

# FACTSHEET: SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

A SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE UK

Relationships come under immense pressure from demands of children and family, work, home and money difficulties. Furthermore, as people change and grow through life their needs and desires can be expected to diversify. Marriages and long-term relationships do not always survive the strain.

Here we have compiled some of the most recent statistics on divorces from marriage, civil-partnership breakdowns, and on separation from long-term cohabiting relationships in general.

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## DIVORCE

### DIVORCE RATES

- 42% of marriages end in divorce *England & Wales (ONS, 2013)*
- More than 235,000 people divorced in 2011 *England & Wales (ONS, 2012)*
- Almost half of divorces involve children under 16 yrs *England & Wales (ONS, 2012)*
- The average age of people divorcing in 2011 was 44.5 yrs for men and 42.1 yrs for women *England & Wales (ONS, 2012)*
- 66% of divorces were on petition of the wife. *England & Wales (ONS, 2012)*
- Of every divorce in 2011 - it was the first divorce for both partners in 70.1% of cases, while in 19.7% one party had been divorced previously, and in 9.6% of cases both had divorced previously *England & Wales (ONS, 2012)*
- Second marriages are more likely to be successful than first marriages. If one or both partners are remarrying they have a 31% chance of divorce, compared to 45% if it is both partners' first time. *England & Wales (Benson, 2013)*  
*Note: There isn't consensus on this issue*

### MARRIAGE DURATION

- 34% of marriages are expected to end in divorce by the 20th wedding anniversary. *England & Wales (ONS, 2013)*  
6% of marriages end by the 20th wedding anniversary because one of the spouses has died.
- Between the fourth and eighth wedding anniversaries the probability of getting divorced by the next anniversary is over 3% *England & Wales (ONS, 2013)*
- At the 26th anniversary the chance of divorcing by the next anniversary falls below 1%. *England & Wales (ONS, 2013)*
- 16% of marriages reach the 60th wedding anniversary without separation or death *England & Wales (ONS, 2013)*

## OTHER FACTORS

- Previous research indicates a trend that those who marry younger are more likely to divorce. For example, of women who had not been married before and who married in 1976:

- 53% had divorced by their 30th anniversary if they were aged under 20 when they married
- 23% had divorced by the same anniversary if they were aged 30 to 34 when they married
- 7% had divorced if they were aged 45 to 49 when they married

England & Wales (ONS, 2013)

- Having children or staying childless has no clear effect on risk of divorce

England & Wales (ONS, 2012)

- While divorce rates are falling for the general population, the number of men aged 60+ divorcing has increased by 73% from 1.6 divorces per 1,000 in 1991 to 2.3 per 1,000 in 2011.

Similar trends are reported in women aged 60+.

England & Wales (ONS, 2013b)

Reasons suggested include an increased in life expectancy, reduced stigma surrounding divorce and greater financial independence among older women

## CHANGES OVER TIME

- The rate of divorce has generally increased over time for those marrying between the early 1970s and the early 1990s.

e.g. 22% of marriages in 1970 had ended by the 15th wedding anniversary, compared to 33% of marriages in 1995 after the same time

England & Wales (ONS, 2013)

- Since 2000 the percentage of marriages ending in divorce appears to be falling.

This is likely to be because people are getting married at older ages and are increasingly cohabiting beforehand – both are factors that increase marriage success

England & Wales (ONS, 2013)

- The average age at divorce has increased from 35yrs in 1976 to 43yrs in 2011. (See page 2 for split by gender)

This is likely because people are getting married later, and cultural stigma has reduced allowing older people to divorce more.

England & Wales (ONS, 2013)

## DIVORCE AND SEPARATION STATISTICS BY REGION

- Across the England and Wales the number and percentage of people not currently living in a couple following separation, legal divorce or civil-partnership dissolution breaks down as follows:
  - North east: 190,419 people, making up 9.1% of the adult population
  - North west: 514,154 people, making up 9.2% of the adult population
  - Yorkshire and the Humber: 363,197 people, making up 8.7% of the adult population
  - East midlands: 303,528 people, making up 8.4% of the adult population
  - West midlands: 372,498 people, making up 8.4% of the adult population
  - East: 388,364 people, making up 8.4% of the adult population
  - London: 563,470 people, making up 8.8% of the adult population
  - South east: 576,657 people, making up 8.5% of the adult population
  - South west: 371,780 people, making up 8.7% of the adult population
  - Wales: 220,281 people, making up 9.0% of the adult population

England & Wales (ONS, 2013c)

## CIVIL PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION

- The number of civil partnership dissolutions granted in 2012 was 794, an increase of 20% on the 2011 numbers<sup>1</sup>
- By the end of 2012, 3.2% of male and 6.1% of female civil partnerships in England and Wales had ended in dissolution.  
  
The first UK civil partnership was on the 5th December 2005: approximately 120,908 individuals entered civil partnerships between 2005 and 2012 (2012 estimate)
- Among those whose civil partnerships ended, this was the first divorce or dissolution for partners in 83.1% of cases, while in 14.8% at least one party had been through divorce or dissolution previously; the remainder ended through the death of a partner.

England & Wales (ONS, 2012b)

England & Wales (ONS, 2013d)

England & Wales (ONS, 2012b)

<sup>1</sup> This steep rise reflects the short length of time since civil partnerships became legal

- The average age at dissolution of civil partnership in England and Wales in 2012 was 38.9 years for men and 38.3 for women  
For men this is younger than the average age at partnership which was 40.0 in 2012
- By the end of 2012, 3.2% of male civil partnerships in the England and Wales had ended in dissolution, while 6.1% of all female partnerships in England and Wales had ended in dissolution

England & Wales  
(ONS, 2013d)

England & Wales  
(ONS, 2013d)

## COHABITATION AND RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

- By the tenth anniversary of moving in together, just under four in ten cohabiting couples will have separated  
  
Slightly over one in ten will be still living together as a couple, and the remaining half will have married each other
- Couples cohabiting in 1999 had a 50% chance of being married or a 38% chance of having split up a decade later. These rates were 62% and 26% for cohabiting couples from 1989.
- 27% of couples that were cohabiting when their child was born will have separated by the time the child is aged 5. By contrast, 9% of couples that were married when their child was born will have separated by their child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. Other factors, besides marital status itself, are thought be attributable for the difference in levels of relationship breakdown.

United Kingdom  
(Beaujouan, 2011)

United Kingdom  
(Beaujouan, 2011)

United Kingdom  
(Crawford, 2011)

## REASONS FOR DIVORCE

- Reasons proven for legal divorce (ONS, 2011):
  - 15% of divorces were granted for adultery, same across genders
  - 36% of divorces granted to men and 54% of divorces granted to women were due to unreasonable behaviour
  - Less than 1% of all divorces were granted due to desertion
  - 32% of divorces granted to men and 22% of divorces granted to women were granted following 2 years of separation and consent
  - 16% of divorces granted to men and 9% of divorces granted to women were granted following 5 years of separation

England & Wales  
(ONS, 2012)

## OUTCOMES OF SEPARATION

- Divorce is economically costly to both men and women, but disproportionately more costly to women
  - The decrease in needs-adjusted income (controlling for relevant background factors) following divorce is 7.32% for men and 23.66% for women. *United Kingdom (Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx, 2009)*
  - Re-partnering is a key protective factor, particularly for low-educated single mothers.
  
- Family breakdown has been estimated to cost the taxpayer almost £46 Billion in 2013 through effects on health, extra housing support, lost work hours, legal aid and other related factors *United Kingdom (Relationship Foundation, 2013)*
  
- On average, separation is initially found to be twice as stressful for married couples as for cohabiting couples – however this difference disappears when accounting for the fact that cohabiting couples are less likely to have children and tend to have a higher education level *United Kingdom (Tavares & Aassve, 2013)*

## OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

- Over 120,00 families with dependent children<sup>2</sup> separated in 2013
  - About half were married couple families (1.3% of 4.7 million married families), and half were from cohabiting couples (5.3% of 1.2 million cohabiting families) *United Kingdom (Benson, 2013)*
  
- In 2010-11, one third of all children aged 16 and under were not living with both of their birth parents
  - This ranged from 15% not living with both parents for children aged less than 1 year old, increasing steadily with age up to 47% for 16 year olds. *United Kingdom (DWP, 2013)*
  - When split by family income, the number of all children aged 16 and under living without both biological parents was 55% for low income households compared to 27% for those in middle/high income families
  
- 8% of families in England and Wales are stepfamilies (540,00 families) *England & Wales (ONS, 2014)*
  
- 3% of families in Northern Ireland are stepfamilies (14,000 families) *Northern Ireland (NISRA, 2013)*

<sup>2</sup> Under 16, or 16-18 in full time education and not married

- Almost 25% of families in the UK are lone parent families *United Kingdom (ONS, 2013e)*
  - 44% of resident parents<sup>3</sup> said their child either splits their time equally, or sees their other parent at least weekly. *United Kingdom (Peacey, 2008)*
  - 29% of resident parents said that their child never sees their other parent, and 20% of all resident parents said that their child has not seen their other parent since separation. *United Kingdom (Peacey, 2008)*
  - Including families with and without child contact, only 35 per cent of all resident parents and 27 per cent of all non-resident parents said they felt child contact frequency was about right at present *United Kingdom (Peacey, 2008)*

## CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURES

- Patterns of divorce and separation have changed over recent decades, so too have family structures
- There are 7.7million families with dependent children, of which:
  - 4.7million (60%) are married couple families
  - 1.2million (15%) are unmarried opposite sex couple families *United Kingdom (ONS, 2013e)*
  - 1.9million (24.5%) are lone parent families
  - 8,000 (0.001%) are civil partnered couple families
  - 5,000 (0.001%) are same-sex cohabiting couple families
- 8.8% of lone-parent families are lone-father families, the remainder are lone mother families *United Kingdom (ONS, 2013e)*



<sup>3</sup> The resident parent is the parent with which a child lives most or all of the time

## HOW RELATE CAN HELP SUPPORT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

### RELATIONSHIP COUNSELING

Relationship counselling can help you come to the decision of what you should do with your relationship. Once you have made that decision, we can help you either to work out your problems and stick together, or help you to split up from each other with the minimum of fuss.

You can speak to our counsellors face to face, by phone or online. We also have a range of other services for people who want help with their relationship.

### FAMILY COUNSELLING

Coming to see one of our family counsellors can help you deal with the effects a break up will have on your family, and keep the impact on your children as low as possible. Find out more about our Family Counselling service and other services for families that may help you on our website.

### MEDIATION

Mediation is not like counselling, it helps couples who have decided to separate deal positively with the practicalities of relationship breakup such as finance, property and parenting issues; and to reach agreement.

We have courses designed especially for people involved in a divorce or relationship break-down. Whether you need to cope after divorce or want help in the break-up process, we have courses for you.

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