Key Relationships Stats

A quick guide to the latest statistics on relationships in the UK, drawn from the Office for National Statistics and Relate’s own relationships survey, *The Way We Are Now*

Last updated January 2016

(Next update July 2016)
Marriage and cohabitation

Office for National Statistics

In 2012 (latest available figures):

- A couple got married every two minutes.
- 70% of marriages were civil ceremonies while 30% were religious. The number of civil ceremonies first exceeded the number of religious ceremonies in 1976.
- 67% of marriages were first marriages for both partners, 19% were remarriages for one of the partners, and 16% were remarriages for both.
- The average age at marriage was 36.5 years for men and 34 years for women.
- The greatest number of marriages was for people aged 25-30 (25% of men getting married and 30% of women getting married were aged 25-30).

In 2015:

Note: following the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 same sex marriage was legalised in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 onwards. 2015 is the first Families and Households data set to include data on same sex marriage.

- 7,732 same-sex couples chose to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage between 10 December 2014 and 30 June 2015.
- A total of 7,366 marriages were formed between same sex couples between 29 March 2014 and 30 June 2015. Of these, 55% (4,059 marriages) were between female couples and 45% (3,307 marriages) were between male couples.

According to the definition by the ONS, a ‘family’ is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child.

- The most common family type was the married or civil partner couple family at 12.5 million.
- The cohabiting couple family continued to be the fastest growing family type in the UK, reaching 3.2 million cohabiting couple families. The number of cohabiting couple families grew by 29.7% between 2005 and 2015. Both opposite and same sex cohabiting couples have increased in number.
- The total number of families based around a married couple decreased between 1996 and 2005 but increased by 187,000 between 2005 and 2015 to 12.5 million. This rise is statistically significant.
- There were an estimated 90,000 families consisting of a same sex cohabiting couple; this was an increase from around 16,000 same sex cohabiting couples in 1996.
The Way We Are Now 2015

- **Marriage** was one of the top three most commonly identified signs of commitment.

- The perceived importance of marriage as a sign of commitment varied by whether respondents had children and their children’s age. Those with children aged over 18 were most likely to identify marriage as a top sign of commitment (48%), whilst only 30% of those without children thought it a top sign, and those with children under five sat in the middle at 39%.

- **People of different ages value getting married differently.** 35% of those aged 65 or over thought getting married was the most important sign of commitment, yet only 12% of 16-24 year olds agreed. 4

Divorce

Office for National Statistics

In 2013 (latest figures available):

- Between 2005 and 2010 the percentage of marriages which ended in divorce decreased from 45% to 42%.

- There was a **2.9% decrease in the number of divorces** from 114,720 compared to 118,140 in 2012.

- The **number of divorces was highest in those aged 40-44**.

- The **majority of divorces were initiated by the wife**; 65% were initiated by the wife, 35% by the husband.

- **Women were more likely to cite their partner’s behaviour as the reason behind the divorce than men.** 54% of divorces granted to women were due to their husband’s behaviour, whereas only 38% of divorces granted to men cited their wife’s behaviour as the reason.

- **Very few divorce decrees** (under 0.01%) were issued jointly to husband and wife.

- **Marriages that end in divorce are lasting slightly longer.** The average duration of a marriage that ends in a divorce was 11.7 years in 2013, up a little from 11.3 years in 2003. 5
In 2011 (latest figures available):

- **There was a continued increase in the number of older people divorcing.**
  Between 1991 and 2011 there was a 73% increase in the number of men divorcing over aged of 60. Trends for women are similar; increasing from 3,200 in 1991 to 5,800 in 2011, an increase of 81%.

- **Whilst overall divorce rates decreased, divorce amongst older people increased.**
  Between 1991 and 2011 there was a decreasing trend for divorce amongst all men (from 13.6 to 10.8 divorces per 1,000 married men). However for over 60s there was an increasing trend for divorce (from 1.6 to 2.3 divorces per 1,000 married men). This is similarly reflected in older women; there were 1.2 divorces per 1,000 married women aged 60 and over in 1991, rising to 1.6 in 2011.

- For those under 60 women were more likely to be the ones granted a divorce, however **for those aged over 60 men and women were equally likely to be granted a divorce.**

- In England and Wales the number and percentage of people who are divorced or formerly in a same-sex civil partnership which is now dissolved breaks down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>Percentage of the adult population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>201,201</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>532,490</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>399,528</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>342,665</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>393,163</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>437,738</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>484,106</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>637,433</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>428,813</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>242,193</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Way We Are Now 2015

- A quarter (24%) of respondents said they had experienced the breakup of their parents’ relationship.

- Children of separated parents were less likely to say that they are close to their dads. 71% of people whose parents have separated reported a good relationship with their mum, compared to only 57% with their dad.
Having Children

Office for National Statistics

In 2014:

- **Over half (52%) of all live births were to mothers aged 30** and over and two-thirds (67%) of fathers were aged 30 and over when their children were born.
- The **average age of all fathers** with new-borns was 33.1 years, a **decrease** from 32.9 years in 2013.
- The **average age of all mothers** with new-borns was 30.2 years, an **increase** from 30.0 in 2013.
- The **average age of first time mothers increased slightly**. First time mothers were an average of 28.5 years old, compared to 27.1 in 2004. Changes in the average age of first time mothers have mirrored trends in the average age of all mothers.
- **Most babies (84%) were born to parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting.**

In 2015:

- **15% of dependent children lived with cohabiting couples**, an increase from 11% in 2005.
- Between 2005 and 2015 the **percentage of dependent children living in a married couple family fell** by 4 percentage points to 62%.
- There were nearly **2 million lone parents with dependent children** in the UK in 2015, a figure which has grown from 1.6 million in 1996. Despite this, the percentage of dependent children living in lone parent families changed little over the decade (2005 to 2015); 23% lived in lone parent families in 2015.
- **Women accounted for 90% of lone parents with dependent children.** This has changed little over the 19 years since 1996.

The Way We Are Now 2015

- **90% of parents reported having a good relationship with their children**, and over 70% of children reported a good relationship with their parents (78% with mum, 72% with dad).
- **Couples with children under 5 were more likely to report that they have a bad relationship with their partner** (5%) whilst only 2% of those with children over 18 said this.

---

1 Data on the average age of first time fathers is not published by ONS
Living Arrangements

Office for National Statistics

In 2015:

- The percentage of young adults (15 to 34) who live with their parents continued to increase, rising from 36% in 1996 to 40% in 2015. Larger numbers of young adults tending to stay at home for longer may be explained by staying in education and training for longer, delaying leaving the parental home as young adults formalise relationships and have children at older ages and as it has become more expensive to rent or buy a home.

- The percentage of adults living at home decreased with age; 48% of 20-24 year olds lived in their parent’s home, by 25-29 this has decreased to 21% and by 30-34 only 8% are living at home with their parents. ²

- Males were more likely to remain living with their parents than females; 90% of 15-19 year old males lived with at least one parent with 88% of females doing the same. By age 20-24 55% of males lived with their parents and only 42% of females. In the 25-29 group 27% of males and only 15% of females lived with their parents.

Household is defined by ONS as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area.

In 2015:

- 29% of households contained just one person. This has not changed much over the last decade.
  
  - Of those aged 16-64 and living alone, 58% were male. Possible reasons for more men living alone at this age are that more men than women never marry, men tend to marry at an older age than women and men being more likely to live alone after a relationship breakup whilst women remain with children from the relationship.

  - Of those aged 65 and over, women were more likely to live alone (72% compared to 61%). This is due to women, on average, living longer and age gaps in opposite sex relationships meaning the male partner is more likely to die first.

- Households containing two or more families were the fastest growing household type over the decade to 2015, increasing by 50% from 197,000 households in 2005 to 295,000 households. This increase is statistically significant. Families in these households may be unrelated, or may be related in some way, for example a married couple with their son and his girlfriend.

- Despite this rise, multi-family households were still only a very small proportion (1%) of all households.¹³

² ONS does not provide longitudinal data broken down by age so we are unable to comment on whether any ages are increasingly or decreasingly likely to be living in the parental home.
## Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Last published</th>
<th>Update Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Families and Households 2015</td>
<td>05/11/2015</td>
<td>Autumn 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>How have marriages of same sex couples affected the number of civil partnership formations, and how many couples have converted their civil partnership into a marriage?, 2015</td>
<td>20/10/2015</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>9 facts about marriage</td>
<td>11/06/2014</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Older people divorcing infographic</td>
<td>06/08/2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Trends in divorces and the divorce rate of people age 60 and over in England and Wales</td>
<td>06/08/2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>KS103EW- Marital and Civil Partnership Status</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>The Way We Are Now 2015</td>
<td>01/09/2015</td>
<td>Late 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. ONS, How have marriages of same sex couples affected the number of civil partnership formations, and how many couples have converted their civil partnership into a marriage?, 2015 [http://bit.ly/1JhwZd3](http://bit.ly/1JhwZd3)
6. ONS, Older People Divorcing Infographic, 2013, [http://bit.ly/1S3Q0Rw](http://bit.ly/1S3Q0Rw)
8. ONS, KS103EW Marital and Civil Partnership Status, 2011
11. ONS, Families and Households, 2015, page 10
12. Relate, The Way We Are Now, 2015, page 11
13. ONS, Families and Households, 2015, page 13