and Families.

<sup>2</sup> At spring. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting.

<sup>3</sup> Other individuals who were not family members may also be included.

<sup>4</sup> May also include non-dependent children.

Source: Census, Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

households with dependent children doubled, to 7 per cent of households in 2005.

While Table 2.2 shows that over half of households were headed by a couple in spring 2005, Table 2.3 is based on people. It shows that over two thirds of people living in private households lived in couple family households in 2005. However, since 1971 the proportion of people living in the traditional family household of a couple with dependent children has fallen from just over a half to just over a third, while the proportion of people living in couple family households with no children has increased from almost a fifth to a quarter. One in eight people lived in a lone-parent household in spring 2005 – three times the proportion in 1971.

One of the most notable changes in household composition over the last three decades has been the increase in one-person households. In 2005 there were 7 million people living alone in Great Britain. The proportion of such households increased from 18 per cent in 1971 to 27 per cent in 1991. It then rose slightly to 29 per cent in 2001 and remained at this

**Table 2.3**  
**People in households:<sup>1</sup> by type of household and family**

Great Britain	Percentages				
	1971	1981	1991	2001 <sup>2</sup>	2005 <sup>2</sup>
<b>One person</b>	6	8	11	12	12
<b>One family households</b>					
Couple					
No children	19	20	23	25	25
Dependent children <sup>3</sup>	52	47	41	39	37
Non-dependent children only	10	10	11	8	9
Lone parent	4	6	10	12	12
<b>Other households</b>	9	9	4	4	5
<b>All people in private households (=100%) (millions)</b>	53.4	53.9	55.4	56.4	57.0
<b>People not in private households (millions)</b>	0.9	0.8	0.8	..	..
<b>Total population (millions)<sup>4</sup></b>	54.4	54.8	56.2	57.4	..

1 See Appendix, Part 2: Households, and Families.  
 2 At spring. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting.  
 3 May also include non-dependent children.  
 4 Data for 1971 to 1991 are census enumerated. Data for 2001 are 2001 mid-year estimates.

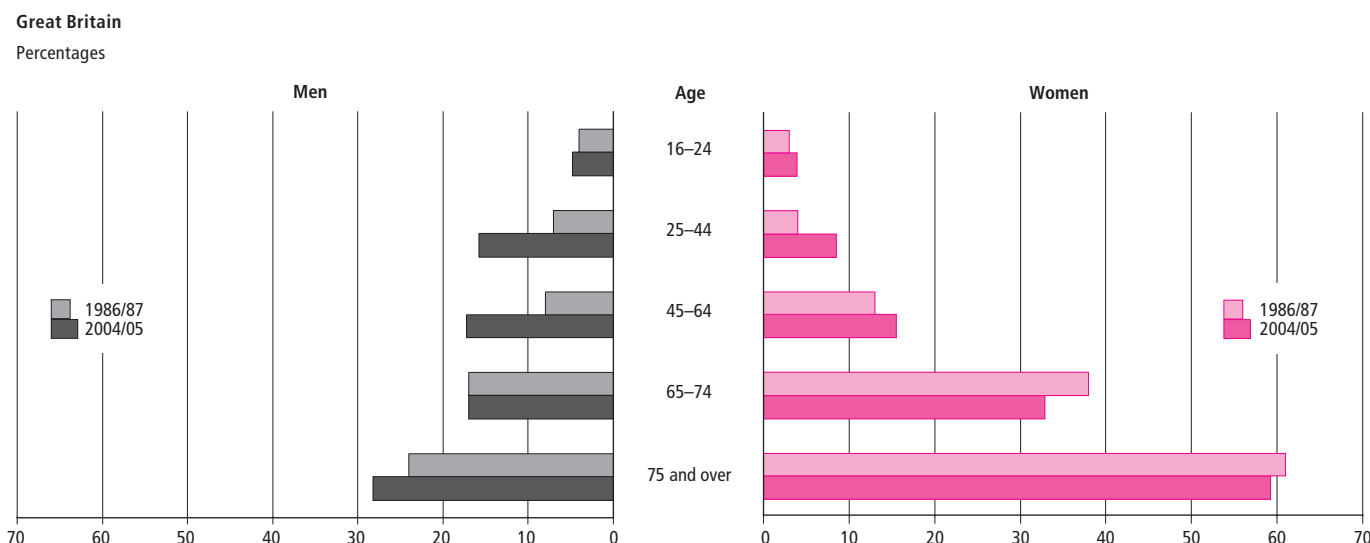
Source: Census, Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

level to 2005. In the mid-1980s and 1990s these households mainly comprised older women. This was a reflection of there being fewer men than women in older age groups and, in particular, the tendency for women to outlive their partners. In 2004/05, 59 per cent of women aged 75 and over were living alone, much the same proportion as in 1986/87 (Figure 2.4). More recently there has been an increasing tendency for people to live on their own at younger ages. The largest increases over the past 20 years were among people aged 25 to 44 and men aged 45 to 64. These proportions more than doubled between 1986/87 and 2004/05.

Another notable change in family structure and relationships has been the increase in the number of adults who live with their parents (Table 2.5 overleaf). Some young people may remain at home while in education or because of economic necessity, such as difficulties entering the housing market (see Figure 10.22). Others may simply choose to continue living with their parents. Young men were more likely than young women to live with their parents. In 2005, 57 per cent of men aged 20 to 24 did so compared with 38 per cent of women of the same age. Between 1991 and 2005 the proportion of men and women in this age group who were living with their parents increased by over 6 percentage points.

There have been changes in the proportion of dependent children within different family types. There has been a fall in the percentage of children living in families headed by a couple with

**Figure 2.4**  
**People living alone: by sex and age<sup>1</sup>**



1 Data from 2001/02 onwards are weighted to compensate for nonresponse and to match known population distributions.

Source: General Household Survey, Office for National Statistics

Table 2.5

## Adults living with their parents: by sex and age

England	Percentages				
	1991	2001 <sup>1</sup>	2002 <sup>1</sup>	2004 <sup>1</sup>	2005 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Men</b>					
20–24	50	57	56	59	57
25–29	19	22	19	23	23
30–34	9	8	8	8	8
<b>Women</b>					
20–24	32	36	37	38	38
25–29	9	11	10	11	11
30–34	5	3	2	4	3

<sup>1</sup> At spring. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting.

Source: Survey of English Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

three or more children since the early 1970s, and for couple families with two children since the early 1980s (Table 2.6). In spring 2005, 76 per cent of children lived in a family unit headed by a couple, compared with 92 per cent in 1972. In contrast there was an increase in the percentage of children living in lone-parent families which increased from 7 per cent in 1972 to 24 per cent in spring 2005. Lone mothers head around nine out of ten lone-parent families.

Table 2.6

Dependent children:<sup>1</sup> by family type

Great Britain	Percentages				
	1972	1981	1992 <sup>2</sup>	2001 <sup>2</sup>	2005 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Couple families</b>					
1 child	16	18	17	17	18
2 children	35	41	38	37	36
3 or more children	41	29	28	24	23
<b>Lone mother families</b>					
1 child	2	3	5	6	7
2 children	2	4	6	8	8
3 or more children	2	3	5	6	6
<b>Lone father families</b>					
1 child	..	1	1	1	1
2 or more children	1	1	1	1	1
<b>All children<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Part 2: Families.

<sup>2</sup> At spring. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes cases where the dependent child is a family unit, for example, a foster child.

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

## 'Reference person' definitions

Though the majority of households contain one family, some households contain multiple families, while others do not contain a family at all (for example, where the household consists of only one person or of non-related adults). This chapter mainly refers to the household reference person but some data are based on the family reference person. The UK Census 2001 defines family reference person and household reference person as follows:

## Family reference person (FRP)

In a couple family, the FRP is chosen from the two people in the couple on the basis of their economic activity. If both people have the same economic activity, the FRP is defined as the elder of the two, or if they are the same age, the first member of the couple on the form. The FRP is taken to be the lone parent in a lone-parent family.

## Household reference person (HRP)

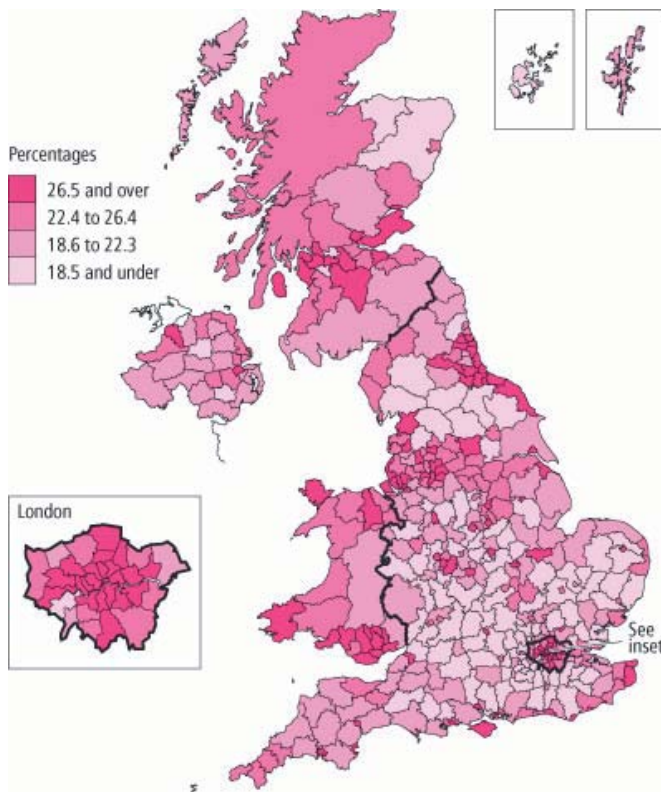
For a person living alone, this person is the HRP. If the household contains one family the HRP is the same as the FRP. If there is more than one family in the household, the HRP is chosen from among the FRPs using the same criteria for choosing the FRP. If there is no family, the HRP is chosen from the individuals using the same criteria.

Among families with dependent children in the United Kingdom a high proportion of lone-parent families live in London and other built-up and industrial areas, such as Glasgow City and Manchester. In nine London boroughs, over 40 per cent of families with dependent children were lone-parent families in 2001; the highest were in Lambeth (48 per cent), Islington (47 per cent) and Southwark (46 per cent) (Map 2.7). Lone parenthood and cohabitation are more prevalent among the younger adults in Great Britain and this was reflected by major cities that had younger age structures (including Manchester, Glasgow City, Liverpool, Belfast and Nottingham). Across the United Kingdom the smallest proportion of lone-parent families were in the South East and East of England. Cohabiting couples with dependent children were least common in Northern Ireland. There were larger than average proportions of married couple families with dependent children in Northern Ireland, East Renfrewshire in Scotland and Hart in the South East of England.

Family type also varies by ethnic group. In the United Kingdom families of Asian and Chinese ethnic origin with dependent children were most likely to be married and least likely to be lone-parent families (Figure 2.8). In 2001, 85 per cent of Indian families with dependent children were headed by a married couple. Lone-parent families were most common among

### Map 2.7

#### Lone parent families with dependent children, 2001<sup>1</sup>



1 Unitary and local authorities in England, unitary authorities in Wales, council areas in Scotland and district council areas in Northern Ireland.

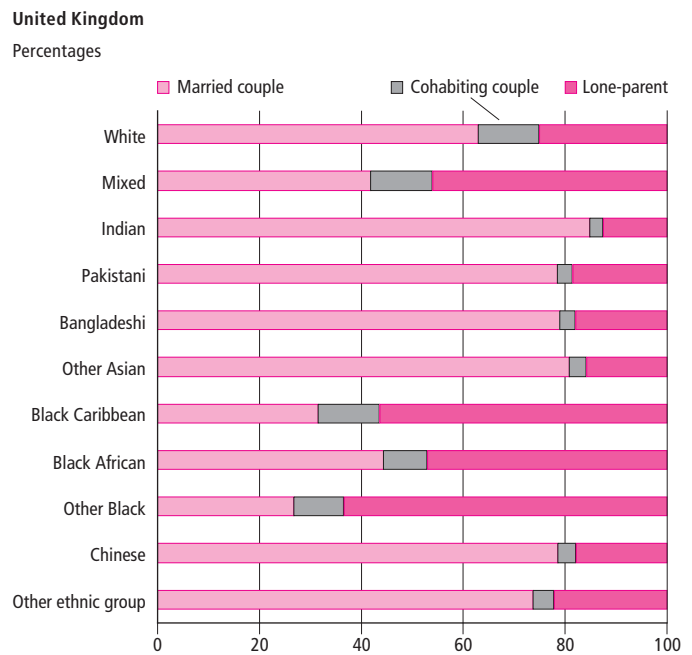
Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics; Census 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Other Black (64 per cent), Black Caribbean (57 per cent), Black African (47 per cent), and Mixed ethnic groups (46 per cent). Cohabiting couple families with dependent children were most common among Mixed, Black Caribbean and White families.

Among all families, those headed by a person of non-White ethnic background were more likely than White families to have dependent children living in them. In 2001 nearly four out of five Bangladeshi families in the United Kingdom contained at least one dependent child compared with over two out of five White families (the smallest for any ethnic group). Over 70 per cent of Black African, Other Black and Pakistani families had dependent children. These differences partly reflect the age structures of the non-White ethnic groups, and past immigration and fertility patterns. In 2001 Bangladeshi and Pakistani families were larger than families of all other ethnic groups, with an average household size of over four. The average family size of Indian and Other Asian families was more than three. Households headed by a person of White Irish, Black Caribbean or White British origin tend to be the smallest (2.2 to 2.3).

### Figure 2.8

#### Families with dependent children: by ethnic group and family type, 2001



Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics; Census 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

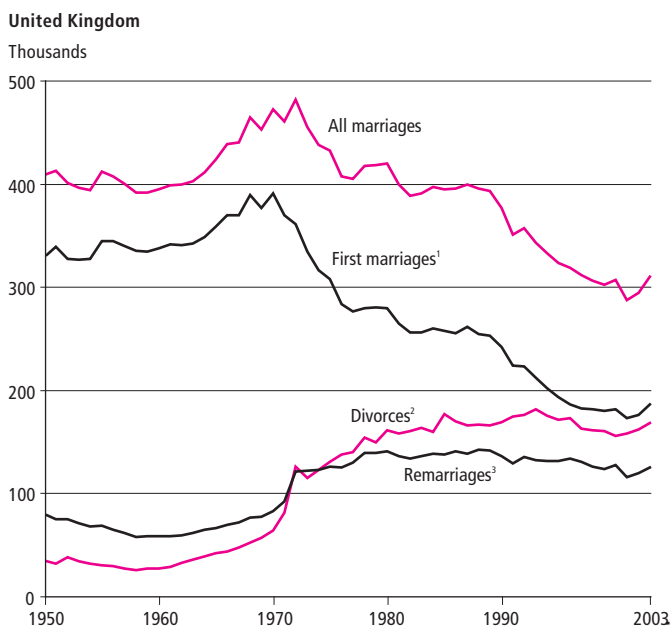
### Partnerships

The pattern of partnership formation has changed since the early 1970s but, despite the decrease in the overall numbers of people marrying, married couples are still the main type of partnership for men and women. In 2005 there were 17.1 million families in the United Kingdom and around seven in ten were headed by a married couple.

In 1950 there were 408,000 marriages in the United Kingdom. The number grew during the mid- to late-1960s to reach a peak of 480,300 in 1972. This growth was partly a result of the babies born in the immediate post-war boom reaching marriageable ages. Also at that time people got married at younger ages than in more recent years. The annual number of marriages then began to decline to reach a low of 286,100 in 2001 (Figure 2.9 overleaf). However there have since been indications of a slight increase. In 2003 there were 308,600 marriages, which was the second successive annual rise. It is too early to tell if this will become a longer term trend.

The age at which people get married for the first time has continued to rise. In 1971 the average age at first marriage was 25 for men and 23 for women in England and Wales; this increased to 31 for men and 29 for women in 2003. There has been a similar trend across Europe. Between 1971 and 2002 the average age at first marriage in the European Union prior

**Figure 2.9**  
**Marriages and divorces**



1 For both partners.  
2 Includes annulments. Data for 1950 to 1970 for Great Britain only.  
3 For one or both partners.

Source: Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

to the ten accession countries joining in 2004 (the EU-15) increased from 26 to 30 for men and 23 to 28 for women. There were differences between all 25 Member States of the European Union (EU-25). In 2003 the country with the youngest newly-weds was Lithuania (27 for men and 24 for women). Sweden had the oldest (33 for men and 31 for women). Traditionally women have married men who are older than themselves. The average age difference between partners in first marriages ranged from just under two years in Ireland and in Portugal, to just under four years in Greece.

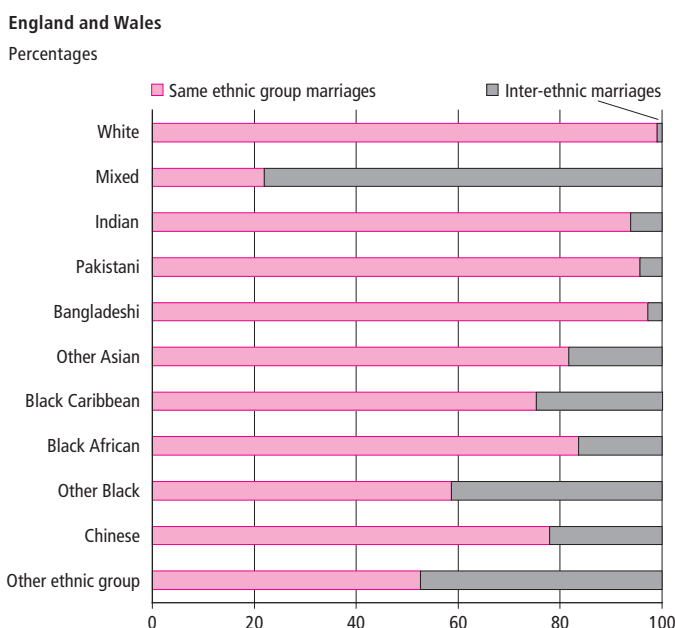
In England and Wales, three quarters of women marry men older than themselves. However an increasing proportion of women are marrying younger men. The proportion of couples where the husband was younger than the wife increased from 15 per cent for those who married in 1963 to 26 per cent for those who married in 2003. Over the same period, the proportion of couples where the man was at most five years older than the woman fell from just under two thirds to just under a half. There was only a small change in the proportion of marriages where the man was more than five years older than the woman: 21 per cent in 1963 compared with 27 per cent in 2003.

Two per cent of marriages were between people from different ethnic backgrounds in England and Wales in 2001. Proportions

of inter-ethnic marriages vary greatly between ethnic groups. People from the Mixed ethnic group were the most likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group (78 per cent). This group is relatively small and there are limited opportunities to marry someone from the same ethnic group. White people are the least likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group.

Black Caribbeans were more likely to be in an inter-ethnic marriage than Black Africans. Married people of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnicity had the lowest proportion of inter-ethnic marriages of the ethnic minority groups (Figure 2.10). Only 6 per cent of Indians, 4 per cent of Pakistanis and 3 per cent of Bangladeshis had married someone outside the South Asian group. This low inter-ethnic marriage rate may be explained by the fact that as well as cultural differences between the ethnic groups, people from South Asian backgrounds generally have different religions to people from other ethnic groups (see article on ethnic and religious populations, page 1). The most common inter-ethnic marriages were between White and Mixed ethnic groups (26 per cent). The next most common were between a White person and someone who described their ethnic group as 'Other' (15 per cent), followed by White and Black Caribbean marriages (12 per cent) and White and Indian marriages (11 per cent).

**Figure 2.10**  
**Inter-ethnic marriages:¹ by ethnic group, 2001**



1 Defined as a marriage between people from different aggregate ethnic groups. For example, a White person married to someone from a non-White ethnic group or a Pakistani person married to someone from a non-Asian ethnic group.

Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

**Table 2.11**

**Non-married people<sup>1</sup> cohabiting: by marital status and sex, 2004/05**

Great Britain	Percentages	
	Men	Women
Single	23	27
Widowed	12	6
Divorced	36	29
Separated	23	11

*1 Aged 16 to 59. Includes those who described themselves as separated but were, in a legal sense, still married.*

**Source: General Household Survey, Office for National Statistics**

The number of divorces taking place each year in Great Britain more than doubled between 1958 and 1969. By 1972 the number of divorces in the United Kingdom had doubled again. This latter increase was partly a result of the *Divorce Reform Act 1969* in England and Wales, which came into effect in 1971. The Act introduced a single ground for divorce – irrevocable breakdown – which could be established by proving one or more certain facts: adultery; desertion; separation either with or without consent; or unreasonable behaviour. Divorce was also permitted in Northern Ireland from 1969. Although there was a slight drop in the number of divorces in 1973, the number rose again in 1974 and peaked in 1993 at 180,000. The number of divorces then fell to 154,600 in 2000. In 2004 the number of divorces in the United Kingdom was 167,100, the fourth successive annual rise. The average age of divorce has increased over time from 39 in 1991 to 43 in 2004 for husbands and from 36 to 40 for wives for the same period.

Following divorce, people often form new relationships and may remarry. Remarriages, for one or both partners, increased by a third between 1971 and 1972 (after the introduction of the *Divorce Reform Act 1969*) in the United Kingdom, and peaked at 141,900 in 1988. In 2003 there were 123,300 remarriages, accounting for two fifths of all marriages.

The proportion of non-married people cohabiting has increased greatly since the mid-1980s among both men and women. The rise in cohabitation may in part be related to people marrying later in life. The percentage of non-married men and women under the age of 60 cohabiting in Great Britain increased between 1986 (the earliest year data are available on a consistent basis) and 2004; from 11 per cent to 24 per cent for men and from 13 per cent to 25 per cent for women.

Cohabiting men were usually divorced, whereas cohabiting women were equally likely to be divorced or single. In 2004/05,

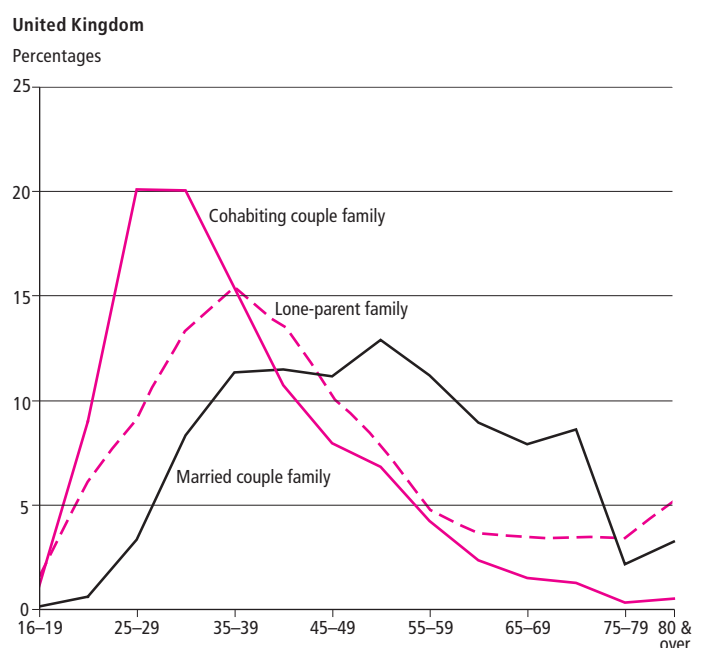
36 per cent of divorced men and 29 per cent of divorced women aged under 60 were cohabiting; 23 per cent of cohabiting men under 60 were separated compared with 11 per cent of women (Table 2.11).

Cohabiting couple families are much younger than married couple families. In 2001, 50 per cent of cohabiting couple families in the United Kingdom were headed by a person aged under 35 compared with only 12 per cent of married couple families (Figure 2.12). A couple's age is taken from one of the adults. The difference in age between cohabiting and married couple families is mostly explained by whether they have children living with them. Cohabiting couples with no children were younger than married couples. This reflects the increase in the number of people cohabiting instead of, or before, getting married. Lone-parent families in 2001 were also younger than married couple families and lone-mother families were younger than lone-father families. Over 60 per cent of families with dependent children were headed by a person in their 30s or early 40s.

Changes in patterns of cohabitation, marriage and divorce have led to considerable changes in the family environment since the early 1970s. The number of children aged under 16 in England and Wales who experienced the divorce of their parents

**Figure 2.12**

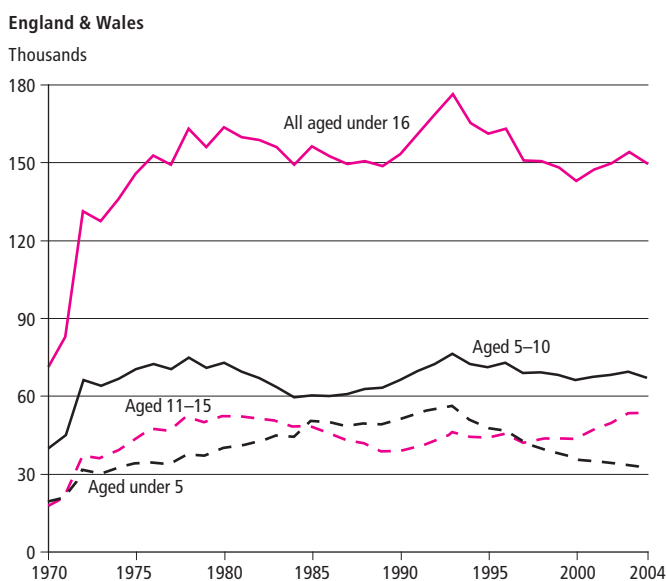
**Age of family reference person:<sup>1</sup> by family type, 2001**



*1 All families where the family reference person is aged 16 and over.*

**Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics; Census 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency**

**Figure 2.13**  
**Children of divorced couples: by age of child**



Source: Office for National Statistics

**Table 2.14**  
**Stepfamilies<sup>1</sup> with dependent children:<sup>2</sup> by family type, 2001**

United Kingdom		
	Percentages	Thousands
Married couples with children from:		
woman's previous marriage/cohabitation	81	303.9
man's previous marriage/cohabitation	15	57.0
both partners, previous marriage/cohabitation	4	16.4
<b>All married couple stepfamilies</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>377.3</b>
Cohabiting couples with children from:		
woman's previous marriage/cohabitation	85	265.8
man's previous marriage/cohabitation	10	32.4
both partners, previous marriage/cohabitation	5	15.1
<b>All cohabiting couple stepfamilies</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>313.3</b>
All couples with children from:		
woman's previous marriage/cohabitation	82	569.7
man's previous marriage/cohabitation	13	89.4
both partners, previous marriage/cohabitation	5	31.5
<b>All stepfamilies</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>690.7</b>

1 All stepfamilies where the family reference person is aged 16 and over. A 'stepfamily' is one where there is a child (or children) who belongs to only one member of the married or cohabiting couple.  
2 A dependent child is a person in a household aged 0 to 15 (whether or not in a family) or a person aged 16 to 18 who is a full-time student in a family with parent(s).

Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics; Census 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

peaked at 176,000 in 1993 (Figure 2.13). This fell to 142,500 in 2000, and then increased each year to reach 153,500 in 2003. This number decreased the following year by 3 per cent to 149,300 in 2004. A fifth of children affected by divorce in 2004 were under five years old and just under two thirds were aged ten or under.

Children are living in an increasing variety of different family structures during their lives. Parents separating can result in lone-parent families, and new relationships can create stepfamilies. The General Household Survey (GHS) showed that 10 per cent of all families with dependent children in Great Britain were stepfamilies in 2004/05. As children tend to stay with their mother following the break-up of a previous relationship, the vast majority (over 80 per cent) consisted of a stepfather and natural mother and 10 per cent consisted of a stepmother and natural father. In the 2001 Census, 38 per cent of cohabiting couple families with dependent children were stepfamilies compared with 8 per cent of married couple families with dependent children. Married couple stepfamilies were also more likely than cohabiting couple stepfamilies to have natural dependent children as well as stepchildren (57 per cent compared with 35 per cent) (Table 2.14).

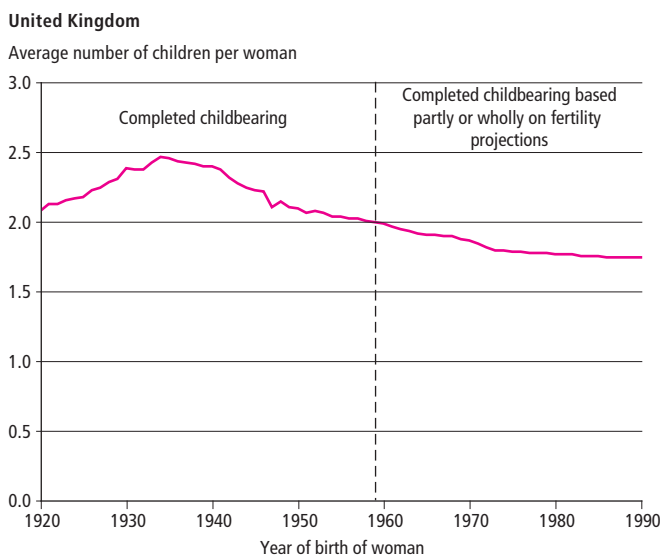
**Family formation**

Fertility patterns influence the size of households and families, and also affect the age structure of the population. The number of births fluctuated throughout the 20th century, but the overall trend was downward. There were sharp peaks in births at the end of both World Wars and a more sustained boom throughout the 1960s. Like births, fertility rates have fluctuated over this period, with similar peaks and an overall downward trend, from 115 live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 at the start of the century to 57 in 1999. Fertility rates fell continually from the highs in the mid-1960s, resulting in a record low in births in 1977. Since then, fertility rates have remained at low levels. The number of births rose in the mid-1980s despite low fertility. These were sustained by the large generations of women born in the late 1950s and 1960s reaching their peak child-bearing age.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the number of children that would be born to a woman if current age patterns of fertility persisted throughout her child-bearing life. This measure summarises the fertility rates for women at each age occurring in one year. In 2004 the United Kingdom had a TFR of 1.77 children per woman. This was an increase from 1.71 in 2003 and a further increase from the record low of 1.63 in 2001. The UK rate in 2004 was higher than the average of 1.50 children per woman in the EU-25.



**Figure 2.15**  
**Completed family size**



Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department

The average number of children per woman is used as an indicator of family size. In the United Kingdom this increased from 2.07 children for women born in 1920 to a peak of 2.46 children for women born in 1934 (Figure 2.15). This peak corresponds with the 1960s 'baby boom'. Family size declined for subsequent generations and is projected to decline to around 1.74 children for women born in the mid-1980s. Women born in 1959, and now at the end of their child-

**Table 2.16**  
**Fertility rates: by age of mother at childbirth**

United Kingdom	Live births per 1,000 women				
	1971	1981	1991	2001	2004
Under 20 <sup>1</sup>	50.0	28.4	32.9	27.9	26.7
20–24	154.4	106.6	88.9	68.0	71.5
25–29	154.6	130.8	119.9	91.5	98.0
30–34	79.4	69.4	86.5	88.0	99.1
35–39	34.3	22.4	32.0	41.3	48.6
40 and over	9.2	4.7	5.3	8.6	10.1
Total Fertility Rate <sup>2</sup>	2.41	1.82	1.82	1.63	1.77
Total births (thousands)	901.6	730.7	792.3	669.1	716.0

<sup>1</sup> Live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19.  
<sup>2</sup> Number of children that would be born to a woman if current patterns of fertility persisted throughout her child-bearing life. For 1981 onwards, this is based on fertility rates for each single year of age, but for 1971 it is based on the rates for each five year age group.

Source: Office for National Statistics

bearing years, had an average of 1.99 children. Within the EU-25 countries family size for this generation of mothers was highest for Ireland (2.67 children) and lowest in Germany (1.67 children). The decline in family size among women born from the mid-1930s onwards is the result both of fewer women having large families, and more women remaining childless. In England and Wales, 31 per cent of women born in 1920 had given birth to three or more children by the end of their child-bearing years. This increased to around 40 per cent of women born in the 1930s and in 1940. It then dropped rapidly to a level of around 30 per cent and has remained at this level for women born after 1945.

Women are having children at an older age than they were 30 years ago. In general, fertility rates for women aged 30 and over have increased, while those for women in their 20s have declined (Table 2.16). However, there was an increase in fertility rates for women in their 20s from 2001 to 2004. Since 1992 the fertility rate for women aged 30 to 34 has exceeded that of women aged 20 to 24 and in 2004 it was higher than the rate for women aged 25 to 29, making this the age group with the highest fertility. This is despite the recent increase in fertility rates for women in their 20s. Changing attitudes to family sizes, delayed entry into marriage and cohabitation and increased female participation in education and the labour market are some of the factors that have encouraged the trend towards later child-bearing and smaller families.

In England and Wales the average age of mothers at childbirth increased by just over two years between 1971 and 2004, to 28.9 years (Table 2.17). Women have also been delaying starting a family, reflected by the increase in the age at which a woman has her first birth. In 2004 the average age at first birth was 27.1 years, over three years older than in 1971.

**Table 2.17**  
**Average age of mother:<sup>1</sup> by birth order<sup>2</sup>**

England & Wales	Years				
	1971	1981	1991	2001	2004
1st child	23.7	24.8	25.6	26.6	27.1
2nd child	26.4	27.3	28.2	29.2	29.5
3rd child	29.1	29.2	29.9	30.7	30.8
4th child	30.9	30.9	31.2	31.5	31.6
5th child and higher	33.6	33.8	33.5	34.4	34.5
All births	26.6	27.0	27.7	28.6	28.9

<sup>1</sup> Age-standardised to take account of the changing population distribution of women.  
<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, Part 2: True birth order.

Source: Office for National Statistics

**Table 2.18**  
**Childless women at ages 25, 35 and 45<sup>1</sup>: by year of birth**

England & Wales	Percentages		
	Age 25	Age 35	Age 45
1929	45	17	15
1939	35	13	12
1949	40	15	13
1959	54	22	18
1969	60	27	.
1979	69	.	.

<sup>1</sup> Includes births at ages over 45.

Source: Office for National Statistics

The trend in waiting longer before starting a family is demonstrated by successive cohorts of women in England and Wales born since the Second World War who have waited longer before starting a family. Forty per cent of women born in 1949 were still childless at age 25; this increased to 69 per cent for women aged 25 who were born in 1979 (Table 2.18). There has also been a rise in childlessness at age 35 from 15 per cent of those born in 1949 to 27 per cent of those born

in 1969. The proportions of women reaching the end of the child-bearing years (age 45) who remained childless, rose from 13 per cent of women born in 1949 to 18 per cent of those born in 1959, the most recent cohort of women to have reached the end of their child-bearing years.

The average age of married women giving birth for the first time has increased by six years since 1971, to 30 in 2003. Births occurring outside marriage tend to take place at a younger age than those inside marriage. In 2001 women giving birth outside marriage were around four years younger than their married counterparts.

Although most children are born to married couples, there has been a substantial rise in the proportion of births occurring outside marriage. With the exception of the periods immediately after the two World Wars, few births occurred outside marriage during the first 60 years of the 20th century. During the 1960s and 1970s such births became more common. In 1980, 12 per cent of all births in the United Kingdom were outside marriage. By 2004 this figure was 42 per cent (Table 2.19). Most of the increase in the number of births outside marriage has been a result of the proportion of children registered by both parents rather than only one parent. This indicates an increase in cohabiting parents.

**Table 2.19**  
**Births outside marriage: EU comparison**

	Percentages					
	1980	1990	2000	2002 <sup>1</sup>	2003	2004
Austria	18	24	31	33	35	36
Belgium <sup>2</sup>	4	12	26	28	31	..
Denmark	33	46	45	45	45	45
Finland	13	25	39	40	40	41
France	11	30	43	44	45	..
Germany	12	15	23	25	27	28
Greece	1	2	4	4	5	5
Ireland	5	15	32	31	31	..
Italy <sup>3</sup>	4	7	10	11	14	15
Luxembourg	6	13	22	23	25	26
Netherlands	4	11	25	27	31	33
Portugal	9	15	22	24	27	29
Spain <sup>2</sup>	4	10	18	20	23	..
Sweden	40	47	55	55	56	55
United Kingdom	12	28	39	40	42	42
EU-15 average <sup>2,3</sup>	10	20	29	30	32	33

<sup>1</sup> Data for Belgium, Spain, Italy and EU-15 average are for 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Data for 2003 are estimated.

<sup>3</sup> Data for 2004 are estimated.

Source: Eurostat

**Table 2.20****Teenage conceptions:<sup>1</sup> by age at conception and outcome, 2003**

England &amp; Wales

	Conceptions (numbers)	Leading to abortions (percentages)	Rates per 1,000 females <sup>2</sup>		
			Leading to maternities	Leading to abortions	All conceptions
Under 14	334	62	0.4	0.6	1.0
14	1,888	64	2.0	3.6	5.7
15	5,802	55	7.7	9.4	17.2
All aged under 16	8,024	57	3.4	4.6	8.0
16	13,303	46	21.7	18.4	40.1
17	20,835	41	37.5	26.1	63.6
All aged under 18	42,162	46	13.7	11.5	42.3
18	26,610	38	50.2	30.4	80.6
19	29,820	35	60.4	32.3	92.7
All aged under 20	98,592	40	35.7	24.1	59.8

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Part 2: Conceptions.

<sup>2</sup> Rates for females aged under 14, under 16, under 18 and under 20 are based on the population of females aged 13, 13 to 15, 15 to 17 and 15 to 19 respectively.

Source: Office for National Statistics

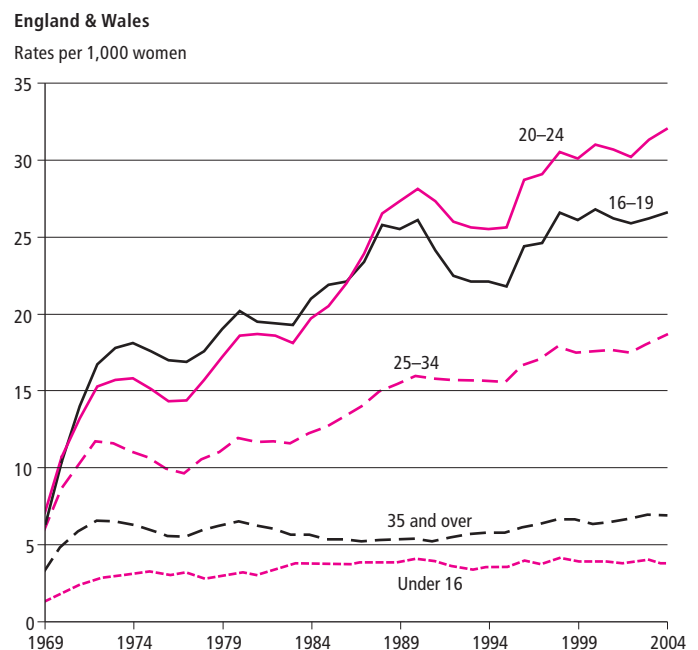
In 2004 the United Kingdom was among the EU-15 countries with the highest levels of births outside marriage, together with Sweden, Denmark, France and Finland (using 2003 data for France, which is the latest available). The highest proportion was in Sweden with 55 per cent, while the lowest proportion was in Greece, at 5 per cent.

Despite the overall trend towards later child-bearing (and the fall in fertility among the under 20s), the teenage pregnancy rate in England and Wales rose in the 1980s, but then fell slightly in the 1990s. There were 98,600 conceptions to girls aged under 20 in 2003 of which less than a tenth were to girls under the age of 16 (Table 2.20). Between 2002 and 2003 the under 20 conception rate fell by 1 per cent from 60.3 to 59.8 conceptions per thousand females aged 15 to 19. The number of conceptions to girls under 14 decreased from 390 in 2002 to 334 in 2003 and just under two fifths of these led to maternities. Between ages 16 and 19, the proportion of conceptions resulting in abortions is lower than at younger ages. Over a third of conceptions to 19 year olds resulted in an abortion, compared with under half of conceptions to 16 year olds.

In 2003 the United Kingdom had the highest rate of live births to teenagers in the EU-25, with an average of 26 live births per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19. This was 19 per cent higher than in Latvia, the country with the next highest rate. Cyprus, Slovenia, Sweden and Denmark had the lowest rates, with around 6 births per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19.

Trends in abortion rates also vary by age of women (Figure 2.21). Since 1969, following the introduction of the *Abortion Act 1967*, abortion rates have risen overall but particularly for women

**Figure 2.21**  
Abortion rates:<sup>1</sup> by age



<sup>1</sup> The rates for girls aged under 16 are based on the population of girls aged 13–15. The rates for women aged 35 and over are based on the population of women aged 35–44.

Source: Office for National Statistics; Department of Health

Table 2.22

### Maternities with multiple births: by age of mother at childbirth, 2004

United Kingdom	Rate per 1,000 maternities	
	Maternities with twins only	Maternities with triplets and over
Under 20	6.7	0.1
20–24	9.1	0.1
25–29	12.8	0.2
30–34	17.5	0.3
35–39	20.9	0.4
40 and over	20.9	0.4
All mothers	14.6	0.2

Source: Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

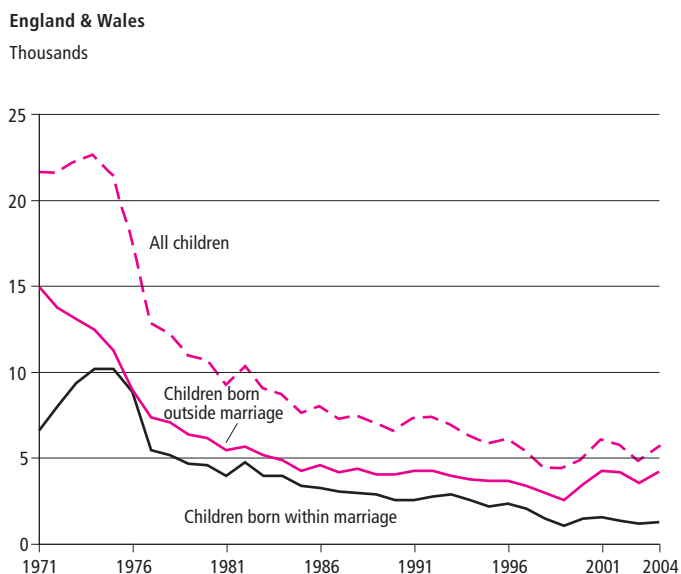
aged between 16 and 34 years. In 2004 women aged between 20 and 24 years had the highest rate, at 31.9 per 1,000 women, whereas girls aged 13 to 15 had the lowest rate, at 3.7 per 1,000 girls.

During the early 1990s the abortion rate among young women aged 16 to 24 fell slightly, but then rose again – as it did for all age groups – between 1995 and 1996. This increase is thought to have been the result of a pill scare. In 1995 the Committee on Safety of Medicines warned that several brands of the contraceptive pill carried an increased risk of thrombosis. This warning is believed to have contributed to an increase in abortion rates in 1996, particularly among young women as they were more likely to have been using the pill. Since the pill scare, abortion rates have not fallen back to the 1995 level but have continued to rise for all age groups except for those aged under 16.

The rate of multiple births increased from 13.2 per 1,000 of all maternities in 1994 to 14.9 per 1,000 of all maternities in 2004. This could be a result of the increased use of IVF (in vitro fertilisation) treatment. In 2004 twins were born at a rate of 14.6 per 1,000 maternities, while 0.2 per 1,000 maternities led to triplets, quadruplets or more (Table 2.22). Multiple-birth rates are higher for women over the age of 35. Among women aged 35 to 39 years and 40 and over, twins accounted for 20.9 per 1,000 maternities, and triplets for 0.4 per 1,000

Figure 2.23

### Adoption orders: by year of registration<sup>1</sup> and whether adopted child was born within or outside marriage<sup>2</sup>



1 Year of entry into the Adopted Children Register. Data for 1990 and 2001 include cases where age of child was greater than 17 years.

2 Data for all children for 1985 to 1989 include cases where marital status was not stated. Where marital status for 1998 are missing they have been imputed.

Source: Office for National Statistics

maternities. In comparison, for women aged under 20 the rates were 6.7 and 0.1 respectively.

Another way in which people may extend their families is through adoption. In 2004 there were 5,500 adoptions in England and Wales, with 47 per cent of adopted children being between one and four years old. Increased use of contraception, new abortion laws and changed attitudes towards lone motherhood have meant that 16,000 fewer children were adopted in 2004 in England and Wales than in 1971 (Figure 2.23).

There was a rapid decline in the number of children available for adoption following the introduction of legal abortion in the *Abortion Act 1967* and after the implementation of the *Children Act 1975*. This latter Act required courts dealing with adoption applications for children of divorced parents to dismiss applications for adoption where a legal custody order was in the child's best interests. Despite these changes, one quarter of the children adopted in England and Wales in 2004 were born inside marriage.

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First published 2006 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and 175 Fifth Avenue,  
New York, NY 10010, USA

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ISBN 1-4039-9384-X

ISSN 0306-7742

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

William Clowes Ltd,

Beccles, Suffolk.

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The Director of ONS is also the National Statistician and the Registrar General for England and Wales.

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